Abstract

Somali refugees arrived in Johannesburg, South Africa following apartheid’s official end in 1994 and have since established a well-organized “Little Mogadishu” in Mayfair, a suburb just west of the city center, which continues to grow as Somalis migrate to the country in search of peace, security, and livelihood opportunities. The backgrounds and experiences Somalis bring to Mayfair influence gender ideologies in the community and complicate gender relations as women and men construct and negotiate new identities in South Africa. Working with Somalis in Mayfair, I used mixed methods in this ethnographic study to collect data on the dynamics of gender. Employing a “gendered geographies of power” framework, I examine how Somalis make sense of their world and the contradictions that surround gender relations for women and men as they interact with one another and the larger South African community.

Somalis face racism, discrimination, and xenophobia from South Africans in their daily lives, which adversely affect women and men’s mobility and opportunities in the country. Physical and economic insecurity draw Somalis to live in Mayfair, where they feel protected and supported by their networks and ethnic kin. These realities contribute
to the way gender relationships function within the Somali community and as women and men manage their lives with limited state support. The patriarchal structure of Somali society ascribes men leadership positions as providers who control their families and communities, while women are charged with household management and have a limited ability to challenge these arrangements in broader society. Patterns of participation for women and men in Mayfair contradict customary structures as economic activities shift, power is reorganized, and cultural standards are adjusted. These new arrangements threaten traditional social positions for Somali women and men—a risk many Somalis cannot accept and will contest—as they redefine community support and protection for their new home. In this dissertation, I explore the dynamics of these contests in Mayfair and for Somali immigrants to South Africa.
Dedication

To Mom and Dad, who taught me I could do anything I set my mind to
Acknowledgments

To the brave and resilient women and men in Mayfair, thank you for welcoming me into your lives and sharing your memories, dreams, triumphs, and disappointments with me. You have enriched my life in ways for which I can never repay you. In particular, I would like to acknowledge those who gave their scarce time and resources to help me: Sowdo, Sahra, Sulega, and Abdusalam. Thank you for your loyalty and friendship, for without you this research would not have succeeded. Sowdo, you are the best assistant a person could want: Waan ku jecelahay! To the men in my special restaurant and to the women I met in shops and homes, I hold you especially close to my heart and cherish my time with you. And finally, many thanks to those at the Somali Association of South Africa (SASA) and the Somali Community Board of South Africa (SCOB) for your advice and readiness to answer my myriad questions.

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Fields of Study

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Acronyms

ACMS – African Centre for Migration & Society (formerly FMSP – Forced Migration Studies Programme)

AOR – Affidavit of Relationship

CBD – Central Business District

CRIS – Community Refugee & Immigration Services

DHA – Department of Home Affairs

SAPS – South African Police Service

SASA – Somali Association of South Africa

SCOB – Somali Community Board of South Africa

UN – United Nations

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Part I: Setting Things Up
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

“Theoretically we would expect a period of hiatus after the shock of uprooting. Since people define themselves in terms of the roles they play and it is thus that they are evaluated and valued, the loss of role structures means that they cannot know who they are or who anyone else is until new roles are constructed and people assigned to them. It takes time to assess the loss of old roles or their transformation. It takes time to renegotiate relationships. All this involves processes of adaptation.” [Colson 2003:8]

Somalis often told me, “Sister, the problem with gender relations is that the man and the woman don’t understand each other.” Women were likely to blame men for their social position and economic hardship in South Africa, while men habitually accused women of abusing their rights in the country and turning their backs on Somali culture in the name of freedom. None of these assertions is entirely true, but these perceptions shape gendered ideologies of Somali lives and relationships in Mayfair, the home of Johannesburg’s Somali community (see Appendix A, Figure 9). Gender relations are about power relationships between women and men. More than this,

[they] embody both the material and the ideological. They are revealed not only in the division of labor and resources between women and men, but also in ideas and representations – the ascribing to women and men of different abilities, attitudes, desires, personality traits, behavior patterns, and so on. Gender relations are both constituted by and help constitute these practices and ideologies, in interaction with other structures of social hierarchy such as class, caste and race. [Agarwal 1997:1-2]
For Somalis, these relationships are enmeshed in varying notions of roles and responsibilities, of control and leadership, and of religion and culture, not to mention the dynamics of living in a country with inhospitable hosts.

South Africa has suffered severe growing pains in its young democracy. Class disparities have replaced racial segregation; high unemployment, inadequate housing, poor service delivery, and persistent corruption are among the most pressing issues South Africans face. Pervasive immigration—legal and illegal—in the wake of apartheid invoked xenophobic attitudes and behaviors from citizens who feel migrants, and especially black migrants from around the continent, threaten to take South Africans’ already scarce economic opportunities while aggravating the country’s high crime rates. These realities have serious implications for Somalis, and women in particular. Emigration from a deeply patriarchal society like Somalia to a constitutionally progressive country such as South Africa might assume women’s empowerment, defined as new possibilities for what women can achieve in areas from which they were previously excluded (Mosedale 2005). While changes can include greater freedom for women, discrimination, crime, and xenophobia hinder women’s ability to act on their newly ascribed rights and opportunities in Mayfair. Physical and economic insecurity draw women and men to live in a community where they feel protected and supported by their networks and ethnic kin. Women thus find it difficult to challenge their social position and effect meaningful change in their lives because of their limited mobility and pressing social and economic needs.
The various backgrounds and experiences individuals bring to Mayfair influence gender ideologies in the community, but larger social contexts equally play a critical role in how Somalis understand their position and opportunities in South Africa. The realities women and men face as black African migrants and as refugees contribute to the way gender relationships function and are conceptualized in a country where Somalis receive limited state support and endure antagonism in their daily lives. The context of South African society, state institutions, and Somali households and sociocultural configurations determine women’s position in society, as do women and men’s personal beliefs about their rights, roles, and responsibilities in their community.

This dissertation explores the intersection of micro and macro variables—from Somali households, families, and community to South African society and institutions—that influence the negotiation of gender identity and the construction of gender relations in Mayfair, using Mahler and Pessar’s (2001; 2006; Pessar and Mahler 2003) “gendered geographies of power” framework as my starting point. Mahler and Pessar conceptualize gender relations in transnational spaces and define the contradictions that surround social contests and organization. I apply this idea to my examination of how Somalis make sense of their world and the contradictions of gender in Mayfair. First, this model recognizes that gender operates across many spatial, social, and cultural grounds leading to normalized behaviors. Second, people are part of larger social structures that shape identities and vary from one location to the next. Finally, a focus on agency defines how people use their location and access to resources to make choices in their lives.
Traditionally Somali men are the leaders and providers who control their families and communities, while Somali women are situated in their homes with limited ability to challenge patriarchy. Patterns of participation for women and men in Mayfair contradict customary structures as economic activities shift, power is reorganized, and cultural standards are adjusted. These new arrangements threaten traditional social positions for Somali women and men—a risk many Somalis cannot accept and will contest—as they redefine community support and protection for their new home. I explore the dynamics of these contests in Mayfair and for Somali immigrants to South Africa.

1.2 Why Somalis, Why Johannesburg, and Why Now?

My first encounter with Somalis came in 2004, when Community Refugee & Immigration Services (CRIS)—a non-profit organization serving the immigrant community in Columbus, Ohio—hired me to work as a resettlement caseworker. My duties included assisting new refugees as they arrived in the US and helping already settled refugees and asylees file sponsorship petitions—called an Affidavit of Relationship (AOR)—to bring their relatives to the US for family reunification. I worked with individuals and families as they learned to navigate the American system and find jobs, housing, education, and social assistance. I helped individuals complete AORs and later shared their joy when relatives arrived in Columbus. I also experienced the sorrow of a denied resettlement petition; the frustration of finding adequate housing, transportation, and jobs for new refugees; and the stress of sponsors who used their
scarce time and resources to help their relatives. CRIS is a vital asset to the community, and I continued my work there until leaving for South Africa to conduct fieldwork.

During my tenure at CRIS, I learned about the triumphs and tribulations of immigrant life in America and became interested in Somali refugee experiences in the diaspora, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. I wanted to know more about Somali lives in places where opportunities for education and employment were limited, where social support and services were wholly inadequate or non-existent, and where hostility toward Somalis was more pronounced and often violent. It was around this time that xenophobic violence escalated in South Africa, culminating in a deadly wave of attacks across the country in May 2008 that resulted in dozens of fatalities—including migrants and South Africans—and hundreds of Somali shop owners without businesses as they lost their livelihoods to arson, looting, and robbery. Many shopkeepers and residents were victims of violence and abuse during the attacks, leaving innumerable Somalis displaced and fleeing for safety in urban Somali communities and makeshift refugee camps.

Somalis were targets for xenophobic violence even before the 2008 attacks, and yet there was a dearth of Somali-specific research in South Africa. I knew there were several Somali communities in the country through my work at CRIS, and this only added to my frustrations. I was particularly interested in women’s livelihoods and their prospects for developing marketable skills through education. Academic studies in other settings corroborated what I often saw in Columbus—that Somali women take advantage of their opportunities in resettlement spaces and generate critical economic resources for their families. This led me to question what women do to get by in South Africa when
Somalis’ presence in the country is fraught with hostility, discrimination, and violence. How could women access resources without the support of the larger South African community? What were women’s economic strategies, especially if formal employment opportunities in Johannesburg were limited? Furthermore, I was curious about gender relationships. Somali gender studies often placed women on a continuum, from celebrating women’s liberation to demonstrating their continued subordination post-resettlement. I wondered where women in South Africa and the community in Johannesburg fit on this continuum, and what caused the variation?

Anthropologists had not contributed much to the question of gender relations in the Somali context. I felt there was a need to explore gender dynamics in a community that continued to grow with new arrivals from East Africa and in a country where Somalis felt they were targets for abuse and violence. What were the challenges for women and men in Mayfair? What did these struggles mean for Somali gender relations? I wanted to understand how women and men manage the colossal barriers they face, and in turn how their responses to those barriers challenge gender arrangements in their communities, leading me to ask, how are women contradicting customary gender models and power relations with men in Mayfair?

I chose Johannesburg as my study site for several reasons. First, the Forced Migration Studies Programme (FMSP)—now the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS)—at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg is a leading institution on migration research in Africa. Establishing an affiliation with ACMS was an important opportunity to network with other migration scholars in South Africa and researchers
working in the Johannesburg office. Second, the 2008 xenophobic violence that spread across South Africa launched in Alexandra, a Johannesburg township, and many previous attacks started near Johannesburg in Gauteng Province (see Appendix A, Figure 8) (CoRMSA2008; Kamwimbi, et al. 2010; Nieftagodien 2008), making Mayfair an attractive research setting for exploring Somalis’ perceptions of their position in the country and the barriers in their lives. Third, Johannesburg’s sizeable Somali population and their concentration in Mayfair provided a location that supported my interaction with the population and offered insight into how external factors affect and influence gender relationships within the community’s boundaries. Finally, new asylum seekers often go to Johannesburg, making the city an ideal setting for documenting Somalis’ first impressions and experiences in the country.

1.3 Organization of Chapters

The chapters that follow explain and contextualize this ethnographic research project. In Chapter 2, I describe the Somali community in Mayfair, provide a summary of the migration and gender literature that informed my work and aided in data analysis and interpretation, and present the textual gaps that my research seeks to fill. I also provide an historical, political, and cultural overview of Somalia and the diaspora to contextualize my study and to understand sociocultural ideologies and debates in the Johannesburg community. Chapter 3 identifies my project design and the methodology I used to conduct fieldwork. In Chapters 4-6, I divide research data into three broad categories for discussion and analysis: Sociocultural and household arrangements, perceived social and
institutional barriers in South Africa, and economic activities. I weave discussions of gender relations into each chapter and as they relate to the topic. Each data set situates gender in Mayfair, explores how it operates among individuals and in the community, and contributes to understanding the complexity of gendered, social relationships among Somalis living in Johannesburg and to evaluating how these pieces challenge, change, and even reinforce customary gender relationships. I conclude with Chapter 7 and restate the research problem, results, and analyses, highlighting the benefits and contributions, and setting an agenda for future investigations.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to explore the contradictions of gender and the complexity of gender relationships, as well as the factors that influence the way Somalis perceive, experience, challenge, and negotiate these structures in Mayfair, Johannesburg, South Africa. I consider how Somalis, and women in particular, manage their lives in Mayfair and explain what drives their economic activities, what limits their movement and opportunities, how they meet their financial obligations, and how their actions affect sociocultural dynamics in the community. This literature review provides the foundation for understanding how I conceptualized and developed this study, why it is important, and what contribution it can make to Somali, gender, and migration studies.

2.2 Mayfair, Johannesburg

Johannesburg, South Africa, located in the Gauteng Province, is the largest and most densely populated city in the country (Statistics South Africa 2007) with about 3.8 million residents (Tau 2012). Recent estimates suggest there are more than 450,000 forced migrants living in the city with an additional 417,700 asylum seekers and other migrants in dire circumstances (Women's Refugee Commission 2011). There is a well-established Somali community that is mostly concentrated in Mayfair (Jinnah 2010;
Peberdy and Majodina 2000), a suburb just west of the city center, and neighboring areas including Mayfair West and Fordsburg, and to a lesser extent Brixton, Langlaagte North, and Newtown. A 2006 African Cities survey indicates that almost 89% of Johannesburg Somalis live within Mayfair (FMSP 2006), making it the uncontested heart of the Somali community while remaining the Islamic center of Johannesburg.

Data on the Somali population in South Africa are problematic. While population estimates range anywhere from 20,000 (IRIN 2007) to 40,000 (Jinnah 2010) people throughout the country, South Africa received 8,500 Somali asylum applications in 2008 (UNHCR 2009a) and more than 3,800 of those were filed in the Gauteng Province (SCOB 2008). According to employees at the Somali Association of South Africa (SASA) in Johannesburg, the first known Somali arrived in South Africa after World War I, followed by more than 450 Somalis at the end of World War II. Any Somalis who came to South Africa during apartheid likely entered the country illegally or as contract workers, per South African immigration laws in this period that excluded non-whites from legal migration processes (Peberdy 1998). As apartheid fell in favor of democracy, influxes of Somalis migrated to the country starting in 1992, one year after the Somali state collapsed, and continued intermittently in the 1990s and 2000s. Most of the asylum seekers arrived after Nelson Mandela was elected president in 1994—a common trend among other migrant groups as well (Buyer 2008; Castles and Miller 2009)—when South Africa admitted refugees legally (Peberdy 1998). Events in Somalia encouraged refugee flows since then, most notably when Ethiopia invaded Somalia in 2006 (Jinnah 2010).
The continued violence and instability in Somalia has displaced tens of thousands of Somalis since early May 2009, creating even more refugees as people flee the country in search of safety (see for example UNHCR 2009b; UNHCR 2009c). Census data were not available for Mayfair Somalis, and Somali community organizations could not provide population estimates due to the frequent mobility of Somalis who work in and out of townships, movement to and from other Somali communities around the country, and a lack of resources and mechanisms to count the population. Some community members suggest a current population of about 5,000 Somalis living in Mayfair, the same number posited by community groups in 1999 (Dykes 2004), but this cannot be verified.

According to the Somali Community Board of South Africa (SCOB) (2009), the majority of Somali migrants are between 15 and 40 years of age and lack formal education. SASA suggests that 80-85% of ethnic Somalis in the country are children under 18 years of age, and of the entire population only 60 are pupils studying in South African universities. While it seems that children are going to primary and secondary school—especially if their parents also live in Mayfair—previous research suggests that as many as 70% of Somali children did not attend school in the past due to discrimination and financial barriers (Landau 2006a; Landau 2006b; Peberdy and Majodina 2000). In addition to safety concerns for their children and fears of xenophobia, parents are responsible for purchasing the textbooks, school uniforms, and supplies (including tissues and toilet paper) their children need to attend school, which is a financial burden not all families can assume (Landau 2006a).
Somalis were drawn to the Mayfair area for its existing South African Indian Muslim communities that had established mosques, Muslim cultural services, and halal butchers (i.e., religiously permissible food shops) (Sadouni 2009; Vigneswaran 2007). Indian Muslims first moved to Mayfair in the 1980s, when whites served as proxies and purchased homes for the community during a time when all non-whites were not permitted to purchase property in the city center (Sadouni N.d.). Mayfair’s proximity to the city center was also important for developing successful businesses and trading schemes (Jinnah 2010). Many Somali shopkeepers who work in townships come to Mayfair to purchase bulk goods that are sold in their shops, and most of the Somalis who live in Mayfair work and interact within the confines of the community in order to maximize the use of their networks and employment opportunities (Moret, et al. 2006).

Mayfair is small—about one square kilometer (Jinnah 2010)—and yet there are dozens of Somali owned and operated shops in the area, ranging from restaurants, clothing shops, and small grocers to electronics shops, internet cafés, and guesthouses. Other migrants live in Mayfair and run their own shops, but Somalis are the largest and most visible ethnic community in the area. Somalis are concentrated on 8th and Central Avenues between Mint Road and Bird Street (Jinnah 2010), where many of the businesses and a Somali mosque are located. Amal Shopping Centre, a Somali-owned mall that opened in 2005, is the heart of the business community where women and men shop, conduct business, and socialize.
The Somali community is vulnerable to social and institutional discrimination and has struggled to acquire adequate living accommodations conducive to productive lives (Peberdy and Majodina 2000). Moreover, refugees in Johannesburg receive little, if any, humanitarian assistance, thereby forcing them to carve out their own economic niches in order to survive (Jacobsen 2005). While refugees and other migrants are legally entitled to the same health, employment, and educational opportunities as other South Africans, this is seldom the case (Harris 2001; Landau 2008). Xenophobia continues to plague South Africa (see for example Kamwimbi, et al. 2010; Landau 2006a; Landau, et al. 2005; Lefko-Everett 2007; Misago, et al. 2009; Wa Kabwe-Segatti and Landau 2008) as do high crime rates and deadly attacks on migrants, most notably the wave of violence that swept across the country in 2008, killing dozens of migrants including Somalis. Hostility toward migrants has been so severe that Somali shops have been looted and burned by mobs, women and children have been threatened in their homes, and Somalis generally are targets for robbery and other brutal attacks (Landau 2008; Misago, et al. 2009). While the brunt of the most abhorrent violence occurs in Somali shops in the townships, Mayfair residents are no strangers to the persistent threat or execution of violations against their person or property.

Research shows that more than 70% of the Somali population in Johannesburg have been victims of crime, and the same percentage have been stopped by police, resulting in interrogations, destroyed documents, and paid bribes (Landau 2008). National unemployment is around 40% (Nyamnjoh 2006; Ellis 2008), while rates for
Gauteng were more than 26% at the time of fieldwork (Statistics South Africa 2011). Previous research in Johannesburg suggest higher unemployment rates among Somalis than the national average (Peberdy and Majodina 2000).

While violence and discrimination would presumably deter new migrants from entering South Africa, the country is an attractive destination. Johannesburg hosts more male than female migrants in general (Jacobsen 2005; Landau, et al. 2005), a pattern observed among Somalis. Early Somali arrivals were predominantly men who migrated without their spouse (Peberdy and Majodina 2000), but this demographic started to change around 2004-2005 as more women came to South Africa in search of husbands—or to reunite with their husbands—and to find opportunities. As the population has grown, so has chain migration as Somalis encourage members of their networks to join them. Others are enticed by South Africa’s immigration laws that grant refugees legal status in the country, an important distinction from most African countries, and to live freely rather than in refugee camps, which South Africa does not have (Jacobsen 2006). Some migrants arrive in South Africa after spending years in refugee camps, such as Dadaab in Kenya¹, or following short stays in refugee camps along the way. As resettlement prospects to the West wane with increasingly restrictive immigration policies, particularly to key destinations such as the United States and the United

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¹ Dadaab, located about 60 miles from the Somali border in North East Province, Kenya, is the world’s largest refugee camp with nearly 400,000 inhabitants, most of whom are Somali. Dadaab comprises three camps and was constructed in 1991 to house 90,000 people seeking refuge from fighting in Somalia (CARE 2012).
Kingdom, South Africa becomes an attractive destination for those frustrated with refugee life in camps. The country also is a destination for some Somalis hoping to migrate onward to a third country in the West. While there are lucrative business opportunities available to entrepreneurs, those jobs generally are in townships (more commonly referred to as the “locations” among Somalis) and are dangerous enterprises due to the constant threat of robbery and violence. Nevertheless, refugees desperate for a livelihood and security accept the risks or even refuse to believe that such perils exist at all and try their luck in South Africa. South Africa is a common destination for migrants across the continent because it is a land of opportunity; the “rainbow nation” comes with gold, as the metaphor goes, which makes it an irresistible resettlement location.

2.3 Somali Culture

2.3.1 Historical Context of Somalia

Somali kinship and social organization are extremely complex systems that vary according to geography, livelihood strategy, and/or clan. Understanding how these arrangements function and have been transformed in the Somali diaspora are difficult to evaluate, as many changes emerged under the dictatorship of Mohamed Siad Barre, who seized power in a 1969 coup d’état, nine years after Italian Somalia and British Somaliland gained independence and became a unitary democratic state. Barre promoted “scientific socialism”, which he defined as “a commitment to equality, economic independence, and economic growth” (Besteman 1999:12). In contrast to his predecessors, Barre’s vision for Somalia included, among other things, bringing women’s
issues to the forefront of public discourse and expanding women’s civil rights. While his
goals were antithetical to traditional customary arrangements that limited women to their
households, Barre pursued his socialist agenda and afforded women previously
unrealized rights. He passed legislation to improve women’s status, enrolled more girls in
school (in an effort to reach gender parity), provided domestic education for women, and
increased women’s political and economic opportunities through jobs in the armed forces
and government, along with positions as clerks, teachers, nurses, and veterinarians
(Abdulle and Ali 2007:146). He downplayed “tribalism” and banned any formal
relationships that promoted social inequality and implemented laws that removed local
leaders from positions of power and replaced them with state level control.

Barre envisioned a united Somalia consisting of all Somalis in the Horn of Africa,
a lofty goal so many years after colonial powers arbitrarily carved ethnic Somali territory
into separate states. He sought to reunite the five Somali regions that were divided under
colonial rule: Southern Somalia (Italy), Northern Somalia/Somaliland (Britain),
Northeastern Kenya (Britain), Djibouti (France), and Eastern Ethiopia/Ogaden (see
Appendix A, Figure 7) (Mazrui 1997). His ambitious agenda failed with Somalia’s
humiliating defeat in the 1978 Ogaden War with Ethiopia that marked the beginning of
his downfall (Besteman 1999; Ssereo 2003). While Barre wanted to end tribalism early in
his regime, he eventually used clan identities to maintain power and strategically
included only individuals who supported his vision in his government as opposition
against him mounted and failed coup attempts increased (Mohamed 1997b). Clan-
affiliated political parties and fighting among clans led to the Somali civil war and an exclusionary clan system where clan alliances have largely disintegrated (Mohamed 1997b), clans and their territories are segregated, and social interactions between clans are limited (Little 2003). Exogamous marriages that linked clans and were critical to maintaining social cohesion are now relics of the past, and the once taboo endogamous unions have become the norm (Mohamed 1997b).

The root cause of Somalia’s disintegration is widely debated among Somalis and scholars who argue for or against the importance of race, class, or clan in instigating the conflict (Adam 1992; Besteman 1996a; Besteman 1996b; Lewis 1998), and it would be erroneous to assume that there is a homogenous Somali culture (Gundel 2002; Langellier 2010). Nevertheless, this brief historical account and the following description of social organization among Somalis synthesize the cultural elements that are most relevant to my research. Numerous texts provide a more nuanced examination of Somali clan systems, regional variations in livelihood strategies and social organization, and historical and political factors that led to the Somali state’s demise and today’s conflict (see for example Besteman 1996a; Besteman 1996b; Besteman 1999; Besteman and Cassanelli 1996; Lewis 1982 [1961]; Lewis 1998; Lewis 1994; Samatar 1992; Samatar 1994).

2.3.2 Kinship, Clans, and Social Organization

Not all Somalis are pastoralists, yet their heritage is largely pastoral and most Somalis descend from nomadic peoples. Even farmers in southern Somalia emerged
primarily from northern pastoral migrants who adopted agriculture and resettled in the south (Lewis 1994). The structure of pastoral society resonates with those living in towns and cities, shaping urban communities and influencing economic and political units (Simons 1995). Lineage allegiances proliferate in towns and villages and determine where individuals live and with whom they associate. Clan and contractual links establish social relations, and the power of kinship and agnation is compared “to iron or to the testicles” (Lewis 1994:29), meaning these solid relationships must be maintained. Just as pastoralists are mutually dependent on their kin for herding and watering animals and for providing assistance in times of famine or hardship, so too are kin necessary supports in urban centers (Lewis 1994).

There are some differences in the social organization of northern and southern Somalis. The south contains steady politico-legal groups, a hierarchical authority system, and the prevalent inclusion of outsiders into their groups (Lewis 1994:133). Agriculture and agropastoralism dominate the south, while the north traditionally relies on pastoralism. The importance of this distinction lies in the way social structure is organized. Clans are large and scattered in the north and do not function as one united group. Instead, clan families are organized agnatically through a primary lineage. The more sedentary southerners have clearly defined territories with permanent villages and communities comprising a few or several hundred nuclear families that are from different lineages and live among heterogeneous agnates (Lewis 1994). These are tightly-knit communities whose members share responsibilities, and they believe that having clan
members scattered across territories is good for inter-clan relations and promotes intra-
clan unity (Helander 1997). Clan distinctions still exist and are reflected in lineage-based
social and political identities (Lewis 1994). Clans hold land titles, and unlike northern
Somalis, clan members live in close proximity and protect the group in its entirety. And
where northern clans seldom unite as a whole to compensate another clan for death of a
member, clan solidarity is the norm in the south (Helander 1997; Lewis 1994).

A basic understanding of Somali clans, lineage, and kinship systems is important
to evaluating Somali social dynamics in the diaspora. Pastoral culture is organized by
segmentary lineage with patrilineal descent leading to a common ancestor (Lewis 1982
[1961]; Lewis 1998; Lewis 1994:19), and the social world is divided by those who are
close kin and those who are distant. Patrilineal genealogies are part of larger clan
categories, or clan families, which are geographically distributed: Dir (west), Isaaq
(center), Daarood (east), Hawiye (central, southern), Digil (south), and Rahanwiin (south)
(Lewis 1982 [1961]; Lewis 1998; Lewis 1994). Somali kinship is a complex web of
affiliations that is perhaps best explained by Mohamed (1997b:147), who writes:

The kinship system (xigto)…gathers individuals from the Somali ethnic group
(nation) into families (qoys) or family cells. It places the families into extended
families (reer) which include the descendants of a close ancestor (grand or great-
grandfather) and their relatives. These extended families are in turn grouped into
lineages (jilib), the lineages into sub-clans (laf), the subclans [sic] into clans
(golo), the clans into clan families (tol), and the clan families constitute the nation
(qaran). Each grouping is built around a common ancestor, called the xigaalo. It
corresponds to the genealogies and the lineages on the father’s side. It allows each
individual to have an identity.
Women and marriage are central to lineage relationships. It is at this level in the genealogical chart that women forge bonds with other lineages and establish inter-clan associations through marriage. Within these lineage segments, endogamous marriage is frowned upon and individuals often seek mates from different, exogamous primary lineages (Lewis 1994; Mohamed 1997b).

Men are part of diya-paying groups within these primary lineage segments, which is “the basic jural and political unit of northern Somali society. It is a lineage or coalition of a few small lineages tracing descent to a common ancestor from between four and eight generations” (Lewis 1994:20). Diya-paying groups function as a kind of social insurance. If a member of the group is wronged, harmed, or killed, the entire group seeks reparation. Conversely, if a diya-paying group member harms or kills another person, his group shares responsibility and the burden of reparation (Lewis 1994). Such groups are created and maintained through formal contracts among agnatic kin who share political unity (Lewis 1994). Individual members must contribute to the group, and those who refuse are forced out (van Notten 2006). Political action is left to the clans, or sub-clans in the case of much larger clans. The highly revered elders establish policy and routinely mediate disputes, and all men are afforded the right to speak at councils (Lewis 1994).

2.3.3 Marriage

Marriage and divorce customs in Somalia differ from those practices in South Africa, demonstrating the contradictions and conflicts that emerge as gender is negotiated
and gender relations are constructed in Mayfair. Girls in Somalia are encouraged to marry because their livelihoods depend on it and fathers seek compensation for their daughters’ upkeep prior to marriage (Lewis 1994). Marriage adds to the intricacy of what Mohamed (1997b) refers to as a “vertical system” of kinship by including a “horizontal system” of ties created through marriage (xidid). These unions customarily comprise individuals without any kinship ties for at least seven to ten generations (Mohamed 1997b) and are used as a strategy to form alliances between lineages, even though they are considered weaker than agnatic ties (Ahmed 2004; Lewis 1994). Cross-cousin marriage often is encouraged since they likely have different lineages, but parallel cousin marriage is abhorred (Ahmed 2004). Somalis follow the Islamic polygyny code, which limits men to four wives at any given time, though it is often older men who have multiple wives. Once a man’s livestock wealth grows, so does the need for extra women to manage herds. In these cases, the senior wife controls the domestic sphere of a family, though not the economic one as each wife has her own animals to care for (Lewis 1994).

A marriage represents the blending of kin, which extends the life of a marriage and sometimes beyond2 (Lewis 1982 [1961]; Lewis 1994). As Simons (1995:147) observes, “There are religious, economic, political, productive, and reproductive matters all tied up in how and why two individuals marry. Nor does any marriage only involve two individuals.” Alliances formed through these marriages must be maintained through

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2 Somalis traditionally practice levirate marriage. When a husband dies before his wife, she is offered in marriage to her deceased husband’s brother or another close agnate.
mutual respect between spouses and toward their in-laws (Mohamed 1997b). However, a man will always maintain loyalty to his patrilineal clan, while a woman—even though she remains the responsibility of her patrilineal clan should she commit any serious crimes—is integrated into her husband’s family (Lewis 1994). A woman, therefore, may feel a conflicted allegiance and could identify with her paternal or maternal clan, or that of her husband since her children are part of his clan, though she remains part of her natal lineage (Gardner and Warsame 2004).

Women are prized for their “physical attraction…the standing and wealth of their families, their reputation or ‘name’ (maga’) as the pastoralists put it, their decorum and character, and their physical strength” (Lewis 1994:35). Marriage procedures are always the same, regardless of the bride’s order in relation to her husband’s other wives. Girls generally marry between 15 and 20 years; men marry between 18 and 25 years. Brothers are expected to marry according to their birth order, and it is believed that those who marry out of order will be unlucky (Lewis 1994:33). Parents have a say in determining whom a son marries, but he has some degree of choice. Arranged marriages are common—they are important for creating or strengthening social ties between lineages—but freedom of choice is far more likely for older men. Women, however, usually have less control over choosing a marriage partner (Lewis 1994) and couples spend little time together before marriage to discourage and prevent pre-marital sexual relations. A girl’s virginity is highly valued; infibulation is recognized as a way to protect purity. When a
man chooses his bride, his father or another senior agnate approaches the girl’s family to discuss marriage arrangements (Ahmed 2004; Lewis 1994).

Before bride-wealth negotiations commence, the groom’s family offers a payment to the bride’s kin, which is a sign of respect (Ahmed 2004). The young man’s father usually pays bride-wealth in uterine family stock. Elder agnates, elder brothers, and the father’s brothers in the diya-paying group, and sometimes the mother’s brother, also contribute. The girl’s father receives payment, or a paternal uncle or elder brother in the father’s absence. Close agnates in the diya-paying group may receive some of the bride-wealth payment, which may include livestock or money (Lewis 1994). Dowry payments often reflect those of the bride-wealth (but do not exceed two thirds of the bride-wealth) and include sheep, goats, burden camels, and household items (Lewis 1982 [1961]; Lewis 1994:39-40). The dower contract is mandatory and there is no marriage without one; it establishes the union and “gives a man full rights over a woman both as a partner and as a bearer of children” (Lewis 1994:42). Once a woman is married, her husband replaces her father as the most powerful force in her life. This means that husbands have a right to the children they produce with their wives, and those children remain with their father and live among their patrilineal kin when there is a divorce.

Divorce is simple, at least for men, and relatively common. Somalis abide by Islamic divorce laws, which allow men to terminate a marriage by saying, “I divorce thee three times” in front of witnesses (Lewis 1994:62). Women cannot claim abuse or neglect as grounds for divorce, even when a husband does not provide basic needs for his wife.
When a woman wants to end her marriage and her husband refuses, there are strategies she can use to make his life miserable, such as abandonment or threats, that will eventually force him into submission and agreeing to divorce (Ahmed 2004; Lewis 1994). Divorce is frequently the result of barrenness, jealously between co-wives, misconduct, and incompatibility (Lewis 1994:62). Women challenge these customary arrangements in Mayfair by choosing their spouses and demanding divorces from their husbands, which in some cases entails turning to South African courts.

2.3.4 Gender Relations

Previous ethnographic research documents that Somali culture is organized around a well-defined sexual division of labor (Lewis 1994) and that women are expected to produce, care for, and enculturate children, while men provide resources and security for the family (Ahmed 2004). The marriage contract confers upon husbands rights to his wife (Lewis 1982 [1961]); women are traditionally subordinate to men and expected to obey their husbands (Lewis 1994). In their role as mothers, women “bear Somali culture, and foster among their children the distinctive role-playing which determines future male and female patterns of behaviour” (Ibrahim 2004:28). Age and sex differences determine the rights and responsibilities of individuals, which are so deeply ingrained in society that they are seldom questioned or challenged. Once boys are circumcised and girls are infibulated, they are guided into adulthood by members of their sex and participate in the gendered activities that they perform as social actors (Mohamed 1997b).
In addition to the value of exogamous marriage in building alliances with other lineages, one of the more important benefits for women is the protection they have against domestic violence. Should a woman suffer abuse at the hands of her husband, her agnates will likely (but not always) intercede and interpret the acts as an insult to her entire clan. In the case of endogamous unions, however, male agnates are less inclined to intervene, as any confrontation reflects poorly on the clan (Gardner and Warsame 2004). Endogamous marriage reduces or eliminates women’s protection against an abusive partner (Ahmed 2004). It is unclear whether this has bearing on outcomes in Mayfair and is an example of the contradiction and powerlessness in the face of changes there.

Sons are highly valued in families because they perpetuate the lineage. While women are critical to building links with other lineages through marriage, ultimately men ensure the continuity of a family’s genealogy. At all levels of the complex clan system, men alone make important decisions and convene in councils where social and political issues are discussed, debated, and resolved. Any private consultation with women in such matters is not publicly recognized (Gardner and Warsame 2004). Diya payments perhaps best demonstrate this crucial difference. When a diya group compensates for the harm, injury, or death of an individual in another clan, payment for women is half the amount of men (Lewis 1994). The interpretation can be that women are worth half of men, and in many cases it does, but the customary reasoning behind this is that diya payments for men are distributed to his entire family, including unmarried sisters, while payment for a woman belongs to her; it is her inheritance (Gardner and Warsame 2004).
2.4 The Somali Diaspora

2.4.1 Historical Context

Somali migration is not a recent phenomenon. Indeed, Somalis’ nomadic heritage makes them naturally well suited as movers within and beyond their national borders, and the experience of travel is greatly valued in Somali cultural tradition (Rousseau, et al. 1998). Somali seamen who worked in the British Merchant Navy left for Britain as early as the late nineteenth century (Tuck 2011), followed by Somalis in search of industrial employment opportunities in the 1950s and 1960s (Waite and Cook 2011). From 1973 onward, men sought jobs in the Gulf States, where they worked as skilled and unskilled laborers (Gundel 2002; Lindley 2006). Somalia’s 1978 defeat in the Ogaden War with Ethiopia produced the first large-scale wave of refugees, as ethnic Somalis living in the Ogaden fled into Somalia (Gundel 2002). Tensions within Somalia mounted in the 1980s, and those who sensed looming, large-scale conflict and had the ability and resources to leave the country did so. Refugees fled Somalia en masse when civil war erupted in 1988 and in 1991 when the Barre government collapsed (Gundel 2002; Lindley 2006).

There are more than one million Somalis living in the diaspora. The Somali diaspora spans the globe, with refugee communities scattered throughout the US and Canada, the Middle East, Australia and New Zealand, North and sub-Saharan Africa, several countries in Western Europe and Scandinavia, and even China, India, and other Asian countries. Most refugees live in Ethiopia or Kenya, settling in Nairobi or in refugee camps in the north. Each community is unique and confronts different social problems.
For example, al-Shabaab\(^3\) recruited several young Somali men in Minneapolis, Minnesota to abandon their families and country to fight in Somalia, where many of them died (Straziuso, et al. 2012). Religious and cultural differences create conflict between Somali youth and African-American students in Columbus, Ohio schools. Misunderstandings between the groups sometimes lead to clashes with neighbors in the city (Williams 2008). Somalis in the mill town of Lewiston, Maine faced fierce resistance from locals (including the mayor, who penned a letter asking them to leave) when they first established their community as secondary migrants (Huisman, et al. 2011). Women in the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya live with the constant threat of rape as they travel to camp borders in search of firewood (Abdi 2007). Somali asylum seekers in the UK who require housing assistance fall under the UK dispersal policy, whereby individuals are relocated to areas where accommodation is readily available (Stewart 2011). Mayfair residents cope with the challenges of discrimination, crime, and xenophobia from their hosts as they manage ideological differences within the community. These communities vary in size and were established at different times. They are subject to different state policies and levels of social support, various attitudes and behaviors from host societies, and religious and cultural similarities and dissimilarities between themselves and their hosts. Despite their distinctions, all of these diasporic communities face gender contests as women’s roles change and lead to conflict in their new homes (Berns-McGown 2007).

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\(^3\) Al-Shabaab, or “The Youth”, is an al-Qaeda linked Islamic group that operates in parts of southern Somalia. They impose Sharia law in areas they control and are known for violent extremism.
2.4.2 Social Organization

Somalis seldom discuss clan dynamics outside of their communities, making it difficult to gauge the role clan divisions play in the diaspora (Bjork 2007). In many instances diasporic Somalis prefer to live in neighborhoods inhabited by members of their clan, but constraints such as a lack of low-income housing challenge their ability to do so (Berns-McGown 2007; Stewart 2011). Clan loyalties are important in resettled Somali communities and do cause friction, as evidenced by conflict over community leadership positions in some locales such as Columbus (see Williams 2006). While exogamous marriage was once the norm in Somalia, marriage is increasingly endogamous in Somalia and the diaspora (Ahmed 2004; Mohamed 1997b), creating problems in the post-1991 political climate. In Somalia’s capital Mogadishu, for example, women who married outside of their clan faced insecurity and abandonment by their kin (Lewis 1994). Women’s suffering during the fighting is attributed to exogamous marriages, as conflict forced women to choose their clan carefully and in terms of which would best protect them. For many women, their association with multiple clans placed them in a precarious situation; inter-clan conflict pitted women against their natal clan and their husbands’ clan. Women had to find safe spaces as their patr kin fought with their husbands’ kin, forcibly separating loving families (Gardner and Warsame 2004). This important shift also is the reality in the diaspora. Somalis are less willing to marry or assist those outside of their own clan (Ibrahim 2004). Women and men carried these conflicts with them as
they fled their country, but the extent of these changes in Mayfair is not clear nor agreed upon by members in the community.

### 2.4.3 Gender Roles and Gender Relations

The civil war has affected household structure and family dynamics in Somalia and in the diaspora. Women customarily control the private sector while men operate in the public realm of society; women are not welcome in men’s space, such as where men socialize and conduct business. These well-defined social boundaries are enforced by social controls, such as gossip, that stigmatize women who challenge these gender arrangements (Kusow 2007). While women raise children and maintain households, Islam affords men roles as breadwinners and security providers (Abdulle and Ali 2007).

In the West, however, boundaries are less rigid and gender relationships are more egalitarian, enabling women to maneuver social space that was once reserved for men (see for example Berns-McGown 1999; Kusow 2007). Since the collapse of the Somali state and the growth of the Somali diaspora, gender roles have been transformed (Abdi 2007; Ahmed 1999; de Regt 2007; Engebrigtsen 2007) as a result of increased economic insecurity. Despite the patriarchal nature of Somali culture, women frequently lead households and are the sole family providers (Abdi 2007; Al-Sharmani 2006; Campbell 2006; Peberdy and Rogerson 2002), making their economic productivity critical to survival (Abdulle and Ali 2007; Berns-McGown 2007; Gardner 2004). In the diaspora, women not only maintain their conventional roles as mothers and housewives, but they
also engage in economic activities once reserved for men, contradicting the customary belief that it is shameful for men to be dependent on women (de Regt 2007; Lewis 1994).

Research in diaspora communities shows that Somali women take advantage of new educational and economic opportunities in their resettlement countries (Decimo 2007; Kleist 2007). Unlike men, women adjust especially well to labor conditions, have greater access to income opportunities than men (Al-Sharmani 2006), and embrace responsibilities that men often do not. For women who received little or no education in Somalia and may not have earned wages in the past, they accept the dead-end, low-paying jobs that men will not pursue, enabling financial independence and creating a threatening role reversal (Affi 1997; Affi 2004; Gardner 2004). These new roles have altered gender relations, as women are now household leaders and instrumental in keeping their families together (Abdulle and Ali 2007; Berns-McGown 2007; Gardner 2004). Paid labor grants women greater autonomy while men lose power in their households (Al-Sharmani 2006; Gardner 2004). These changes challenge gender relations and patriarchy, and they afford women more active public and social roles (Pessar 1999).

Somali women have become visible in the economic roles they play (Ahmed 1999), and this visibility is part of a larger transformative process where men react to their loss of power as they see women performing new roles. Economic autonomy enables women to send remittances to relatives living in Somalia and elsewhere in the diaspora, and they often work extra hours or multiple jobs to meet their families’ financial demands (Horst 2007). Somali women living in Columbus, Ohio, for example,
often remit to extended relatives whom they do not know well or have not met (Shaffer 2012). Their willingness to accept jobs that are considered beneath men, along with their business savvy, means that the money they earn to support their households and the remittances they send to Somalia and elsewhere match, and perhaps surpass, those contributions of men. Women are thought to remember their families at home or in refugee camps more frequently than men do (Horst 2006b; Horst 2007; McMichael and Manderson 2004). Indeed, some Somalis living in camps believe that daughters are more valuable than sons because of the remittances they send (Horst 2002), which can empower women with more family control (Al-Sharmani 2006). Women’s economic success enables them to participate actively in rebuilding efforts in Somalia. Their contributions have built schools and invested in technology (Kusow 2007), and women throughout the diaspora have collected funds for these and other projects to benefit refugees (Al-Sharmani 2006). The remittances women send sustain families and maintain kinship and cultural ties abroad. Sons were highly valued in pastoral society, but women in the diaspora are demonstrating their importance. A father would never rely on his daughter for support in traditional society, but survival needs transcend those boundaries.

While many migrant women find economic success and autonomy, others suffer in their new situations (Colson 2004 [1999]; Kay 1989; Matlou 2004 [1999]) and endure increased subordination (Datta 1998; Kay 1989), a result of the way men respond to shifting power structures and men's inability to secure employment for themselves (Brettell 2008). The employment opportunities women enjoy in the West, as well as the
rights and prescriptions for gender equality in countries such as South Africa, exacerbate men’s depression, stress, and perceived loss of status, power, family authority, and sense of self-worth. These feelings have led to increased domestic violence (Mohamed 1997a) or men’s disengagement from family affairs (Kusow 2007), causing high divorce rates and single mother households (Affi 1997; Affi 2004; Berns-McGown 1999; Utteh 1997).

There is increased khat use, a plant whose leaves are chewed for its stimulant effects that is commonly found in the Horn of Africa, and poor father-child relations (Kusow 2007). Many women attribute these changes to their ability to adapt and to men’s inability to adjust their attitudes and beliefs (McSpadden and Moussa 1993), which are exacerbated by the lack of protection from traditional male networks once afforded women (Mohamed 1997a). The absence of male household leaders is pervasive (Kusow 2007). Just as divorce is much easier for women in the diaspora since they no longer require their husband’s permission, it is also simpler for men to abandon their families.

This section shows that the challenges of resettlement contradict women’s dedication to their cultural principles, which is a crucial component of the conflict in Mayfair. Women in the diaspora continue to focus on instilling Somali culture and Muslim values in their children, which they feel is threatened by Westernization (Berns-McGown 2007). At the same time, many women do not tolerate deadbeat husbands and are proactive family leaders. Some women feel their situation improves without the men who drain family resources, and they view men’s lack of support and assistance from unemployed husbands inexcusable (Affi 1997; Berns-McGown 1999; Gardner 2004).
Nonetheless, the disintegration of the household is particularly painful to women who have lost their husbands to war, abandonment, divorce, or resettlement patterns. Many women remain single and raise their children without male assistance.

2.5 Migration, Refugees, and Gender

2.5.1 Historical Context

A focus on men long overshadowed women’s participation in migratory and resettlement processes by assuming that women naturally follow their husbands, fathers, and brothers. This perspective served to exclude women from migration debates and limit their roles to those of voiceless, subservient followers who are led silently, and without agency or autonomy, by the men who control them and make choices on their behalf. It was not until the mid-1970s that migrant women received attention in the social sciences, but even then they were perceived as dependents of men (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; Pessar 2003). The failure to include women in earlier migration discourse is largely attributed to neoclassical theory that dominated migration studies from the 1950s to the 1970s (Pessar 1999; Pessar 2003) and which explored international migration in the context of push and pull factors and the need for countries to meet labor demands (Massey 1999). Migration inquiries were concerned with dissimilarities between countries regarding employment and wages in addition to the costs of migration (Massey, et al. 1993) and posited that men were willing to take risks as migrants while women protected community tradition and maintained the family home (Pessar 2003). Neoclassical theory did not focus on households and social networks, but instead looked to the migration choices of individual
actors. It did not make gender differentiations in migration decisions, nor did it consider gender ideologies (Pessar 1999) even though migration is gendered and women tend to move internally. Nonetheless, anthropologists have been instrumental in bringing women and gender into migration research (Foner 2003; Pessar 2003) by recognizing that migration processes are inherently gendered (Donato, et al. 2006). Objecting to a focus on binary models of actors or larger political and economic structures, anthropologists:

pointed to the importance of mediating units such as households, families, and social networks… [which] facilitated and sustained international migration, as well as channeled its effects. Feminist ethnographers, in turn, challenged the ways in which much of the scholarship on migration, in general, and on households and social networks, in particular, neglected important matters of gender hierarchies, inequality, and conflict. [Pessar 2003:76]

The limited, exclusionary perspectives from the past not only silenced the women who are important players within their families and households, but it is also antithetical to anthropology’s commitment to holistic understanding and exacerbates Western notions of gendered categories and assumptions about gender relationships in non-Western settings. Disregarding the importance of women’s participation in these practices limited inquiries and interpretations of the complex processes and interactions that lead women—and refugee women in particular—to new lives in wholly different settings.

The place of women in mobility emerged in the 1980s when anthropologists began to focus on gender roles and the migration process (Knörr and Meier 2000) while criticizing earlier binary models that had focused on “the universal subjugation of women and culturally specific articulations of gender differences” (Donato, et al. 2006:5). Scholars highlighted the need to include gender as part of the complex web of social
relationships that shape migration processes and outcomes, arguing it is those gendered relations that are crucial to understanding how women and men are empowered or limited in the course of migration and settlement (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). They insisted that the use of “gender” cannot be conflated with women, but rather should be understood as “a key relational dimension of human activity and thought—activity and thought informed by cultural and individual notions of men and women—having consequences for their social or cultural positioning and the ways in which they experience and live their lives” (Indra 2004 [1999]:2). In the context of refugee and forced migration research, and just as masculinity is socially constructed, men’s experiences as refugees must be included in analyses of gender relations, renegotiations, and processes among communities living in exile (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2004 [1999]). This is especially important for understanding gender structures among Somalis living in Mayfair.

Women’s roles in making decisions about migration—choosing to leave home, deciding where to resettle, and starting a new life and livelihood strategy—have become a source of interest to scholars who seek to understand the gendered dynamics of migration and resettlement practices. Women not only influence familial migration decisions, and in some cases migrate alone and independent of prior consultation with close kin, but they also play critical roles in their resettlement communities and provide for their families as they struggle to navigate life in their new home. Even though concern with gender in migration is a fairly recent development, it has thrived (Pessar 2003) and
increasingly relies on interdisciplinary perspectives and collaboration in response to the complexity of migration processes (see for example Silvey 2006; Sinke 2006).

Anthropological inquiries have focused on women’s changing roles within their families and in household structures, and on their experiences as migrants (Brettell 2008). Women’s labor participation and their important roles as economic agents now receive attention and focus on the costs and benefits of those experiences. Anthropologists emphasize the importance of gender and gendered migration processes, and they work to bring gender into transnational studies (Foner 2003; Mahler and Pessar 2006). Research geared toward women investigates the challenges of migration (Brettell 2003), and in the case of refugees and forced migrants, focuses on how women manage the difficulties of flight, resettlement, and exile (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2004 [1999]). These evaluations must also unpack the categories of women by recognizing variation among them through factors such as race, class, ethnicity, and age (Indra 2004 [1999]) to understand how these components mediate gender relations (Lutz 2010). Despite the growing literature on women and migration in recent years, however, there remains a dearth of concentrated studies on women and gender issues among certain populations and in some geographic regions. Indeed, women have been for the most part excluded from migration scholarship and gendered analyses of migration in South Africa (Peberdy 2009).

2.5.2 Migration and Refugees

The paucity of gender focus in refugee literature until recently (Colson 2003; Indra 2004 [1999]) is perplexing. Refugees have contributed to the “feminization of
migration” (Castles and Miller 2009) as more women migrate without male companions, and yet gender as a crucial component of migration remains marginalized within the scholarship (Mahler and Pessar 2006). Although migration studies still struggle to define a uniform theory of mobility (Donato, et al. 2006; Van Hear 2010), and gender analyses have not contributed significantly to building on theoretical models of migration, examining gender in the context of migration is important to understanding the fluidity of gendered social relationships and the ways in which they are contested and negotiated through intricate migration processes (Mahler and Pessar 2006).

“Refugee” was not a conceptually distinct social category until the end of World War II, when it became part of a globalized process (Malkki 1995b). Refugees are often excluded from general migration discourse and regarded as different from other migration trajectories, even though their long-term movement shares similarities with voluntary migration (Trager 2005a). This segregation also contributes to problems with developing a general migration theory (Castles 2010). Refugee theories usually assume that migrants are forced to flee their homes and have little control over their movement, but refugees make migration decisions (Horst 2006b; Van Hear 1998) and weigh their options about where to move (Richmond 1993). Refugee communities are part of transnational communities (Koser 2002), and as transmigrants—or social actors in two or more nation-states, one of which being the homeland (Brettell 2003)—refugees are often deeply committed to their home country and invest in maintaining ties with those who stay behind. Transnational migration includes all types of migrants who engage in the
economic and political institutions and the usual living arrangements in their countries of settlement but remain strongly connected to their native land in that “they maintain connections, build institutions, conduct transactions, and influence local and national events in the countries from which they emigrated” (Glick Schiller, et al. 1995:48). Transnational perspectives are especially useful for conceptualizing Somali lives in the diaspora as they rebuild their lives while retaining their networks in Somalia.

The dynamics of migration and gender are increasingly focal points of inquiry, concentrating on the ways individuals become aware of gender—relational and contextual—as they navigate new lives and manage changing social, economic, and political processes while grappling with realities from the past (Donato, et al. 2006:6; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Pessar 2005). Feminist scholarship explores human and cultural variation and has shifted the focus away from sex and biological gender toward identities and differences to understand “what those categories mean and how they intersect both with one another and with other relevant categories, such as age, occupation, religion, status, and so on” (Stockett and Geller 2006:2). Gender is one piece of identity formation operating within other structures of social inequality (Dirks, et al. 1994). Nonetheless, gender offers an important way to understand social order and power constructs, which then shapes gendered behavior and relationships (Lorber 2010).

2.5.3 “Gendered Geographies of Power”

Anthropologists Mahler and Pessar (2001; 2006; Pessar and Mahler 2003) propose a “gendered geographies of power” framework to examine gender and
transnationalism, and social agency within power hierarchies, which has resonance beyond transnational examinations (Pessar 2003; Pessar and Mahler 2003). Research on how migration alters gender relations shows variation in outcomes, with some studies pointing to new opportunities and egalitarian, empowering gender models, while others question women’s liberation and instead show increased subordination (King, et al. 2006; Park 2008; Parrado and Flippen 2005). To explore this discrepancy, the first piece of their model posits that gender functions across “geographical scales”—that is, multiple spatial, social, and cultural grounds—that are critical to understanding how gender interacts with and produces gendered behaviors. Gender plays out in various spaces, such as the body, the family, and the state, and is normalized through repetition. It is bolstered by the deeply entrenched interactions among and between these different forces (Mahler and Pessar 2006). This point questions if and how transnational movement, and the transformations that result from migration processes, benefit or hinder women through the renegotiation of gender relations. It explores what happens in new settings and whether new spaces and places change gender relations, and in which direction.

The second component looks at how people fit into social structures and within specific social spaces, or “social locations”, which form people’s identities and determine how they think and act (Pessar 2003:95). Mahler and Pessar (2006:43) explain this point with the example that Moroccan immigrants who live in Spain have low social locations at a national level but also within the nation’s hierarchy based on variables such as gender, class, and race. These social locations are mutable, and people exist and operate
within these different hierarchal systems. Moroccans with low locations in Spain may hold high locations in their homeland.

The final pieces of this framework consider different agencies. An investigation of “power geometries” focuses on agency and its manifestations to provide an understanding of how actors use their locations and access to resources to manage their conditions and make choices about exerting personal agency (or deciding not to), and thus gain access to power. Finally, this model includes the individual processes of imagination that is shaped by gender in tandem with substantive agency. For example, refugee men who feel emasculated in resettlement might be less willing to invest in job skills training or in maintaining their families. Regardless of whether migration outcomes meet initial expectations—making a dream reality—the thoughts that influence behavior are important to explaining variation. These two components examine how thought and action are related, exploring why two seemingly identical individuals act in various ways, or why one person has more initiative than another and strategizes their agency.

This paradigm was designed to fill a theoretical void in transnational migration research and “to conceptualize and study gendered identities and relations when conducted and negotiated across international borders, as they relate to multiple axes of difference, and as they operate along and across many sociospatial scales – from the body to the globe” (Mahler and Pessar 2006:42). It is useful for thinking about the complexity of gender and how gender functions in Mayfair through the interaction of Somali sociocultural constructs and South African society and institutions. Migration processes
affect gender relations, and understanding social locations clarifies why these changing relationships create conflict in South Africa. The gendered ways in which Somalis think about and act on their agency influence outcomes and help to explain variation among and between women and men in Mayfair.

The “gendered geographies of power” is a model through which the production and reproduction of gender can be explored within a particular context—in a specific location—and even compared against groups in other transnational spaces. This framework is especially relevant to studies on the gendered lives of refugees and the state’s role in that process as it considers multiple variables to explore gender in transnational inquiry (McIlwaine 2010; Pessar and Mahler 2003) and to clarify why gender renegotiations can result in uneven changes in gender identities. It questions why, for example, there may be changes in one sphere but not the other. To illustrate this point, McIlwaine (2010) explains that Latin American migrant women in London enjoy employment opportunities with wages that grant them more household power, but their jobs do not improve their overall status, a result of women’s low status work. While migration alters gendered actions, resistance to change varies according to class and nationality and depends on how firmly rooted gender ideologies are.

2.5.4 Micro and Macro Structures

Several variables shape refugee experiences of loss and exile, including “structural similarities or dissimilarities between themselves and receiving societies, availability and accessibility of resources and income-generating opportunities,
availability and nature of assistance at the initial stage, host government policies and practices, [and] attitudes of nationals towards refugees” (Kibreab 2004:21). Each of these components influence outcomes in households, sociocultural arrangements, and gender relations in the Somali diaspora and must be examined within their specific context to understand variation in different communities. Women and men experience settlement in gendered ways, and their opportunities and limitations in a strange land are shaped by gender and sociocultural perceptions of distinctions between women and men. Moreover, analyses of these differences must consider variation between the sexes, including nationality, race, age, marital status, and class structures (Mahler and Pessar 2006; McIlwaine 2010), all of which affect Somalis living in Mayfair in some way.

Van Hear (1998) argues that migration outcomes depend not only on migrants, but also on host communities and those who stay behind. Non-migrants affect Somali lives in Mayfair through remittance demands from Somalia, as well as through pressure to maintain cultural constructions from afar. A focus on states’ laws and policies has generated interest among feminist ethnographers, who examine how their gendered approaches to migrants, including refugees and asylees, shape migrants’ access to resources and opportunities, such as general policies regarding which household member receives the family’s social assistance checks (Mahler and Pessar 2006). The ways in which states respond to migrants have very real consequences and influence people’s experiences. State legislation and migration policies may hinder family survival strategies and alter power structures within households (Pessar 2003). Nonetheless, migrants
strategize based on their specific set of circumstances and use their households and networks to make important decisions and to access resources. Political-economic perspectives in migration research examine how individuals function within larger historical, political, and economic contexts, which is a useful way to think about how state policies influence migration structures and effects (Brettell 2003:10). A focus on changing gender relations and identities must include an examination of situational macro and micro level structures (McIlwaine 2010).

**The Question of Agency**

The degree to which agency is equated to women’s empowerment is debatable. Ortner (2006) takes the position that social agents are so deeply involved in their social relations that the notion of a wholly free social actor is untenable. Agents operate within their social networks as well as in larger social contexts where power, inequality, and competition are everyday realities (Ortner 2006). While most people have the ability to act as agents, uneven power structures influence and sometimes limit agency (Moore 1994). In other words, actors use agency to influence social outcomes, to resist power structures in order to transform society, and to achieve their goals, but there remain sociocultural constructions of power that can and sometimes lead to disempowerment:

> Whatever “agency” they [persons] seem to “have” as individuals is in reality something that is always in fact interactively negotiated. In this sense they are never free agents, not only in the sense that they do not have the freedom to formulate and realize their own goals in a social vacuum, but also in the sense that they do not have the ability to fully control those relations toward their own ends. As truly and inescapably social beings, they can only work within the many webs of relations that make up their social worlds. [Ortner 2006:151-52]
Using Sherpa women as an example, Ortner (1996) shows that while women have the ability to pursue their own interests and act (for the most part) freely, their agency is limited within society by gender disparities engrained in their cultural fabric, which serves to weaken their agency.

It is the use of agency and the capacity for behaving in new and different ways that enables some degree of change in gender relations, and these processes must be examined by considering structural, institutional, or intersubjective limitations (McNay 2000:23). Pessar and Mahler (2003:813) argue that gender is not only a fluid process, but also a structure of social relationships: “Recognizing that gender becomes embedded in institutions lays the foundation as well for analyzing the structural factors that condition gender relations in addition to ideological factors”. The shifting social structure of gender relations can be altered by the struggle to control the different forms of capital, including social and economic, that shape power relations and divisions (McNay 2000).

Agency is a way to conceptualize refugees not as powerless victims, but as actors who utilize different strategies to survive and manage their lives in the midst of their displacement and resettlement. It is also constructive to consider the effects of others’ agency, such as government officials and policy makers, on the lives of refugees (Bakewell 2010; Essed, et al. 2004). Brettell (2003:7) argues that anthropological inquiry of migration “should emphasize both structure and agency; it should look at macro-level contextual issues, micro-level strategies and decision-making, and the meso-level relational structures within which individuals operate. It needs to articulate both people
and process” (and see Cohen and Sirkeci 2011). To understand the complexity of changes in gender models and identity in established refugee communities outside of the homeland, agency informs the dynamics of gender renegotiations and changing social relationships in settlement spaces (Essed, et al. 2004).

**Households, Families, and Communities**

In addition to significant macro level milieus, the hallmarks of anthropology—studies of kinship and social organization—are fundamental to understanding migrant households (Blackwood 2003; Cohen 2004); consequently, much attention has been directed toward migrants themselves, focusing on “families, households, and communities, as well as on the larger economic and social contexts in which they live and work” (Trager 2005a:10). The emphasis on households, as well as on social networks and relationships, offers migration studies an attempt “to combine macro- and microperspectives of analysis through the filter of the household [which] not only bring the migrant-as-decision-maker back into focus, but also reintroduces the social and cultural variables that must be considered in conjunction with economic variables” (Brettell 2008:125). Situating individuals as actors within their various social and kin groups provides a framework for examining how social networks function and how individuals use those networks in migration and to maintain linkages (Brettell 2003; Cohen 2001; Cohen 2004). To understand gender relations within households, household dynamics must be explored in tandem with other external factors such as social, economic, and legal institutions (Agarwal 1997).
Migration scholars have reshaped inquiry to include households as a critical unit of analysis in recent decades. And while migrants as members of households can increase income and spread risk (Massey 1998; Massey, et al. 1993), the household can also limit opportunities by putting the group before individual choice (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011). Somali men, for example, flee risk and the disasters they face at home, but they do not meet their expectations in Mayfair and are unable to support their households effectively. Insecurity builds even as people flee from some risks but fail to find the opportunities they expected. Critics also object to the assumption that migrant households are organized around reciprocity, consensus, and altruism (Pessar 2003:80) and that all household decisions are made unanimously while ignoring important power relations (Clark 2003). Regardless of a migrant’s motivation—to support his or her household or to flee from it—households factor into migration decisions and influence outcomes (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011). For Somalis in Mayfair, migration choices are about escaping insecurity in Somalia, with or without household consensus and altruism.

Transnational approaches have been criticized for their tendency to portray migrant populations as homogeneous groups (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011; Horst 2006b) and asserting the unity of households in making migration decisions (Brettell 2003; Pessar 1999; Pessar 2003). Households are increasingly understood as porous constructions with “enormous variability in household forms, structures and activities both within and between societies. They [scholars] also stress that households are not bounded units and that their internal structures and workings both produce and are produced by larger-scale
cultural, economic and political processes” (Moore 1994:86). Rather than thinking of households as centers of mutual cooperation and dedication to the maintenance and betterment of the whole, they can be understood as cores of complex relationships (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011), power struggles, and conflicting interests that require constant bargaining and negotiation (Agarwal 1997; Moore 1994).

Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992) contends that migration models must consider power relations within the household and the way migration alters concepts of patriarchy and supports the renegotiation of gender relations. Power is intimately tied to gender relations within households by the way women and men understand, bargain, and negotiate their rights and responsibilities in marriage (Moore 1994). Part of this restructuring in migrant households involves how women’s new roles and experiences influence their views. For example, research points to the importance of employment type and not simply economic activities that determine how these processes shape gendered outcomes in migration. When female domestic workers are exposed to the norms of their host societies, they may see alternative models defining household activities that influence their own homes, patterns of activities, expectations, and successes (Brettell 2003). Furthermore, studies demonstrate the importance of household composition in reshaping conceptions of gender in households. In her work with Mexican families, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992) points to extended separation as a cause for shifting gender relations between spouses that favors women. While time is critical to change among Mexicans, Brettell’s (2003) research on Portuguese shows that historical patterns of spousal separation result in fewer gender
contests as women were granted domestic power prior to migration. Power structures shift when spouses live apart for extended periods and women assume new roles and responsibilities during the separation.

Women’s ability or desire to contest gender norms is situational. For Mexican women, migration creates a conflict between their expectations as women and the economic needs that encourage movement (Cohen, et al. 2008), something which is seen in Mayfair as women balance their responsibilities. Turning to Vietnamese migrant women in the US, Kibria (1993) emphasizes that women balance their access to new resources with customary family structures, resulting in limited alterations to traditional gender arrangements. Even as they challenge gender relations more broadly, women value their family roles and focus on maintaining their important household and family responsibilities. Furthermore, economic security is mutable and precarious, leaving women dependent on men’s financial contributions to their families. This study highlights the contradictory nature of gender, and more importantly illustrates that migrant women may not seek sweeping changes to patriarchal cultural systems even with access to resources and economic empowerment.

Pessar’s (1995; 2003) research on Dominicans in the US underscores the choices women make about the outcomes of their wage labor. Women must decide between improving gender relations in their households through their economic contributions or enhancing their family’s social status by leaving the workforce and maintaining traditional gender arrangements. Women struggle with the conflict between patriarchal
ideologies and economic responsibilities. Pessar’s work concludes that women who stop working often adhere to immigrant and family philosophies over individual gains in their households through economic activities.

Larger social structures influence how and whether gender relations change in households, as Pessar’s research demonstrates. These conflicts also occur in non-migration contexts. For example, deeply ingrained social arrangements that maintain women’s dependence on men inhibit empowerment for female garment workers in Ahmedabad, India even as their work enables them to make decisions in their households. Furthermore, the nature of garment work is similar to the unpaid labor women perform in their homes, limiting women’s ability to influence changing gender relations in households, families, and society (Kantor 2003). Research on marital households in Costa Rica draws the same conclusion, showing that when women’s informal jobs are similar to tasks women already perform in their households, those activities often reinforce gender arrangements (Mannon 2006). The results of these studies indicate that work itself does not improve women’s status. Instead, empowerment involves complex interactions with larger structures and ideologies within social systems.

Other research supports the view that social structure and ideologies influence gender relations in addition to changes in gender roles. In their comparative study of gender relations among Mexican nationals in Durham, North Carolina and four sending communities in Mexico, Parrado and Flippen (2005) discover uneven outcomes of women’s work. Their study found that even as migration increases women’s economic
participation, their low wage employment is less empowering than in Mexico because weaker social networks and difficulty navigating the US immigration system increase partner dependency. Thus, migrant women’s economic participation often signifies a family’s economic insecurity and does not improve their overall status, a pattern noted in other studies of Hispanics in the US (Fernández-Kelly and García 1990).

While households are critically important to understanding gender relations, a broader evaluation of families—those relations that may not be confined to a single household unit—offer insight into much larger cultural meanings of gender relations and patriarchy within a social system. In his work on Zapotec peasant migration to Mexico, for example, Hirabayashi (1993) demonstrates that group solidarity and conformity to social standards of behavior is a condition for receiving survival resources from the group. Larger kinship structures beyond the household, as well as social networks, play a key role in controlling social life and in maintaining patriarchal systems (Hirabayashi 1993; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). For Somalis, these structures include layers of clan and kin relations in the Mayfair community and sometimes beyond.

**Economics**

Safa (1995) argues that a household and national gender perspective is necessary to understand how women’s labor participation affects their status, as paid employment may create other challenges that impede a change in status. Women are cognizant of the bargaining power that comes with their new roles as participants in the labor economy, and they may gain substantial clout within the household if its members are highly
dependent on women’s financial contributions; thus, the greater the need for women’s income, the more women can resist male dominance. In their study of women’s control in Sri Lankan households, however, Malhotra and Mather (1997) show that while access to education and resources can be empowering, larger social contexts and patriarchal ideologies do not guarantee autonomy in the domestic sphere. Based on her ethnological research on female industrial workers living in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, Safa (1995:182) stresses that paid employment empowers women only when state policies, access to resources, and household conditions are favorable to women. When a woman’s wages serve as a substitute to her husband’s, there is little benefit to her overall status and it is a burden when she is left alone. This pattern exists in Mayfair, where most women earn an income only in the absence of a husband’s contributions and that income does not improve their overall status. Safa (1995) argues that it is only when women are major financial contributors to their households, and when married women comprise much of the paid labor force, that employment advances women’s status. Egalitarian relationships, she continues, are most likely found among younger, educated, and employed couples who contribute equally to the household economy.

Safa’s evaluation of employment outcomes for women is useful for assessing women’s paid labor in migration contexts and for thinking about gender relations in Mayfair. As women’s status changes, so do relationships between men and women (Holtzman 2000). It is important to question the role women’s economic participation plays in determining how migration challenges gender relations. Women are responsible
for maintaining their families, and migrant women are no exception (Trager 2005b), even as they challenge subordinating cultural norms and practices (Pessar 2003). It is common for them to face disapproval, and even conflict, in cases where women’s participation in wage labor is a new development (Macleod 1991; Mills 2003). Somali women in Mayfair defend themselves against disparaging comments about their work as they balance responsibilities in and outside of their homes.

Gender contests emerging from women’s wage labor are evident in other studies. Koenig’s (1997) case study of women’s settlement in Mali demonstrates that women often judge migration according to the outcome, or the benefit, for themselves and their children. They are less concerned with maintaining existing gender roles found in their cultural traditions and respond to resettlement with the goal of acquiring economic resources to support their families (Koenig 1995). Economic needs and women’s participation in paid employment appear in debates about women’s roles in non-migrating societies as well. In Muslim Moroccan society, for example, women seek employment as a survival strategy, which men interpret as a challenge to their authority over them and their activities; therefore, the alleged “liberation of women is predominantly an economic issue” (Mernissi 1987[1975]:165), as men perceive women’s economic pursuits as a direct threat to their ability to control them. In Egypt, Muslim women have been heavily criticized for working, which is a reaction attributed, in part, to leaving fewer jobs available to men. Islamists who oppose women’s participation in the
workforce cite the need for women to focus their attention on raising families and not on working outside the home (Abu-Lughod 1998).

Other research shows that as migrant women access the social and economic resources once reserved for men, they are empowered to effect change in family gender relations by making important decisions in matters from which they were excluded in the past (Mills 2003). Women’s gains as key financial players within their families shift power structures in their favor. Even though men’s positions are compromised, they typically maintain a higher social status relative to women (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). While women’s financial contributions may secure a family’s economic stability in some cases, men are often recognized as household heads (Blackwood 2003), which places women in a precarious situation that limits their social advancement through their economic productivity. In the case of migration and resettlement, the process of women’s economic development “must lead to a reevaluation of those very cultural and individual notions that inform gender constructs” (Colson 2004 [1999]:37). To understand such gendered differences in the changing social and economic experiences of male and female migrants, gender relations must be examined closely (Moore 1988).

While many cases demonstrate that spousal relations may suffer from women’s labor, others emphasize women’s gains in their families and communities. They are granted more privileges as respected and important players and often have more control over personal choices, such as marriage. Indeed, “many women view their wage work as a source of increased personal independence and security despite the often exploitative
Women’s autonomy gained through labor, even with existing gender inequalities in the labor market, affords them more control over households and decision making while men lose power. These changes challenge the patriarchal structures found in home societies, and they grant women more active public and social roles in their new locations (Pessar 1999).

2.5.5 Gender Relations

Refugee discourse in non-scholarly circles frequently categorize women as powerless victims, but their proactive response to situational circumstances demonstrates their strength and resilience (RajasinghamSenanayake 2004). Women are independent actors within their households and communities (Semyonov and Gorodzeisky 2005), and the additional responsibilities they assume as migrants alter gender relations. Indeed, shifting migration processes create social transformations through the different resources that become available and the gender renegotiations that occur (Essed, et al. 2004; Kibria 1990). Gender relations and patriarchal behaviors undergo change that is rooted in the migration process as social, economic, and political factors shift in resettlement countries. The ways in which refugees reconstruct their lives and social networks is a gendered process that enables people to renegotiate their new identities in exile (Colson 2004 [1999]; Meertens 2004), but to sustain them requires a broad, communal acceptance of these new roles (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004), including by women. The process leading to lasting and empowering change requires consideration of other intersecting factors that often reinforce traditional gender ideologies. For example, Park’s (2008)
research on South Korean women living in New York shows that employment alone does not empower women but is tied to other factors such as class status and motherhood, which shape women’s perceptions of empowerment through employment. It is crucial to examine the ways activities and their associations become more or less gendered to understand how gender roles and identities evolve over time (Gutmann 2007 [1996]).

It is difficult to measure how migration alters gender relations and to determine how customary relations are defined (Pessar and Mahler 2003). Migration outcomes and whether, or to what extent, gender relations change are variable for different populations and depend on cultural contexts and other external forces (Brettell 2003; Pessar 2005). For example, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992) argues that while gender relations become less patriarchal in Mexican immigrant families, it is a heterogeneous process that is shaped by structural variation in how migration decisions are made (i.e., who migrates and when) within households and families. Shifting power structures enable women to contest gender norms, which may produce changes within social systems over time (Hofmann and Buckley 2011), but the immediate effect can be negative for women as they face pressure to conform to social norms or shunning for their deviant behavior (McSpadden and Moussa 1993). Lamphere’s (1986) research on women’s workforce participation in the US shows that while family members may adapt some of their behaviors, the foundation of traditional cultural values regarding authority and respect remain unchanged. These conflicts are present in Mayfair as Somalis negotiate gender relations.
Women navigate patriarchy and accept their responsibility to support their families even with broader criticism and contests rooted in ideological variation within the community.

Many studies demonstrate that migrant women’s experiences differ from those of men, and the migration process itself effects change in gender relations and patriarchal behaviors (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992). Essed, et al. (2004) suggest that women manage their refugee lives more efficiently than men by transcending their cultural gender arrangements and adapting to the needs and demands of their current situation. This, in turn, leads to robust political, economic, and social identities that are altered by the nature of their refugee experience. Research on Eritrean refugees shows, for example, the gendered nature of coping with being a refugee better positions women to handle the changes proactively while men tend to respond with feelings of confusion and disillusionment (Kibreab 2004). Men have responded to shifting power structures, women’s economic success, and an inability to secure worthwhile employment differently, and in some cases women have suffered tremendously for it (Colson 2004 [1999]; Kay 1989; Matlou 2004 [1999]). Many men do not assist women with domestic duties, resulting in a double burden on women who must work and manage the household, and men agonize over their apparent loss of status after migrating. For example, in the case of Eritrean refugees in Canada, men who held professional positions in their home countries find themselves unemployed in the diaspora, which challenges their masculinity as well as their ability to lead their households (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2004 [1999]). Among Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees in the United States, who generally
regard women as inferior, reports of depression and suicide are endemic. The rights and employment opportunities women enjoy in the West, compounded with men’s perceived loss of power, family authority, and sense of self-worth have led to increased domestic violence (McSpadden and Moussa 1993). Patterns of violence exist beyond refugee communities in the West and also occur in refugee camps, where boredom consumes men as women work to provide for their families (Abdi 2007; Szczepanikova 2005). The loss of close kin protection and support systems as families are separated through the course of flight and resettlement increase women’s vulnerability to spousal abuse (Holtzman 2000). Women who lack strong social networks in their adopted communities suffer in silence and live in fear, and often attribute these changes to men’s inability to adjust their attitudes and beliefs (McSpadden and Moussa 1993).

Research demonstrates that women are less willing to return to their homeland for fear of losing the advantages they acquired abroad. Much of this is attributed to the employment opportunities and social conditions they have experienced outside of their native land (Brettell 2008). Studies show that women’s changing roles are a direct threat to husbands who are the customary family providers, and men have grown resentful of women’s increasing value as family decision-makers (see for example Matsuoka and Sorenson 2004 [1999]). In Mayfair, men struggle to support their families and may be reluctant to leave the community and the protection it affords in search of lucrative employment opportunities elsewhere, placing the burden on women. The outcome is that Somali women are enmeshed in a contradictory, complex web of shifting cultural and
gender structures, understandings, and ideologies that challenge their ability to take advantage of new opportunities in their new homes as they balance their responsibilities with the expectations of them.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Project Design Overview

I conducted this ethnographic study in Mayfair, Johannesburg, South Africa from January 2010 to January 2011 to understand how different micro and macro variables influence gender negotiations and construct gender relations in Mayfair. Using mixed methods to elicit data, informants participated in three separate interviews—unstructured, narrative, and semi-structured—over the course of the research period. Adult women and adult men were included in the study to better understand the complexity of Somali gender relations and to compare and contrast their differential experiences in South Africa. Focus group interviews with women and men separately, as well as with women and men together, were used to discuss data and to elaborate on the issues that arose during interviews and throughout participant observation.

I define each individual I worked with as a case study for my ethnography. I recruited a total of 60 women and men to gather a range of responses that captures the diversity of the Somali community in Mayfair, including differences in gender, age, employment, marital status, educational achievement, geographic background, and migration experiences, among other things. I triangulated my fieldwork through an iterative process that combined case studies, historical materials, and data from other
sources throughout the research period (LeCompte and Schensul 1999b). This dissertation is the story of Somalis in Mayfair. I use the voices of informants, friends, and acquaintances to describe and discuss gender relations, and to explain what it means to be a Somali woman and man in South Africa.

3.2 Institutional Review Board (IRB) Study Approval

The Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The Ohio State University approved this research, including a waiver for providing documentation of consent, on November 25, 2009 (see Appendix B).

3.3 Research Sample

A mixed non-probability sampling strategy—essential for collecting data on sensitive issues (Bernard 2006)—was used in my study to recruit 30 Somali women and 30 Somali men aged eighteen years and over in Johannesburg, which was a sufficient number to reach saturation (Guest, et al. 2006). I employed a purposive sampling strategy consisting of equal numbers of women and men. Each sample was composed of women and men who are and are not engaged in income generating activities to ensure variability among the population. Working with economically active and inactive women and men helped me determine how gender relations are constructed in relation to women’s different economic roles and varying household compositions. In total, 34 adult women and 40 adult men were recruited into the study. Four women did not complete their interviews because they moved away from Johannesburg during the course of my
fieldwork and could not meet with me to complete their interviews. Ten men decided they could not or did not want to complete their interviews and chose to withdraw from the study. Either they had moved away from Johannesburg; work and family commitments prevented them from making time in their schedule to meet with me; or they decided they did not want to complete their interviews with me. All of the 74 informants recruited completed the first interview.

After I made initial contacts with members of the Somali community and established trusting relationships with individuals in Mayfair, many of those individuals agreed to join the study. I employed chain referral selection—a useful strategy for working with hidden populations—in tandem with convenience sampling (Schensul, et al. 1999). This entailed recruiting existing research participants to suggest individuals to include in the study based on their understanding of the selection criteria. Research participants, key informants, or I then contacted the potential participants to explain the purpose, requirements, risks, and benefits of the project and to invite her or him to join the study. Some of the referrals did not meet criteria necessary to participate in the study or were not cooperative during the first interview and were not included in the data set.

3.4 Research Techniques

The beginning of fieldwork consisted of setting up the field, gaining access to the Mayfair community, engaging in participant observation, and recruiting research participants. I engaged in ethnographic mapping (Singer 1999) to identify community
boundaries; created a record of Somali owned and operated shops, businesses, social service organizations, mosques, and other community establishments; ascertained activities and specialized activity areas; and observed behaviors within the community. I spent the first two months making contacts and building rapport with members of the Somali community. I conducted semi-structured interviews with employees and volunteers at SASA and SCOB—organizations in Mayfair that provide services such as conflict mediation, food distribution, and legal advice to the Somali community—to learn about the Somali community, including its history in Johannesburg, migration patterns, educational and employment opportunities, and social and institutional barriers. These interviews provided information only and were not used to ask questions of opinion or questions about employees’ personal experiences working in the Mayfair community.

Throughout the fieldwork period, I used group interviews with women and men to discuss data, clarify concepts, and elaborate on events in Mayfair and notes I made during participant observation. Such conversations with men were held in a Somali restaurant that became my field office and where men gathered to eat and socialize. I normally spoke with women in the restaurant kitchen or in their homes. These were facilitated simply by sitting with women or men as we spent time together and asking questions about their lives and their world in South Africa. They provided information on cultural constructions and served as a starting point for developing individual interview questions and understanding how members of the community think about research variables. I organized several focus group interviews (Schensul 1999) comprising women and men
separately as well as mixed gender discussion groups to ascertain gendered attitudes and ideas about xenophobia and the perceived barriers to successful economic endeavors in Johannesburg, and perceived changes in the community (compared to Somalia) regarding gender roles and gender relations. Most group interviews were not recorded and I took notes only, while all focus group interviews were recorded for future data analysis.

As women and men were recruited into the study, I began unstructured interviews in the restaurant and in participants’ homes or businesses, during which time qualitative and quantitative data were collected. I used face-to-face surveys to collect basic demographic data, such as gender, age, place of birth, marital status, educational background, languages spoken, employment history, household composition, migration history and status, and length of time in South Africa. The surveys were useful for probing respondents for more data and for working with respondents who may not be literate, which produced more accurate data and was useful for clarifying concepts for respondents (Bernard 2006).

During these interviews, I inquired about participants’ economic activities, the perceived social and institutional barriers that limit their access to jobs and resources, and women and men’s experiences as migrants in Johannesburg. Data collected from these surveys and interviews were intended to provide a complex account of the circumstances leading to each participant’s economic life. This first round of interviews took place over several weeks, and in a few cases required multiple visits to individuals’ homes and/or businesses due to interruptions that prevented us from finishing in one sitting. I made
every attempt to be flexible and provide the time needed for participants to feel comfortable enough to share their attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences with me.

Life histories offer critical insight and understanding into individual lives and experiences within larger historical and cultural contexts (Brettell 2003). To define life and social models in Somalia, I collected narratives from women and men to explore past gender arrangements, including Somali customs, ideologies, beliefs, and practices (LeCompte and Schensul 1999b). Informants discussed their home, work, and cultural lives before leaving Somalia (or another birth country) and described their personal relationships and their understanding of sociocultural arrangements in their lives before migration. These narratives provided the foundation for identifying how gender relations have changed and what it means to be Somali in the South African context. They also offered insight into the migratory process, including making the decision to leave Somalia, the journey to South Africa, and resettlement in the country. Narratives were collected in individuals’ homes, in shops and businesses, and at the restaurant.

The final interview was semi-structured and designed to collect data on participants’ understanding of gender roles and gender relations, and on remittances. Questions built on data collected through group and focus group interviews, unstructured interviews, and participant observation to provide more detailed information on gender issues. Informants were asked to identify how their relationships with Somali women and men have changed in Johannesburg and to what they attribute those differences. They also discussed how women and men’s roles and responsibilities have changed since
arriving in South Africa and how their household composition and other outside factors affect those differences, as well as explained their perceptions of women’s changing economic roles and how they affect gender relations. It is during this interview that I discussed remittance practices with informants and inquired about their sending and receiving habits. Informants shared details of their lives in Mayfair, including the changes and challenges in their households and in the larger community, and assessed how cultural constructs are changing in South Africa.

Each of the three interviews lasted about 60-90 minutes, though some were much longer and others were shorter. Informants chose the location of our interview—usually in a shop, in a home, or in my restaurant office. Only a handful of interviews were digitally recorded. When I had no choice but to meet with informants in public areas (i.e., local businesses) where there were prying eyes and much visibility, I did not bother asking about recording because it would create suspicion from passersby and members of the Somali community. It also would advertise that I was interviewing a specific person and draw attention to what we were doing. In private areas of the restaurant, or in individuals’ homes or in secluded rooms of a business, I sought consent to record interviews but most people were uncomfortable with the idea and declined.

I used participant observation in tandem with surveys and interviews to develop the most complete picture of the Somali world in Johannesburg. Participant observation was used throughout the duration of my study to build relationships and trust within the community, and to observe behaviors that would be missed without a constant presence
in Mayfair (Schensul, et al. 1999). It enabled me to immerse myself in the local culture and collect data that cannot be acquired through interviews alone. This included spending time with women, and men when appropriate, in their homes and shops, in restaurants and cafés, on the street, and at work. I accompanied research participants, when culturally appropriate, on day-to-day activities to better understand varying gender roles. This entailed spending time with men in restaurants and guesthouses, and visiting women in their shops and homes. During my daily participant observation, I kept handwritten field notes when appropriate or otherwise jotted things down when possible. When I was in a woman’s shop, for example, and strangers were present, I took mental notes as to not arouse suspicion from those who did not know or trust me.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

I use LeCompte and Schensul’s (1999a) three stages of analysis to discuss how data were examined. First, I made mental notes and observations as discreetly as possible when it was inappropriate to take detailed records during participant observation and daily interactions with community members in Mayfair. I wrote descriptive fieldnotes each night, recording everything I could recall about my day, including interactions and observations, and expanded those notes into detailed accounts of conversations, activities, ideas, and explanations about the events that transpired. I reviewed and coded my fieldnotes to develop hypotheses about gender relationships and to generate new questions to explore in the field.
All interviews—digitally recorded or not—were recorded in a field notebook in the presence of the informant and then transcribed from my notebook at the end of each day in Mayfair. I recorded interview data verbatim when possible but wrote many notes in shorthand and later expanded them to detail informants’ responses. I entered data into Excel spreadsheets in the field and used in-the-field analysis to organize data and operationalize variables. I used grounded theory to code data in order to develop a theoretical model for understanding gender relationships in Mayfair (Charmaz 2006).

In the second stage of analysis, I performed what LeCompte and Schensul (1999a) refer to as “tidying up” my data—that is, organizing data after leaving Mayfair. This included labeling photos as well as video and audio recordings. I created a data management system where I arranged different types of data into separate files for order and simple access. I read interviews and fieldnotes several times to categorize data for analysis and to check for missing data.

In the final stage of analysis, I coded data and categorized it to identify and explore ideas, themes, units, patterns, and structures (LeCompte and Schensul 1999a). Once I grouped data together, I examined informants’ responses and assigned numeric values to count the frequency of those answers for analysis. I explored patterns that emerged from interviews by reviewing fieldnotes, group interviews, focus group interviews, and individual interviews with community leaders to develop a theoretical understanding of gender relationships in Mayfair.
During data analysis, I converted coded data to simple databases for analysis and defining variables. I developed profile analyses of each woman and man in Excel to define demographic characteristics of each participant, to explore any correlation between and among variables, and to explain variation in attitudes and beliefs regarding gender relations in Mayfair (Bernard 2006). Using normative depictions to represent Somalis in Mayfair, the result of this work is an ethnographically rich and detailed description of gender relations among Somalis as well as a deeper understanding of Somali lives in Johannesburg.

3.6 *Naagta Gaasha (The White, Non-Muslim Woman)*

My presence in Mayfair was novel. As a white, non-Muslim American woman and professional anthropologist, I was clearly an outsider and cognizant of my responsibility to conform to acceptable social standards while in Mayfair. Particularly being non-Muslim, I was careful to dress appropriately in the field. I wore a long skirt, long-sleeved shirts, and some sort of hair covering—usually a hat or a headscarf—every day I was in Mayfair. I heard rumors that I was a missionary hoping to convert Somalis to Christianity, and as such I did not discuss my personal religious views with anyone beyond the inner circle of my most trusted friends, nor did I question others’ beliefs and practices outside of an interview context unless the informant chose to discuss it. I invited Somalis in the community to ask questions about my work or me. When conducting interviews, I engaged in small talk with informants to ease any anxieties they might have and to make them feel comfortable discussing their lives with me.
My identity as an American woman and an academic also meant that Somalis had pre-conceived notions of what my views are regarding matters such as female genital cutting (FGC) and women’s rights to pursue education and wage labor. This undoubtedly influenced what people discussed with me in casual conversations and during interviews. For example, I did not ask questions about FGC unless women and men first addressed it. In those situations, women opposed to the practice—not a single woman revealed her support of cutting to me—and men mentioned the consequences of female circumcision as it affected their sexual relationships. An acquaintance introduced me to a Somali doctor who lives in Kenya and visited Mayfair during my fieldwork. I spoke with the doctor for about an hour, during which time he questioned me extensively about my research and anti-FGC campaigns. He asked why Westerners invest so much money to eradicate FGC when malaria is the more deadly and pressing issue that deserves funding. It was clear from the manner in which he addressed me that he was suspicious of my motives and assumed I was on the anti-FGC bandwagon. My response to the doctor, and in similar situations, was that I wanted to learn what Somalis think about the topics we discussed and not to reflect on my personal views, which had no relevance or place in interviews or conversations. Participants also knew that I valued their opinions and they could say whatever they thought or felt without judgment from my assistants or me.

3.7 Community Expectations and Experience with Refugees

I often struggled with Somalis’ expectations of me and I had to exercise caution around my prior involvement with refugee resettlement in the US. Revealing my work
with Somalis in the US and through CRIS meant that people consulted me frequently about their immigration cases and hopes for resettlement, thinking I could do something to expedite their applications held by the UNHCR in Pretoria, but it also lessened Somalis’ wariness of me. It also caused concern for how this might affect data collection. I did not want people to embellish their experiences because they thought they could get something from me. My anxieties lessened with time in the field and assistance from key informants; it became easier to identify and verify exaggerated claims by trusting and confiding in my closest allies and listening closely to conversations and gossip within the community. Conversely, not addressing my work with CRIS fueled and perpetuated the doubts some Somalis had concerning my identity and motives for being in Mayfair. There were Somalis who remained unconvinced that I was anything other than a CIA agent sent from America to spy on Somalis—I was unable to establish for what reasons I might be a spy—or a United Nations employee who could lead any Somali of my choosing to the US. It was a bit of a Catch-22, and I used my experience strategically if I felt it necessary but otherwise downplayed my involvement with CRIS.

I made every effort to be clear and honest about the objectives of my research. Even after I explained to (potential) research participants and acquaintances that I had no ability to influence or further their UNHCR resettlement petitions, it was a recurring issue throughout the fieldwork period. What I could do, however, was provide information about the process of resettling refugees and assist with writing letters for individuals who needed to submit affidavits or explanations to the UNHCR or various Western embassies.
In these situations, I collected information from individuals and penned their statements based on what they told me. This served to alleviate some people’s suspicions about me while improving their immigration prospects by having a well-written document containing only relevant information.

3.8 Research Assistants

Establishing rapport and making contacts with members of the community initially was easier than anticipated, though selecting research assistants, both female and male, was much more challenging. I needed individuals who would provide insight into the local community, assist with language comprehension and translation, and serve as intermediaries while I established myself in Mayfair. It was difficult to locate reliable individuals with the necessary language skills, cultural knowledge, and understanding of my objectives. Several men were strong contenders but their commitment was wavering, and few women had the skills set I needed to move forward. Women who met my criteria often had jobs and were unwilling or unable to work with me. Not having assistants was not only frustrating but also impeded progress on my study.

About two months into my fieldwork, I met Zeinab, a young Somali journalist who heard about me through mutual friends and wanted to learn more about my research. When Zeinab and I met, I liked her immediately and she indicated her willingness to help me. Our relationship was built on reciprocity—she would recruit participants and help with interviews while I would teach her English—but developed into a true friendship.
Zeinab spent nearly all of her time helping me, even when I was not in Mayfair, and refused monetary compensation for it. I often found ways to repay her, such as giving her books and clothing, buying her food, and when her purse strings were particularly tight, insisting that she accept money for rent or remittances to her mother in Somalia.

I had been going to Mayfair more than a month when I met Ahmed, a highly educated and intelligent man who became my most dedicated informant and the closest I came to having a male research assistant. Ahmed felt responsible for helping me and worried about people being honest with me, suspicious of me, and willing to speak with me—all things I had considered before. When I requested his help with interviews, he did everything I asked for. While Ahmed had his own family and commitments and could not devote the time and effort Zeinab did, he also was a trusted confidant and friend.

3.9 Triumphs and Challenges in the Field

In the weeks and months preceding my arrival in Johannesburg, my attempts to contact Somali organizations in Mayfair proved unsuccessful. By the time I arrived in South Africa, researchers at the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS) at Wits University in Johannesburg were the only real connection I had to the Somali community. I realized that I would have to walk into the community and find Somalis willing to talk to me. One morning in early February, my husband Dan and I drove into Mayfair, parked on Church Street, and began our search for Somalis. We immediately found a Somali woman sitting on the sidewalk with her daughter selling shoes, bed linens, and duvets.
When I approached her to introduce myself and ask for Somali restaurant suggestions, she asked me for money because she was a single mother raising four children alone. Her story was the first of many I heard about women struggling to survive with little outside support. The woman seemed bemused by my presence and feeble attempt to speak Somali, but she nonetheless pointed us in the direction of Amal Shopping Centre.

By the time Dan and I found Amal and sat in a Somali café there, it hit me that conducting research in the Mayfair community might be a greater challenging than I had anticipated. I was the only woman around, aside from the non-Somali woman manning the restroom, and felt uncomfortably exposed being in male social space. On my next trip to Mayfair, again I gravitated toward Amal where in a separate wing I discovered the shops run by women who sell goods ranging from fabric and clothing to shoes, perfume, linens, and other household items. While I did not meet anyone on that particular visit, I was able to begin mapping the area and acquainting myself with the layout of Mayfair.

My luck turned on my next trip to Mayfair, when I met some of the women who became invaluable informants and trusted friends. Zaheera Jinnah, a researcher at the ACMS who also works with Somali women, invited me to meet her at a Somali restaurant to introduce me to women in the community. I found Zaheera sitting with a group of women in the kitchen when I arrived. Zamzam, the restaurant owner who also ran the attached guesthouse where Somali men stay, was part of the group. As soon as I saw Zamzam, I knew instantly and instinctively that she would become a confidant; I was right. I described my work to the women and they seemed receptive to my research. I
listened quietly as Zamzam and the other women spoke of the daily threats they received, that their throats would be slit following the end of the 2010 Soccer World Cup hosted by South Africa. These women told me about their experiences of looted businesses, police corruption, and single mothers with no real income. In the midst of all this, Zamzam welcomed me into her world and invited me to use her place of business as my office. She told me I could meet and interview Somali women and men at the restaurant and regard her home as my own. Spending so much time at Zamzam’s meant that I was privy to details about people’s personal relationships. Some men spent nearly every day at the restaurant and then disappeared for weeks at a time. In some cases, men’s presence at Zamzam’s was a barometer for what was happening in their households.

From that day on, I began most days at Zamzam’s. It was a great place to work; everyone knew where the restaurant was and my connection to Zamzam made my task monumentally easier. I eased myself into the community at Zamzam’s and built rapport with those who spent time in the restaurant and guesthouse. I got henna tattoos, shopped for skirts and headscarves, and cooked with women in the kitchen—anything to spend time and build relationships with women I met through Zamzam. When I was not with women, I stayed in the restaurant and talked to the men who either lived in the guesthouse or frequented it to socialize. We spent countless hours watching TV and discussing politics, sports, celebrities, and anything Somali-related. I made an effort to stop by Zamzam’s every day to search for new informants and maintain the relationships I developed with those who hung around the restaurant.
3.9.1 2010 World Cup in South Africa

Talk of resuming the 2008 xenophobic attacks following the end of the World Cup was rampant in the months prior to the momentous occasion. As the World Cup final drew near, Somalis worried about what might happen to them, and to all foreigners in the country. Somalis expected xenophobic attacks, and some even hoped for them so that the international community would learn about Somali lives in South Africa and the UN would cave to pressure to resettle them in the West. When I asked people what their plans were for July 12, the day after the World Cup final, most anticipated staying home and waiting anxiously to see if violence erupted as promised. Threats from neighbors, police, nurses, taxi drivers, shopkeepers, and random people on the streets intensified as the date approached and the future seemed uncertain. Somalis were scared. They were told to leave or be killed, which weighed heavily on the community during June and July and the months leading up to the opening ceremony even as everyone talked about the matches, proclaimed their allegiance to the various countries involved, and watched the matches all day long during the competition. I decided to spend July 12 at home and heard things were quiet in Mayfair. In the days that followed, there were reports of looting in the Western Cape and an incident outside Johannesburg, but Mayfair was calm for the time being, the restaurant was busy, and people were carrying on with their lives.

The post-World Cup uncertainty, along with the slow start in locating reliable research assistants, forced me to rethink my interviewing strategy in the final months of fieldwork. Instead of conducting the second and third interviews separately, I decided to
consolidate them. People started to panic and I worried informants would flee Mayfair before finishing their work with me. It was also during this time that individuals were so preoccupied with fears of xenophobia that interview responses reflected their anxieties. Concerns were evident in people’s behavior, too, as many men were chewing *khat* fast and furiously. Men I had never seen before and those who did not normally chew when I was around Zamzam’s during the day binged and did little else. It was a coping mechanism because the stress was so great and no one knew what else to do.

### 3.9.2 Difficult Interviews

One troubling consequence of conducting this research was my desensitization to tragic tales of human misery. People spoke of their suffering every day. Women told me about abusive spouses, rape in Somalia and South Africa, struggles to find survival resources, fears of being attacked, devastating loss of family and friends, and the desperation of having nowhere to go—the hopelessness, sadness, and confusion that marks their lives. Men spoke of self-loathing for spending their days chewing *khat* and socializing with nothing to do, hoping something will change but feeling powerless to control their destinies. Some had killed men while others suffered tremendously as victims in Somalia, only to experience a different kind of war in South Africa. People talked about xenophobia and expressed anger and fear for the things that happen to Somalis in the country. I met men who were shot, stabbed, set alight, and forced to drink paraffin as shopkeepers in townships. I knew women who had been raped and beaten, some showing the scars from abuse years before. There was undiagnosed mental illness
that has no name in Somali other than “crazy”, and they are treated as social outcasts accordingly. And I became desensitized to all of it, making notes as informants nonchalantly recounted their experiences. The reality of their lives overshadowed the profound tragedy in their lives.

I felt privileged when informants shared their most candid thoughts, feelings, and experiences with me. Not only did it signify trust, but it also helped them release the pain of carrying secrets for so long. I visited two women in their home one day and we discussed life in South Africa. Both single mothers, the women struggled to support their children, had grown weary of life in Mayfair, and felt suffocated by the growth of the Somali community. They confessed to having suicidal thoughts, and all I could do was listen and encourage them to continue fighting. On another occasion, I sat in silence as a rape survivor recounted multiple incidents of sexual violation, never telling anyone about her experiences for fear the news would somehow reach the community. When the interview ended, she said it was cathartic and thanked me for letting her talk about it.

One of the most difficult interviews I had was with a woman who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and mental illness. She married three times and had several children, all of whom were removed from her custody. Her first husband beat her, burning her with an iron and having sex with her so violently that “things aren’t right on the inside.” The woman had recently lost her third husband in an accident and she wanted to kill herself. Alone and lacking resources, no one in the community was willing to help her, and Indian Muslim organizations referred her back to the Somali community for
assistance. After relaying her story, she asked me how I could help her retrieve her children, resettle in another country, and access survival resources. I offered some suggestions and explained that I was studying Somali lives in Mayfair only and was not in a position to remedy those problems for her. I struggled with such requests and worked with assistants to ensure they understood the limitations of my role as a researcher in their community, which was the reality even though it felt an inadequate response.

I halted interviews every now and then when it seemed too intense and emotional for the informant to continue. During one particular interview, I asked a male informant how his life changed after the war started. He described his experiences and said that he did not find what he was expecting; he was displaced, demoralized, and ran for his life. The man felt lucky to be alive, but many of his friends—especially classmates from university—were not so fortunate. He shared a story about witnessing the execution of his childhood friends and began to sob. After walking away from me and spending a few minutes alone, he returned and said we could continue but I decided to stop the interview and finish the following day or another time. This incident caught me off-guard; I did not expect the man to react so strongly because of his usual stoicism, and unlike women I could not exactly comfort him with a hug. He later said that he tried to forget those memories and our interview stirred them, but he felt better talking about those feelings and apologized for his “foolish” behavior. I insisted there was nothing wrong with the emotion he felt and there was absolutely nothing for which to be sorry. The experience reminded me how much Somalis have suffered and how fragile their lives are.
Part II: Data and Discussion

I present data in the next three chapters that discuss how micro and macro structures affect women and men’s lives in Mayfair and what those arrangements mean for constructing and negotiating gender relations in the Somali community. Chapter 4 focuses on Somali culture and society in Mayfair to explore how households and the larger community are constructed, to identify and explain variation among individuals, to understand what challenges women and men face, to discover what is contested or changing, and finally to discuss how household and community dynamics influence how gender relations are produced and experienced. In Chapter 5, I highlight the social and institutional barriers that limit women and men’s access to jobs and resources, as Somalis understand and realize them, to explore how micro and macro structures construct women and men’s lives, limit their opportunities, and challenge Somali customary gender models in South Africa. Chapter 6 elaborates on the tactics women and men use to procure cash and material assets. It also discusses how Somalis use those resources to ensure their and their extended families’ survival.

As Somalis like to say, “People are like our fingers; everyone is different.” These differences shape the ways in which individual refugees adapt to their new circumstances (Kibreab 2004). Nonetheless, and even with their varied experiences, women share a
commonality in that there are challenges in their lives, as different as individual situations may be. Women left their homeland, and often without immediate family members, to start a new life in South Africa. Cultural differences and understandings within the Somali community and in the larger South African context, compounded with discrimination and xenophobia, exacerbate the barriers women face in Mayfair and limit their economic opportunities. Kinship and social arrangements in South Africa invite new interpretations of Somali culture as women and men redefine their roles in a foreign land. In the midst of changing culture and formulating new identities, Somalis often are at odds with those who do not share their vision of what it is to be Somali in South Africa. While some embrace their new opportunities and rights in the country, others maintain customary Somali social structure and resist alterations to conventional customs and gender arrangements. The outcome may be a fractured community that struggles to (re)define itself and function cohesively even as individuals depend on others, and the broader community, to survive in Mayfair.
Chapter 4: Sociocultural and Household Arrangements

4.1 Migration Choices

“I left Mogadishu in 1991, after my older brother and father were killed, and fled to Barawe with my mother and two sisters and stayed until 1998. We went to Kismayo and real war broke out there a year later and I became separated from my family. I have been alone since that time. In 2003, I left Somalia because the fighting was getting worse. I left from the port of Kismayo and went to Beira, Mozambique, and then to Maputo [Mozambique], where I got in a truck and crossed into South Africa. I chose South Africa because I couldn’t get into Kenya. I wanted a better life and people told me to come here.” – Female, 30

“I left Somalia in June 2005 because my father and brother were killed and I had a lot of problems. I went to Kenya for one month and left because it was expensive and there was no money. I was staying with relatives in Kenya and they couldn’t afford to keep me, so I came to South Africa with friends in October 2005. People told me to come here because it offers a better life. On my way to South Africa, I spent time in a Mozambique jail. They tried to deport me and other Somalis to Malawi, but we were sent back to Mozambique and released by police at night. My family wanted me to stay in Somalia, but I left anyway.” – Female, 28

The migration process reflects women’s desire to find peace, safety, and security when their homeland no longer provided protection and opportunities. It is clear that some women planned their migration routes carefully and sought to manage an otherwise uncontrollable existence. They found strength in making choices about their own movement and left with the goal to improve their lives. Conversely, there are women who followed their parents, spouses, friends, neighbors, and strangers out of Somalia and eventually to South Africa. Refugee women lost everything they owned, including in
some cases immediate kin and close relatives and friends, and were left with few opportunities and no vision for the future. With the assistance of others, women were guided to the perceived relative safety of South Africa to start their lives anew. Women’s differential migration stories and experiences are a testament to their strength and demonstrate the diversity of Somali women in Mayfair. I wanted to explore what prompted women to leave Somalia and make the perilous journey from East Africa to South Africa, with the goal of understanding if and how gender factors into migration choices and journeys and if there are gendered differences in how and why people move. It was also important to know what motivated women to travel to a country with endemic discrimination against Somalis and scarce opportunities for women.

4.1.1 Leaving Somalia

“I left Somalia [when I did] because I was a virgin and my parents were afraid I would be raped. I was afraid to leave, but it was their [her parents’] idea and I went. I was frightened to leave my mom.” – Female, 27

Many women left Somalia years before their journey brought them to South Africa. I spoke with eight women who reported that they fled Somalia when the government collapsed in 1991 but arrived in South Africa after living in Kenya, Ethiopia, and other countries. Women fled Somalia alone or with their families and sought refuge in Kenya—as refugees living in camps or in major urban centers—or in other African countries where limited opportunities for employment and education, legal status and citizenship, and onward travel to the West forced them to reevaluate their options. The
journeys women took to South Africa are varied and their experiences leaving Somalia are different, but the one thing they share—that all Somalis share—is the complete loss they suffered. Women and men who fled Somalia typically lost or left everything they owned and worked for behind. Some were pastoralists and others led luxurious lives in Mogadishu, but they all lost the only lives they knew in the name of war. The overwhelming grief of losing family, friends, and country—and all that entails—shattered lives, destroyed dreams, and left a lot of people navigating their world without directions.

I asked women to discuss their experiences emigrating from Somalia, including what propelled them to leave when they did and to what degree the choice was their own. Nineteen women reported that it was their idea to leave Somalia compared to 11 women who were encouraged to migrate by spouses, parents, or other extended kin and friends. Fartun, for example, heard stories of migrants’ great adventures abroad and suggested to her husband that they go to Kenya, which they did, and it was not until several weeks later that she told her parents. Abshiro told her mother that she would leave with neighbors and relatives and while her mother was supportive, her father was not and he found out only after she left. Farhiya followed the news closely when apartheid fell and was intrigued by the sweeping changes in South Africa. She was encouraged by the shift to democracy and felt the country offered exciting opportunities for education and employment. With her husband and young children in tow, the family came to Mayfair in search of a better life and the possibility of onward migration.
Women who left Somalia voluntarily either were alone or supported by kin who felt it was safer for them than remaining in the country where the risk of rape and death were everyday realities. Suad left Somalia reluctantly and alone after her parents, who feared she would be raped, encouraged her to migrate to a relatively safer country. Sending her to refugee camps in Dadaab was not an option, given the prevalence of rape in the area (Abdi 2006). Maano decided she had to get out of Somalia in October 1991 when fighting in Mogadishu escalated and her 13-year-old niece was knifed and raped. Hayat reached her breaking point after her father and brother were killed in 2005. Ladan also lost her brother and father in 1991, and she fled Mogadishu with her mother and two sisters and went to Barawe, where the family stayed until 1998. They moved to Kismayo and when “real war” broke out a year later, Ladan became separated from her family and has been on her own ever since. She left Somalia alone in 2003 due to deteriorating conditions in the country. Other women reported unintentional family separations in the midst of fighting and fleeing. Shamso left Somalia with her neighbors in 2005, after she lost her family when their house burned down while she was out playing with friends.

Even though personal experiences of suffering in Somalia are gendered, such as women who were raped and men who feared being recruited to fight, fleeing the country was a strategy for women and men to find safety. Of the 30 women interviewed, 27 reported leaving Somalia because of endless fighting and violence in the country. Weary of war, they sought peace and security. Many of these women lost their homes and family members to war, and in some cases women survived rape and other forms of violence
against them in Somalia. Interestingly, two of the three remaining women had never been to Somalia but are ethnic Somali, and the last woman I interviewed fled from an abusive husband who used to beat and rape her. In her case, a neighbor helped her escape by arranging her departure from Somalia.

Men were also motivated to leave Somalia because of war, violence, fear, and suffering, but only 15 men cited persistent fighting as the primary reason to get out of the country. These men were tired of war and the constant threat of loss, death, and destruction, but they also lacked survival resources. With limited jobs in Somalia, men decided to try their luck as migrant workers in the hopes of earning an income sufficient to support their families. Migration choices for women and men involved finding the safety and security that Somalia could not provide. The damage war created certainly influenced men’s decisions to leave Somalia, even if their specific goals differed from those of women. Women felt powerless to defend themselves against the threat of rape, abuse, and death. As family and security providers, men were powerless to control the threats against themselves and their families, and they could not overcome the lack of opportunities that war created.

4.1.2 Entering South Africa

“I came to South Africa because I heard it offered jobs, money, and a better life. I discussed my decision with my mom, who didn’t support it and wanted me to go to Saudi Arabia. There were no opportunities for women [in Kenya] and I didn’t want to be a housewife. I came to South Africa alone but travelled with other Somalis I met on the road. Leaving Kenya was a huge decision and it destroyed my marriage, but I had to do it.” – Female, 26
Not all Somalis came to South Africa in search of protection. Many came from relatively safe areas, such as Somaliland and Kenya, and travelled to the country in search of economic opportunities. They may hold legal refugee status but were motivated by employment prospects or other reasons that do not fall under the refugee rubric (Jacobsen 2006). This is particularly true of men. Several informants noted that female migration to South Africa became more prevalent around 2004-2005, even though my data do not corroborate this pattern (see Figure 1). One common explanation for women’s arrival in Mayfair is that there was a shortage of marriageable women, leaving men without spouses. This compelled women living in East Africa to travel to South Africa in search of husbands or support. Some men who traveled to South Africa earlier had wives and children in Somalia and later brought them to Johannesburg, which also contributed to the spike in female migrants.
In most cases, Somalis migrated to South Africa after the fall of apartheid. While data support the assertion that more women arrived in South Africa during the 2000s, several women found their way to Mayfair long before the Somali community was established in Johannesburg. For example, Taliso and Farhiya arrived in 1995. During the Barre regime, Taliso’s family lived outside of Somalia as required by her father’s government position. After her father died in the early 1990s and Taliso’s closest family members and friends were killed in Somalia, she had few options as fighting continued. She decided to travel to South Africa, a place she thought was better and with superior educational opportunities. Farhiya was familiar with the sweeping changes occurring in South Africa at the time and believed all she heard about improved living conditions and
access to opportunities in the country. She decided to go to South Africa and use the country as a launching pad to resettle in a third country, an idea that never materialized. Other women who ventured to South Africa in the 1990s based their decisions on perceived employment opportunities, on a quest for a safe and peaceful life, and on a belief that South Africa was the gateway to the West where sponsorship to Europe, Australia, or North America would be processed with ease and efficiency.

Women and men offered similar explanations for why they migrated to South Africa specifically⁴ (see Table 1), the most notable exception being job opportunities. Men were motivated by the prospect of employment after struggling to access the few jobs available to them in Somalia. Those who sought work and refuge in Kenya faced myriad challenges with documentation, police harassment, and securing employment, and the accessibility of South Africa enticed them after failing to secure resettlement in the West. For men who felt their only options were to live in Kenyan refugee camps or to struggle in overcrowded Eastleigh, the area of Nairobi where Somalis live and work, they decided to pursue new and better opportunities in a country that accepts refugees and offers more work possibilities. Through their networks and word of mouth, men heard about available jobs in South African townships and knew their chances of economic success were far greater in South Africa than in other countries around the continent. Daleel, for example, wanted to migrate to the West but had no opportunity to go. He had

⁴ Several women and men gave answers that fit in two categories. Both responses are included in Table 1, making the total number of responses 34 for women and 41 for men.
male friends who told him South Africa was the only country where he could survive with his family and live in peace. Friends said he could get refugee status and an ID indicating his legal status, and it would be easy to bring his family and find a good job. Daleel came to South Africa alone and sent for his wife and children several months later.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better life</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Followed others</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family/community</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accepts refugees</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Onward travel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job opportunities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Health care</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL RESPONSES</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
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Table 1. Migration Decisions

4.2 Gender Roles

“When women work, the children suffer and don’t receive love, like they’ve been abandoned. This affects men because [women working] is like two bachelors staying together. A husband wants his wife in the home, and he wants to come home to a home-cooked dinner.” – Male, 27

“Men have no responsibilities here [in Mayfair], but women have more because they have to work, take care of men, and take care of themselves. Women do everything. It’s different in South Africa because the law, religion, and culture are different from Somalia. Religion says that women don’t work and men do; women must be in the house. In South Africa, women have the freedom to work and the laws aren’t dictated by religion.” – Male, 31
Challenging enculturated gender roles in Mayfair is one of the contradictions that can create a great deal of tension and, I would argue, a lot of misunderstanding, between spouses. During my interview with Said, he said that women are supposed to stay home, cook, and clean, while men are free to move around and interact publicly. Most men share this sentiment. As children, Somalis are raised performing gendered chores and having gendered responsibilities. Said told me that if he had washed dishes as a child, his father would have beaten him. In Somalia, girls and women cooked food for men, who always ate first and left women with what remained. Girls were responsible for cleaning their brothers’ space and picking up after them. Their roles were in managing the household, while boys had few chores. I asked men what their responsibilities were as children in Somalia. Men never performed any work for the household because those duties were reserved for girls. Instead, boys attended school or tended to animals.

Women in Mayfair demand more from their husbands and many feel men have failed to meet their responsibilities to their families, forcing women to perform new roles such as engaging in economic activities and devoting time to their children’s education. This contradiction has important consequences for women and gender relations. Living in South Africa enabled women to be proactive and make choices about their lives that they could not have in Somalia, yet they retain their household obligations while adding to their workload. The burden of managing the household and juggling new responsibilities frustrates women who believe that men do not share this extra work with them equally or at all. Women feel they do everything with minimal support from their husbands and are
constrained by their responsibilities while husbands move around freely and do what they want. Men do not offer women the support they need to ease the stress of daily multitasking in a world where there are greater demands on people to meet everyday survival needs, not to mention the pressure to provide financial resources to extended kin and friends in East Africa. As much as women adopt new roles in South Africa, they still think of the household as their responsibility. Women enter the customary male domain as wage earners but maintain a distinction between gendered roles in Somali society.

From men’s perspective, they are confused about what it is women want and feel they do what they can to support their families, but nothing they do seems to be enough to satisfy their wives’ demands. According to men, if they are providing financial support to their families, as they are required to do by the Qur’an and Somali culture, women should not have complaints. Men who try to assist their wives find their help is not welcome. There is a contradiction between what women say their husbands will not do to help them and what men describe as rejection by their wives when they offer to relieve the pressure on their wives. Roble tried to explain this paradox:

Culturally, Somalis have sexual and social divisions among nomads, but now there is a cocktail of cultures in town. Somali labor roles were adapted through pastoralism, such as collecting water and firewood, which is women’s work. Women performed these tasks because men were out with their camels and women had to stay near the home. Women were trained in their jobs at a young age, and they see their role is in the house. To change this takes time. If a husband doesn’t work, his wife will ask why. A husband who stays home and cleans doesn’t have a good reputation. Women complain if her husband wants to help her with such tasks because it is her job, her responsibility. They say it’s changing in South Africa but the stigma attached to gendered differences continues. Change is always difficult.
Roble’s comments are interesting in that he touches on the very point many men made. While some men would never entertain the thought of performing household tasks, those who want to ease their wives’ burden by helping them at home are met with rejection and criticism. This may come from the household and the larger community. Women feel the household is their responsibility, just as men feel providing financial support to their families is theirs. If a man does not secure adequate resources, women take it upon themselves to fill that gap. Men, however, cannot reciprocate in this way to assist women, which leaves them feeling confused about what role they should play.

I asked about gender roles in Somalia during several focus group interviews with women and men. This was a contentious issue, particularly in the context of my questions about how gender roles shaped gender relations. In a women’s focus group, participants insisted that women were nothing in Somalia and they lived like slaves. From their perspective, girls had no choice but to work in the house and they had little freedom to pursue an education or socialize with friends. They argued that women were forced to marry for brideprice and could not choose their spouse. Farhiya dissented, reasoning that gender arrangements are what Somali culture is. Women stayed home to care for children and manage the house, and it is not the abuse other women said it is. In a separate discussion, Mohamed elaborated on this point:

By confining women to the house and marrying her to a good man, families think they’re helping girls, not subordinating them. It’s not abuse. Men think they’re doing good for her. Men and families are not trying to punish or harm women; they want to find them good providers and to know she’s in good hands. Gender inequality isn’t about marriage; it’s about society. Roles in society must change for women. They must become clerics and teachers. Only men make political and
tribal decisions. The perception is that women don’t belong there; they should be at home.

Men noted that women in Somalia do not believe they are slaves, but the exposure to Western values and ideals have persuaded women to reflect on life in their homeland in this way. Women performed the tasks they were taught and did not think about other possibilities until they were influenced by women’s lives in Western society.

Islam also defines women’s roles, which Somalis interpret as encouraging women to sit at home, cook, and clean while men work for resources outside the home. Farhiya’s views echo Mohamed’s point. Men are responsible for buying their wives the things they need, and gender roles are abusive only when men fail to meet this obligation, in which case women have the right to leave the house and work for themselves. When the same topic arose during a mixed gender focus group, men accused women of lying about accusations of slavery. Daleel said that men were the best husbands in Somalia and talk of slavery emerged only after Somalis fled the country. Haaruun insisted that women were not slaves and explained there was a sexual division of labor that enabled boys to go to school; however, education was quite limited for all Somalis once the war started and few people had the opportunity to attend. When women talk about forced marriages, they refer to a practice from the distant past. He also argued that as long as men accept the responsibilities Allah gave them to lead their households, there is no problem. In South Africa, however, men are irresponsible and roles are changing. The question of women’s roles in Somalia is important if we want to understand how gender relationships are changing in South Africa. Several men noted in their interviews that women have become
difficult in South Africa and seek revenge against men for what they did to women in Somalia, even though they take issue with the notion that women were abused.

Women’s discussion of whether they should work in South Africa was contradictory. Women feel it is better for them to stay home if there is a husband capable of fully supporting his family, and yet Barlin said with anger that it is men who made the rule that women work only at home. When I asked women in a focus group if they would want to work even with a successful husband, they said yes and that it would be difficult to do in Somalia. Aside from having limited job opportunities in Somalia, men’s opposition to women’s employment stems from their customary role as family providers and the discomfort men feel toward women who interact with men outside of their kin networks. Keynaan explained this resistance and fear of negative influences that lead to “immorality” should a woman work: “Everyone wants to talk to your wife, advise her, and try to pick her up. After these things happen, she’s no longer ashamed and loses respect for you because of the things other people say and what she’s been exposed to. If she works in an office, that’s okay, but not in the shops.” Indeed, many people heard stories about men trying to seduce married women in public and saying bluntly, “I want to fuck you”, something which would have severe consequences in Somalia.

Some men believe employed women will conspire against their husbands at work and pollute each other’s minds with ideas about calling the police to make false domestic violence claims, and thus destroy their marriages. This fear exacerbates the power struggle between women and men, and men use culture and religion to discourage
women from pursuing work outside the home. Several men indicated they would never allow their wives to accept jobs under any circumstances, including abject poverty. For them, financial struggles are preferable to a wife abandoning her customary role as household manager and to the possibility of culturally inappropriate behavior. These contradictions, conflicts, and power contests often lead to divorce and demonstrate shifting gender structures in Mayfair.

The contradictory nature of gender relations is obvious when realizing that some men are generally supportive of what women are trying to do. Some men encourage women’s work and see the positive outcomes of these changes, which include improving families’ lives, as Keyse conveys, “In Somalia, women used to be behind us and now they’re leading us in work. They work for themselves and it is good. Women can help their families.” Attitudes toward women’s work transcend gender and instead are variable according to specific situations. In the South African context, women feel their lack of education and skills, limited opportunities, and insecurity in the country lead them to prefer staying close to home whenever possible, even though they aspire to do other things if circumstances were favorable. For them, acquiring skills and education that would enable them to build a career is not realistic, though they are optimistic about their daughters’ prospects in the future.

4.3 Gender Relations

“We’re in another country and have new and different experiences, but that doesn’t mean our culture changes.” – Female, 38
“Men’s responsibilities are the same [in South Africa], but women’s are different. Women who come to South Africa are told they have more power than men here. Women begin to control their husbands and they take the responsibility to tell men what to do. They come to South Africa and decide that they’re the boss.” – Male, 29

Informants offered their perspectives on how relationships between women and men have changed in Mayfair. Some women and men consider any alteration to Somali customs as indicative of religious and cultural abandonment, betrayal, and disrespect, which is attributed to women’s behavior in South Africa, an interesting contradiction since many women argue their conduct is only a reaction to men’s. Others see shifting roles and gender relations as a positive move toward equality. There are women who believe that men want to control them and therefore feel threatened by women’s new roles, but these women contend they are simply picking up men’s slack and working to support their families. Economic need and the reality of life in South Africa inevitably challenge gender relations, but how individuals understand and contest these processes is variable. For many women, conflict arises from different ideas about women’s economic participation and how household resources should be allocated. Perceptions of women’s rights also create tension and misunderstanding in spousal relationships. The loss of close kin equally plays a critical role in these transitions, as their absence enables people—and women in particular—to conduct their lives without family interference.

Social relationships between women and men in South Africa are more relaxed in the sense that women and men can be friends—within or beyond their kinship groups—and speak to each other in public, even though some members of the community
disapprove of such interactions. Women also have the ability to date men before committing to marriage, something they could not do (easily) in Somalia, and enjoy freedom of movement. It remains inappropriate for women and men to date openly and expose themselves as a couple to the community in some people’s view, but it is part of the slow changes emerging in Mayfair. Informants noted the increasing prevalence of pre-marital sex in the community and argued that relationships change, in part, because close kin are absent and cannot monitor women’s movement and behavior.

The absence of the extended family in South Africa makes a considerable difference in gender relations. Families lived near or by each other in Somalia, where male kin observed girls closely to ensure they behaved appropriately. For example, girls who had license to date could do so only in their home, under their family’s watch. South Africa affords women and men the freedom to make friends and the ability to date and find suitable marriage partners. In Mayfair, women and men can go to restaurants and movies, albeit with some discretion as couples often go to surrounding areas such as Fordsburg and Newtown to spend time together. Women also reported that an out of wedlock pregnancy is easier to conceal and manage in South Africa.

4.3.1 Historical Context

With Siad Barre’s repressive regime in the years preceding the civil war and in the more than 20 years since the Somali state collapsed, gender relations have undergone continuous renegotiation as family and individual needs change due to the strain of economic hardship, suffering, death, displacement, and transnational migration. Somalis
confront this cultural transformation as they face immeasurable challenges to rebuilding their lives. The shifting roles and responsibilities of women in the diaspora complicate gender relations, particularly in South Africa. In addition to pervasive discrimination and an incessant fear of xenophobic violence, Somalis hold different and conflicting visions of an ideal community in Mayfair. My informants arrived in South Africa at different times, and they left Somalia—if they have been there at all—at different stages of the conflict. Each person brings his or her individual experiences to Mayfair, and community ideology evolves as its population grows. Despite this heterogeneity, specific patterns emerge even with temporal and historical trends. Women and men struggle with power structures and negotiate the realities of gender conflict and survival needs.

Many of the Somalis who arrived soon after Mandela became president in 1994 are more integrated into South African society than newer arrivals. Distinguished as “old” and “new” migrants, old Somalis lived through the cultural, political, and economic transformations in South Africa and did not have an established Somali community. They did not have the security of existing networks in Mayfair and embraced members of other migrant and native communities. They developed new networks, or rather the character of their networks changed—a common practice among refugees (Horst 2006a)—with their South African friends and neighbors, and they relied on them for assistance. Old Somalis carved out lives for themselves and escaped the perils of remaining in Somalia. They learned English, found jobs, and survived without other Somalis to support them. While the perception is that old Somalis are more successful, better understand their
democratic rights, and find South African life simpler to navigate given their extensive experience in the country, they face the same discrimination as other migrants.

Somalis continue to emigrate from the Horn of Africa, and the expanding Mayfair community carries the signs of prolonged conflict in their homeland with them to South Africa. Newer migrants have gravitated to Mayfair, and older, settled Somalis find themselves integrating into a community they do not fully understand. As Somalis established themselves in Mayfair and built their own “Little Mogadishu”, old Somalis were confronted with the challenge of cohabiting with their ethnic kin even though they share few commonalities. This means that old Somalis who enjoyed the perceived rights and freedoms of living in a constitutionally progressive, democratic South Africa found themselves at odds with newer migrants who brought their religious and cultural ideologies with them. Several informants argued that fighting in Somalia is no longer about clanism, but rather it is about Islamic dogma and textual interpretations. Indeed, conservative Islamist movements have proliferated in Somalia and have trickled into Mayfair, creating conflict in the community.

The promise of a new South Africa sustained the populous in the euphoria following the end of apartheid, but lingering economic inequality spurred the onslaught of crime, violence, and discrimination that has become characteristic of the country still healing from the wounds of white rule and racial segregation. Frustration is merited; unemployment rates are high in Gauteng Province and quality of life has remained stagnant or even deteriorated. Post-apartheid disappointment culminated in impoverished
South Africans who target the migrants who have found economic success in South Africa, and the tension is palpable. Many Somalis believe they are marks for xenophobic violence because of their entrepreneurial prowess; consequently, the Somali community is insular and individuals prefer to live and interact in Mayfair where they feel safe.

These realities have implications for old and new Somalis, and for gender relations. Fear and vulnerability confine individuals—women and men—to Mayfair. People need community support to survive. If women cannot leave the relative security of Mayfair to seek employment, they must rely on Somalis to support their income-generating ventures. Women are pressured to behave appropriately, however members of the population define it. With different ideas about the roles and responsibilities of community members, what it means to be Somali, and what is appropriate behavior for women, Somalis struggle to produce and define their identity in South Africa.

4.3.2 Patriarchy and Culture Change

“There is no equality in South Africa because women don’t have money and must be under the man. Equality issues here are different from those in Somalia. In Somalia, divorced women have somewhere to go—parents and family. In South Africa, divorced women have nowhere to go. Women get trapped in bad marriages because of this. If women have money, they don’t need marriage.” – Female, 41

“For us [women], we don’t want to go back to the way things were before, and men want us to.” – Female, 36

Somali culture remains deeply patriarchal despite changes caused by protracted conflict and migration. While some things have changed through necessity and exposure to different cultural and legal systems, people generally feel that patriarchy endures.
Many people fear that Somalis are losing their culture because the greatest victims of war—the children—lost their identity and the chance to grow up in peace. Children’s exposure to South African culture and the various relationships they build with non-Somalis certainly will influence their worldview and perhaps challenge the cultural system—its values, customs, and traditions—by which they were raised. The dominant belief held by those I interviewed is that patriarchy will fade into the past with the next generation, but the current marginalization of Somalis in Mayfair may stunt patriarchy’s decline more than in communities where integration is more pronounced.

Patriarchy manifests itself by the way families and Somalis in general regard female development as members of the cultural system. The view that men are family providers is problematic in South Africa. It is extremely difficult for men to succeed when they are targeted for crime and their work is often demanding and dangerous. Some men contend that while husbands were leaders and providers in Somalia, women in the diaspora have the laws of their resettlement countries on their side. This reality leaves men powerless to control outcomes and powerless to assert control over women. Daleel explained that these changes encourage women to “rule their husbands”:

According to the law of the country, the women don’t listen to their husbands the way they used to be in Somalia. The women are trying to be the leader, but the husband will never allow his wife to be the leader. That’s why the arguing and fighting start with each other. We were never abusing the woman in Somalia. But if you touch her here, the police will come and lock you up in jail. You must be under the woman.

Many Somalis, and men in particular, share Daleel’s sentiments. There is some truth to his views, but this is also a contradiction as few women are real leaders in their
relationships and challenge their husbands in such ways. For those women who do call
the police, their actions frighten men into thinking most women have and will use their
power to destroy their husbands’ lives. From many men’s perspective, and some women
as well, women change because they come to South Africa and get different ideas about
their relationships based on South African gender constructions.

4.3.3 Spousal Relations

“Relationships between men and women change; it’s a kind of civilization. Women have
freedom in South Africa. They can go out if they wish and men don’t always say no.
Families go out in public together; men go to weddings. Women go to weddings and men
stay home to watch the kids. A woman can work if she wants, even if her husband has
money. She can do what she wants. A man might have a shop, while his wife is a hawker.
It’s very different from Somalia.” – Female, 26

“In Somalia, wives must consult their husbands for everything. In South Africa, it
depends on the man.” – Male, 40

Spousal relationships are complicated by the dynamics of life in South Africa.
While levirate marriage has largely disappeared, one man travelled to Mayfair to marry
his murdered brother’s widow. Amir assumed the role of father to the children his brother
and sister-in-law bore, but the marriage was near its end by the time I arrived in Mayfair.
Amir confided in me about their marital woes and told me they often fought about his
being gone all the time and her confinement to the house. Amir told his wife that it was
her job to stay home with the children, cooking and cleaning, while he left the house
during the day to earn money for the family. He wanted the marriage to endure for the
sake of the children and was persistent about keeping the family together. His wife, on
the other hand, demanded a divorce and threatened to call the police if Amir did not leave her alone. During one intense argument, Amir resisted the urge to hit her, knowing he would be arrested if he did, and instead decided to consult Somali elders and community leaders and asked them to mediate, following Somali custom. The elders agreed to speak with the wife, convene the council to discuss the conflict, and inform both parties of their decision, which Amir and his wife were obliged to obey. The elders ultimately agreed that divorce was the best solution and that Amir’s wife should keep the children, as Amir would not be able to raise them alone while working all day to provide for them. Instead, he agreed to pay support for the children, but not for his former wife.

This story illustrates several key points and sources of spousal conflict in Mayfair. In Somali culture, traditionally, a woman could not divorce her husband without his consent, and divorce granted a husband custody rights of their children. This is one of the most interesting issues in the diaspora, where laws and norms in settlement countries pose a challenge to customary practices. Amir’s wife might have turned to the legal system to pursue a divorce, in which case Amir believed the courts would favor his wife with custody arrangements and spousal support. Amir wanted custody of the children because, he claimed, his wife was not caring for the children properly and he feared she might harm them. By turning to the elders, he sought control of the situation and a resolution that could benefit him and would pressure his wife to conform. Many women, in fact, feel the council of elders, who comprise men, disproportionately favor men in the name of preserving outdated, patriarchal traditions that disempower women and deny
them their rights as equal partners in marriage. Elders aim to keep families together rather than to promote separation and divorce, but this means that many disgruntled wives feel the male councils side with husbands, regardless of the private situation, and leave women trapped in failed marriages. Men in particular prefer to settle conflicts without the interference of the state, as they covet the Somali customs that generally support them. Women, on the other hand, may be more willing to turn to sources outside the community to achieve the outcomes they desire. They can use the threat of South African intervention to leverage their position in their conjugal relationships.

This case also demonstrates men’s loss of power and control over their lives—wives included. There is no legal outlet for abused women in Somalia. As domestic violence is a private issue, kin manage and resolve grievances, not the police. By threatening to call the police, Amir’s wife used her power within South Africa’s legal system to manipulate Amir into complying with her wishes. While he wanted to hit her in the midst of his rage and frustration, Amir abstained for fear of moving their conflict from the home and the community and into the hands of the South African state. It would have been resolved in a way that defies Somali custom. This example also points to another important change in South Africa, which is the way women use the state to afford them the protection their close kin provided in Somalia. Regardless of the outcome, women in Somalia turned to their natal kin for assistance in times of marital conflict, financial troubles, domestic violence, or any number of issues. Whether a woman’s patrikin or clan elders mediated the dispute, she always had somewhere to turn. Women
may not feel they have other outlets for support in South Africa and use the police to fill that gap, which occurs in other migrant communities as well (see for example Holtzman 2000). It also helps that Somalis believe the state favors women in such cases.

Another important issue that emerges from Amir’s story is the contradiction of women’s spatial mobility. Amir wanted his wife to stay in the house and perform her duties as wife and mother. In fact, he said his wife belongs in the home because she is not educated and therefore should not work. When I followed up with questions about whether he might be amenable to her working if she were educated, Amir told me that it was safer for her to remain inside while he took risks for the family by moving around Mayfair to earn a livelihood. A great source of marital conflict is that women want more freedom of movement but men think they should have less and cite safety concerns as the reason. At the same time, women limit their mobility for fear of violence and abuse from those outside of their community. Make no mistake, women have cause for concern over their personal safety and they are vulnerable to harassment and crime should they venture from the perceived security of Mayfair, but the threat can be used by men as a way to control women’s movement and keep them home.

One of Amir’s concerns about his failed marriage is that the family filed a resettlement petition at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Pretoria, and he worried that his wife would sabotage his chances for resettlement by writing an inflammatory letter to the United Nations (UN) consisting of lies that would exclude him from their case. Women know they exercise enormous power
in situations that involve the state or the UNHCR. A disgruntled wife who separated from her husband wrote a “dangerous” letter to the UNHCR to request an expedited review of their family’s resettlement petition. In the letter, she said that she and her husband had divorced after he abandoned her and the children and did not provide any financial support. While the letter embellished the actual situation, it nonetheless was effective in excluding the husband from moving to the US. For those men who dream of onward migration to the West, maintaining those family units are critical to securing a flight out of South Africa, and unhappy wives can use this power to their advantage.

Marriage

“People are choosing each other now. We left our family, our fathers, behind. Older people arranged marriages but we have experience now and see it’s not good. When girls turned fourteen, they used to be forced into marriage. Girls were told by their families that if they accepted the man, her family would bless her. If she didn’t accept the man, her family would curse her.” – Female, 18

“Husbands expect wives to care for and respect him, and to allow him to enjoy her, but men don’t get all that.” – Male, 26

Women often mentioned the prevalence of single mothers in Mayfair and the challenges women face without having spousal support. Indeed, my data show more divorced women than men (see Figure 2). Informants cited the difficulty divorced mothers have in finding spouses who will assume the financial responsibility for their children in the absence of child support from their former husbands and kin who have the resources to assist them. Older, divorced women may also struggle to acquire a husband if their fertility is compromised or they have reached menopause. Men have more
flexibility in their choice of spouse since age is not a factor in their reproductive potency and divorced men do not assume custody of their children, nor financial responsibility in some cases, in Mayfair. The nine men who are not married attribute their bachelor status to economic insecurity, though some mentioned their apprehension about marrying women who might be after their already scarce resources.

Figure 2. Marital Status

Arranged marriages built alliances in Somalia, and girls who refused a potential husband faced shunning or cursing. While these marriages are increasingly uncommon in South Africa, there are instances where they occur or are pursued. Cawo’s clan family,
for example, summoned her to Pretoria to encourage her to marry the son of a Somali woman who was visiting from Canada. Marriage for opportunistic migration purposes is not unusual. The woman promised Cawo resettlement in Canada but was disappointed when Cawo refused their offer and angrily told them not to waste her time again. Other women, however, were unable to deny such an arrangement. One woman told me about an arranged marriage in the works under dubious circumstances. Keynaan, a man who frequented Zamzam’s restaurant, became enraged when his sister-in-law, who lived with Keynaan’s family, started dating a Somali man that Keynaan did not like and referred to as “street boy”. Keynaan worried that the relationship would negatively influence his 15-year-old daughter, and so he pulled her out of school and vowed to marry her off to a man of Keynaan’s choosing to prevent a similar outcome. Keynaan negotiated a meeting between a man he liked and his daughter, who promptly refused to marry the man. While Keynaan’s household thought he overreacted to his sister-in-law’s relationship, they accepted the likelihood that his daughter could not refuse the arrangement.

Families also arranged marriages in Somalia, and sometimes in South Africa, to find respectable and responsible men for their daughters. With inexperienced girls marrying at such a young age, some informants argued that families looked out for girls’ best interests and sought to protect them from making mistakes. There are still arranged marriages, but many people insisted they are not forced unions. If a girl or woman refuses to marry a man, no one can force her to accept him as her husband; arranged marriages are agreed upon, but there is pressure on women to comply. This is being negotiated in
Mayfair. There are debates (but little consensus) about the prevalence and acceptability of arranged marriages. Parents want their children to be happy but recognize that social stigmas are strong in Somali culture. For example, should a girl marry a man whose family is considered immoral, she will carry that burden and it will add to the pressure within the marriage. If two people marry and a stigma is there, their love must be strong to overcome it, and parents want to protect their children from that suffering.

The incidence of arranged marriages has declined for several reasons. First, the war separated families who once relied on those relationships to strengthen ties with other clans. With families dispersed all over the world, those partnerships have largely subsided and the importance of alliance building has been replaced by wariness and distrust of other clans. Single female migrants are interested in pursuing relationships that benefit them, not their nuclear and extended family, especially since many of the women living in Mayfair do not have their close kin living in the community with them. Second, Somalis are learning more about Islam and Islamic principles have penetrated Somali society in the sense that what is religiously appropriate is more important than cultural traditions. More Somalis believe that Islam promotes free choice in marriage. As Islam gains a stronger hold in cultural practice, people see that arranged marriages were a cultural construction and not an Islamic one. Islamic understanding remains a point of contention in other aspects of marriage (as discussed elsewhere), but debates surrounding Islamic rules and arranged marriages are important nonetheless. Third, a lot of women and men have been influenced by what they perceive as Western notions of romantic
love, and they want this in their relationships. This is especially true of women. Those who listen to music and watch television and movies see healthy and happy Western relationships that developed through compatibility, love, and commitment.

Some informants believe Somalis marry for love, while others view it as a strategic move for personal and financial gain. Men search for partners who will not only produce children, but who will take care of them. When Biixi temporarily separated from his wife, he contemplated taking a second wife—without divorcing the first—to have someone to care for him, he said. Most men cannot cook or make tea, and they refuse to clean. They do not shop for food or buy their own toiletries. The rare case of a single father requires a woman to manage the household and children. When Qaasin and his wife separated, he assumed custody of the children and married another woman to have a caretaker. Qaasin later reconciled with his first wife and divorced her replacement.

Gender roles are so firmly rooted that men have learned not to function in the domestic sphere and are wholly dependent on women for support. In fact, several informants told me that others would mock or criticize a man for performing a woman’s job, such as cooking. Women who do not fulfill these domestic roles are subject to divorce.

Men who are not married and live in Somali guesthouses would like to have wives and start families, if they do not already have children, but feel their lives are too unstable to pursue serious relationships. They know stories of failed marriages and greedy wives who want only money, making them reluctant to seek partners as they question women’s motives. They also fear the costs of wooing potential brides and the
financial demands of marrying a woman who lives in Mayfair. The surplus of bachelors enticed many women to South Africa in search of husbands and wealth, but there are cases of men pursuing women from Somalia to marry before, some men say, ideas about women’s rights and concepts of freedom in South Africa corrupt them. This strategy sometimes backfires and demonstrates men’s powerlessness when men invest in bringing women to Mayfair for marriage and their new wives leave them shortly after their arrival. Men’s frustration and lack of control lead them to believe that women conspire against them by consulting other women in the community who advise wives to demand more from their husbands and to make husbands’ lives as difficult as possible. They think some women want to sabotage marriages in the name of women’s empowerment.

**Polygyny**

“My husband has two wives. I feel nothing now, but before I was shocked, confused, and jealous. No woman wants this but sometimes we have to deal with it. It’s his [a husband’s] choice and we must accept it.” – Female, 34

Two men I interviewed had more than one wife, and only one woman was part of a polygynous marriage at the time of my research. There are cases of men who came to South Africa without their spouse and children and have since taken a girlfriend or plan to marry another wife, though the wife or wives who remain in Somalia may not know about their husband’s relationship in Mayfair. Polygyny is not very common because men cannot afford to support multiple wives and households. Indeed, the two men mentioned previously are successful business owners who have more resources to
provide for their wives, even as their multiple families are dispersed in other African countries. With so many families scraping to get by, and the requirement that husbands treat each of their wives equally, it is not feasible for men to support several spouses. Furthermore, life in urban Johannesburg does not necessitate many wives, as economic productivity is limited. First wives often are jealous when their husbands take another wife and demand divorces. For example, Maano was furious when her first husband told her he had married another woman. She was so belligerent that he took her to the hospital and had her sedated for fear she would kill him; they divorced. Maano then married Aadan in South Africa and they spent seven years together before he took another wife without consulting her. They too divorced.

Men may or may not consult their wives before marrying another woman. Those who do not discuss plans with their wives before wedding a second, third, or forth wife do so intentionally because the first wife may forbid it and then a man might feel he cannot proceed. Most of the women I interviewed said a husband taking a new wife is intolerable and they could not remain in a polygynous union. Women fear their husbands will marry additional women but feel powerless to control it, as Farhiya said, “If you are Somalian woman, you are waiting that day.” For most women who have had such an experience, they spoke of the sadness and jealousy they felt when their husbands told them their plans to take other wives. Faiza was resigned to it, saying she was shocked, hurt, and confused in the beginning but came to accept her husband’s choice. It was his right, she reasoned, and she could do nothing about it: “No one [woman] wants this, but
sometimes we have to deal with it.” Faiza’s husband lives in a township with his second wife while Faiza lives in a single room with her seven children in Mayfair.

**Sex and Circumcision**

“There is no one around and they [Somalis] can do what they want. They can sleep with whoever they want. People have that freedom here.” – Male, 39

A few women and men were willing to discuss their sexual relationships with me, but only if they initiated the conversation. The misunderstanding between some couples regarding sex was striking and contradictory. The women I spoke with longed for romance, tenderness, and foreplay but felt their husbands had little interest in satisfying their needs. One woman liked to say that men “fuck like animals. They’re in and out quickly and you can forget foreplay.” Barlin often compared men to dogs and said the only difference is that men’s tails are in the front. Some of the married men who discussed intercourse spoke of their frustration with their wives’ lack of interest in making love with them and felt they practically had to rape their wives to get sex. A handful of women, on the other hand, told me their husbands rape them and use them for sex whenever they want. Tarabi explained his perspective:

Husbands can’t tell their wives what to do. Women create more difficulties in their marriages. Women threaten their husbands with the police, and they reject their husbands’ pleas for sex. In Somalia, women get fucked by their husbands whether they want it or not. Here, when husbands want sex and the wife isn’t having it, or if the husband forces his wife to have sex, women will say their husbands raped her.
Women seek intimacy and meaningful connection with their husbands. The multi-tasking that marks women’s lives in South Africa seldom leaves the energy or desire for sex, not to mention that families often live in shared accommodation and sleep in the same room with their children (discussed more in Chapter 6). Men have a different take on the matter and feel that sex is a critical component of marriage and their right within the marriage. A lack of sex can lead to tension between spouses or divorce, and in some cases, men will pursue sexual satisfaction elsewhere.

Warsame was willing to discuss sex with me and said that pre-marital sex is far more common in South Africa than in was in Somalia, which he attributes to the Western influence. It remains taboo but occurs because family members are not present to monitor individual behaviors. Roble discussed how sex was sacred in Somalia and reserved only for marriage. He also said:

Men have a right to sex even if his wife doesn’t want it. Women expect men to approach her for sex. On the wedding night, a woman is shy and the man forces himself on her. Men don’t always know if no [to sex] means no or if she is playing. If a woman approaches her husband for sex, even if they’ve been married five years, he might wonder if she’s a prostitute.

When I asked women about playing games with their husbands, they assured me they mean “no” when they tell their husbands they do not want sex.

Attitudes toward female circumcision are changing. For many Somalis, they believed infibulation was a requirement of Islam. As people—especially women—become educated and learn to read and understand the Qur’an in Arabic, in addition to their access to online resources where they can learn more about their faith, Somalis
recognize that religion and culture are separate systems and that female genital cutting is a cultural and not a religious practice. When I met Waris, who was recently divorced, I asked her why she and her husband separated. She refused to allow infibulation of her two young daughters, defying her mother-in-law’s wishes, which led to divorce. Waris had traumatizing memories of her own experience, and consequently sex was painful and childbirth difficult. She spoke of great sadness when watching couples make love in movies because they feel pleasure while she suffers from pain and discomfort. Many women echoed Waris’ sentiments. While some circumcised women enjoy sex, many are not satisfied and find the experience uncomfortable.

Somalis often use the word “prostitute” when referring to women’s perceived promiscuous behavior, such as dressing without hijab or niqab, socializing with men publicly, or refusing sex with their husbands. Women explained that husbands want sex but wives are busy with children and the house all day and are thinking of other things. Some women attribute this lack of desire to infibulation and limited sexual stimulation. Whatever the reason, sexual problems between spouses are an important issue in marriage and may lead to jealousy from a husband who thinks his wife is going elsewhere if she rejects him. Men’s sexual frustration leads to accusations of infidelity, but Barlin complained that the problem is a lack of foreplay: “He just want to come right through like a camel. So how we feel?” Because women are infibulated, they require extra stimulation for arousal but do not get that level of attention from their husbands, which therefore reduces women’s desire for sex.
Domestic Violence

“It [domestic violence] happens, but if a woman loves her husband she won’t report it. If a husband rapes his wife, it’s not considered rape because it’s her husband’s choice, not hers. Women are ashamed to report cases to the police because she must have done something wrong to be abused in the first place. Women have hard decisions to make about standing up for their rights.” – Male, 47

“Women call the police and tell their husbands, ‘This is South Africa, not Somalia’ and she threatens her husband. Sometimes Somali ladies pretend to call the police when their husbands are present as a way to scare them into behaving nicely. They’re actually calling their friends. [This is different because] life changes, but no one will change their culture.” – Female, 44

Migrant women are vulnerable to domestic violence due to insecure livelihoods, poverty, crime and xenophobia, and immigration laws, policies, and status. These challenges often are exacerbated by women’s few or scant social networks in their host country (Kiwunaka 2010). Part of the problem is that women’s limited opportunities make it more likely they will remain in violent marriages for lack of suitable alternatives. They suffer brutality for the sake of survival and for fear of losing their children and what few resources they have should they pursue a divorce. With few skills and limited earnings potential, women recognize that they are financially unable to live independently and without a spouse. If a divorced woman has several children and needs a husband to provide financial support for all of them, her marriage prospects are limited.

Women who shared their stories of domestic violence did so voluntarily. I did not initiate dialogue regarding any sort of physical or emotional abuse unless a woman first addressed it during our interview. Those who did speak about their encounters said it was
cathartic to discuss the pain of their experiences with someone they could trust. While I do not have much data on how many women in my sample have been victims of domestic violence, and no man discussed patterns of violence in their spousal relationships, those women I know who resorted to calling the police have lived in South Africa since the 1990s. This could mean that women who have been in the country longer know their rights as women and are emboldened to defy Somali cultural customs since they have stronger or better established networks and do not share the ideologies of newer arrivals.

Some women feel that turning to Somali elders and community leaders will not guarantee the outcome they desire. If women use customary outlets to facilitate their divorce, the elders might decide that the couple should continue working through their problems, so women might feel they have little support and are forced to endure further abuse. Barlin explained her frustration with elders:

There is a lot [of divorce]. Husbands’ expectations have changed. Women have their eyes open and see wrong and right. Husbands are not happy about this. When wives and husbands fight, the elders are there to resolve problems. The problem is that elders don’t do right and are old-fashioned and tell women, “You’re a woman. You must respect your husband.” Elders support the men. They don’t ask women questions during the mediation, just the husbands. Like with my husband and me, people say I’m wrong but what happens behind closed doors? Only my husband and I know.

Another issue is that while women have social networks in Mayfair, they may not have close kin to protect them against domestic violence. If a woman lives without her kinship networks, there is no one to defend her should a husband become aggressive. This change occurs in other migrant communities as well (Holtzman 2000).
Spousal abuse is a contradiction. From men’s perspective, general frustration, disappointment, and emasculation increase the possibility of domestic violence. Men use violence to demonstrate their power and control over women, when in fact they have lost power over women in South Africa and cannot control outcomes. Furthermore, substance abuse aggravates the potential for violent behavior. For example, Mako was trapped in an abusive marriage to a man who was addicted to khat and did not work. Mako’s predicament was common knowledge in the community and she performed several informal activities to make ends meet, some of which were dangerous while others were labor intensive. Mako did not hold a job until her husband developed problems and stopped working. Eventually he started beating and cursing her. When she broached the subject of divorce, her husband refused and told members of the community that he was too sick and old to leave the family home, and that Mako was free to leave as long as she left their children with him. For fear of losing her children in divorce, she suffered her husband’s physical and verbal abuse to keep her family together. Toward the end of my year in Mayfair, Mako arranged a marriage for her young daughter simply to get her out of the house to escape the violence. Her husband also abused the children, which led to his daughter’s suicide attempt. The marriage arrangement was Mako’s way of protecting her daughter, particularly if something happened to Mako and she could no longer prevent her husband from beating the children. Mako’s husband used violence and threats to control her, when in fact Mako led her family and household, making decisions for her ...

5 This primarily includes khat, but some men use alcohol and occasionally marijuana. While there were rumors of men who use harder drugs, such as cocaine, I could not verify those claims.
family and allocating resources as she saw fit. She held the power in her family, but her abusive husband effectively used the only means he had to manipulate and dominate her.

Men voiced their concern that women make false rape and domestic violence claims to the police to prove their power over husbands. I sat with a group of women in a shop at Amal one afternoon to discuss this issue. Women said the phone calls to police are legitimate, though they were aware (through gossip) of phony cases. They agreed that women are empowered in South Africa because of the state’s stance on equality. Men know this, they continued, making them less likely to become physically violent toward a woman who exerts her power in this way. Threatening a husband with police intervention is an effective way to alter men’s behavior in some cases. As Fartun said, “Women have the ability to make their own decisions here. Women can confront their husbands and kick them out. In Somalia, men hit their wives. In South Africa, men hit their wives and their wives go to the police.” In addition to more egalitarian state laws and policies in South Africa, calling the police has become a substitute for the protection women would likely receive from their consanguineous kin should a husband harm his wife.

**Khat**

“When they [men] get freedom, some become alcoholics, drug addicts, or chew too much mirra [khat]. They forget their wife and children and behave irresponsibly. They don’t support their families. Some men spend money on khat and sleep with other women [while they’re married].” – Male, 39
It is difficult to gauge the extent of *khat* usage, but the harm it causes in families with members—often husbands and fathers—who have picked up the habit is real. Employees at SASA and SCOB told me that *khat* use is not that widespread in Mayfair, but I happened to spend most of my time in a place where men congregated to chew and socialize. Nevertheless, it is important because husbands who use *khat* regularly often end up with broken families. It is a contradiction of use and abuse, and of socializing versus family violence in some cases. Nearly all of the men who passed the time at Zamzam’s restaurant were frequent, and often daily, users. From women’s perspective, *khat* addiction destroys families in two important ways. First, men spend scarce family resources on the narcotic. The price of *khat* depends on the origin of the crop, as well as on its availability and quality. For example, the occasional shipment from Kenya yields a higher price because it is more potent than the South African variety. *Khat* is sold in bundles, called kilos, and men might chew several kilos in a single day. In addition to the purchase price, men drink sweetened beverages—tea or soft drinks—when they chew, and many also smoke cigarettes, so the costs add up quickly. *Khat* is an anorectic and if men decide to eat in the restaurant before chewing, it is an additional cost. Second, men prefer to stay in one place once they start chewing, which is often in the afternoon or early evening. Men do not go home until very late at night, and sometimes not at all. There are cases of men binging on *khat* for two or three days in a single session, during which time they are unlikely to spend any time at home. Therefore, men are away from their homes for an extended period, leaving wives feeling neglected and managing the house and children alone while their husbands are out socializing with friends.
Men have a somewhat different take on *khat*. First, I would argue that it is a coping mechanism for men, and sometimes women, who may be unemployed or underemployed and feel bored, frustrated, depressed, hopeless, and generally dissatisfied with their lives in South Africa. In this way, *khat* provides a temporary rush and alleviates the stress and disappointment many Somalis bear. It is a way to pass the time and put people’s troubles aside, albeit temporarily, in order to manage the reality of their lives in Mayfair. Second, men socialize, sit with friends, chew *khat*, and have lively debates or important discussions. Most men do not have formal jobs with colleagues they can befriend, and sharing in the chewing ritual bonds the men and is central to maintaining networks. It brings men together in a place where they can learn the latest gossip and keep current on events in Mayfair and about Somalis all over the world. Third, sitting together and talking is imperative for networking and learning about employment opportunities. People also gather to strategize and develop ideas for onward migration or launching business ventures, which is a critical survival strategy. Finally, men do not always feel welcome at home during the day and leave to get out of their wives’ way. In addition to cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, women spend their days socializing with other women in their homes. Women generally stay in the house, unless they must leave to shop or to transport children to and from school, and cultivate friendships and networks in much the same way as men. Men, in turn, feel that they are interfering with their wives’ activities if the stay in the house. They get out of their wives’ way and use that time for their own social, gendered endeavors because most do not have stable employment to occupy their time.
Women and men debated the *khat* issue in focus group interviews. Men argued that chewing does not cost much money and many people do not pay anything for the habit. Somali dealers often give *khat* away free of charge when men have little money to spare, especially when they lack funds to buy food for their children. They believe that finances are not the problem, but rather it is lying to wives that create spousal conflict. Some men tell their wives that they are working and cannot come home. When women find out their husbands are sitting with friends and chewing *khat*, they are upset by the deceit and some husbands’ refusal to answer their wives when they ask where they have been. Men said they would not spend so much time on *khat* if they had decent jobs that pay a living wage. Women agreed that lying about the habit and the time men spend chewing is a major source of tension between spouses, but even after a lengthy debate with men, they remained unconvinced that chewing *khat* is free or inexpensive.

**Divorce**

“There is a lot [of divorce] here, and everywhere else, because women think they have freedom. Women want to work; men want them to stay in the house because it’s not safe for them to go out. Husbands want their wives to stay home because men don’t want to be responsible for their children. This is the only reason there is so much divorce.” – Female, 20

“When there are problems [in Somalia], elders and outsiders intervene. Outside Somalia, there is no mother or cousin to intervene, and then there is no one to help. In Somalia, women might say, ‘This man isn’t helping me’, but a husband supports his wife and there’s nothing she can do about it. In South Africa, a man’s money isn’t enough. When a man doesn’t support his wife here, women say ‘this is an easy life. This is South Africa. Tell him to fuck off.’ People get rid of each other easily. A man will leave his wife and kids and he will take another life.” – Female, 44
Women and men could not agree on whether there is more divorce in South Africa compared to Somalia, but men at community organizations said divorce rates are high. Marital problems are frequently about resources, and divorces are attributed to increased financial stress and heightened spousal expectations. Some informants suggest that having children so quickly after marriage strains finances and prevents new spouses from spending time together and learning about each other before starting a family. Women blame men for marital troubles, and men fault women for failed marriages. Men think women are influenced by the world around them and want to earn their own money, which causes spousal conflict. I discussed this with Mansuur, an employee at one of the Somali community organizations, who argued that divorce is about control. He argued that before the Somali war, men were in charge of women and women were mostly housewives who complied with gender models. Now there are female breadwinners who have at least some autonomy in Mayfair and from men’s perspective, women demand quite a lot from their husbands and want to seize control of their spousal relationships.

Women customarily cannot divorce their husbands, although this is changing in South Africa as women have the ability to initiate divorce proceedings through South Africa’s legal system. Disgruntled wives are known to use different strategies to achieve divorce, such as displaying poor cooking skills and household management. The worst offense is for a wife to cavort with another man, guaranteeing divorce (Simons 1995). Marital conflict required mediation in Somalia. If a couple suffered from financial troubles, for example, elders would work with the couple and their families to find a
solution. Informants reported that quick divorces resolve marital problems in Mayfair and may not include mediation. In Adnaan’s view, women react too hastily when husbands fail to meet their expectations: “Somali women don’t care about anything. If she has a lot of money, she keeps it for herself and is shy to give her husband any. Women believe that men must work for themselves. If the husband isn’t working, she’s embarrassed and says he doesn’t give to the family, and he loses control over her.” In Warsame’s view, fighting stems from impatience and intolerance, and this causes people to overreact during difficult financial periods and leads to divorce.

When husbands and wives get in an argument, women are known to ask for a divorce even though that is not the outcome they desire. Women in a focus group interview said wives do this because it is the only power they have, and all they really want is for their husbands to listen to them. There is a Somali proverb for this: “Don’t fight with your brother-in-law based on what your sister says.” In other words, women embellish the truth or say things they do not mean, so a woman’s word cannot be accepted as fact. Men addressed this issue during a focus group, and they agreed that elders favor men during conflict mediation by pushing women to remain with their husbands. Women do not feel they receive justice for their marital woes and use other routes to express their dismay. Nabiil noted, “When wives get angry, they don’t know how else to solve that problem and they talk about divorce. The problem is a lack of communication between spouses.” When Nabiil first married Naciimo, she asked for a divorce every time they had a disagreement. He finally asked her to express her concerns
without asking for a divorce, and it worked because they found a way to communicate and create understanding. Nabiil blames parents for not teaching daughters their marital duties and expectations, leaving her ill equipped to manage conflict.

4.3.4 Families and Households

“The person who earns money is the one who’s dictating in the household. The person who makes money, whether it’s a man or a woman, decides how the money is spent.” – Male, 39

“Men are trying but it’s not enough. There are more demands coming from the house. All men try to provide for their families but it is hard.” – Male, 44

Women strongly identify with the domestic sphere and caretaking—cooking, cleaning, washing, and in some cases paid labor are women’s most important roles. Supporting, educating, and caring for children are top priorities, and married women include their husbands’ maintenance as a key responsibility. Nonetheless, informants indicated that many women are less willing to perform the hard labor that marked their lives in Somalia. Women contrasted South Africa from Somalia by using wives’ food preparation as an example. When I asked about male and female relationship changes, women mentioned that wives no longer wake up early to prepare their husbands’ breakfast: “I’m not in Somalia. Why must I get up to prepare him the food?” The perception is that women have more control to make those decisions and even tell their husbands to bring dinner home, such as Nando’s (a fast food chain) or KFC, when they do not want to cook. Men believe they cannot refuse their wives’ demands because they will leave their husbands, forcing men to fend for themselves. These are examples of how
women resent control over them and resist household inequalities (Agarwal 1997). This contradiction also shows men’s powerlessness as they placate their wives to keep their marriages intact, while women use their power to get what they want.

Women are in charge of the household in that they must maintain it in addition to cooking and childcare. Only ten women self-identified as the household leader, which entails managing the home, determining how money is spent, and making important decisions about housing and household composition. Women who lead their households often provide financial support to it. All but one of the ten women earn an income, and the woman who does not work has a husband whose job as a truck driver often leaves her in Mayfair alone with their children. Furthermore, all but one woman who reported a being household leader had arrived in South Africa by 2005. One single woman came in 2009 but lives with female friends and is in charge of the rental agreement.

Household dynamics contribute to the lack of female leadership, as many women live in sublet rooms in apartments and houses with or without a spouse and children. I interviewed only one set of spouses, and both answered the question about household leadership differently, which reflects the power and control issues married couples face as they build their lives in South Africa. Dalmar and Amina married in the mid-2000s and had one child during my fieldwork period. Amina told me she is the household leader because she is in charge of the daily operations and decides who lives in their home. She is responsible for the household budget and tells Dalmar how much money they need for rent, utilities, food, and incidentals. Amina does not have a paid job, but she owns a share
in her brother’s shop and he sends her a portion of his profits each month. Dalmar performs odd jobs around Mayfair and generates enough income to support his growing family, which he gives to Amina and allows her to spend as she sees fit. In his own words, “I am the head of the family, but that doesn’t mean I have to dictate everything to my wife.” While Dalmar consults Amina and their relationship seems to be egalitarian in the sense there is mutual respect, communication, and consideration, Dalmar said that he makes all final decisions and is the leader.

When married women view the home as their domain alone, they assume the leadership position and feel they are in charge of its organization and management. If a woman defers to her husband as leader, even as she makes important decisions about the house, she accepts that her husband controls her position. This power dynamic varies from family to family, but it demonstrates how couples come to misunderstand their rights and responsibilities in their relationships. These ideologies speak not only to the reality of gender arrangements and different perceptions of leadership in Mayfair, they also show that “economic processes, such as the differentiation of tasks by gender, negotiations between husbands and wives over income distribution and discussions with daughters and sons about educational provision and residence requirements, are actually a set of practical activities which operationalize gender ideologies” (Moore 1994:92). These relationships are indicative of larger social contexts, power constructions, and inequalities that shape social order. This situation is not unique to Somalis. Other studies have shown (see for example Turner 2004) that while larger institutions promote
women’s empowerment and gender equality, and indeed gender ideologies undergo challenges and transformations, not much changes in the grand scheme of things. Women and men’s expectations remain the same and gendered roles have not shifted in ways that are unanimously accepted in Somali society.

Buraqo explained that women are in charge of the household, but men counter that claim in public. In a focus group, men said that women can advise their husbands but men make all final decisions. Allah granted men leadership roles and the husband is the family head, and this is why men can divorce women but it is not a reciprocal arrangement. Men’s leadership role cannot be challenged because it is an Islamic prescription. Unlike culture, religion cannot bend. Barlin agreed with this but pointed out the problem: “The religion says women stay home and that’s good. But men in Somalia do wrong to us and abuse us all the time. I do everything for my family. The head of the family is the husband, if he do it right, but he don’t do it.” Men believe that women gain more household control when they work, and a woman who misinterprets economic power as leadership is considered going against Islam and Somali culture. Respectful working women still obey their husbands’ decisions, but men feel that women who have their own money have no use for men and disrespect their religious rights.

4.3.5 Clans and Leadership

“I used to think my friends, who came from all clans, were my sisters and brothers. These friends became enemies when the war started. I didn’t know what my clan was and now it’s the most important thing with Somalis. I hate that. I still feel sorry about what happened in Somalia. We are followers because of the war. I think about when we will find peace. It doesn’t matter which clan people come from. Every family lost family
members in the war, but the past is passed; I forget. Everyone has this problem.” – Female, 36

“What difference does not having the extended family here make? People go to their tribal family, as the tribal family becomes the extended family here.” – Male, 40

It is difficult to gauge how pervasive clan divisions are in Mayfair. One of the contradictory outcomes of the war is that women were born into one clan, married into another, and forced to choose between their fathers’ clan and the clan of their husbands and children during conflict (Gardner and Warsame 2004). Several informants argued that while clan membership is one’s identity, Somalis lack the time and resources to debate clanism even as they acknowledge the problems it can create in South Africa. But kinship has become synonymous with clanism (Grobbelaar and Ghalib 2007) and divisions within Somalia perhaps inevitably creep into Somali lives in Mayfair, such as when current events in Somalia cause tension in the community. How clan identity factors into gender relations and marriage decisions, for example, are under negotiation, and informants’ responses to questions about this process in Mayfair were ambiguous.

Despite internal divisions, Somalis are united when threatened by outsiders. For example, police officers robbed a Somali family in Mayfair (discussed in detail in Chapter 5) and word spread quickly as the crime occurred. Before the perpetrators fled the scene, Somalis surrounded the area and restrained the officers. In this case, with an outside threat, there were no clan divisions because the community itself was under attack. Fahmi best explained how clanism works:
Somalis are naturally competitive. It’s me against my brother; me and my brother against our cousins; Me, my brother, and our cousins against our sub-clan; me, my brother, our cousins, and our sub-clan against our clan, and so on. Because Somalis follow their patrilineage, if my mother’s clan, Darod, is fighting with my father’s clan, Isaaq, my father’s clan is more powerful to me and my mother becomes my enemy. Clan loyalties are stronger than kin, and I would be expected to turn my back on my mother.

Fahmi said the problem is that men create a lot of the clanism in Mayfair, but women follow and also participate in divisive behavior. In his view, Somalis help only members of their clan and nothing is done in the name of altruism. If a man helps a woman, for example, he wants sex, marriage, or something in return.

The perception that Somalis are losing their culture, language, and religion is a tragic outcome of conflict for many Somalis throughout the diaspora. Part of the frustration stems from the decreasing importance of the Somali political system that has no legal value or recognition in South Africa. There is the feeling that there are neither real guardians of Somali culture nor highly regarded councils of elders for the community. People turn to elders for conflict mediation, but elders hold no real power and cannot enforce customary laws as they would in Somalia. Relationships built around solid clan and kinship systems in Somalia have weakened in South Africa because, as several informants noted, those who are elders in Mayfair often met as strangers in South Africa and hail from different Somali clans and provinces. Some Somalis also feel that those who assume leadership positions are not qualified because they lack education, experience, and qualities needed to represent the community. This shift favors women who have the ability to reject clan mediation and community interference in their lives, but it also increases their risk of other control mechanisms, such as domestic violence.
4.3.6 Islam

“As far as Muslim culture goes, men and women aren’t the same. Culturally, in South Africa, we are the same.” – Female, 44

“There is no equality here or in Somalia. The religion says that if you are a woman and you have a husband, you aren’t supposed to be equal. If you are married, you must be ready to do anything your husband asks for, but it’s not reciprocal.” – Female, 27

When I asked women to explain how they understand their place as Muslim women, Hido expressed the view that many women hold: “There are religious differences between men and women. There are more rules for women. Religion restricts women’s movements and what they can do. Women can’t move as men do.” Women also referred to the perception that men are 100 and women are 50, which they understand to mean that women are worth half that of men. They said that Allah made women that way, and they cannot contest it. This view is cultural as well. For example, a diya payment for a man’s death at the hands of an individual is twice that of women. Haaruun explained that men are 100 because they hold the strength, endurance, and full responsibility for the family’s well-being, while women are 50 because they are weaker. When discussing women and Islam, Haaruun cited Suruh IV, Verse 34 of the Qur’an, which reads:

Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High, Exalted, Great.

Debates abound as to what this verse means and how to interpret its content. It is not my intention to engage in a discussion of interpretation here, but I do want to point out, as
Haaruun did, that this verse underscores the perception that men and women are not the same. From Somalis’ perspective, men are stronger physically while women are more vulnerable, and they believe this verse proves that women are weaker than men are. This view is part of the contradiction that men naturally control women, and they have lost that power in Mayfair and violence against women is one outcome.

4.3.7 Power, Equality, and Women’s Rights

“There is lots of freedom in South Africa, so women have more opportunities. Women are caretakers in Somalia. South Africa legislation has empowered women but they abuse it—this is the perspective of Somalis in the community. A man can’t beat his wife, touch her, or slap her because women know the rules.” – Male, 28

“We see South African lives and South African women. They have Women’s Day and we want to be like that. The South African government says, ‘This is not Somalia. Women, children, and dogs are important here. You can’t abuse your wife.’” – Female, 36

There are several assumptions about the rights of refugees in South Africa, and women’s rights in particular. Most Somalis feel that women are ascribed more rights than men, and that courts favor women in domestic affairs. Many believe that ensuring greater rights for women is included in South Africa’s constitution, even though it outlines measures for equality only. When I asked informants about equality and women’s rights, responses varied greatly regarding just how much power Somali women have in the country, and several people questioned whether their new power is real. A woman pointed out that in Somali culture, “Men pay 100 for diya, while women are 50.” When asked how that makes her feel, she said, “It’s not good in my heart, but it is the culture.
It’s still the same in South Africa.” Women who choose to adopt South African culture, or at least adhere more to the country’s ideologies and laws than to Somali customs, have and exert their autonomy but are perceived as anti-Somali, or going against the culture.

Somalis assert that most people follow their culture in Mayfair, and those who abide by South African laws are perceived differently in the community. A battered woman can use Somali culture—kin relations and elders—to mediate spousal conflict, or she can turn to the police and have her husband arrested. This choice empowers women and leads Somalis to believe that women hold more power than men do, or rather, women who use South African laws have more power. Women who maintain Somali culture and laws hold less power but have better reputations in Mayfair, as one man said: “Those who follow the South African way are seen as the wrong people on the wrong road.” While women might have more power, Somali society remains deeply patriarchal and women must choose their battles carefully. The perception is that women do as they please, whereas women in Somalia had to accept their limited rights and comply with their husbands’ decisions without question or resistance.

When I asked Roble to assess women’s situation and explain this contradiction in South Africa, he said that even with constitutional equal rights in the country, women fear Somali society because society charges their fate and perpetuates their reputation. The perception is that South African laws do not adhere to Somali culture or values, and as Roble says, “We still deal with things in the Somali way. Those who drop Somali life are shunned in society.” Even though new locations modify aspects of culture, “ideas and
values that people see as expressions of ‘our traditions’, although no longer lived experience, still motivate people’s sense of belonging” (Engebrigtsen 2007:729).

Women must decide for themselves whether they want to exercise their new rights or conform to Somali laws and customs. With limited economic opportunities, most women cannot gamble their position in society.

Batuulo follows Somali custom over South African law and is the strongest woman I met in Mayfair. She was the successful family breadwinner and household leader. Her husband did not work and offered no material or emotional support to his family, and Batuulo suspected infidelity. Her achievement as an entrepreneur afforded her tremendous power in her home and, to a lesser extent, in the community. People turned to her for material and financial assistance, as well as conflict mediation and resolution. Despite her value among Somalis, her husband beat her and she could not receive the divorce she desperately desired without his approval. Both her and her husband’s family, along with community members, worked tirelessly to persuade Batuulo to reconsider her position. Even Batuulo’s kin relations from other cities in South Africa came to Mayfair to mediate, despite her insistence that it was no one’s business but her own. Her husband threatened to take her children and her business should they divorce, effectively trapping her in the marriage. Even with her success, Somali society still regarded her husband as the head of the family. Batuulo told me that divorce would come with a settlement, which would involve surrendering her business and having her male kin pay her husband to divorce her.
Batuulo and I discussed her marital woes frequently. The following comes from an exchange we had during one of her interviews:

MFS: It seems that on one hand, women have more control over their lives here and can do what they want, but on the other hand Somali culture and tradition are still extremely powerful forces and limit the things you can do. You’re in South Africa; you’re strong and successful, but you can’t divorce your husband. What can you do about it?

B: I have two hands. On one hand is our culture and religion. I am begging Farah for a divorce because he is my husband and the father of our children. I have tried to talk to him about it, but nothing. If things don’t work behind the door, I’ll go to Islamic organizations for assistance. On the other hand is my last option, and that is to take him to court, and I know the South African court will side with me.

MFS: How do you balance the two—culture and religion—versus your South African rights?

B: Always I’ll prefer whatever is good to Batuulo. I don’t care about what is Somali and what is South African. It is what is good for me.

It was not until Batuulo finally went to the police that her husband granted her plea for a divorce. Farah constantly harassed and threatened Batuulo, saying he would kill her.

Batuulo worried that social services might remove her children from their house if she went to the police but felt justified and feared for her life. Eventually both families, community members, and Somali elders reluctantly agreed that Batuulo and Farah could not resolve their differences. As most women do, she turned to the police only as a last resort; she felt that no one in the community listened to her problems and such a radical move was the only option left for her to achieve the outcome she desired.

I asked women during a group interview what they want from their lives in South Africa, to which they responded “freedom”. They want to get up in the morning and go to a job for which they are paid. They want to spend their salary as they see fit and provide
for their children and extended family. Women said they are free to do what they want and that no one can control them: “We feel freedom, but there is still something in the culture [that holds women back].” When asked if freedom in their households translates to the larger community, women said they feel free with their friends. While women believe there is freedom in South Africa, it does not necessarily apply to them. Women maintain their culture but realize that their new lives offer opportunities to eliminate aspects of culture that do not favor women. As Yasmin stated, “Wherever we are, they [men] are stepping on us like hell. And we say, ‘Hell, no!’ This is South Africa, and we are going forward.” Women who want change find it difficult to push ahead as long as they lack support from the community, and they are frustrated by those challenges.

Buraqo believes the problem is about Somalis, and mostly men, who attempt to control women because there is more freedom in South Africa and they want to keep people in their culture. In other words, men try harder to maintain control in the name of culture and religion even though they ultimately are powerless to control anyone. Somalis are afraid of losing their culture, and Buraqo thinks they do not understand culture and religion. If Buraqo wears trousers, for example, people say she is no longer Somali and she abandoned her religion even though, as Buraqo says, “My culture is in my heart.”

Haaruun argued that educated people and those who think they are clever do not follow Somali culture and laws. Men were quick to point out that Somali women hear South Africa’s laws protect women’s rights, which enables them to use the police in domestic affairs to demonstrate their power. When I asked women if many women resort
to calling the police, they said it is only a small number who do. Men recognize that gender equality is included in South Africa's constitution, but they feel women take advantage of this and use laws in the wrong way. Roble argued, “We believe women and men are the same and the only difference is the job division, but that is not here. Here we are in town and we see women as providers. Women are not inferior. We are abusing the law of equality. Women only use that advantage to punish somebody when they don’t get what they want. They are lying.” He went on to say that women use their new power incorrectly and step outside of their culture, which most Somalis perceive as negative.

When I asked Batuulo to respond to men who say women in South Africa have changed because they seek vengeance, she said, “They’re lying. I never saw a woman abuse her husband. Women don’t seek revenge.” Men lament women’s use of police to threaten men. In a men’s focus group, they told a story to illustrate the problem. A pregnant woman confronted and fought with her husband in the street for no legitimate reason. As the fight escalated, the wife stoned her husband and he bled. She summoned the police and had him arrested, and he went to jail even though she attacked him. Men told this story to show that police side with women regardless of the situation, and they feel women abuse the power they have by using the police to solve their problems and to prove they have control over men in South Africa.

Men discussed other ways women “abuse” their power. Women cannot divorce their husbands in Somalia but do in South Africa, or unhappy wives create chaos in the house by leaving. They explained that good, genuine women never report domestic
problems to the police, even if there is abuse. Men feel that because women do not have their families in Mayfair, there is a power struggle and women’s only option is to call the police. They argue that if there is gender equality in South Africa, women must use something other than the police, as there are more pressing issues in their lives. Women who have their husbands arrested often drop police cases because the community applies pressure on those women. From men’s perspective, there is a misunderstanding of equality. As refugees, they say, women and men suffer equally and share the same challenges in their lives. Calling the police is women’s only real power and they should focus instead on solving the problems all Somalis have in South Africa.

The concept of gender equality has penetrated the Somali community and modified some customary distinctions between women and men, but it appears that little has changed in practice. This is central to understanding how conflict and contradictions challenge gender relations in Mayfair. From Daleel’s perspective, “The concept of equality is changing. Men think things are getting worse, while women think they’re getting better because of democracy.” Women use their state allocated power as a way to manipulate men into getting the outcomes they desire. By threatening men with calling the police and bringing outside forces into conflict resolution, women can often achieve their goals by the mere suggestion of South African intervention. Women recognize that community involvement in resolving relationship problems usually favors men, and they know that turning to the state normally supports women. On one hand, women use their position with the state to leverage the outcomes they want. Manipulation is a useful
strategy for women; men do not want to confront the police or navigate the court system. On the other hand, state involvement endangers women’s position in the community and may result in losing much needed support, a risk far too great for many women to accept.

These push and pull factors empower and disempower women who often lack their close kinship networks that would protect and defend them. At the same time, those absent networks grant women more autonomy in their personal lives. Women accept their new roles and responsibilities but feel they must operate within a cultural system that resists change in a world where change is the only way to survive. Women may be granted more power, but exercising that power might threaten their livelihood prospects. A “difficult” woman who uses resources outside of the community to achieve her ends will be hard-pressed to find a man willing to marry and support her, as she may cause trouble for him later.

Equality is understood as something granted to women by the South African government; it is not part of Somali culture. Eight women and 14 men feel there is no gender equality in Mayfair. For them, social conditions and the understanding that Allah made a distinction between the sexes mean that equality is unattainable. However, men perceive that women think differently about their role in society and demand their rights as equal beings, and that is what has changed in South Africa. Women are “under the man”, meaning men always control and dominate women, and it is an arrangement designed by Allah; it is the rule of nature and cannot be challenged. As women are exposed to different cultures and new ways of thinking about social order and gender
organization, they challenge the Somali way and want to embrace these new ideas about what women should be able to do with their lives. When asked if men want to control women in South Africa, women said it is a fifty-fifty proposition: yes and no. Gender equality and equal opportunities are novel concepts for many people.

Whether or not women have real and meaningful power—that is, the power to control their lives and outcomes—in South Africa depends on how one thinks about it. One woman made an important point that encapsulates the problem between culture and the state: “Women have power in South Africa because of the laws in this country, but we feel like it’s not ours because we’re sent to places like Somali Community Board to solve our problems.” Some men believe the perception that women have power is misguided and untrue. Warsame explained his perspective, which other men echoed, that Somali women observe South African women and they get ideas about controlling their husbands and try “execute” their plans in Mayfair. Warsame continued:

In Somalia, women think this way but have no power. Here, the majority of women have more power—well, they think they do but really don’t. Power is in their head, but it’s not the reality. Women are encouraged and influenced by the world around them. They want to practice their hidden agendas. Women are told about the justice system and the Western influence, and that gives them ideas. Some women think these things but religion stops them. For others, they are successful and practice their difficult behaviors.

Warsame agrees that women feel they have more power because the law is on their side, but the power is not real because women misunderstand their rights by thinking they can control others. For other women and men, women’s ability to call the police equates real power because the mere threat of police intervention is enough to alter a man’s behavior.
toward his wife. Men liked to say that women and dogs have more power and respect in South African society than men.

The assertion that women do not hold real power is interesting and contradicts how informants answered the question of whether women have more power in South Africa than in Somalia. Looking at the data, only six women and two men said women have not gained power in South Africa. This is notable because all eight individuals had arrived in South Africa by 2005 at the latest. Both men and two of the women came to the country in the 1990s. These informants said that women’s only power is to call the police, but life in Mayfair otherwise mirrors Somalia. Men view the issue of power as a misunderstanding between women and men, as well as women’s lack of respect for men. Women take the position that Somali women still rely on men and they are confined by religion and culture, and those systems do not change in Mayfair. These individuals have seen colossal transformations in Mayfair over the years, but life and economic participation in South Africa do not guarantee women’s empowerment and from their perspective, they have not seen women’s status change. If women are powerless in Mayfair, it is because they cannot escape the mechanisms of social control within the community they rely upon for protection and support.

Women are social agents who must decide for themselves whether they will maintain Somali culture or adopt South African values and ideologies, but these decisions are not made in a vacuum. If a woman follows her culture, she will not turn to the South African state for assistance in domestic matters or behave in a way that is contrary to
customary practices. Should a woman adhere to South African ideologies, she jeopardizes her position in Somali society. Aadan nicely describes the choices women have in this regard:

Women have more power here. South Africa gives women power in the constitution, and it usually doesn’t cause problems because women want their own culture. The government gives women power, but Somali women don’t want it; they want to keep their own culture. If women accept the power they’re given here, they risk losing their husband and becoming separate from their culture. People must keep their religion and culture to remain connected to their community. Women’s power here isn’t real.

The dilemma women face between following Somali culture or embracing South African laws often results in choosing the former. Women’s economic insecurity is too precarious to risk social ostracism in their community. Furthermore, women’s actions have consequences for their families beyond Mayfair, and they are conflicted about how their behavior affects their families’ reputation. Social control transcends geography, and families will know if a woman takes her husband to court. Roble noted that things do not change because those in Mayfair have left Somalia. Even as distance separates close kin, women remain the lens through which families are judged.
Chapter 5: Perceived Social and Institutional Barriers in South Africa

“We can’t get anything—work or assistance—because it’s not our country. We are foreigners. Somalis know how to make business and are targeted. Somalis like to work for themselves. There is no help from the government. Somalis can’t go to other countries and they have nothing here. The police are corrupt and there is no protection. I feel fear and shame of the police [because they humiliate Somalis and treat them poorly].” – Female, 36

“The South African government is ruled by blacks. Most of the black people here—the South African blacks—don’t have education or jobs. They believe we take their jobs; we don’t.” – Male, 39

Somalis believe there are many social and institutional barriers that limit their access to jobs and resources in South Africa, some of which are gendered while others apply to the entire community. I asked women and men about these barriers and as they relate to their experiences in Johannesburg. Their responses reflect the social, cultural, religious, and political issues that complicate Somalis’ lives and inhibit women’s ability to secure income-generating activities for themselves. The consequences of these barriers, however, extend beyond unstable livelihoods as they also impair gender relationships, limit opportunities for individual development, exacerbate fear and insecurity, and adversely affect physical and mental health. Aside from the physical scars that illustrate the violence women and men have endured, women have suffered miscarriages and depression, which they attribute to protracted stress.
Most Somali women live and interact within the confines of Mayfair, where community solidarity provides them with a sense of protection. Women are especially vulnerable to discrimination and fear falling victim to rape, robbery, and harassment if they venture far from the safety of the community. Not only does this limit their ability to integrate into larger South African society, but it reduces their economic opportunities. Women’s insecurity is rooted in the pervasive social and institutional barriers that restrict their movement, and their economic choices reflect anxiety about interacting outside the community. These barriers are significant to understanding community dynamics in Mayfair, as uncertain livelihoods and unstable protection from harm force all Somalis to rely on one another for economic support and physical safety. These factors play a vital role in the way gender relations function among members of the Mayfair community.

I asked women and men to tell me about the social and institutional barriers that limit Somalis’ access—and women in particular—to jobs and resources in Mayfair (see Tables 2 and 3). The goal was to learn how women and men perceive the obstacles in their lives, and to understand how and to what they attribute women’s limitations as economic actors. Some informants cited the gendered traditions within Somali culture as a barrier to women’s opportunities. Not only do factors created by the South African state and its citizens hinder women’s prospects through discrimination, xenophobia, and racism, but also Somali sociocultural dynamics. This is also a contradiction. Even as the state promotes gender equity, it serves to limit Somali women’s movement and opportunities, forcing them to operate almost exclusively within their community.
5.1 Government Support and Social Services

“There is a lack of social support, a lack of government support. The [South African] government doesn’t open people’s minds and give people opportunities.” – Female, 28
Somalis are grateful for their legal status, or rather their right to live in South Africa legally, but feel abandoned by the government through a lack of financial support and social services to help refugees establish their new lives in the country. South Africa does not provide refugee camps for asylum seekers nor does it assist refugee populations (DHA 2012b). South Africa is not unique in this regard, as many countries defer their refugee obligations to NGOs and/or the UNHCR (Jacobsen 2006). When South Africa established temporary refugee camps as xenophobic violence spread throughout the country in 2008, for example, those who fled to the camps blamed the state and the UN when they found themselves living in deplorable conditions (Robins 2009).

This lack of investment in refugee populations drives individuals to settle in urban centers, such as Johannesburg, where they must develop an income-generating strategy, which may include relying on the community for monetary support. While the lack of refugee camps is an attractive feature of South Africa for many Somalis and other asylum seekers who prefer urban mobility, education access, economic opportunities, health care resources, humanitarian assistance, communal living, and community protection that living in cities should provide (Jacobsen 2006), this example demonstrates the state’s lack of commitment to supporting refugees living in the country. This is especially detrimental for women who cannot pursue the economic activities men perform due to safety concerns and household responsibilities. Without state support, someone like Qani, a single woman who does not speak English, must rely on assistance from the Somali community. In the absence of social service provisions to support resettlement, such as
orientation, language classes, and job skills training, Somalis face an insurmountable barrier to realizing their economic potential. Somalis’ ability to interact more successfully with native South Africans is severely limited by the lack of programs available to aid new refugees in establishing themselves in the country.

Somali women and men are apprehensive about reporting crime to the police. There is little follow up and the 2008 xenophobic attacks, for example, resulted in few convictions, despite hundreds of arrests. Police often caved to South African community demands for releasing perpetrators of the violence, which demonstrates state supported discrimination and inequality as it excludes foreign migrants from justice afforded to its citizens and does nothing to discourage nationals from committing heinous crimes against foreigners (Kamwimbi, et al. 2010). When about 30 Somalis were murdered in townships around Cape Town in 2006, mostly in broad daylight, those who commented on the crimes publicly pointed to economic competition as the cause, but SASA argued the police participated in the violence by ignoring the deaths or perhaps providing the weaponry used to commit the crimes (Landau 2008). Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) accuse the South African state of perpetuating xenophobia through its policies designed to rid the country of undocumented migrants as it simultaneously affirms its commitment to human rights. If things are to change for Somalis, the state must play a prominent role.

Government support and social services are critical to Somalis’ ability to integrate into South African society. The lack of priority afforded non-nationals exacerbates discrimination against them and results in denying them access to their basic rights the
state committed itself to apply, such as free primary education for children and health care (Landau 2008). Somalis face discrimination not only from South African citizens, but also from the state that does not provide protection or assistance. Based on her research of Somalis in the US, Abdi (2011) shows that integration involves much more than building relationships with individuals in the host society. States must invest in refugees and commit themselves to granting and implementing the same rights and responsibilities as its citizenry. It is only then that real integration can commence. A lack of social support and citizenship further marginalizes Somalis and ensures their distinction as a foreign group, leaving them with few allies and relying on the community for security, protection, and opportunities. Larger social contexts in South Africa that promote discrimination force Somalis to live together (Sadouni 2009).

5.2 Documentation and Citizenship

“No ID means no job; the refugee paper means nothing. Without an ID, you can’t buy a house, get a job, access education, open a bank account, buy medical insurance, or start a business. There is no quality of life without an ID. There is no peace and no safety in South Africa.” – Female, 28

“South Africa is nice, but we’re foreigners and refugees; we are not citizens. Everyone asks for my passport and I can’t go anywhere like Mozambique because everyone wants to see my passport.” – Female, 38

The South Africa Refugee Rights Act of 1998 grants asylum seekers, defined as those individuals who cannot or will not return to their country of origin for fear of persecution or even death, entry into South Africa and the right to apply for refugee status. As legal refugees, individuals are entitled to, among other provisions,
employment, basic health services, an identity card, and full protection under the law. With the exception of voting, refugees are guaranteed most of the rights that South African citizens enjoy (DHA 2012b). They also have the right to apply for an adjustment of status—a permanent residence permit—five years after being granted asylum and living continuously in South Africa (Lawyers for Human Rights 2009). Discrimination, xenophobia, and ignorance of the law limit Somalis in all aspects of their refugee lives, as their legal rights are often ignored or complicated by indifference and corruption.

Several informants noted that Somalis share many of their barriers with South Africans, such as high unemployment, but Somalis are exceptional due to documentation challenges. Identification books—and a 13 digit identity number—are paramount to accessing opportunities and resources in South Africa, for without one refugees cannot secure higher education, housing, bank accounts, driver’s licenses, business entrepreneurship, and formal employment. It also excludes them from developing any sense of belonging and identity as South African residents (Kiwanuka 2010). It is common for Somalis to apply for documentation but may not obtain their ID or may receive an expired document. The glacial speed of the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) has left about one third of asylum seekers—a number derived from migrant survey data—waiting a minimum of 18 months for a decision on their case (Landau 2006a). Somalis must renew their refugee documentation papers every two years, and there are cases of people who applied for refugee status and never received their ID papers. During the renewal process, DHA considers conditions in refugees’ home
countries before granting two additional years (Lawyers for Human Rights 2009). The DHA has rejected legitimate asylum claims and endangered refugees who risk refoulement, which may discourage asylum seekers from applying for or renewing their legal status (Amit 2012). There have been cases of refugees—Ethiopians, for example—who were refused a renewal of their refugee status because the DHA deemed Ethiopia capable of providing them with protection (Harris 2001).

Somalis should be eligible for South African citizenship after ten years; none of my informants, and no one I met in Mayfair, is a South African citizen. Frustration lies in having rights to documentation and citizenship as legal refugees but a lack of implementation. Children born in South Africa are aliens and not citizens, and Somalis feel they have nothing without access to citizenship. South Africa’s lack of commitment to providing citizenship is a way to segregate the population between those who are full members and those who are not (Faist 2010). As non-citizens, Somalis do not hold any allegiance to South Africa because they have not been accepted as permanent members of society. Instead, South Africa is a waiting space, a state of liminality (Turner 1967) where refugees are not citizens and yet they are not visitors (Malkki 1995a).

When I asked women to identify the greatest institutional barrier to securing a livelihood in South Africa, they overwhelmingly cited the difficulties with obtaining valid documentation of their refugee status, as well as a lack of access to South African citizenship. Thirteen women identified the challenges they face when dealing with DHA as a major obstacle in achieving success and realizing their rights in the country. After an
asylum seeker is granted refugee status, she or he is issued a Section 24 permit confirming their legal standing that enables her or him to apply for an ID document designed exclusively for refugees (DHA 2012a). The resultant red ID book contrasts with South African citizens’ green ID book and therefore is used to discriminate against refugees who carry them by those who refuse to acknowledge the red ID books as indicators of legal status and rights in the country. There is a stigma attached to red IDs, as it indicates a refugee’s lack of citizenship and enables potential employers, for example, to dismiss an applicant based on refugee status. Research has shown that a lack of citizenship greatly affects migrant economic outcomes (Potocky-Tripodi 2004).

One of the problems, though, is that few women and men hold these IDs. Of the 30 women interviewed, only seven hold ID books; eight of 30 men carry a red ID book. Some have applied for but never received their ID documents, while others feel they are a waste of time and resources because it serves no real benefit to an individual. People also receive expired IDs. Documents frequently are stolen or destroyed, and Somalis generally dread the corruption at DHA offices that force them to pay hefty bribes in exchange for service. Mansuur, who works at a Somali community organization, explained that bribe prices vary by nationality and Somalis can pay as much as 2,000 ZAR (about 200-250 USD) during the first trip to the DHA to apply for refugee status that should be free. Mansuur said that the bribe price depends on one’s approach when negotiating with immigration officers: “The refugee and immigration officer are alone when getting the documents together. You must sit and negotiate. The officer will take whatever money
you have, and the more you discuss it the higher the price goes.” Landau (2006a) describes these “fees” as payments for unnecessary services provided to asylum seekers, such as translators. This can be prohibitively expensive, leading some asylum seekers to stay in South Africa without legal documentation. The hassle of traveling to the local DHA office, queuing for hours to see an officer, and following up on an immigration case is an exhaustive, time-consuming, and expensive process. Somalis’ prospects for eventual citizenship are minimal, leaving little motivation to pursue identity documents, and most refugees remain hopeful that the UNHCR will resettle them in the West at some point.

5.3 Crime and Xenophobia

“Life is very hard. I live in fear, not knowing when xenophobia will come. I’m not sure if it will happen again, but I’m waiting.” – Female, 32

“There is a culture of violence in South Africa. People are taught to seek their rights in violence. This is the only means for people to get what they want. Killing is just a normal thing.” – Male, 24

During a conversation about crime and violence in South Africa, a Somali elder compared his community’s situation in the country to that of a circle formed by Somalis. Two are plucked from the circle and die every day. One by one, the circle becomes smaller, but South Africans will not be satisfied until there is no one left standing. This metaphor encapsulates not only how Somalis believe they are targeted as foreigners, but it also captures the unity of the community (in the sense that they work collectively to minimize outside risks despite internal divisions) and symbolizes their marginalization and shared identity. In other words, individual differences mean little in the grand scheme
of things. The chain signifies strength, safety, and protection, and an effort to keep the culture solidly intact. While it weakens with each broken link, the circle quickly reforms but leaves Somalis feeling even more isolated and vulnerable to the myriad outside forces that want to expel them from the country.

Harris (2001) examines the way media coverage, politicians’ comments about foreigners, and public reactions to non-citizens in the form of violence encourage antagonism toward migrants. Migrants often receive coverage that misrepresents them, or at the very least feeds pre-conceived notions of migrants as trouble in South Africa and a strain on the state, which then shapes the public’s view of non-nationals. These manifestations induce what Cohen (1980) refers to as “moral panics”, or ascribing groups of people as a menace to society. For example, media coverage of Somalis or other migrant groups often focuses on negative aspects and events in migrants’ lives, which (re)produces emotionally charged anxiety toward, and apprehension of, migrants (Ewing 2008). Politicians have made xenophobic statements that perpetuate resentment and disdain of foreigners, such as suggesting that migrants are economic competitors and crime is not targeted at foreigners but to all South Africans equally. Migrants are also blamed for high crime rates, despite South African Police Service (SAPS) data that counter this claim. Attitudes are formed often through the things people hear and not from personal experiences, and these views lead to the violence directed at foreigners, who suffer in the name of bias, discrimination, apathy, and ignorance (Harris 2001).
South Africa’s propensity toward xenophobia distinguishes the country as one of the most hostile environments for foreign migrants in the world, and for black Africans in particular (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Peberdy and Majodina 2000). Somalis pitched different theories about why they are so vulnerable, and which myths perpetuated South Africans’ angst toward them. The primary assertion is that Somalis’ entrepreneurial prowess and economic success stir resentment among South Africans who believe Somalis are getting rich by taking South Africans’ money (see for example IRIN 2008). Most of this financial achievement is the result of men’s activities, especially those outside of Mayfair where men are visible to South Africans. Men engage in several employment strategies, but owning or managing shops in townships is by far the most common livelihood for men who are willing to leave the boundaries of Mayfair. Opening a shop in a township can be lucrative. Somalis accommodate inhabitants who otherwise would have to pay for transportation to the nearest store, and they keep longer business hours, making it convenient for South Africans who work during the day and can shop only in the early morning or in the evening. Somalis buy their goods in bulk and offer lower prices than their counterparts, making it advantageous for customers to patronize their shops (IRIN 2008). This creates resentment from South African competitors who feel Somalis are running them out of business on their turf, in their own country.

In addition to the perception that Somalis are an economic threat to South Africans and are soft targets who are “mobile ATMs” (Landau 2008), Somalis feel they are blamed for crimes that South Africans and other migrants commit. They are perceived
as the perpetrators of criminal behavior rather than victims of xenophobia, discrimination, and social ills in South African society. Qorane, a man who frequented Zamzam’s restaurant, felt it has more to do with religion—that is, being Muslim—than Somali entrepreneurship. He also cited South Africans’ perception that Somalis refuse to integrate, which he insisted is not true but others corroborated the belief that a lack of integration is key. Others suggested their troubles in South Africa are because (most) Somalis are not Bantu, as many black South Africans are, and the xenophobia involves targeting those who do not share a trans-ethnic identity. It may be more appropriate to conceptualize this point not as an issue of the blanket term Bantu, but rather the argument that hostility toward blacks from elsewhere on the continent is perilous to post-apartheid South Africa. As the country struggles to rebuild in its young democracy, the concept of a united nation excludes outsiders who threaten the process (Harris 2001).

As much as Somalis suffer at the hands of South African corruption, violence, and discrimination, many acknowledge that Somalis have created their insulated community. Some informants suggested that Somalis are as racist as South Africans are and must accept some responsibility for their troubles and lack of integration in the country. This is especially true of shopkeepers in townships. In my conversations with SCOB employees and other Somalis in the community, there was the strong feeling that much of the violence in townships is attributed to Somalis’ lack of integration and communication with the locals in the communities where they set up shop. They move into their new shops without establishing relationships with community leaders and neighbors and
without making introductions to their potential customers, making them more vulnerable to attack because they have not developed alliances or built networks in those areas.

Women discussed their lives in South Africa, and those who participated in a women’s focus group interview agreed unanimously that they live in fear constantly and it affects their opportunities. They wait for xenophobia to destroy their lives and are afraid to leave their homes. Women said that when they sleep and hear noise, they fear someone is breaking into their house to harm them. These feelings also limit their movement and women stay near their homes as much as possible because they are scared even to walk down the street for fear of being attacked in the street in broad daylight. Whereas neighbors in Somalia helped one another, women say their non-Somali neighbors tell them to go home because they make South Africa dirty. Nineteen women—compared to eight men—cited fear of South Africans, including the police, and safety concerns as the greatest social barrier in their economic lives, followed closely by 15 women who felt that racism, discrimination, and xenophobia were most detrimental to securing employment and living safely in South Africa. Women generally avoid work in the townships because the risk of rape poses insurmountable safety concerns, making the prospect of securing a livelihood there too dangerous for women to consider seriously.

Several people illustrated this threat using the story of a woman who, along with her two sons and young daughter, was murdered in Queenstown, a township near Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape, in 2008. While many Somali murders are not widely reported, this particular case was investigated by the United Nations Human Rights
Commission (IRIN 2008) due to the brutality of the attack. The mother was stabbed 113 times after she and her daughter were gang raped (Makuni 2008). Stories such as this especially vicious assault are widely known throughout the community and exacerbate the anxiety women feel about leaving Mayfair in search of lucrative opportunities in townships. The threat of rape and murder control women’s mobility and limit their economic activities to those they can perform locally.

Some women, however, have few livelihood options and choose to transport goods from Johannesburg to Somali shops in the townships for money. Women take items such as shoes, clothing, perfume, toiletries, and anything that might entice shopkeepers to buy products from them to resell in their shops. While I knew of women who traveled to and from the townships for work, only one woman interviewed reported this as a livelihood strategy. As a single woman, Fartun accepted the risk out of necessity even though she found the work dangerous. By the time we completed her interviews, however, Fartun had married and no longer worked at all. While Somalis fully understand the perils, most believe that townships offer the best opportunities for economic success. Women and men cited this as a women’s barrier, which is that women are far too vulnerable to pursue employment outside of the community protection men offer them in Mayfair. Somalis believe that women cannot achieve the same level of economic success as men because of the gendered limitations to women’s opportunities. Only the strongest and boldest women can compete with men for financial equality, but they are confined mostly to those few opportunities in Mayfair.
Despite the elevated risk for women in townships, four women previously lived in those settlements, compared to 19 men who had lived and worked in townships at least once during their stay in South Africa, and an additional two men had transported goods to townships to sell to shopkeepers. Only two women, Isniino and Roda, formerly owned and operated groceries there. Isniino opened her shop near Johannesburg shortly after arriving in South Africa and closed it less than two months later when it was looted during a robbery. Isniino then moved to Mayfair where she remains and works in one of Kaltuma’s shops. Roda is an anomaly, an exceptionally determined woman who at one point—from 2003-2007—owned five shops in townships throughout the North West Province, an area adjoining Gauteng Province on its western border. Roda lived and worked in one of the five shops for one year while her children lived in Johannesburg with relatives. Her other shops were run by her husband, his relatives, and other employees. As a shopkeeper in her business, Roda opened the grocery in the morning and worked until 9:00 pm daily, during which time she befriended her neighbors. Despite the relationships she cultivated with the local community, Roda still endured frequent confrontations with robbers but continued her work until one particular incident when, during a robbery, burglars held a gun to her head and threatened to rape and kill her. She shouted and neighbors came to her rescue, but the rattling experience pushed her to leave the townships in search of safety in Johannesburg. Roda eventually closed her shops after looting incidents during waves of xenophobic violence.
Two women lived with their husbands in townships. Faiza grew tired of being afraid and eventually left for Mayfair, where she lives with their children, while her husband remains in the townships with his second wife. Hoodo lived with her husband and his cousins when they owned and operated two large shops in the Eastern Cape. The shops were in the vicinity and the men rotated sleeping in them at night—a standard practice for those who are responsible for protecting businesses against attempted robberies and attacks in the townships—as they were frequently robbed and threatened with robbery and looting. One night in 2008, as Hoodo and her husband slept nearby, one of the shops was petrol bombed. Two of the cousins were sleeping inside at the time and the only windows in the shop were small enough that grown men could not use them to escape, yet they were large enough to launch a petrol bomb into the shop. The ensuing blaze spread quickly and the desperate men trapped inside fled to the front door, which was the only accessible exit that offered any hope of escape, but they could not pry the door open. They died. Police found the cousins’ bodies together by the door. Following the tragedy, Hoodo’s husband was not the same and they eventually divorced, even though she remains very much in love with him and traumatized by the experience. This dangerous reality dissuades women from living and working in townships and prompts men to insist that women stay in Mayfair where they are afforded community protection.

Men’s mobility outside of Mayfair and their work in townships mean that men are exposed to crime, and often violent crime, more frequently than women. Women prefer the relative security of Mayfair and do not venture far from the community unless it is
necessary. They know their vulnerability to crime and women particularly fear rape and sexual assault more than any other form of violence against them. Sometimes hardship demands that women leave the community to work as hawkers in the central business district (CBD), for example, but most women stay in the area to conduct their daily business. It naturally follows, then, that more men have been victims of crime than women have, as Figure 3 demonstrates. The most heinous forms of violence—stabbing, shooting, beating, burning, and death—disproportionately affect Somali men, and especially those who own or operate shops in townships. Overall, men accept more risks in their economic pursuits than women do because men are considered better equipped to manage the perils of life in South Africa outside of Mayfair.

![Figure 3. Crime Data for Somali Women and Men](image_url)
I asked informants if they have been victims of crime in South Africa. Excluding violence among and between Somalis, about 77% of men experienced crime while 53% of women reported offences against their person or property. Together crime personally affected 65% of my informants. The rate would be higher if various forms of violence within the Somali community were calculated, but my goal is to demonstrate how outside threats to Somalis affect their lives and opportunities. Incidents of crime is a broad category that should and does encompass any harmful and/or illegal acts against an individual’s person or property. Every event my informants described, whether it was a stolen cellphone or a shooting in the townships, is included under the “victim of crime” rubric. Six women experienced only petty crime—that is, crime such as theft that does not include physical violence against the victim—while men were far more likely to suffer violent attacks against them, which often occur in townships. Once the statistics are disaggregated further, ten of the 16 women and every single man who reported crime were victims of violent crime, or crime that includes physical harm against her or his person. This does not mean that men are not victims of petty crime, but every man who reported crime to me had been involved in at least one act of violent crime against him, and 13 of these incidents occurred in townships.

The number and type of crimes reported by women and men illustrate the gendered risks individuals assume. The least violent crime against women was theft and the most serious was rape. Women who reported petty crime had experienced theft, and usually as a result of their work as hawkers. For example, Kaaha traveled to the CBD to
sell goods on the street several days a week and regularly lost stock to robbery, which she accepted as part of the job. When the same criminals threatened to kidnap her daughter, should she continue competing with South Africans who also were hawking in the area, Kaaha finally filed a police report. In another case, a disgruntled customer attacked and stabbed a female shopkeeper in town, and yet another woman was injured when she was kidnapped and jumped out of a moving vehicle to escape. Other women were robbed in their shops or during home invasions, and two women were brutally raped. A South African man raped Falis when she was home alone during a robbery at her brother’s home in the Western Cape; it was never reported to the police. She never told anyone for fear of upsetting her brother, and she could not confide in friends or community members who might gossip and destroy her reputation.

The fear of rape created by insecurity within Somalia and the reality of life in refugee camps affects women’s movement (see for example Abdi 2007) and also influences how women dress. This anxiety extends to Somali women in South Africa, whose concerns for personal safety are not unfounded. The SAPS annual report for 2010 (SAPS Strategic Management 2010) noted a 19.8% increase of all sexual offenses against adult women (18 years and older) between 2008/2009 and 2009/2010.⁶ Somali women in South Africa limit their movement, dress in hijab or niqab when going out, and opt for

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⁶ This increase is attributed in part to a period of time in December 2007 when gender and age data for sexual offenses was not recorded due to problems with implementing new sexual offense codes in the Crime Administration System (CAS). However, sexual offenses against women have increased and remain problematic.
private Somali taxi drivers instead of public transportation as a way to protect themselves from the threat of robbery, (sexual) harassment, and rape. Women fear rape more than any other form of violence against them; it is a crime worse than death. Despite their best efforts to protect themselves against violence, women admitted to having been raped in the country. The stigma attached to rape is so great that women carry their secrets and seldom tell anyone, including a spouse, best friend, or close relative, for fear of gossip. Aside from the physical violation and mental despair of such a despicable act, a victim of rape is deemed unmarriageable and a married woman would face abandonment.

Crimes such as rape are not limited to adult women. Geele insisted that I go to his house one day to meet a distraught single mother of six, Wiilo, who was in hiding and moving around Johannesburg incognito to avoid detection. A security guard raped her young daughter during a break at school one day. Wiilo filed a police report and the man was arrested and jailed. Even as detectives worked on the case and a court date was set, the guard’s family threatened to kill Wiilo, calling her phone and asking people on the street where she stayed. Wiilo left her home, pulled her children out of school, and moved every two or three nights to stay with different people. In addition to the community response to female rape victims, this case demonstrates why Somalis are reluctant to report crimes. I interviewed several victims of crime who fled their homes or lived in hiding for fear of retribution simply because they filed a case with the police.

While women’s stories are harrowing, men’s tales often involve armed robbery and physical violence, and in some instances the death of a colleague, friend, or relative,
which demonstrates the gendered nature of power and violence. Of the 23 men who reported crime, two owned shops in townships that were robbed and looted while they were away, but the damage to their businesses had a lasting effect on men’s psyche and on their financial status. Eight of the 13 men who experienced violence against their person in the townships were beaten, stabbed, or shot (at) during a robbery, but the ferocity of crime is not limited to townships. One man, Yusuf, who was once shot, stabbed, and robbed in the townships, was murdered at the end of 2011 when he was driving through Newtown, a suburb between Mayfair and the CBD. A group of South Africans committed a robbery and as the police pursued them, the robbers, in search of a getaway vehicle, surrounded Yusuf’s car in an attempted hijacking and was shot to death when he resisted. Most violent crime, however, is confined to townships. Mansuur said that more than 500 Somalis were murdered in a decade, and most of those occurred in townships. Hundreds of shops have been looted, and waves of xenophobic violence sometimes mean that dozens of Somali groceries may be targeted in a single day.

Even as men accept risks to earn an income, they assume they are soft targets for violence and harassment. Men said in a focus group that they are frustrated by the lack of media coverage when Somalis are harmed or murdered, and they feel South Africa’s constitutional rights do not apply to them. This affects their mental and economic vitality, and men who live in Mayfair do so out of fear. For them, they are afraid to move around Johannesburg, and the entire country, and yet they feel that staying in Mayfair makes them crazy. As horrendous as the 2008 xenophobic attacks were, men were at least
pleased the violence exposed the problem even though it is not the solution. They blame South African citizens, government, other foreigners, and Somalis themselves for their problems because Somalis hide from their difficulties rather than confront them.

5.4 Discrimination and Racism

“I pretend to be without ears. When I’m walking and people call to me, I ignore them and keep walking. They say things like, ‘makwerekwere [foreigner], this is South Africa. Go back to your own country. We don’t need you.’” – Female, 34

In addition to crime against persons and/or their property, verbal abuse is pervasive and is particularly frightening for women. Somalis are frequently referred to as “makwerekwere”, which is a derogatory term used to describe foreigners, or black migrants from other African countries (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Nyamnjoh 2006). Following the 2008 xenophobic attacks, Somalis were verbally threatened and taunted by South Africans who reminded them that they would be killed or chased out of the country after the 2010 Soccer World Cup hosted by South Africa. Women are deeply affected by verbal harassment. Their fear prevents them from moving around Johannesburg freely and ensures they stay in Mayfair, even though women are tormented within community boundaries as well. Dawo told me that South Africans shout threats to her and her family as they walk by her home, swearing at her and saying things such as, “We’re going to

7 “Makwerekwere”, as Nyamnjoh (2006:39) defines it, has several meanings. While it can refer to people who are unable to speak local South African languages well, it also connotes the inferiority, backwardness, and uncivilized nature of dark skinned Africans who normally land in this category.
start the xenophobia soon. We don’t want you here. We’re going to kill you.” For women, verbal threats exacerbate their feelings of powerlessness and insecurity.

Women feel discrimination most pointedly in hospitals, and every woman I discussed the issue with spoke bitterly of South African hospitals, and of the nurses in particular. Going to the hospital is often a humiliating experience, and one that results in little care and assistance. Women told me they were often shooed away or verbally abused by nurses who mocked, intimidated, and/or refused to serve them. When women go to the hospital to give birth, for example, they are showered with insults: “Why are you having a baby here? No one wants you here. Go back where you came from!” Two women said that when they were in the hospital to give birth, the nurses refused to help and they pushed their babies out alone. In one case, a nurse removed the placenta but then refused to stitch the woman up. These are not isolated cases. An oft-cited example in academic work is of a Somali woman who, while in labor, was refused entry in an emergency room and gave birth to her child on a sidewalk by the hospital. She recovered, but her infant later died (Landau 2006a; Landau 2007). Women told me that the doctors are good, but the nurses—the black ones—are racist and disrespectful. They mock Somali women for not wearing bras and laugh at them in front of everyone.

Discrimination is also evident in the organizations that exist to support the refugee community. Somalis are skeptical of the UNHCR’s commitment to help them, and they feel exploited and abused by corrupt security officials who manage crowds outside of the UNHCR office in Pretoria. Women and men, and even women with infants and young
children, often journeyed to Pretoria the night before or in the middle of the night to secure a place in the queue to ensure their meeting with a UN officer the following morning. Despite Somalis’ efforts, security guards routinely allowed non-Somali nationals to skip the line ahead of them or refused to admit Somalis into the building without first paying a hefty bribe. With no Somali embassy or government representation to assist them, Somalis think of the United Nations as their embassy, but one that does not adequately meet their needs or protect them. They spoke highly of white UN officials, who they felt were compassionate and empathetic, but had little use for African—South African and otherwise—employees who had no interest in helping Somalis. While the UN has since adjusted its procedures for managing refugees who need to speak with UN officials, due in part to the corruption outside the building, Somalis’ experiences there demonstrate the systematic problems they encounter even with humanitarian agencies.

5.4.1 Police Protection and Corruption

“I have had negative experiences with police and I am afraid of them. When I sold clothing on the street, they would take my merchandise and sometimes resell those items. Usually you can pay a bribe to retrieve the items police steal.” – Female, 28

Somalis generally fear, dread, and loathe the police for their incessant harassment and corruption. Kaaha stopped selling clothing in the CBD because police stole her

8 The Somali ambassador to South Africa announced in July 2012 that Somalia is opening an embassy in Pretoria at some point in the near future (Hussein 2012).
merchandise, and I witnessed repugnant police behavior on several occasions. Kaltuma always displays her merchandise on the street in Mayfair, just outside her shop close to the door, hoping to attract customers. As I worked on an interview in the shop one day, there was rather sudden chaos as the shopkeepers and customers brought everything inside quickly because, they said, the Metro Police were walking toward the shop and if anything remained outside, the police would help themselves to whatever they liked. Hayat reported that a bribe usually worked to retrieve items stolen by police. I was at Zamzam’s a couple of times when the police showed up looking for bribes, which they often used Zamzam for by threatening to harass and arrest her customers. On the day of my farewell party, I watched in horror (from across the street) as the police pulled up to Zamzam’s and harassed the men outside the restaurant. They were armed with assault rifles and threatened the Somali men who argued with them before taking Yaasir away in a paddy wagon. They drove him around the block and returned him to the restaurant.

Police corruption is normalized to the point that Somalis expect most encounters with police to end with a bribe or as a negative experience. Former shopkeepers noted that when their shops were robbed and they called for help, the police showed up well after the incident occurred, effectively enabling criminals’ escape. Police are known for destroying refugee documents (Harris 2001), which is a tremendous hassle—not to mention a clear violation of human rights—given the sluggish pace of the DHA in issuing identification documents and the general nuisance of wasting precious time and money traveling to and from the office to complete paperwork and make case inquiries. In a
country where Somalis already are insecure and vulnerable, police are feared just as greatly as criminals roaming the streets freely.

There have been cases of police committing heinous crimes against Somalis. In September 2010, for example, three uniformed police reservists and a civilian were arrested after rob-bbing a Somali family in their Mayfair home. Saying they were there to question a man for alleged drug dealing, the police entered the home, held a gun to the Somali man’s head, threatened the couple’s two-year-old daughter with a knife, and robbed the family of cash, jewelry, and a cell phone (Skade 2010). The news spread quickly around Mayfair, and I was told that this was not an isolated incident, as South African police have been charged with other burglaries in the Somali community. Such incidents further alienate Somalis who feel there is no one truly concerned about their safety and protection and no one to guard them.

The police frequently set up checkpoints in and around Mayfair and stop cars at random to check for driver’s licenses and immigration documentation. Most women do not drive and the checkpoints disproportionately target Somali men. From time to time, the police construct barricades in Mayfair and stop everyone in the area to check for documentation, drugs, and illegal weapons. While some Somalis believe these checks are designed to intimidate and harass them, others encourage roadblocks if it means removing criminals and weapons from the streets of their community. To be fair, not all police officers target Somalis, and not all of them are bad. Somalis also instigate trouble on occasion and have earned a reputation for being difficult. Haaruun criticized Somalis,
and men in particular, who stand around and hang out all over Mayfair’s streets. They park their vehicles badly, block pedestrian passages, and cause a nuisance generally. When the police come around to restore order, Somalis make a lot of noise and have been known to stone the police for what they perceive as interfering with their lives. Overall, though, Somalis’ disdain for the police is warranted.

5.5 Language

“If we are Somali ladies, we can’t go anywhere because we don’t speak English. If we go to a business, we can’t talk to anyone because of the language barrier. If I try to get my own shop, I can’t because I have no money to get one.” – Female, 38

“Now there are many communities here with different languages. It’s difficult to resettle in communities with other languages because you must learn a new language. When you move, you have to start from scratch and learn a new language and a new community. You move again and the cycle repeats itself.” – Male, 27

Women and men believe that women speak less English than men and have greater difficulty navigating their lives in South Africa. Women are responsible for managing their children’s education, for example, and their difficulty communicating in English means that they are unable to forge bonds with teachers and administrators. A lack of English also complicates women’s interaction with doctors in their offices and in hospitals, as they struggle to describe their afflictions and do not understand medical diagnoses or the medication they are prescribed to treat illnesses and infections. Free and accessible English classes are not available to the community, which means that women and men must learn new languages independently or scrape together the cash to pay for classes at language schools offered in the CBD. This reality does not favor women.
I asked informants to identity and evaluate their English skills, which is the dominant language in Johannesburg. English language ability was divided broadly into three categories: no English, limited English, and good English (see Figure 4). Two of the three women who do not speak any English are not employed and receive support from their husbands, while the third woman prepares specialty foods for Somali weddings and supplements her small income by asking community members to support her. Limited English encompasses a minimal ability to communicate with English speakers and ranges from some to very little English comprehension. Somalis were identified as speaking good English if I could communicate with them easily and they were able to conduct interviews in English. Data show that more men (N=17) speak good English than women (N=10), and more women (N=17) than men (N=11) have limited English skills. This is attributed to women’s limited interaction with those outside the Mayfair community and men’s extensive mobility in employment.
It has been shown that migrants’ socioeconomic outcomes are enhanced with proficiency in the primary language of their host (Nawyn, et al. 2012), but it is also critical to social capital beyond financial resources, as it separates outsiders and excludes them from full participation in their host society. The absence of linguistic skills also serves to reduce migrants’ access to information that would aid in improving their lives and ensuring survival, such as knowledge of resources that will help them achieve success and fully realize their rights (Nawyn, et al. 2012). This disproportionately affects women, whose limited knowledge of English requires them to rely on spouses, children, or other community members for assistance when interacting with non-Somalis. This also reduces women’s ability to secure income-generating opportunities beyond those available to them in Mayfair.
Somalis voiced their frustration with the complexity of culture and language in South Africa. With 11 official languages, various indigenous groups use their tribal languages in their everyday interactions that are associated with different cities and regions in the country. English is widely spoken in Johannesburg, whereas Afrikaans is the more common language in Cape Town. Prejudice against Somalis is manifested in many forms, and language is sometimes used to discriminate against Somalis when they are expected to speak with members of each community in their local, ethnic language, such as Zulu or Xhosa. Quman said that if she asked a black South African for directions on the street in Johannesburg, she or he would expect her to converse in Zulu, even though both parties understand and speak English. If Somalis cannot speak the local language, South Africans will not listen or help them. Of the 30 women interviewed, only one could speak a South African language, Xhosa, while four men could speak at least some of a local language. Somalis are expected to learn English or Afrikaans, depending on where they live, as well as local languages. Women are particularly disadvantaged in this regard because their contact with locals is limited, whereas men are likely to work outside of their communities at some point and are exposed to South African languages.

5.6 Education

“If we [women] were educated, we could get a job because we like that job. With no education, our opportunities are limited. We must work and it’s hard work. Without education and with someone to support you, it’s better to stay home. People work because they need to survive, not because they enjoy it.” – Female, 25

“Most men are not supportive of women. Men like their women vulnerable. They won’t marry an educated woman because [they believe] she will rule her husband. Most ladies are not educated because of their background from Somalia. The perception is that
women don’t need an education because they’ll get married and serve their husbands.” – Female, 24

A lack of formal education and job skills training is a widely recognized barrier to women’s economic opportunities and success. Tertiary education is an aspiration for many women, but it is an unattainable goal because it is expensive, time-consuming, and requires travel outside of Mayfair, sometimes at night. Indeed, Mansuur estimated a Somali population of about 40,000 in South Africa, and only 60 individuals are university students. One of the biggest problems is that university fees are too high and there is no financial support available to Somalis, who often arrive in South Africa with nothing. Admission is complicated for those who hold degrees and qualifications from Somalia. Most refugees cannot produce a high school certificate or diploma, and South Africa’s system likely will not recognize Somali credentials. Satisfying immediate survival needs also serve as a barrier to women’s education. Women who must provide for their families do not have the time or inclination to invest in schooling; paying rent and buying food are more pressing concerns. Furthermore, and regardless of employment status, women are still expected to manage their homes and care for children. Cultural norms often prevent women from furthering their education, as Garaad explained:

The culture of education is not instilled in Somali culture. Somalis pursue knowledge but not formally; it’s not naturalized in Somali society. The modern system of twelve years and then university is not in the Somali cultural system. Many students drop out of school, and society encourages them to drop out because the system takes too long to complete.

…
Things are harder for women; it’s the cultural attitude. Knowledge was for need [in Somalia] and not for knowledge’s sake. Knowledge was pursued for a particular need. For women, education was not included. There was knowledge of livestock, for example, but society does not give women the drive for knowledge.

So much has changed. Now the main hindrance is that education is a scarce and expensive resource. Families must make a choice. They must decide who will be given an education, and it does not favor women.

While this might be changing slowly, girls’ education remains undervalued even as women recognize the importance of education for their children and prioritize sending them through South African schools. They want their children to attend university and find success in formal employment. As Abyan said, “I’m ignorant and I don’t want my kids to be the same.” Women seek better lives for their children and want them to embrace the opportunities they never had.

When I asked informants if Somalis now recognize the value of women’s education, responses were mixed. Several people noted the perception among some Somalis that sending girls to co-ed schools in South Africa increases their risk of prostitution or becoming spoiled in general. Some families prefer to keep their daughters in the house, and others enroll their daughters in school but pull them out if they hear rumors about their daughters’ poor behavior, such as interacting with boys. Aside from the alleged danger of girls’ immorality, there are Somalis who believe that women’s education is a poor investment because of the cultural expectation to marry and become housewives. This attitude may be changing in the diaspora, however, as women prove their value by the money they send to their families and their commitment to supporting them. Men, on the other hand, are considered less reliable and more likely to refuse
remittance requests or to send very little financial aid. Somalis in Somalia are realizing the potential for women to remit even more if they have the education that enables them to secure better employment, and therefore more income.

Data support Garaad’s assertion that women’s education was not a priority in Somalia and women were disproportionately excluded from school compared to men (see Figure 5). Girls were the first family members removed from school if a household could not afford education fees, and that is assuming they were enrolled in school at all. Qamar, for example, told me that her younger brother started school before she did, and he was in grade six while she was in grade four by the time they left Somalia for Nairobi; she never resumed her studies in Kenya. Nine women and three men never had any formal education, and an additional 16 women and eight men discontinued their studies after receiving some or completing primary schooling. At the secondary school level, only four women attended or finished high school before stopping, compared to ten men. Only one woman pursued studies at the collegiate level, but she did not earn a degree. In stark contrast, eight men attended or finished university, and one additional man pursued and completed his law degree in Somalia. Looking at the data broadly, 25 women never achieved an education beyond the primary school level, compared to 11 men. Only five women, versus 19 men, received at least some secondary schooling or beyond.
None of my informants were born or raised in South Africa. Their education came primarily from school systems in Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia. Women who wish to pursue education in South Africa face several roadblocks and disappointments because there is no government support for their studies, they fear travelling outside of Mayfair alone, and family and household responsibilities override their hopes to improve their lives and economic prospects. Only two women, Farhiya and Karuur, pursued specialized training in South Africa. Farhiya ended her studies after she became pregnant; the fees were too much when she had to pay her other children’s school fees. Men have greater flexibility to pursue an education or special training, even though they share women’s
financial obstacles. Their enhanced mobility, strong English skills, and lack of household management responsibilities better position men to engage in educational interests.

5.7 Culture

“Somalis are one when there are funerals, xenophobic attacks, or other problems. Somalis are united externally, but not internally.” – Male, 30

The complexity of culture as a barrier in Somali women’s lives cannot be overstated. More than two decades have passed since war first erupted in Somalia, and ongoing conflict continues to challenge the cultural and ideological identities of those who seek peace, safety, and opportunities in Mayfair. Somali culture is not homogenous, and the differential experiences of war and displacement have fragmented Somali society in some ways through continued clanism and opposing views on politics and religious interpretation. At the same time, Somalis, like other migrants, create a community space to construct “their own identity, a sense of unity, cohesion, shared history, and solidarity” (Bastia 2011:1518). In addition to evolving cultural contests within the community, Somalis live in a country that is not their own, and one that does not embrace their foreign guests. A lack of mutual understanding and acceptance of cultural dissimilarities, and the perception that Somalis are unwilling to integrate as they take South African jobs, further complicates the relationship between Somalis and South Africans.

Mayfair is home to ethnic Somalis from Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia, and Kenya, and their clan affiliations are as varied as their origins and experiences.
Geography once separated the different Somali clans, but they must co-exist in Johannesburg. Cultural differences abound based on those attachments, as well as on generational experiences before and during conflict, and with migration. Somalis continue to renegotiate their cultural identity in Mayfair, and varying ideas about what it is to be Somali in the South African context can create tension, misunderstanding, and conflict within the community. This is especially true regarding women’s roles and opportunities for income-generating activities.

Women feel that Somali culture is a barrier to their employment opportunities, and Islam plays an important role in the perception that women’s movements are controlled in Mayfair and beyond. Informants noted religious differences between women and men and acknowledged that there are more rules for women, such as greater restrictions on where they go and what they do. Several women commented that men in particular do not encourage women to join the work force, and some posited that men want to control women and keep them vulnerable. Tusmo, for example, feels that men make life difficult for women because they do not want women going outside and prefer that they stay home. She complained, “Men aren’t giving women any life. The men aren’t working and don’t have an education either, and they don’t talk nicely to their wives.” Qamar argued that culture places men first, and women’s opportunities are secondary. Women who challenge their gender roles, which they do out of necessity, face criticism by some members of the community who think their position is in the home only, and that it is the duty of men to support women and children. Survival, however, necessitates
that women accept their limited opportunities and support their families through any economic activities they find.

### 5.7.1 Old and New Somalis

“I don’t know who these new Somalis are. We’re not the same type. We don’t think the same. How they think and how I think are different.” – Female, 35

“Old Somalis are more integrated into South African society and have other non-Somali friends. They have become soft because they’ve learned everything here and have lots of experience. Old Somalis don’t care what you do or what you wear. New Somalis ran away from fighting, from al-Shabaab, and don’t know different cultures. They think Somalis and South Africans are the same [when they first arrive in South Africa]. They are surprised if they see a Somali with a white person and will draw their own conclusions.” – Female, 22

Van Hear (1998) argues that relations between co-ethnic migrants are important to outcomes and may not be positive. One of the most interesting issues that arose during interviews is the idea of old and new Somalis, of those who have lived in South Africa for many years and of those who recently arrived in Mayfair. For women who moved to Johannesburg as early as the mid-1990s until about 2004 or 2005, life was very different before new Somalis arrived. Old Somalis sought opportunities in South Africa and were more independent than newer arrivals. They established the Mayfair community and saw its rapid development into a pocket of Somalia in South Africa. When old Somalis came to Mayfair, their numbers were few and they befriended members of the Indian Muslim community, who assisted them with their resettlement. As more Somalis moved to the area, they effectively pushed Indian Muslims out of Mayfair and into neighboring Fordsburg, and Indians took much of the support once provided through zakat, or
almsgiving, with them. While Indians are still present in Mayfair, often as landlords to Somalis and other Muslim migrants, some are selling their properties and relocating.

Distinctions between old and new Somalis are important for understanding how Somali culture is challenged, produced, and reproduced in Mayfair. People bring their different ideologies and experiences to South Africa, and there seems to be a clash between differing views of how to construct Somali society in the country. Old Somalis tend to think of newer arrivals as violent criminals and extremists who know only war, chaos, anarchy, and destruction. They never knew a peaceful Somalia and do not fully understand Somali culture since they have not been exposed to it. Furthermore, as several informants noted, these new Somalis do not realize what laws, civilization, and “normal” lives are, and they have no respect for religion, culture, or law because they do not truly grasp the concept. Haaruun even referred to new arrivals as immoral and believes they are responsible for creating a society in which vicious actions are accepted as normal. He sees that people are motivated by money and seek only financial and material gain. People embrace those who have money, but they stop coming around once it is gone. Buraqo often said that Somalis are hypocrites who appear to be good on the surface, but their hearts and minds are venomous.

The Somalis arriving in South Africa today carry the baggage of Somalia with them. In Somalia, everyone is suspicious of one another and there is no trust among neighbors or strangers. No one knows who is aligned with whom, who is a spy or an informant, or who will report anything one says to al-Shabaab. People genuinely fear for
their lives, are careful who they talk to, and pay attention to what they and others say. Somali strangers cannot stay in a Somali guesthouse unless someone can vouch for the person and say he is good, they know him, and will offer to accept responsibility for him. There is a culture of violence, of distrust, and of extreme suspicion. Barlin described the difference in this way: “We’re brothers and sisters, and we didn’t know about tribes. New Somalis think about tribes and that’s all they talk about. There is no brotherhood here. New Somalis fight, steal, kill, and behave like they’re in Somalia.”

I spent an afternoon talking to Hawo and Liin in Hawo’s home during a difficult week for them. They struggled financially and felt no one in the community wanted to help them, even though they had children to raise alone and bills to pay. Both having arrived in South Africa in the 1990s, they struggled to understand the new Somalis, those who had spent most of their lives in conflict torn Somalia and whose ideologies differed vastly from their own. Both women felt disempowered by the growth of the community in Mayfair and lamented their presence in Johannesburg. For them, they were forced to integrate in Mayfair because there were so few Somalis in the country when they first arrived. Hawo befriended Indian Muslims and other South Africans and was known to walk around Mayfair without any head covering at all. As the Somali population grew, however, she felt increasingly pressured to don a headscarf and interact with other Somalis, effectively surrendering the autonomy she achieved in South Africa. She told me that she started wearing a headscarf only in 2006 because she grew tired of
harassment from her community. People came to Hawo’s house to torment her, and she finally submitted to their demands. Her 16-year-old daughter does not always cover her hair and Somalis now pester her, which makes Hawo feel as though she lives in a prison. The demographics of Mayfair changed as more Somalis arrived, and she needed to remain within the community to earn a living and to provide support to her children.

For women who arrived in Mayfair before there was a recognized Somali community, they were more integrated into South African society by learning English and working with non-Somali nationals. Women and men understood South African laws and norms, interacted socially with non-Somalis, and dressed and behaved as they chose. Since there were few Somalis at the time, clan divisions were irrelevant and there was mutual respect among those who simply sought a better life. These early migrants had also left Somalia either before or in the early days of the war. While the war still deeply affected them through the loss of loved ones and their homeland, they escaped the personal experience of living in the violent conflict.

With more Somalis arriving in Mayfair, and often straight from Somalia or Kenya, the community grows and relies more heavily on one another now than at any time in the past. The ideologies of new Somalis have penetrated Mayfair and altered people’s behavior, which has in turn affected relationships with South Africans. Almost all informants make a distinction between old and new Somalis, and most speak favorably of old Somalis but feel new Somalis create more problems for the community and characterize them as unwilling to learn about and respect South African laws and
social codes of behavior, which contradicts views about women who adhere to South African laws over Somali culture. A generation has grown up knowing only war and chaos and not an effective government or an education. From the perspective of several informants, new Somalis are aggressive and often violent, lack basic respect for others, are ignorant of South African culture, and misunderstand what Somali culture is since they have never seen a peaceful Somalia. They bring the conflict to Mayfair with clanism and divisive political and religious ideologies, while old Somalis are perceived to be wealthier, to have more opportunities, and to be more integrated into South African life. Individual beliefs and experiences shape the way Somalis define and understand their culture. As the community grows, so does the influence of new Somalis, who many believe embrace conservative Islam and perpetuate clanism.

5.7.2 Religion and Women’s Dress

“People see the hijab and know we’re different because we look different; people know we’re Somali. Religion prevents me from removing my hijab. Men can do whatever they want because it’s not immediately obvious they’re Somali, whereas it’s different for women.” – Female, 38

“We are one hundred percent Muslim and come to a non-Muslim country like South Africa. We do not respect other people’s religions, and South Africans don’t respect Islam. We come to South Africa and believe our religion is the only good thing. There is discrimination because we are Muslim, because we are Somalis.” – Female, 22

The shift toward conservative Islam has led to some ambivalence among Somalis, and women in particular seem to be central to the debate due to shifting gender structures in Mayfair. Women’s attire is an obvious problem because it is visible to everyone, and strangers can pass judgment on individuals based on what they see. I never saw a Somali
woman walk around Mayfair without some sort of head covering. Women dress quite conservatively, especially around the Amal area. Women who live on the outskirts of town might sit on the front stoop of their homes with little more than a transparent scarf cloaking their hair, but they don hijabs or niqabs to go to town. Men and women apply enormous pressure on women to dress “appropriately”, despite that many women spoke of their desire to dress more casually and comfortably. I was at Zamzam’s one day when Oriyo appeared wearing jeans and a hat. A couple of women admired Oriyo’s bravery and loved her ensemble, but within minutes a man summoned Oriyo to criticize her clothing, to remind her that she is a Muslim woman, and to ask her if she is a man or a woman. When Sahra first arrived in Mayfair, she dressed as she would in Kenya, only to adopt skirts and headscarves after gossip about her circulated throughout the community. Women fear accusations of prostitution if they wander around Mayfair without covering their hair or wearing form-fitting clothing. A female informant told me that she stopped wearing blue jeans in 2000 as part of her religious choice. When I asked her why it is that women must cover their bodies, she said that men cannot control their feelings and are turned on by the shape of women’s bodies. Women, therefore, must be shy and cover their bodies, and if a woman does not, whatever happens to her is her responsibility.

The issue of women’s dress is a contradiction that was cited by seven women and two men as a barrier to women’s success in South Africa. Women who choose to dress in Western clothing, such as trousers, form-fitting tops, and perhaps a loose headscarf or no head covering, face condemnation and sometimes accusations of abandoning Islam and
their culture. When women rely on their kin and social networks, they cannot afford to jeopardize that critical relationship. They must exercise caution in how they resist domination. For women to change their dress publicly endangers their position in their networks and communities (Allen 2009). At the same time, women who wear *hijabs* and *niqabs* struggle to find work outside the community because it is easier to discriminate against those who look different, and their religious convictions preclude them from accepting certain jobs that are contrary to their Islamic values.

Somalis are targeted for their distinguished phenotypic characteristics and their religious and linguistic differences (Buyer 2008). Women’s conservative dress serves as a marker of cultural and religious difference, which Somalis feel is used to target them for crime, harassment, and discrimination. This in turn serves to intimidate women and limit their movement, thus confining them to their community in Mayfair. At the same time, women are pressured by their community to wear conservative dress in order to conform to religious and cultural standards that have evolved over the past two or three decades in Somalia and are now prevalent among all Somalis. Somalis’ propensity for gossip pushes women to conform to cultural prescriptions of what is deemed appropriate and acceptable within their social rubric. This is not unusual, however, as gossip can be used to demonstrate power while manipulating the subjects of gossip (Isotalo 2007). It may promote community solidarity, but it also creates conflict and serves to punish those who defy cultural values and norms. As a form of social control, gossip teaches people how to behave and discourages people from behaving in inappropriate ways (Dreby 2009).
Women who would like to dress casually fear how others in the community will react to what is perceived as a rejection of Somali culture and religion. As Tusmo said, “They [Somalis] think that if you wear a nice dress, high heels, and makeup, you look like a prostitute. People think you’re bad if you don’t cover, even though religion is in your heart.” Indeed, Yasmin noted the harassment women receive for not dressing conservatively. Other Somalis have told her she will go to hell for not covering enough of her body. Giving the appearance of being religiously observant and culturally respectful is of critical importance in Mayfair, but it also limits women who wish to pursue opportunities outside their community.

Somalis say that women carry their family’s dignity. When I asked people to explain why this is so, they pointed to Islam and said that women can show only their hands and face; anything more is haram (or forbidden) because it reflects poorly on the woman and her family. Women who dress appropriately, stay home, and are quiet lead others to think her family is good and respectable. If a woman dresses inappropriately, goes out at night, and dates men, others will think her family is bad or immoral. Daleel attributes this to Islam, which he says does not allow women to speak to men outside of close kin and the nuclear family or, in other words, anyone she could potentially marry. Passing judgment on a family starts with the women in it, and the first thing people see is how a woman is dressed. It takes only one woman to spoil the entire family’s reputation. For example, Keynan explained that if he wanted to marry a good woman who has two sisters with bad reputations because they had babies out of wedlock, Keynan’s family
would discuss his plans and decide that maybe the woman he loves is like her sisters, and
perhaps the whole family is also bad. Men do not carry the same burden because they are
not required to dress as conservatively as women do and should they engage in pre-
marital sex and impregnate a woman, men can deny fathering an illegitimate child and
they do not carry the evidence of immoral behavior. Women can bring shame to their
families that lasts forever. Children use their father’s first name as a middle name and
their paternal grandfather’s first name as a last name. Men are known as the son of
someone while women marry and become someone’s husband. If there is a bastard child,
people do not know from where the child came and it spoils the family name. If a man is
a drunkard and dies, the problem ends. A woman who becomes pregnant out of wedlock
brings a stigma that continues through the generations. This is why sex is considered
sacred only for marriage and is hugely stigmatized in society. If a wife kisses her husband
publicly, it is shameful because culture dictates that any sexual activity must be in private
and within marriage. A woman who publicly misbehaves injures her family’s reputation
and makes a good sister look bad.

The perception that women carry their family’s reputation is one reason why
gender relations are difficult in South Africa. Rage said that women cannot sit with
strange men even in their homes, but this is changing in South Africa. Male and female
interaction with non-kin is inevitable in Mayfair because people live in town and women
work within the community. The need for women to work and provide for their families
is non-negotiable, even if it means defying men who feel women should stay only in the
house. This is important to understanding why women face so much resistance in the
work they do, why men guard women so closely, and why women and men
misunderstand each other in South Africa.

5.7.3 Integration and Interaction with South Africans

“There is no integration. Somalis don’t communicate with others, such as other shopkeepers and members of the community when they move to the locations [townships]. Somalis don’t introduce themselves. They don’t talk to others and aren’t friendly to others. Somalis are wrong and South Africans are wrong. You must introduce yourself to the community before you open a shop. You must meet community leaders. Somalis don’t do that and that’s why they have trouble.” – Female, 44

“Somalis are conservative and like to stick together. It is hard for them to socialize with other communities. The life pushes them to be together, and protection is a big part of it. When you are together, you feel you are safe.” – Male, 47

A lack of integration is a widely recognized barrier to Somalis’ opportunities and security in South Africa, but on whom the blame should be placed is up for debate. There are people who argue that it does not matter what Somalis do; they are loathed by South Africans for any number of reasons—culture, religion, language, and economics—and Somalis suffer at the hands of inhospitable hosts who feel threatened by their mere presence in the country. It may also be that Somalis have overstayed their welcome, as hostilities can arise when what is perceived as temporary migration becomes permanent (Ghorashi 2004). Others criticize Somalis’ arrogance and unwillingness to integrate into mainstream society. Indeed, Somalis are among the least integrated of all immigrant groups in South Africa (Landau 2008). Ugas, an outcast within his community, pointed out that people frequently lectured and criticized Rahmo for spending time with me, a
non-Muslim white woman, and accused her of abandoning her culture and religion.

Several people told me that a lack of integration and communication with locals who live in the communities where Somalis open their shops are to blame for much of the violence in townships. Roble blames Somalis for their problems:

We are not integrated into the other societies we’re living with. We created our own little Somalia here. We are next to them [in South Africa] but not with them. Whatever we do here, we do in the Somalian way. We do not have the influence of South Africans. Some might change their faith, but they are shunned and aren’t part of the society. Somalis have no strength to stand up together and build something with this diaspora.

It could be that both sides are correct, as South Africans and Somalis may not see a mutual benefit in building relationships (Buyer 2008). Haaruun thinks Somali isolation in South Africa is unique because other diaspora societies are more integrated. Other refugee studies, however, show that integration and social cohesion are challenges in communities that suffer from exclusive immigration policies and societal hostility toward them (for a discussion of asylum seekers in the UK, for example, see Hynes and Sales 2010). But part of the problem is that marginalized communities do not become part of mainstream society (Portes 2010). While in theory Somalis are protected in South African society, the reality is quite different for those who venture out of Mayfair alone. They lose the protection provided by their community, as Roble noted, “The security we get from the South African government is very limited. The conditions force us to be together. That’s why Somalis are so close in Mayfair.” Somalis need each other for their basic survival, and they use the guise of community solidarity to stave off outside threats.
The issue of integration arose as a distinguishing difference between old and new Somalis. Old Somalis had no choice but to interact with other nationals because there were not many Somalis in Mayfair at the time, whereas new Somalis arrived in the heart of Johannesburg’s Somali community and did not have to rely on other nationals to help them. The theory, then, is that new Somalis cannot understand why anyone would befriend individuals outside of their community. Integration appears to be a contradiction. Somalis feel their status as foreigners, refugees, entrepreneurs, and Muslims isolates them from South African society and forces them to interact with and rely on their own community for survival, protection, and support. At the same time, Somalis believe that South Africans perceive them as refusing to interact with larger society and making any effort to acculturate into South African culture. Somalis feel they are targets for crime and xenophobia simply because they are Somali, and this forces them to live together. South Africans view Somalis as insulated and arrogant refugees who lack respect for their hosts. There is truth to both positions.

In this period of challenge and change, Somalis fear the loss of their culture by living in the diaspora. Men mostly agreed with Haaruun when he said, “We are losing our identity and new generations don’t have that nostalgic feeling for their country. At the end, we lose our identity. Younger generations don’t care what’s happening there [in Somalia] and I think they will not be part of the solution, so at the end, I think we will lose. That’s my opinion.” Men think there is confusion about Islam’s rules and many Somalis have no real understanding of their faith. This concerns Somalis such as Daleel
who feel apprehensive about the future: “What’s worrying me is that we are melting completely. The religion, the culture, the people who are growing up here don’t know their culture and the family. We are losing the religion. We are losing the culture. The next generation won’t know anything about these things, and we worry about the future.” It is interesting that while Somalis acknowledge individual differences, they tend to view their culture as a single entity and explain varying ideas regarding cultural identity and practices as discrepancies created out of ignorance, confusion about religious versus cultural arrangements, and a lack of understanding of what real Somali culture is. At the same time, people recognize that culture is more flexible than religion, particularly as Somalis tease out the differences between religion and culture and lean toward religious prescriptions over contradictory cultural practices. In the diaspora, culture changes are more pronounced and individuals recognize those differences acutely.

The real issue is how people perceive cultural identity. Hall (2003) writes that identity “is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture” (2003:237). Different memories of Somalia based on experience, geography, clan, gender, class, livelihood, and so on create various ideas about what being Somali is, even as people argue there is “one language, one religion, and one culture”. Negotiating a refugee identity must be an individual achievement, and it is influenced by personal experience and current situations (Buyer 2008). In the case of Somalis, creations of identity can be expressed physically,
through real material relations and violence. Rape, for example, is not intellectual; it is physical violence. There is physical evidence for how this goes on in Mayfair.
Chapter 6: Economic Activities

“Women want to work to support their families. Women believe this is a place to work and they want that because they see others working. If a wife insists on working and the husband doesn’t like it, there’s a problem. A woman sees other women working and getting money, and she then wants that. Women are competitive. Women want to become like a man.” – Male, 27

“A woman in Somalia wouldn’t need to work whether she’s married or not. Even without a husband, she has her family to look after her. In South Africa, Somalis need to survive whether you are a man or a woman. It’s not easy for men or women to live here without a job. There are lots of female breadwinners, but women don’t have to work if they have relatives living in the West who can support her.” – Male, 28

Women face numerous roadblocks in their struggle to support their families, but they are resourceful and manage even in the most trying times. I wanted to learn about different activities, including income generation and remittance practices, and to understand how women use kinship and social networks in their lives. Many women travel to South Africa as singles or without their immediate and extended families, resulting in the loss of their closest support networks as well as a new responsibility to provide financial support to those left behind in East Africa. The new gender roles women assume, as income earners and as financial providers, challenge customary gender arrangements in Mayfair (Sadouni N.d.) but also in the larger Somali context.

Women spoke of their desire to “be skilled” in something, to have the ability to succeed and pursue meaningful jobs. The reality of Mayfair means that women do not
work unless they must, whether it is a single mother or a married woman whose husband is unable or unwilling to support his family. I asked women if they would work even with an income-generating husband; most reported that they would prefer to stay home because “it’s better” and affords some degree of security. Women spoke of their dreams and ambitions, such as attending university and working in a leadership capacity, but recognize them as unattainable. They feel powerless, to a large degree, to improve their situation. Economic activities do not provide long-term profit; work is for survival, and women do not subject themselves to the perils or intensive labor of economic involvement unless there are no suitable alternatives. Women who turn profits in their business ventures reinvest their capital in people and necessities. They use money to build and maintain social and kinship networks, which are vital to survival in Mayfair. Few Somalis have the ability to save money for the long-term. When finances are especially tight, they rely on connections to those who can help them; it is a reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationship.

Women often find themselves living in South Africa with few opportunities, little financial support from their families, and the responsibility of leading their households. The paradox is that Somali cultural contexts do not encourage women to pursue economic endeavors, and yet the reality of women’s lives demands their economic participation. Studies have demonstrated women’s economic success in the diaspora (see for example Al-Sharmani 2006; Campbell 2006; Peberdy and Rogerson 2002) and their investment in their households and relatives abroad. While this can be true in South
Africa, women generally struggle to get by. They accept the responsibility to provide for their families in the absence of a husband’s financial contribution, despite the increased workload and intense pressure to provide sufficient resources for their families. Their resourcefulness enables them to navigate their lives in Mayfair as they carve out a livelihood when there are no alternatives.

Successful women often face resistance from conservative community members and even from individuals in their households. This manifests in various ways, ranging from idle gossip and scolding to domestic violence. Tusmo is a woman in her forties who has lived in South Africa since 1997, and her experiences illustrate the conflict between cultural traditions and survival demands. Her husband quit his job in a shop several years ago and decided to stop working entirely. Tusmo sustained her husband and children by selling homemade sweets around Mayfair, and eventually began selling vegetables, clothing, perfume, and jewelry in the same way and rented out rooms in her home to earn extra income to feed her family and to put her children through school. As time passed, Tusmo’s husband became abusive and started beating her regularly. When I asked Tusmo why he beat her, she did not know but said he often was angry when she left the house to work. He wanted her to stay home all day and did not think she should work, but Tusmo had no alternative and became the family’s breadwinner. Tusmo responded to financial demands with proaction, and her husband responded to her power with violence.

6.1 Employment

“Women work because the problem is touching them.” – Female, 26
“In Somalia, most women don’t work. In South Africa, women work and this causes problems. Women’s work can lead to divorce because the wife isn’t around the house all the time. This is the biggest cause for gender relations to change in South Africa.” – Male, 25

Safa (1995) argues that women are empowered by paid employment only when certain conditions are met, such as favorable state policies, access to resources, and household conditions. South African laws grant refugees rights, such as the right to employment, but they are not implemented and enforced, serving to limit opportunities for women in particular. This and other forms of xenophobia marginalize the Somali community and adversely affect their ability to secure income-earning opportunities (Peberdy and Majodina 2000). Crime and discrimination exacerbate the effects of failed state policies and few employment options for women, and Somali cultural contexts pose yet additional challenges to women whose primary goal is to provide for their families. Women work only when household dynamics leave them with no alternative; it is a survival strategy that may not secure women’s empowerment.

The question of whether women have become breadwinners in South Africa is not easy to answer. Despite the prevalence of female workers, the perception remains that men are the primary financial providers and most women do not work. Mansuur views the situation in South Africa as unique. More women are the economic powerhouse in their families in Somalia and in the diaspora, but this is not the case in South Africa because, Mansuur noted, “the kind of work that should be done is very hard for women to do. Women can’t go out there in the townships and open a shop and sleep in the night [in the shop] and all that. There’s no way that they can do it. Even those women you see in
Amal, they have got their husbands in the townships.” Many Somalis share Mansuur’s sentiment that it is too dangerous for women to become breadwinners, but women do not want to sit in their homes and desperately want something to do. Women may find or create jobs in Mayfair that demand long hours and labor but with little financial compensation for their work. Women do not have the ability to compete with men’s wages because men’s jobs are too perilous for women to pursue.

Employment opportunities are mostly gendered, but with hawking being a notable exception. Gender often determines the type of shop a business owner runs. For example, men primarily open grocery stores in townships while women manage textile stores in town. It is widely acknowledged that women are safer when they conduct their economic activities in or near Mayfair. A handful of women currently or previously worked at Oriental Plaza in Fordsburg\(^9\), while a few others venture beyond the community to work as hawkers in the CBD or to acquire goods such as clothing and vegetables from markets to sell in Mayfair. For the most part, however, women prefer the relative security of their community. Many of the men I met had some previous or current experience as shop owners or shopkeepers in townships. Those who abandoned their positions there felt the risks outweighed the benefits and did not want to die at the hands of South Africans for protecting a business from robbery or other harm; former township workers in Mayfair often had the scars to prove the danger of living without their ethnic kin to defend them.

\(^9\) Oriental Plaza is a large shopping center in Fordsburg that has been open since the 1970s and contains hundreds of stores. Shops are individually owned and patronized by Johannesburg residents and visitors.
Men described their position as a catch-22. They believe there are no jobs for them in Mayfair, but they are relatively safe. Conversely, there are ample job opportunities in townships, but the work is dangerous and they are afraid to stay there. Men who experienced violence in townships were reluctant to return for a livelihood but often felt the desperation of having few alternatives while financial pressure mounted. For most women, any form of interaction in the townships is not a consideration. Faiso’s comments echo Somalis’ general sentiment regarding women working in townships: “We [women] are softer than men. It’s easier for men. We have only one life. It’s a dangerous way to waste the life making money in the locations [townships].” Married men often keep their families in Mayfair while they work in townships for fear something will happen to their wives and children.

Several informants explained that Somalis are entrepreneurial because, as part of a so-called classless society, people do not want to work for anyone and be part of a hierarchal relationship. The realities of life in South Africa, however, force people to work for others in their businesses. But the entrepreneurial spirit requires more than the belief that Somalis should not work under other Somalis. It also lies in individual motivation and a sincere desire for success (Yetim 2008). Few women indicated the ambition to become a business owner, primarily because any form of employment is a necessary survival strategy and not a desire to advance their career. Their opportunities are limited by their confinement to the Mayfair area and what they can achieve in the community. Men, on the other hand, piece together a livelihood often through the
informal activities they pursue independently. Shopkeepers in the townships told me that men who are willing to work there do so as part of a larger strategy to eventually own a shop. By working in townships, men can save money and gain the experience needed to purchase and manage a shop later. As several men told me, there is no personal value in defending a shop to the death when there is little benefit for the men at risk.

I asked informants to describe their employment history and current economic activities in Mayfair. Even with the perceived risks, 17 women reported having jobs, albeit mostly informal ones, compared to 25 men, and more women (N=13) than men (N=5) stated that they were not employed (see Figure 6). Women piece together a livelihood using all available strategies; most jobs are in the informal sector, as identified by 11 employed women. Opportunities are scarce and women use their skills to produce an income, even if it means leaving Mayfair and assuming the associated risks. Of the 17 women who earn an income, ten work exclusively in Mayfair, meaning they do not leave Mayfair at any time to perform their jobs. Four of the remaining women work exclusively outside of the community boundaries, while one woman accesses goods elsewhere in Johannesburg to sell in Mayfair. Two women with formal jobs travel beyond Mayfair for work commitments, but their employment caters to the Somali community. Two of the four women whose work is outside of Mayfair are employed in nearby Fordsburg, where the women live and can walk to work easily. One woman is a hawker in the CBD, and there is one woman who takes clothing from Amal to sell to Somali shopkeepers in the
townships. All four business owners operate in Mayfair. Employment, for the most part, is intimately tied to life and interaction within the Somali community.

When I asked Farhiya how she chose her job, she stated, “It’s to survive the life.” Without startup money to open a shop in Mayfair, Farhiya performed any number of informal jobs to buy food for her family. If she sat in her house all day, her children would not eat. Women in need of an income use their skills to develop self-employment strategies, such as cooking food for weddings or to sell in shops. This approach is the
result of any number of factors. Some women prefer the independence associated with working on their own schedule so they can still manage their households and parental duties (such as transporting their children to and from school) without conflict. They also prefer to avoid the abusive conditions of working informally for a boss, who may exploit women since they are not registered employees and South African labor standards do not apply to them. Furthermore, jobs in local shops are scarce. While Mayfair is home to a thriving Somali community, there are limited employment options for women.

Clan membership may affect women’s ability to secure jobs within the community. When I asked informants to explain how Somalis find jobs, several people noted the role clan dynamics play in employment. Somalis procure employment by their own creation or by asking others for jobs. For example, if someone does not want to work as a hawker or peddler but needs a job, she or he uses their networks to see if a shop owner is hiring. Whether or not an individual secures a job working for another Somali is, many argue, tied to clan affiliation. If an individual is part of a clan not widely represented in Mayfair, job opportunities are severely limited. Shop owners hire employees whose family and reputation they know and are less likely to trust strangers, even if those strangers are considered friends.

Timiro, who is from Baidoa, is close friends with Ubah, who is from the Ogaden. They are so close that Timiro visits Ubah in her shop nearly every day. Timiro fretted about her finances and confided in me that she wanted a part-time job to supplement her income. Ubah sought to hire a new employee around the same time, so naturally I
suggested that Timiro work in Ubah’s shop since she spends so much of her time there anyway. Timiro insisted that Ubah never would hire her because they are not the same clan, even though their friendship is important to both of them. Timiro explained that she met Ubah in South Africa and they do not know each other’s background or family in Somalia. People in Mayfair discuss their families back home, but Timiro does not share that bond with Ubah. Instead of asking for an ID when hiring an employee, a shop owner inquires about the job seeker’s family and who is taking responsibility for the potential employee. If an employee steals, the owner knows where to turn to resolve the issue. People also prefer to pay members of their own clan family.

One of the most intriguing paradoxes I observed is that households, no matter how impoverished, often have foreign maids. Notwithstanding my surprise that poor families with limited income could afford to hire a maid, it struck me that none of them were Somali. Even in Zamzam’s restaurant, the only Somali employee was the head cook. The sous-chef and cleaners came from Zimbabwe, Malawi, and other countries around the sub-continent. Why, when so many Somalis are un(der)employed and struggling to get by, would employers refuse to hire fellow Somalis who are under substantial financial strain? I asked Zamzam about this one day, and her response was fascinating. She said that Somalis believe they cannot work for her because Somalis are the same. It is a cultural issue; working for a Somali creates a hierarchy, and Somalis do not want to be told what to do, especially by other Somalis. And then she added,
“Cleaning is black [people’s] work. It’s not for us.” This perspective further limits women’s employment prospects in Mayfair.

The question of whether or not women’s economic participation changes gender relations evoked interesting responses. Women have jobs because their family’s livelihood—in South Africa and in Somalia—depends on it. In Somalia, women did not have the pressure to support their natal kin, and they had only their husbands and children to worry about. This has changed for women living in South Africa who now feel responsible for supporting their close kin abroad. With more economic opportunities and greater financial demands on families, women are likely to engage in economic activities when their households necessitate it. This holds true for single and married women. Most women believe that economic activities have nothing to do with gender relations; work is for survival and not advancing women’s social position. Men have the perception that women who earn their own money do not need men since money is freedom from dependence. This contradiction creates conflict between spouses. As Adnaan noted, “Women have their own money and their own business and aren’t waiting for their husband’s hand. This is why women aren’t listening to their husbands. Before, a woman was under the man and didn’t talk too much, but now women have their own money and can do whatever they want.” In cases where both spouses work, what has changed is women’s financial obligation to the family. Women now contribute to household economics in ways that were once solely men’s responsibility.
Women feel that the way men respond to their economic participation causes gender relations to shift, not the act of working itself. Abshiro stated, “Only men believe women bring problems when they work. Men think women think they don’t need them. Men think women can do whatever they want when they’re working.” When I asked women about this during a focus group interview, they said a woman would want a husband even with financial independence. While men perceive women’s economic success as a rejection of them as providers and partners, women view it as a subsistence strategy and would like a strong partnership built on love and support. From women’s perspective, they are surviving only. Dawo explained that some men complain about women working and most do not want their wives to work and will use children as an excuse, saying women must stay home to care for them. In Somalia, married women had to consult their husbands for permission to work. Women made decisions in the house, but anything beyond the domestic sphere required a husband’s consent. Women reported that married women should have their husbands’ approval to pursue a job, but household realities force women to work even if their husbands oppose their employment. When men lost their livelihoods in Somalia, close kin rescued and supported families. Women assume this role in South Africa and want to play a larger role in their families’ financial maintenance even as women and men generally believe that women should stay home if their husbands can provide for the family.

6.1.1 Employment and Risk

“I worked in a grocery in Fordsburg for two months but quit because my salary was too little. I sold clothes and sometimes food in town on Jeppe Street in the CBD for two years
and quit because of police harassment. They were stealing my clothes. Sometimes I cooked food at home and sold it in town for about five or six months. I stopped because the competition became too much and I didn’t earn enough money. Now my husband supports me and I stay in the house.” – Female, 28

Somalis value entrepreneurship and most believe that owning a business is the best option for Somalis in South Africa and that explains, in part, why men accept the risk of opening shops in the townships. Owning a shop in a township can be lucrative, but it is perilous work and a livelihood might be destroyed should there be a robbery, not to mention the physical danger associated with the trade. There also can be fierce resistance from local competitors who feel Somalis threaten their livelihoods. In 2008, for example, businessmen in the Western Cape sent letters to Somali shopkeepers advising them to abandon their groceries to avoid “actions that will include physically fighting” (IRIN 2008). There is a growing, organized movement to rid townships of foreign traders through evictions and threats of violence (Segatti 2011). Several of the men I interviewed had been stabbed, shot, set alight, and/or otherwise tormented while living and working in townships, deeming the risk too great for women to accept as a livelihood strategy. This does not mean that women never try their luck in townships, but those who have and now live in Mayfair abandoned this approach after negative personal experiences there persuaded them to settle in Mayfair, where their networks offer support and security.

Men accept the dangerous jobs and are willing to work beyond the Mayfair community. This gives men the advantage, albeit a precarious one, to pursue a wider variety of informal economic activities than women, and it also affords them greater
There were six male business owners in my sample. Three of those businesses are in townships; one is located in Newtown, which is next to the CBD and near Mayfair; and two are in Mayfair. Five men are unemployed, and ten conduct their business in Mayfair exclusively. Three of the ten men who work in Mayfair participate in economic activities that involve some degree of legal risk. Fifteen of the men who reported having jobs must travel outside of Mayfair for at least some of their work, and most men have at least some employment experience that involves moving beyond the protection of their community. For example, men work as truck drivers, informal taxi drivers, and goods transporters to townships, which heighten their risk of confrontation with corrupt police who demand bribes, as well as the threat of hijacking, robbery, personal injury, or death. Men also deal khat in bulk and have to travel to farms throughout the country to purchase and then transport the crop back to Johannesburg. This involves tremendous personal and financial risk for the movers. Roadblocks are common around the country and Somalis feel targeted when driving through one, as police are more likely to pull them over to search the vehicle and check immigration documentation. When khat is found in a vehicle, police either confiscate it or demand hefty bribes to continue on the road; sometimes men are arrested and jailed. These incidences can involve a substantial loss of revenue, not to mention an amplified fear of police and general angst toward South Africa. Many of the men who live in Mayfair wanted to escape or avoid these risks, but survival strategies sometimes necessitate them.
Any job a woman takes has some degree of risk. Hawkers face robbery and harassment whether they work in Mayfair or in the CBD (Jacobsen 2005). Farhiya, for example, took advantage of the World Cup hype and sold counterfeit Bafana Bafana\(^\text{10}\) t-shirts around Mayfair. Like many hawkers and peddlers, Farhiya acquired her goods through Indian wholesalers in Mayfair and Fordsburg. She spoke of losing her stock to thieves and police officers who confiscated them. Women who own or operate shops risk robbery or theft by customers and the police who patrol the area, as demonstrated in Kaltuma’s case mentioned earlier. Somalis, and business owners in particular, fear the police and feel they abuse Somalis’ vulnerable status as they humiliate and exploit them at every opportunity. While working in Mayfair does not guarantee protection from police abuse or robbery, the security afforded women who are surrounded by their kin and clan somewhat eases their anxiety and encourages them to operate within Mayfair as much is possible. In desperate times, however, women may accept the dangers often reserved for men, who feel they are better equipped to manage confrontation.

Business owners and self-employed, informal workers face financial risks in their endeavors. Somalis rely on credit from shops or individuals when they need goods but do not have the cash on hand to purchase them. Whether someone buys items from a business or a street peddler, the seller often will give credit and receive payment later, as long as the transaction is between Somalis who know one another. The problem for sellers, however, is that they rely on the income those goods generate. Their financial

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\(^{10}\) Bafana Bafana is the nickname for South Africa’s national football (soccer) team.
security suffers when they lose potential revenue by surrendering their items for credit and exacerbates when they have to search for the debtor to apply pressure for repayment. Ruun sells khat for Bashir and her salary depends on the amount she sells. When Bashir tells her to give credit, it cuts into her profits and reduces her income. The stress and financial hardship are painful to bear, but it is a necessary risk nonetheless. This exchange system is critical when income can be capricious and fluctuates from day to day. Somalis who give credit say it is their responsibility to help others, and ultimately it is good for business (and, I would argue, their reputation), but it offers security as well.

Safiyo sells vegetables, coats, perfume, jewelry, and anything else that yield profits. She gave a man a lot of produce one day because he had no cash to pay, and he gave her several hundred rand a few days later. If Safiyo needs money to go to the market to purchase goods to sell, she borrows money from one or several people. She acquires the goods and sells them, earning a profit of 10-30 ZAR per item, and repays her loans in cash or goods. Reciprocity ensures she has the financial backing to run informal trading. This serves to benefit the community, but sometimes at the expense of the lender. People come to Zamzam’s restaurant to eat, and sometimes without paying. The problem is that she had a 10,000 ZAR debt to pay even as she continued giving food away. Instead of earning income through her restaurant, she requested loans from individuals to pay her debt. This ongoing exchange guarantees group membership but is not necessarily altruistic in nature. People may offer credit reluctantly because it is an important safety net in the event a livelihood strategy fails. Somalis use reciprocity to get by, often giving
in times of feast and taking in times of famine. If individuals do not offer credit, they cannot expect to receive it or other forms of assistance when their cash flow is limited.

6.2 *Zakat, Shaxaad, and Network Assistance*

In the absence of government and humanitarian aid, Somalis turn to their cultural and religious communities for assistance when women and families do not have an income or what they earn falls short of meeting financial demands. They also rely on their kinship and social networks to provide material support, such as food and housing, when there are no alternatives other than homelessness. This collective support is critical for single and married women in various situations. It is important to note, however, that being a part of a network does not ensure access to resources and may exclude those who are considered outsiders (Ryan 2011).

Women and men use *zakat*\(^{11}\) and *shaxaad* to meet financial demands, though *zakat* can also come in the form of material assistance. Both strategies procure economic support, but the difference is that *zakat* is a religious obligation while *shaxaad* is a monetary gift. *Zakat* is compulsory in Islam. Individuals with the financial means must give a portion of their income annually to individuals or organizations, who then distribute funds to the needy. While people can pay *zakat* once a year, they are encouraged to give more frequently if they are in the position to do so. This is an

\(^{11}\) *Zakat*, or almsgiving, is one of the five pillars of Islam. Indian Muslims in Johannesburg have offered much support to the Somali community over the years, such as financial and food assistance, through *zakat*. Food donations are especially abundant during the holy month of Ramadan.
important component of being Muslim. *Shaxaad*, on the other hand, is money people give to those in need. It is a gift, but one that the person in need requests. Unlike *zakat*, *shaxaad* is not compulsory and one must ask for money if it is to be considered *shaxaad*. If someone gives another person money without asking, it is a gift only and not *shaxaad*.

### 6.2.1 Zakat

Women who do not work or who have little income survive using several strategies, depending on their situation. Single or married, with or without a job or a husband’s income, women may rely on *zakat* to get by or to weather periods of severe financial hardship. Assistance from Muslim charities may pay rent or children’s school fees, and it can come in the form of food aid for needy families, particularly when children are involved. Somalis’ reliance on *zakat* varies from family to family, but it is an important crutch that helps people manage when money is especially tight or scarce.

Faiza’s husband lives in a township with his second wife, leaving Faiza alone in Mayfair with a one-room apartment and seven children to support. Faiza does not have a job but receives financial assistance for her children’s school fees through local Muslim organizations. Dunia, a single mother of four, receives financial aid through the Johannesburg Muslim Charitable Organisation to help with food and rent. Some women receive assistance through *zakat* but also obtain support from kin and clan networks and through remittances from wealthier relatives abroad.

Not all women and men, however, are willing to request assistance from Muslim charities. Some people told me stories about asking for *zakat* only to be turned away or
advised to seek help from the Somali community. For many of those people, the Somali community and community organizations do not provide sufficient assistance, which makes them feel they have no real support from anyone in the country. There is the perception from some non-Somali Muslims that the Mayfair community has the strength and resources to support their fellow Somalis without outside assistance. Informants cited the growing reluctance of South African Indian Muslims to invest in Somalis because of their perceived wealth. Yasmin mentioned that there are Somalis who live outside of South Africa, invest in Mayfair businesses, and visit from time to time. When Indians see Somalis driving nice cars and receiving support from the diaspora, they are less willing to provide assistance. Nonetheless, Muslim organizations, and Indian Muslims in particular, remain a critical asset to families.

6.2.2 Shaxaad

If women do not have jobs or money when there is a family emergency or relatives are suffering, they can ask friends or members of the community and their extended family to give them money through shaxaad, which is a gift they will not repay. Somalis seem to have mixed feelings about giving shaxaad. Jama and Barlin, for example, indicated that Somalis know who in their community is suffering most and when they see those individuals, it is their responsibility to help them, even if it is by giving a few rand only. They recognize that they could be the ones in need, and therefore it is important to alleviate suffering. It also makes them feel good, and it pleases Allah. Other people, however, are less gracious and do not appreciate demands for their already
limited resources. One woman who receives *shaxaad*, for example, said that Somalis insult her sometimes because she does not have money. They give her money, albeit reluctantly, but are quite rude about it. The explanation for this, in my view, is that since *shaxaad* is not an Islamic obligation, unlike *zakat*, and is a gift that is not repaid, the exchange is not reciprocal. While Somalis may argue they help others because of the personal fulfillment it gives them, reciprocity and social security are at the heart of those transactions, and *shaxaad* offers no immediate or future benefit to the donor, making it a poor investment with no return. In the case of the aforementioned woman, she relies on *shaxaad* for survival and requests *shaxaad* from everyone she encounters, myself included, which drives Somalis away from her. They know she will ask for money they do not have or do not want to give, and there is no real advantage to developing a relationship with her because it is not balanced.

6.2.3 Network Assistance

In cases where women do have access to cash but are short in difficult times, they may ask their kin networks for credit to weather periods of financial hardship or familial emergency. They borrow money that will be reimbursed, interest free, when they can afford it. It is temporary aid that Somalis need from time to time, and people are willing to help because it ensures future assistance should the loaner encounter financial troubles down the road. Women rely on their networks even when they do not have income. Five of the 13 women who do not work live with friends and kin who are willing to house and feed them. Their living arrangements may be temporary, meaning that the women may
move periodically if their hosts are unable or unwilling to support them in the long-term, or they can be more permanent. Idil’s husband divorced her because she could not have children. She came to Mayfair in 2010 after a grueling boat trip from Somalia to Mozambique, and then to South Africa by land. With no English skills, education, or money, Idil relies on her networks for support. She first lived with Sahro in the room Sahro rented from another woman. Sahro bought Idil food and shared her bed with her before moving Idil to another family’s apartment that had more space and resources to support her. After some time, Idil relocated to Durban where she has kin relations who were willing and committed to providing for her in the long term. These cousins had been sending her remittances and decided it would be better if she moved there to live with them. Husbands support the eight remaining women who do not have their own income. For the five women who live with friends and rely on them for income and support, securing a job is unrealistic, difficult, or daunting. Women’s lack of marketable skills and limited employment opportunities, in addition to discrimination, safety concerns, transportation issues, and poor compensation for the time investment in employment endeavors, discourage them from pursuing jobs.

6.3 *Ayuuto*

Women may use *ayuuto* to develop and strengthen their social and kinship networks in Mayfair. A practice found throughout the diaspora, Somali women and men (but primarily women) form *ayuuto* groups that comprise individuals who contribute equal amounts of money to the group every few days according to the schedule each
group creates. *Ayuuto* groups designate days to collect cash from each group member to distribute to an individual in the group. The system is designed so that each person receives the pot of money through a recipient rotation. Barlin, for example, owns a business in Mayfair and is part of an eight-person *ayuuto*. The group decided to have 15 rotations in each round, and each member contributes 200 ZAR to their *ayuuto* every three days. On the third day, one person gets 3,000 ZAR. Barlin wanted distributions that are more frequent, so she contributes 600 ZAR—she sets aside 200 ZAR each day—every three days. She receives *ayuuto* payments at the second, seventh, and ninth distribution days, as those are her numbers in the rotation and because she pays more to the group. Other members in her group also pay extra for regular distributions, which is why there are 15 rotations and eight people. If Barlin set aside 200 ZAR every day, she would have the same amount of money—9,000 ZAR—at the end of the same period, but the group forces her to save that money, for without her group she would spend the money on other things. *Ayuuto* demands discipline and reinforces critical kinship ties and social networks. She must save money because others have put their trust in her and their livelihoods are at stake; it is a way to build social capital (Agarwal 1997).

Women and men use money acquired through *ayuuto* for different purposes. Farhiya participates in *ayuuto* to ensure she has rent money. There are five women in her group, and everyone pays 300 ZAR every ten days with a 1,500 ZAR distribution in each rotation. Married women may use *ayuuto* even without employment by saving a small amount of the money a husband allocates for his wife’s weekly shopping. By purchasing
cheap items, she can set aside some money to contribute to her ayuuto. Most women were not part of an ayuuto at the time of our interview because they lack the income security needed to participate in the group. Some women had previous experience as ayuuto group members and used the money for remittance purposes, which appears to be the primary motivating force behind the practice outside of Somalia.

6.4 Remittances

“I send money every month to my mom, dad, and siblings. Somalis are now seeing the value of education for girls because women send money more frequently. My mom never understood why I learned English, and now I am the breadwinner. I told her [mom] that if I had received more education, I could do even better for her.” – Female, 26

“Somali women overseas remit a lot more than men. It’s immoral if a man doesn’t help his wife’s family, but it happens. The problem is that men become irresponsible. Somali culture is being uprooted. Children learn right and wrong from their parents, but some fathers now don’t know their religion and have no education—basic education you get from your parents. They are unable to teach their children anything, and they don’t teach women’s rights. This is why couples argue about remitting to the wife’s family.” – Male, 44

Remittances received from the Somali diaspora are critical to Somalia’s economy and have replaced livestock exports as the primary source of foreign-exchange earnings (Ahmed 2000). Studies have shown that remittances have a positive effect on Somali households, providing families with secure livelihoods, and they have contributed to the private sector’s growth (Ahmed 2000; Gundel 2002; Little 2003). The Somali case is interesting because remittances have played a crucial role in Somalia’s economy for decades, but the causes for migration and the use of remittances have changed considerably since the state collapsed in 1991. Many Somali male migrants worked in the
oil-rich Arab nations in the 1970s and 1980s (Jamal 1992), and the remittances they sent home were used primarily for trade and small amounts were left for families. This is likely inverted today, and Somalis migrate to acquire refugee status so they can contribute to their families’ livelihoods (Horst 2002).

The remittances individuals send create important links to their homeland (Tettey and Puplampu 2005). They represent family obligations and serve as one way migrants maintain contact with their home countries while providing for relatives’ livelihoods (Cohen 2011; Jacobsen 2005). Trager (2005a:27) notes that “discussion of remittances and exchanges makes two assumptions: one, that these exchanges take place between a migrant and others in one other place, the ‘home’; and, two, that the majority of exchanges takes place among family or household members.” She believes these assumptions are usually correct, but as people spread out and networks expand so do connections to different places and non-kin individuals who are part of the same community (Trager 2005a). Cohen (2011) argues that remittances also drive local economic growth in receiving communities, the benefits of which extend beyond the household. This is true of Somalis as communities around the world are interconnected through powerful social networks and the ease of modern communication systems (Tettey and Puplampu 2005). Xawilaad, or the informal value-transfer system (Horst 2006b), was established by Somalis in the 1980s to deal with increasing remittance flows from the diaspora and is used to send and receive remittances worldwide. It is critical to maintaining livelihoods, reconstructing Somalia, and even funding clan militias.
Somalis in South Africa are remittance senders and receivers. The importance of remittances cannot be overstated; it is the lifeline for many families, and women in particular bear the responsibility of supporting their nuclear and clan kin. In fact, Nafisa, who grew up in Dadaab refugee camps, said that families who have female kin in the diaspora lead better lives. Regardless of when women arrived in South Africa, their commitment to sending money to their families is strong and they remit as frequently as finances permit (Shaffer 2012). Men share this obligation as well, but the difference is in the sacrifices they are willing to make personally to provide much needed resources to their families in East Africa.

Women discussed the importance of remitting in a women’s focus group. For them, remitting is a top priority and they must send money so their families can eat. I asked women why remitting is so vital when, in their view, their lives were oppressive in Somalia. Women said their families are not to blame; they were not educated and did only what they thought was culturally appropriate. They must help because those individuals are still their family, even if they did wrong to women in the name of culture. Remitting is about respecting the family, and Islam says mothers always come first. As one woman said, “We lost our government because of men. So we [women] want to build our country.” Women think they can make a difference in Somalia, and it starts with supporting individuals and families.

Women tend to remit less money than men do, but they are more dependable. I asked men to explain why women are such reliable remitters. Adnaan thinks that men are
hassled to remit more frequently than women, which makes men more likely to say no. Inshaar feels that it involves trust, and men endure the most of their family’s anger when there is nothing to send: “Women and men are the same with remittances [and their commitment to remitting]. If someone in Somalia calls a girl in the diaspora for money and she has nothing, they trust her. If a man says the same, they don’t trust that he’s telling the truth. Somalis think men always have all the money.” The perception that men are the providers and women are the caretakers contributes to the idea that men should be responsible for sending financial support to their families.

Women have assumed a role that once belonged to men, and their ability to offer remittances has earned the respect of their families. It is a surprising and welcome outcome of women’s migration for Somali families, and women have proven their value as family breadwinners and committed daughters. Somali families in East Africa feel proud of women’s accomplishments abroad and are grateful for the support, even if they send less money than men do. The long-term effect of women’s remittance practices and social change remain to be seen. Roble pointed out that while the money women send is critically important to their families, it will not break social barriers. A woman may earn respect and control of how money is spent, but it does not transfer to larger social contexts. Women’s remittances will boost her position only in the house. I share Lindley’s (2010) view that remittances are part of the social transformation process, but they also protect and ensure women’s long-term interests (Agarwal 1997).
Data counter the assumption that men do not accept their responsibility to provide financial maintenance to their families. All but three men either remit or feel it is their responsibility to do so. Some men remit seldom or only when asked, while others send money to their families monthly. Their remittance practices fluctuate due to employment and economic insecurity, the amount of time they have been away from their homeland, and how committed they are to the individuals who ask for assistance. Many men find it easy to decline a request for remittances and a few feel it is not compulsory to send at all. For them, they are speaking the truth when they tell people they do not have or want to send money, and they will not feel guilty for it. At the same time, a number of men are saddened by their inability to remit. Of the three men who do not feel any responsibility for remitting, one has no contact with his family; another man’s entire family lives in the West and remits to him; and one man feels absolutely no responsibility to his family. Women’s responses are quite similar to men. Twenty-five women are committed to remitting but may not always have the ability to do so. Two women have no family because they died or were separated; one has no contact with her family; another does not send or feel responsible for remitting; and one woman’s family lives in the West and there is no need for her to worry about supporting her family. Data show that women and men equally feel responsible for their families. The key difference is in women’s willingness to sacrifice personally to help their kin. Men are far less likely to accommodate family abroad before their own needs are met.
I asked informants to identify the responsibilities they have to their families beyond Johannesburg. Most noted the tremendous pressure they feel to remit because they live outside of Somalia. The perception is that Somalis in South Africa have money to send those still living in East Africa, and individuals in Mayfair sometimes receive a barrage of remittance requests they cannot afford to fulfill. For women and men who do not have relatives in Europe, North America, or Australia to help them, the weight of their responsibility is great, and they make many sacrifices to meet the needs of their kin. When there is nothing to give, relatives do not always believe them and accuse women and men of abandonment, something that deeply affects women in particular.

Somalis who live in East Africa believe that South Africa is like Western countries in that there are ample employment opportunities that come with substantial incomes. For the most part, women feel it is their duty to remit and it is something that affords them great satisfaction. When they cannot provide the cash to send relatives and friends, women feel guilty and disappointed. Sabo sometimes will not answer her phone when her family calls and she has nothing to send because they make her feel so bad. As she explained tearfully, “It hurts. I feel bad. When your family is crying and I can’t afford it, it is bad. They can’t even believe you. They won’t believe. My sister died [from a heart attack] and she wouldn’t believe me. She said, ‘Why did you erase me from your memory? How could you forget me?’” Women are devastated when relatives accuse them of greed and disregard for their family’s plight. Remitting is something women value, as Barlin describes, “It’s [sending remittances] very important for me. After I send
them [my family] money, I feel happy for myself, and I feel joy. I believe if I send money to people today, I will get more money tomorrow.” For most women, supporting their close kin and friends is a top priority, just after providing for their families locally.

Wives may apply immense pressure on their husbands to remit to her family. It may be part of the marital negotiation or a promise from future husbands to support his wife and her kin in East Africa. When men fall short on their word—intentionally or circumstantially—marriages can unravel over time because wives have unfulfilled expectations from their husbands and financial obligations to their families. A husband may remit to his own family and when his wife asks for money to send her kin, he might say, “I married you, not your family” and that he does not care about her family. I asked men about this during a focus group interview. They said remitting to a wife’s family is a moral responsibility but not a compulsory practice. It is immoral not to remit if there is need and a man has the ability to send money, but it does not mean a man is not meeting his obligations to his wife and children.

When women and men in Mayfair have relatives living in the West, they feel less pressure to remit. While they still consider it their responsibility, they believe those relatives are in a better financial position to support their families in Africa. When I asked Nasteex if he feels obligated to remit, he said, “They’re my family. It’s an Islamic principle that a man must feed his family. If a brother dies, you must support his children.” Nasteex’s brother died in 1989 and his children are in Somalia, but he does not remit to them even though he deems it compulsory. All of his siblings live abroad—
Australia, New Zealand, US, UK, and Italy—and he feels they are more financially secure and can better support his nieces and nephews in Somalia. Having relatives in the West also means that individuals may receive support from them when finances are limited. Some rely on the continuous remittances they send while others resort to asking for remittances only in emergencies. Tarabi does not have a job and his wife, who lives in Finland, provides enough remittances for him to live comfortably in Mayfair. Khadija’s mother and sister live in the US and send her remittances when she does not have enough to pay her bills. They have also loaned her money to expand her business in the past, which Khadija repays over time. At the same time, Khadija sends money to Somalia and never turns a hungry, broke, or homeless Somali away; she always gives whatever she can to those in need. Still others do not bother requesting help from the West because their relatives either send them so little that it is not worth the hassle, or those relatives belittle them and make them feel guilty for asking, if they answer the phone at all.

Women make sacrifices to send remittances and sometimes take risks to access cash. Some women may collect money from their local networks or ask for credit to send money when there is an emergency or great hardship. Other women remit regularly and employ risky strategies to procure money for their families. Yurub, for example, does not work but sends her mother in Somalia 100 USD every month. When I asked her how she gets so much money to send, she said that she sets aside some of the money her husband gives her for food and household items. Her husband does not know she remits and she hides her activities. Yurub acknowledged that remitting so much money causes her to
suffer and that her husband would be furious if he found out, but she will not stop. Yasmin once skipped a rent payment to remit to her family, and her son scolded her for sending resources they needed, as her sacrifice caused the family hardship. He felt that it is good to remit if there is extra money to spare, but not if you cannot afford it. Yasmin used their different views on remittances to explain how women and men think about supporting their families. Men can say no without guilt, whereas women say yes because they have children and understand the responsibilities of caring for children. Most female and male informants corroborated Yasmin’s story. While this is a broad generalization, as there are men who feel ashamed and agonize over their inability to remit, men are less likely to experience the anguish of telling someone no.

The amount women remit varies and depends on what the needs are and how much they have to spare. With so many women working informally, if at all, their income fluctuates greatly and they send what they can as often as they can. Women reported remitting as little as 50 USD to as much as several hundred dollars in a single transaction. Some women remit monthly while others send cash a couple of times a year, or whenever a friend or relative calls requesting assistance. Everyone explained that women are the more dependable remitters because they are weak and have soft hearts; men are strong. Women feel empathy and have more compassion for others’ suffering, making them remitters that are more committed. They are also generous and kind, and willing to send whatever they have. Adnaan said that families in Somalia would call a daughter for money before a son for this reason.
It is difficult for women to say no to their families, but men do because once they are married, women say, a man is no longer concerned about his family. A man’s focus shifts to his wife and children and not to his parents. Buraqo used a Somali proverb to explain: “If male cows go out, they won’t come back, but females will.” One woman elaborated by saying, “Men’s brains are an empty box”. By this, she means that men prioritize their own desires and often exclude their families left behind. For example, Yasin does not remit and I asked him if he feels guilty for it, to which he replied, “I didn’t until you started asking me questions about it. It’s every man for himself in South Africa and you forget.” He went on to say that mounting stress causes people to forget that others are suffering more elsewhere.

Women and men remit to a wide range of individuals: parents, siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, and old friends and colleagues. They remit to their mother’s kin and their father’s kin, but almost everyone said that remitting to their mothers and their mothers’ family takes precedence. Many informants were unable to explain why, exactly, but some suggested that their father’s family did not treat them as well as their mother’s kin. Yurub said that a mother’s sisters are called “good aunties”, or “small mom”, and a father’s sisters are “bad aunties” who do not care about their nieces. Daleel said that supporting the mother’s side of the family maintains the family connection that is already secured through blood on the father’s side. If Amir had the choice between remitting to his mother’s sister or his father’s sister, he would choose his mother’s sister because “she is the mother without the breast.” Mothers are the top
priority. Women feel closer to their mothers and spent more time with them as children. Mothers are revered for giving life to children, offering unconditional love, and making sacrifices to care for them. Women and men noted the suffering their mothers endured carrying them in the womb and giving birth to them. Mothers were also a constant presence in their children’s lives and offering financial aid to them is the least they can do to repay them. As women and elders, mothers deserve the support they would receive in a stable Somalia with their family unit intact.

6.5 Marriage

“Women coming from Somalia think their husbands have money and that life is cheap here. The reality is different and they realize they were dreaming. This causes husbands and wives to start fighting, insult and misunderstand each other, and have no respect for each other. Somalis no longer have tolerance for one another. Wives say, ‘I don’t need you’ and find a husband with more money. There is more misunderstanding here. If life is not good, everything will be destroyed.” – Female, 44

“Life in South Africa is being defined by economics. I don’t date Somali women because it’s too expensive. Women have responsibilities to their families. If you marry a woman and are responsible for her only, that’s okay. But more often than not you marry her family, too, and it causes big problems. Women work because they have a responsibility to their families back home. Women who don’t work marry and it becomes her husband’s responsibility to support both her and her family.” – Male, 28

The single mother phenomenon is very painful for women who are desperate to support their children with their limited opportunities. Following a divorce in Somalia, women would return to their natal kin to live and receive support. Even without paid work, women could rely on their families to take care of them. Employment, I was told, was more of a choice for women in Somalia but is a necessity in South Africa where life
is expensive and close kin networks may be limited or wholly absent. Divorced women may or may not receive spousal or child support from their former husbands, and many Somalis believe men abandon their families when financial pressures are too great.

Women employ a number of strategies to meet their family commitments. One approach is to negotiate the terms of the marriage and the financial responsibilities a man will assume to his wife and her family. This is particularly potent for women who are unable to work due to childcare responsibilities and cultural expectations. Dowry was common practice in Somalia and still occurs in South Africa, though it is viewed as negotiation for provisions throughout the marriage. This influences some women’s decisions about choosing a husband, as Farhiya says, “Some couples negotiate before a marriage takes place. When a single lady is working, she tells a potential husband not to waste her time if he’s not going to support her once they’re married.” While some men meet this cultural and religious obligation, others control the family’s purse strings and ration the money women receive to run the household.

Many Somalis in Mayfair believe that a woman’s choice in a husband is made, in large part, by his financial success and ability to support his wife and her family. Adnaan said, “If a man has money, a woman wants to marry him because he will take care of her. When young women come to Johannesburg, they have nothing. It’s not uncommon for women to marry a man who is ten to fifteen years older because he has money and she believes her life will be okay.” Failure to assist his wife in this way, particularly when a man has the financial means to do so, may lead to divorce.
While there is variation in the primary reasons for coming to South Africa, most Somali women and men were at least somewhat motivated by the prospect of acquiring money to support themselves and their families abroad. As one single woman searching for a husband told me, “No money, no honey!” Marriage is but one way women procure remittance funds. Men often assume the responsibility to remit to a wife’s family as part of the pre-nuptial negotiation. Before a marriage takes place, most men tell their prospective wife to quit her job, if she has one, and he will provide monetary support to her extended family. In many cases, the issue of remittances has become an essential condition of marriage. Marital discontent arises when men slip into economic hardship and can no longer afford those crucial remittances. If a husband cannot support his wife and her family, she might threaten to get a job, and if he refuses to allow his wife to work, they will likely divorce.

I held a small focus group to discuss the idea of marrying men for the sole purpose of gaining financial support for women’s families. Women complained that men promise money for a woman and her family before the marriage takes place, but this priority changes after the wedding. Haaruun agreed that some men earn a substantial income from their shops but give their wives very little money for their basic support. This is not the case for everyone, though, as men often enter marriage with the best of intentions and make promises they want to keep, but financial situations change and sometimes create hardship. Abdirizak, a man who has worked in townships off and on for several years, fought with his wife incessantly over their scant economic resources. His
wife wanted him to remit to her family in Somalia, and Abdirizak wanted to send money to his family, but there was none to send. In response to their struggles, Abdirizak’s wife sought his permission to find a job, a request he refused: “I prefer to get a good job and she’ll stay in the house.” The problem, too, is that men might find great success in townships but lose their capital overnight when the shop is looted or robbed. When men provide financial support consistently and it stops suddenly, expectations remain and cause conflict between spouses and a wife’s extended family.

Men also have their own marital strategies. Several people said that men marry older women as an economic strategy. Men in Somalia typically marry young girls and women who are virgins and have years of reproductive capacity ahead of them. It is unusual for a man to marry an older woman, which leads Somalis to question their motives. Men sometimes order women from East Africa and do not meet their wives until they arrive in Johannesburg for the marriage. Families make the arrangements since men do not have the money or travel documents to return to the country and choose a bride. For these men, it is less expensive to order a wife given the perception that women in South Africa have more needs and demand money for her home, family, and maintenance. The logic behind this, Hanad argued, is that “at home, you send her family money once at the time of marriage and it’s finished. Women from home accept a less nice house and less nice furniture. Some [brides] change [once they are in South Africa], maybe less than twenty percent. They change because they adopted the life of South Africa.” The prevailing thought is women in East Africa accept what they are given, are
less demanding, and do not know anything about South African life. While this saves men money, it can also backfire when new brides leave their husbands shortly after arriving in Mayfair. Some women use marriage as a free ticket to South Africa, in addition to the bridprice their families receive, and abandon their new husbands once they are established in the country.

6.6 Accommodation /Room Rentals

“Women always complain about their husbands because she’s not happy that other people stay in the house because he needs rent money. She asks him why he’s working in the locations [townships] because it’s still not enough money. Everyone rents out rooms in their house but they don’t like it.” – Female, 44

Several people noted that rent skyrocketed in Mayfair when foreigners arrived, or rather influxes of foreigners, and Indian landlords exploit Somalis in particular by charging them higher rent than other nationals. From what Somalis told me, Indians are reluctant to let their properties to Somalis because they believe Somalis neglect and destroy dwellings and outside areas. Consequently, rent is very high and Somalis are willing to pay more for the security and convenience of living in Mayfair. Several Somalis said that landlords frequently increase rent without prior notice and in the absence of a rental agreement, leaving tenants with few alternatives other than to move or to sublet rooms to other Somalis. This is an important shift for Somalis. People owned their homes in Somalia and did not have the added expense of rent payments, which has exacerbated the enormous financial pressure Somalis face in Mayfair.
Multiple family households, room sharing, and room rentals are fixtures in Mayfair because housing is expensive and in short supply. These configurations frequently exclude close kin (Peberdy and Majodina 2000). High rent also means that families, and female household leaders, rent out rooms in their homes or apartments for additional income. Families do not like to let extra rooms in their homes, but household economics sometimes require it. Entire families might stay in one room with one or two beds and some mattresses tossed on the floor. Liban and his wife had three children and a forth on the way. Their apartment comprised a kitchen, a bathroom, and two rooms that they used as bedrooms. When Liban could no longer afford rent and other living expenses with his meager earnings as an self-employed taxi driver, he decided to let one of the rooms and move the children into his bedroom. The room was about 12’x12’ and served as the living and sleeping space for his family of five. Farhiya’s tenants provided enough income for her to pay electric and water bills, but her informal work did not always produce enough income to pay rent and left her asking for extensions. As might be expected, this arrangement can create stress and lead to the deterioration of spousal relationships. When entire families live and sleep in one room, a couple cannot communicate privately and women feel shame for making love (playing “night games”) when children are present, which causes marital tension. Furthermore, children lack study space and the buildings and facilities do not weather overcrowding well (Peberdy and Majodina 2000). Confining families in this way aggravates the strain spouses already feel and further problematizes the problems couples face.
This chapter shows again how access to resources and competition over power are playing out in Mayfair. Gender relations are challenged by the economic realities of South African life, leading women to forgo customary Somali gender roles and practices in favor of pursuing survival strategies in the absence of financial provisions from men. The ensuing gender contests demonstrate men’s difficulty in accepting the outcomes of women’s labor participation, which sometimes manifest themselves through physical violence against women. Somalis hold little power as refugees in South Africa, but women have proven their ability to overcome economic barriers when they must and manage to access resources when there are no alternatives. Men often find women’s economic empowerment and men’s disempowerment problematic, as men have lost control over financial resources and their ability to control women’s roles and behavior. As gender relations undergo negotiations in Mayfair, women’s economic activities will continue to serve as reminders of shifting power structures in the community and beyond.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

“Those Somalis who don’t respect their culture do what they want. Somalis who do respect their culture are limited in what they can do.” – Female, 29

This dissertation explores how micro and macro variables—from individuals and households to larger sociocultural contexts and institutions—intersect and shape the negotiation of gender and the construction of gender relations in Mayfair’s Somali community. The way individuals define and understand contested issues link gender relations to power constructions (Moore 1994), and my research reveals the complex and contradictory nature of this process as women challenge traditional gender models to procure survival resources for their families even as they maintain the customary roles that situate them in their homes. In the absence of supportive spouses or extended kin networks, women engage in economic activities and may seek state intervention when spouses fail to meet their culturally determined responsibilities. Some community members interpret these acts as cultural and religious deviance, causing conflict as they accuse women of adopting South African laws, values, and ideologies. Even with expanded rights for women in South Africa, there are consequences for challenging Somali cultural norms. While the organization of social life enables women and men to make choices, core social structures are largely unchanged (Hays 1994).
Larger social and institutional barriers, such as crime, xenophobia, and a lack of state support, discourage Somalis (and women in particular) from pursuing employment outside of Mayfair. Women and men create jobs in the absence of formal opportunities, but women must juggle resource demands with household responsibilities as they invest substantial time and labor into their jobs, and often with minimal financial return. While women are resourceful, they often rely on other Somalis and community organizations to supplement their income. This need obliges women (and men) to conform to community expectations that ensure access to the social and economic resources and support systems that members alone enjoy. Their networks may assist women, but it is contingent upon meeting social standards of conduct (Allen 2009). At the same time, the state’s commitment to equality leaves women room to resist gender inequalities and community prescriptions for their behavior (Agarwal 1997), but the insurmountable barriers they face—as women, as (single) mothers, as Muslims, and as unwanted foreigners—limit their ability to insist on change in a community whose support they need to survive.

Other studies document the pattern observed in Mayfair (e.g., Kantor 2003; Malhotra and Mather 1997; Pessar 1995)—that women’s wages grant them greater household control but do not extend to the larger community. Women continue to face social control, as demonstrated by the way women don 

\textit{hijabs} or \textit{niqabs} to walk to the Amal area, and lack female representation in community leadership positions. Somali women are marginalized in broader South African society and remain members of a strongly patriarchal society. Despite these obstacles, women use their agency even as
they are dominated at the macro and micro level. In her discussion of the way dominant powers use their agency to further their own projects, Ortner (2006:144) writes, “the less powerful seek to nourish and protect by creating or protecting sites, literally or metaphorically, ‘on the margins of power.’” This encapsulates the dynamics of Somali lives in Mayfair, where Somalis created a community that protects one another and finds strength and support among their ethnic kin. The inherent danger for Somalis—and women in particular—to live and interact in South Africa is palpable, but outside threats are also used as a way to apply strict social control over women and to ensure they maintain their culturally appropriate position as wives, mothers, and household managers, as well as behavior that upholds social expectations. Women who defy these norms face damaged reputations, at the very least, or social ostracism, in the most extreme. Most women are unable to overcome challenges in South Africa without their community. Even those who are self-sufficient must exercise caution, knowing circumstances change and sometimes unexpectedly.

Malkki’s (1995a) research on Hutu refugees living in Tanzania shows that while life in camps segregates refugees and restricts their movement, just as Mayfair does for Somalis, their seclusion promotes a new power dynamic that enables people to quickly exchange information about others as they move from village to village. Perhaps it is too severe to compare Mayfair to a refugee camp, but it is an appropriate metaphor for how Somalis feel about their lives in Johannesburg. Their social isolation and vulnerability to discrimination, crime, and xenophobia create the need for security that Mayfair provides.
As part of this confinement, Somalis developed the ability to control individual behavior through the threat of gossip that can damage reputations and problematize assistance for those who stray from acceptable cultural conduct. Insecurity demands that Somalis rely on their community for support and survival. To receive this assistance, people must demonstrate their membership in the community by maintaining cultural constructs and resisting adoption of South African values and ideologies.

7.1 Theoretical Contributions and “Gendered Geographies of Power”

Mahler and Pessar’s (2001; 2006; Pessar and Mahler 2003) “gendered geographies of power” framework provides a useful point for thinking about the complex interaction between and among the micro and macro variables that influence the negotiation of gender relations in Mayfair. First, gender operates across many spatial, social, and cultural grounds, leading to normalized behaviors. Realities in South Africa largely confine women to Mayfair and limit their movement beyond the security its boundaries provides. These dynamics necessitate women’s reliance on their community for protection and support when other strategies fail or are insufficient. Even as women work to satisfy their financial demands, they must make difficult choices as they challenge Somali cultural constructions. Second, Somalis’ limited opportunities and negative social experiences with South Africans render them powerless as they operate within a hierarchal system with low social locations. Encounters with discrimination, crime, and xenophobia shape Somali identities and influence how they think and act in their daily lives. Power negotiations are a contradictory, multi-layered process in Mayfair
that create tension and conflict among and between households, families, and the larger Somali community. Third, women and men make choices about exerting their agency based on their location and access to resources. Women work only in the absence of other financial support, and their need for protection means that they often create jobs they can perform in Mayfair. Physical and economic insecurity influence the way women understand their opportunities and ability to challenge gender constructions that situate them in their households. Finally, my research shows the contradictions inherent in these processes in Mayfair. Future research on gender relations in the Somali diaspora will be well served by using this template to examine complex gender relationships in communities where different micro and macro factors produce different outcomes.

This study contributes to an anthropological understanding of how gender operates within the context of refugee migration and economic outcomes. The ways in which refugees reconstruct their lives and social networks is a gendered process that enables people to renegotiate their new identities in exile (Colson 2004 [1999]; Meertens 2004). Safa’s (1995:182) research demonstrates that women’s employment can lead to egalitarian marriages, but these new roles require a broad, communal acceptance to sustain them (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004). Without general approval, women are disempowered further through violence and other forms of control in society. Women may resist domination, such as by pursuing divorce, or other means to control their lives (Warren 2010) in ways that defy customary practices within their cultural system, leading to the perception that women are more demanding in their relationships.
This case study shows that power contests are contradictory and uneven as refugee communities operate within multiple power structures in their resettlement spaces. My research builds on Mahler and Pessar’s “gendered geographies of power” model and reveals that women have fewer opportunities to resist power hierarchies and forms of social control in Mayfair. When women depend on the social and economic resources their communities provide, they must abide by social rules to remain eligible for support. This limits women’s ability to challenge customary gender models in a way that empowers them and enhances their social position. For example, women who pursue paid employment distribute their income as they choose, but their need to work at all demonstrates their vulnerability as women who lack stable support from husbands, families, and networks. Rather than conceptualizing women’s employment as an empowering device, it is a marker of vulnerability and economic need (Fernández-Kelly and García 1990; Pessar 2003). Building on this model and Safa’s (1995) understanding of employment outcomes, my study generally supports the view that women’s wage labor substitutes those of men in Mayfair, adding to their responsibilities in ways that do not grant them power beyond their household.

This research also establishes the importance of intersecting factors—within and beyond migrant communities in their social locations—that shape gender identities and relations. In situations where social support systems are not available to refugees, heightened power contests can lead to violence and force women to make difficult decisions about exerting their agency or ensuring their position in the community. Gender
roles are the product of cultural ideas and behaviors that situate individuals as actors in their social systems and determine the roles they perform as members of society, but larger macro and micro forces often challenge these constructions and demand that individuals within them adapt to changing situations, including alterations of gender roles even in patriarchal societies. Studies have shown that social and legal trends, as well as women’s engagement in paid labor and educational opportunities, diminish patriarchal social constructions and alter women’s status over time (Warren 2010). As the Somali community grows in Mayfair, and with new members bringing ideologies that conflict with those of older arrivals, it remains to be seen whether patriarchy is dismantled or reinforced with time. Much of this also hinges on larger forces, such as the South African government’s commitment to protecting refugees and enforcing state policies that should benefit them, and how xenophobic attitudes and behaviors in South Africa evolve over time. Collectively these factors will shape gender relations and determine communal acceptance of women’s new gender roles in Mayfair.

7.2 Broader Research Contributions and Implications

Few ethnographic studies concentrate on female refugees, economic activities, and gender relations in a single project. There also is little academic research on these issues in sub-Saharan Africa, and Somalis in South Africa have received minimal, focused scholarly attention. Refugee literature offers little to paradigms focused on migration outcomes and social dynamics through a gendered lens, and this research bridges this gap by contextualizing the factors that determine how these relationships
function in Mayfair’s Somali community. The dearth of refugee studies that explore these issues specifically is detrimental to migration research generally and to scholarly understanding of the intricate social and kinship relationships—including gender—within refugee communities. The complexity of gender constructs in migration processes and outcomes, and those of refugees in particular, cannot be overstated. Women’s commitment to supporting their households, families, and communities through economic participation challenges customary gender models in resettlement spaces as migrants reinterpret their identities and redefine their roles in new situations. However, sociocultural and household constructs, along with larger social and institutional barriers, can limit women’s opportunities and impede their ability to provide financial assistance to their households and those in their social and kinship networks.

As Somalis continue to disperse around the world, it is critically important to understand changing gender relations and the micro and macro variables that determine outcomes in different contexts. Studies that concentrate on gender relationships are crucial to understanding how and why women and men experience shifting social and economic structures in dissimilar ways. Women feel they have the responsibility to pick up the pieces in a world where the war men started shattered lives. Challenges to gender roles and gender relations in the diaspora occur simultaneously in Somalia, as women earn their own money and make decisions about how to use that income to support their households. The effects of these economic changes, however, will be measured by whether women’s wages complement men’s earnings or simply substitute them. If
earnings replace those of men, time will tell if work empowers women in the long term or adds to their burden (Ibrahim 2004; Safa 1995).

The shortcomings of South Africa’s state policies and legal protection are evident when examining migration outcomes through a gendered lens. Physical and economic insecurity further marginalize and impoverish refugees as they rebuild their lives, limiting their ability to integrate into and contribute to the social and economic development of their host society. Women particularly suffer in this regard, as limited mobility, inadequate resources, and insufficient job opportunities guarantee that women have fewer openings through which they can challenge and negotiate gender relations to improve their lives. A nuanced examination of gender in these contexts would benefit policy makers as they refine strategies designed to assist refugee populations in their resettlement spaces in South Africa and beyond.

7.3 Future Research Directions

It was not until late in my fieldwork that I began to gain real trust from community members in Mayfair. Somalis are distrustful of outsiders, and my time in the field ended just as I made invaluable connections with those who perhaps were initially apprehensive of my presence. Social and community dynamics mean that I spent the majority of my time in one restaurant, which may have limited my sample and observations of men in particular. Additional research in different social settings in Mayfair will be critical to future inquiries in the community. Future research also should include interviews with spouses. Dalmar and Amina are the only husband and wife team I
interviewed, albeit separately, and their perceptions regarding household leadership are discordant. A focus on understanding how partners perceive their roles in the same relationship will give insight into the challenges of gender relations and the way gender shapes each partner’s ideas about power dynamics in marriage.

Many of the topics discussed in this dissertation require deeper engagement to understand the nuances of Somali variation in gendered ideologies according to age and generation, kinship and clan origin, and geographic background. The oldest woman I interviewed was 44-years-old; the oldest man was 47-years-old. Future research will benefit from including older respondents who have memories of Somalia well before the state collapsed and perhaps prior to independence in 1960. Their perspective is critical to understanding and explaining the evolution of gender ideologies over time. Somali studies would benefit from an ethnographic project that places the dynamics of kinship as central to understanding how kinship and clanship structures are shifting in the diaspora. Furthermore, Somalis have varied colonial and post-colonial experiences, which have shaped gender constructions differently. For example, Faaruq, a local community leader, noted that women have rights in Somaliland that women in Somalia do not enjoy. While I cannot verify this, it is a notable distinction worthy of exploration. A meaningful investigation of these dynamics in diaspora communities will aid in understanding the cultural challenges Somalis face in different contexts.
7.4 **A Final Thought**

When I returned to the US and read through my field notes and interviews, I realized how much negativity there was about South Africa and wondered if Somalis found anything positive. During an Internet discussion with Jihan, I asked her what she likes about South Africa. Somalis must work to survive, she said, and that is a good thing because people have to be responsible for themselves and not rely on others to take care of them. She also said there is peace. While many Somalis die in townships and the fear of crime and xenophobia are a daily threat everywhere, those in Mayfair do not fall asleep at night listening to gunfire as they would in Mogadishu. People do not have to worry about dodging bullets during gunfights or running for cover in an explosion, and this is why, for Jihan, death is an especially painful reality to face in South Africa. When a Somali is murdered or killed in a tragic accident, it hurts more than it would if she were in Somalia. Death is a common, random, and almost expected outcome in Somalia, but it is not in South Africa. Somalis have survived so much to be in South Africa. Despite their many differences, most Somalis want only peace, security, and opportunities. When one loses his or her life to crime, it is shocking and hurts deeply. I think Jihan’s sentiments ring true for many of the Somalis who are desperate to make sense of their past as they attempt to rebuild their lives in a country that does not want them there and where their future remains tumultuous and uncertain. In a world where Somalis believe their suffering is ignored, forgotten, or dismissed, they feel abandoned by every person and institution charged with protecting them and granting them their right to live.
decently. In the midst of South African apathy, however, women feel silenced within their own community. Women suffer not only at the hands of the state and among South Africans, but also within the context of culture by challenging the choices women make to improve their lives and to support their families.
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Appendix A: Maps
Figure 7. Map of East Africa
Figure 8. Map of South Africa
Figure 9. Map of Mayfair
Appendix B: IRB Approval
November 25, 2009

Protocol Number: 2009B0321
 Protocol Title: CHALLENGING TRADITIONS AND GENDER RELATIONS AMONG SOMALI WOMEN IN JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA. Jeffrey Cohen, Marian Shaffer, Anthropology.
 Type of Review: Initial Review--Expedited
 IRB Staff Contact: Jacob R. Stoddard
 Phone: 614-292-0526
 Email: stoddard.13@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Cohen,

The Behavioral and Social Sciences IRB APPROVED BY EXPEDITED REVIEW the above referenced research. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research presents minimal risk to subjects and qualifies under the expedited review category(s) listed below.

Date of IRB Approval: November 25, 2009
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: November 12, 2010
Expedited Review Category: 7

In addition, the protocol has been approved for the inclusion of non-English speaking subjects and for a waiver of documentation of the consent process.

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

This approval is valid for one year from the date of IRB review when approval is granted or modifications are required. The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Continuing Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. A final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 3 years after the research has ended.

It is the responsibility of all investigators and research staff to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events and potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHRRP Federalwide Assurance #000006378.

All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website – www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Shari R. Speer, PhD, Chair
Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board

hs-017-06 Exp Approval New CR
Version 01/13/89

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Appendix C: Scope of Interviews
Interview 1: Unstructured Interviews and Face-to-Face Surveys

Unstructured interviews were used to inquire about participants’ economic activities, the perceived social and institutional barriers that limit their access to jobs and resources, and women and men’s experiences as migrants in Johannesburg. The following questions guided interviews:

**Jobs and Resources**

1. Do you earn money? Do you have a job?
2. How do you earn money? What is your job?
   a. How much money do you earn?
   b. How do you spend your money?
   c. How long have you been earning money doing this work?
   d. Describe your work.
   e. Do you work with other Somalis? Other migrants? South Africans?
3. How did you choose your job?
4. Do you have a boss? Do you own your business?
   a. If you own a business, tell me about the process of opening and operating a business in Johannesburg.
   b. If you have a boss, tell me about the process of finding a job in Johannesburg.
5. If you are self-employed (e.g., street trader, cook, driver), why did you decide to do this type of work?
6. What are the biggest challenges for you in the work you do?
8. How do members of the Somali community feel about the work you do?
9. Can you tell me about a time or situation when other Somalis did not support the work you do?
10. If you do not have a job, how do you access food, housing, and other survival resources?
11. Have your experiences with members of the Somali community affected your ability to access a job or the resources you need to survive? Explain.

**South Africa**

1. Have you had any negative experiences with the police? South Africans? Other migrants? Explain and provide examples.
2. Have your experiences with the police, South Africans, or other migrants affected your ability to access a job or resources? Explain.
3. How would you describe the Somali community in Johannesburg?
4. What are the challenges of being a migrant in Johannesburg?
5. What are your experiences as a migrant in Johannesburg? What do you like and dislike about being here?
6. Why did you come to South Africa?
7. Would you prefer going to the West?
9. Have you been a victim of crime in South Africa?
10. What are the social and institutional barriers that limit people’s access to jobs and resources in Mayfair/ Johannesburg/ South Africa? How are these different for women and men?
11. How do you manage your barriers in South Africa?

Face-to-face surveys were used to collect participants’ demographic data including:

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Place of birth
4. Marital status
5. Educational background
6. Language proficiency
7. Employment history
8. Income
9. Location of residence (i.e., Mayfair or another location in Johannesburg)
10. Household composition
11. Migration history
12. Migration status
13. Length of time in South Africa
14. Residence prior to Johannesburg
15. Ownership (e.g., apartment, business, car)
16. Socioeconomic background
Interview 2: Narratives

I collected narratives from women and men to explore past gender arrangements, including “traditional” Somali ideologies, beliefs, and practices. Examples of some of the questions asked include:

1. Tell me about your life in Somalia (growing up, daily life, work and family life, socioeconomic background).
2. What responsibilities did you have?
3. Who made decisions in your household? Who made decisions about members of your household?
4. What were relationships between women and men like?
5. What about love, dating, marriage, divorce, domestic violence, and so on?
6. What jobs did men and women have?
7. How did your life change after the civil war started?
8. When and how did you decide to leave Somalia?
9. Who traveled with you on your trip to South Africa?
10. Tell me about your journey to South Africa. Did you stay in other countries or refugee camps before arriving in Johannesburg?
11. Tell me about resettling in Johannesburg. What challenges did you face?
Interview 3: Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interview questions built on data collected through focus groups, unstructured interviews, narratives, and participant observation. The third interview addressed gender roles and gender relationships in Mayfair and the changes people experience in their homes and community. I also inquired about remittances in this interview. Examples of some of the questions asked include:

Life and Gender in South Africa

1. Describe your life in South Africa.
2. Do you have children in school?
3. How have relationships between women and men changed in Johannesburg?
4. Tell me about marriage.
   a. Do people marry for love or opportunities?
   b. Are there arranged marriages in Mayfair?
   c. Do people date? Is this acceptable?
   d. Is there more divorce in South Africa?
   e. Is there much domestic violence in South Africa?
   f. What happens when there is marital conflict?
12. How have your relationships with women/ men changed in Johannesburg?
   a. Why are these relationships different?
   b. What do you attribute to these differences?
13. What are your family and community responsibilities in Johannesburg?
   a. How are these different from Somalia?
   b. Do women have more responsibilities in South Africa?
14. How have women and men’s responsibilities changed in Johannesburg? Why?
15. How have women and men’s economic roles changed in Johannesburg? Why?
16. How have your relationships changed in South Africa?
   a. Why are these relationships different?
17. Do women’s economic activities affect or change gender models/ relations?
   a. What causes gender relations to change?
   b. Are there jobs that women and men cannot do?
18. Does Somali culture limit women’s opportunities?
19. Are women and men equal in South Africa?
20. Do women have more power in South Africa?
21. Has Somali culture changed in Mayfair?
   a. Are the cultural changes you have observed good or bad?
Families, Households, and Community

1. What decisions do you make in your household?
2. What roles do you play in your household?
3. What roles do you play in your community?
4. How are these different from what they were in Somalia?
5. Is your household composition different from what it was in Somalia? How?
6. How does your household composition affect the responsibilities you have and the roles you play?
7. What responsibilities do you have to your family outside of Johannesburg?
   a. Is this different from the responsibilities you had in Somalia? How?
8. Who provides financial support in your household?
9. Does household composition affect whether women work?
10. Can you tell me about old and new Somalis? What is the difference?

Remittances

1. Do you send remittances?
   a. Is sending remittances compulsory? Do you feel responsible for sending money to your family and friends?
   b. How often do you send remittances?
   c. To whom do you send remittances?
   d. How much money do you send?
   e. Who is your top priority for sending remittances? Why?
   f. Why do you remit?
   g. Do you ever turn down remittance requests?
   h. What happens if you tell someone you cannot send him or her money?
   i. How do you feel when you cannot send remittances?
2. Do you receive remittances?
   a. Who sends you remittances?
   b. How often do you receive remittances?
   c. How much money do you receive?
   d. Where are the people who send you remittances?