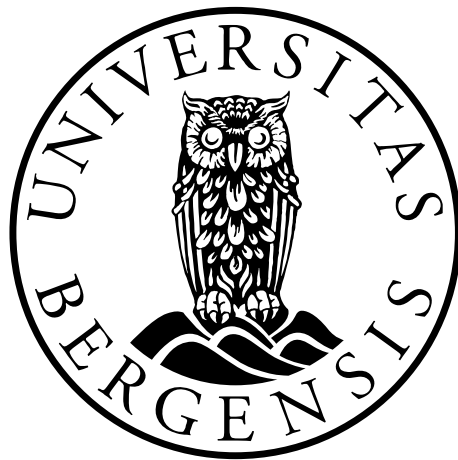


**The Role of “Islamic feminism” in Somali Immigrant Women’s  
Intra-and Extra-Household Bargaining Power and in Mitigating the  
Negative Effects of the Image Problem in their Integration in Norway**

**Anne Wangui Ngunjiri**



**Master of Philosophy in Gender and Development**

**Spring, 2013**

**Faculty of Psychology  
Department of Health Promotion and Development**

## **Abstract**

This research explores the aspirations and life experiences of Somali immigrant women in Bergen as they embark on gender-tuned interpretation of the Quran as a source of bargaining power within the household and in the wider Norwegian immigration context. By bargaining power I mean an individual's interests or preferences and the ability to act on those interests or preferences. I show that, faced by constraints such as restrictive structures within the Norwegian immigration context and patriarchal norms of conduct, some Somali women have created a vision, an ideal and a practice of ordering life according to the Quran that they call "Islamic feminism". This ideal, Somali "Islamic feminism", has clear associations with the political movement of Islamic Feminism, but it is also clearly unique and distinct, due to its origins among Somali immigrant women themselves. I argue that by means of Somali "Islamic feminism", these brave women are using the Quran to challenge patriarchy. By so doing, they are gaining bargaining power within and outside their households and are creating grassroot change, as well as a ray of hope for the next generation of Somali women. The voices of Somali men are also included in showing how migration creates new forms of belonging and redefines new patterns of gender power relations. The research concludes that Somali "Islamic feminism" has a "catalyzing effect" on the degree of intra-and-extra household bargaining power although the magnitude diminishes at extra household levels.

## **Acknowledgements**

I am thankful to programme coordinators Haldis Haukanes and Marit Tjomsland for their generous support, input and guidance. I am extremely grateful to Gaudencia Mutema, my thesis supervisor, for her encouragement, detailed and valuable suggestions and editorial advice. I also thank Victor Chimhutu, Padmaja Barua and my fellow graduate students for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this research. I benefitted immensely from the insights of the Somali women and men whom I interviewed in Bergen. Special thanks are due to Abdul Ahmed and Ifrah Ciyow who provided excellent research assistance. Views, omissions and errors are my responsibility. E-mail address for correspondence: [wangui555@hotmail.com](mailto:wangui555@hotmail.com)

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	ii
Table of Contents .....	iii
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	3
1.1 Research Questions .....	3
1.2 Thesis Outline and Presentation of Chapters.....	4
<b>Chapter 2: Background and Context</b> .....	5
2.1 Perspectives on Patriarchy.....	5
2.2 Attitudes towards Muslim Immigrants and their Integration in Europe .....	5
2.3 On Somalis and Clan Affiliation .....	8
2.4 Integration of Somali Immigrants Norway.....	11
<b>Chapter 3: Literature Review on Gender, Immigration and Islamic Feminism</b> .....	12
3.1 Gender and Immigration.....	12
3.2 Integration and Cultural Polarization of Somali Immigrants in Norway .....	14
3.3 On Islamic Feminism .....	15
3.3.1 Feminism, A loaded Term.....	15
3.3.2 Schools of Thought in Islamic Feminism.....	16
<b>Chapter 4: Conceptual Framework</b> .....	20
4.1 Intersectionality: A Relational Model and Theory of Inequalities .....	20
4.2 Gidden’s Structuration Theory and Women’s Bargaining Power.....	22
4.2.1 The Structure and Agency Framework .....	22
4.2.2 Interactions among Reflexive Agents .....	24
4.2.3 Understanding Intersectionality, Structure and Agency .....	26
4.3 The Bargaining Framework of Household Decision Making Processes .....	27
<b>Chapter 5: Data Collection, Methods and Ethical Considerations</b> .....	33
5.1 Position as Researcher .....	33
5.2 Selection of Informants .....	33
5.3 Procedure and Data Collection Methods.....	35
5.4 Interviews .....	36
5.5 Participant Observation .....	39
5.6 Challenges .....	39
5.7 Ethical Considerations .....	41
5.8 Data Analysis .....	42
<b>Chapter 6: Empirical Chapters</b> .....	43
6.1 Changing Gender Relations and Quest for Belonging among Somali Immigrants .....	43
6.1.1 The Somali Clan System, Male Dominance and Gender Inequality.....	43
6.1.2 Changing Gender Roles and Integration of Somali Immigrants .....	47
6.1.2 (a) Breadwinners .....	47
6.1.2 (b) Taxi Business.....	49
6.1.3 Everyday Socialization of Somali Children outside the Household .....	52
6.1.3 (a) Religiously Sanctioned Consumerism .....	52

6.2 Somali Women’s Views and Experiences of Islamic Feminism .....	55
6.2.1 Interaction between Islam and Feminism.....	55
6.2.2 Somali “Islamic feminism” in the eyes of ‘other’ Women .....	60
6.2.3 Somali “Islamic feminism” in the Eyes of Somali Men .....	61
6.3 Intra- and- Extra Household Outcomes of Somali “Islamic feminism”.....	63
6.3.1 Intra Household Outcomes on Ideas and Practises glossed as Islamic .....	63
6.3.1 (a) On Sexuality and Contraceptives.....	63
6.3.1 (b) On Polygamy .....	64
6.3.1 (c) Domestic Violence.....	66
6.3.1 (d) Second generation Somali Immigrants.....	67
6.3.1 (e) Complimentary versus Egalitarian Gender Roles.....	68
6.3.2 Extra Household Outcomes.....	69
6.3.2 (a) Self-Image and Self Esteem through Education .....	69
6.3.2 (b) Attitudinal Barriers to Integration and Cultural Polarization .....	71
6.3.2 (c) In the hall of fame of ‘symbol of oppression’: The Islamic Veil .....	71
<b>Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion.....</b>	<b>74</b>
7.1 Discussion of the First Research Question.....	74
7.2 Discussion of the Second Research Question .....	76
7.3 Discussion of the Third Research Question .....	78
7.4 Discussion of the Fourth Research Question .....	80
7.5 Conclusion.....	81
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>84</b>

## Chapter 1 Introduction

Presenting her 2012 annual report to the General Assembly in November 2012, the United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Farida Shaheed, warned against passively pointing fingers at culture and structures as the reason why women do not have access to rights. In her own words:

“...this overly-simplistic attitude diverts our attention from the specific actors, institutions, rules and regulations that keep women subordinated within patriarchal systems and structures... the struggle for women’s human rights, including cultural rights, is not against religion, culture, or tradition...the critical issue is not whether and how religion, culture and tradition prevail over women’s human rights, but how to ensure that women own their culture (including religion and tradition) as well as their human rights and decide which cultural traditions, values or practices are to be kept intact, modified or discarded altogether” (GIHR, 2012).

Similarly, Cornwall and Molyneux (2006: 1182) argue that “...rights are not in themselves inherently transformative: it is *how* rights come to be framed and claimed that defines their potential”. This is precisely the position the Somali “Islamic feminism” group in Bergen have taken from a grassroots, bottom up approach. They are looking at and trying to challenge the actors that have put them at the bottom of the gender equality barrel. This research aims at exploring the extent to which the grassroot association has succeeded in improving their position as women both in the household and outside the household.

Substantial research effort has been devoted to gender inequality. In gender and development research, it is greatly agreed that gender inequality in access to resources in developing countries is correlated to asymmetric bargaining power of women within the household, the repercussions of which are unequal outcomes in well-being (Quisumbing and Maluccio, 2000). Nevertheless, while the literature on gender and migration is growing, there is relatively little research and knowledge on what happens to gender relations in the context of migration (Pessar & Maher 2003: 812). Further, according to Mutema (2010: 282), gender still remains peripheral in research on migrants and their religions, whereas gender could be a useful analytical tool in understanding religious and social changes brought about by migration.

This research focuses on bargaining as a strategy used by Somali immigrants in Norway in negotiating power within and outside the households. I explore the gendered differences in negotiations and various bargaining strategies employed by Somali immigrants as they develop a sense of Somali identity that is often filtered through a religious and gendered lens. By bargaining power I mean an individual's interests or preferences and the ability to act on those interests or preferences. By negotiations I mean the process through which bargaining takes place until a decision is made subject to an individual's bargaining power. Further, the research provides a theoretical understanding of the linkages between gender, religion, immigration and outcomes within and outside the household.

According to Quisumbing and Maluccio (2000), in the pursuit for gender equity on an institutional level, women's access to options outside of the household could increase their bargaining power. Paid employment, human capital and transfers, they argue, are great outside options which are influential in enabling women to act on their preferences within the household. However, employment for example is rather ineffective because it breeds constraints in wage levels through gender gaps in income thus a reduced ability to provide liberation to women. Some outside options are therefore necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for women's bargaining power. This justifies the need to investigate different mechanisms that can be employed to avail outside options or fallback positions to women outside of the household.

Specific to this research is the gendered and power significance of active roles taken by Somali immigrant women in Muslim gender debates in their quest to improve women's prevailing conditions both within and outside of the household in the Norwegian society. Focus will be on Somali women's bargaining power through "Islamic feminism" and how they apply it to negotiate and challenge what they call the two patriarchal natures of Islam and Somali culture. It is important to stress that Somali "Islamic feminism" will be used in this research to refer to the informants' and participants' use of this practice while Islamic Feminism will be used when talking about the more established concept and political women's movement.

It is worth noting that I do not attempt to present an exhaustive list of the meanings of Islamic Feminism but an account based on the remarks and experiences of the informants themselves. According to (Tomas, 2011), there exists different schools of thought on Islamic Feminism and there is no one proper definition of Islamic Feminism hence why the Somali version of Islamic Feminism will appear in quotes in this research. By that premise, and in pursuit of sufficient conditions for women's bargaining power, I seek to investigate women's bargaining power through outside options provided by norms building in Somali "Islamic feminism".

## **1.1 Research Questions**

- How do Somali immigrant women in Bergen, Norway bargain for power within households? What constraints do they face?
- How do Somali immigrant women in Bergen bargain for their position and for access to resources within the Norwegian immigration context? What are the constraints?
- What mechanisms do Somali immigrant women devise to negotiate the challenges they face within and outside households?
- What are the outcomes and what implications do they have for the women and for Norway as the host country of immigration?



## **1.2 Thesis Outline and Presentation of Chapters**

While this Chapter presents the overall outline of the thesis, Chapter 2 reviews the background characteristics of participants and their host country Norway. Chapter 3 discusses relevant literature. In Chapter 4, the theoretical and conceptual framework employed to guide the interpretation of the study are discussed. Chapter 5 presents my empirical strategy, describes the data and discusses relevant analysis. Chapter 6 presents the empirical findings. This includes an analysis of informants' and participants' perceptions on integration, gender relations as a result of immigration and an analysis of their perception on the concept of Islamic Feminism. Chapter 7 sums up and discusses the findings and major conclusions on both integration policies and Somali "Islamic feminism" and their impact on women's bargaining power, and gives recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Background and Context**

### **2.1 Perspectives on Patriarchy**

In her attempt to theorize patriarchy, Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women”. Further, patriarchy is classified into private and public patriarchy. In private patriarchy, women have no access to employment and depend on one patriarch-the man. In public patriarchy, women gain access to employment but are treated differently from men in terms of equal pay and job status. Public patriarchy according to Walby (1990) exists in six structures: paid employment, housework, culture, sexuality, violence and the state. These different structures intersect with one another to affect the position of women, in differing degrees. Thus patriarchy exists in different natures and intensity depending on the society in question. The society (especially the West), Walby argues, has managed to move from private to public patriarchy in the 21 century. However, due to the patriarchal nature of capitalism, without a feminist movement women are at a loss due to their different disadvantaged positions outside of the household. This research explores the different patriarchal structures that work to disadvantage Somali women in an immigration context, the degree of interaction between private and public patriarchy, and how Somali women fight those patriarchal structures.

### **2.2 Attitudes towards Muslim Immigrants and their Integration in Europe**

In a report prepared for the European Commission and the OECD, Rudiger & Spencer (2003) present an exploration of the economic and social integration of immigrants in Europe. They note a continued exclusion of some immigrant communities from the main society even up to third generations in Europe. The far right was seen as capitalising on religious and ethnic differences in their pursuit of anti-immigration policies. The lesson provided for European Union policy makers was to address the barriers to integration in formulating their immigration policies. Furthermore, Rudiger & Spencer (2003) suggested that integration policies were to include all residents of any given European Union member state, without

placing the entire burden of integration solely on the shoulders of immigrants, particularly Muslim immigrants.

In their words:

“...policies must address the institutional barriers to integration, including discriminatory practises, and not only, for instance, migrants’ need to adapt and develop their skills. Exclusion and inequality have multiple causes and require a range of economic, social, cultural and political levers to address them: policies should not focus only on integration into the labour market, or on cultural attitudes, but take a holistic approach. ...the integration of Muslim minorities must be a particular priority, but has been neglected in the past” (Rudiger & Spencer 2003: 41).

However, despite these recommendations almost a decade ago, Lentin & Titley (2011) note that there has been a rise in anti-immigrant sentiment in Europe and North America. This has further polarized Islam and the West, further pushing Somali immigrants to the bottom end of the social hierarchy. Results from my fieldwork also affirm this marginalization of Muslims immigrants. Somali immigrants, like other Muslim immigrants in Europe have an ‘image’ problem: they are *perceived* as struggling with embracing the equality of men and women by virtue of religion. Gender relations among Muslim societies in Europe are viewed from a negative and over-simplified perspective by non-Muslims (Silvestri, 2008: 3).

Consequently, the West has formed “monolithic image of Islam as a ‘fundamentalist’ religion that by default ‘submits’ women”. This has led to extensive coverage by the media on the Islamic veil, ignoring crucial aspects of Muslim women such as their hopes, aspirations and expectations (Silvestri, 2008: 17). This image is exacerbated by the post 9/11 context which gave rise to the eyes of the world being steadfastly focused on Muslims along with a rise in the media coverage on Muslims. Suddenly, the veil was equated to terrorism which fueled the need to report on women such as in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia where women are expected to adhere to strict dress codes (Silvestri, 2008:18). At the same time, this research suggests that while marginalization is experienced in extreme forms, some Somali women are refusing to occupy positions of exclusion, both in their households and in Norwegian society as I show in Chapter 6.2 of the empirical chapters.

In her literature review article on the intersection of religion and migration among African immigrants, Mutema (2010) notes that studies on the role of religion in enhancing positive experiences of African immigrants is a less commonly adopted approach. In the few cases where it is mentioned, she argues, most studies focus on how religion impedes the integration of immigrants in their host countries. Mutema notes that in the context of Western countries, Islam as a religion is perceived as a threat to both civilisation and culture. Specific to Somalis in Norway, bringing up children in the way of Islam is considered a hindrance to integration into the non-Muslim Norwegian society (Mutema 2010: 272).

Mutema (2010: 274) views religion and Africanicity as two dimensions representing two sides of the same coin and thus recommends a more dynamic approach of the study of African migrants with respect to the two dimensions. In her words:

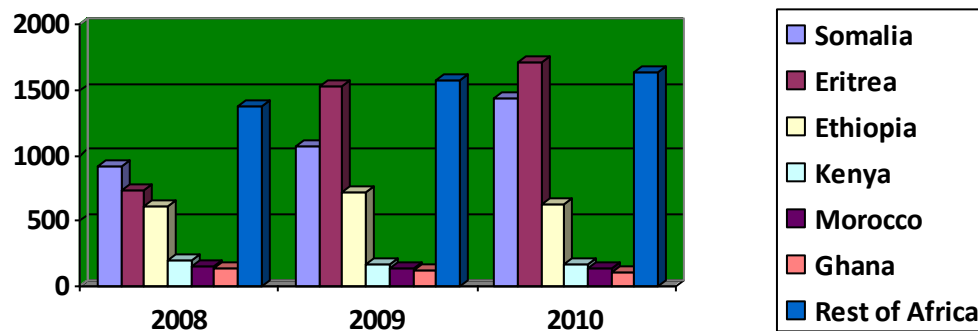
“.....when researchers investigate gender power relations in refugee settings, where men depend on donor aid or social welfare benefits and lose their stereotypical role of breadwinners, they need to be attentive to how religious teachings can be applied to justify violence against women and children. Researchers also need to be mindful of the ways in which religion can be used in the same settings to wade off any challenges to male authority in the home and in the refugee community” (Mutema 2010: 281).

By looking at the role of Islam in women’s bargaining power, this research hopes to bridge a gap noted by Mutema (2010: 281-282); that not so much effort has been made to incorporate gender into migration research at international level, with specific focus on African immigrants and religion. When it comes to identity formation within immigrant societies, religion offers a sense of belonging in a way that the host society may not be able to provide, such as in the presence of anti-immigrant policies and negative image from the media.

### 2.3 On Somalis and Clan Affiliation

The graph below shows immigration of African Populations in Norway by year and country. Somalia is ranked second in the number of immigration flows:

**Immigration by African Country**



Source: Author's own graph based on figures from Statistics Year Book Norway, 2011.

Somalis immigration into Norway mainly started after the overthrow of Said Barre in 1991, which resulted in the civil war which still continues today in on Somalia. In his study of integration of Somalis in Norway, Ali (2010: 16) writes that Somali populations' arrival in Norway takes place through two alternatives. The first alternative is where they flee from Somalia to Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Egypt or Ethiopia- which are countries home to refugee camps run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (*UNHCR*). Moving from Somalia is in itself a difficult task and involves channels such as selling of assets and remittances from family members in order to afford transportation to the countries in question. Through a quota system, the *UNHCR* then resettles them in a country such as Norway to seek refuge. The second alternative is where they flee from Somalia into other countries from where they move to Norway without *UNHCR* assistance.

Fangen (2008: 26-28) writes that in Somalia, the clan determines cultural identity and social stratification. There are six main clans but there is no agreement on the exact ranking. Quoting Kusow (1998: 319), Fangen proceeds to note that based on the notion of having originated from a common ancestor, Somalis in Somalia view their identity as a given and not constructed. They therefore, according to Fangen's interpretation, see themselves as a people

that both biologically and culturally belong to one ethnic group. Despite these diverse clan differences, Somalis are generally viewed as ethnically and religiously homogenous with most of the population belonging to Islamic faith (Sunni-Islam). Since these clans are headed by men, I find it interesting to find out what happens after immigration. Do men still hold on to clans as a tool for bargaining?

Fangen (2008: 29) continues to note that the clan system has an effect on the positioning of the woman in Somalia. Under president Siyad Barre, in the 1970's and 1980's more women were involved in the political spheres, with Barre's wife heading the Somali Women's Democratic Organisation. Among the issues the organisation dealt with were equal pay for equal work, equal rights between men and women in marriage when it came to inheritance and divorce issues. However, all this was brought to a halt when the war broke out and clan antagonism increased. The clan structures made it difficult for women to participate in the political life because women were no longer allowed to participate in political spheres. Relevant to this study, the fact that gender polarisation became intensified in Somalia shortly before Somalis emigrated en masse as refugees makes me curious about the direction this antagonism takes upon immigration, coupled with the need to craft a new Somali identity in the Diaspora.

UNICEF's article "*Women's rights in Islam and Somali Culture*" (2002) calls on the participation of Islamic religious leaders and clan leaders in exploring the rights of women in both Islam and Somali culture. The document highlights that Somali culture is inherently patriarchal and heavily influenced by Islam. In spite of the apparent position held by Somali women in the home, this is no guarantee that they can exercise their rights, the article notes. The Somali woman's strength is a product of war whose aftermath makes it necessary for women to be self-sufficient and work outside the home.

The methodology employed by UNICEF in the production of the 2002 article was two research teams comprising both women and men who were knowledgeable on issues pertaining both Islam and gender. Both groups did an in-depth study of Islamic law (*Shari'a*) and Somali customary law (*Xeen*). Women rights were studied under two umbrellas of

CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) and Koran/Hadith (*stories from Prophet Mohammed*). The findings of the research teams were that a woman's place in Islam is determined by Islamic law while a woman's place in culture, is determined by cultural laws. In the case of Somalis, there exists an intersection between Somali culture and Islam as religion. For instance, in Somali traditional culture, a woman is expected to join her husband's lineage upon marriage, after having lived with her family, just like in Islam. However, paradoxically, in terms of clans and traditions, a Somali woman is not assimilated into her new husband's lineage because she is still connected to her father's lineage through birth. Thus, inasmuch as the ideal position for a woman is to feel a sense of belonging from her new family, the realistic position is that the women appear lost and with an apparent lack of identity (UNICEF 2002: 5).

The socio-economic situation of both men and women greatly affects the interpretation and application of Islamic view of women's rights. The impact of the war in Somalia has led to the victimization of women. Lack of proper state structures has led to scarcity of women in the public roles and hence propagation of traditional roles through clan systems that are headed and managed by men as exemplified by the following quote from the article:

"In practice, customary law is pervasive, undermining the application of Islamic law... women can be particularly vulnerable to the substitution of customary law to Sharia law. Elders routinely exert pressure on women to settle out of court through traditional channels, thus forfeiting their legal rights...the primary duty of women is to maintain the home, provide support to her husband, and bearing, raising and teaching her children "(UNICEF 2002: 15, 20).

However, women in the Diaspora have helped set up NGO's and advocate for women's rights in Islam in Somali culture. This has led to conflicting traditional roles of women and what Somali needs from women in their nation building efforts (UNICEF 2002: 6). I find this study by UNICEF relevant because it deals with Somali women in Somalia and thus provides a valuable background to understanding the gender relations and bargaining practices in a migration context.

## 2.4 Integration of Somali Immigrants in Norway

Norway, like many other Western countries, has rejected assimilation as a policy goal and adopted, in its place, an integration policy. All immigrants in Norway are thus expected to integrate into the Norwegian society, by which, theoretically it is meant that they should participate in the Norwegian culture without necessarily shedding the ethno-cultural identity they bring with them from their original countries (Fangen, 2008: 38-39). To facilitate the integration policy into practice, exclusive to refugees, the Norwegian government assists in the integration process by offering an introduction scheme for refugees and family members reunited with them (SOPEMI, 2011). Somali refugees on arrival in Norway first stay at a reception centre. It is only after their application is processed and they are accepted as asylum seekers that they qualify for the integration program. The programme is organised by local municipalities, is compulsory for refugees between 18 and 55 years, and must be completed within the first five years of their stay in Norway. The Introduction Centre for Refugees is responsible for the program in Bergen which is tailored to individual needs and abilities and basically comprises basic skills in the Norwegian language, social studies and preparation, entry and participation in the labour market. According to the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi), the Integration Barometer shows that the two most important indicators of integration are Norwegian language proficiency and participation in the labour market (UDI, 2011).

The reason for my choice of Somali refugees as target informants is the cultural polarization between the Somali 'culture' as it is perceived in public discourse and in the media, and the Norwegian mainstream culture. I argue that this polarisation exposes Somalis to what Quesada (2011) calls 'structural vulnerability'<sup>1</sup>. Fangen (2008: 12) informs that Somalis in Norway find themselves in a lower hierarchical position compared to other immigrant populations. I justify another choice of focusing on Somalis as resulting from the negative image in the media and public about Somalis, insufficient research on the group, including their 'outsider within' status and cultural polarization (Fangen 2008:21).

---

<sup>1</sup> "Structural vulnerability refers to one's position in social hierarchies that imposes physical-emotional suffering on specific population groups and individuals in patterned ways...It often results in the formation of subjectivities that are socially depreciated. The vulnerability of an individual is produced by his or her location in a hierarchical social order and its diverse networks of power relationships and effects" (Quesada et al. (2011).



## **Chapter 3 Literature Review on Gender, Immigration and Islamic Feminism**

Literature reviewed includes journal articles, books, book reviews, conference papers based on their contribution and insights to this research. This chapter is grouped into three main categories. The first category involves a review on gender and immigration. The second category comprises literature on Somali immigrants in Norway and the last category reviews literature on Islamic Feminism.

### **3.1 Gender and Immigration**

Using an interdisciplinary approach, Donato et al. (2006) review a list of existing literature on Mexico-US migration with a view to understanding how gender and migration interact. They inform that there is need for gender in migration to be theorized, interpreted and understood properly (Donato et al. 2006: 23). They present two schools of thought. The first school of thought takes gender as a dichotomous (male and female) and then proceeds to make an analysis using quantitative approaches. The other school of thought sees gender as relational and constitutive of human behaviour. From that standpoint, they see gender as dynamic and intersecting with other variables such as class, ethnicity and race, a view which challenges and complements the simplistic male-female approach to gender and migration studies. Their recommendation on analyzing gender within migration is to take an integrated approach of the two schools of thought and tackle what differentiates them in a conscious manner in order to get the best out of what the two provide in their methodological approaches. This can be done for example by testing findings of a quantitative survey through ethnographic research especially in cases where it is not easy to explain gender differences by the theory that produced quantitative results (Donato et al. 2006: 18-19).

The use of ethnographic research appears to take an upper hand in their analyses. To illustrate this fully, Donato et al. (2006: 20) present an example from Parrado and Flippen (2005) who used both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse how power, labour and emotional attachments affect Mexican families who immigrate into USA. They found that women have a high tendency to find employment after immigration which leads to increased

disposable income at household level and eventually could contribute to gender equality. However, the disadvantage to that was that immigration encouraged husband-wife dependency by taking away extended family and social ties enjoyed in countries of origin. In view of this finding, it can be argued that dependence affects women significantly leading to their being prone to structural vulnerability which, in turn, breeds lower power with respect to gender relations on the part of the women. In such a situation of structural vulnerability, it can be argued therefore that immigration, on its own, does not necessarily lead to gender equality". As (Donato et al. 2006: 20) note, "...the connection between migration, employment, and female independence is not necessarily direct and uni-directional".

Their findings necessitate the need to go beyond labour markets and households and analyse relationships beyond the household. In their words:

"...future scholarship must take seriously the insistence of gender theorists that gender structures all human relationships and all human activities - not only for men and women but also across the many chronological and spatial fields of migration ...an important challenge in deepening and extending gender analysis is to see gender at work, in the so called public arenas of politics or immigration policy or in the global arena of international governance, for example, of refugee movements"(Donato et al. 2006: 20).

Donato et al. (2006) conclude by calling for future research that draws on the advantages and strengths of different school of thoughts and research that goes beyond just analyzing and theorizing gender in terms of men, women and households only. They also recommend analyses that portray gender at work and into analyzing gender at work and that helps move gender from the margins and into the disciplinary mainstream successfully (Donato et al. 2006:22-23).

In keeping with these suggestions, this research places gender at the centre by first looking at changing gender relations within Somali immigrant household. Thereafter, and based on gender intra-household relations, it explores gender extra-household relations.

### **3.2 Integration and Cultural Polarization of Somali Immigrants in Norway**

In her book, *Identity and Practice* (2008), Katrine Fangen deals with the themes of identity, class and gender among Somalis in Norway. Most of her research is qualitative, which gives her work much valuable insight into the Somali migration context and the lived experiences and voices of the immigrants themselves. In the period 2003-2007, Fangen conducted 50 life histories, as well as several group interviews with Somalis living in Norway. In addition to interviews, Fangen observed a few families during cultural arrangements. The population of Somalis interviewed were either born in Norway, in Somalia, or predominantly Muslim countries (Fangen 2008: 23-25). Fangen's main aim was to question the picture of Somalis in Norway as objects of humiliation and try to offer a different image, based on how Somalis view themselves. The aim had dual objectives of first considering Somalis as Norwegian Somalis or ethnic minority versus 'what is wrong with Somalis', while at the same time researching into and investigating how Somalis identify themselves and integrate or cope with the challenges they face in Norway (Fangen 2008: 11-12).

Fangen applied Crenshaw's (1988) concept of Intersectionality to see how different backgrounds (race, ethnicity, education, place of birth, migration histories, class and experiences) influence and affect how individual Somalis are placed in and cope with their marginalised hierarchical positions of marginality in the Norwegian culture and society. Her work therefore helps me understand where Somalis are coming from when they speak out against forms of marginalisation especially those connected with their struggles with integration. My goal in this study is to continue on this theme of marginalisation of Somali immigrants, however using a different lens, namely the gendered practice of intra-and –extra household bargaining.

Gabowduale 2010's research revolves around challenges faced by Somalis in their social cultural adaptation to the Norwegian society. He interviewed Somalis living in Oslo, Bærum and Asker regions of Norway. He had a total of 23 informants of both genders. Focus was also made on the trauma after escaping from war-torn Somali. The main finding was that due to their different way of upbringing, Somali immigrants face acculturation problems in

Norway. Their psychological welfare is also negatively affected by being brought up in war-torn areas.

Research about Somalis in Norway has seemingly mainly focused on themes revolving around humiliation. However, there seems to be a gap in knowledge of research focusing on the bargaining power of women in the household and how this affects intrahousehold resource allocations. Beyond understanding the challenges of Somalis, I find it important to understand what determines the levels of power within the household, the abuse of which could cause family conflict.

### **3.3 On Islamic Feminism**

#### **3.3.1 Feminism: A Loaded Term**

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word “Feminism” refers to the advocacy of women’s rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes. To quote Whitcher (2005: 12), by tracing its origin to the French Revolution, the term feminism “*carries with it a certain amount of definitional baggage*” because it originally sought rights that had been promised to women at that time. While the term is historically associated with calls for equality during the French Revolution, one cannot overlook the fact that women in other parts of the world have been struggling to assert their rights to social, political and economic equality. Times have changed, and so has the term: it has since then evolved to assume different meanings depending on the geographical and cultural context. In some cases, as in developing nations, former colonies and among marginalized populations in the West, new forms of feminism have emerged to challenge some of the very assumptions upon which Western feminists thought is based and to reassert the image of Woman through the lens of non-Western women themselves. Among these newer, alternative forms of feminism is Islamic Feminism.

### 3.3.2 Schools of Thought in Islamic Feminism

According to Tomac (2011), Islamic Feminism generally fights for gender equality from within Islam in all spheres of life, that is, social, political and economic aspects. The methodology in the application of Islamic Feminism entails reinterpreting Quran *Sunnah*(*practice of Prophet Mohammeds teachings*) and Quran *Hadith* (*stories from Prophet Mohammed*) through what are called *ijtihad*(*independent investigation of religious sources*) and *tafsir* (*Quran interpretation*). The underlying argument is that gender inequality in Islam stems from misguided interpretation of Islamic teachings by patriarchal minded individuals. Thus, just as male interpreters constructed their own interpretations of Islamic texts and sanctioned male dominance, so too can female interpreters contribute immensely towards the deconstruction and the challenging of male dominance (Tomac, 2011:14).

Islamic Feminism faces challenges from two camps. The first camp argues that Islam and feminism are completely polar concepts and as such, Islamic Feminism is an oxymoron. The second camp, views Islamic Feminism as an alternative to Western Feminism that is: it cannot survive on its own (Tomac, 2011:18). In this research, the literature reviewed on the first camp includes Ebadi (2009). The literature reviewed on the second camp includes Badran (2002). Literature reviewed on mainstream Islamic Feminism includes Moghadam (2002) and Abu-Lughod (2009).

Shirin Ebadi, the first Iranian and the first Muslim woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Norway disagrees with the notions of Islamic Feminism. She views Islamic Feminism as a great concept as long as it is wholesome and applies to all women: that is, as long as the adjective Islamic is not used to make it a concept unique to Muslims. According to Ebadi “Women’s rights, Feminism and democracy are universal concepts with clear definitions that are the same throughout the world. It makes no difference whether we are in the West or the East. Those who speak of Islamic Feminism, Islamic human rights and Islamic democracy are referring to something quite different from what is universally known as feminism, human rights and democracy”(Ebadi 2009).

Badran (2002) a historian, approaches Islam from a feminist perspective in writings, public talks and interviews on Islamic Feminism. In *Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name?* (2002b), Badran writes:

"Islamic Feminism, which derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence...Islamic Feminism advocates women's rights, gender equality, and social justice using Islamic discourse as its paramount discourse, though not necessarily its only one" ( Badran 2002).

As seen by her definition, Badran sees the relevance of Islamic Feminism beyond the confines of religion, hence her emphasis that the main discourse may be Islamic discourse but that there are other authoritative discourses emerging from it. Later in 2006, Badran continued to note that the core of Islamic Feminism is in explanation of gender equality using interpretation of Islamic texts. She noted the spread of Islamic Feminism through the internet and blogs and noted that:

"Islamic feminism has incurred enemies from within and without the Muslim community: (1) from within—men who fear the loss of patriarchal privilege and women who fear the loss of patriarchal protection, and 2) from without –those whose pleasure and politics are found in denigrating Islam as irredeemably anti-women" (Badran, 2006).

Similarly, Moghadam (2002) acknowledges the limits of relying on religious interpretations when fighting for women's rights. She argues that the applicability of religious interpretations depends on the prevailing social context. Human and women's rights are best sought after in contexts where proper institutions are in place to bring it into fruition. Moghadam rejects the narrow definition of Islamic Feminism that treats Muslim women as a collectivity lacking agency. Instead, she acknowledges that Muslim women are different and characterized by diversity across geographical regions and cultures. As evidenced in my own research, in their pursuit for transformation and empowerment, different Muslim women will apply different strategies to assert and negotiate their position in and outside of the household. Moghadam thus refers to feminism as "a theoretical perspective and a practice that criticizes social and gender inequalities, aims at women's empowerment and seeks to transform knowledge - and in some interpretations, to transform socioeconomic structures, political

power, and international relations. Women, and not religion, should be at the center of that theory and practice" (Moghadam 2002: 1165).

Relevant to this study, I will explore the form of Islamic Feminism practiced by Somali immigrant women, and whether it improves their bargaining power, what battles they face in promoting Somali "Islamic feminism" and the implications for Somali women who are not members of this grassroots association.

Tahir-ul-Qadri (2011) argues that gender equality is fundamental and part of the jurisprudence of Islamic teachings. Gender inequality among Muslims is therefore not faith-based. Tahir-ul-Qadri quotes a verse from the Quran: "And according to usage, women too have rights over men similar to the rights of men over women" (al-Quran, 2: 228). He interprets this to mean that rights which men enjoy are obligations to women and similarly, rights of women are obligations to men. However, men are at a higher rank in responsibility sphere than women (al-Quran, 2:228), "Men, however, have an advantage in that men bear the responsibility to protect and ensure the women have their rights fulfilled. The whole responsibility of maintaining social and economic obligations is, according to Islamic teachings, shouldered by the man. Any problems with gender distribution of responsibilities are cultural, social, economic or sociological and hence not necessarily religious. Comparing the Islamic world to the Western world, he notes that five women have become prime ministers in Islamic countries while countries in the west such as the USA and most European countries are yet to have a female head of state. Furthermore, women rights were only granted in the 20th century in the West while they have been around since inception of Islam. Religion or rather Islam is not correlated to gender inequality.

Bangstad (2007) provides a background to Islamic Feminism. He writes that Islamic Feminism is based on an Islamic faith framework. He notes however that there does not seem to exist a unified movement with regard to theory and practice. He prefers to use the term "Islamic Feminisms" because very few things are crystal clear and can be determined with certitude. Bangstad further writes that Islamic Feminism involves re-interpretation of Islamic texts so as to promote women rights both in the 'Muslim world' and also Muslims living in

Western societies. Islamic Feminism fights two battles: one against patriarchy oriented Muslim men within Islam and the other against Western secular Feminism which they accuse of having a condescending attitude towards Islam. Western Feminism, according to Bangstad, is secular by virtue of not being rooted in any religious faith. Furthermore, according to Bangstad, western feminists take the view that women in the 'Muslim world' must "throw off the yoke of religion" in order to have equal rights with men. Secular feminism is thus seen as a better and more viable alternative for women to achieving meaningful liberation. The only paradoxical similarity between secular feminism and Islamic feminism is their view of Muslim women as objects of male control (Bangstad 2007).

Bangstad (2007) further notes that Western Feminism does not have a monopoly in fighting for women rights. In their works, contemporary Islamic Feminists such as Egyptian Huda Shaarawi, Lebanese Nazira Zain al-Din and Moroccan feminist and activist Fatima Mernissi build on the pioneering works of Islamic women writers and activists as early as the 1920's. They question conventional images of Muslim women and instead reassert a more diverse image of Muslim women that appears identifiable to women in the Muslim world. With colonization in the 1950's and 1960's, this cooled down and was dominated by secular Feminists. Furthermore most of the Islamic Feminists were also involved in political issues at that time, something that watered down Islamic Feminism. Islamic Feminism then reemerged in the 1980's fiercely anchoring their stand for women rights on the Quran. This eliminates a lot of female candidates who are not proficient in the English language. Bangstad writes that most of the western/secular Feminists take the view that secular feminism should be the norm. Those who mean otherwise such as Islamic Feminists are seen as outcasts and given a cold shoulder. The challenges facing Islamic Feminism at the moment is the tendency to approach the movement in English instead of the language of the Quran (Bangstad, 2007).



## **Chapter 4: Conceptual Framework**

This chapter will explore the theory of Intersectionality, Giddens's structuration theory, and the Bargaining Framework of household decision making processes. The goal is to illuminate the ways in which Somali immigrants perceive and reconstruct their worlds, in gendered ways, in an immigration context.

### **4.1 Intersectionality: A Relational Model and Theory of Inequality**

According to (Kerner 2009), the term "Intersectionality" is often associated with gender, race and class. This can be attributed to the origins of the term and theory of intersectionality. Intersectionality was first coined and proposed by Crenshaw (1989) as a method of conceptualising identity and oppression. Crenshaw suggested that social and cultural categories such as race, gender, class operate and interact on multiple and simultaneous levels in ways that create conditions of inequality (Kerner, 2009: 2). As Kerner (2009) notes, intersectionality has advanced from a concept focusing solely on black feminism to an analysis of different systems of inequality and multiple forms of marginalisation: that is, going beyond race, gender and class and incorporating other forms of social identifiers. Referring to the sensitivity of 'race' as a topic of discussion, Kerner (2009) explains how scholars avoid the usage of 'race' only in their analyses, choosing instead to look at ethnicity, nationality and religion (Kerner, 2009: 2).

Using Germany as an example, Kerner explains that to theorise and do an intersectional analysis, one needs to first find out what the cause of inequality is. This could be gender, patriarchy, nationalism or the question could be left open-ended. Second in the analysis, is determining how one can understand what happens when the various forms of inequality meet, and conceptualise what is happening at the intersection of those inequalities (Kerner 2009: 4). This second analysis or question is answered through first acknowledging that there are micro-, macro- as well as meso levels of inequality. On the intersection of sexism and racism, Kerner (2009:5) brings in the concepts of 'gendered racial norms' and 'radicalised gendered norms' which are referred to as "the pluralisation and internal differentiation of common diversity categories." To explain the two concepts, Kerner notes

that gender norms and stereotypes faced by Muslim or black women, for example, are totally different from those experienced by women belonging to other 'racial' categories. Similarly gender norms and stereotypes experienced by the same Muslim or black women are entirely different from those experienced by their male counterparts. So here the concepts of gender and norms and 'race' and norms intersect on different dimensions (Kerner 2009:5). To quote Nash(2008), "ultimately, intersectionality seeks to demonstrate the racial variation(s) within gender and the gendered variation(s) within race through its attention to subjects whose identities contest race-or-gender categorisations" (Nash 2008:3).

Moving from an individual to a structural level, the same happens at the intersection of institutions, for instance, households, migration policies, culture and the labour market. For example, the labour market could intersect with households and norms. Here, despite the fact that middle and upper class women go to work, the very reality that most maids are also women means that the sexual division of labour creates and strengthens power hierarchies and hence inequalities among women.

Introducing the concept of 'gendered ethnicization', Kerner (2009) explains how 'racial' and ethnic identity formation interlock when it comes to immigrants. Referring to immigrants in Germany, Kerner writes that identity formation of women immigrants in Germany always tags along ethnicity. In other words members of an ethnic minority stand out and are seen as very distant from the ethnic majority population. Thus, the two go hand in hand, and are inseparable. It is thus important to look at multi-dimensional aspects of intersectionality when making an analysis of a research. According to Kerner (2009:5-6), an example of how such an analysis could be conducted is to pose the question: How does gender and 'race' intersect in the institutional concept of immigration? Kerner concludes that "the intersectionality paradigm has served to encourage complexity to stimulate creativity, to discourage premature closure and to lead the way towards new questions and research areas within feminist theory and beyond" (Kerner 2009: 6). I will apply the same concept in this research in a similar way to Kerner, however, with a view to illuminating variations, say among Somali women who belong to the Somali "Islamic feminism" and those who do not.

## **4.2 Giddens's Structuration Theory and Women's Bargaining Power**

### **4.2.1 The Structure and Agency Framework**

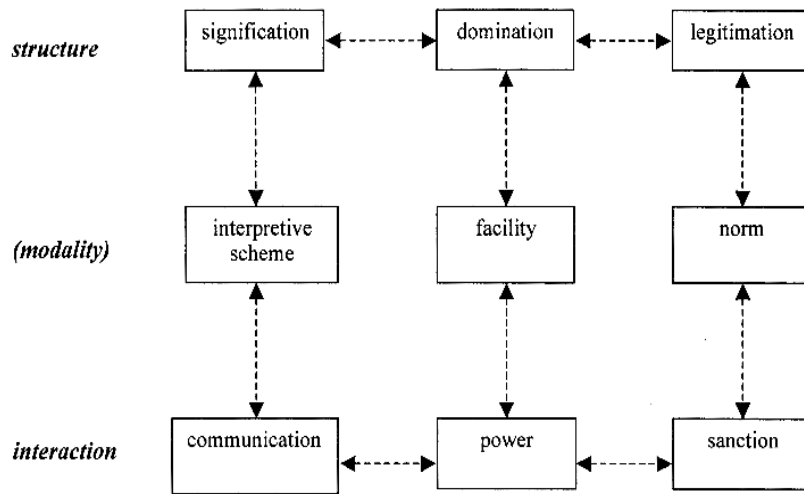
Agency refers to “the capacity of an agent to act in preserving a moral standard of some accepted social norms... an agent is an individual, engaged with a social structure... and an agent's direct knowledge of his society informs his action” (Saha, 2011: 1). Giddens defines structures as “rules and resources, organized as properties of social systems”(Reus, 2009 ). In his structuration theory, Giddens criticises the tendency in the works of Weber, Marx, Durkheim, of leaning on either the structure alone or agency alone to explain individual actions and social order. Giddens chooses rather to transcend the dichotomy or dualism of structure and agency and to bring in the reflexivity dimension which yields the theory of structuration:

“The concept of ‘structuration’, in the sense specific to Giddens’ ‘structuration’ theory, involves thinking of objectivity and subjectivity with respect to the formation of structures, as constitutive of each other, and hence as not being logically exclusive. For him the relation between structure and agency is one of ‘duality’, not dualism” (Parker, 2000: 9).

Gauntlett (2002) explains the core of Giddens theory of structuration as follows:

“Human agency (micro level activity) and social structure (macro level forces) continuously feed into each other. The social structure is reproduced through repetition of acts by individual people (and therefore can change)”. In other words, “there is a social structure – traditions, institutions, moral codes and established ways of doing things; but it also means that these can be changed when people start to ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them differently”. Structuration is thus the conditions that govern this process (Gauntlett 2002: 92-94).

Anthony Giddens emphasizes the importance of the interplay between the structure and agency as explained in the diagram below:



Source: Adapted from Giddens (1984) p. 29

The diagram as pointed out by Bass Reuss (2009) can be explained as follows: the top layer represents the structure; the bottom layer represents interactions among agents. For purposes of this study, the structure represents the Norwegian integration system and the social norms of Somalis. The agent represents the Somali refugees. Both layers are connected by the middle layer of modalities. This is a two way street, meaning structures influence the agents and agents influence the structure. The structure comprises three dimensions: signification (production of meaning), domination (degree of power) and legitimation (societal norms, values and standards). These three dimensions are translated by agents as communication, power and sanctions. Modalities are the means by which structures are translated into actions. This means that modalities can be influenced. An individual reflects on his or her position in the structure and acts accordingly, meaning that agency and structure are complimentary forces or two sides of the same coin. Using their knowledge of existing structures, individuals reflect on and use interpretive schemes to communicate meanings of the structure. Restrictive structures, male dominance for example, is capable of revision and transformation if agents (women) have bargaining power.

#### 4.2.2 Interactions among Reflexive Agents

Central to Giddens' structuration theory is that in the first place, individuals have the structure (rules and resources) ingrained in them. Consequently, individuals use those rules as formulas to solve life's different problems, through interaction, in a reflexive manner. Rules define rights and obligations, and failure to oblige can lead to sanctions. Possession of resources (such as power) translates to ability to transform the rules through mobilising power (Turner, 1986: 971-975).

Giddens' structuration theory has it that the basic domain of social science is social practices, and not individual experiences or aspects of the structure. Repeated actions by agents lead to the existence of the structure meaning that the structure does not exist on its own. The structure comprises rules and resources that together form properties of the social system (Turner, 1986: 971-975). For example, European immigration policies and attitudes do not exist without Europeans who form the attitude and policies of immigrants. Similarly, specific to the Somali society, the clan system does not exist outside of the Somali people that make up the structure of loyalty to clannism.

Gauntlett (2002) emphasises that to understand Giddens, one has to have the phrase '*post-traditional society*' imprinted in the back of their head because that is the theme that runs through his work. Individuals in society are reflexive on how they view their past, how it has impacted on their current state and how they choose to act accordingly. This he calls 'modern reflexivity' meaning that people do not walk or follow a path blindly just because generations before them walked through that path. "Societies which try to 'modernise' in the most obvious institutional sense –by becoming something like a capitalist democracy – but which do not throw off other traditions, such as gender inequalities, are likely to fail in their attempt to be successful modern societies" (Gauntlett 2002: 95-96). Given how diverse the informants in my study are and how varied their perspectives were, it will be informative and corrective to show how Somali immigrants actively make necessary adjustments upon immigration.

The theory is instrumental in this research in examining different structures that affect Somali immigrants: that is, the rules, resources and obligations that affect their immigration experiences in a gendered manner. This section considers the roles of the structures such as the Norwegian society, the media, the Somali traditional culture and Islam in women's intra- and-extra household bargaining power. Reflexivity of Somali women on all these structures will be studied in order to see how the immigrants are both enabled and constrained by the structures and actors within the different structures. Contrary to media representations of Somali immigrants as tied to tradition and rigid values, the structuration theory has the potential to shed light on the ways in which Somali immigrants and specifically immigrant women adapt their traditions, values and practices in new contexts. In this way, they exemplify what Giddens calls a "post-traditional society" (Gauntlett, 2002).

As noted in Chapter 2, the European society is changing into a diverse and multicultural society as a result of immigration. Muslim immigrants add a not so appreciated religious aspect to diversity. However, due to the negative perceptions of Muslim immigrants, the European society is plagued with fears. The Europeans hold fears as to the future of Europe while the Muslim immigrants deal with the negative image problem perpetrated by the media. Structuration theory will further be used to show how the term Muslim is defined by different actors in the society and how different sources of power such as the media dominate or define what a Muslim is, and how Somali women are constrained by such power. At the same time the research looks into Somali traditional culture as a source of power that defines what it is to be a woman and how the Somali women themselves challenge the traditions using Islam. As for modernity, I will look into Norwegian norms versus Islamic norms as well as Somali norms versus Islamic norms as experienced by Somali women themselves.

I choose structuration theory because, despite its criticisms, I find it to be the best theory in my analyses of different structures and actors in this research and how these are interlinked. Referring to feminist theory, Walby (1996) notes how feminist theory seems to be in a dilemma as to what degree women are affected by patriarchy. If one was to apply the structure approach only, it could make women appear to be 'passive victims' of the structure

denying them of their agency role. On the other hand, if one was to highlight on the women's movements and their political action, then there is a danger in portraying women as "colluding with their patriarchal oppressors". This implies that if the women have the capacity to achieve full agency in bargaining and decision-making, then they themselves are responsible for having failed to act on their current oppressions in the first place. Thus one has to avoid dichotomising structure and agency and find a middle ground between the two, something Anthony Giddens has done. Reflexivity of individual actors and institutions/structures are thus complements, not substitutes. For instance, as Walby notes, men have traditionally had the upper hand in collective agency, which is why they have managed to establish patriarchal structures. This has not been the case with women though (Walby 1996:1-3). Yet, it does not rule out the potential that women through their collective agency can reverse and reclaim the gains men have made through patriarchy in the form of male dominance as this research shows.

### **4.2.3 Understanding Intersectionality within Structure and Agency**

McCaughan (1993) writes that the reason why social scientists and political activists have failed to understand why cultural homogenisation and universalization of Western values has failed is that they do not fully grasp the relationship between structure and agency. Referring to liberalism, Marxism and modernisation theories of the 1950's and 1960's, McCaughan (1993) notes that modernisation theories were geared towards universalization of Western values. It was assumed that differences such as those of race, nationality and ethnicity would pale into insignificance when and if all nations progressed towards modernity: that is, that if all nations progressed towards a middle class society, then hegemonic institutions such as market institutions, liberal-democratic institutions would remove race, class and ethnic differences. Foreign direct investment and aid to the global south would catalyse the process to bring those countries into stabilisation in terms of middle-class prosperity (McCaughan, 1993: 1).

However, world events prove otherwise with people moving towards ethnicity than towards middle-class prosperity leading to difficulties in homogenising the world's systemic structures through globalisation. Social theory has approached this problem by trying to theorise and understand both the structure and agency on different realms. Marx

conceptualised structure and agency by focusing on the “objective realm of structure”. He is criticised for over emphasising on capitalism and class and not giving much weight to conflict and struggle within systems, such as patriarchy and family. Durkheim focused on division of labour in society to understand structure and agency. He is criticised for leaving out power and domination within systems. McCaughan advocates for a union of both structure and agency (McCaughan, 1993: 2).

### **4.3 The Bargaining Framework of Household Decision Making Processes**

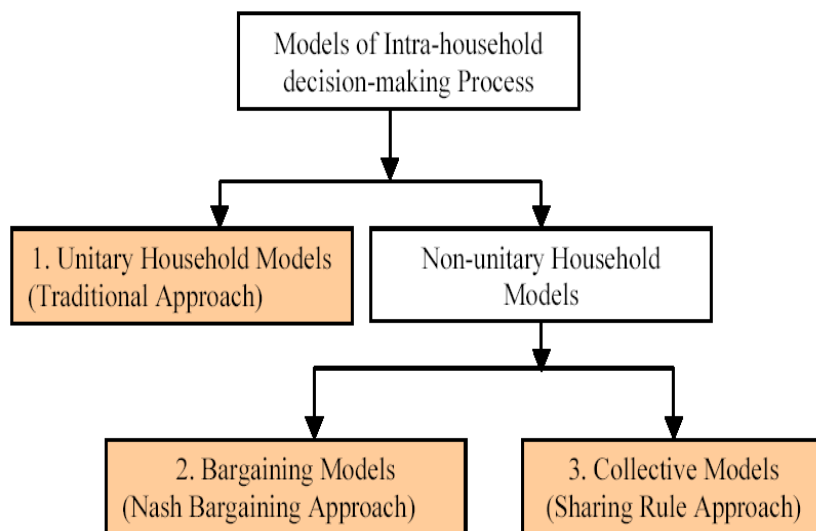
Studies done on intra-household resource allocation in the last two decades have tended to by and large focus on women’s bargaining power and the effect this has on their welfare and that of the children. These include, among others, Amartya Sen(2001), Dito (2011), Kabeer (2000), Quisumbing & Maluccio (2000), Doss (2011), Agarwal (1997) and Govindasamy & Malhotra (1996).

The empirical findings from these studies essentially show that gendered norms and power structures of any one society reflect largely on the gendered roles within the households. Access to and control over resources is seen as an indicator of women’s bargaining power. The studies have thus endorsed and recognized that improving women’s bargaining power has a positive effect on well-being at both household and individual levels. The studies link the imbalance of power within the household to differences in access to resources and welfare inequalities. The studies majorly focus on the effect of women’s bargaining power on outcomes such as expenses on food and clothing and reproductive decisions.

According to Hoddinott et al. (1997), the theory of intrahousehold allocation was formulated to help understand the decision-making process that leads to allocation and access to resources within the household in developing countries. However material can be drawn from the theory and applied to another geographical focus because most people make their decisions within the framework of the household. There are two approaches to the theory of



intra-household allocation of resources: the unitary model and the non-unitary models as explained by Fukuda et al. (2005) in the figure below:



Source: (Fukuda et al 2005:1644)

The unitary approach is based on the rationality assumption that households act as one unit with one altruistic decision maker. In decision making therefore, households are assumed to have similar preferences, with no asymmetric information. The non-unitary models on the other hand are conflict-based and classified into bargaining and collective models. The bargaining models treat bargaining power of different household members as endogenous to the decision making process: that is, every individual has different needs and the strength of the bargaining power influences the decision making process (Fukuda et al. 2005:1644).

Many writers have tested the unitary model of household resource allocation and found it inappropriate because it does not account for individual identities of household members. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (2001) views the household as comprising both discrimination and cooperation with a bias against women. On women's agency, Sen(2001) notes a positive link between women's agency and social achievements. In his words:

“An enhancement of women's active agency can, in many circumstances, contribute substantially to the lives of all people - men as well as women, children as well as adults. As many studies have brought out, the greater empowerment of women tends to reduce child neglect and mortality, cut down fertility and overcrowding, and more generally, broaden social concern and care” (Sen, 2001).

Agarwal et al. (2003) examine the challenges of Amartya Sen's work. They note that Sen's work implicitly meant that proper agency of women means women being given a chance to have their voices heard and to also be involved in decision making in various policy spheres.

Kabeer (2004) examined the two competing models of explaining intrahousehold resource allocation and concluded that in the study of gender relations, bargaining models of the household have more advantages than those based on altruism because they factor in inequalities within the household. According to Kabeer (2004), the reason why policy makers often end up overlooking women's needs is that most policies targeting household allocation are shaped and informed by economists' formal models which ignore crucial factors that have a powerful influence on allocation such as kinship, parenthood, norms, intimate relations of marriage and other everyday realities. Economists explain behaviour in terms of prices and incomes. However, culture can and does affect the rationality assumption inherent in economics. Thus "an inclusion of allocative rules, aside from those of the market would considerably improve our understanding of household processes and outcomes"(Kabeer, 2004:134).

The bargaining framework model will be used to analyze gender relations in intra- and extra-household dynamics and how these are socially constructed and contested. It will also be used to check for gender asymmetries. Defining gender relations as "relations of power between men and women", Agarwal notes that gender relations interact with structures such as class and ethnicity to influence both economic and ideological outcomes of households (Agarwal 1997:1-2). According to Kandiyoti (1988:274), women make strategies based on given constraints such as patriarchal bargains, an area that will be explored in the discussion on intersectionality.

The bargaining framework incorporates both conflict and cooperation in its analysis. On one instance, households are better off cooperating than not cooperating. But what happens when cooperation fails or is no longer an option? This leads to bargaining. The

person who gains is the person who has the highest bargaining power in that particular decision in question. In other words, the outcome of the decision-making is determined by the strength of the “fall-back position”: that is, how strong an individual’s best alternative is if they do not succeed in the negotiation. Without a fallback position, an individual is left with no other alternative than to negotiate until a deal is reached, even if that agreement is unacceptable. To put it in Agarwal’s terms, when it comes to pooled income for example, “Household members bargain over the use of the pooled income, the outcome depending on their bargaining power, determined by their respective fall-back positions”( Agarwal 1997:4).

When it comes to determinants of intra-household bargaining power, Agarwal points out that there are many factors that can determine an individual’s bargaining power. It could be, among others, their level of economic endowment or institutions in place. However, these very factors that determine an individual’s bargaining power could themselves be subject to bargaining. For instance, in decision making concerning, say household financial investments, it can be argued that women in employment have a stronger bargaining power than unemployed women because they bring financial contribution to the table. However, disposal of same finances that give the women bargaining power could be subject to bargaining, what Agarwal refers to as “sequentially interlinked bargaining” (Agarwal, 1997: 7).

According to Kleist (2010), since the onset of war in 1988-1991, most Somalis live abroad either as refugees or reunified with families as a result of the war in Somalia. Socio-economic change has led to drastic changes in gender relations. Thus, understanding the resources allocated is vital to projecting possible gendered outcomes as this study aspires to do. Kleist shows how Somali immigrant men in Denmark try to restore what the article refers to as a ‘failed masculinity’, and how they are often caught between two worlds: what was (in Somalia) and what is (in the welfare states). In the study, Somali men are portrayed as complaining about how the West influences their women and allegedly takes the culture away from them in the name of equal rights. From a reading of the challenges faced by Somali men in Denmark, one would assume as inconceivable, confronting the factors that give rise to failed masculinities and to an apparently hostile relationship between Somalis and the Danish society.

According to Kandiyoti (1988), only through understanding women's constraints, and then finding out how the women strategize and cope can we better understand patriarchy, hence why this thesis will focus on strategies employed by women and how they achieve their bargaining power. Kandiyoti in describing male dominance dichotomizes male dominance into a sub-Saharan African pattern and an East Asia and Muslim Middle East pattern-which Kandiyoti refers to as classic patriarchy (Kandiyoti, 1988). Somali immigrants possess both African and Muslim identities making their analyses rather interesting.

In their work, Quisumbing & Maluccio (2000) and Doss (2011) apply an economics perspective and focus on ownership of assets as the main variable of interest in the indication of a woman's bargaining power. The assets focused on are current assets (assets in a woman's possession now), assets possessed at marriage and assets expected in the case of negative shocks such as financial crisis in the household or dissolution of marriage. According to these authors, a woman holding current assets is likely to spend it on food and other welfare items. A woman with a fall-back position outside of the marriage, for example, one who is entitled to say, half of the property upon divorce, has a higher bargaining power within the household.

The catch here according to Quisumbing & Maluccio (1999) and Doss (1997) is that even though a woman in possession of current assets is likely to spend it on household welfare items such as food, if the bargaining processes of how she gained possession of the asset and how she could lose the asset is not addressed, then ownership of assets is correlated to but not a causality of bargaining power. For instance, if a woman knows that she will get full custody of children and hence financial responsibility of children if she gets divorced, then she may not really have a much bargaining power after all. In this instance, ownership of assets is correlated to bargaining power but the woman considers other underlying issues hence ownership of assets is not really a cause or source of bargaining power. Even though she gets to dispose the asset at will, she might not employ confrontational strategies meaning she really does not have power within (Dito, 2011: 10-11). A crucial question that runs

through the four questions in my research is: What really causes or facilitates bargaining power among Somali immigrant women in Bergen?

Similar to works mentioned above, the study by Govindasamy and Malhotra (1996) focused on human capital as the ideal position and an indicator of women's bargaining power. In their view, a woman's level of education determines her bargaining power especially in fertility decisions. As such, they would argue, it is highly unlikely that an educated woman would subject herself to restricting norms against the use of contraceptives, for example. However, realistic positions are that most women do not have the education needed to know their rights for example. Can this be said for Somali Muslim women? That is an issue that will be addressed in the empirical chapters.

Agarwal (1997) challenges future studies of household bargaining power to go beyond the household and concludes that studying households at household level only, could lead to inaccurate results. Agarwal identifies some quantitative and qualitative dimensions that are usually ignored in the studies of household dynamics. First, she outlines the effects of social perceptions in the valuation of women's needs. Secondly, complicated social norms. Thirdly, the dichotomy of altruism versus self-interest, that is, how age, gender, religion, class, race, context and other factors motivate an individual to either altruism or self-interest. Fourthly, Agarwal suggests the inclusion of institutions in household analysis. Thus, in her view, negotiations should not just be on household resources, they should be over social norms and should also include constructions and reconstructions of gender roles (Agarwal 1997:37-38).

One gap in the mentioned literature is the failure to research on what happens to women from low income countries in the context of immigration to the global North. Does the power balance in the household remain the same? What affects this transition and do the women acquire better bargaining positions within and outside the household? These are questions incorporated in the main research questions and whose answers are more fully covered in the empirical chapters and subsequent discussion. I now turn to the methods I used in conducting the research and ethical considerations that emerged in my data collection.

## **Chapter 5 Data Collection, Methods and Ethical Considerations**

### **5.1 Position as Researcher**

This being my first attempt at employing qualitative methods of research, I found the incorporation of ethnographic methods of study highly enriching in terms of answers they were able to provide, that quantitative methods I am more familiar with would possibly not have been able to address. I viewed myself as both an insider and outsider while conducting the research. As a non-ethnic Somali researcher, I was an outsider based on the fact that I was not studying my own immigrant community. As a non-European researcher, I was an insider by virtue of belonging to the Kenyan immigrant community meaning I was well-versed with some of the implications of immigration. These two simultaneous identity statuses might have affected the dynamics and outcomes of the research with regard to my relationship with research participants, the kind of data I collected and how I interpreted the everyday reality of the research participants. In ways similar yet distinctively different from the Somali anthropologist, Kusow (2003), I believe that the data I was able to produce is heavily influenced by the ever-shifting positions in which I was, as both insider and outsider (Kusow 2003: 592-593).

### **5.2 Selection of Informants**

In the period between June-August 2012, I conducted 16 in-depth interviews and four focus group discussions with Somali immigrants living in Bergen, Norway. While I started my fieldwork with a list of several selection criteria, the eventual sample I ended up with was affected by circumstances such as the timing of the fieldwork, in the middle of the Norwegian summer holidays, which partly coincided with the month of Ramadan ( 20<sup>th</sup> July-20<sup>th</sup> August 2012). It depended on who was available and willing to be interviewed and on the availability of my research assistant and translator Abdul, who I recruited based on his relatively high level of education, being well-known and respected in the Somali community and also on his work experience as translator in the Bergen municipality.

A requirement for possible participants was that they had to identify themselves as Somalis and at least 18 years of age. The time of residence in Norway varied and as such there was a variation in citizenship status. But they all considered themselves ethnic Somalis. Given that I wanted to focus on women's bargaining power, the male to female distribution of my research sample was skewed with more women participants and focus group discussions. This sample is listed in table 1 and 2 below:

**Table 1: Overview of the Participants**

	<b>PARTICIPANTS PSEUDONYM</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>STAY IN NORWAY</b>	<b>CIVIL STATUS</b>	<b>NO OF CHILDREN</b>	<b>"SOMALI ISLAMIC FEMINISM"</b>
1	FAUZIA	WOMAN	40-50	15 YEARS	DIVORCED	2	NON MEMBER
2	GHEDI	MAN	40-50	21 YEARS	DIVORCED	0	NON MEMBER
3	QAMAAN	MAN	30-40	11 YEARS	DIVORCED	4	NON MEMBER
4	AHMED	MAN	30-40	13 YEARS	MARRIED	2	NON MEMBER
5	SWALHA	WOMAN	20-30	6 YEARS	MARRIED	4	NON MEMBER
6	SULEIMAN	MAN	50-60	16 YEARS	MARRIED	6	NON MEMBER
7	YASMIN	WOMAN	20-30	10 YEARS	MARRIED	0	MEMBER
8	HAWA	WOMAN	30-40	12 YEARS	MARRIED	2	MEMBER
9	Zeinab	WOMAN	20-40	8 YEARS	SINGLE	0	MEMBER
10	Safiyo	WOMAN	20-40	6 YEARS	SINGLE	0	MEMBER
11	AMINA	WOMAN	20-40	10 YEARS	SINGLE	0	MEMBER
12	Lamin	MAN	20-40	9 YEARS	MARRIED	3	NON-MEMBER
13	Adija	WOMAN	20-30	13 YEARS	SINGLE	0	MEMBER
14	Miriam	WOMAN	30-40	5 YEARS	MARRIED	3	MEMBER
15	Moyo	WOMAN	40-50	4 YEARS	SINGLE	3	NON MEMBER
16	Ayan	WOMAN	20-30	7 YEARS	MARRIED	1	MEMBER

**Table 2: List of Focus Group Discussions**

<b>FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION</b>	<b>COMPOSITION</b>	<b>NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS</b>
1	MEN	13
2	WOMEN	20
3	WOMEN	5
4	WOMEN	9

For the purpose of this research, headship was associated to different factors including contribution to total household income, marital status, decision making capacity. The reason for choosing the Somali immigrant group was mainly the cultural polarization between both their host culture (Norway) and the culture of other immigrant groups which gave me an impression that the implications of immigration on households could have hit hardest among Somali households. From previous contact with Somalis in my home country Kenya, I reflected on Katrine Fangen who states that Somalis are the most homogenous group people in Africa despite their clan differences because 98% of the population are ethnic Somali (Fangen 2007: 28). I find this a highly debatable homogeneity given the length of the civil war. There must be some irreconcilable differences, which in my opinion are clan-based. As I remember Somali households in Kenya, some Somalis who had immigrated from northwest Somalia (Somaliland) actually claim to be non-ethnic Somalis and like to think of themselves as more Arabic than African. These Somalis from Somaliland belong to one single clan and have always wanted to break from mainland Somalia and stand alone as a country, claiming that if Djibouti can stand alone as a country, so can Somaliland. I find it puzzling that they are homogenous and at the same time want to create a clan based state in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the rest of the world is aiming at forming a globalized village such as the European Union and the upcoming African Monetary Union.

### **5.3 Procedure and Data Collection Methods**

The methodology involved one-on-one in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation and digital text analysis. I prefer to use the term digital text analysis because my methodology did really fit the method from the field of literature (humanities of books, religious scripts and so on. I mainly analyzed online blogs and other internet material. Adults between the ages of 20-55 were interviewed in order to include a multiplicity of voices to the research and hopefully achieve a multi-dimensional perspective of the Somali immigrant community in Bergen. Languages used were Norwegian, Somali, English and Swahili (in order of frequency) and participants had the choice to be interviewed in any one of the languages.



Interviews were conducted after 1700 hours during weekdays, and at varied times during weekends. The reason is that everyone involved in the process had various concerns and commitments during the day, work being the major commitment. Most of the interviews were conducted in the participants' residence in the presence of Abdul. The other interviews were conducted at restaurants, coffee bars and other similar public settings. The interview guide evolved during the data collection phase to include emerging issues such as the use of contraceptives. I was concerned that this would have been too sensitive of a question but one participant and the research assistant advised me otherwise. Each interview lasted about 1-1,5 hours. Repeat interviews were conducted in order to seek clarification and additional information to previously asked questions especially where new understandings developed from interviewing other participants. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed at the end of each day and to my pleasant surprise, the participants did not refuse to have their voices recorded.

## **5.4 Interviews**

As I had learnt from my coursework, with interviews there are major differences. There are: (1) Structured interviews which are associated with quantitative data, (2) Semi-structured interviews, (3) Unstructured interviews which are also called in-depth interviews and (4) focus group discussions. I used a combination of 2, 3, and 4 above in order to provide a large data resource from which to draw meaning during the analysis stage of the research. In interviews where translation was required, conversations were translated to both the interviewer and participant simultaneously. I attributed this to the competence of the research assistant. Despite previous contact with Somalis, I was not very well-versed with the social norms and values of the Somali community. To address this issue, I applied the triangulation method of reading body language, repeat interviews and existing literature on Somalis in Norway on topics I did not understand properly and which might have been obvious to the participants.

All interviews started with the mention of confidentiality. Then the participants were requested to narrate their experiences in relation to, among others issues (1) challenges of settling in, (2) budget allocation and budget constraints, (3) asset formation and transfer, (4)

gender roles, (5) child upbringing and intergenerational conflicts and (6) the role of extended family members and clan membership. Certain questions were easier than others due to the emotions they invoked on the participants. An example of a question that invoked emotions was “*Has this household experienced any negative shocks due to immigration?*” At the end of each interview, the confidentiality issue was readdressed and participants thanked for their contribution to the research.

The fieldwork and interview process took a new turn upon interviewing the fifth participant (*hereinafter assigned pseudonym Yasmin*) who introduced me to Islamic Feminism, a concept I had never heard of before this particular interview. The interview lasted two hours as she spent a lot of time explaining the concept to me. After that interview, my view of how to approach the study of Somali households changed and I decided to introduce or add Islamic Feminism to household models - the structure that that I had originally intended to guide my study. The decision was made based on the fact that it was clear from the previous four participants that Islam guides household decision-making process. Never had I imagined that a participant would propel the research forward in such a substantial manner. I thought I had full control of the concepts and approach of my research. I took a two weeks break in order to fully internalize the concept of Islamic Feminism as well as read articles, blogs, and other related readings sent to me by Yasmin (female, twenties).

Around this text analysis time, Yasmin invited me to the organization Young Muslims in Bergen (“*Ung Muslim i Bergen*”). The group meets regularly to discuss a range of issues facing Muslim women people today. Despite the group being gender neutral, only women seemed to attend or at least only women were present in the three meetings I attended as an observer. Being Muslim is a precondition for membership within the group. Quite a large number of members are Somalis. The meetings are conducted in Norwegian and the concept of Islamic Feminism is taught to the women through action. For example, there were quizzes about women who have fought for the rights of Islamic women. The members were expected to know their names by heart. The concept of education was also drilled in them as there were some who could not read the quiz although they knew the answers verbally.

At the meetings, most women took notes. I took notes too, but my notes were both on what I was observing and the concept being taught. Two focus group discussions were conducted with “Young Muslims in Bergen”. The first was during one of the group’s activities. The second focus group discussion was conducted in a restaurant and revolved around many issues including female genital mutilation and the use of contraceptives.

The third focus group discussion was with members of the Somali Women Association (*Somalisk kvinneforening i Bergen og Hordaland*). This was a small focus group discussion of about three members including one of the leaders. The group is cultural and society-oriented. Their main role is to unite and bring Somalis together regardless of clan allegiance /differences. They do that through arranging festival days, for example, after Ramadan and also work closely with *Empo, KirkensBymisjon Bergen, Bufetat, Regionvest*. Together, they engage in other projects such as Female Genital Mutilation in Bergen and environs. One of the participants expressed her appreciation of the organization because her husband is from another clan and so this was the only organization that made it possible for her and her family to meet fellow Somalis in a cultural or festive setting. However, upon attending one of the Ramadan celebrations, I questioned myself how much impact this had on my research, especially with regard to gender relations. Somali society is segregated along gender lines, so even in festivals, the men still stayed apart from the women but in the same premises.

The fourth and fifth focus group discussions were with the Somali men taxi association who meet at a certain public place regularly. Trying to steer the interviews and discussions away from politics of immigration and Kenya-Somali political rows was more of a challenge with men than with women participants.

My two insider/ identity statuses were very dynamic and kept transforming themselves during the fieldwork. During the focus group discussions of both genders, I felt as an outsider when issues of religion came up because I am a non-Muslim. At the same time, I felt as an

insider when barriers to integration and other immigrant or female issues were discussed. In the focus group discussion which took place at the Bergen Mosque, I was very much an insider when female products and health issues were discussed, but immediately became an outsider during prayer breaks. In some situations I was a suspicious insider. Reflecting on the whole field work, I found focus group discussions a more effective method than the individual interviews. This is a little paradoxical about the informants' attitudes to being interviewed, since they had initially shown willingness to even be tape-recorded but ended up being more open and resourceful at group interviews.

## **5.5 Participant Observation**

Beyond interviews, participant observation was conducted through attending social gatherings and through informal conversations. One of my observations was with regard to the use and purchasing of *halal* products. *Halal* products are products including food, makeup, and so on that are allowed under Islamic dietary guidelines. I was invited to a *halal* seminar at the Bergen Mosque. I got to understand from the members why the focus on *halal* products and how they incorporated this in family settings. Observation was also conducted in participants' homes. However, before, during and after the interviews, I questioned myself if the participants behaved differently in my presence. An example is one interview where the female partner felt the male partner did not spend time at home or help in household chores. However when he came home almost at the end of one interview, he prepared dinner for everyone.

## **5.6 Challenges**

Abdul, my research assistant, organized almost all meetings by calling the participants in advance and explaining the nature of my research before the interview. I recall when I was working on the final touches of proposal writing, I socialized with Somalis in Somali restaurants hoping that this would be an added advantage in my research. It was easy to strike conversations about most issues, but as soon as I explained my intended research proposal, they did not seem interested in participating in the research esp. as individual participants for fear of being implicated in anything. One male Somali participant born and bred in my home

country Kenya and who I had known for a long time and who speaks Kenya's national language Swahili refused to be interviewed. He told me that he did not want me to know his intimate details. However, paradoxically, the person later became of much help after the interviews and during the male focus group discussions as he was able to explain some fundamental issues about Somali community in Swahili language. After three such similar incidences, I decided to place all my hopes of finding participants through my research assistant. Interestingly, when other Somalis, unknown to me, were approached by the research assistant, there was no problem at all. Thus, it would have been more difficult had I opted to find the participants on my own and based on existing friendships. I tried the snowballing method but it failed too. I had written an introduction about my research which I gave to each interviewee so they could distribute among their friends but the method proved ineffective as I did not receive any feedback.

This experience was similar but not close to that of ethnic Somali Gabouwdouale (2010) who was surprised to find that even as an insider, there is a difference between him being Somali and being a Somali researcher. During his master thesis, he reported that his fellow Somalis viewed him differently and with suspicion the moment he started doing his research. Prior to that he was well known in the Somali community of Norway and he took it for granted that he would get willing participants (Gabouwdouale, 2010: 36-37). Perhaps this is one of the insider/outsider dichotomies Kusow (2010) also encountered. I experienced the same challenge that an insider experienced. Referring to (Merton 1972: 23-34), Kusow points out that "Differences of religion or age or class or occupation work to divide what similarities of race, sex or nationality work to unite" Therefore, "the central question should not be whether or not one group or the other has privileged access to social reality but a consideration of their distinctive and interactive roles in the process of truth seeking."

To shake or not to shake hands was a dilemma and challenge I found myself in while meeting or interviewing male participants. Some Somali men do not shake hands with women for religious and cultural reasons, others shake hands. So in most circumstances I waited for the man to stretch his hand first. However, in one incidence the man did not shake hands with me because he thought I was a Muslim without a headgear as he later explained. When

another man joined in and shook my hand, the previous man asked why I did not shake hands with him.

## **5.7 Ethical Considerations**

To maintain confidentiality and preserve their anonymity, pseudonyms were used in the place of the participants' real names. Integrity in the use of triangulation was maintained by getting varied and relevant data and ensuring the authenticity of the data. To ensure reliability of the data, I used the same guide for all participants. However, the dynamics were rather challenging because the interviews were semi-structured. Though I might not have asked the same questions, I made an effort to remain within the framework of the interview guide.

I ensured responsibility towards the participants by asking them to participate voluntarily. I made it clear that they would not be coerced or induced into responding or participating and that if they felt uncomfortable during the interview, they had the right to discontinue without any implications. I made participants aware of the accrued benefits of the research before the interview began and while conducting the interview, they all got the chance to ask questions or seek clarification if an issue was not clear.

In instances where ethical or political tensions arose, I made a conscious effort to steer the research and the informants/participants into upholding research ethics especially if ethical and political tensions arose. As a Kenyan, my ethnicity was an issue because of Kenya's war against Al-Shabaab (JihadWatch, 2011), (Munene, 2012)] and I found it quite difficult to avoid political issues especially among men. I encountered during the data analysis and in the writing up of the thesis that despite having assigned informants with pseudonyms, I still had to take careful consideration to uphold anonymity and to avoid any breach of confidentiality.

## **5.8 Data Analysis**

The interviews were audio taped and transcribed at the end of each day from the tapes to Microsoft word documents word by word. After the fieldwork, I extracted relevant information from the interviews that I considered necessary for inclusion, based on the goals of my research which took a different turn when I discovered: Somali “Islamic feminism”. Some information was more important and thus was focused on while other information was left out. A reassessment of assigning of pseudonyms was made and data fed into open code 3.6 software programme which is used to code qualitative data. This programme requires much detail in order to come up with as many codes as possible and in order that if a second person were to follow the same procedure, they would arrive at similar conclusions relatively.

Data from the fieldwork was fed into the open code 3.6 software and codes generated. I then sorted and classified the information into categories as I tried to make sense of the material. After a thorough reflection and studying of the data categories, a few themes emerged which are discussed in the next empirical chapters.

## **Chapter 6: Empirical Chapters**

### **6.1 Changing Gender Relations and Quest for Belonging among Somali Immigrants**

When I started out my fieldwork, I had the following research questions that the empirical chapters seek to answer:

- How do Somali immigrant women in Bergen, Norway bargain for power within households? What constraints do they face?
- How do Somali immigrant women in Bergen bargain for their position and for access to resources within the Norwegian immigration context? What are the constraints?
- What mechanisms do Somali immigrant women devise to negotiate the challenges they face within and outside households?
- What are the outcomes and what implications do they have for the women and for Norway as the host country of immigration?

What emerged from the interviews and focus groups discussions not only sheds light on these questions I had; there emerged a concept that enriched my understanding about the position of Somali women in and outside the household. In this chapter, I will present the findings from my fieldwork, which will lay the groundwork for the analysis and discussion.

#### **6.1.1 The Somali Clan System, Male Dominance and Gender Inequality**

One of the main findings that helped inform my understanding of Somali society was the significance and importance of the clan system. While I had read about its role and significance in the context of Somalia, its importance for Somali men in particular, in the Norwegian context, was striking. As noted in the background chapter, the Somali kinship system is based on clans. Clan members trace their identity from a common ancestor. Clan leaders are exclusively male, and the relationship between different clans is characterized by



conflict and tension. Responding to the question on the importance of clans, two participants had the following take on clan membership:

*“Belonging to a clan is like belonging to a club where membership allows you access to a host of exclusive benefits and privileges including personal recognition, and a sense of identity. Our clans share the same language, the same culture and the same religion which is Islam. So as Somalis, we identify ourselves with Islam and with clans. Even if there are many Somalis living abroad, the mentality about clans is still in our hearts. I have a network of friends in the diaspora and what we want is for clans to adapt to the institutions of the upcoming Somalia nation (Qamaan: man, thirties).*

*“As Somalis we all belong to a particular clan. The purpose of the clan is so that we can know each other. It is like a membership ID card. It is only normal. African countries have tribes and if you want to use a first world example, just look at Britain. They have Irish people, English people, Scottish people and some consider themselves more important than others. You will find Scottish people not wanting to be called English. It is the same for us only that due to bad leadership, Somali clans end up fighting. But the idea is the same, its a human need. And we Somalis have lived our entire lives through war and with lack of a national or continental identity. It is only normal to want to identify with our clans instead of our status less nation (Suleiman: man, fifties).*

*“We in the Somali Women Association believe that clans are part of who we are. We do not deny that we identify with clans what we discourage is use of clans to divide people. Islam does not believe in dividing people but you will see clans dividing people. In fact they do not see Somali Bantus as Somalis. You would think that moving to the West makes us feel less attached to clans but I tell you the influence is still there. Clans who felt looked down upon back in Somalia try to revenge in the Western world by spreading wrong images of other clans. We are trying as women in this organization to bring clans together by holding interclan parties and working with men especially” (Fauzia: woman, forties).*

It seems here that belonging to a clan is important and gives a sense of belonging. At the male focus group discussion, the men listed down pros and cons of clan membership as shown in the following comments:

*“It is hard to explain it. The most important aspect of our identity is clan membership, which can be equated to tribes in other African countries. We Somalis are similar in many aspects including language, religion, culture, and many other areas. You would expect those similarities to make us united but the truth is we are one of the famous failed nations in the world despite numerous attempts to form a government. Clan extremists can be likened to radical Muslims. They blow everything out of proportion. Still I believe, dismantling clans is not the solution. If you look properly, you will see that since twenty years ago, the most stable parts of the Somali society are those headed by clans” (Ghedi: man, forties).*

*“Clans are important to our identity despite the image they portray now. A new government would be a good thing, but it should come as a complement to clans not a substitute” (Adam: man, focus group discussion).*

However, other participants did not have a very positive view of the clan as it is today. Despite the fact that most Somalis believe that clans are important for tracing their roots to their ancestors, some participants, especially women, felt that men dominate clan headship for their own benefit. As Moyo said:

*“Clan affiliations are the reason why Somali people have not succeeded as a state. The difference between Somali clans and clans belonging to other African tribes is that Somali clans are managed by warlords. All the armies you see or hear about in Somalia are based on relationship by blood. So when you hear about war, it’s about clans fighting each other in order to gain control of different parts of the country. The original meaning of clans is therefore lost” (Moyo: woman, forties).*

Additionally, most women participants reported that there exists an asymmetry of obligations and scope for male opportunism in the Somali traditional culture and clans precipitate this practice. As two participants noted in a focus group discussion:

*“Our men are very good at talking about their rights and every woman knows what her obligations are. But rarely do they talk about their obligations in Islam” (Miriam: woman, thirties).*

*“Since these clans are headed by men, it is a competition of men versus men and women are rarely taken seriously in Somalia including governance of households” (Adija: woman, twenties).*

Members of the Somali “Islamic feminism” association found the clan system as it is today to be their worst enemy in terms of gender equality within Islam. They acknowledged that to bring about change, they have to work with the current structure and challenge it. However, the women acknowledged that for there to be cohesion and to improve the position of the woman in the Somali society, they would have to act and cooperate with the clan structures, not necessarily abolish them. Most women at the discussion group felt that what is needed is to challenge existing traditions and the best way to do this would be through religion.

*“Our men like to claim that Islam and Somali culture go hand in hand. This is the very reason why I have always told members of our Islamic feminist group that the best weapon to use against men oppressing us to suit their needs is to quote the Quran and use it against practices we consider not Islamic. The moment you mention rights to them or anything Western, that is the moment you create a wedge between you and a Somali man. But if you mention Islam, you are likely to influence him. It is not an easy road, but it is definitely possible to achieve this goal, with time” (Yasmin: woman, twenties).*

Crucial too is the notion of an imagined Somali nation in the Diaspora. Results from the fieldwork suggest that being part of a Somali nation (under perceived threat of western values) further intensifies the need to conform to Somali cultural traditions and Islamic values and practices.

*“If Somalia expects to solve the current crisis and form a government, they have to start with the grassroots. The way things are run by communities today should be taken into account even as we move on to getting a stable government. As women in the diaspora, we cannot just sit back and watch our fellow women back home continue to be dominated. We have to speak out against male dominance and other practices so that they do not carry the habit on to new governments. We might not see the results now, but our future generations will” (Fauzia: woman, forties).*

These clan dynamics show an intersection of gender and clans making one group (the women) feel vulnerable to clan membership. Perhaps the fact that they may never return to Somalia makes this search and yearning for a sense of belonging in culture and religion an endless need. As a Kenyan, reflecting on this aspect of Somalis makes it a very interesting aspect and an example of cultural polarization between Somalis and other immigrants in Norway. Somalia geographically neighbours Kenya, but Kenyan immigrants are not known to seek a sense of belonging with such intensity. Kenyans believe that there are many grey areas around nationalism, and there are many ways of being Kenyan. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that Kenyans have a possibility to return to Kenya at will and feel a sense of belonging there while the Somalis more or less have to imagine a nation that they want to build, and then try and live up to what they would like that nation to look like, no matter the cost.

The implications of clan system seem to be diverse at both the structural and societal level. Somali women, it appears, want to learn and preserve the history passed down through the clan system. However, they express a desire to challenge the male dominance perpetuated through the clan system as I show in chapter 6.2.

## **6.1.2 Changing Gender Roles and Integration of Somali Immigrants**

### **6.1.2 (a) Bread winners**

In both individual interviews and focus group discussions, it was apparent that Somali men and women perceived men as bearers of the financial responsibility burden of the household. However, this role is gradually being eroded by the reality of their immigration context where employment options for Somali men are restrictive. Findings of this research show that employment is a huge barrier for Somali men in Norway making this gender identity as sole breadwinners stand in stark contradiction with the reality.

Commenting on the economic status of Somali immigrant men, three participants stated:

*“I feel that immigrant men need to be taught how to work. What do you want to do should be the issue with the authorities. Not what can we do for you. But the way it is now, it is such a hassle for a lot of Somali immigrant men to find jobs... a man needs to feel important in his job and needs to have had a choice in it, not just doing a job because he has no alternative” (Suleiman: man, fifties).*

*“The welfare system is to blame for this; we are not recognized as heads of household. The reality is that living away from Somalia and not being in a position to be the sole bread winner harms my self-esteem. Before Norway, our marriages tended to be better. Not anymore. Our women now know that they can decide on major issues including how many children to have which is not their role. The reality is that living away from Somalia and not being in a position to be the sole bread winner harms my self-esteem” (Ahmed: man, thirties).*

*“I am not against having to learn Norwegian in order to find employment. But understand that for many of us the stress and pressure of war from other countries make it difficult to sit back and learn a new language” (Yusuf: man, focus group discussion).*

Here we see that due to the principles of the welfare state, men feel that the family structure has been changed by virtue of being placed on an equal footing with women in terms of access to employment. The Norwegian structure has it that one needs to speak Norwegian to find meaningful employment. As such, patriarchy here does not just take the form of male domination; it takes the form of men having their customary duties challenged by the immigration context. It can be argued that in extreme scenarios, this could fuel the men’s desire for male domination because the men feel as if they have lost their manhood and their ability to provide as was evident in their homeland. Again, their agency as immigrants is very restricted as it is impossible to have the structure change to allowing people to integrate without learning Norwegian.

Difficulties in finding employment for Somali immigrants are exacerbated by the social media. This negative image trickles down to social arenas and in several instances, Somali men are refused entry into public social places such as clubs as Ahmed experienced.

*“Time and again, I have been refused entry into clubs, for fear that I will cause trouble, just because I am Somali” (Ahmed: man, thirties).*

*“The media has also spread news that Somalis live apart legally but together physically in order to enjoy some benefits from the state. While I consider this behaviour of Somalis filthy, I find it strange that the authorities do not sit back and wonder why it happens. The truth is that it happens because our women have no hope in us being able to support them fully. They don’t blame us they blame the system hence why they leave us and opt to live alone. Guilt catches up with them and they return to our men for cultural and other reasons” (Ghedi: man, forties).*

In this instance we see male identity intersecting with ethnic identity to worsen Somali men’s position in the household. Their role as bread winner is challenged by difficulties in finding employment, and being ethnically Somali worsens the situation. This could in the worst cases put Somali women in vulnerable positions of neglect and violence by their men as negative mechanisms of coping with the shocking reality. At the same time, economic challenges put Somali men on edge and make them pursue alternative bread winning strategies not so embraced by their wives as seen in the next section.

### **6.1.2 (b) Taxi Business**

Yasmin (woman, twenties) and other participants in focus group discussions held the view that most Somali men choose taxi business as means of earning income because it keeps them away from the responsibilities of household chores. The pressure in Norway in terms of lack of extended family to help with household chores challenges the patriarchal nature of the Somali culture. Faced with this challenge, a lot of men choose jobs that keep them away from responsibilities around household chores.

When asked about their choice of bread winning sources, Somali men reported that the taxi business gives them autonomy and a position to make decisions.

*“Ask every other immigrant man, working shifts are the jobs available to most of us. It is difficult to find a full time job working within normal hours. Most importantly, as men, we feel owning a taxi business or any other form of business is one of the areas that make us feel in control of our lives. And of course, a business requires a lot of time invested in it” (Ahmed: man, thirties).*

*“Understand too that most of us came to Norway at advanced ages. Studying the language is important just for communication purposes. but as we older men, it is not a priority, we don’t need those high ranking jobs if it is going to take years trying and you are not even sure you will find a job within your field, and even when you find one you will be too old to build experience. Our options are thus limited and most of us work up to 15hours a day to make ends meet. Where will we find the time to attend to household work? It is important to get an education, we tell our younger sons and daughters to get one, but education only gives you awareness, not money. If you go for education to make money, you will be disappointed. You will only become a paid slave. Use the enhanced awareness to make money, not the other way round” (Suleiman: man, fifties).*

As a result of men’s gender roles being tied to finances and income, failure to be sole bread winners threatens their gender identity and consequently gender relations. However, not all Somali men are faced with under or unemployment and not all blame the Norwegian system for their lack of better jobs.

*“We Somalis living in Norway have an opportunity to move to one of the best countries in the world and we should do all we can to integrate. The problem is that most Somalis are proud and not patient with the system. I tell my friends that we all need to get it together and have respect for ourselves and change this image. My husband lives here and he is an engineer. He is successful because he went to school and worked hard. It is as simple as that. Work hard and integrate” (Hawa: woman, thirties).*

*“You need to be careful before you criticize the Norwegian system for not being inclusive. The Norwegian system is very fair and does not oppress. People say media is bad, but it’s not exclusive to Somalis and again, the media needs attention of the people and as*

*such they have to dramatize situations. But it's not hate, its journalism. The reason they pick on Somalia is the war in Somalia and the current Al Shabaab links. About integration, I am here to be a better human being. Sometimes the Norwegian ways are not digestible to we immigrants but overall, same justice, same rights should be the definition of integration. In Norway the system allows for same rights and justice but immigrants find themselves marginalized majorly because of language skills and also the attitude of the Norwegians. Norwegians worry about what will happen when someone is offered a job and if the person will perform or do their job properly. Norwegians are quite reserved people and if they don't know you they might have problems trusting you. Personality matters too, if an individual has issues such as low self-esteem and other complexes, they will not make it. Don't blame your skin colour or such....get qualified first. Rules are respected and if you can do a good job, then you will make it. If you know who you are you will always survive. Also when you come to a job situation, you have to do the job the way it is supposed to be done. Don't get sick and misuse the system. One is here to be a better human being and I am very grateful for the Norwegian system and their respect for the rule of law” (Ghedi: male, forties).*

Here, we see women bargaining over household chores and faced by the constraint of employment options for their partners. Due to high standard of living in Norway, Somali immigrant women are inclined to enter the labour force in order to increase family income. But they see their way of entering the labour force significantly different from that of the men.

*“If one is not too fussy about the kind of job one wants, there are jobs available for immigrants in Norway. Men find this a bit difficult because their work define them. For most of us women, we appreciate any kind of job as long as we feel comfortable there. The issue is not finding work for us, the issue is being Muslim while in in the job” (Swalha: woman, twenties).*

This section shows that a distinctive type of patriarchal bargaining exists in the Norwegian immigration context among Somalis. In both male focus group discussions, the men appeared to find themselves in an integrative dilemma of rights and obligations. On the one hand, they adhered to Islam, a religion which places the household economic burden squarely on the shoulders of a man and requires fair treatment of wives. On the other hand,



the realities of immigration and lack of employment including the high costs of living do not accord them this possibility. As noted in the literature review section, Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) refers to these negotiations as ‘*patriarchal bargains*’ and recognizes them as the most important aspects of negotiations that can help understand gender relations.

### **6.1.3 Everyday Socialization and Vulnerability of Children Outside the Household.**

#### **6.1.3 (a) Religiously Sanctioned Consumerism**

The majority of the informants mentioned ‘halaal’ products as their preferred choice of food consumption. ‘*Halaal*’ means food sanctioned in a religious manner. This type of food is only sold in specific shops, mostly owned by fellow immigrants. This is a shared culture between Islam and Somali traditions.

Eating pork is not allowed in both Islamic religious beliefs and Somali traditional culture. For instance, in occasions where Somali children have to attend social gatherings with their peers such as a birthday party where they socialize with other non-Somali children, the Somali children shy away from enquiring whether meal contains pork or not. The parents find it as their duty to organize such events and make effort and ring the hosts to notify them of the meal choice in advance but the children are still faced with the problem of explaining why they do not eat this or that, and end up receiving rude comments by other children who eat pork.

*“The pig is clearly forbidden in Islamic religion. We can handle it as adults but the picture is different with our children as they may not be able to explain themselves away every time they are placed into this position especially at birthday parties. We do not expect non-Muslims to stop eating pork, but the comments children bring home are upsetting to us parents. I’m not so sure, but maybe the comments are just out of ignorance. In most cases a phone call works, but in some cases, it does not help. We also feel we have to negotiate our identity to families hosting parties when we have to ask them to watch out for rude comments”* (Hawa: woman, thirties).

Here, it can be inferred that the Somali children face tension trying to make sense of and establish a sense of belonging. Somali immigrants have both Islam and Somali traditional culture aspects of their identity. As seen above some Somali immigrants are keen on consumption of religiously sanctioned food (halaal) while others are not so keen on it. Gauntlett (2002) credits consumerism as the best way to measure lifestyle changes. Equating lifestyle to genres, Gauntlett(2002) referring to Anthony Giddens emphasizes that just as movie directors have the choice to make action, drama or romantic movies; individuals direct their own lifestyles after reflecting on the consequences (Gauntly 2002:102). A case in point here is Ahmed who reported eating any kind of meat as long as he is in a Christian nation such as Norway because he believes that Christians slaughter meat the same way Muslims do. However, if he visited China for example, he would be sceptical and not eat meat.

*“Personally I like my meat and lost my keen interest in halaal food when I was living in Kenya. In my opinion, Christians, Jews and Muslims follow the same procedures in butcheries, so I don’t worry much in a Christian nation. I just don’t think about it. But if I went to a country like china for example, I will be sceptical”* (Ahmed: man, thirties).

Majority of the informants reported child upbringing as a challenge and one of the main identity battles. The Bergen municipality offers courses under an ‘International Child Development Program’. Courses are offered both in Norwegian and English. But this according to Hawa is not an ideal solution. In her view,

*“The course does help some parents understand the values of Norwegian culture which are mainly cooperation and respect. But even though respect is a value, as a mother of two young children aged five and two, I find respect to be lacking when children address their elders by their names instead of the cultural Somali way of using titles such as Aunt or Uncle. This has become an issue in my own household when my daughter returned home one afternoon asking for an explanation as to why every senior person is an aunt or uncle. The following day the teacher brought the issue up saying the Somali approach was inconsistent with Norwegian approach. The teacher had reported this in a respectable manner bottom-line, my principles had been brought to test. Now I have to teach my children to act one way in school and another way at home”* (Hawa: woman, thirties).

Fauzia noted that although Somali based organizations exist, such as the Somali Women Association, not much attention is paid to children: “The *organizations play a huge role of bringing Somalis together and discussing the role of the Diaspora in the future of Somalia for example. Such meetings are good; I never miss them they make me feel at home. But children are neglected. All we do is bringing our children to parties and the story ends there*” (Fauzia: woman, forties).

These different ways of child upbringing in the Norwegian and Somali culture as highlighted have created a point of conflict. On some occasions, Somalis have had to answer to child protection authorities. In these cases the Somali parents see their parental duties as eroded by Norwegian norms and values of child upbringing. Noncompliance with Norwegian norms has seen some families sanctioned with extreme cases of Somali children taken away as explained by Miriam:

*“Most of the Somali women who do not speak Norwegian do not like the use of translators because it’s humiliating especially in public. These parents end up contravening/breaking the law and the law in return catches up with them. In extreme cases they have their children taken away from them due to non-compliance. The child protection service could be wrong, but with the language barrier it is difficult to figure out who did what, where and when in every case where a child is taken away from the mother”* (Miriam: woman, thirties)

Although I did not interview any parent whose child had been taken away from them or was on the wrong side of the law, the fear that this could happen to any Somali parent was deeply felt by the informants. Given the stigma and sensitivity around losing a child to child protection services, I am persuaded to think that there was much more beneath the surface of what third parties told me, and I take the view that this would be an interesting area of future research.

When it comes to raising teenagers, exit of households by daughters is mainly as a result of marriage. This according to Yasmin (female, twenties) is so as to “cement *the Islamic traditions and way of life which the ladies are prone to losing should they live outside of the extended household.*” Here, there seems to be a convention that when daughters live with families, it creates a sense of belonging to the Somali and Islamic lifestyles, in preparation for the same kind of life in a similar setting upon marriage.

## **6.2 Somali Immigrant Women's Views and Experiences of Islamic Feminism**

One of the findings made in the fieldwork was an idea, an ideal, vision and way of ordering life according to the Quran, referred to by Somali women as “Islamic feminism” which this research attributes to being a tool for Somali women’s bargaining power both inside and outside of the household. The women’s movement uses the framework as a guide to managing their households. This chapter will focus on the main arguments of Somali “Islamic feminism” and delve into exploring who its critics and supporters are. Basically, Somali women untangle patriarchy by invoking religion. I choose to present the findings from this group because I felt that they do not only blame the West for the gender inequalities among Somali households in the immigration context, but also blame the patriarchal system spearheaded by clans in the Somali community.

The Somali women I interviewed in the focus group viewed themselves as Islamic feminists/activists/ teachers distinguishing themselves from secular feminists. Despite their perceived negative connotations of secular feminism, they still identify themselves directly with the label feminist, and apply it to liberate them from patriarchy without having to lose a crucial part of their identity- Islam.

I refer to Somali “Islamic feminism” in this chapter as a product of the Somali women themselves, evidently an adaption of feminism to an Islamic constituency within a Western context, the Somali migration context in Norway. What will be presented in this chapter is thus distinctive from the more established concept of Islamic Feminism, but there are important similarities such as a refusal to embrace Western feminism or values.

### **6.2.1 Interaction between Islam and Feminism**

The Somali women’s group identified in the fieldwork strives to integrate religion and feminism in their gendered values as a minority in Norway. Results from the fieldwork show that Somali “Islamic feminism” operates within an Islamic discursive framework and involves

re-interpretation of Islamic texts so as to promote women's rights. Yasmin (female, twenties) believes that the worst enemy of Islamic feminism among Somali women is Somali traditional culture itself with regard to the position of women relative to men. She argued that "Islamic feminism" is the answer to male opportunism inherent in the Somali culture.

*"Women have always had rights under Islam, the problem is that they have not always had access to those rights. In our case for example, Somali men have created a clan system that does not incorporate women's rights in its operations. As Islamic feminists we are bringing this to light. Our aim is to show other women that they have rights within Islam. The problem is not merging Feminism and Islam, the problem is matching male supremacy and Islam"* (Yasmin: woman, twenties).

Similarly, Somali "Islamic feminists" were clear about how Islam interacts with Feminism and had their own definition of Islamic Feminism and how their definition sets them apart from other Muslim feminist ideas. As three participants noted:

*"Our understanding of Islamic Feminism is that it is based on the Quran and seeks to promote gender equality using Islamic texts only. Islamic feminism does not defend Islam as a religion. It does not claim Islam is better than Christianity or any such thing. Islamic feminism is all about women and their rights in Islam. As Islamic feminists, we are not just choosing a few verses from Quran, Sunnah and Hadith in order to suite our needs. We are simply against wrong interpretations of the Quran and are quite aware that patriarchy is the number one cause of female oppression"* (Yasmin: woman, twenties).

*"Islamic Feminism is not just about women, it's about equitable rights to all. We are not saying we want to lead men and not submit to them. But we can only submit to what is just"* (Zeinab: female, twenties).

*"Women who refuse to call themselves feminists are just missing a golden opportunity to help fellow women who might be in disadvantaged situations. Being feminist simply entails believing that women deserve same opportunities and rights as men. And as an Islamic feminist, the Quran clearly stipulates that the rights and obligations are to both men and women"* (Safiyo: woman, twenties).

Here we see that Somali “Islamic feminism” grassroots association does not incorporate any secular perspectives in its interpretations. The association thus does not share the views of Margot Badran and her fellow writers who view Islamic feminism as middle ground between secular and Islamic religious views as shown in the literature review chapter. Members of the Islamic Feminism emphasized on the importance of reinterpreting Islamic texts properly, as seen by comments from the following three participants:

*“Interpreting Islamic texts is very important to us. One has to make sure that we do not bring in any secular perspectives on it. We do not want to do what our men have done, taken the Quran and given it their own male interpretation and have ended up oppressing women. As you heard from one of our group members, our men are even going to lengths of taking jobs away from the household just so that they do not feel owned by us. Anyway, my point here is that we have to make sure our interpretation of Islamic texts hurts nobody including the men. We are doing what is right for all , including acknowledging areas where our traditions have affected women”* (Ayan: female, twenties)

*“It is important that we pass the message across that oppression and male dominance are anti-Islamic. The problem is the attitude our men have towards us women. We are seen as not capable of making a huge impact on any progressive aspect. We are seen as operating best in household chores and other matters. Not all men see us this way of course, but some men believe that a woman is not that much valuable”* (Jamilla: woman, focus group discussion).

*“When it comes to interpreting Islamic texts, it is better to do it as a group than individually. I have felt so much stronger and able to meet challenges in my own household when I joined this group. It is better this way. I have a few friends that are willing to join this movement especially after they saw how happy I was and how powerful I seemed when we discussed about Islam. They are also seeing changes in my own relationship with my husband and children as I have become aware of rights and power within Islam. This would not have happened if I were just alone at home. I encourage all women to join the group, and I wish the Norwegian authorities would recognize us as part of their integration programme”* (Miriam: female, thirties).

When asked about the use of the label 'Feminism' and whether this has any connotations with secular ideas, the following was said:

*"It really does not matter what you call yourself as long as you identify that there is a problem with the Somali traditional culture and are willing to change it. But let's get realistic what else would you call yourself. We identify ourselves as feminists because in our understanding feminism is about women's rights"* (Neema : woman, focus group discussion).

*"Feminism adds power to what we do. It actually helps us look legitimate and aware of the oppression that sometimes goes on from our men. I have a friend who wanted to pursue a career after marriage and had never heard that it is okay for Muslim women to use contraceptives for example. After she joined the group she was able convince her husband on the legitimacy of contraceptives. That is what feminism is all about, it's about helping women see their rights. In our case our rights are in the Quran"* (Fatma: woman, focus group discussion).

*"I think it is very important to use the term Feminism in describing ourselves. It adds a certain type of power to it. When I talk about rights in Islam to my colleagues at work who are not Muslim, they tend to listen more when I talk about the association and feminism than if I just refer to the Quran"* (Mina: woman, focus group discussion).

*"Feminism is not about "what women want, what women need is the more practical side of Feminism in my understanding. Women need a sense of togetherness in pursuing a goal and that is why we call ourselves Islamic feminists, meaning we are feminists who abide by what Allah says. The label does not change who we are, it makes us stronger and more focused"* (Aziza: woman, focus group discussion).

Findings of the research also showed that Somali "Islamic feminism" is a feminism of difference rather than a feminism of sameness. As four participants put it:

*"There is a huge difference between equal treatment of women and fair/just treatment of women. We as Islamic feminists advocate for the latter. We are enlightened and it is very clear to us that men and women are not equal; we have different needs - men and women. But*

*it is not right that one person gets some rights at the expense of another” (Safiyo: female, twenties).*

*“Women as well as men contribute different forms of power to different situations- just because we are different, it does not mean we have less power- we just have a different way to express our power. This is one of the huge lessons i have learnt from Islamic feminism along with my fellow Somali sisters” (Jamila: woman, focus group discussion).*

*“I am a feminist in that I believe men and women are equal in the eyes of Allah and as such need to be treated equally in all aspects. To me, treating people equally does not mean treating them the same. Equal treatment to me means justice for both men and women. Women naturally give birth to children something that men cannot do. Does that mean we should figure out a way to make men pregnant? No. It only goes to show that feminism should be all about rights and responsibilities based on gender differences rather than sameness. For example men are on average stronger than women, women are emotionally strong and intuitive. Based on that fathers should teach their sons not to hit women and this should be backed up by the law. Similarly mothers should teach their daughters how to not trick or exploit men” (Hawa: woman, focus group discussion).*

*“I find it contradictory when women (Muslim or otherwise) claim that they are not "feminists" while at the same time attributing their success to their predecessors who stood for and fought for equality” (Ayan: woman, twenties).*

When asked about how they spread word or learn about Islamic Feminism, the women had the following to say:

*“ At the moment we read articles and listen from women such as Yasmin Moghaheed. There are many Muslim women who are spreading word about “Islamic Feminism”. We try and get as much as we can from them and apply it to our context” (Yasmin: woman, twenties).*

*“ We try to learn from women from other countries. Egypt is especially one of the countries we learn from. Somalia is just starting a government and this is the best time for us to start practicing activism. In Egypt for example, women were not allowed to become judges or hold other similar position. Islamic feminism is what saved the women in Egypt. As is well known,*



*in 2005 Egypt had its first three women as judges. As we hope for a new government in Somalia it is our hope that women voices will be included in the government” (Zainatu: woman, focus group discussion).*

## **6.2.2 Somali “Islamic Feminism” in the eyes of ‘other’ Somali women**

Somali women who are not part of the group had an unsure attitude about it.

*“I have heard about the Somali “Islamic feminism” group, my daughter is a member of the group. I do not oppose it as long as it makes my daughter a better Muslim. However, I think they have a much harder job than they think. To have to prove yourself to other people all the time” (Fauzia: female, forties).*

*“I definitely have no doubt that there needs to be more equality among Somali households. However, the reason why I am not a staunch follower of Islamic feminism or feminism of any sort is that not all things are black and white as my fellow Islamic feminist sisters think”(Swalha: woman, thirties).*

When asked about the applicability of Islamic feminism to women of other religions, Somali women had this to say:

*“Anyone can practice ijtihad (interpretation). It does not really matter where you care coming from, you can read the Islamic texts and understand them or use them to criticize traditions that do not abide by Islam yet they claim to believe in Islam” (Talifa: woman, focus group discussion).*

*“What matters is what is said not who is saying it. Even we women who belong to Islamic faith have problems convincing our own men about our interpretations but they listen to what we have to say. It would be great to have women’s rights sought after from an Islamic perspective. We would like to contribute to current knowledge about women rights. If other*

*faiths can learn from us, that would not be a problem”* (Saliha: woman, focus group discussion).

### **6.2.3 Somali “Islamic feminism” in the Eyes of Somali Men**

The question of how they viewed “Islamic Feminism” was posed to men both individually and at focus group discussions. Somali men seemed to have limited support for Somali “Islamic feminism”, with the majority casting doubt on the viability of any type of “Islamic feminism” as the following comment illustrates:

*“You cannot be Muslim and feminist at the same time; religion and rights can’t walk together. You can be a Muslim and practice what is required as a Muslim, then be a feminist on a whole different level without dragging religion into it. One cannot use religion to promote gender equality. Religion is an individual affair, if one wants to promote gender equality then seek guidance from the law or other institutions that use reason to define what is just and what is unjust to women. Islamic feminism is in my eyes is just a source of conflict because both genders will interpret the Quran to fit their needs or perspectives and at the end of the day, no proper results are seen”* (Mohammed: man, focus group discussion).

There is a statement found in the Quran and one of the sources of conflict about how Islam as a religion views women.

*“Yes it is true that the Quran states women’s words in Islam are worth half that of man. But the historical context must be applied here. This was a unique case which applied to financial situations, not all aspects of life. At that time, women knew nothing about money because it wasn’t their area of expertise. In fact, it was only verbal evidence whose worth was half that of a man. If a woman had contractual evidence, her word was by all means credible and worth that of a man”* (Suleiman: man, focus group discussion).

Qamaan reported the following when asked about Islamic feminism in his repeat interview *“Feminism has made women lose their womanhood....a lot is to be blamed on the so called freedom in the sense that women were happy in Somalia but, but when they move to*

*Norway or any other western country, the woman feels she is in a free world and problems come in as they get the notion that they are free. They misinterpret the freedom. They take advantage of the man. If they had differences back home, she feels this is the time to revenge, she may be harbouring some things from back home...why do our women feel the need to hold a grudge against our clan system that has been there for ages? The facts are clear that all through history it is a man's duty to protect and provide for his own including wife and children. It thus makes more sense to have men in headship positions at clan levels” (Qamaan: man, thirties).*

However, Suleiman (man, fifties) appeared to support Islamic feminism. *“Islamic feminism is effortless for me; because it is the right thing to do to defend the vulnerable of both genders, but women should use their genuine feminine qualities.”*

There seems to be a tendency among men to consider Islam and Feminism contradictory terms but this is not limited to men only. Literature reviews shows that there exists that battle in other Muslim areas too. Mahnaz Afkhami an Iranian feminist believes that she is Muslim and a feminist, but does not consider herself an ‘Islamic feminist’ (Moghadam: 1152).

This section brings to light the fact that most of the issues that Islamic Feminism deals with are systemic in nature and thus framed by a preexisting norms, social structure and identities. Essentialism on gender roles seems to be one of the toughest nuts to crack in the Somali case within the household and the image problem seems to be the hardest challenge to the outer world. There is need for them to understand both systems before they can even begin to find their place in both systems.

The next section looks at the outcomes of bargaining beyond the household to relations with the immigrant community and with the state.

### **6.3 Intra- and- Extra Household Outcomes of Somali “Islamic feminism”**

This section questions whether “Islamic feminism” is a source of bargaining power and whether it can be applied in a Western context. The chapter will examine the values of Somali women and how they find them similar or different to values of Western Norwegian women. The chapter will also explore whether Norway is a fertile ground for “Islamic Feminism” to take root.

#### **6.3.1 Intrahousehold Outcomes on Ideas and Practises glossed as Islamic**

“Somali Islamic Feminism” aims at exposing patriarchal ideas in the form of male dominance that have been perpetrated by traditions in the name of Islam. They have as their main aim to transform traditions that have been glossed as Islamic.

##### **6.3.1 (a) On Sexuality and Contraceptives**

The cultural background and educational level were the main reasons for how both men and women perceived the use of contraceptives.

*“In my house, I do not advocate for contraceptives. From the Islamic point of view, a woman is supposed to breastfeed for two years, so she would have the third baby with a difference of two to three years. Children are a blessing from God. I would like to have as many as God wills. We use the cycle and breastfeeding but if the method does not work, then the kid is considered a blessing” (Qamaan, man: thirties).*

Others participants had a different take:

*“Islam allows for the use of contraceptives but not the Somali tradition. In Islam you can plan issues to do with your family. I think the polygamy concept is the leading cause of Somali women having many kids. The husband would rather she has many kids so she can forget him and find something to do while he keeps himself busy with other wives Permanent birth control methods such as sterilization are prohibited for both men and women based on a*

*teaching or hadith where the Prophet Mohammed forbade some men from castrating themselves. But there are of course a few exceptions. If by getting pregnant a woman exposes her body to health risks then sterilization may be considered. But it is not the norm in Islam”* (Amina: woman, twenties).

*“Actually what is not allowed is killing of unborn bodies which means that Islam allows for abortion within 90 days of pregnancy for a good cause of course. The only method of contraception not allowed in Islam is sterilization* (Miriam: woman, thirties).

Some participants such as Hawa are passive/silent believers of contraceptives use:

*“The issue of contraceptives is a bit tricky among Somalis. In Somali community there is no family planning. Life is expensive in Norway and since many of them do not use contraceptives, they end up having many children and the concept of a large family does not fit into the Norwegian society. There are also a lot of misconceptions about the side effects of the use of contraceptives among Somali women. I believe the use of contraceptives is an issue that should be spread and educated to Somali women but I wouldn’t start such a project myself as other Somali women would speak behind my back”* (Hawa: female, thirties).

Amina who works as a nurse complained that the Norwegian system does not go a long way in assisting Somali mothers in contraceptives:

*“In my nursing profession, the correct procedure for pregnant mothers is to do a follow up on their pregnancies including a discussion on the use of contraceptives. But my fellow nurses ignore the contraceptive part when it comes to patients especially of Muslim background. They simply do not know how to approach the topic. I am not surprised that this is the case given that in school, no one talked about how to treat non-Norwegian patients. The subject is somehow ignored”* (Amina: woman, twenties).

### **6.3.1 (b) On Polygamy**

Polygamy or plural marriage, though sanctioned by Islam, is illegal in Norway. Somali “Islamic Feminism” does not have the power or the will to work towards its

decriminalization. I did not interview any polygamous Somali or any woman in it directly, but I was able to gather information about it from the women's focus group discussion. Somali women have tried their very best to own polygamy by providing clear guidelines as to how it should happen and eventually leaving men who do not adhere to the Islamic teachings , through divorce in extreme cases.

Yasmin reported that one of the questions she gets from her colleagues is about the possibility of her husband coming home one night announcing a second wife. According to her, this is a whole misconception.

*“Polygamy does not need to be eliminated; our men need to have sanctions on how to go about it. As a principle a man is only supposed to get a second wife if he can afford it and after consultation with his current wife or wives”* (Adija: woman, twenties).

These views were echoed by another participant in the Women's focus group discussion:

*“I feel that the west needs to understand that we have a voice in polygamy and it is a rare occurrence. I keep getting the question of why we allow our men to marry four wives and I have to explain that this is in excessive times and usually the wife has to approve a second wife and finances must allow it to happen. A few of my white friends think that we Somali women are worthless and going by the statistics, they could be right. Most of us Somali women have many children but I think the problem is lack of awareness about contraceptives”* (Nadifa, Women's focus group Discussion).

*“Most of my Norwegian female friends state that Islamic religion is custom made for men. They have a tendency to capitalize on the ‘virgins in paradise, beating wives and four wives’ aspects. What makes it worse is when they can quote life examples by observing some of our women. As a nurse, I meet a lot of our Somali women under cultural bondage which is why I believe in feminism. I don't have to fight secularism, but I can fight misinterpretations of Islam, especially if strengthened by cultural and patriarchal norms”* (Aziza: Women's focus group discussion).

Qamaan (male, thirties) in his repeat interview opened up about his view on Polygamy expressing his need to see people proving the harm of polygamy, not just asserting general statements.

*“I don’t like it when people make sweeping statements about polygamy. I am yet to see someone going beyond the harms of polygamy. I’ll tell you what makes it different; it prevents extra marital affairs that are so rampant in monogamous families. Given its illegality in Norway , a lot of the people I know that practice it keep the women in separate households, and only get a marriage license for one wife. Economic hardships could drive some men to keeping it secret, but Islam does not approve of that kind of approach”*

### **6.3.1 (c) Domestic Violence.**

Majority of the informants and participants in focus group discussion agreed that domestic violence is not allowed in Islam. It is one of the lessons taught at the women group where they try to educate women on how to avoid it and what to do when it occurs.

*“Violence is not a solution and not okay. However women are violent too, it goes both ways. Violence is a secondary issue, usually there are deeper issues involved and these should be addressed. Dialogue is important”* (Swalha: female, twenties).

*“Violence in Norwegian context is finance based. Couples should discuss issues, budget financial matters and prioritize. Either of the couple can be responsible. Trouble starts when either of them becomes extravagant. I believe women can be extravagant and buy cosmetics and other expensive things in the name of beauty. Our Somali women like competition and rivalry among themselves in terms of who owns what, which is not healthy”* (Qamaan: man, thirties).

*“One more thing, there should be certain rules that couples should abide by, and promises to be kept. Forgiveness and mutual understanding should also be present. Insiders within the*

*household such as family members should be avoided as they could make stories thus trust important. Violence doesn't start within a day. People come out when enough is enough. It probably has something to do with lack of contentment in the kind of life they had and what they have now. Upbringing matters too, and influence from parents. Personalities matters too especially when the man becomes too demanding on expectations e.g. why didn't you do the house chores- expecting 100% cleanliness” (Suleiman: man, fifties).*

*“I think perhaps we need to redefine domestic violence. In Somalia people are happy and satisfied with life. Same life is translated as not a good life in the Western world. The Islamic Feminism you talked about is a cause too. To me, a woman is mother, wife, daughter and sister. I value a woman and I know what is good for her. Feminism brought changes within the women, brought an exaggeration part of the women and they lost their womanhood” (Qamaan: man, thirties).*

#### **6.3.1 (d) Second generation Somali Immigrants**

Findings of the research are that “Islamic Feminism” is likely to have a more positive effect on second generation Somali women , in that they may not have experienced patriarchy in its ‘raw form’. Women have been able to get themselves an education. Educating women so that they can know and be able to claim their rights is one of the goals of this association.

*“I think our daughters will have it easier if they learn the principles of gender equality in Islam from an early age” (Zeinab: female, twenties).*

*“In my opinion, our children born and bred in the West could lead to abolition of clannism if they return to Somalia. Clannism is the deeprooted problem. In the grand scheme of things, clannism (which is also found in other countries) leads to the loss of continental identity in Africa. Africans should see themselves as Africans like they did in the in the 50s and 60s, before the 70s came in with their nationalism making us start to identify ourselves as Somalis, Kenyans etc. This trickled down to politics being run by tribal power (Moyo: female, forties).*



Other participants reported that eradicating male dominance could be a challenge:

*“Male supremacy is real in Somalia. Islamic Feminism needs to be spread in Somalia in our local language. Otherwise at the moment, as young woman I don’t think I would relocate to Somalia because of the prevailing strong and enduring patriarchal culture. I feel it would be a constraint to my well-being”* (Salama: woman, focus group discussion).

*“I’m very disappointed to be saying this but it is incorrect to assume that tribalism does not exist in the Diaspora. Sometimes we are even worse than those we left behind. My three children for example are indifferent and could not be bothered about returning to Somalia or even updating themselves about the day –to-day activities. Some do not even want to visit their motherland”* (Suleiman: male, fifties).

### **6.3.1 (e) Complimentary versus Egalitarian Gender Roles**

Some gender roles have reversed especially with child care. Findings of the research show that fathers are now closer to their children and have to take them to day care or help with assignments. It can be argued that this is as a result of the welfare state policies but Somali “Islamic feminism” group teaches women that the men should help with rising of children.

*“Earlier in Somalia, raising children was the sole responsibility of women and the men would bring in income. However one person’s income is hard to maintain a family so we prefer to share the roles”* (Suleiman: male fifties).

*“In my household we follow a shared chores system, after long and heated discussions. Generally, I as a woman have the main responsibility of keeping a home and making decisions such as what to have for dinner. In my view, Somali culture is patriarchal in nature while Islamic nature has better rights. Islam believes that all shall be fair. Islamic religion is liberal, while Somali culture is restrictive and lets the woman do all the household chores.*

*This is one of the issues our group tackles; all shall be fair in Islam” (Ayan: woman, twenties).*

*“Whatever happens in the household should be taken care of by the woman. Personally I have no problems cleaning the house or assisting in household chores. It does not increase or decrease my status as a man. I think on a national level, this could be sorted out if rights of women are incorporated in the constitution, and taught from early childhood. When it comes from the side of justice and constitution, e.g. in Norway, men may not necessarily want to cook and all but the law does not allow them to leave it all to the woman. In Africa though perhaps joblessness and the status of a woman as housewife causes people to or women to work more in the household. One has to consider this issue on a case by case issue” (Ghedi: male, forties).*

### **6.3.2 Extrahousehold Outcomes**

#### **6.3.2 (a) Self-Image and Self Esteem through Education**

Education among Somali Muslim women who follow the Feminist association has helped most women improve their knowledge on what rights they have as Muslims within Islam and consequently their self-image. This has gone to great lengths within the household as evidenced by comments from three participants:

*“Most of the Somali women in the group and in general are not educated enough to be able to interpret the Quran on their own. We are working on this, and we are ensuring that the upcoming generation of younger Muslim women are educated. We insist on the importance of education and when our women see what other Muslim women have been able to achieve because of education, we see many women interested in education” (Yasmin: female, twenties).*

*“I now see the importance of education for being a powerful woman within Islam. I really enjoy reading interpretations of the Quran by women like me. I may not have the education*

*needed to contribute to it but i will make sure all my three daughters get educated and be able to analyse women issues within Islam” (Miriam: female, thirties).*

*“One of the things i have learnt and which has improved my self-confidence is that I now view obedience very differently. Before I joined this feminist group, i took it as a given that i had to do anything and everything my husband or any male leader said. But now i know that despite the biological differences we cannot argue about, we are all equal in our own way. I also know friends from this group who can say without a doubt that they see themselves differently. Islamic feminism is an eye opener to us” (Zaituni: woman, focus group discussion).*

However, paradoxically, outside of the household, one of the major challenges has to do with choice of professions for Somali and Muslim women in general. Some professions such as teaching, chemist technicians and politically related work do not allow women to dress wear the veil.

*“I am training to become a teacher. But I know that I will not be allowed to wear a hijab in front of students because in Norway, this will be seen as if am trying to impact my knowledge of Islam to non-Muslim children. I don’t know what will happen when that time comes, I might have to do away with the hijab, but it will be against my will’ (Amina: female, twenties).*

*“My daughter aspired to become a maths teacher when she grew up. I was torn between encouraging her to pursuing her dreams and accepting the reality. I finally talked with her and we opted for a career in nursing” (Fauzia: female, forties).*

*“Norwegian rules allow for wearing the hijab, but in reality, we women face challenges when it comes to job-hunting. Teaching is the worst of all the professions. One will simply not be allowed to wear the hijab. In fact, take for example the Norwegian minister for culture. She is Muslim but she does not wear the hijab. Most likely it is because it was not acceptable in her line of work” (Safiyo: female, twenties).*

Findings from the women's focus group discussion on the issue of employment indicate that professions related to healthcare are more accepting to the wearing of the veil, although the impression is that they allow it because of the need to recruit health care workers and providers.

*"I haven't really had any issues with my bosses for wearing the hijab. I get questions related to why I wear it, but that's about it"* (Yasmin: woman, twenties).

Here we see different forms of marginalisation as expressed by Kerner (2009) in the conceptual framework. First Somali women are marginalised by virtue of being women by men. And just when they thought education has liberated them, they are faced with the Norwegian structure that has different norms of conduct.

### **6.3.2 (b) Attitudinal Barriers to Integration and Cultural Polarization**

Like other immigrants, Somali immigrants experience a drop in social status upon immigration. However of the 16 individual participants interviewed, most of them expressed a belief and a concern that their religion, Islam, is a point of contention that makes them have to deal with the integration challenges differently from other immigrants with women facing more complicated obstacles. As one participant stated:

*"There is obvious fear among people when dealing with Muslims. The media has also spread very bad things about Somali people in Norway. This makes it extremely difficult for us to feel like we belong here"* (Adija: woman, twenties).

Somali women wished the media would publish something good about them. This was confirmed to me in March 2013 when prominent Yasmin Mogaheed visited Bergen and talked to Muslim women but there was no such news in the newspaper.

### **6.3.2 (c) In the hall of fame of 'symbol of oppression': the Islamic Veil**

Most of the participants interviewed agreed that it takes patience and time to find a job as well as proficiency in Norwegian language. This did not seem to be a problem to them.

However, work place norms especially the wearing of the Hijab is a major challenge and frustration that they face.

Veil in this chapter is used to refer to full Islamic body and face-covering garments and will be viewed as the main outcome of extra household bargaining. It is crystal clear that the Muslim way of dressing and in particular the veil is considered alien attire by the majority. When asked about what kind of comments they receive from the public, the majority of the informants reported that generally, the Norwegian society has no problems with them wearing veils for religious purposes, but in public spaces, there is a general feeling that veils should not be allowed.

*“I keep getting the question why I am hiding who I am. One of my Norwegian friends at work has been to Tehran and she wore the veil there to respect the customs of the people. She wonders why we Muslims cannot respect the values of the west especially in learning institutions and work places. She thinks our men make us wear the veils”* (Safiyo, female focus group)

The majority of the women were also very much aware of the western view of the hijab, that it oppresses women.

*“We wear the hijab, Niqab and other Islamic clothes at will and are not a threat to anybody. I always get the feeling that people feel uncomfortable around me especially in public places like restaurants and buses”* (Jamila: woman, focus group discussion).

*“We understand the west does not embrace the veil. I wonder why they don’t complain about our men wearing a beard. Sometimes you have to wonder about their reasoning. If non-Muslim women are allowed to show their body, why can’t we be allowed to cover ours?”* (Zeinab: woman, twenties).

However, not all Somali Muslims are keen on wearing the veil.

*“Personally I do not wear the veil except if I am in the mosque or any other religious gathering. I wear my faith in my heart. So do my sisters and mother. I think it has to do with the upbringing”* (Swalha: woman, twenties)

Somali immigrant women achieve agency in choice of clothing when it comes to the veil (hijab). At a macro level though, Somali women face problems with retail infrastructure in that there are no shops for Islamic dress code in Bergen. Most of them have to buy Islamic clothes from Oslo, online shopping, shopping in Dubai or other shops in Europe. Nevertheless, their lifestyles are affected by consumerism.

*“As for the hijab, I can pretty much convert scarfs into hijabs and be fashionable. In a religious context I will wear the hijab to show a sense of togetherness with my Muslim sisters; in other settings I may wear a fashionable veil. In that case I go by style and can shop in ordinary malls”* (Swalha: woman, twenties).

In this instance, it is apparent that when Somali women choose to wear certain “Western” scarves, they are saying that they can exercise loyalty and piety as Muslims and also be fashionable, in non-Muslim spaces. Thus the Islamic veil (hijab) is an object of and also creates a sense of belonging or identity with religion and culture.

## **CHAPTER 7 Discussion and Conclusion**

### **7.1 Discussion of the First Research Question**

- How do Somali immigrant women in Bergen, Norway bargain for power within households? What constraints do they face?

Empirical research revealed the role of tradition in Muslim families, specific to the Somali community. Over and over again, all participants identified themselves as both Muslims and Somalis. Even though religion and culture are distinctively separate concepts, for Somalis they at times overlap or diverge to the extent of not being reconcilable. Somalis invoke both religion and culture in their daily lives and as such, religion and culture intersect and guide people's interpretations of the meaning of life and their quest for belonging.

Findings from my fieldwork show that Somali women devise strategic and assertive means of applying religion to cultural practices, the result being that they gain bargaining power within and outside of their households. Even though most Somalis profess that Somali culture and Islam as a religion are infused in their identities as Somalis, when it comes to gender there is a clear distinction between the two. The Somali clan system is experienced by Somali women as a structure that colludes with Islamic principles for embracing patriarchal patterns of life. The women I interviewed experienced both the clan system and patriarchy espoused in Islam as a joint structure that put them in fixed positions of inferiority, compared to Somali men. This structure is however being challenged by Somali women themselves who are following Somali traditions in a reflective manner and using Islam as a religion to challenge norms that denigrate them.

Somali "Islamic feminism" has become an important tool for bargaining power among Somali women. The women in the grassroot association have as their aim to have a gender-tuned interpretation of the Quran to guide their households. They do not seek sameness; they seek equality in gender differences. However, as seen in the literature review chapter, Badran (2006) notes that Muslim women face challenges from men within the society when

patriarchal ideas feel threatened. Challenges also arise from women within the society who are not open to change. Somali households exemplify Sen (2001)'s view that the household comprises both discrimination and cooperation with a bias against women as discussed in chapter 4.3. Practices such as the use of contraceptives put some Somali men on edge, making them feel as though they were losing control of decision-making as fatherhood was concerned. Further, similar to the findings of Donato et al. (2006) as discussed in Chapter 3.1, is that immigration of Somalis into Norway takes away the extended family and social ties enjoyed in Somalia. This automatically affects gender relations and masculinity as men refuse to take up what they consider women's roles and end up being accused of taking up jobs such as taxi in order not to help out in domestic chores.

As discussed in Chapter 4.2.2, possession of bargaining power translates into the ability to transform existing rules through mobilising power (Turner, 1986). Somali "Islamic feminism" appears to provide intrahousehold bargaining power and as such, women have been able to reflect on and challenge the existing Somali culture through using interpretative schemes of the structure. Enhancing women's agency through Somali "Islamic feminism" has proven to lead to their empowerment especially in fertility decisions. Thus as Kabeer (2004) recommends, it is important to factor in inequalities within Somali households in order to understand their household processes and outcomes.

In agreement with Tahir-ul-Qadri (2011) whose sentiments are expressed in Chapter 3.3.2, Somali "Islamic feminism" views gender equality as fundamental to Islamic teachings. Gender inequality among Somalis is thus considered cultural based, and not faith based. Thus, as discussed in Chapter 4.1 in line with Kerner(2009)'s suggestion on how to do an intersectionality analysis, the cause of inequality among Somali immigrants is first, the Somali culture itself as a structure. Secondly, discussion of the second research question in the next section will show that, when their Islamic religious status meets Norwegian mainstream culture which is non-Islamic, Somali women become unequal to non-Muslim women in the Norwegian structure and are unable to access certain resources such as teaching professions due to the Islamic veil. Hence here we see two structures intersecting to marginalize Somali women based on gender and religious differences. We also see what Nash (2008) describes as micro (intrahousehold) and macro (extrahousehold) levels of inequality as



discussed in Chapter 4.1. At the intersection of those inequalities, Somali women are faced with patriarchy in different forms. At the household level, they face patriarchy in the structures of culture. This in my opinion is the reason why Donato et al. (2006) recommend that analyses of gender equality should not just focus on the household. As I quoted in chapter 3.1, "...the connection between migration, employment, and female independence is not necessarily direct and uni-directional" (Donato et al 2006: 20).

There seems to be a tendency among men to consider Islam and Feminism as contradictory but this is not limited to men only. Neither is the assumption that Islam and Feminism are incompatible limited to Somalis. Moghadam(2002) writes about Mahnaz Afkhami, an Iranian feminist who believes that she is Muslim and a feminist , but does not consider herself an Islamic feminist (Moghadam 2002: 1152).

## **7.2 Discussion of the Second Research Question**

- How do Somali immigrant women in Bergen bargain for their position and for access to resources within the Norwegian immigration context? What are the constraints?

Findings of the research show the identity of Somali immigrant women seems to fall at the intersection of different forms of marginalization. In the first place, they are ethnically different from ethnic majority Norwegians like most immigrants from the global South. Moreover, their religious identity brings along with it norms of conduct such as dressing(the Islamic veil) which is considered by the majority Norwegian population as being incompatible with Norwegian structural norms. This effectively puts Somali women in a more disadvantaged position than other non-Muslim immigrant women in selected professions such as teaching. This as Kerner (2009:2) describes in chapter 4.1, is a form of multiple marginalization appearing when institutions of culture and labour market meet making the women face patriarchy in the form of employment structure.

Thus, at extra household levels, in the Norwegian immigration context, we see the two concepts described by Kerner (2009) in chapter 4.1 as ‘gendered racial norms’ and ‘racialised gendered norms’ taking effect. Gender norms and stereotypes faced by Somali Muslim women are different from those experienced by non-Muslim immigrant women belonging to other ‘racial’ categories. They do not have to face the veil question in employment for example. At the same time gender norms and stereotypes faced by the same Somali Muslim women are very different from those faced by their male counterparts. Somali immigrant women, by virtue of having their identities contesting race and gender categorizations thus experience racial variations within gender and gendered variation within race as explained in Chapter 4.1. By virtue of being African and Muslim, the identity of Somali immigrants always tags along ethnicity, a concept described by Kerner (2009) as gendered ethnicization. They stand out from the ethnic majority population (Norwegians), and by being Muslim they stand out from most African immigrants.

Although integration is the policy claimed on paper, in practice, findings from my fieldwork show that Somali immigrants experience their incorporation into Norwegian society in terms of assimilation. Their lived experience is in many ways similar to the policy of assimilation proclaimed and practised in France, where immigrants are expected to adopt the host countries culture entirely and shed markers of difference from their original countries (Rudiger & Spencer 2003:4). Somali immigrant women interviewed expressed a desire to be fully integrated into the Norwegian society. These results echoed those of Silvestri (2008) whose report showed that Muslim women in Europe appreciate European countries for their respect for gender equality through the rule of law. This research considers Somali “Islamic feminists” well integrated because all meetings are held in Norwegian language. As noted earlier the barometer for integration considers ability to speak Norwegian and participation in employment the two main important indicators of integration.

### 7.3 Discussion of the Third Research Question

- What mechanisms do Somali immigrant women devise to negotiate the challenges they face within and outside households?

Inasmuch as Somali “Islamic feminism” gives women collective agency within and outside of the household, there is need to go beyond women’s agency and into a critical analysis of values embedded in different structures. Meeting together with other Muslim women facing similar forms of marginalization, and discussing their integration problems and possible solutions in Norwegian, are some of the ways in which Somali women attempt to bargain for their position within the Norwegian society.

In terms of determinants of bargaining power, I find that bargaining power is significantly higher when women are members of the Somali “Islamic feminism” grassroots association than when they are not. I measure this by the quality of answers provided by my respondents. Most members of Somali “Islamic feminism” association clearly expressed the desire to assert and own their views and had ready answers for all sorts of questions basing them on the Quran. This means they had evaluated the dominance of culture versus Islam and had had a clear understanding of both. Non-members seemed to resign to fate, by for example not finding employment in order not to have to face the question on the *hijab*. Members of the association had answers as what to say if confronted about the veil, and how to make sure the person asking never had to ask again, by providing a satisfactory answer.

Reflexivity on the Norwegian structure has only led to women identifying their challenges, but they have not been able to challenge the Norwegian structure. Negative images posted by the media on Islam and women have influenced the structure and these may take a lifetime to eliminate.

The level of economic endowment or ownership of assets did not come up as an issue affecting or indicating women's intra-household bargaining power. This could perhaps be attributed to the Norwegian structure which supports unemployed immigrants with basic needs. Thus, women who bring a financial contribution to the table did not seem to have a stronger bargaining power than women who did not work.

Human capital seemed to indicate women's bargaining power in Somali households. Two points which jumped at me were that even though Islamic Feminism is frequently advocated and embraced by the women, the force of patriarchy in the form of male dominance seems to have remained so strong that they did not always know how to face up to male dominance, nor did they have the decision-making skills to reject the practice through an Islamic framework. Thus, they may not be able to effectively articulate their points across to their partners and male members of the Somali community unless the values system was changed. Women that were better educated enough to have a good level of English proficiency were more active in focus group discussions and shared what they had read about Islamic Feminism in blogs and on the internet unlike those who did not have a good level of English proficiency. As Bangstad (2007) notes, literature on Islamic Feminism exists predominantly in English language.

Similar to the findings of Badran (2006), Somali Muslim women have redefined obedience and hence moved past "patriarchal protection". This means that they recognize that there are biological differences between men and women but that this does not make them inferior in any way or make men superior in any way. As Badran (2006) also noted, the male protection expected of Islamic men had led some women to misinterpret obedience to mean fully following what their men say, up until they met "Islamic feminism".

## 7.4 Discussion of the Fourth Research Question

- What are the outcomes and what implications do they have for the women and for Norway as the host country of immigration?

Somali women have been able to act as reflexive agents within the patriarchal structure of the clan system. Somali “Islamic feminism” gives hope that male dominance and other traditions that denigrate women can be challenged using Islam. Islamic Feminism can exert a positive impact on women’s bargaining power and is important with respect to its ability and reliability as a tool for negotiating women’s positions within the household and mitigating the negative effects of immigration on Muslim women’s image problem in the West. In content and consequence, what “Islamic feminism” in the eyes of Somali women has achieved can be classified in two broad terms: within the household, and outside the household.

Findings show that Somali women, like most Muslim immigrant women in Europe and North America, consider dressing as a way of signaling their Muslim identity to others. Informants who wear the veil considered themselves to be doing so independently and not through coercion. Despite the fact that Somali immigrant women are proud of using the veil as a symbol of their Muslim identity, most of the respondents felt that the veil is seen as a symbol of oppression by the mainstream Norwegian society. They complained of having experienced negative attitudes and confrontations about it in the public space.

Somali “Islamic feminism” shows the need for an institutional approach in improving women’s bargaining power. It can be argued that Norway as a country of immigration, and hence, spatial structure has an influence on Somali immigrant women’s perception of the success of Islamic Feminism. The Norwegian system is restrictive to patriarchal practices, going by the vast amount of rights accessible to women of all origins. This could inspire the Somali society to strive towards greater gender equality. But the Somali women themselves

have to be inspired to instigate and become the changes they want to see in their society or households. Therefore, this transition would only stem from a mesh of macro forces (traditional Somali culture) and micro forces (individual desire for change) as suggested by Gauntlett (2002: 98).

The aspirations of Somali Muslim women in Bergen are to be well integrated into the Norwegian society. Women belonging in the Somali “Islamic feminism” grassroots association expressed a desire to be understood and assisted in the integration process so that they can become better contributing members of the Norwegian society. Guided by this vision, the Somali “Islamic feminists” take it as their responsibility to learn about Norwegian civic processes including learning Norwegian and getting qualifications for employment relevant to their qualifications and experience. The women believe that the Norwegian government could perhaps consider the role they play in making Somali immigrant women feel assimilated instead of integrated into the Norwegian society. The women’s wish is that the stakeholders could help improve women’s integration through incorporation of differences into the Norwegian culture such as in the use of *hijab* for women teachers. As soon as they feel integrated, the Somali immigrant women appear to want to settle permanently and increase their ability to shape Norwegian community priorities.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

In this research, structuration and intersectionality theories have been very helpful in understanding the complex dynamics of immigration, religion, ethnicity and gender. As seen in the conceptual framework chapter, the aim of structuration theory is to explain social practices across space and time. This is done through looking at how both actions and structures are interlinked and how they depend on each other. As a result of immigration, Somali immigrants’ lives change leading to Somali norms and patriarchal structures being either reproduced and/or challenged within immigration contexts. The different forms and degrees of norms, identities and patriarchal structures intersect with gender, ethnicity, Islam and Somali traditional culture within the Norwegian welfare state. I have argued that it is

usually at the intersection of these factors, forces and structures that Somali women's negotiation and bargaining takes place.

As in other types of Feminism, there are different schools of thought on what constitutes Islamic Feminism. There is no unanimous definition of the term among Islamic Feminism. Yet among Somali women living in Bergen who use the concept of Islamic Feminism in reference to their everyday experiences of subordination in the home and marginalization in the wider society, the very concept of Islamic Feminism takes on a consistent meaning with diverse implications. One positive remark about Somali "Islamic feminists" is that they do not seem to only blame the West for the gender inequalities among Somali households. They seem to take the view that one cannot blame women for wanting what men have, if the men have them because they are inaccessible or unjustly denied to women. Thus in this research, Somali "Islamic feminism" as a methodology has been 'fighting' Somali culture, not merely Western Feminism.

Empirical findings have further revealed that political, public and media discourses in Norway and in Europe have made the image problem of Muslims a structure in itself. It can be argued that the discourses magnify religion as the problem but according to the research findings and Somali immigrant's perception of the reality, cultural interpretations of Islam are the problem. Thus, in the longer term, the analyses indicate the difficulty in discerning the extra household impact of Somali "Islamic feminism" under the current structure in Europe. The same actors who have exacerbated the problem could change the situation by looking at different traditions of different Muslim ethnic minorities because that is where the problem lies.

Empirical analyses have also shown that when it comes to the Norwegian system, structures (signification, domination and legitimation) are experienced differently by Somali immigrants and Somali immigrant women. The women, for example, do not seem to have an effective way of dealing with the media and the image problem it has created on Muslim women. As explained in Chapter 4 (4,2), lack of power means that changing the Norwegian structure with regard to the negative perceptions on Somali immigrant women such as of the

*hijab* as a symbol of oppression is an uphill task. Much of the structural change is dependent upon the Norwegian hosts, who hold the dominant norms, values and resources (power). A central challenge therefore, is to create the necessary conditions for those actors to reflect on their actions, such as through researching on Muslim ethnic minorities. This would perhaps improve the conditions for Somali women living in Norway.

Somali “Islamic feminism” is a phenomenon that has great potential to improve gender equality for Muslim women anywhere in the world. For scholars and policy-makers alike, it can serve as a particular framework for challenging patriarchy that has wider relevance outside the particularity of Islam. However, whether Somali “Islamic feminism” is sustainable remains to be seen. Empirical findings have shown that there is a limit to which Somali “Islamic feminism” can be used on a practical level. For example, Somali “Islamic feminism” does not completely offset extra household negative effects on bargaining power. Another limitation is that Somali men, Norwegian politicians and the media have not fully engaged with their role in creating and perpetuating negative perceptions whether with reference to Somali women or Somali immigrants.

In conclusion, given the positive increases in bargaining power among women in Bergen, Somali “Islamic feminism” can offer a useful tool to Muslim women elsewhere in the world, who may be in search of an effective framework for challenging male dominance. In order to challenge people who view Islam and Feminism as an oxymoron, this research recommends further research to look at ways in which Islamic Feminism as a concept can have a universal application so that it does not have to be a concept unique to Muslims. This is in line with what Moghadam (2002) noted, that women and not religion should be the centre of Feminism. This is what I believe Somali “Islamic feminism” does; it puts women back at the centre of Feminism, not by diminishing the significance of religion for Somali women, but by emphasizing how religion creates room for Somali women to claim the right to equality within Islam.



## Bibliography

- Abu -Lughod (2009). Dialects of Women's Empowerment: The International Circuitry of the Arab Human Development Report, 2005.
- Agarwal, B. (1997). "Bargaining" and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household. *Feminist Economics* (3(1)), pages 1-51. IAAFE.
- Agarwal, B., Humphries, J., & Robeyns, I. (2003). Exploring The Challenges of Amartya Sen's Work and Ideas: An Introduction. *Feminist Economics*, vol 9(2-3), 3-12. IAAFE
- Ali, A. (2010). The Rough Road to Integration. The Case of Somali Immigrants' Integration in Norway. *Masters thesis: University of Oslo*.
- Badran, M. (2002). Islamic feminism: what's in a name? *Al-Ahram Weekly Online* (Issue No.569). Al-Ahram-Cairo.
- Badran, M. (2006). Islamic Feminism Revisited. *countercurrents.org*.
- Bangstad, S. (2007). Feministisk nedlatenhet. *Dagbladet.no*.
- Bruce, J., & Lloyd, C. (1997). Finding the Ties That Bind: Beyond Headship and Household. pp. 213-228.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle.1988. "Race, Reform and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Anti-Discrimination Law." *Harvard Law Review*. 101: 1331-1387.
- Cornwall, A., & Molyneux, M. (2006). The Politics of Rights-Dilemmas for Feminist Praxis: an introduction. *Third World Quarterly*, vol 27(7), pages 1175-1191.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review* 43(6):1241-1299).
- Dito, B. B. (2011). Essays on Women's Bargaining Power and Intra-Household Resource Allocation in Rural Ethiopia. *Doctoral Thesis-Erasmus University Rotterdam*.
- Donato, K. M., Gabaccia, D., Holdaway, J., Manalansan, M., & Pessar, P. (2006). A Glass Half Full? Gender in Migration Studies. *The International Migration Review*, Volume 40(1), pages 3-26.
- Doss, C. (2011). Intrahousehold Bargaining and Resource Allocation in Developing Countries. *World Bank Development Report*.
- Ebadi, S. (2009). No to Islamic feminism & Islamic Human Rights. *Online Interview: Shahrzad News*.
- Fangen, K. (2006). Humiliation Experienced by Somali Refugees in Norway. *Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo*.
- Fangen, K. (2008). Identitet og praksis: Etnisitet, klasse og kjønn blant somaliere i Norge. *Gyldendal Norsk Forlag As 2008*.

- Fukuda, D., Nepal, K., & Yai, T. (2005). MicroEconomic Models of Intra-household Activity Time Allocation. *Journal of the Eastern Asia Society for Transportation Studies*, Vol. 6,, pp. 1637 – 1650.
- Gabowduale, K. (2010). Somali Families in Norway: A Critical Review of the Changing Socio-Structural situation and Its Consequence for the Family. *Masters thesis: University of Oslo*.
- Gauntlett, D. (2002). Media, Gender and Identity:An Introduction. *Journal of Consumer Culture*.
- GHIR. (2012). United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights. *Geneva Institute for Human Rights (GHIR)*.
- Govindasamy, P., & Mahotra, A. (1996). Women's Position and Family Planning in Egypt. *Studies in Family Planning*, vol. 27(6), pages 328-340.
- Hoddinott., J., Alderman., H., & Haddad., L. (1997). Policy Issues and Intrahousehold Resource Allocation: Conclusions.
- JihadWatch. (2011). Al-Shabaab warns Kenya of "endless war". *Jihad Watch*.
- Kabeer, N. (2000). Chapter 2: 'Rational Fools or 'cultural dopes'? Stories of structure and agency in the social sciences. *The Power to Choose. Bangladeshi Women and Labour Market Decisions in London and Dhaka*, pages 16-24.
- Kabeer, N. (2004). Reversed Realities, Gender hierarchies in development thought: Chapter 5: Benevolent Dictators, Maternal Altruists and Patriarchal Contracts. *Gender and Household Economics*, pages 19-35.
- Kandiyoti Deniz (1988): Bargaining With Patriarchy. *Gender and Society*, Vol. 2, No 3, Special issue to Honour Jessie Bernard (Sept., 1988),pp. 274-290.
- Kerner, I. (2009). Intersectionality and Feminist Theory: Reflections on the Current Debate in Europe. *APSA Annual Meeting in Toronto, September 3-6*.
- Kleist, N. (2010). Negotiating Respectable Masculinity. *African Diaspora*, 3, pages 185-206.
- Kusow, A. (2003). Beyond Indigenous Authenticity:Reflections on the Insider/Outsider Debate in Immigration Research. *Symbolic Interaction*, Volume 26(Number 4), pages 591–599.
- Lentin, A. &Titley, G. (2011). The crisis of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age. New York: Zed Books, Ltd
- Marambanyika, O. (2008). Social Identity Management and Integration amongst Indigenous African Refugee Minorities in Norway: The Case of Kvæfjord Kommune.
- Moghadam, V. M. (2002). Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Towards a Resolution of the Debate. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol.27,(no.4).
- Munene, M. (2012). The Challenge of Al-Shabaab. *e-International Relations*.
- McCaughan, E. J. (1993). Race, ethnicity, nation and class within theories of structure and agency. . *Social Justice*, vol.20. Gale Group.

- Mutema, G. (2010). Religion and African Migration: A survey. *Religious Compass*, 4(5), pages 271-286.
- Nash, J. C. (2008). Re-thinking intersectionality. *Feminist review*(89).
- Parrado E.A. & Flippen, C. (2005). Migration and Gender among Mexican Women, *American Sociological Review*, 4(70), pp. 606-632.
- Parker, J. (2000) Structuration. *Buckingham: Open University Press*.
- Pessar, P. R. & Mahler, S. J. (2003). Transnational Migration: Bringing Gender In, *International Migration Review*, 37(3), pp. 812-846.
- Quesada, J. (2011). Why Structural Vulnerability? Why Latino Migrants in the United States? . *Medical Anthropology*.
- Quisumbing, A. R., & Maluccio, J. A. (2000). Intrahousehold Allocation and Gender Relations: New Empirical Evidence. *Food Consumption and Nutrition Division Discussion Papers*(No. 84).
- Reus, B. (2009). An introduction to the structuration theory of Giddens. . *Online collaborative spaces, self-organization*.
- Rudiger, A., & Spencer, S. (2003). The Economic and Social Aspects of Migration: Social Integration of Migrants and ethnic Minorities. Policies to Combat Discrimination. *Conference Jointly organised by The European Commission and the OECD: Brussels, 21-22 January 2003*
- Saha, S. (2011). Amartya Sen's Concept of Human Rights: Agency's Vital Role. *Forum on Public Policy*.
- Sen, A. (2001). Many Faces of Gender Inequality. *Frontline. An essay by Amartya Sen. , Volume 18(22)*, Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University.
- SOPEMI. (2011). International Migration 2010–2011. *SOPEMI Report for Norway-OECD's reporting system on migration*.
- Silvestri, D. S. (2008). Europe's Muslim women:potential, aspirations and challenges. *Research Report: London's City University and Cambridge University (UK)*.
- Statistics-Norway. (2012). Statistical Yearbook of Norway 2012. *Statistisk sentralbyrå • Statistics Norway*.
- Tahir-ul-Qadri, D. M. (2011). Gender Equality and Islam. *Minhaj-ul-Quran International (MQI) : Women League*.

Tomac, A. (2011). Debating 'Islamic Feminism' : Between Turkish Secular Feminist and North American Academic Critiques. *Thesis- Department of Gender Studies*. Queen's University. Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Turner, H J (1986). Review Essay: The Theory of Structuration. *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol 91, Issue (4):pp979-987

UNICEF. (2002). Women's Rights in Islam and Somali Culture. *Academy for Peace and Development Hargeysa, Somaliland*.

Walby, S. (1990). *Theorising Patriarchy*. Oxford, Blackwell.

Walby, S. (1996). Key Concepts in Feminist Theory. *FREIA - Feminist Research Centre in Aalborg* (Paper 33).