

The integration experience of Somali refugee youth in Ottawa, Canada:
“Failure is not an option for us”

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Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the
Department of Sociology and Anthropology

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By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the integration experience of a targeted group of young Somali refugees in Ottawa, Canada. The data obtained for this thesis spanned two years and is based on participant observation, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The purpose of this study is to better understand the impact of the refugee experience on the integration process, as well as to explore the factors that hamper and/or assist the integration of Somali youth. It focuses on the economic and social factors that combine in complex ways to influence the integration experience. In particular, the study examines how culture, identity, religion, schools, the ethnic community, the youth's larger social world, family and gender weave together to shape the individual's integration experience. Based on their own personal experiences, these youth reveal several ways in which the integration of young Somalis in Ottawa can be assisted. The life stories and focus group discussions reveal that, for this particular group of Somali youth, "failure is not an option". They also highlight, especially to policy-makers, the value of this kind of qualitative research, and the need to invest in the continued integration process of Somali youth – both for their benefit and that of Canadian society as a whole.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Aim of Research

The primary aim of this research is to better understand the impact of the refugee experience on the integration process as well as explore the factors that hamper or assist the integration process of a select group of Somali youth. The social and economic factors that influence the integration process are dominant issues. The role of the individual (e.g., developmental level, coping mechanisms), the family, and the larger social world (e.g., culture, school, ethnic community, host community, neighborhood, relations with peers, teachers) are explored in the context of how they hamper or assist the integration process of Somali youth.

1.1 Background

While working on my Master's degree I wanted to do a thesis on the impact of war and conflict on children. My interest in this topic was a result of my government experience, which involved putting the issue of children and youth affected by conflict on the government of Canada's agenda. While contemplating this, I was introduced to the Executive Director of the former Somali Center for Youth, Women and Community Development who suggested that I look at Somalis in Ottawa explaining, "We [Somalis] are all war affected." During the following summer and fall of 2003, the Ottawa Citizen had several articles on Somali youth crime in Ottawa and local media were reporting on the increasing incidents of youth crime in South East Ottawa. This caused an Ottawa City councillor to comment that it was youth who "aren't from here" that were causing the trouble. That made me question how a relatively newcomer group like the Somalis,

were integrating into Ottawa. What was causing this behavior amongst Somali youth?

Were there factors related to the refugee or integration experience that contributed to this behavior? What is the integration experience of Somali refugee youth in Ottawa? What were some of the factors that might hamper or assist their integration?

1.2 The Issue: Somali Refugees in Ottawa

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees there are 10.4 million refugees in the world (UNHCR 2003:14). Of these 75 to 80 percent are women and children (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 1994:21). Many of these children do not escape the atrocities of war and conflict, and may be affected in many different ways, including being wounded, being forced to become child soldiers, getting involved in child labor or sexual exploitation. Many more experience the psychological trauma of death and injury in their families and communities, and/or of having to flee their homes. As a result of their experiences, these children face complex social and economic factors that can influence their integration. The impact of the refugee experience, as it relates to the integration experience, is explored more closely in Chapter Three.

In the local context, child refugees from war-torn countries and regions are known to be present in Ottawa, Canada. Of particular interest for this study are Somali refugee youth, the majority who arrived during the period of 1990-1996 fleeing war, repression, natural catastrophes and insecurities in their homeland. Many have tried to integrate socially, economically and politically into Canadian society. The Somali community in Ottawa has become increasingly concerned with the integration of Somali youth because

of alarmingly high rates of poverty, youth unemployment, single female households and youth crime.

The relocation of Somali refugees, a group whose sociocultural practices and religious affiliation often vary with mainstream Canada, has brought to light challenging issues associated with the refugee integration process. The limited exposure of some Somalis to the English language has hampered their effective participation in Canadian socioeconomic activities. Equally important is that many Somali adults who possess academic qualifications and professional skills have been unsuccessful in utilizing these for their social and economic progress in Canada because their previous academic experiences and degrees, attained from other universities and colleges, are often not recognized by Canadian universities or professional associations. This is a barrier to the social and economic integration of Somalis in Ottawa. As well, it hampers the children as the family's standard of living is limited because the only accessible employment is low paying.

The aforementioned problems affecting Somali youth in Ottawa calls into question the integration experience of Somali youth. What barriers to their integration do Somali youth identify? How do youth overcome these barriers? What factors assist the integration of Somali youth? What suggestions do they have to assist other Somali youth in Ottawa?

In order to examine these questions I carried out an ethnographic case study of Somali refugee youth living in Ottawa. This research allowed me to determine the integration experiences of young refugees and their opinions of what hampers and assists

their integration. This research included the following: an extensive review of literature and internet sources; consultations with Somali community organizations; and qualitative interviews with young women and men of the Somali community in Ottawa, who came to Canada between 1990 and 1996 as refugees fleeing civil war in Somalia. This study is limited to those who were under the age of 10 years old when they arrived in Canada, and who are presently over the age of 15 (15-24)¹.

In seeking qualitative data, I used life stories, unstructured and/or semi structured interviews, focus groups and participant observation. The analysis of these qualitative data was done through grounded theory. These methods, which are described more fully in Chapter Two, helped contextualize Somali refugees' current situations and their experiences before and after their arrival in Canada. An examination of their past experiences and lives in Somalia during the civil war, and experience and process of traveling from Somalia to Canada helped establish the degree to which the refugee experience impacted their lives. This helped to further contextualize what specific needs they may have as a result.

Through life stories and semi -structured interviews, refugee youth expressed their views and these were examined in the context of the integration process into Canadian society. As well, this showed what barriers they believed that they faced trying to integrate into Canada as well as the factors that assisted their integration. Finally, these youths offered suggestions as to what could be done to assist their integration.

¹ For this thesis I received clearance from the Ethics Department at Carleton University to research subjects under the age eighteen.

These interviews also provided insight into some of the important networks on which different refugees rely.

By taking a closer look at the integration process of Somali youth, this study examines some of the effective ways of overcoming integration barriers, and uncovers steps that can be taken to assist refugee youth integration. This study provides a better understanding of the complexities involved in the integration of refugee youth populations into Canadian society, and a more comprehensive knowledge of the unique social, cultural and economic issues facing young refugees. This research has both an academic and a policy focus. Academically, the research aims to contribute to anthropological, Africanist, and development scholarship on issues of refugee youth integration. Certain organizations have shown interest in potentially benefiting from this research including the Russell Heights Community Centre as well as other researchers working in the field of children and conflict. The empirical data related to the effectiveness of integration of refugee youth should be useful to ongoing programs delivered by all levels of government, and various other organizations supporting refugee youth. Young Somalis, who were children when they arrived in Canada, who were told about this upcoming research, expressed a strong desire to tell their stories. They indicated that no one has ever shown interest in their past and present experiences, and now look forward to having their voices heard through this study.

1.3 History of Somali Refugees in Ottawa

In order to understand the integration problems faced by Somali refugees, it is necessary to examine their pre-migration spatial and temporal context, and look at why

they came to Canada. Since the end of colonization, Somalia has experienced economic and political instability. In 1969, General Mohamed Siad Barre came to power through a military coup and in 1977 waged war with Ethiopia. A humanitarian crisis ensued as a result of refugees fleeing to Somalia. In 1988, Somali clans in the north waged civil war against the government in the South. The government put down the rebellion, but more than 50 000 people were killed. Finally, in 1991, the largest blow came to Somalia as the Barre regime was overthrown by the United Somalia Congress (USC), while the Somali National Movement (SNM) took over the north leading to the collapse of the Republic of Somalia. A lack of central government, conflict between clans, civil war and famine combined to cripple Somalia, and led to a United Nations peacekeeping mission in 1993. This proved disastrous, as UN troops became involved in armed conflict with the various factions. When the UN operation finally departed in 1995, the country that remained was deeply divided with no central government, open civil war, and open clan warfare (Abdullahi 2001). It was during this period of 1990-1996 that Canada accepted 13,861 Somali refugees (Citizenship and Immigration Canada reports n.d.(b)) and during this time the Somali population in Ottawa Carleton grew from 2260 in 1991 (Statistics Canada 1993) to 8280 in 2001 (Statistics Canada 2001). The 13,861 statistic was compiled by adding data from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada annual reports from 1990 to 1996². Within this population are those who came as children (under 18 years old) and who are now young adults. Statistical estimates indicate

² To view the tables from these reports please see "Table S6: Convention Refugees and Members of Designated Classes: Top Ten Countries of Last Permanent Residence by Province or Territory of Intended Destination" Statistics and Reference Publications. Citizenship and Immigration Statistics for years 1990 - 1996.

that over the next 10 years the young adult population (aged 20-29) in Ottawa is expected to grow by 43% (Somalia Center for Youth, Women and Community Development 2003:14).

1.4 Somali Culture

Any exploration and examination of Somali refugee youth must include a discussion on Somali culture. Somalia is a pastoralist society based on patriarchal values with roots in Islam. Somalis are largely ethnically, linguistically and religiously homogeneous and the clan is the principal economic, political and social unit of the community. The family, marriage, and children are important in establishing peoples' identities, roles, and statuses within the clan.

The Somali identity is intertwined with Islam (Abdullahi 2001:8) and children are taught specific gender roles from an early age. Girls are brought up to become wives and mothers, and support their husbands, whereas boys are brought up to become heads of their own households, and to support a wife and children. The division of labor between women and men is based on the notions of 'public' and 'private'. Women are responsible for the affairs inside the home and boundaries of the home area (cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children, getting water, fire wood, and tending to the domestic herds). Men go 'out' into the public sphere, tend the camels away from home and attend to the political, economic, and social affairs of the community by participating in clan meetings. Women cannot attend clan meetings, they have no "formal voice" in the decision making processes of their lives or the community, but may influence these when in discussions within the home.

A further examination of notions of private and public are pertinent in the Somali context, because, as previously mentioned, single female headed households have been identified as an issue affecting Somali youth. This indicates that changes to women's traditional roles in the division of labor and their traditional role in parent-child relationships have an impact on Somali youth. As one feminist anthropologist notes "the 'domestic' versus 'public' has been, and remains, very powerful because it provides a way of linking the cultural valuations given to the category 'woman' to the organization of women's activities in society" (Moore 1988:21).

1.5 Need for Research

Since 1990, the Somali community in Ottawa has become increasingly concerned with issues surrounding Somali youth and over time they have found that the needs of Somali youth have changed since the early 1990's, as language is not as much a barrier to integration as previously suggested. Yet issues of poverty, racism and residues of the refugee experience still haunt young people (59 percent of immigrant youth aged 0-19 live in poverty in Ottawa) (Somalia Center for Youth, Women and Community Development 2003:6).

There is little documentation and reporting on Somali youth. As a result the community itself has organized and written the most extensive and up to date reports on issues affecting Somali youth. The most recent report done by the Somalia Center for Youth, Women and Community Development in 2003 describes the following as issues currently facing Somali youth in Ottawa: youth crime, single female headed households, unemployment, racism, psychological counseling and intergenerational conflict.

The fears and concerns are well justified as reports and statistics show that 60% of youth incarcerations in the Ottawa Juvenile Delinquency Center are of Muslim faith. Within this 60% youth population of Muslim faith, 90% are Somali speaking (Somalia Center for Youth, Women and Community Development 2003:11). The findings on youth crime are staggering. The above mentioned 2003 report finds 69% of the Somali community believes they have a crime problem. Additionally, 56% see the crime problem as moderately serious and 51% are of the view that some of the youth in the local Somali community are in danger of getting in trouble with the law if their current behavior continues (Somalia Center for Youth, Women and Community Development 2003:8). Finally, 85% of the Somali community think the root cause of delinquent behavior is a result of “social pressures and the influence of society, psychological factors typically associated with youth and adulthood, negative pre-migration and integration experiences, and difficult family situations” (Somalia Center for Youth, Women and Community Development 2003:9). The 2003 report also identifies the following as factors playing a major role, both positive and negative, in the integration of Somali youth: culture shock, supportive youth organizations, stereotyping, self esteem, identity problems and racial hostility in the community where they live.

1.6 Limitations of Study

One of the major limitations of this study was that it focused on a small group of Somali youth. As a result, there are voices that are not being heard and there are things that I missed because I could not talk to everyone involved. For example, one original objective of this study was to talk to Somali youth who were in jail, involved with drugs,

or had dropped out of school. However, I found I had no access to these youth but rather was in contact with those who were in school or had graduated and were not in jail. At the time, I was concerned that I was not getting a sample of Somali youths who were experiencing difficulty with the integration process. Yet, even the youths I did interview were facing similar barriers to their integration such as low socioeconomic status as a result of migration, issues associated with poverty, language, culture, and single female headed households. Secondly, due to the young age of the participants at migration, memory was an issue. The young Somalis I interviewed had little or no memory of their lives in Somalia or of the civil war going on there or their migration to Canada. Because of this I was not fully able to understand the Somali youths' experience as refugees.

I also found there was a lack of baseline data on the Somali population in Ottawa, and a lack of information on where they reside, which made sampling difficult. This is discussed further in the Methodology Chapter under "Snowball Sampling for the Somali Community." Issues surrounding representation were evident as I grappled with how to represent Somali youth in a narrative when I am a middle class white female.

There is a lack of literature on life story analysis and youth. This was an issue for me because of the participants' young age, and limited memory of their lives in Somalia. As well, due to the fact that the participants were in their teens at the time of the interviews, their life spans are short and not enough information emerged to see a pattern establishing. Therefore, it may be best to use this information to offer a glimpse into their everyday lived experiences, and to provide youths with the opportunity to tell about their experiences and their views and suggestions on how to address some of the issues.

There is a scarcity of literature on the integration of refugee children and youth in Canada. Literature that is available does not distinguish between legal categories of immigrants and refugees and, therefore, there is a lack of information on how the refugee experience influences the integration process. Finally, there is insufficient literature on the integration experiences of Somali youths, a group whose cultural and religious practice differs significantly from those of mainstream Canada. This is particularly problematic because, the greater the cultural difference the more difficult the integration process can be. This means that there is inadequate knowledge related to the design and development of programs and services that are culturally sensitive. More importantly, this means that the needs and concerns of Somali youth in Ottawa, who are trying to integrate, have been ignored. The interviews conducted showed that Somali youth have identified specific things that can assist their healthy integration into Ottawa society.

1.7 Chapter Outline

Chapter Two of this thesis describes how the qualitative research was conducted to obtain the data.

Chapter Three reviews the literature on immigrant and refugee youth. It looks at the impact of the refugee experience on children and youth as well as how this can affect the integration experience. The literature review deals with the psychological and social factors that may hamper or assist the integration process. As well, it shows that in order to understand the integration experience of youth it is necessary to examine the subject at an individual level as well as in the context of the family and larger social world.

Chapter Four is the presentation and analyses of Somali refugee youths' own personal experiences with integration through the life stories of four female and three male Somali youth. It hears directly from youth what assists their integration, what hinders it and why. As well, it explores the role of the family, culture and identity, religion, education, the ethnic community, neighborhood and host community in the integration process and provides insight into the larger social world of Somali youth

Chapter Five is another step in the triangulation of the data. This chapter presents and analyzes two focus group discussions on Somali youths' perceptions of the factors that they consider affect the integration and lives of young Somalis in Ottawa. The focus group discussions also provide an opportunity for youths to discuss and make specific suggestions about how to improve the lives of young Somalis in Ottawa from the perspective of what they would do if they were "in charge" of making decisions in their neighborhood or community.

This study ends with suggestions determined by the researcher and from Somali youth on ways in which the integration process of Somali youth in Ottawa might be assisted. These suggestions are directed towards the municipal, provincial and federal governments, those involved in the creation, funding and implementation of community based programs, educators in schools, and, Ottawa society more generally. This chapter also summarizes the issues that hamper integration and how youth overcome these barriers as well as other factors that assist their integration. Finally, this thesis concludes that an ethnographic study can be used to influence policy issues related to the integration of refugee youth.

Chapter 2: Methodology

“The qualitative researcher talks with people about their experiences and perceptions”

(Patton 1990:10)

2.0 Introduction

This thesis is based on qualitative research that explored the integration experiences of Somali youth in Ottawa, Canada. The key research methods used include life story collection, focus groups, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. These methods helped to contextualize Somali immigrants' current situations and their experiences before and after their arrival in Canada.

It is important to note that I determined that my original research subjects would be youth who came to Canada under the age of 18 years old and were 18 years of age or more at the time of the interviews. As well, these were to be youth who were in jail, had dropped out of school, were unemployed and considered to be having “problems” integrating. However, this target group changed for two reasons. First, most of the youths at the Russell Heights Community House with whom I was in contact, were still in high school, were not in jail and were under the age of eighteen. Secondly, many in the Somali community, including parents, did not consider youth at age 18 and above to be “having problems” or “at risk.” As explained to me by a parent and Somali community youth worker, “It’s not those kids who are having problems. It’s the generation of Somalis that are 14, 15 and 16 that aren’t fitting in. These kids don’t know where they belong. They don’t know whether they are Somali or Canadian or African-

American”.³ This is how the research came to focus on Somali youth aged 15-24. I acknowledge that the voices of Somali youth who appear to be doing “okay” are represented in this thesis and other voices of Somali youth are absent. As well, there is a limitation in the study as a result of not having access to youth who are clearly and visibly doing “poorly.”

Research began with a review of literature and Internet sources covering a range of perspectives relating to immigrants and refugees, gender and immigrants and child and youth immigrants. Following this, primary data were collected from six main sources. Between June 2003 and June 2004, I consulted Somali community leaders on their views about the issues facing the integration of Somali youth in Ottawa. During this time I carried out participant observation within the Somalia Center for Youth, Women and Community Development from December 2003-March 2004 and at Russell Heights Community House from April 2004 to September 2004. As well, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three different employees from other organizations⁴ working with immigrant Somali youth including the following: one female adult youth health counselor, one male adult Somali youth program director, and the male adult House Coordinator of the Russell Heights Community House. Each interview lasted for one and a half hours and took place in their respective community centers.

³ Informal conversation with Somali parent during participant observation (Feb 27, 2004).

⁴ The three organizations were the Somali Centre for Family Services, South East Ottawa Community Health Centre and Russell Heights Community House. I did not do an in depth study of these organizations but collected data for comparison and to understand the different programs and services available to Somali immigrant youth. Semi-structured interviews also identified issues affecting Somali immigrant youth from the perspective of service providers working with these youth.

The fourth set of data consists of life story interviews with four Somali females aged 15-18 and three Somali males aged 17-24. Each interview lasted one and a half to two hours, and took place at the Russell Heights Community House. In addition, two focus groups were completed, the first with eight⁵ Somali female youth ages 15 to 18 and a separate focus group with eight⁶ Somali male youth ages 15 to 24. Each of these lasted two hours and both were held at the Russell Heights Community House.

2.1 Participant Observation

Many note that participant observation is a central method of research in cultural anthropology, because it gives the researcher a window into the daily lives of research subjects and/or the basic groundwork for designing additional research techniques (Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland 1998: 259; Pelto and Pelto 1991: 68-69). A better understanding of the lives of Somali youth was obtained through participant observation at two organizations. The first was at the Somalia Center for Youth, Women and Community Development, where I answered phones, attended meetings with the Executive Director, typed letters of reference and letters to landlords. I also volunteered at the Russell Heights Community House, where I was involved in homework clubs, computer room supervision and spent time talking to parents and youths in various social settings. I spent many hours sitting outside with Somali mothers drinking Somali tea and watching the neighborhood children and youth play basketball, have water fights, ride bikes and fill the streets with shouting, laughter, and occasionally tears and fighting. We

⁵ Three of the eight female youth also participated in the life story interviews.

⁶ One of the eight male youth also participated in the life story interviews.

noticed drug dealers in the neighborhood, and youths smoking drugs and drinking near the Russell Heights Community House.

During these informal gatherings mothers talked about the issues they thought Somali youth, including their own children, were facing as a result of the immigration experience. One mother, in particular, often expressed confusion over what was happening and would ask me: “Mary, what do you think is the problem with these children? Are they always going to be like this? What is going to happen to them? Are they this way because of the poverty? Because they are black? What is it? Is that what you are going to try and find out?” I spent many hours in the Russell Heights Community House talking with young adult Somali women about the *Hijab* (headscarf), Islam and feminism, dating and how they see their lives unfolding differently from their mothers’ lives. These methods provided insight and understanding into the lives and experiences of young Somalis in Ottawa, described more fully in Chapter Four.

2.2 Sampling

According to Pelto and Pelto (1991:123), ensuring validity is a central consideration in research methodology. Some researchers note that qualitative research can be strengthened through sampling (Bernard 1988:80 and Patton 1990:75) and, whenever possible, probability sampling offers better representation of the population under study than non probability sampling. In this qualitative research study, a snowball approach was utilized to identify community organizations and interviewees.

2.2.1 Snowball Sampling for Somali Community

Part of the original data for this thesis was to be based on the life stories of 10 Somali youths involved with programs at the Somali Centre for Youth, Women and Community Development who were identified through snowball sampling. Unfortunately, the Centre closed due to lack of funding in March 2004, before the youths were identified and sampling began. I attempted to identify the various areas of the City of Ottawa where Somali youth live, but this became confusing due to a lack of baseline data on the Somali population in Ottawa⁷ and lack of information on where they reside⁸. Peltó and Peltó (1990:129) note the difficulty of identifying the boundaries of ethnic subgroups in urban settings and suggest restricting research to certain census tracts that are known to contain large numbers of the particular groups. Thus, I obtained information on where the Somali population in Ottawa was concentrated from both the Somalia Centre for Youth, Women and Community Development and the Somali Center for Family Services. The largest Somali population lived in the South End, specifically Russell Road area (north and south), Lefry St, Sandlewood, Hunt Club, Bank and Hawthorne, Uplands, and Alta Vista. The second largest concentration was in the West End at Ramsey, Barrhaven and Bayshore. The third largest was in the East End including

⁷ While Statistics Canada 2001 census indicates 8280 Somalis in Ottawa Carleton, both the Somalia Centre for Youth, Women and Community Development and the Somali Centre for Family Services estimate it to be between 18 000 to 20 000. Both suggest that this discrepancy is due to migration in and out of Ottawa, births in Ottawa and the fact that many Somali people will not participate in data collection because they do not feel comfortable providing personal information. The Somalia Centre for Youth, Women and Community Development used voter lists, school attendance records and health services information, as well as “key assumptions based on the observations of the Executive Director and members of the Board” to support the 20 000 estimate. I do not know what methods were used by the Somali Centre for Family Services.

⁸ I was unable to obtain any information from the City of Ottawa or the Social Planning Council of Ottawa as to where the Somali population in Ottawa reside.

McArthur, Queen Mary, Donald, Ogilvie, Beaconhill, Lowertown/Centretown, Scott Street and Richmond Road. Community Centre leaders noted that while most Somalis live in low income housing, some live in middle class communities⁹.

Based on the information that the Russell Road area had the largest Somali population, and the fact that the former youth director of the Somali Centre for Youth, Women and Community Development had begun work at Russell Road Community House and could be a key informant, I chose the low income housing area of Russell Heights to carry out research. The lack of baseline data on the Somali population in Russell Heights also became a factor, as no public documentation¹⁰ on the number of its Somali residents or youth living there is readily available. Thus, I used the snowball sampling technique again to identify research participants.

2.2.2 Snowball Sampling of Participants

As Bernard (1988:95) notes, “despite our best efforts, it is often impossible to do strict probability sampling in the field.” Based on the reasons mentioned above, it became necessary to adopt an alternative sampling approach that would provide access to male and female Somali youths who came to Canada as children. The snowball approach

⁹ According to the former Executive Director of the Somalia Centre for Youth, Women and Community Development, there are 20 major neighborhoods in Ottawa Carleton that have low income housing and 50% of these have some Somali residents with the average Somali household having 5-6 people.

¹⁰ Ottawa Housing does not release detailed information on residents, citing privacy laws. I was allowed to see a copy of the June 2004 Ottawa Housing report for Russell Heights which showed 688 residents with a total of 228 between the ages of 12-18. These data were not broken down by ethnicity. The Russell Heights Community House Coordinator did his own demographic breakdown, based on documents he received from Ottawa Housing that show the name of each resident/unit. He then added up the names he recognized to be Somali and estimated there to be 53 units out of 160 with Somali inhabitants with an average of 6.13 people/unit for a total of 325 Somalis.

allows for the use of a key informant to locate more key individuals who then helped identify likely candidates for research (Bernard 1988:98).

This method identified a sample of nine female youth (eight female youth for one focus group session, three of whom also participated in life story interviews and an additional female youth who participated in the life story interview)¹¹, and a total of ten male youth (eight male youth for a focus group session, one of which also participated in the life story interview and two additional male youth for life story interviews). All youth lived in the area, were attending, or had completed their education in various schools in the city, and were between the ages of 15-24. This included youth I met through participant observation at the Russell Heights Community House, through other youth and through a main informant who also worked at the Russell Height Community House. Informed consent was obtained from the parents of youth under the age of eighteen by the youth themselves and from the main informant who introduced me to some of the parents. Participants in this study were offered confidentiality and they chose the pseudonyms to be used in place of their real names. For this research I obtained ethical clearance from Carleton University to work with youth under the age of 18.

2.3 Triangulation

Denzin (1987) notes, “no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival causal factors. Because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of observations must be employed. This is termed triangulation” (Denzin 1987:28). Thus a combination of methods was used to strengthen the validity of the research results and to triangulate the data. This combination of methods was also

¹¹ Three of the female youth focus group participants also participated in the life story interviews.

necessary because of a lack of documented research, studies and baseline data available on Somali youth in Canada and, in particular, Ottawa. While some of these methods such as a review of literature and Internet sources are explained above, the following methods of life stories of Somali youth, focus groups with Somali youth participants and semi-structured interviews with organizations and Somali parents are explained below.

2.4 Life Stories

Life stories from immigrant youths, elicited through in-depth unstructured and semi-structured interviews¹², provided valuable insight into the lives of Somali youth. The collection of life stories began with a brief examination of their lives in Somalia during the civil war and their experiences and the process of traveling from Somalia to Canada.¹³ Following this, the interviews elicited Somali youths' early memories of Canada and their experiences of going to school, socializing, and becoming adolescents in Canada. These discussions established the context in which young Somalis current needs and concerns arose, and provided an understanding not only of the immigrants' experiences, but also identified the different resources they had at their disposal to assist their integration into Canadian society. This provided data on positive and negative factors that affected their integration, and on some of the important networks upon which different immigrants relied.

¹² A list of questions used in these life story interviews can be found in Appendix A.

¹³ Issues surrounding memory and age arose here. Youth were between the ages of five and seven when they were living in Somalia and when they traveled to Canada so they have limited memory of their lives at that time.

The anthropological significance of the life story in this thesis is that it provides evidence of the experiences, beliefs, views and opinions of young Somalis who experience economic, social and cultural difficulties as a minority group within Canadian society. This method is useful as it reveals “the participant’s view of the experiences in which he or she has been involved” (Brettell 1998:527). Levy and Hollan (1998:340) explain the use of life story collection or person-centered interviewing as “the study of the interrelations of private and public worlds of people in a community – that is, the study of how people’s minds and selves are affected by and, in turn, affect the culture and society of the communities in which they live.” As Brettell (1998) points out, the use of life stories has been cautioned by some to be controversial due to concerns around validity, reliability and representativeness, but it has become increasingly utilized based on growing concerns for reflexivity and feminist anthropology (Brettell 1998:526). Langness (1965) points out life histories can be a problematic method in that it is difficult to verify facts obtained from them. On the other hand, as Pelto and Pelto (1991) note, “life-history materials may be more useful for examining the patterning of general values, foci of cultural interests, and perceptions of social and natural relationships than as true histories” (Pelto and Pelto 1991:76). On the issue of representativeness, Pelto and Pelto (1991:77) also note that while the life history is rich in cultural information, there is a potential problem in that those who give their life stories may not be representative of the population at large. In order to account for this, the authors recommend the “use of life histories as explanatory and illustrative materials in connection with other kinds of data” (Pelto and Pelto 1991:77). In response to Pelto and Pelto’s concerns, in this study,

further exploration and testing of responses was done through the use of focus groups, which served to triangulate the data. From the life story interviews, a series of semi-structured questions were developed to be explored in the focus groups, in interviews with parents and with service providers.

2.5 Focus Groups

Focus groups are useful when combined with other tools, such as ethnographic research and individual interviews (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999) because “in depth ethnographic work may be more appropriate for documenting broad cultural issues, but focus groups are particularly suited to the study of attitudes and experiences around specific topics” (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999:5). Focus groups were useful as a means to hear and explore Somali female and male youths’ perceptions of the issues they considered to be affecting the integration and lives of young Somalis in Ottawa. These discussions also provided an opportunity for youths to reflect on, and then to make, specific recommendations to improve the lives of young Somalis in Ottawa from the perspective of what they would do if they were “in charge” of making decisions in their neighborhood and community. Furthermore, it afforded an opportunity for more youths to tell about their personal experiences, and to generate discussion on issues that they considered important to their own integration and their daily lives.

As noted by Kitzinger and Barbour (1999: 5), “focus groups are ideal for exploring people’s experiences, wishes and concerns. The method is particularly useful for allowing participants to generate their own questions, frames and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms, in their own vocabulary”. Indeed, much

of the richest data on gender, media, identity and the recommendations for meeting the needs of young Somalis was provided by the youths when they were given the opportunity to explore the issues they considered to be important, and not in response to questions posed by the researcher. These focus groups also explored differences between individual statements and male and female focus groups' statements. In particular, they highlighted differences on certain issues between females in the female focus group and differences of perception between the male and female focus groups. They also served to explore the gender-based perceptions that each group had about the other. The focus groups served to give meaning to and complement the one-on-one interviews and the participant observation by reinforcing the cultural context in which meaning is ascribed to themes such as gender, religion, culture, language, family and social networks. The same questions were used for both focus groups (see Appendix B).

2.6 Semi-Structured Interviews with Organizations

In order to further explore those themes that arose from the life stories and focus groups, as well as to ensure triangulation, semi structured interviews were conducted with Somali youth service providers. This particular interview technique utilized an interview guide, which consisted of a written list of questions, themes and topics that needed to be covered in a particular order. As Bernard (1994) notes, this type of interview technique allows the researcher to be “fully in control of what you want from an interview but leaves both you and your informant to follow new leads” (Bernard 1994:210).

Semi- structured interviews were conducted with individuals working in organizations and agencies that provide service and programming for Somali youths in

Ottawa, including the geographical area in which young Somalis reside. Questions with subjects in this category covered the following broad themes: 1) the official view of their organization or agency, and their personal views on the functioning and effectiveness of integration programs and assistance for Somali youth; 2) the constraints to programming and funding experienced due to one's particular role and function in the organization; and, 3) suggestions for improvements that could ideally and/or pragmatically be put in place. The data obtained from these interviews revealed the various programs and services available to Somali youth refugees, and indicated their effectiveness. Questions relating to the funding and structure of these organizations and service providers also identified the partnerships, support and coordination that exist between service providers working with Somali youth. The same questions were used for all interviews with service providers (see Appendix C).

2.7 Data Analysis

In this thesis, the analysis of the data obtained by the methods described above was accomplished through grounded theory. Literature by Bernard and Ryan (1998:607) refer to several instances in which grounded theory has been used in ethnographic case studies because "Grounded theory emphasizes the discovery and labeling of concepts (variables) and the building of models based on a close reading of the text." (Bernard and Ryan 1998:607)

Bernard and Ryan (1998:607) provide a good review of the literature on the topic of grounded theory and various authors note that it is a series of procedures used to: (1) bring the researcher close to informant's experiences; (2) provide a rigorous and detailed

method for identifying categories and concepts that emerge from text; and, (3) help the researcher link the concepts into substantive and formal theories.

I utilized the procedures outlined by these authors in the following order: I produced verbatim transcripts of interviews and read them to identify potential themes. As these themes emerged, I assembled all the data from the different life stories and focus groups that related to each theme and determined what similarities and contradictions existed within the thematic categories, as well as how the thematic categories related to one another or overlapped. Examining the relationship between categories offered an opportunity to develop theoretical models of the role of the individual, the family and larger social worlds in the integration process which were then continuously tested especially when data emerged that appeared to contradict these theoretical models which are discussed more fully in Chapter Three¹⁴. Throughout the entire process I practiced what Bernard and Ryan (1998:608) refer to as “memoing,” which is when the researcher maintains “running notes about the coding and about potential hypotheses and new directions for research,” (Bernard and Ryan 1998:608).

In the following chapters entitled, “Life Stories and Thematic Analysis” and “Focus Groups and Thematic Analysis”, I present the concepts and themes using verbatim quotes from participants to illustrate how these themes are common throughout the study and to highlight exceptions. According to Bernard and Ryan (1998:610), this is consistent with much of grounded theory.

¹⁴ Ahearn and Athey 1991; Anisef and Murphy Kilbride 2003; Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2003.

Chapter 3: Understanding the Refugee Experience and the Integration Experience

3.0 Introduction

As noted in Chapter One, the objective of this study is to understand the integration process of Somali refugee youth in Ottawa. It is necessary to examine the refugee and integration experience from several perspectives. It is important to contextualize the refugee experience and its impact on the integration process of children and youth, and to identify some of the factors that hinder integration and those that can assist integration. Specifically, this study examines what Somali youth in Ottawa feel has hampered or assisted their own integration, and what they suggest could be done to assist the integration of other Somali youth.

This chapter reviews the literature on refugees, the refugee experience, the integration experience, and highlights aspects of this study that relate to the arguments put forth by various authors. As shown below, refugees are a special kind of immigrant, and their experiences before and after flight must be taken into consideration when discussing their integration. As well, this chapter shows that there are social, political and economic factors that combine together to hamper or assist integration and examines these in detail.

3.1 Definition of Refugee

The term “refugee” can refer to someone who flees one country for another or may be used by governments to refer to legal categories of entrants. For the purpose of this thesis, the definition of refugee, as defined by the Government of Canada, is:

a person who has had to flee his or her country because of a well-founded fear of persecution and has been given protection by the Government of Canada. A refugee is a person who cannot return to his or her country because of a danger of torture, a risk of cruel and unusual treatment or punishment or a risk to his or her life and has been given protection by the Government of Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2006:4)

This is in contrast to an “immigrant” who is defined by the Government of Canada as “a person who has chosen to settle in Canada and has been accepted as a permanent resident by the Government of Canada” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2006:4). It is important to note that much of the existing literature on the integration experience reviewed for this thesis does not distinguish between legal categories of immigrants and refugees. For example, Suárez-Orozco and Todorova (2003) use the term immigrant to refer to an individual “who is escaping political, religious, or ethnic persecution,” as well as an individual who is “lured by the promise of better jobs and the hope for better educational opportunities” (Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2003:19). Additionally, Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes do not distinguish between the two terms and define immigrants as those who come to the host country “for economic reasons,” as well as those “fleeing political, religious or ethnic persecution” (Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes 2003:91). Finally, Anisef and Murphy Kilbride (2003:1) do not distinguish between the legal categories of immigrant and refugee, instead referring to both as “newcomers”. While the legal distinction is recognized, there are many common characteristics.

The factors that matter in the experience of refugee children overlap considerably with what matters in the lives of other immigrant children. The physical and psychological availability of parents, the family’s socioeconomic background, and the context in which the family resettles all

shape the transition for both refugee and immigrant children. But the trauma suffered by refugee children before departing their homeland greatly influences their subsequent adaptations. (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001:28)

Because much of the literature referred to in this thesis adopts similar definitions, the term “immigrant youth” is interchangeable with “refugee youth.” However, as noted above, the specific experiences of refugee children must be taken into consideration. Therefore, the following section provides a general overview of the refugee experience.

3.2 Refugee Experience

Refugee youth are a diverse group as they come from different cultural, linguistic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. Despite differences among refugees, the literature suggests that generalizations can be made about the refugee experience.

The experiences before, during and after flight the refugee experience is marked by trauma, loss, danger, isolation and stress (Ahearn and Athey, 1991). Refugees bring with them the experience of war and conflict. The impacts of conflict may be direct and obvious, such as death, wounding, sexual violence, family displacement and/or dislocation. But some are often less obvious, such as poverty, unfair labor practices and/or loss of health and education services. As a result of migration, refugees experience considerable changes in their physical environment, socio-cultural community, and interpersonal relationships, which can be very stressful for children and adults (Anisef and Murphy Kilbride 2003:14). In addition, the effects of conflict and of being refugees can lead children and youth to experience adverse physical, social, economic, emotional and psychological consequences. Children and youth who face

trauma may experience post-traumatic stress disorder as well as cognitive and social deficits. How this manifests itself relates to the degree of violence, presence or absence of personal injury, age, coping ability of the child, and access to the support of the family and larger community (Ahearn and Athey 1991). While refugee children and youth faced disturbing events in their past, they also face stress in dealing with the present and future.

The refugee experience can have a profound impact on the family. Families disintegrate and are often separated during conflict and stays in refugee camps. Sometimes parents and siblings are killed, and the children are separated, sent away overseas or to relatives for their own safety. These children often arrive in the host country as minors who must rely on extended family or the refugee system to help them integrate into or function in the host society.

In addition to the loss of one or both parents, refugee children may experience the loss of friends, as well as the larger community to which they belong. The loss of community can leave refugees feeling isolated and confused about their place in society, as communities provide a network of relationships that support individuals and families, offer a sense of belonging, and help to define social roles (Ahearn and Athey 1991:13; Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2003:20). The disruption of daily routines and activities, such as schooling, occurs as children flee their homes or spend time in refugee camps, adding further stress to their lives.

As shown above, refugees, especially children, are a special kind of immigrant and “their resettlement must take account of the unusual circumstances surrounding their

experience prior to their arrival in Canada, as well as their unique social, economic and psychological needs” (Metropolis n.d.:1)¹⁵.

3.3 Integration

The process of dealing with a new country, a strange land, language barriers and unfamiliar customs is stressful for children, and more so for refugee children who bring with them residual effects of the refugee experience such as loss, trauma, family disruption and social isolation (Ahearn and Athey 1991:3-17). Ideally, the final outcome of this resettling process is integration. The definition of integration to be used throughout this thesis is “some maintenance of the cultural integrity of the group, as well as the movement by the group to become an integral part of a larger societal framework” (Berry, Kim and Boski 1987:66). I take this to mean that integration is a process that occurs over time. During the process, a choice is made by the group to retain aspects of the culture of origin while moving to join the larger social system of the dominant society.

The integration process varies amongst refugee children, as some flourish during the experience while others, unable to cope, suffer negative consequences such as delinquency and depression. The integration process is complex and multifaceted due to numerous social, economic, political and cultural factors¹⁶ that hinder integration or combine together to support it. In order to understand how these factors come together to

¹⁵ Metropolis is an international forum for comparative research and public policy development about population migration, cultural diversity and the challenges of immigrant integration in cities in Canada and around the world. In Canada, the Metropolis project is built upon partnerships between all levels of government, academic researchers and community organizations in four Centres of Excellence.

¹⁶ While I recognize the importance of the psychological influences as they pertain to the integration of refugee children and youth, an analysis of these is beyond the scope of this thesis. As an anthropological study, this thesis emphasizes the sociocultural aspects of the integration process for Somali youth.

influence the integration process it is necessary to examine the child in the context of three broad categories: individual, family and larger social world (Ahearn and Athey 1991:10; Anisef and Murphy Kilbride 2003:17; Suárez and Todorova 2003:23; Thompson and Gurney 2003:79).

The individual level refers to the child's cultural, socioeconomic, religious, background as well as his/her developmental level, level of personal resilience, mental health and ability to cope (Ahearn and Athey 1991:4). The family provides the basic security for a child to ensure that normal development can occur, and family stability has an impact on the healthy development and behavior of the refugee child during the integration experience (Ahearn and Athey 1991:10-11; Anisef and Murphy Kilbride 2003:14). As a result, the family is an important social resource and significant relationship in the child's life. Finally, the larger social world of the child (e.g., school, ethnic community, host community, neighborhood, religious institutions) and relationships inherent in these, can act as resources that support the healthy emotional development and positive socialization of the child during the integration process (Ahearn and Athey 1991:13-16; Anisef and Murphy Kilbride 2003:14; Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2003:21-23). Ahearn and Athey (1991) use the term community to refer to the world outside the family that plays a role in the socialization of the child and those relationships inherent in them. They consider this to include religion and religious institutions, education and school, the refugee's ethnic community and the community in the host country. Anisef and Murphy Kilbride (2003) and Suárez-Orozco and Torodova (2003) use the term "social world" rather than community to refer to the ethnic group,

neighborhood, schools and religious institutions and the social relations inherent in these (e.g., peers, teachers, church or mosque members, coaches, non-related adults). For the purpose of this thesis I will use the term “social world” rather than community, to refer to the religious affiliations, education and school, neighborhood, ethnic community and the relations inherent in these.

Ahearn and Athey (1991:4) and Thompson and Gurney (2003:77) suggest that a stress or resiliency framework is the best way to examine the integration process, as this focuses on the individual experience of the child as well as the larger environment surrounding the child. According to these scholars, this approach allows for an examination of the factors that hinder integration to be examined simultaneously with those that assist integration. Using this approach, the following section examines the social, political and economic factors that can hinder or assist the integration of refugee youth. This examination begins with themes related to the refugee youths’ social world, followed by the family and then gender. These themes also emerged in the life stories and focus group discussions as seen in Chapters Four and Five.

3.4 Role of the Social World in Integration

3.4.1 Culture, Identity, Religion

Culture can be a barrier to integration, and the greater the cultural difference is between the refugee and host country the more difficult integration can be (Berry, Kim and Boski 1987). As noted previously, there are significant differences between Somali culture and Canadian culture. The definition of culture to be used throughout this thesis is “the sum of learned knowledge and skills - including religion and language - that

distinguishes one community from another and which, subject to the vagaries of innovation and change, passes on in a recognizable form from generation to generation” (Lewis 1985:17). I take this to mean that culture is a collective understanding of norms and values that provides a community with meaning. Culture is passed on from one generation to the next through patterns and structures of socialization such as the family, schools, education, and religion (Ahearn and Athey 1991:14).

Identity

During integration, refugee children may lose or reject aspects of their “traditional” culture, as they try to learn the culture of the host country and incorporate it into their lives. The process of choosing what is meaningful and functional in one culture and incorporating it into another culture can be challenging and stressful, and could lead to a loss of ethnic or cultural identity, which prevents healthy development, and could hinder integration (Eisenbruck 1988 cited in Ahearn and Athey 1991:14). While the literature fails to address some of the ways in which children choose which aspects of the culture of origin and the host culture to retain or reject, the life stories and focus groups in this study reveal some of the factors that influence this decision for Somali youth.

The stress inherent in the process of identity development is further compounded for refugee children and youth of color, as they can also encounter racism and discrimination in the host country (Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes 2003:97). Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes (2003:97). For this study I recognize that race is a social, political and human construct (Miles 1989), and have taken particular note of Robert Miles’ (1989) theory on race. Miles contention that race is analytically ineffectual

leads him to view it as a process (1989:72). “I therefore employ the concept of racialisation to refer to those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities” (Miles 1989:75). Seen this way, as a basis of action, Miles argues that “the racialisation of human beings entails the racialisation of the processes in which they participate and the structures and institutions that result” (Miles 1989:76). In the Canadian context, the connection between racialisation, racism and the integration process is described by Satzewich (1998):

[D]emocratic racism, [which] refers to a peculiarly Canadian form of racism that reflects an effort to reconcile two fundamentally conflicting sets of values...many Canadians take pride themselves in their commitment to democratic principles such as justice, equality and fairness, but at the same time have negative attitudes about and discriminate against minority groups. (Satzewich 1998 cited in Abdulkadir 2006:31)

Racism in Canada can be traced to the treatment of Canada’s indigenous communities by European settler societies. In the current context, 9/11¹⁷ has triggered increased racism and discrimination towards refugees and ethnic and religious communities, as unfair associations are made between refugees and terrorism as national security arguments and concerns have become part of our daily discourse (Canadian Council for Refugees 2002:1). As Jakubowski (1997) notes, hostility towards newcomers serves as an outlet for the expression of underlying racist sentiments, and this is especially true in times of economic or political difficulty, when those with less power, including newcomers are easy scapegoats for the shortcomings of society (Jakubowski 1997:20-21). This is

¹⁷ The terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001.

pertinent in the Somali context as stereotyping, racism and racial hostility have been identified by youth as factors playing a role in their integration.

A review of literature by Portes and Zhou (1993) point out that the larger social world (e.g., neighborhood, school) influences identity development as models, choices and opportunities available to immigrant youth that differ for those who interact mainly with other immigrant youth and those who interact with mainstream youth. Berry (1991) points out that during the early integration period, children should maintain relationships with other family members or those who share their language, culture, and identity, as these relationships can prevent the child from suffering from a sense of identity loss or marginalization (Berry 1991:33).

The integration process is assisted when the child or youth is able to develop an identity, which incorporates elements of both the culture of origin and the host culture, known as a bicultural or multicultural identity (Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes 2003:98)¹⁸. These scholars note that the process of formulating a bicultural identity is difficult, and point out that the family and the social world of the child are necessary to assist this process.

Since so much of the process of adolescents' identity development depends on the definition of self through relationships with others, immigrant youth must experience relationships with older peers or adults who have successfully integrated two cultures into one identity, and who support this endeavor in members of the next generation. (Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes 2003:98)

¹⁸ For further discussion on the identity development of refugee and immigrant youth see Bankston and Zhou 1995; Camino 1994; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001; and Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2003.

Parents can assist the child's positive identity formation by supporting the child's development of a new cultural identity rather than resisting it (Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes 2003:98). Yet, this may be problematic because, as indicated below, conflict can occur when parents object to their child learning aspects of the host culture, especially those that they feel a clash in values with the culture of origin. The scholars attempt to address this by suggesting that, in the absence of parent or parental support, non-related adults and peers (e.g., teachers, coaches, mentors, youth workers and community workers) found in the youth's social world (school, religious institutions, community organizations) can assist this process. This is discussed further in the following section.

The process, outlined, above, for establishing a bicultural identity is problematic for the Somali youth in Ottawa because, as a newcomer population, Somalis have not been in the host country long enough for a generation to come of age. In fact, the life stories in Chapter Four and the focus groups in Chapter Five show that Somali youth feel that there are no adult Somalis who have successfully integrated into Ottawa society, and consider this to be an impediment to their own integration. However, Chapters Four and Five also show that, in spite of this barrier, some Somali youth are able to create identities that incorporate aspects of both Somali and Canadian culture, and reveal some of the cultural aspects that the youth are choosing to reject or accept as well as the process by which youth are determining these.

Religion

Islam is closely linked with Somali culture and, as mentioned previously, the greater the cultural difference, the more difficult integration is. Ahearn and Athey (1991:14) and Thompson and Gurney (2003: 84-85), note that religion plays a role in the socialization process of refugee children and youth. It acts as a moral compass by providing boundaries for behavior in the context of the family, community, dating, sexual activity, and marriage and also provides relief from the stress refugee youth face as a result of the integration experience. However, some refugee youth lose or reject their faith as a result of things they witnessed and endured during the refugee experience (Ahearn and Athey 1991:14). The literature also suggests that gathering in the context of religion is a way to express and maintain one's ethnic identity (De Voe 2002: 235-241), as well as to offer a sense of community and network that can provide support and resources to refugees and immigrants during the integration process (Ahearn and Athey 1991: 14-16; Thompson and Gurney 2003:76).

De Voe examines the social integration of Somali youth in St Louis Missouri, USA in 2007. Based on her examination of the role of religion in the lives of young Somali women in the context of the integration process, she argues that the *hijab*¹⁹ is being used by the Somali community to define ethnic identity, and to enforce gender based relations and appropriate behaviour amongst young Somali females. Furthermore, by forcing young Somali women to wear the *hijab*, the Somali community hinders the social integration of young Somali women both in the public school system and in the

¹⁹ De Voe defines the hijab as a headscarf covering the hair (but not the face), shirts with long sleeves, and pants or long skirts (De Voe 2002:236). This contradicts findings in this study whereby the hijab is seen as simply a headscarf.

larger St. Louis society. The *hijab* makes these young females visibly different from mainstream American youth, and leaves them less likely or able to develop linkages with non-Muslim female youth. In contrast, in De Voe's study, young Somali males do not face this barrier and are able to integrate more easily since they wear clothing that blends in with young American males (De Voe 2002:236). This thesis similarly identifies that religion and, in particular, the use of the *hijab* as an ethnic identifier, had an impact on the integration of young Somali females, as discussed in Chapter Four.

3.4.2 Community and Social Relations

While the word "community" can define a territorially bounded group, it also refers to "the collective interests, values and norms that organize activities and interactions" (Ahearn and Athey 1991:13)²⁰. In this sense, the community is a way to manage social relations, gain associates and establish mutual intentions (Ahearn and Athey 1991:15). As mentioned previously, the loss of community accompanies the refugee experience leaving refugees without a network of resources or a sense of their place in the world, which can lead to feelings of social isolation (Ahearn and Athey 1991: 13-15; Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2003: 20-22). Zhou and Li (2003: 58-59) note that the ethnic community can assist the integration of refugees during the early stages of the integration process by providing newcomers with information on housing and jobs, and assisting them in interpreting the host culture and language. The authors also point out that, as refugees and immigrants become more integrated, the need to rely on the ethnic community diminishes, and refugees move away from members of the ethnic community

²⁰ Chapters Four and Five show that not all Somali youth define community this way. Rather some define community as the physical space in which they live while others do not understand the meaning of the word.

and become part of a community in the host culture. However, Ahearn and Athey (1991) also suggest that this sense of ethnic community is not always straightforward. The reestablishment of the ethnic community in the host country may, in fact, be quite problematic as religious, political, ethnic and racial tensions may be carried over from the land of origin and continue in the host country. As well, language, cultural barriers and racism, on the part of host society, can prevent refugees from becoming part of the community of the host culture (Ahearn and Athey 1991:15).

It is important to acknowledge that members of the host community (e.g., peers and non-related adults in schools, religious institutions and community organizations), are able to assist the integration process, as they offer children and youth valuable information about the host culture, provide them with a social network outside the family, and act as a link to mainstream society (Ahearn and Athey 1991:14; Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes 2003: 91; Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2003:22). In addition, members in the host community, who are immigrants themselves and who have successfully constructed a bicultural identity, can serve as role models to immigrant youth, and assist them in the process of their own bicultural identity formation (Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes 2003: 98-99).

Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes (2003) suggest that community sports programs, neighborhood activity centers, and volunteer mentoring programs may assist the integration process of immigrant youth. These services provide immigrant youth, who live in low-income areas plagued by violence, gangs and drugs, a safe, structured, adult supervised atmosphere during out of school hours. Additionally, the authors

indicate that immigrant youth who are involved in these activities and relationships show an improvement in their academic performance and behavior. It is important to note that mentors and community youth workers may be immigrants themselves and, therefore, they are able to relate to the immigrant youth experience. Alternatively, they may be members of the host culture who have an awareness of immigrant youth issues, an interest in learning about different cultures, and a willingness to act as a cultural guide (Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes 2003:99).

3.4.3 School and Education

Disruption in a child's education can be a barrier to integration when refugee children have not had the same curriculum as their Canadian counterparts, or have had interruptions in schooling as a result of conflict. Interruptions, combined with the lack of knowledge of the host language, leaves refugee children to suffer low academic achievement and lag behind their host country peers. The difficulties that children experience can result in behaviour that teachers consider problematic, and a child in the process of acquiring a new language may be diagnosed incorrectly as "learning disabled". Children and youth who are misdiagnosed and, as a result, are put into a special educational stream, are more apt to suffer from low self esteem as a result of their school experiences (Canino and Spurlock 1994: 21-23). In addition, refugee children sometimes face discrimination by teachers or students (Anisef and Murphy Kilbride 2003:19). Children who have negative school experiences are more apt to have low attendance, exhibit delinquent behavior, and drop out of school, thereby limiting their education and, in turn, their employment opportunities, which could be a barrier to their integration

(Anisef and Murphy Kilbride 2003:19). This is significant, as this study reveals that Somali leaders and parents in Ottawa have identified the high rate of Somali youth dropping out of school as an issue affecting Somali youth.

However, despite some drawbacks to the school experience, education and schooling can actually assist the integration process, as schools can play a role in the socialization process of refugee youth by providing them with information on the host culture and reinforcing its behavioral norms (Ahearn and Athey 1991:13; De Voe 2002: 236; Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2003:21). Programs such as English as a Second Language (ESL), offered in schools, can assist children and youth with language acquisition and their educational progress (Lam, 1994 cited in Anisef and Murphy Kilbride 2003: 20). As well, educational attainment increases employment opportunities, which, in turn, assist integration.

Conchas and Pérez (2003), examine the role of education and schooling in the context of the integration of minority immigrant youth in the United States, and argue that educational attainment is linked to the ethnic community's perceptions of opportunity structures. As such, immigrant youth who see that success in school equals upward mobility do better in school than youth who resisted the notion that school leads to social and economic mobility. This is particularly significant because, as noted above, the high rate of school dropouts has been cited as an issue of concern amongst the Somali community in Ottawa. The educational experiences of Somali youth, examined in Chapters Four and Five, reveal the extent to which the ethnic community and other factors influence the educational aspirations and attainment of Somali youth.

3.5 Role of the Family in Integration

As shown above, the refugee experience can have serious impacts on the family, and this disruption in family life can hamper the integration process of the child. For example, refugee parents typically experience a decline in socioeconomic status in the early post migration period as their academic and employment experiences are not immediately recognized in the host country. Both Suárez-Orozco and Todorova (2003), and Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes (2003) provide a review of literature that shows that children raised in poverty might be more susceptible to depression, anxiety and delinquency. These children are more apt to live in neighborhoods beset with gangs, violence and drugs, leaving them at risk to these influences. Children and youth raised in socioeconomic deprivation are less likely to be in contact with mainstream youth who often provide key information on the language and culture of the host country (Suárez – Orozco and Todorova 2003:20, Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes 2003:94)²¹. Additionally, culturally scripted familial roles may change, and, with them, the notions that children and youth have about where they fit into the family and society, which can lead to confusion and depression amongst refugee children (Ahearn and Athey 1991:14; Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2003: 21-22). Women, separated from their husbands, find themselves in the position as sole earners and the heads of households. Women, whose “traditional” roles are generally confined to the private sphere (the home), are ill prepared to take on the roles associated with the public sphere and that of breadwinner²². As seen

²¹ For further discussion on this and related literature on immigrant youth see Capps (2001) and Luthar (1999).

²² Further discussion on gender differences in Somali culture is found below in the section “Somali Culture”.

in Chapter One, the Somali community identified single female headed households as a factor affecting young Somali males. The life stories and focus groups in the following chapters reveal the impact that growing up in a single female headed households has on both male and female Somali youth. The parent-child dynamic also changes when children learn the host language and their parents are unable to understand and communicate. The language barrier prevents parents from supporting their children's educational experience, as they cannot assist with homework or communicate with teachers. Parents, unaware of the cultural norms of the host country, are often unable to assist their children who are trying to understand the host culture and deal with cultural differences (Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes 2003:95-99). Additionally, parents who grew up as part of an ethnic majority are unable to assist their children who find themselves marginalized as part of an ethnic minority (Waters, 1997 cited in Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes 2003:93). Conflicts between parents and children can occur when adult migrants largely preserve the features of culture and lifestyle of their country of origin, while the second generation²³ has an easier time accepting the cultural norms of the host country (Remennick 1999:65).

This study reveals, that, despite the language barrier, some refugee parents are able to assist with the integration of their children by mitigating the negative impact of socioeconomic deprivation, by supporting their education, and educating their children about issues they may face as a result of being a minority. The life stories and focus groups in Chapters Four and Five that follow, also reveal that there are different opinions

²³ Second generation refers to those youth who were born in Canada.

by youths as to how being raised in a single female headed household affects the integration experience of young Somalis.

3.6 Gender

The issue of gender crosscuts all aspects of identity and the refugee and integration experience. Gender is a social construct about the proper roles and behaviour for males and females that intersects with age, race, culture, religion and socioeconomic status. I take this to mean that gender is the social meaning given to male and female roles in society by the family and the larger social world. While there is a lack of literature on how gender influences the integration process for youth, I have identified some research projects²⁴ dealing with the integration of immigrants and refugees, which provide useful models of how the theoretical concept of gender guides grounded research. These projects demonstrate how the use of a gender perspective can provide valuable insight into the personal experiences of refugees and immigrants, and a more thorough understanding of their integration into the receiving society.

As mentioned previously, the family may experience profound changes as a result of the refugee experience, and traditional roles accorded to males and females may change before, during or after flight. The impact of the refugee experience upon the family is explored in the research conducted by Dion and Dion (2001) which examined the role of the family in the context of the cultural adaptation of refugees and immigrants, and in the socialization of adolescents and young adults. They argue that individual experiences of refugees are best uncovered through the exploration of how traditional

²⁴ See the following sources for detailed research information on specific projects involving immigrants in which gender and race are the central focus of the conceptual framework: Dion and Dion (2001) and Matsuoka and Sorenson (2001).

roles of women and men are negotiated and renegotiated, as a result of the refugee experience. They also show that an examination of how these role changes affect the parent-child relationship provides important insights into the adaptation and integration experience of youth. The parent-child relationship can affect the socialization of youth, in particular, the development of ethnocultural identity among adolescents and young adults (Dion and Dion 2001:511). The central focus on gender, in the above mentioned qualitative research project, corresponds to the research objectives of this thesis, which includes an examination of how the family, and, in particular, single parent families, play a role in the integration of female and male Somali refugee youth. Such a study is particularly pertinent in the Somali context because, as previously mentioned, the family plays a crucial role in establishing people's identities and roles within Somali culture.

The way in which gender impacts the educational experience of immigrant youth is explored by Baolian Qin-Hillard (2003), who examines why females in some ethnic groups have higher academic aspirations and achievements than males. Several reasons are suggested for this gender gap. First, there is a gender role shift amongst parents who become supportive of girl's education in the host country, because they consider their daughter's education to be linked to increased job opportunities and a sense of succeeding in the host country. Secondly, culturally scripted notions of gender lead some parents to be more protective of females than males, such as keeping their daughters inside where their homework is monitored and they are not exposed to the negative influences. Thirdly, female immigrant youth see school as a liberating space where they are free from culturally scripted gender roles and their parents, therefore, they have a

positive attitude toward school. Finally, females view educational attainment as a means to break free from culturally scripted gender roles in the future (Baolian Qin-Hillard 2003:92).²⁵

This is significant in this case study of Somali youth in Ottawa, as the life stories in the next chapter show that some female Somali youth have higher educational aspirations than young Somali males. Moreover, this study reveals that there are gender differences within the integration process that fall under the thematic categories of family, culture, identity and religion.

As a review of the literature shows, there are a myriad of factors that influence the refugee and integration experience. The integration process of refugee youth is not a straightforward process. It is hugely dependent on time, as well as where refugees arrive, how they arrive, the differences between the host culture and culture of origin, age of refugee and gender. In addition, the process is complex due to the influence of cultural, economic and political factors. The life stories and focus group discussions in the following chapters provide a case study on Somali refugee youths in Ottawa and their situations as a result of the refugee and integration experiences.

²⁵ For more discussion on this topic, see Portes and Rumbaut (2001); Brandon (1991), and Rong and Brown (2001).

Chapter 4: Life Stories and Thematic Analysis

*“Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people”
(Spradley 1979:3)*

4.0 Introduction

There is a lack of data on the experiences of Somali immigrant youth in Canada and, in particular, on youth who are described as “successful” or “making it”. Such youths are deemed successful because they attend school, are not in trouble with the law, and do not have children out of wedlock, despite the fact that they may lack appropriate role models and are often from single parent families. There is a gap in the literature on this particular group of Somali youths, which means that these voices have been overlooked. As Briggs (1998:20) notes, “[t]hrough ethnographic writings anthropologists give voice to the voiceless”. Thus, this study serves to give voice to those Somali youths who are currently students, those who have completed their secondary school studies, those who are employed or seeking employment, those who are not in trouble with the law and those who are not dating or having children out of wedlock. All of these youths are trying to integrate successfully into Ottawa, despite the numerous and varied challenges they face.

This chapter provides ethnographic information of a select group of 19 Somali youth immigrants (nine females and ten males) between the ages of 15 and 25 who live in a low income housing area of Ottawa, Canada. The data obtained through the collection of life stories, focus groups and participant observation, as described in Chapter 2, allowed me to become familiar with youth participants and their lives. The ethnographic

research produced rich data consisting of youths voicing their integration experiences in Ottawa, as well as their perceptions of themselves and aspirations for the future.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the immigration and integration experience has a different impact on children and youth than on adults, and is influenced by gender. Refugees and immigrants face numerous challenges and impediments to social, political and economic integration into a new society (Ahearn and Athey 1991; De Voe 2002; Vargas 1999). These barriers include language, education, and cultural differences (Anisef and Murphy Kilbride 2003:14; Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2003:19). The life stories and focus group discussions in this study reveal numerous barriers to integration, and highlight the construction and maintenance of identity, the use of social relations and the role of the wider social world, the family and gender in the context of the integration experience. Such information provides a means to better understand the integration process of Somali youth and to identify some of the factors they feel have affected their integration into Ottawa. They also highlight some of the perceptions Somali youth have of themselves, and how they feel they are perceived by other Somalis and non-Somalis in Ottawa.

These data are compiled and presented in two chapters. First, the life stories of four female Somali youths and three male Somali youths describe their backgrounds, the details of their migration experience to Canada, and their experiences of trying to integrate into Ottawa. The life story interviews examine the role of Somali culture, the role of parents, siblings, extended family and clan membership in the integration process of youth, and the social networks on which Somali youth rely. This is followed by a

second section which utilizes the literature discussed in Chapter Three in order to contextualize this study and the youths' experiences. The information acquired was used as part of the triangulation of the data and served to develop the questions for the focus groups which are analyzed and discussed in Chapter Five. Chapter Five presents the results of two separate focus groups, disaggregated by sex (eight Somali males and seven Somali females), in which the questions posed addressed the factors that participants feel affect their integration both positively and negatively.

As previously noted, all Somali youth participants lived in Russell Heights, Ottawa, at the time of the interviews and focus group discussions. The following section provides a brief description of Russell Heights and the Russell Heights Community House. A brief profile of the community further contextualizes the lives of Somali youth participants, and provides an overview of some of the programs and resources available to them within the local space where they are growing up.

4.1 Community Profile

Russell Heights is a social housing area in South East Ottawa, comprised of 160 units of three, four and five bedroom row housing. There are 688 residents, of which 406 are under 18 years of age and 178 are between the ages of 12 and 18²⁶. Residents are largely new Canadians and members of visible minority groups²⁷ who live on some form of assistance and/or hold low paying jobs. According to the Russell Heights Community

²⁶ These numbers were obtained through viewing an internal document the City of Ottawa provided to the Russell Heights Community House Coordinator (interview June 9, 2004).

²⁷ According to the House coordinator these are "Lebanese, Arab, some recently arrived Afghanis, Haitians, Somali, and a number of non-Somali Africans."

House Coordinator, “53 units out of 160 are Somali, coming out to 28% of units”²⁸ with an average of just over 6 Somalis per unit²⁹.

In the middle of the neighborhood is the Russell Heights Community House. It is one of 14 such community houses across the city set up by Ottawa Housing and is governed by the Russell Heights Tenant’s Association. According to the House Coordinator, the official mission statement of the Community House is that:

It’s set up to provide social, health, educational and recreational programs to the low income residents of Russell Heights Community itself. This includes the 160 units of subsidized family row housing, as well as the low income people in the surrounding neighborhoods. (Interview with Russell Heights Community House Coordinator June 9, 2004)

The Community House receives no ongoing funding from any one source and the majority of grants they do receive are for one fiscal year only. For the fiscal year 2004-2005, the Community House budget was \$95,892, funded by a number of sources including the City of Ottawa, the United Way and the South East Ottawa Community Health Centre. In previous years, the Russell Heights Community House received support from the Trillium Foundation, the City of Ottawa and Human Resources Development Canada. These grants work in different ways: some have a percentage earmarked for infrastructure (e.g., telephone, materials), while others may or may not be used for core operating costs (e.g., employee salaries, daily operations). As a result of such unreliable funding, the Russell Heights Community House faces challenges in terms of maintaining programs and support for local residents.

²⁸ These numbers were obtained by the Russell Heights Community House Coordinator (interview June 9, 2004).

²⁹ Ibid.

The programs offered by the Community House are dependent on the type of grant received. Presently, the United Way is funding a Homework Club program which operates during the school year, from Monday to Thursday from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m., and provides tutors to assist youths with their homework. In addition, the United Way funds the After 4 Recreation program, each Friday from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., which provides organized activities for youth ages six to 12. The Community House also partners with volunteers and other organizations, (e.g., the South East Ottawa Community Health Centre), to create and implement programs such as “Lunch & Chat,” which provide an opportunity for recent immigrant women to meet other women in a social setting.

In previous years, the Russell Heights Community House constantly had to look to various granting agencies for funding, and often determined its priorities for the year on the basis of which grants were available for any programs or activities that may be helpful to women, youth and the community at large. In 2004-2005, the Community House formed a coalition with the other 13 Community Houses in order to better coordinate their programming and funding applications. Instead of each Community House applying to the United Way each year, several groups now partner together in order to submit one application.

While a description of Russell Heights and the Russell Heights Community House provides a framework in which to examine the lives of Somali youths, familiarity with the experiences and lives of some of the individual participants is needed in order to more fully examine the integration experience of Somali youth. The following section of

life stories and analyses will provide a greater understanding of the integration experience of Somali youth.

4.2 Life Stories and Thematic Analysis

Below are the life stories of young Somalis, four female (Sophia, Filsan, Sue and Rahma) and three males (Muhamed, Mahad and Hussein). It is important to note that this is not a Psychology thesis. While not wanting to minimize the mental and psychological impact of war on the immigration and integration experience, an in-depth examination of these issues is beyond the scope of this thesis. As noted in the Methodology Chapter, these youth represent a select group of Somali refugee youth who appear to be doing “okay” in terms of the integration experience and are from a particular demographic group and area of the Ottawa. This information was gathered using semi-structured interviews, participant observation and snowball sampling.

Female Life Stories and Thematic Analysis

4.2.1 Sophia

Sophia was 18 years old at the time of the interview. She had been awarded a scholarship from the University of Ottawa where she planned to study Biology. Her future aspiration is to become a medical doctor³⁰.

When asked about her background and her migration experience, Sophia said that she was born in 1986 in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. Then, in 1991, when she was five years old, she arrived in Montreal, Canada with her mother, and her younger sister

³⁰ Sophia first had the sense of wanting to become a doctor when she was eight years old, when she went to visit her mother who was hospitalized. Sophia explained that, during these visits, she was impressed by the doctor’s abilities to help her mother, which had an impact and led her to decide to become a doctor.

and brother³¹ where they remained for a few weeks before moving to Ottawa to live with Sophia's aunt³². In 1994 Sophia and her family relocated to their own apartment in the Russell Heights area of Ottawa, where they have lived ever since. According to Sophia, she has no memory of her life in Somalia, leaving Somalia, or her journey to Canada.

In discussing her early years in Canada, Sophia explained that she attended an English language public school in Ottawa for grades one to six and had to attend English as a Second Language Classes (ESL) initially. Now Sophia is fluent in English and French, and has retained her ability to speak Arabic and Somali.

In 1997, when Sophia was in grade seven, she and her sister began attending the newly opened Ottawa Islamic School, where she went on to become a member of the school's first graduating class. Sophia explained that the change of schools was precipitated by what she described as "racism" that her mother encountered from the teachers and principal at the school Sophia and her sister were attending. She elaborated:

At the school we went to, the principal and teachers told my mother that my sister had a problem learning and understanding the concepts of math and science. They perceived [my sister] to be dumb and they told [my mother] to take [my sister] to a special school. My mom argued and argued with them. She told them 'I know she can comprehend because she excels in the Koran class.' My mom fought with the principal and then she took us both out of the school. My sister then won math prizes and she won a prize from the Physics Department at Ottawa University.

³¹ When asked about her father Sophia replied that he died in Somalia shortly after she and her family moved to Canada.

³² The terms "Aunt" and "Uncle" are typically used by Somalis to show respect to all female and male elders, including those related through Somali kinship ties. In this particular case, Sophia was asked about the context in which she used the term "Aunt" and indicated that the woman she was referring to is a maternal relative.

Sophia described her mother as her “role model,” and detailed how her mother has tried to assist the integration of Sophia and her siblings. She continued, “From the beginning [of arriving in Canada], she [Sophia’s mother] told us the obstacles we would face, like drugs and racism, and our biggest weapon is education.” In the ensuing discussion on what role Somali parents can have in their children’s integration, Sophia noted, “I would make sure there is more education for mothers on how they can help their kids [overcome barriers to integration] and talk to their kids [about obstacles to integration].” Sophia pointed out that, as a result of the language barrier, some Somali parents are unable to participate in their children’s education, and that while some public schools provide translation for parents this service should be available in all public schools. She also felt that differences between Somali and Canadian culture might be confusing to some Somali parents, in particular, the transition from childhood to adulthood and how each culture ascribes meaning to “adult” and “child.” She elaborated:

Here [in Canada], there are teenagers, but we [in Somali culture] don’t have that [teenagers]. We have young adults. We teach our [Somali] kids to take responsibility very early on. At age 10, children start taking care of the house. By the time you are 18 years old you are pretty much an adult. We don’t have youth. We have children, yes.

Sophia identified herself as “Canadian,” and “Somali,” as well as a member of the Muslim community in Ottawa adding, “I am part of a lot of communities.” In Sophia’s opinion, Somalis in Ottawa form “a big community, not a lot of small ones,” and she described how Somalis in Ottawa come together for weddings and events organized by the Somali Centre for Family Services. Yet, Sophia felt that Somalis in Ottawa should

get together more often for social activities and that there should be a local Somali newspaper. Sophia claimed that she did not feel a sense of community or belonging in her neighborhood of Russell Heights, despite the number of Somalis living there, which she attributed to the lack of social activities and opportunities to socialize for both Somalis and non Somalis in her neighborhood. When asked about her social life and friends, Sophia spoke of spending most of her time going to school and the Mosque, as well as participating in events such as youth gatherings organized by the Somali Centre for Family Services.³³

Although Sophia has spent most of her life in Canada, she has retained certain aspects of Somali culture, in particular, Islam, and noted, “We’re [Somalis] Muslim people.” Sophia expressed her Muslim identity through her physical appearance, which was noticeably different than the other Somali female youth in the neighborhood. While quite a few of the other young Somali females in the neighborhood wore a modified *hijab*³⁴, Sophia was one of the few young Somali females to appear more *asturaad* (covered head to toe), and dressed in more traditional Somali skirts rather than the jean skirts many other Somali female youth wore. However, Sophia also noted that one aspect of Somali culture, namely, the organizing notion of clans, is not a cultural feature that is central to many Somali youth living in Canada either because they have not been educated about it or by choice. She explained:

³³ The Somali Centre for Family Services was first mentioned by Sophia. It is located on Bank St. in Ottawa, Canada. The mandate of the Centre is to assist refugees and immigrants in need, focusing on particular needs of the Somali families and individuals living in the City of Ottawa, through partnerships, services and programs that are timely, culturally appropriate and make a difference to their well-being.

³⁴ The ‘modified’ hijab consists of a headscarf, which is paired with short sleeved shirts or tank tops and, in some instances, jeans or sweat pants.

This issue of clans destroyed Somalia. My mom didn't teach me about it. When I was in grade nine some girls told me what clan I was in. I went home and told my mom and she got mad. She said it's like racism. The youth I know all recognize it destroyed our country. It isn't predominant, but there are always some who talk about it.

In discussing the barriers to integration that Somali youth in Ottawa face, Sophia listed several. First, she perceived there to be a lack of Somali teachers, role models or mentors to show Somali youth they can be professionals, largely due to the lack of job opportunities, in Ottawa, for those Somalis who have obtained an education either abroad or in Canada. She proposed that there be a mentorship program for Somali youth, similar to Big Brothers and Big Sisters, as a way to address the issue of the lack of role models. Secondly, Sophia believed that many Somali youth feel that they are contending with negative public perception and racism, noting, “[s]o people [Somali youth] feel that everyone is against you.” In Sophia’s opinion, if Canadians were better educated about Somalis and their culture, there would be less racism, and an improved perception of Somalis on the part of Canadian society.

Sophia also felt that there were differences in the integration experience on the basis of gender. In discussing the most significant issue facing Somali male youth in Ottawa, Sophia felt that, “drugs is [sic] the biggest [issue], then low self esteem.” This was followed by negative stereotyping of Somali male youth by City of Ottawa Police officers, which she based on her own observations and an experience her brother had with the police. Sophia felt that the City of Ottawa Police should become better educated about Somalis, there should be an ongoing dialogue between Somalis and the Police, and

that Somalis should be better represented within the Ottawa Police department³⁵. In terms of Somali female youth, Sophia suggested that there should be more activities, such as camping, exclusively for young women.

Finally, Sophia commented that she perceived there to be no “link,” or working relationship between Somalis in Ottawa and elected officials at the municipal, provincial and federal levels, adding that she felt that all three levels of government could be doing more to assist the integration of Somalis in Ottawa.

Closer examination of Sophia’s story

The themes of language, family, culture/ identity/ religion, community and social relations, racism and gender all featured prominently in Sophia’s story. In relation to family, her narrative showed that some Somali parents are able to assist their children’s integration by participating in their education and guiding them through the maturation process in Canadian culture and society. However, it also revealed that language and cultural barriers inhibit the ability of some Somali parents from doing so. Sophia’s remarks that there are no Somali teachers, role models, or mentors for Somali youth, and no working relationship, between Somalis in Ottawa and elected officials, suggest that, overall, there is a lack of integration of Somalis in Ottawa, and that this hinders the integration of young Somalis.

In terms of culture, Sophia’s narrative shows that she has maintained aspects of Somali culture such as Islam, but has rejected the central organizing element of Somali culture, notably, clans, due to her mother’s influence on the matter. In addition, her story shows that Sophia feels she has created several identities, as indicated by the fact that she

³⁵ Sophia thought that there were three Somalis in the City of Ottawa Police Department.

maintains an ethnic identity through Islam and also identifies herself as “Canadian.” In reference to Ottawa and Canada as a “social space,” Sophia’s story suggests that she feels some conflict between Canadian society and Somalis. Of particular note are her comments that Canadians need to be better educated about Somalis, all Somalis in Ottawa face racism, and her reflection that Somali youth are perceived negatively within Canadian society. Aspects of Sophia’s story reveal that Sophia has conflicting opinions on the Somali community in Ottawa. Her comment of seeing one community rather than several communities implies that Sophia sees Somalis in Ottawa as potentially united. However, the fact that she did not feel a sense of ‘community’ in her neighborhood of Russell Heights suggests that the Somali community is not as united as Sophia believes it to be. It could be argued that Sophia equates social activities for Somalis with the idea of a closely knit Somali community. Sophia’s narrative also showed that she considers racism, on the part of Ottawa society, service providers (i.e., teachers and principals) and City of Ottawa Police, to be a barrier to integration for Somali youth as well Somali adults. Finally, Sophia’s story shows that she feels there are some gender differences in the integration experience of Somali youth, and that young Somali men face different barriers to integration than young Somali women.

Like Sophia, the following life story of Filsan illustrates that family also play a role in her life and integration experience. Moreover, some of Filsan’s remarks indicate that she shares Sophia’s view that the Somali community in Ottawa is not successfully integrated, and that this is a barrier to the successful integration of Somali youth. By comparison, Filsan’s sense of community and her view that there are different Somali

communities in Ottawa differs from Sophia's sense of community and her belief that there is one Somali community in Ottawa.

4.2.2 Filsan

Filsan was 17 years old at the time of the interview and about to enter grade 11 at an English language public high school near Russell Heights, Ottawa, where she lives with her mother, father, three sisters³⁶ and brother³⁷. In the future, she would like to become a pediatric nurse³⁸ or family doctor in a hospital in Somalia, or with the non-governmental organization Doctors Without Borders.

Filsan was born in 1987 in a small town in northern Somalia. She recounted that when she was five years old, her mother and older sister left Somalia for Montreal,³⁹ and Filsan was sent to live with her aunt and uncle⁴⁰ in a nearby town in Somalia. A few months later, Filsan's father collected her and together they flew to Montreal, where they joined her mother and sisters.⁴¹ Filsan and her family remained in Montreal for a few months then moved to Russell Heights when Filsan's father found a job in Ottawa.

During Filsan's first year in Canada, language was an issue for her both at home and at school. She described how at home, she spoke Somali while her younger sister who was born in Montreal spoke only French. The kindergarten class she attended was at an English language public school, and she was not always able to understand the teacher. She noted that watching television and the Somali peers in her class helped her to

³⁶ One sister is older than Filsan while the other two are younger.

³⁷ This brother is younger than Filsan and she also has an older brother who lives in the United States.

³⁸ Filsan's mother was a nurse in Somalia.

³⁹ Montreal was chosen as the city in Canada to immigrate to because Filsan's mother spoke French but not English.

⁴⁰ Filsan's father's brother and his wife.

⁴¹ Filsan's mother had another daughter who was born in Montreal before Filsan arrived there.

overcome the language barrier. She noted that her peer group included, “A group of five girls who live here [in Russell Heights] and we were friends and still are friends. That helped out a lot. They knew English and they used to explain everything to me and would help me out and translate for me.” Since then, Filsan has become fluent in English and French, yet she has lost some of her ability to understand Somali and Arabic.

Filsan described herself as “Canadian Somali” and appeared to express her ethnic identity through religion, in particular, Islam. During the course my fieldwork, Filsan was always observed wearing a headscarf frequently adorned with Gucci, Fendi or Calvin Klein logos. As well, Filsan wore clothing that covered her arms, legs and torso, and said her preferred clothing included jean skirts and jean jackets. She explained that while most Muslim girls do not start wearing the headscarf until puberty, or age 15, she began wearing a *hijab* in grade one in order to be like her female Somali peers in Russell Heights. Filsan continued to discuss the *hijab* and expressed her annoyance at the people she encounters who consider the *hijab* to be a form of female oppression:

It’s totally wrong [that the *hijab* is a form of female oppression]. I don’t see why they [Ottawa society] think we are oppressed because we wear *hijab*, or we cover up, or we have a guy walking with us everywhere. But that’s part of the religion. And we choose to wear the *hijab* and we choose to cover up. We [Muslim females] don’t want to show our bodies, we would rather show our minds instead.

Filsan practiced her religion as an adolescent Muslim in Ottawa and explained that, in addition to going to the Mosque and Koran class, she prays regularly at school. She noted that her current high school provides a teacher supervised room beside the gym for use by Muslim students for Friday prayers and during Ramadan, but the rest of the time

she prays in a corner by the gymnasium changing room. While she felt that non Muslim students were accepting of her religion, “they [other students] mostly leave me alone,” she felt that her teachers made it difficult to accommodate her request to pray. She described the situation at school.

The ones that aren't [accommodating], I just tell them [teachers] I am going to the washroom or something. I think they [teachers] could be nicer about it. Here [Canada] in the constitution there is the freedom to practice your religion and praying is practicing your religion so you should be allowed to do it.

While Islam is one component of Somali culture that Filsan discussed, clan membership does not figure in her life in Canada because her parents have spoken against it. She explained, “[M]y dad says it [the notion of clans] is stupid and mostly about pride, and that they [Somalis in Somalia] are fighting for no reason.”

In discussing the Somali community in Ottawa, Filsan felt that Somalis should not be viewed as a homogeneous group. In her opinion Somalis in Ottawa comprise several different groups who face different issues based on where they live within Ottawa and that, in order to assist the integration of Somalis in Ottawa, these factors need to be considered. She explained,

I think there is [sic] a couple of a different [Somali] communities. Sometimes we are united, like at weddings, but most of the time it's separate communities with your neighborhood. So, I would start with each community 'cause each community is different and has different needs. Once you provide one community with their needs you can move onto the other one and they can help out other communities as well.

Filsan noted that both Somali adults and youth face barriers to integrating into Canada. As an example, she pointed to the fact that her mother was a nurse in Somalia and was

fluent in French, yet she “couldn’t be a nurse here [Canada].” As well, her father, despite being fluent in English and French, experienced a decline in socioeconomic status after migrating to Canada, as he went from being a businessman to working in a car rental company and suffered from downward mobility.

In terms of Somali youth, Filsan felt that there were gender differences in the integration experience and in the barriers that Somali males face versus females. She explained:

I think actually the girls are doing good [sic]. But the guys’ biggest problem is drugs. Some come here when they are teenagers and they want to make money but they can’t so they get into selling drugs and using drugs. The second [problem] is some of them just don’t care. They don’t take school seriously.

In addition, Filsan felt there was a lack of positive role models, and too many negative role models for young Somali males. She recommended that there be some type of mentoring programs for Somali male youth. She attributed the lack of positive adult male role models to the fact that there are a large number of single female headed Somali families in Ottawa, and mentioned that her father is often asked by single Somali mothers to talk to their sons because “[t]heir [Somali male youth] moms can’t really control them ‘cause they are, like, 18 and 20 [years old] and [their mothers] can’t really do anything.”

Filsan believed there are differences based on gender in terms of how Somali parents treat their sons as opposed to their daughters, and that mothers and fathers are stricter and more protective of the girls because “they [Somali parents] don’t want bad things to happen to them. And they think that guys can defend themselves [against violence].” However, Filsan pointed out that in her family both she and her brother are

given curfews and that her mother often keeps her brother inside the house, as “that way he won’t get influenced by the other boys [in the neighborhood].” In the end, Filsan felt that many Somali parents experience difficulty raising their children in Canada because Somali youth know “the system” better than their parents.

Closer Examination of Filsan’s Story

The themes of language, family, culture/identity/religion, community, school and gender all emerged from Filsan’s story. Her story revealed that language was an issue for her in the early immigration phase and that television and Somali peers were resources that helped her overcome this barrier. Filsan’s narrative shows some of the ways in which Somali parents can have a role in their children’s integration (e.g., setting curfews for Filsan and her siblings and keeping her brother inside). As well, it shows that Somali adult males, such as Filsan’s father, who are not related or members of extended family or clans, can be resources and/or role models for young Somali males. However, this suggests that culturally defined gender roles might prevent some Somali mothers from assisting their sons’ integration. Finally, the fact that Filsan aspires to be a pediatric nurse, like her mother, could suggest that her mother acts as a positive role model for Filsan.

Filsan’s story shows that she reinforces her Somali identity through her Muslim religion, rather than through the kinship system of clans, which may be due to her father’s influence. The fact that she wears a *hijab*, prays at school, the Mosque and attends Koran class suggests that her social space revolves around Islam. However, her criticism of those who claim the *hijab* is a form of oppression and her complaint that the

teachers at her school do not accommodate her practice of Islam suggest that she feels her religion is misunderstood in Ottawa. That she does not feel free to practice her religion in Ottawa could be a barrier to her integration. Filsan's story also reveals that Islam shapes her perception of gender and gender roles, as reflected in her belief that wearing a *hijab* allows females to be respected for their minds and not their bodies, and that Somali parents are justified in treating their daughters differently from their sons.

Filsan's belief that there are several different Somali communities in Ottawa, based on the fact that each neighborhood has its own needs, implies that she does not see the Somali community in Ottawa as united or homogeneous. In addition, her comments that Somali adults face barriers to integration and that there is a lack of adult Somali role models, suggests that, overall, she does not feel Somalis are successfully integrating into Ottawa. Finally, her story shows that she sees some gender differences in the integration barriers that Somali youths encounter. In particular, drugs and a lack of educational attainment are issues facing young Somali males, while misperceptions regarding Islam and the *hijab* are issues facing young Somali females.

Like Filsan, Sue's narrative below reveals that she has also retained similar aspects of Somali culture (e.g., Islam) while rejecting a main component (e.g., clan membership). As well, Sue reinforces her Somali identity through Islam and wears a *hijab*, prays daily and attends Koran class. Yet, unlike Filsan who believed that fathers are justified in behaving in a stricter and more protective way with their daughters than their sons, Sue condemned such unequal treatment and expressed her hope that it would

change in the future, and that Somali parents would regard their male and female children as equals.

4.2.3 Sue

Sue was 15 years old at the time of the interview and lived in Russell Heights, Ottawa with her mother, sister⁴² and four brothers⁴³. When asked about her father, Sue explained that while her father lives in Ottawa he does not live with Sue and her siblings although he visits them on a weekly basis. Sue had completed grade 11 at an English language public school near Russell Heights and was preparing to enter grade 12. She is fluent in English and French and said that in the future she would like to attend the University of Ottawa and become a medical doctor because she “wants to help others”.

In discussing her background and migration to Canada, Sue said that she was born in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, and was two years old when she came to Canada in 1991. She explained that due to her young age at the time of migration, she has no memory of her life in Somalia and recounted how her early memories of Canada are of moving back and forth between Ottawa and Toronto several times with her family due to her father’s job opportunities. In 1996, Sue and her family moved from Toronto to Ottawa where she and her family stayed in a shelter for a few months prior to moving Russell Heights. Sue’s father is employed in construction and her mother cleans offices.

When asked about her first few years in Canada, Sue noted that she started grade one in Ottawa in 1995 at the age of six and told of being able to speak English when she began school as she had acquired the language by watching television. However, she mentioned that her parents were unable to learn the language and were, therefore, unable

⁴² Sue’s sister is nine years old

⁴³ Sue’s brothers are seven, 12, 17 and 21 years of age.

to assist Sue with her homework, so she attended the homework club operated by the Russell Heights Community House.

Sue described herself as “Somali Canadian,” and said that she considered herself to be Canadian because she has been in Canada for “a long time.” Nonetheless, she has maintained aspects of her Somali identity through Islam. Sue told of praying at daily at home and attending Koran classes held at a home in Russell Heights. Sue admitted that she refrains from praying at school with the exception of Friday prayers when her school provides students with the use of the drama room to pray under the supervision of a teacher. Sue also expressed her ethnic identity through her choice of clothing. She wore a *hijab* (headscarf), jeans and long sleeved shirt to the interview, and was typically observed in the neighborhood wearing a *hijab*, long pants or skirt and long sleeve shirt or jacket or coat. Sue explained that while many Somali females do not begin wearing the *hijab* until they reach puberty, she began wearing the *hijab* in grade four, when she was nine years old, because she was trying to emulate her mother. Sue believed that most young Somali females have a choice as to whether or not they want to wear the *hijab*, yet she pointed out that some Somali parents force their daughters to wear the *hijab*. According to Sue these young Somali females are rebelling in their own way. “Some [young Somali females] wear it [*hijab*] ‘cause their parents tell them [to]. But then they take it off when they get to school.” When asked if she was retaining any other components of Somali culture, such as clan structure, Sue insisted that it is not something that she and other Somali youth have maintained while living in Canada, adding, “[W]e [Somali youth] don’t talk about that kind of stuff [clan/tribe] here [in Canada].” Yet, in

describing the Somali community in Ottawa, Sue was of the opinion that there are “different groups of Somalis in Ottawa” and that these groups only came together during the annual Somali community summer picnic at Vincent Massey Park and Somali weddings. This could imply that Sue does not see the Somali community as being united or a homogeneous group.

In the ensuing discussion on Somali culture, Sue was critical of what she perceived to be gender inequality within Somali culture. In Sue’s opinion, some Somali parents treat their daughters differently from their sons and, in particular, Somali fathers are stricter with their daughters than their sons. She elaborated: “We (females) actually have to ask to go outside. Whereas the boys, they come back at night, and fathers, all they say is, like, ‘Don’t do that tomorrow’, and they (males) do that tomorrow.”

Outside of school, Sue told of spending her time at the mosque, Koran class or in her neighborhood where she frequents the Russell Heights Community House to use the computers there for completing school projects. She described how, in the past, she and other young people in the neighborhood would go to the Dempsey Community Centre and watch movies and “hang out,” and lamented the fact that movie night no longer exists, and complained of the lack of activities in Russell Heights for young females. Sue felt that programs and activities (such as indoor gym time, movie nights and “just talking”) would provide an opportunity for Somali female youth to socialize with other Somali and non-Somali youth outside the presence of their fathers, as well as keep young Somali males occupied so they would not be “smoking weed and stealing stuff.” Sue complained about the young Somali

males in her neighborhood, whom she sees engaging in drug use, and admitted that she knows of “a few” Somali male youth who have been arrested for property theft, both in her neighborhood and other parts of the city as well. To counter this, Sue was of the opinion that there should be a full time police officer in Russell Heights to deal with the issues of drugs and theft in the neighborhood, however, she was also critical of how the police treat Somali male youth. She noted “[A]lot of [Somali] boys feel they [police] are out to get them” adding that many Somali male youth have had negative experiences with the police and that these youth felt they were unfairly targeted by police.

Closer Examination of Sue’s story

Sue’s narrative serves to highlight themes of family, culture/ identity/ religion, community and gender in the integration process. In terms of family, while the role of Sue’s parents in her integration remains unclear, her comment that she feels Somali parents, in particular fathers, are less strict with their sons than their daughters implies that her father, despite not living with Sue and her siblings, still has an authoritative role in their lives, suggesting that culturally defined gender roles are enforced in Sue’s family. Her story also shows that she has maintained certain aspects of Somali culture such as Islam, but not the organizing notion of clans and that, in addition to maintaining a Somali identity, she is creating a Canadian one as well. Religion, particularly Islam, is used to maintain Sue’s ethnic identity, as indicated by the fact that she wears the *hijab*.

Sue’s story reveals that her school, the Mosque and Koran classes are social spaces that Sue occupies. It also implies that the Russell Heights Community House is a

positive social space, which may be able to support the integration of Somalis, whereas the neighborhood of Russell Heights, with its drugs and theft problems, may not be as positive a social space and could hamper the integration of Somali youth. Sue's story indicates that she has identified some things that could be done to assist the integration of Somali youth. For example, she suggests that more youth orientated activities would give young Somali males an alternative to drugs and crime, and provide young female Somalis with a social space other than their home or school. Sue's narrative shows that she sees gender differences in the integration process of Somali youth. While some young Somali females face gender inequality and some are forced to wear the *hijab*, some young Somali males are engaging in illegal activities (e.g., drug use, theft) and face discrimination from the City of Ottawa Police. Sue's comment that some Somali female youth remove their *hijabs* when they are at school could suggest that Somali female youth really are not given the freedom of choice when in the same social space as their parents, yet these young female Somalis are using school and possibly movie nights to create a social space where they can exercise their choice on whether or not to wear the *hijab*. This implies that there is some generational tension, and that a number of female youth are integrating in ways that are considered culturally inappropriate by some Somalis.

Like Sue, Rahma's story below shows that she believes that organized recreational and social activities have assisted her integration, and expressed regret that many of these opportunities are no longer available in Russell Heights. Yet, unlike Sue,

Rahma believes that Somali male children have the greatest risk of not integrating and that more needs to be placed on that generation of Somali males.

4.2.4 Rahma

Rahma was 16 years old at the time of the interview and living in Russell Heights, Ottawa, with both of her parents and her four siblings⁴⁴. She was about to begin grade 11 at an English language public high school, and was searching for part time employment in a fast food restaurant in order to earn money for driving lessons. Her future aspirations are to attend university and become a pediatrician.

In discussing her background and migration to Canada, Rahma explained that she was born in 1988 in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, and lived there with her family until they came to Canada in 1996 when Rahma was eight years old. She admitted to having limited memory of her life in Somalia other than the fact that she often played outdoors with her friends. She does not remember whether or not she attended school and recounted how her father left the house to go to work each day but she does not remember what he did for employment. She said that she was unaware of the war in Somalia and has only vague memories of her journey to Canada and of arriving in Ottawa with her family.

When asked about her early years in Ottawa, Rahma said that when her family first arrived in Ottawa, they lived in a low income apartment complex in an East End Ottawa neighborhood, commonly known for housing immigrants and refugees. A year later, the family moved into a shelter where they remained for a few months before moving to Russell Heights. After the family moved to Russell Heights, Rahma's father

⁴⁴ One older brother, two younger brothers and one younger sister.

began work in a restaurant where he continues to work, while her mother remained at home.

Rahma explained that when she arrived in Canada, she was unable to understand English and spoke only Somali and Arabic. She said that she entered grade three in an English language public school where she took English as a Second Language classes (ESL) as part of the regular school curriculum, and, in addition, had an English tutor⁴⁵ come to her home. However, she noted that, despite these resources, she found it difficult to learn English and to keep up with the other students in her class. Rahma's parents were unable to understand English and could not assist her with her school work, so she attended the homework club at the Russell Heights Community House in order to receive the help she needed.

When asked about growing up in Ottawa, Rahma told of attending events and activities at the nearby Dempsey Community Centre⁴⁶, where she and other female youth from her neighborhood would "watch movies, do dance competitions and stuff." According to Rahma, these programs allowed her to socialize with other young females in a supervised environment outside the home and off the streets of her neighborhood. She expressed her disappointment that these activities are no longer available and was critical of what she considered to be a lack of programs and activities for female youth in the neighborhood. When asked what she would recommend to help Somali youth in Ottawa, she added that she would like to see more opportunities for adolescent females to socialize and suggested that the Russell Heights Community Youth House be refurbished

⁴⁵ Rahma had no recollection of who organized or paid for these sessions, but remembers her siblings also received tutoring at the same time.

⁴⁶ The Centre is run by the City of Ottawa and is located next to Russell Heights

in order to host youth activities, including movie nights. She also pointed out that many of the female youth in Russell Heights would like access to an indoor swimming pool where they could swim without males being in the pool at the same time. She noted that while there is an outdoor pool at the nearby Dempsey Community Centre, there is no “female only” swim program scheduled, and that she preferred to swim without males in the area because, according to Islam, females should refrain from swimming with males.

In discussing the integration of Somali youth in Ottawa, Rahma told of often seeing young males, including some Somalis, drinking and doing drugs in one particular parking lot in the neighborhood and behind the Russell Heights Community House. In her opinion, these young Somali males are negatively influencing the male Somali children in the neighborhood and should stop this behavior. Rahma based her comments on her observations of her younger brothers, who, along with other male Somali children in the neighborhood, try to imitate the behavior of the adolescent Somali males. She explained, “[t]he little boys are vicious now [swearing, fighting, throwing rocks and bricks and stealing from the local convenience store].” Overall, Rahma felt the behavior of many Somali male youth would improve if both the children and youth had activities to occupy them, and some place to play other than the streets of Russell Heights. She questioned why the Russell Heights Community House and the Dempsey Community Centre could not have more activities for children and youth.

Rahma described herself as Somali- Canadian and expressed her ethnic identity through Islam. She claimed to pray at school on Fridays, and attend Koran classes in her neighborhood. In addition, she was observed during the course of research wearing a

hijab and clothing that covers her torso, arms and legs and, at the time of the interview, she wore jeans and a long sleeved shirt, but said she preferred to wear long skirts. Rahma explained that she started to wear the *hijab* when she began attending school in Canada because her mother told her to wear it, but noted that most Somali females do not begin to wear the *hijab* until puberty. While Rahma has maintained her culture through Islam, she does not recognize the organizing notion of clans, and pointed out that she does not know which clan she is from, nor does clan structure play a role in her life in Canada.

In discussing the Somali community in Ottawa, Rahma described herself as being a member of the “group” of Somalis who live in Russell Heights, and explained that there are “different groups” of Somalis in Ottawa, who are identified by neighborhoods or areas of the city in which they live. In her opinion, the only time all Somalis in Ottawa get together is for weddings and for an annual summer picnic at Vincent Massey Park.

Closer Examination of Rahma’s story

In Rahma’s story, the themes of language, family, culture/ identity/ religion, community and gender emerge. Her narrative shows that she was unable to speak English during the early integration process yet resources such as ESL and an English tutor assisted her language acquisition. As well, the homework club at the Russell Heights Community House provided her with the academic support her parents were unable to offer her due to their lack of English language skills. Although Rahma’s story does not fully reveal the role of her family in her integration, it does show that her family was not separated as a result of the migration experience, and that she has a male and female adult Somali in her life, namely her parents.

Rahma's description of herself as Somali-Canadian indicates that she feels that she has dual identities. Her story reveals that she expresses her Somali identity through religion, particularly Islam, as evident by the fact that she attends Koran class, prays at school and wears the *hijab*. In addition to Islam, the Somali language is another aspect of Somali culture that she has retained in Canada, yet her story shows that, like others, she has rejected the cultural aspect of Somali clans. In terms of community and social space, Rahma's description of herself as belonging to the Somali community of Russell Heights suggests that she considers the Somali community in Ottawa to be one heterogeneous and to be comprised of different groups based on geographical area or neighborhood. Rahma's acknowledgement that activities at the Dempsey Community Centre provided her with a form of organized recreation in a safe supervised environment suggests that this was a positive social space. Her criticism of the lack of activities currently available and her request for particular female only activities implies that Rahma feels these activities are beneficial to her personal development and integration. Her request for a female only swim program shows that some Somali female youth follow the ethics of Islam and consider it forbidden for post pubescent, unmarried and unrelated males and females to swim together, and that religiously defined gender roles need to be considered when developing policy and programming that target integration. Further gender differences in the integration experience are implied in Rahma's comments that young females need access to organized programs for increased socialization, while young Somali males need organized programs and activities as a way to keep them off the streets of Russell Heights where they are more apt to get into trouble. Finally, Rahma's

comment that Somali male youth are negative role models for younger Somali male children, and that this jeopardizes the integration of young Somali children, implies that she believes that Somali males are having more difficulty integrating than Somali females.

The stories of Sophia, Filsan, Sue and Rahma above, indicate some of the ways that young Somali females have overcome barriers to integration, and revealed some of the factors that have either assisted or hindered their integration. In addition, the discussion highlighted the important role of community and social space, family, and culture and identity in the integration process. It also showed the importance that Islam plays in their lives, and how religion might, in some ways, strengthen their ties to one another, but, in others ways it might inhibit their integration into the wider community in Ottawa.

Male Life Stories

The following life stories of Muhamed, Mahad and Hussein further explore the themes identified above. Their stories show that there are some similarities in the integration experience of young Somali males and females. However, there are also differences in opinion about what has assisted or hampered the integration of young Somalis, as well as the ways in which with both young males and females deal with the barriers to integration. Lastly, it is important to note that the male participants are older than the female participants, and, thus, the life experiences of both groups of participants can be compared up until the age of eighteen. However, the male life stories below show

that after the age of 18, issues surrounding employment and marriage emerge, which was not the case in the stories of young Somali females discussed above.

4.2.5 Muhamed

Muhamed was 22 years old at the time of the interview and lived with his mother, father, three younger brothers and younger sister in Russell Heights. Engaged to be married shortly, Muhamed explained that after the wedding, he and his fiancée would move to their own apartment in another area of the city. Muhamed graduated from the tourism program at Algonquin College in 2002 yet he was unable to find work in this area, and was working part time in construction while continuing to look for full time employment in a tourism related field.

In discussing his background and immigration experience, Muhamed explained that he was born in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1982. He recounted how, when he was six years old, his father took a job at the Somali Embassy in Tunisia and moved the family there. Then, in 1990, the Embassy closed due to the war in Somalia, and Muhamed and his family⁴⁷ went to Morocco where they remained for a few days then they traveled on to Buffalo, New York, staying with friends of his father for a few weeks before traveling to Canada. Then, in February 1991, when Muhamed was nine years old, he and his family settled in a town north of St. Catherines, Ontario.

When asked about his early years in Canada, Muhamed said that, shortly after settling in St. Catherine's, he began grade one at a Catholic School near his home. He described the first few months of school as "tough," because he spoke only Somali and Arabic and was unable to understand English. He told of frequently being in altercations

⁴⁷ Muhamed has five older sisters and three younger brothers.

with other children, because he was unable to understand them and thought they were making fun of him when they spoke to him. Muhamed said that he felt that the other children looked at him “strangely,” because he and his sisters were the only Somali children at the school. He noted that once he began English as a Second Language classes and was able to understand his classmates, the situation improved and he made friends.

In 1996, when Muhamed was 15 years old, he and his family moved to London, Ontario, where they remained for a few years before moving to Ottawa, Ontario because, according to Muhamed, his father had increased job opportunities in Ottawa as well as because of the large Somali network there. During the first six months they lived in Ottawa, Muhamed and his family lived in a shelter in the city’s west end with a large Somali population, and Muhamed attended a nearby English language public high school. Following that, Muhamed and his family moved to Russell Heights in the east end of Ottawa, and Muhamed began attending a different English language public high school near Russell Heights.

In recounting his adolescent years, Muhamed acknowledged that he was often in trouble with his parents, teachers and the City of Ottawa police. His behavior included skipping school, staying out all night without calling his parents and attending high school parties that were broken up by police. He admitted that some of his experiences with the police were the result of his own actions, such as “staying out after midnight when you’re under sixteen”. However, he also felt that the City of Ottawa Police negatively stereotype Somali male youth, and gave the example of how he was once

driving his car and the police stopped him and accused him of stealing it. He noted, “Like, you’re bound to be in trouble with the police if you’re a Somali kid.”

In Muhamed’s opinion, his behavior at that time was typical of all Canadian adolescents who feel the need to “follow the crowd” and who “try and fit in” with their peers. He explained that, when he was 16 years old, he realized he needed to change his behavior and stay out of trouble, and attributed this realization to Somali culture. He elaborated: “In Somali culture, when you reach puberty, you’re considered an adult and, according to Allah, you become accountable for your own actions. But when you’re a kid, Allah holds [the] parents responsible for their kid’s actions.” To improve his behavior, Muhamed said that he stopped socializing with those young males, both Somali and non-Somali, who “caused trouble,” and avoided the areas of his neighborhood where male youth go to use drugs and alcohol. He noted that he also became involved with organizing movie nights⁴⁸ for the Russell Heights Community House and basketball nights⁴⁹ at the nearby Dempsey Community Centre. Muhamed felt that these activities taught him responsibility, and provided him with a supervised place to socialize away from the negative influence of some of the neighborhood boys. Muhamed was critical of the fact that there are no longer movie nights and that the male youth from Russell Heights are no longer allowed to use the facilities at the Dempsey Community Centre.

⁴⁸ This was an activity that was funded by the Russell Heights Community House. On designated evenings youths could gather in the Youth Community House and watch movies under adult supervision. As one Community worker noted, “it’s [movie nights] a way to capture them. Then you can say ‘try this program’ or help them with other issues. And it gets them off the street and gives them something to do.” (interview August 4, 2004)

⁴⁹ Funded by the City of Ottawa, this program allowed youth the use of the basketball court during allocated times. In the spring of 2004, this program was suspended for male youth from Russell Heights following an incident in which a computer was broken.

Muhamed described himself as both “Canadian” and “Somali.” While he admitted that while he is no longer is able to speak Somali and does not recognize clan membership, he maintains a Somali identity by attending Somali weddings, through Islam and by praying regularly and going to the Mosque.

In the ensuing discussion on the integration experience of Somali youths, Muhamed was of the opinion that more should be done to assist the integration of Somalis in Ottawa. He was critical of the fact that Somalis are not being represented in government or middle class professions in Ottawa, and felt that more jobs should be provided to Somali adults and youth. To reinforce this point, he noted that his father was a physics professor in Somalia, and his mother a school teacher there, yet, both were unable to have their professional credentials and job experience recognized, and have only been able to find employment in the service sector of the economy. When asked what he thought could be done to assist the integration of Somali youth in Ottawa, Muhamed recommended that the City of Ottawa provide funding to community organizations⁵⁰ for recreation programs such as those he participated in, which, he felt, assisted his integration.

Closer examination of Muhamed’s story

The themes of language, family, culture/ identity/ religion, school, community and employment all feature prominently in Muhamed’s story. As a child, language was a barrier to Muhamed’s integration and his ethnicity made him feel different, yet, it also gave him a sense of belonging to a Somali peer group. The fact that Muhamed attributed

⁵⁰ Community Organizations specifically mentioned were the Russell Heights Community House and the Dempsey Community Center.

his adolescent behavioral problems to peer pressure from both Somali and non-Somali peer groups, and to imitating the behavior of others, suggests that he was trying to achieve a sense of belonging to a peer group as well as gain acceptance from them.

While his narrative does not fully explore the role his family had in his integration process, it does show that both his mother and father were present in his life, which may have provided him with both male and female role models and parental support. However, Muhamed's story reveals that the socioeconomic status of his parents was negatively affected by the immigration experience, and, as a result, forced the family to live in a shelter and in low income housing.

The role of Somali culture and Islam in both Muhamed's life and integration process is reflected in his understanding of the notion of appropriate Muslim maturation, from childhood to adulthood, which led to positive behavioral changes during Muhamed's adolescence and may have assisted his integration. In terms of social space, his narrative suggests that youth programs may have assisted his integration, while socializing with certain male youth, the social space of his neighborhood as a low income community and negative stereotyping by City of Ottawa Police may have hindered his integration.

Muhamed's perception of the lack of Somali representation in government and middle to upper class professions in Canada, as well as his belief in the need for more employment opportunities for Somalis, implies that he does not feel that Somalis are integrating socially and economically into Canada and Ottawa. Continuing on the theme

of employment, it is interesting to note that Muhamed had completed a post secondary education and was trying to secure employment in his area of study⁵¹.

Finally, his specific suggestion and funding for programs implemented by community organizations reveals that he believes that there are things that can be done to assist the integration problem, and that the City is capable of supporting them.

The following story of Mahad shows that both he and Muhamed feel that negative stereotyping of Somali male youth by the City of Ottawa police is a barrier to integration, and both identify drug and alcohol use as problems facing Somali male youth. However, as Mahad's story reveals, he felt that confusion over identity was the most significant issue affecting the successful integration of all Somali youth.

4.2.6 Mahad

At the time of the interview, Mahad was 20 years old and lived in Russell Heights with his mother. When asked if his father also came to Canada, Mahad replied "No."⁵² He had graduated from a French language public high school in Ottawa in 2003, and planned to attend the University of Ottawa in September of 2004 to study economics. In the meantime he was looking for a job in order to save money for university.

Mahad was born in 1984 in Ethiopia to Somali parents. He has few memories of his life in Ethiopia and, during the time he lived in Ethiopia, was unaware of the war in neighboring Somali until his mother told him that they needed to leave the country

⁵¹ Muhamed was the first participant in which the theme of attempting to secure employment following educational attainment arose. However, I did not pursue this further .

⁵² The status of Mahad's father remained unclear. When asked again during the interview if his father ever lived in Canada, Mahad shifted uncomfortably in his seat, crossed his arms in front of his chest in a manner that suggested he was protecting himself, and sternly replied, "No", indicating that he did not wish to discuss his father.

because there was a civil war. In 1990, when Mahad was six years old, he arrived in Montreal, Canada, with his mother, two older brothers and two older sisters, where they remained in a shelter for a few months before moving to Russell Heights in Ottawa.

In September 1990, shortly after arriving in Ottawa, Mahad began grade three. Because both Mahad and his mother were fluent in French and unable to understand English, Mahad received his public school education in French language public schools through to his completion of high school. Since his migration to Canada Mahad has remained fluent in Arabic, Somali and French and has become fluent in English, acquiring the language on his own.

Mahad described himself as Somali and Canadian, and reinforces his Somali identity in Canada through Islam. He regularly attends the Mosque, Koran class and events organized by a French Student Muslim Organization that he joined in high school. The role of Islam was reflected in Mahad's physical appearance as well. His choice of clothes contrasted with both the other young Somali males who participated in this research, and those Somali male youth observed in Russell Heights who wore t-shirts, basketball jerseys and loose baggy jeans that hung down below their waist. Despite the heat of the summer, Mahad was always observed wearing long pants, a long sleeved shirt or long sleeve jacket and a thin wool cap covering his head. However, notions of clan, a form of identification within Somali culture, is not considered by Mahad to be a way for him and many other Somali youth in Ottawa, to maintain a Somali identity in Canada. noting, "It's [clans] not something good to keep." He went on to explain "There is one big [Somali] community, not a lot of groups."

Reflecting on his own integration experience, Mahad felt that the process of understanding and adapting to Canadian culture leads to identity confusion among all immigrant youth. He elaborated:

One thing [issue affecting integration] that I do see that is around, and not just with Somalis, is identity, lots of identity. You are coming here [to Canada] and you don't know who you are so you are trying to blend in, and at the same time keep what you have [cultural identity]. So kids are in that [state of confusion over identity].

In Mahad's opinion, the media, in particular, television shows and the news, are guilty of portraying negative images of black youth, and that these images perpetuate the confusion many Somali youth have with regard to their identity. He explained,

You see those kids [Somali youth] watching T.V. and they are seeing all those people having a lot of money and stuff and they want that. And when you don't have an identity to say that I don't really need that much money, I want just education, I want this. So you will learn to have whatever other people have, and when you want to have what other people have you are going to try to copy this person. 'Oh, this person was from the ghetto. I am going to the ghetto. He never finished school. Why would I finish school? He got whatever he got without finishing school so what did he do?'

Although Mahad considered religion to be central to the Somali identity, he nonetheless believed it to be absent in the lives of many Somali youth. He felt that if more Somali youth had a greater understanding of and adherence to Islam, youth would refrain from alcohol and drug use, crime and pre-marital sex because they would understand that these are things forbidden in Islam. Mahad also believed that a greater knowledge of Islam would assist Somali youth in understanding that certain concepts of Canadian culture, such as dating, are in conflict with Somali culture and should be avoided. Mahad pointed out that high school is an important time for Somali youth to

understand and practice their religion because, within Islam, adolescence signifies maturation from childhood into adulthood and the acceptance of personal responsibility.

He explained:

When you reach puberty it is on your own if you do something. It is going to be on your back. That's why, when you start young learning about your religion, when you reach puberty, you are going to know that 'Okay, from now on, I am a man, so whatever action I take is going to be on me. I am going to be judged on that so, you know, 'don't do this, don't do that'.

While Mahad believed that an adherence to Islam could facilitate the successful integration of Somali youth, he also felt that Canadian society made it difficult for both him and other Muslims to practice their religion. He criticized his high school for not providing Muslim students with a place to pray, and for preventing the French Muslim Students Organization from having meetings or inviting speakers on school property. Mahad maintained that heightened racism, since 9/11, is an issue that affects the integration of all Muslim youth, and accused the media of inciting this racism by portraying Islam negatively and using phrases such as "Muslim extremists" or "Muslim terrorists."

In Mahad's opinion, racism exists within the City of Ottawa police in that they negatively stereotype Somali male youth. He explained, "[The] police think, 'These Somalis, they must be doing something bad. They are Muslim. They must be doing something bad. They are black. They must be doing something bad'." He attributed the fact that he does not go out in public much as the reason that he has not personally had any experiences with the police, although he claimed to have witnessed some interaction between Somali male youth and the police in Russell Heights.

When discussing what he felt could assist the integration of young Somalis, Mahad listed organized programs and activities such as leadership training, mentoring and stay- in-school programs. He argued that these activities would help Somali youth build self- esteem and provide them with something to do other than loiter in the neighborhood where they are apt to get into trouble. According to Mahad, he stays inside his house⁵³ in order to avoid socializing with other Somali male youth living in Russell Heights, because he disapproves of their consuming alcohol and drugs, the use of profanity, skipping school, theft and vandalism. He also feels that female Somali youth should have more access to activities (e.g., swimming) and that these programs should accommodate their religious concerns prohibiting adult females from being uncovered around non-related males.

Finally, Mahad said he felt that the integration of Somali youth was directly affected by their environment. He accused the government of “ghettoizing” immigrants by putting them all in low income, run- down neighborhoods, and for failing to provide adequate employment opportunities for Somali parents, leading them to be unemployed or employed in low income jobs. As a result, he argued, Somali youth are relegated to living in poverty and prevented from having economically and socially successful Somali role models, both of which hinders their successful integration. Mahad suggested that moving Somalis out of neighborhoods such as Russell Heights and providing them with

⁵³ It is important to note that during the course of the field work, Mahad was never observed at the basketball court, Russell Heights Community House or on the main street of the neighborhood. He was only observed in the back laneway walking from the bus stop to the back door of his house.

employment opportunities would assist the integration of all Somalis in Ottawa, not just Somali youth.

Closer Examination of Mahad's story

Throughout Mahad's story the themes of language, family, culture/ identity/ religion, community, racism, and the media⁵⁴ appear. Language was not a barrier to Mahad's integration since he spoke French, one of Canada's official languages, when he migrated. Nor was language a barrier to his education since he attended a French language school. This also means that Mahad's mother was able to communicate with his teachers which may have assisted his integration. Mahad's story does not fully explore the role of family in his integration, and it remains unclear how his father became separated from Mahad's family. Yet, his story shows that being raised as a member of a single female headed household does not appear to have had a negative impact on Mahad's integration. While it is unclear from Mahad's story if there have been any Somali male role models in his life, the social space of the Mosque and the French Student Muslim Organization may have provided him with some exposure to Somali adult male role models or Muslim adult male role models.

In terms of Somali culture and identity, Mahad's story shows that he considers religion, in particular, an adherence to Islam, to be something that can assist the integration of Somali youth. However, it is important to note that he felt it was difficult to practice his religion in Ottawa, and perceived that both he and other Muslims faced discrimination, or racism on the basis of religion, which may hinder the integration of

⁵⁴ The theme of media arose in the stories of both Mahad and Hussein. Because they were the final two interviewees, the theme of media had not been pursued previously.

both Mahad and other Somali youth. Mahad's story also shows that he considers confusion over identity and conflict between Somali and Canadian culture to be factors that hinder integration. Yet, he describes himself as Canadian and Somali which suggests that he is constructing two identities. While Mahad identifies aspects of poverty (e.g., living in low income housing where one is exposed to drugs and crime) as barriers to integration, he notes that youth programs might assist integration by removing youth from this negative environment. Racism and negative stereotyping by the City of Ottawa Police and negative media portrayal of both Blacks and Muslims are also factors that Mahad considers hamper the integration process.

Finally, Mahad's narrative suggests that he does not feel that, in general, Somalis have integrated into Canada and Ottawa. Of particular note are his comments that a lack of Somali adult role models and a lack of job opportunities for Somalis in Ottawa are barriers to Somali youth integration.

Hussein's narrative below reveals that both he and Mahad share the view that one way to assist the integration of Somali youth is to provide organized and supervised programs and activities in their neighborhood that provide youth with an alternative to spending time on the streets. However, while Mahad believed that religion, in particular, Islam, could assist Somali youth in their integration, Hussein did not consider religion to be important to the successful integration of Somali youth.

4.2.7 Hussein

Hussein was 24 years old at the time of the interview and lived in Russell Heights with his older sister⁵⁵ and her four children. He had completed two years in Arts at Algonquin College but quit before graduating, claiming that he felt he had gone as far as he could in the program and was no longer learning anything from his teachers. Hussein referred to himself as an artist with a focus on computer generated imagery and animation, and claimed that his inspiration came from watching Disney movies. Unable to find employment as a computer animator, Hussein sold a few drawings and sketches, and was employed part time by a large national department store chain.

Hussein was born in 1980 in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, to Somali parents. He has some memory of his early childhood in Ethiopia, such as living in the country, attending an Islamic school, and of his father whom he described as having been a positive influence in his life. In 1988, when Hussein was eight years old, his parents sent him to Rome, Italy, to live with his older sister where he attended school and learned to speak Italian. In 1990, when Hussein was ten years old, he came to Toronto, Canada with his oldest sister⁵⁶ and her two children where they stayed with relatives for a month or so, before moving to Ottawa where they lived with extended family. In 1992, Hussein moved to Russell Heights with his oldest sister, her husband, their two children and two nieces⁵⁷.

⁵⁵ Hussein is the youngest of five brothers and six sisters.

⁵⁶ Hussein's oldest sister became his legal guardian when his parents died; she was also a guardian to two nieces.

⁵⁷ Hussein's sister and her husband separated a few years after they moved to Russell Heights.

Hussein began school in Ottawa in grade three, and found the first few months difficult as a result of the language barrier. He spoke Italian and some Somali, yet was unable to understand English until after a few months of attending ESL class. According to Hussein, he was very shy until adolescence at which time he developed friendships with non-Somali male youth and began dating several non-Somali, non-Muslim girls. Although he acknowledged that dating is forbidden in Islam, he did not see a problem with it. Nonetheless, Hussein maintained a Somali identity through Islam by regularly going to the Mosque, praying daily and refraining from drugs and alcohol. He felt that Somali clan membership had no place in Canada, and described clans as “bad” because they “make Somalis choose sides.”

Hussein described himself as being in the “[O]ne percent of Somali teens who made it,” in that he did not drop out of school, use drugs or alcohol, or end up in jail like other Somali male youth. In Hussein’s opinion, the greatest impediment to successful integration that Somali youth face is the lack of successful Somali role models that Somali youth can turn to for guidance, inspiration and mentoring. He also felt that more Somali youth would stay in school if they saw Somalis who were economically and socially integrated. Hussein said that he was fortunate to have had positive role models such as the sister who raised him, whom he described as “superwoman”, as well as other role models such as Martin Luther King and Oprah Winfrey. He also noted that his personal motto is, “Just watch me,” a famous quote from Pierre Elliot Trudeau. Hussein also felt that, in addition to having role models, leadership and mentoring programs could

help build self esteem and inspire Somali youth to remain in school by showing them that it is possible for Somalis to become economically and socially integrated in Ottawa.

In Hussein's opinion, some Somali female youth in Canada are struggling to fit into an image that both the Western media and their Canadian peers have imposed upon them. He gave the example that many young Somali females dress in tank tops and short t-shirts in order to show off their bodies, and that many of these young Somali women try to have as many boyfriends as possible. In his opinion, this pressure to fit an image, combined with a lack of successful Somali female role models, has resulted in young Somali females suffering from self esteem issues⁵⁸.

According to Hussein, many Somali youth are exposed to negative influences such as crime, drugs and alcohol in the neighborhood of Russell Heights. He was able to avoid these influences by occupying himself with sports and other activities like drawing. He explained, "I started lifting weights when I was 12 and would play basketball. This helped keep me busy and off the streets." Hussein also claimed that the reason he had never been in trouble with the City of Ottawa Police was because he remained inside his house and off the streets of Russell Heights. Nonetheless, he was adamant that the police and media negatively stereotype Somali and black male youth. He argued, "If you're black, it's different than if you're white."

Hussein suggested that there be a supervised facility where Somali youth can go to play sports, watch movies and "hang out", and that the City of Ottawa should put more energy and resources into activities for Somali youth, because "more police isn't the

⁵⁸ This is not reflective of young Somali females with whom I spoke. However, it may be reflective of ones I did not interview.

answer.” Hussein did note that while Russell Heights has an outdoor basketball court for use in the summer and an outdoor hockey rink in the winter, there is still a need for activities that are not seasonal and that provide youth with an opportunity to “get off the streets all year around.”

Closer Examination of Hussein’s story

Hussein’s story highlights how the thematic categories of language, culture/identity/ religion, family, gender and the media influence the integration process. Language was a barrier for Hussein during the early integration process in both Italy and in Canada. His narrative also reveals that since living in Canada, Hussein has chosen not to maintain a Somali identity based on clan membership and, instead, reinforces his ethnic identity through Islam. However, his story shows that he chooses to follow only certain Islamic practices (e.g., going to the mosque, refraining from alcohol and drugs), while engaging in behavior, such as dating, that is forbidden in Islam.

The family appears to have assisted Hussein’s integration, as it provided him with both male and female positive role models in his life. His story also reveals that non related males and females are able to be seen as positive role models for Somali youth and it is important to note that all of his role models are black, which suggests that race⁵⁹ is an important factor in the identification process of Somali youth. The fact that one of his role models is his sister, a Somali woman, shows that some Somali women are able to overcome the barrier of cultural gender roles to become positive role models to Somali

⁵⁹ The notion of race is a controversial term in anthropology.

male youth⁶⁰. However, this may not be the case with all Somalis or Somalis who are non-related.

In terms of social space, Hussein's comment that he was "shy" at school could suggest that he may have felt uncomfortable or isolated as a result of his Somali identity, or that he did not have a sense of belonging to either a Somali or non-Somali peer group. While Hussein's story also shows that his character changed during adolescence to become more "social," no indication was provided as to what may have caused this change. Notions of private versus public appear in Hussein's narrative. Of particular note is that he considers the neighborhood of Russell Heights a public space, to be negative or hamper integration whereas staying in his house or the private space is positive and assisted his integration. However, Hussein's story also reveals that certain public spaces (e.g., supervised facilities where youth can play sports, watch movies, etc.) are considered positive and may assist integration. Finally, Hussein considers that mentorship programs and leadership training are able to assist Somali youths integration, however, he did not indicate if these programs involved Somali or non-Somali mentors or trainers.

Other barriers to integration specifically mentioned by Hussein include negative stereotyping of Somali youth by the City of Ottawa Police, the media and a lack of adult Somali role models for Somali youth, indicating that he does not feel that, overall, Somalis have integrated into Ottawa, Canada.

⁶⁰ This may be influenced by the fact that she is a sibling.

4.3 Thematic Analysis

The life stories above reveal numerous similarities amongst participants. First, all participants migrated to Canada at a young age, and as a result of their age at migration they have little or no memory of their lives in Somalia. Secondly, the narratives show that each of the participants migrated to Canada with either his or her parents or an adult relative, and explained the role of their families in their integration. Thirdly, all the participants have the same socioeconomic status, and all continue to live in the same low-income housing area where they settled soon after migrating to Canada. Finally, all participants had similar levels of educational attainment and aspirations of entering middle to upper income professions (e.g., doctor, nurse, economist, travel consultant, animator). However, by using specific thematic categories that emerged during the research, the following discussion indicates variations in how these young people have dealt with these barriers to integration. This section also highlights critical aspects of the integration process, including the following: the ways through which participants construct and maintain their identity; their use of social networks and social space; and, the role of the community and family in the integration process.

4.3.1 Language

All of the participants were unable to speak English when they immigrated to Canada. As Ahearn and Athey (1991:13) note, facing a new language at school in the host country, generally has a negative impact on the academic and social success of refugee children. This did not appear to be the case amongst participants in this study. However, Canino and Spurlock (1994:23) point out that one characteristic of second

language acquisition is problematic behaviour, which was the case with one participant. All participants, with the exception of one, had ESL lessons as a language resource. They also relied upon television, English language tutors, and the Russell Heights Homework Club to help them to improve their linguistic skills. It is important to note that most participants are fluent in both of Canada's official languages. Finally, according to Ahearn and Athey (1991:12), the language barrier may prevent parents from communicating with service providers (e.g., teachers), which can be an obstacle to a child's integration. While this did not appear to be the case for any of the participants, one participant felt that this was an issue for some Somali youth and their parents, and suggested that translators should be available to Somali parents.

4.3.2 Somali Culture, Identity, and Religion

All participants have retained some aspect of Somali culture, such as Islam, yet all have lost, rejected, or have never recognized a central feature of Somali identity, that is, clan membership. The most common reason for this is that parents do not wish to continue the problem of clan conflict in Canada because of the devastation that occurred with such rivalry back home, and they downplay the significance of clan membership to young people. This is consistent with Ahearn and Athey's argument that parents are a critical vehicle for passing on culture from generation to generation⁶¹. Overall, the stories indicate that some second generation Somalis in Ottawa reject the notion of clan membership as a key component of Somali culture. As seen previously, a variety of literature points to the fact that children adapt to a new culture more easily than adults, and that there may be conflict, confusion and misunderstanding between the new culture

⁶¹ See Chapter 2 in this thesis.

and traditional values and norms (Ahearn and Athey 1991:14; Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes 2003:96). The participants in this research do not describe this as a barrier to their own integration, yet some participants feel that conflicts between Somali culture and Canadian culture are an issue for some Somali youth. One male participant feels that notions of Western dating causes confusion for Somali youth, while a female participant feels differences in how Canadians and Somalis view the maturation process for males and females, leads to confusion amongst Somali parents, both of which may inhibit successful social and cultural integration. This discrepancy in the perception of youth may affect how the integration of Somali youth is understood and assisted by both Somali parents and the public, both in Ottawa and in Canada.

Identity

Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes (2003) in their discussion on immigrant adolescents, argue that developing a sense of identity means navigating between the identity of their culture of origin and that of the host country, and that this process may be difficult for some youth. In this study, only one male participant identified identity confusion as a barrier to integration, yet felt this was a barrier to the integration of all immigrant youth. Authors such as Brankston & Zhou (1995), Camino (1994) and Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) (cited in Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes 2003:99), suggest that creating an identity incorporating elements of both cultures may be the most adaptive strategy for immigrant youth. This is found to be the case in this research, which shows that participants define themselves as “Somali” and “Canadian”,

indicating that they are integrating, yet, are maintaining a Somali identity on the basis of religion, and, in some instances, through language, dress and social networks.

Religion

The life stories above reveal that Islam plays a major role in the lives of all participants, with their adherence to daily prayers (at home and in school), and regular attendance at Koran class, the mosque and association with a Muslim youth association. The life stories show that all participants see Islam as a way to reinforce their Somali identity and strengthen their ties to one another. While all female participants express their identity in their physical appearance, as shown by the fact that they all wear the *hijab* and fairly conservative clothing, this was the case for only one male participant who covers his arms and head. For the females, this is consistent with what De Voe (2002:236) says about the *hijab*⁶² being a symbol of self and community⁶³. The stories show that Islam shapes female participants' understanding of gender relations, and parent- child relationships. There is a difference of opinion, though, among the young women, about men's different behavioral expectations of their daughters and sons. On the one hand, fathers are viewed as overly protective and strict with the girls; on the other hand, however, this is seen as justified given women's elevated status within Islamic belief.

Ahearn and Athey (1991:14) explain that religion is a major force in the socialization of the child, particularly in the inculcation of moral values to guide behavior. This is found to be the case in this research as the life stories show that, in

⁶² De Voe defines the hijab as a headscarf covering the hair (but not the face), shirts with long sleeve, and pants or long skirts (De Voe, 2002:236) as noted in Chapter Three above.

⁶³ See Chapter 2 of this thesis.

accordance with Islam, both males and females recognize puberty as an important time in their maturation. Young women regarded puberty as a time to begin wearing the *hijab* and covering themselves, while young males considered it to be a time for accepting personal responsibility and, for some, changing their behavior. More importantly, there is a consensus amongst male participants that a greater adherence to religion can assist their successful integration. However, some female and male participants feel that it is difficult to follow the demands of Islam in a non-Islamic setting (e.g., school), where young people may be made to feel ostracized or different. This point deserves particular consideration since the literature (Ahearn and Athey 1991; Anisef and Murphy Kilbride 2003; Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2003) suggests that the school plays an important role in the socialization of adolescents and the integration of immigrant adolescents. Problems of assessment and placement, along with cultural misunderstanding of students, their parents, and their ethnic communities can have serious consequences on children's classroom experiences or integration into the community (De Voe 2002:286). This appears to counter the argument that the female participant in this study, who attends an Islamic school, is isolated from mainstream Canadian youth, which hinders her integration. Rather, she is now in a comfortable environment that has actually led to scholarships and increased educational opportunities, and this appears to have assisted her integration, and put her in a position where she is more likely to attain economic integration and be a role model for other Somali youth.

Some participants also feel that Islam is misunderstood by the public in Ottawa and, as one participant notes, unfairly portrayed in the media. As a result, these

participants feel unable to practice their religion freely, which inhibits their feelings of being accepted and, ultimately, their integration.

4.3.3 Community and Social Relations

The stories reveal the social world that participants occupy, and the networks upon which they rely, as well as participants' perceptions of the Somali community in Ottawa, and its role in their lives. In this study, all participants considered themselves to be members of the Somali community in Ottawa, and they experienced this community through Somali weddings, attending the mosque and Koran classes, and Somali summer picnics in Vincent Massey Park. However, Ahearn and Athey (1991:15) suggest that refugees face both within-group schisms and larger societal divisions. The preexisting ethnic, religious, and political divisions of the society of origin are frequently reconstituted in refugee groupings formed in the new country. This appears to be reflected in this study, as the stories show that the perception of the Somali "community" in Ottawa varied amongst participants, with some participants seeing a unified Somali community, while others found the "community" to consist of several groups based on neighborhood (i.e., territory). Moreover, this is suggested in the fact that only one participant, a female, was aware of the Somali Centre for Youth and Community Development and benefited from its services. This is important to note as it may affect Somali youths' access to Somali organizations or neighborhood based community organizations, and the various programs and activities they offer.

The Russell Heights Community House served as a focal point for both male and female participants with both groups relying on the Homework Club and recreational

activities such as movie nights, which provided a safe supervised alternative to the streets and a place for both females and males to socialize with other Somali and non-Somali youth outside their homes. Male participants also found these activities to be a form of leadership training. It is important to note that, at the time of these interviews, these recreational activities were no longer provided at the Russell Heights Community House, due to the funding structure described at the beginning of this chapter. Most participants noted that Somali youth are able to create social spaces within which they engage in culturally inappropriate behaviors such as young women removing their *hijabs* at school and going to clubs, and young men loitering around the streets of their neighborhood using drugs and alcohol. However, some participants point out that the design of some programs (e.g., combined male/female swimming) means that, in order to participate, Somali youth must engage in culturally inappropriate behavior.⁶⁴ This means there are few government funded programs for Somali youth to participate in, which should be considered for future programs and activities targeting for Somali and Muslim youth.

As the narratives note, most male and female participants feel that all Somalis regardless of age or gender, experience racism in Ottawa, and all consider such discrimination to be a barrier to the integration of Somali youth. In particular, all male participants and some females feel that the City of Ottawa police negatively stereotype all black male youth including Somali youth, which can act as a barrier to their successful integration. Racism in a settler society, such as Canada, is often a serious impediment to

⁶⁴ Islamic rules prohibit females from exposing their hair, arms and legs in the presence of unrelated males.

reestablishing a trustful and ordered community life, in that it stigmatizes and further isolates refugees (Ahearn and Athey 1991:15).

4.3.4 School/Education

While some male and female participants felt that male youth were more likely to jeopardize their integration by not acquiring a high school or post secondary education, the above stories show that some male youth are completing high school and some post secondary education. It could be suggested that the reason for such high academic achievement amongst young Somalis is linked to the ethnic community's perceptions of Ottawa's and Canada's opportunity structures, as noted in research by Conchas and Pérez (2003). It is important to note that all young female Somalis share the same aspiration to become medical professionals while none of the males aspired to this profession. This is consistent with research by Baolian Qin-Hillard (2003) which found that females in some ethnic groups have higher academic aspirations and achievements than males. As noted in Chapter Three, Baolian Qin-Hillard (2003) suggests several reasons for this gender difference. However, the life stories above offered no specific information that could account for the gender difference in this study.

4.3.5 Family

As discussed in Chapter Three, the family has an important role to play in a child's integration experience in that the successful development of a refugee or immigrant child is directly related to the family's ability to provide support, security and love to the child. However, Chapter Three also notes that parents' ability to assist their child may be negatively affected as a result of the integration experience. In this study, it

was unanimous amongst participants that the immigration process negatively affected the socioeconomic status of Somali parents. Unable to have their professional credentials and job experience recognized in Canada, many Somali parents in Ottawa are left to seek employment in low-income sectors of the economy (e.g., service industry, manual labor). This low level employment has had a major impact on the socioeconomic status of their children. As seen in the stories above, Somali youth are relegated to living in low incoming housing and are exposed to negative influences such as drugs and crime, and are marginalized from mainstream Canadian youth. This lack of recognition and economic integration, of Somali parents, means that parents are not always able to act as role models and mentors to show Somali youth that it is possible to become economically and socially integrated into Ottawa society, an issue all youth viewed as a major barrier to their own successful integration. Yet, some of the stories reveal that some Somali parents are able to overcome these barriers and act as positive adult role models for their children, and they actively discuss integration issues and barriers to integration with their offspring. It is important to note that, according to some authors (Dion and Dion 2001; Remennick 1999), the immigration experience differs on the basis of gender with women facing the added burden of negotiating different forms of patriarchy and culturally defined gender roles. However, this study shows that the single mothers and female guardians of some of the participants have been able overcome gender expectations of a woman's role in Islamic society and act as role models for their sons, daughters and siblings. Nevertheless, the stories also show that this may not be the case with all single Somali mothers and, in such cases, single Somali mothers enlist the assistance of a male

family friend to help them with their sons, whose fathers are absent. This provides a positive male role model for non related Somali male youth, thus filling a role that a Somali mother is unable to fill.

4.3.6 Gender

While there are differences in the integration experience, most participants indicated that Somali male youth experience more difficulties to successful integration than Somali female youth, although one male participant disagreed. This appears to contradict research by De Voe (2002) that found that young Somali females seem to experience more social and integrative problems than Somali boys (De Voe 2002:236). The stories above show that Somali male youth are more susceptible to the negative aspect of having a low socioeconomic status, in particular, living in low income housing where they are exposed to drugs, crime and are marginalized from mainstream Canadian youth more so than young Somali females. Finally, it is interesting to note that, in some instances, female adult Somalis are able to be role models to young Somali males, but not in all cases. As well, some unrelated adult males were asked to help with young Somali males.

Overall, the stories and analysis reveal that Somali youth have similar ways of dealing with language barriers and cultural differences. As well, the discussion shows that all youth share similar social networks and social spaces. However, there are gender differences. Some male participants avoid the public space or the neighborhood, and turn toward private spaces, such as their homes, to assist their integration while some female participants feel that being in the “public” space promotes their integration.

However, this goes against culturally defined gender roles within Somali culture, which typically associates men with “public” spaces and women with “private” spaces (Abdullahi 2001:120). Finally, the analysis shows that, overall, male Somali youth face more increased barriers to their successful integration than female Somali youth, such as: the effects of living in low income housing and negative stereotyping, racial profiling, and racism by City of Ottawa Police. These do not appear to be issues for Somali female youth.

The following chapter summarizes the focus group results, which further reveal the similarities and differences in how Somali youth deal with barriers to integration, as well the ways through which participants construct their identity, their use of social networks and social space, and, the role of community and family in the integration process. Finally, Chapter Five shows the gendered differences in the integration process and how Somali male youth face different barriers to integration than do female Somali youth.

Chapter 5 : Female and Male Focus Groups and Thematic Analysis

5.0 Introduction

As noted in Chapter One, a combination of methods was used to strengthen the validity of the research results and to triangulate the data. These included a review of the literature on the integration of refugee youth as seen in Chapter Three, and the life stories documented in Chapter Three. In order to provide a broader base of knowledge on the ethnographic data, two focus groups were completed. One included eight⁶⁵ Somali female youth ages 15 to 18 and the other eight⁶⁶ Somali male youth ages 15 to 24. Each of these discussions lasted two hours and both were held at the Russell Heights Community House. As discussed in the Methodology section in Chapter One, the purpose of the focus groups was to explore the differences and similarities between the life stories and male and female focus groups' statements in the context of how Somali youth deal with the barriers to integration, and to explore the gender-based perceptions that each group has about the other. These discussions⁶⁷ give meaning to and complement the literature, the one-on-one interviews and the participant observation by reinforcing the cultural context in which meaning is ascribed to thematic categories such as gender, religion, culture, language, family, social relations, community and the ways in which participants construct and maintain their identity. The discussions also produced a list of detailed suggestions⁶⁸ from Somali youth of those things that they felt could assist

⁶⁵ Three of the eight female youth also participated in the life story interviews.

⁶⁶ One of the eight male youth also participated in the life story interviews.

⁶⁷ The quotations containing language used by the participants may seem tedious and repetitive, but this is how they speak. This also shows that they speak in a manner common amongst Canadian adolescents.

⁶⁸ Each youth was asked to write down five things they would do if they were "in charge" of programming and policy related to Somali integration for the City of Ottawa. In addition to submitting these ideas in writing, each youth then presented these suggestions orally.

the positive integration of all Somali youth in Ottawa from the perspective of what they would do if they had a voice in the decision making process in their neighborhood and within the City of Ottawa. Finally, they afforded an additional opportunity for the youths to tell about their personal experiences, and to generate discussion on issues that they considered important to their integration and their daily lives.

The same format was followed for each focus group. At the beginning of each focus group session, the youths gave their name, identified where they were born and said how long they had lived in Canada. This was followed by five key discussion questions related to the following topics: 1) their immigration experience; 2) the Somali community in Ottawa; 3) factors affecting youths' integration; 4) key issues facing youths; 5) suggestions to assist the integration process, which each participant presented individually, and then these ideas were discussed amongst the group. The following is a discussion of the female focus group results followed by the male focus group results. At the end is an overall summary of both focus groups based on the thematic categories: language, family, culture and identity, religion, social space and social networks and gender, presented in table form and followed by a discussion of each table.

5.1 Female Focus Group

Question 1: Thinking back to when you first came to Canada and the first few years you lived here, what are some of the things you remember about that time (i.e., Your first day of school, your house). What were some of the good things about coming to Canada? What were some of the bad things?

All participants noted that they experienced difficulty with language at school during the early immigration period. One positive aspect that participants agreed upon

was that Canada offered better educational opportunities than Somalia. However, all the young women remembered their parents struggling to communicate with service providers (e.g., teachers, store clerks) as a result of the language barrier and experiencing difficulty finding a job, as a result, and also due to the fact that their professional and educational qualifications were not recognized, all of which they respondents considered to be a negative aspect of immigrating to Canada.

Question 2: When you hear the words “community” or “Somali community in Ottawa” what do you think that means? What does it mean to you? Do you consider yourself a member of a community?

Participants were divided on the concept of “community.” One young woman considered there to be a unified Somali community, however, the rest of the participants disagreed, while one participant stated, “I don’t even know what it [community] means” (F2, 17 years old, May 20, 2004). Participants expressed a desire to foster a sense of community in their neighborhood or Russell Heights because, as one young female noted, “helping our community is helping our kids” (F2, 17 years old, May 20, 2004). Others suggested the following as ways to foster a sense of community: “More programs for young children and older girls” (F6, 16 years old, May 20, 2004); and, “Have picnics as a community” (F4, 14 years old, May 20, 2004). Participants complained of neighborhood male youth using the grounds of the Russell Heights Community Centre to consume alcohol and use drugs, and felt that action needed to be taken to stop this behavior, which then prompted a discussion on Somali parents. While participants felt that Somali parents have a role to play in the children’s lives, they acknowledged that many Somali parents are unable to assist their children as a result of the language barrier and lack of

understanding of being an immigrant minority youth in Canada. This is illustrated in the following exchange: “We need to let Somali parents know they have power and can have an impact on their children” (F3, 16 years old, May 20, 2004). “Problem is parents don’t know [how to assist their children]” (F2, 17 years old, May 20, 2004). “Our parents, like most [immigrants] who come here feel powerless. They don’t have the capacity to go say to the guy in charge, ‘Hey, do something about this [the drugs in Russell Heights]’ ” (F2, 17 years old, May 20, 2004). In conclusion, participants felt Somali parents should have access to more language training and information on how to deal with the drugs in their neighborhood.

Question 3: What do you think are the issue(s) that have had a positive and negative effect on the integration of Somali youth in Ottawa? Do you think these are different for boys and girls? If so, in what way?

The responses to this question covered both economic and social issues. As explained in the following exchange, participants felt that there should be more job opportunities for Somali youth, especially Somali youth who are graduating from university, and that this would assist their integration. As one participant explained, “If we can get more youth in different sectors, like in the private sector, more youth in the government, the Somali community would respect it” (F8, 18 years old, May 20, 2004). Another stated, “[T]he Somali community would have someone they could connect with,” (F2, 17 years old, May 20, 2004).

Participants identified gender differences in the integration experience. Several young women mentioned “drugs” as the most pressing issues facing young Somali males, as well as “peer pressure”, “dropping out of school”, “a lack of positive role models” and

“choosing the wrong role models.” Yet, all participants agreed that “[Somali] boys, they have potential” (F2, 17 years old, May 20, 2004), and recommended there be a Big Brother type mentoring program for young Somali males. However, opinion was divided on whether the Big Brothers should be Somali, African or mainstream Canadians in order that youth might have a “link,” or connection to Canadian society. In terms of adolescent females, the young women felt that there should be more programs and activities like all female swim time and organized sports available to them. Some young women noted that traditional Somali culture is nomadic, and that the sedentary lifestyle of Canada has resulted in an increase in diabetes amongst Somali women. Because of this, there should be a “female only” place where Somali women of all ages can swim and exercise without the need to wear culturally appropriate attire such as the *hijab* and clothes that cover their arms and legs.

Question 4: What do you think is the single most important issue facing Somali females in Ottawa?

It was unanimous amongst the young women that Somali females are doing “Okay” (F7, 17 years old, May 20, 2004), in terms of integrating into Ottawa, but that young Somali males are having difficulty integrating. As participants explained, “[Somali] girls are fighting back [against the barriers to integration], but for guys there should be more [to assist them]” (F2, 17 years old, May 20, 2004). “I think the girls are okay [integrating] but the guys are in need [of help to integrate]” (F3, 16 years old, May 20, 2004). Participants felt that young Somali males are negatively stereotyped and face discrimination on the basis of race by the City of Ottawa Police, while the young women

told of having experienced an increase in discrimination on the basis of religion since September 11, 2001. They all agreed that, since then, the media has portrayed Muslims in a negative fashion and that the general public looks at them differently because they wear the *hijab*. Both of these factors have the potential to inhibit their integration. As one participant stated, “[T]hey [people in Ottawa] always looked at us differently because we are wearing this [*hijab*], but now it is even worse” (F3, 16 years old, May 20, 2004). Several participants identified their mothers as having assisted their integration. One participant noted, “[Somali] girls have mothers, so we are lucky. They [mothers] are fighting [to help their children]. They are telling us, ‘Go to college, be something.’ ” (F8, 18 years old, May 20, 2004). Several participants considered obtaining an education as key to their integration, as seen in the following exchange: “Like, reality in this country [is] you need an education, and mostly [Somali] girls are finishing school” (F3, 16 years old, May 20, 2004). This prompted a discussion amongst participants about how, when they become adults, their lives will be different from their mothers. Several young women noted that they will not face a language barrier especially in dealing with teachers, while others noted that they would have jobs and, therefore, not need welfare. Some participants also remarked that the fathers of their children would not abandon them, which led to a discussion on Somali fathers during which participants explained that most Somali fathers, unable to have their professional and educational credentials recognized in Canada, are forced to work abroad or are unemployed. Each participant then provided an example of how her mother, father, aunt or uncle had been a doctor,

teacher or mathematician in while living in Somalia or Italy, but was unable to find employment in their field in Canada.

Question 5: If you were in charge of Russell Heights of the City of Ottawa, write down five things you would do to help Somali youth. After you do this, each person will read out her recommendations and we will discuss them.

Participants were asked to write five recommendations, which they then presented orally. These recommendations fell under three main categories: programs, community and education. Under the theme of programs, all young women recommended that they have access to more “female only” physical activity programs such as swimming, gym time and access to the basketball court, where young women can take off their *hijab* in the absence of males, and socialize with mainstream Canadian women. Several young women also requested more activities (e.g., camping trips) that take place out of their neighborhood of Russell Heights. Other recommendations included more programs and activities for Somali children and young men and a supervised area where children and youth can go to socialize away from the negative influences such as the drugs and poor role models of the neighborhood streets.

The thematic category of community offered several recommendations which focused largely on creating a feeling of “community” both within the neighborhood of Russell Heights and the larger Somali population in Ottawa. Recommendations included organizing local youth to participate in a clean up day of Russell Heights, and that youth collectively paint and restore the former Youth House in anticipation that this would foster a sense of pride and respect for the neighborhood, and assist the overall well being of the youth. As well, participants were emphatic that the drug use and drug selling

problem in the neighborhood be stopped. Other recommendations focused on uniting the Somali population in Ottawa, by establishing a newspaper or newsletter to be circulated amongst Somali youth in Ottawa and bringing together Somalis in Ottawa to discuss the common issues that affect them. Finally, the participants expressed a need to establish a relationship between Somalis in Ottawa and prominent figures such as Members of Provincial Parliament and Members of Parliament where Somalis can voice and discuss their problems and concerns.

The thematic category of education focused largely on the role of parents in their children's integration. Many participants recommended that Somali parents be educated in identifying drug use amongst their children, as well as taught how to discuss drug prevention with them. The young women also felt that Somali parents need to be empowered and taught that they are capable of creating a safe secure neighborhood for their children and that they have an important role to play in assisting their children's positive integration.

The following discussion of the male focus group shows that both male and female participants experienced language as a barrier to integration during the early immigration period, and that all recognized that their parents' inability to have their professional experiences and credentials recognized has hampered their integration. The discussion also shows that in contrast to female youth, the male youth felt that they faced discrimination by other Somalis in Ottawa and negative stereotyping by City of Ottawa Police, both of which hampered their integration.

5.2 Male Youth Focus Group Discussion

Question 1: Thinking back to when you first came to Canada and the first few years you lived here, what are some of the things you remember about that time (i.e. the first day of school, your house). What were some of the good things about coming to Canada? What were some of the bad things?

All participants remembered their first winter in Canada and that language was a barrier during the early immigration period. One exception to this was the young male who was born in Canada, and who was fluent in English when he began school. Participants listed English as a Second Language class, watching television, older siblings, relatives and Somali peers as resources that assisted them to overcome the language barrier. One participant explained the importance of Somali peers during the early immigration period,

It [the first year in Canada] wasn't too tough you know, 'cause like, you have a group of people, like, 'cause most of us [Somali male youth] came [to Canada] at the same time, or with two or three years difference. We all kind of came together so it's like you sort of grow along together. (M6, 16 years old, May 20, 2004)

It was unanimous amongst participants that a negative aspect of immigration was that their parents were unable to have their professional and academic qualifications recognized, which put them in a low socioeconomic group.

Question 2: When you hear the words “community” or “Somali community in Ottawa” what do you think that means? What does it mean to you? Do you consider yourself a member of a community?

All participants agreed that the Somali ‘community’ was not a unified entity, and it was unanimous amongst participants that other Somalis in Ottawa view young Somali

males living in Russell Heights negatively. Many young men added that, as a result of this negative perception, they have been unable to access some of the youth programs currently administered by other Somali organizations⁶⁹ in Ottawa. This is illustrated in the following exchange.

I mean, there are [Somali] communities but like, like, within the Somali community I think that, they look down most on Russell [Heights] 'cause of it's past history. So, like, even their programs that run within the Somali communities, they sometimes forget to acknowledge us [youth in Russell Heights] and sometimes forget us 'cause of past history with older generations which give it, I guess, it's reputation of being bad or what not. (M2, 15 years old, May 20, 2004)

As a community, like, there's some good things that the [Somali] community has done, like, you know there's a lot of things that I commend them for like what they did, for example, like, they started like basketball tournaments like going out of town, playing other Somali communities in other cities. And that thing has been getting a lot of rave reviews from Somali youth 'cause they like it and enjoy that kind of stuff. They look forward to it. But, you know, if there was a little bit more funding and stuff like that, you know, it would benefit all, you know? All communities, like Russell and other communities, but it's just, we feel like it's just skewed, it's like, not everybody, just a couple of guys [who have access to programs]. (M4, 15 years old, May 20, 2004)

Several participants also claimed that internal Somali politics, "politics like as in who you know [in the Somali community]" (M4, 15 years old, May 20, 2004), also prevented youth from Russell Heights from being able to access some programs.

Question 3: What do you think are the issue(s) that have had a positive and negative effect on the integration of Somali youth in Ottawa? Do you think these are different for boys than for girls? If so, in what way?

⁶⁹ No names were mentioned.

All participants described religion, in particular, Islam, as having a “major role” in assisting integration by teaching “morals⁷⁰”. As well, they pointed out that having access to organized programs and activities (i.e., movie nights, basketball, table games, counseling, leadership skills training) assisted their integration. As one participant stated:

People don't really know it but the programs they used to run, like, used to be run for us. Like, it'd be like, 'Oh let's go watch a movie, just chill out have a good time, you know whatever. It'd be like all positive things like nothing negative and when you grow up with that kind of attitude your whole life, you get to have positive thoughts and you grow up with it [positive thoughts]. And if like young kids don't have those kind of programs, like we grew up with these programs till the age of like 15, so we all matured. And it got to the point where we understood what was right or wrong. (M1, 16 years old, May 20, 2004)

While participants noted that both family and Somali peers assisted their integration some of the young men also believed that the family, in particular single female headed households, and the negative influence of peers might hinder their integration. This is reflected in the following exchange:

The family plays the biggest role [in integration]. Like my family is huge. When I was like the youngest, I was pushed away from gangs and bad things or anything like that, and shown positive things, love, and caring. (M3, 15 years old, May 20, 2004)

“This [difficulty integrating] happens with, like, kids with no father. Like, it's a trend. Like, it usually happens with single mothers, you know, where the kids, you know, start like, you know, going to jail and stuff like that. A mother can't teach her son how to be a man, you know what I mean? So that's what she needs, she needs a father figure. I was lucky, I had bigger

⁷⁰ According to Islam it is forbidden to consume alcohol and illegal drugs or commit crimes.

brothers, you know, that, like, you know, taught me right from wrong. And uncles too. (M2, 15 years old, May 20, 2004)

It [integration] depends if your friends are like, negative, and even though you maybe have a positive mindset you, like, slowly will be influenced. A big difference [to integration] would be your friends, I think, and what area you grew up in. Things that happen in your area, as well, people don't really think about it but it's the small things that count. Like, small things like, your friends, or your household, all adds up to making up who you are and your character. [M3, 15 years old, May 20, 2004]

Several of the young men felt that living in a low income neighborhood like Russell Heights could be a barrier to their integration. As participants stated,

We [young Somali males] hate where we live too. We're trying to live in a good environment and we try, you know, we're all good kids but it's because the environment we have shapes us into someone that we don't want to become, you know? I say it's just the environment of the community. We see white kids who have establishments and they are bad, you know, and nobody looks at them, and they look at us 'cause we like, live here [in Russell Heights]. We're good kids, but it's the background [low income housing] we live in that comes with that. Someday, I want to get out of here [Russell Heights]...when I make it [e.g., economically and socially integrated]. (M3, 15 years old, May 20, 2004)

We try and get out of here [Russell Heights] you know. You try and leave the neighborhood but someone pushes you away from another community, you have to come back to yours and then there's no programs, so you're still there and there's no way out, you know? (M1, 16 years old, May 20, 2004)

Participants also felt that the City of Ottawa Police and Ottawa society negatively stereotype young Somali males, and that this stereotyping fosters a lack of self-esteem, which hampers their integration. As one youth explained, "If you tell a little baby he's bad, he's going to grow up bad, but, if you tell him he's a good baby, he'll do something

good” (M6, 16 years old, May 20, 2004). These young male participants offered no comments on the issues affecting the integration of young Somali women.

Question 4: What do you think is the single most important issue facing young Somali males in Ottawa?

Participants felt that the influence of gangs is the most important issue facing Somali youth in Ottawa. Some youth elaborated on this. “Most of these people [in gangs] their influence is what’s cool and what not and the media” (M2, 15 years old, May 20, 2004). “Most people [in gangs], they’re so influenced like they just drop out of school and what not” [M3, 15 years old, May 20, 2004]. This led the young men to comment on the fact that Ottawa society has chosen to focus only on those Somali youth who are getting into trouble rather than young Somalis who are trying to integrate. This is seen in the following exchange:

It’s ironic that it’s those guys [young Somali males who are getting in trouble] that are, like, getting all the attention [from the media and society]. Like, our country like wins the gold medal in the Olympics that one person represents the whole country. One person commits a crime they start to think everyone is like that.” (M3, 15 years old, May 20, 2004)

There’s a lot of positive things about Somali young men. You look at Carleton University, you know, like Africans, like black [youth], four of those kids are Somali young men you know what I mean? And, like, every year, Somali young men, young boys, you know, that are like 22, 23 that are graduating out of university and college you know? And if you look at that, that’s positive you know. The future’s bright. So the light should be shining on those kind of people [Somalis males who are graduating] you know. If the light shines on those kind of people then the younger ones [Somali male youth] are gonna say “Hey you know what? I want to be like that guy.” (M4, 15 years old, May 20, 2004)

This prompted participants to express a sense of obligation they felt towards family and other youth still living in Somalia because of the increased educational opportunities Somali youth have in Canada. This is reflected in the following comments:

There's some burden you know, on our shoulders, you know, to make it. 'Cause people are looking up to you, you know, so make it. They're not going to look up to you, say if you don't you're wasting your education. So if you don't get your education here, practically you're wasting your time."
(M3, 15 years old, May 20, 2004)

[A]nd one other thing is that, Somalis, you know like, the future is us. You know we are the future for Somali kids, you know, like us in North America. So failure is not an option for most of us. You gotta make it. (M6, 16 years old, May 20, 2004)

Many of the young men felt that they were not yet able to consider themselves role models to younger Somali boys, and that there should be more role models for young Somalis. In particular, they noted the small number of Somali teachers and police officers and that they considered it important to have Somalis who are teaching physics, math and chemistry and that they would be "encouraged," if they could see that there were more Somali teachers in a variety of subjects. As well, participants pointed out that there are a few Somali police officers and all agreed this provides Somalis with "a voice," although they felt that the numbers of Somali police officers should increase.

Question 5: If you were in charge of Russell Heights or the City of Ottawa, write down the five things you would do to help Somali youth. After you do this each person will read out his recommendations and we will discuss them.

These recommendations fell under four categories: programs, police, role models, and education, with the themes intersecting. The majority of recommendations were on the theme of programs with participants asking for more organized recreational and

educational activities for young Somali males, particularly those ages eight to 18 years of age, in a safe supervised setting in their own neighborhood. While some youth made general references to “youth programs” and “after school activities”, most youth referred specifically to activities like “basketball programs,” “movie nights,” “job fairs” and “homework clubs.” The theme of role models was also evident amongst the program recommendations as illustrated by the following comment:

I would set up centers where Somali youth can go and get help with things going on in their social life, ‘cause there is a good majority of Somalis that don’t have a male role model, so they end up looking up to the males outside their homes and, in some cases, it turns out alright, but in most cases they look up to the wrong person. There are many Somali men that want to make a difference, but do not have the right resources. (M3, 15 years old, May 20, 2004)

Well, my first choice when it comes to helping my community would be to create this activity [mentoring programs] for everyone. I certainly feel that today’s youth [Somali] don’t have role models and by keeping the youth actively oriented towards sports and community awareness, keeping youth challenged with work and help them keep intact with the future shapers. (M2, 15 years old, May 20, 2004)

The thematic category of police offered a recommendation that there should be less intimidation of Somali youth by police officers and less discrimination of Somali youth by the City of Ottawa Police. Several young men suggested there be more Somali police officers⁷¹ because, as one youth wrote, “[M]ore Somali police can help out the Somali youth” (M6, 16 years old, May 20, 2004)

Recommendations in the thematic category of education were for an increase in academic scholarships for Somali youth as this would “motivate more youth to go to

⁷¹ There was no indication given by the youth as to what gender these police officers should be.

university and be somebody in the future” [M4, 15 years old, May 20, 2004], and more Somali teachers, because “teachers motivate students in becoming successful” [M7, 15 years old, May 20, 2004].

At the end of the session all participants agreed that there was a lack of resources being directed towards assisting the integration of Somali youth in Ottawa, which left many feeling like Ottawa society, in general, has discriminated against them. One youth summarized the sentiment by commenting:

What you can change is the running of programs for youth, and positive reinforcement like certain academic achievements, like more amounts of scholarships to motivate more youth to go to university and be somebody in the future. Because we may be Somalis, but as a whole, we are human beings, and no human beings need to be discriminated against or not looked after. (M1, 16 years old, May 20, 2004)

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, these focus groups explored differences and similarities between the life stories and female and male focus groups’ statements in the context of how Somali youth have dealt with those barriers to integration which were previously mentioned, and served to explore the gender-based perceptions that each group had about the other. In order to better understand these similarities and differences, the following tables and analysis of the female and male focus groups utilize the same thematic categories of language, culture/religion/identity, community and social relations, school and education, family and gender in the analysis of the life stories in Chapter Four.

Table 1: Female Focus Group Thematic Analysis

	Factors that hamper Integration	Factors that assist Integration
Language	-Parents' inability to communicate with schools, service providers. -Parents unable to secure employment	- Youth have language competency. - Youths able to attain education and jobs.
Somali Culture/ Identity and Religion	- Negative stereotype of Muslims since 9/11. - Use of <i>hijab</i> singles out females as "different."	- Females only activities with Canadian women
Community and Social Relations	-Difference of opinion over the meaning of the word "community" -Lack of a sense of "community" in Russell Heights. - Drug and alcohol use in Russell Heights.	- Foster a sense of community in Russell Heights by offering organized programs and social activities (e.g., picnics). - Newspaper for Somalis in Ottawa. - Somali youth representation in private sector and government.
School Education		Obtaining an education.
Family	- Inability of parents to educate their children about the harm of drugs. - Lack of adult male role models. -Parents unable to have professional credentials recognized. - Absent fathers	- Mothers positive role models. - Mothers support child's integration by promoting education and explaining barriers they might face as minority youth.
Gender	- Young Somali males need more assistance to integrate. - Drug use amongst young males. - Negative stereotyping of young Somali males by city of Ottawa Police. - Young males dropping out of school, lack of positive role models and choosing the wrong role models.	

Table 2: Male Focus Group Thematic Analysis

	Factors that hamper Integration	Factors that assist Integration
Language	-Language was a barrier during early immigration period	-ESL classes, television, siblings, relatives and Somali peers.
Somali Culture/ Identity and Religion	-Somali politics (e.g., clans) prevents youth from having access to programs -Negative stereotyping of Somali youth by Ottawa society and City of Ottawa Police leads to low self-esteem.	- Provides moral guidance.
Community and Social Relations	- Negative perception of youth who live in Russell Heights by other Somalis in Ottawa. -Environment of low income housing (e.g., Russell Heights).	-Organized programs and activities within Russell Heights. - Other Somali youth who are attending University. - Adult Somali male role models (e.g., Somali teachers and Police officers).
School Education		Sense of obligation to other Somalis to obtain an education and integrate.
Family	Parents unable to have professional credentials recognized means low socioeconomic status for youth. - Single female headed households	Father, male siblings and related adult males can act as positive role models for youth. -Provide guidance in keeping youth away from gangs. - Influence youths' character.
Gender	Gangs	

5.3 Summary of Female and Male Focus Groups Thematic Analysis

5.3.1 Language

Both female and male participants considered language to be a barrier during the early immigration period. However, only male participants listed things such as ESL classes, television, other Somali youth and their family and extended family as language resources (Table 2). As seen in Table 1, the young women felt that the language barrier and a decline in socioeconomic status were negative aspects of immigrating to Canada.

5.3.2 Somali Culture/ Identity/ Religion

The focus group revealed that these young women are focused on obtaining an education and becoming more active in the “public” space (Table 1), which could suggest that this means that they are not conforming to traditional Somali gender roles in which Somali women typically occupy a “private” space. However, research on South Asian immigrant women and youth by Naidoo (1984 cited in Dion and Dion 2001:517) found that even though mothers had high educational expectations for their daughters, traditional cultural values pertaining to family functioning were still apparent, although the focus groups did not provide clear indication of this either way. As shown in Chapter Three, preexisting ethnic, religious, and political divisions of the society of origin are frequently reconstituted in refugee groupings formed in the new country, which appears to be the case in this research. As shown in Table 2, “politics” prevents some young Somali males from having access to programs and activities that could assist their integration, which could suggest that clans, a central component to Somali culture, are

being maintained in Canada. However, interviews with Sophia et al., suggest that this is not the case amongst Somali youth in Ottawa suggesting there are intergenerational differences within Somalis in Ottawa. It is clear that male participants felt that identity issues played a part in their integration process but this was not the case for the female participants. In particular, the young men felt that both Ottawa society and City of Ottawa Police exhibit a negative attitude toward Somali youth, which leads to low self esteem and hinders their integration. While many participants were hesitant to identify themselves as role models, they did acknowledge that they have the potential to be positive male role models in the future (Table 2).

Religion

The role of Islam is apparent in the lives of both female and male participants. Female participants are maintaining an ethnic identity through Islam, as reflected in their physical appearance (e.g., all wore a *hijab*). However, as Table 1 shows, the young women feel that the negative media portrayal of Islam following September 11, 2001, has caused them to feel discrimination on the basis of religion, and that by wearing the *hijab* they were viewed as “different” by Ottawa society, which might affect their social and cultural integration. This is consistent with a study by De Voe (2002), which found that amongst young Somali women in the public school setting, clothing, and, in particular, the *hijab*, led to more social and integrative problems for them. In contrast, the young male participants did not express Islam through their clothing and did not complain of discrimination on the basis of religion. Instead, young Somali males felt that Islam assists their integration by providing moral guidance (e.g., abstaining from drugs and

alcohol, not engaging in criminal activity) (Table 2). This was also the case in a study which found that some immigrant youth use religion or a belief in God as a moral compass for their lives, pointing to directions and answers, revealing a “right” and “wrong” way, and providing boundaries (Thompson and Gurney 2003:85).

5.3.3 Community and Social Relations

Female participants differed in their opinion of the Somali community in Ottawa (Table 1). While one young woman viewed it as unified, other participants disagreed and some said that they did not even understand the meaning of the word “community”. This is important to note as the term assumes homogeneity where diversity may actually exist. It was unanimous amongst participants that they felt no sense of “community” or belonging in their neighborhood of Russell Heights, yet, all expressed a desire to establish a sense of community because the young women felt that promoting a sense of “community” within Russell Heights by offering more programs (e.g., swimming, camping) would assist their integration, as it would allow them to participate in activities with mainstream Canadian youth. Finally, participants disapproved of the drug and alcohol use amongst youth in Russell Heights (Table 1).

In contrast to the young women, Table 2 shows that the young men felt that there is no unified Somali community in Ottawa, and that other Somali “communities” negatively stereotype young Somali males who live in Russell Heights, and that the environment of low income housing, (e.g., propensity of gangs, drugs, crime) hinders their integration. This is consistent with literature discussed in Chapter 2 by Suárez-Orozco and Todorova (2003) on immigrant youth that found that poverty coexists with

single parenthood and residences in neighborhood plagued with violence, gang activity and drug trade. Unlike the young women, the male participants experienced the “community” through recreational activities such as movie nights, basketball programs, and leadership training that assisted their integration by providing them with a safe supervised place to socialize with other male youth. Also, the fact that the young men felt that seeing more Somali professionals (e.g., teachers and police officers) would assist their integration suggests that not enough adult Somalis have been integrated into mainstream Ottawa.

5.3.4 School/Education

Tables 1 and 2 both show that female and male participants consider educational attainment to be an important factor that can contribute to their integration. In addition, Somali teachers⁷² may be seen by youth as symbols that integration is possible, and they can serve as an extension of the youth’s social network outside the family⁷³.

5.3.5 Family

Some authors suggest that immigration is stressful for the family in that parents may experience a change in social and economic status, as well as a loss of social networks, and must adjust to a new language and cultural norms (Ahearn and Athey 1991 and Suárez-Orozco & Todorova 2003). There are several ways in which this is apparent in this study. First, all participants felt that the immigration process has had a negative affect on the socioeconomic status of Somali adults and parents, as many are unemployed

⁷² There was no indication provided as to the gender of Somali teachers.

⁷³ Schools did not appear to be singled out in the focus groups as a social space, whereas they specifically emerged as a social space with problems in the life stories. This may be due to the fact that there were no questions specific to school posed during the focus groups as there was during the life story interviews.

or underemployed as a result of not having their professional qualifications recognized and because of the language barrier (Table 1 and 2). According to the female participants, this means that Somali fathers have to travel to other cities and provinces to find employment, resulting in absentee fathers and a lack of adult male role models, both of which might hinder the integration of young Somali males. Table 1 shows that young women feel that a lack of cultural integration on the part of Somali parents inhibits the ability of some Somali parents to discuss aspects of adolescence specific to the host country (e.g., dangers of drug use), and, in turn, hampers parents' ability to assist the integration of their children, leading participants to recommend that Somali parents be educated on how to discuss the dangers of drugs and drug use with their children. However, the young women indicated that, regardless of the employment status of their mothers, Somali mothers are able to be positive role models by encouraging their daughters to obtain an education in the hopes that this will assist their integration (Table 1). In comparison, Table 2 shows that young men felt that only related males could be seen as positive role models, and that being in a single female headed household might hinder integration, which suggests that culturally defined gender roles inhibit Somali women's ability to assist their sons' integration.

5.3.6 Gender

The discussion showed that female participants considered the male participants to have more difficulty with integration and that young men face different barriers to integration, such as being more susceptible to the negative aspects of living in low income housing where they are exposed to drugs, crime and are marginalized from

mainstream Canadian youth. Also, Somali male youth have more negative experiences with the City of Ottawa Police and face negative stereotyping on the basis of where they live than Somali female youth. As well, there were differences in what each gender considered to be the most important issue facing their integration. While the young men felt the issue was gangs, young women identified a lack of employment opportunities for young Somalis and discrimination on the basis of religion to be the most pressing issues. Overall, the young women felt that they were succeeding in overcoming the barriers to their integration, yet young men required more assistance in doing so.

The focus group discussion and analysis above indicated some of the ways that young female and male Somalis have overcome barriers to integration, and revealed some of the things that participants consider to have hindered or assisted their integration. Most importantly, the discussion provided an opportunity for participants to suggest ways to assist the integration of Somali youth if they had a voice in the decision making process within their neighborhood, community and City of Ottawa. While participants dealt with barriers such as language and culture in similar ways, they each relied on different social networks that had used social spaces differently. While all participants felt that the immigration process affected the family in the same way, there was a difference of opinion amongst participants as to gender roles within the family. The discussion showed that, although Islam has played a role in the lives of both the young women and men, some participants indicated that it also has the potential to limit their integration into the wider community in Ottawa. Finally, all participants agreed that more

recreational activities would assist their integration, yet, for different reasons for females and males.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Overview

This study examined the integration experience of a select group of young Somali refugees in Ottawa. This chapter looks at the implications of the data produced through the methods described in Chapter Two. It also offers some practical suggestions to assist Somali refugee youth in Ottawa to overcome some of the barriers to integration that they face. As stated above, the integration process varies amongst refugee children, as some are unable to cope with its stresses and strains, and suffer negative consequences such as delinquency, while others flourish during the experience.

The literature available on Somalis in Ottawa is scarce. What is available is focused primarily on youth who are in juvenile detention, have dropped out of school, or are involved with crime, drugs and prostitution. The current literature also focuses on the disintegration of the Somali family and the issue of single female-headed households having a negative influence on the integration of young Somalis.

In contrast, the youth who participated in this research all live in the same low income housing area, are in school or had graduated from high school or a post-secondary institution, are employed or actively seeking employment, and are not in trouble with the police or in jail. All of these are positive outcomes for these young Somalis, despite the fact that some of the participants were from so-called vulnerable single female headed households. These youth had never been asked to speak about their integration experiences and were critical of the fact that, most often, attention is paid to Somali youth who are “in trouble”, rather than young Somalis, like themselves, who are

working toward their future and a better life by remaining in school, defining clear life goals, and being good Somalis and Canadians.

A review of the literature on integration shows that there are both social and economic issues that influence the integration process and that the process is unique for each individual. The identification and analysis of the life stories and focus group discussions reveal a number of factors in this study that hamper and assist integration. This study identifies several interconnected thematic categories related to language, culture/ identity/religion, school/education, community and social relations, family and gender. Importantly, this study provides a forum for Somali youth to discuss their integration experiences and to suggest ways in which their integration, and that of other young Somalis, can be assisted. Finally, this study reveals that there is a lack of research being done on Somali youth in Ottawa and identifies future areas of research.

6.1 Summary of Main Findings from Life Stories, Focus Groups and Participants' Suggestions

6.1.1 Language

This study reveals that language⁷⁴ is not a major barrier to integration for young Somalis being educated in Canada. However, the language barrier prevents some non-English or non-French speaking Somali parents from being able to participate in their children's education, which, in turn, can hamper young Somalis' integration. In order to address this, participants suggest that schools provide translators for Somali parents in order for them to be able to communicate with their children's teachers and principal.

⁷⁴ As a result of Somalia being colonized by France and Italy, some Somali refugees can speak French and/or Italian. This point, combined with the fact that Canada has two official languages, French and English, means that the chances of language being a barrier in Canada is reduced.

6.1.2 Culture, Identity, and Religion

As noted previously, the greater the cultural difference between the refugee and host country, the more difficult integration can be (Berry, Kim and Boski 1987). Also, as shown at the beginning of this study, the sociocultural practices and religious affiliation of Somalis often varies with mainstream Canada. Participants in this study feel that Western notions of dating and images of black youth portrayed in the media, which contradict the principles of Islam, can be confusing for Somali youth and hinder their integration. This study reveals that there are differences between Somali and Canadian culture in the understanding of the maturation process and perception of youth. This is important as it can affect how the integration of Somali youth is understood and assisted by both Somali parents and the rest of the public in Ottawa and in Canada. In order to assist the integration of Somali youth, it is imperative that non-Somali service providers understand aspects of Somali culture, such as those mentioned above. Similarly, Somali parents need to receive some education on Canadian culture in order to be able to assist the integration of their children as well as themselves.

The integration process is assisted when children and youth are able to develop an identity that incorporates aspects of the traditional culture and host culture (Roffman, Suárez-Orozco and Rhodes 2003:98). Young Somalis in this study create bi-cultural Somali-Canadian identities, and their parents play a role in the process of deciding which aspects of Somali culture to retain (e.g., religion) or reject (e.g., clans). All participants reinforce their ethnic identity through Islam, and religion shapes their notions of maturation, appropriate gender roles and behavior. One male participant feels that a

greater adherence to Islam can assist the integration of Somali youth in Ottawa, and influence them to refrain from delinquent behavior. However, most participants identify a lack of understanding of Islam amongst Ottawa society as a barrier to their integration.

All of the young participants in this study experienced an increase in negative stereotyping of Muslims after 9/11, especially female participants who wear the *hijab*, as doing so makes them visibly different from mainstream society. In order to assist their integration, female participants note that Ottawa society needs to be better educated about the meaning of wearing the *hijab* for Muslim women.

6.1.3 School and Education

Many participants feel that their school environment was not conducive to practicing their religion, which, in turn, inhibited their feelings of being accepted and, ultimately, their integration. This is significant since this research reveals that schools are an important social space for young Somalis and, as noted above, schools can play an important part in the socialization and integration of immigrant adolescents. These findings highlight the need for schools and post-secondary institutions to consider how to accommodate the needs of religiously diverse students. This study also shows that participants are graduating from high school and post secondary institutions. As well, many have high academic aspirations. As noted in Chapter Three, educational attainment may be linked to the ethnic community's perceptions of opportunity structures. However, the life stories and focus groups do not provide enough information to determine if this is the case in this study. Exceptions to this include one male participant who is inspired to attend university because he sees other young Somalis graduating from

Carleton University and the female participants who aspire to enter the medical profession. These youths could be seen as potential role models to younger Somalis.

6.1.4 Community and Social Relations

A majority of participants feel there are several different Somali communities in Ottawa, based on geographical location, which suggests that Somalis in Ottawa should not be viewed as a homogeneous group, and that the issues facing Somalis can vary. This study also reveals that some adult Somalis are possibly perpetuating certain group schisms and political divisions that existed in Somalia. As noted above by one male participant, “politics” prevents some young Somalis from being able to access specific Somali programs and services that might assist their integration.

It is crucial for individuals, agencies and government departments who work with Somalis in Ottawa to recognize that Somali representatives and leaders cannot be assumed to represent or speak for all Somalis in Ottawa. Somalis in Ottawa need to consider that while the clan system was used as an organizing principle in Somalia, it may not be applicable in Canada because it perpetuates political divisions and inter-clan tensions and, as noted in this study, can act as a barrier to integration.

Overall, participants do not feel that Somalis in Ottawa are integrating adequately and effectively. They identify this as a barrier to their own integration, as it means there is a lack of role models to show Somali youth that it is possible to integrate into Ottawa society. There is also a lack of mentors who can provide guidance and advice to young Somalis on how to overcome some of the barriers to integration.

Somali youth do not feel that Somalis are represented or recognized by municipal, provincial and federal level political structures, and that there is a lack of resources and interest in issues related to their integration. As a result, participants believe that Ottawa society does not care about them. Participants suggest that increased employment opportunities for Somalis would show young Somalis that it is possible to integrate into Ottawa. Participants also note that the recognition and acceptance of professional and educational credentials obtained outside Canada would assist Somalis to be more quickly employed in their field, and integrated into Ottawa and Canadian society more generally.

It is important to note that these young participants specifically mention the need for more Somali teachers. The desire for more Somali teachers is seen by youth as a way to address some of the above noted barriers to their integration such as some teachers' misunderstanding of Islam, and the inability of teachers and Somali parents to communicate as a result of the parents' language barrier. However, it is important to note that participants see non-related adult males and young Somalis who are completing post-secondary education as role models. This suggests that Somalis could set up their own mentoring program, similar to the model of Big Brothers, Big Sisters. This type of program could also benefit Somali youth who are at risk of dropping out of school, engaging in illegal behavior, or becoming involved with gangs.

Participants identify aspects of their neighborhood such as gangs, drugs, alcohol use, negative peers, and crime as barriers to integration. However, programs offered by the Russell Heights Community House, such as the homework club, leadership training,

and recreational activities such as movie nights and sports provided youth with a safe supervised alternative to the streets. During the time that the interviews for this research were conducted, the recreational activities stated above were no longer offered due to changes in the funding structure (described in Chapter Four).

Young participants in the study reveal that racism, on the part of Ottawa society, is a barrier to Somalis' integration. As well, both male participants and some female participants identify negative stereotyping and treatment of young Somali males by City of Ottawa Police to be a barrier to their integration. Participants believe that racism and discrimination can only be dealt with by individual racists themselves or through public education in Ottawa. However, participants suggest that there be more dialogue in order to increase understanding between Somalis and City of Ottawa Police, and that there be an increase in the number of Somali police officers in Ottawa.

6.1.5 Family

This study reveals that Somali parents experience a decline in socioeconomic status as a result of the refugee experience, and the lack of formal recognition in Canada for their professional and academic credentials, and previous job experiences. This is significant because participants indicate that poverty is a crucial issue that hampers their integration. Many participants recognize that their low income neighborhood is beset with drugs, violence and issues of poverty accompanied by an increased propensity for youth delinquency. Another implication of the low employment status of Somali parents is that participants feel there is a lack of Somali adult role models who are socially and economically integrating, which serves as a barrier to young Somalis' own integration.

The issue of recognizing foreign credentials has been on the agenda of federal and provincial governments and professional associations for some time. Unfortunately, little progress has been made at a rate fast enough to make a difference for these youth.

Participants in this research describe different ways in which their parents assist their own and their siblings' integration: by being good role models; playing a role in their children's education; educating their children on issues that they may face as a result of poverty and growing up as a visible minority in Canada (e.g., drugs, racism); upholding aspects of Somali cultural identity and values that are not viewed as divisive; and, keeping their children away from negative influences in their neighborhood and elsewhere. Participants suggest that Somali parents be given access to resources that can assist them to become better informed on how to talk to their children about such issues, as well as other aspects of Canadian culture. Finally, while some male participants feel that being in a single female headed household does not hamper their integration, this is not the case for all participants. This suggests that culturally defined gender roles can inhibit Somali women who can be regarded as role models for young Somali males. This issue of gender is discussed further below.

6.1.6 Gender

This study reveals that Somali male youth appear to experience more difficulty integrating than Somali female youth. They are more susceptible than young Somali females to the negative consequences of having a low socioeconomic status, which tends to mean living in low income and somewhat ghettoized neighbourhoods where they are exposed to drugs, crime and are more marginalized from mainstream Canadian youth and

society. This public image of young Somalis as ‘problem’ youth can have an impact on young, law-abiding Somali males who have negative experiences with the City of Ottawa Police (e.g., they are stopped or questioned for no apparent reason), but this is not an issue for young Somali females.

Both male and female participants feel that certain male youth are more likely to jeopardize their integration by not acquiring high school or post-secondary education. However, as the life stories in this thesis indicate, some male youth complete high school and have some post secondary education. It is interesting to note that the female participants in this study have higher academic aspirations than males. But this may be changing as more males graduate from university and become role models for younger males as indicated above. The literature review in Chapter Three suggests several reasons for this gender difference (e.g., parents are more supportive of girls’ education in the host country because of the perception of greater job opportunities and sense of succeeding in the host country), yet, no additional data emerged from the life stories or focus group discussions in this study to support any of those conclusions.

This study shows that, in some instances, female adult Somalis are able to be role models to young Somali males but not in all cases. Finally, some male participants believe that staying at home or in the “private” space facilitates their integration while some female participants feel that being in the “public” space promotes their integration. This is in contrast to traditional Somali gender roles which associate males with “public” space and females with the “private” space.

The thematic categories provided valuable information on the factors that hamper and assist the integration of participants. Based on the data gathered, several lessons have been learned from this research project and areas for future research are identified below.

6.2 Lessons learned from the research project

This study focuses on young Somalis who are not in trouble with the law or schools, and who are trying to make choices to improve the quality of their lives. However, these choices are somewhat limited by their backgrounds and the socio-economic, cultural and political circumstances they find themselves in as Somali refugees in Ottawa.

There is no forum in which to discuss the issues related to the integration of young Somalis living in Ottawa. Young Somalis have suggestions and ideas on how to assist their integration and young Somalis need to be included in these discussions. Ideas suggested include: translators in school for parents; cultural resources for parents; better understanding of Islam by Ottawa society and schools; more recreational programs; more Somali teachers and Police Officers; and, less racism and negative stereotyping of Somalis. These suggestions and ideas deserve to be acknowledged and addressed by those involved in the creation, funding and implementation of community based programs, educators in schools, and the City of Ottawa Police Service. During the early stages of this research, the City of Ottawa had a Mayor's Task Force on Somali youth in Ottawa, but no report or recommendations were ever produced from this effort. Since that time a new Mayor was elected in Ottawa and the Task Force was disbanded.

This research reveals that one of the most pressing needs for Somali youth is having ready access to programs (e.g., movie nights, organized sports, and leadership training) in a safe supervised environment away from the negative influences that can accompany poverty. While an in-depth examination of these programs and their funding structures was beyond the scope of this study, this research highlights the need for more community and/or school-based programs for refugees and youth living in poverty. In addition, this research shows some key principles that need to be taken into account when proposing specific programs to address the needs of Somali male and female youth. First, religiously defined gender roles must be taken into consideration. For example, certain programs such as swimming can include both pre-pubescent females and males, yet must be separate for adolescent females and males. Secondly, young Somalis must be involved as participants in decision-making processes when such programs are being designed to ensure that their voices are heard, that their needs are being met, and that new programs are effective. Thirdly, political factions amongst Somalis in Ottawa need to be understood, recognized and addressed by Somalis and others to ensure that young Somalis are not prevented from having access to programs or from having their voices heard. Finally, this study reveals that the Somali community in Ottawa is heterogeneous and can not be targeted en masse by organizations and policy makers interested in assisting the integration of Somalis in Ottawa.

6.3 Future Research

One area for further research is an examination of the opportunity structures that may show Somali youth that it is possible to move forward in Ottawa society. Another

is an examination of the transition from school to employment. Due to the young age of participants at the time of the study, little information emerged on this subject from the life stories and focus group discussions. However, two male participants were employed part time and one female participant said that she wanted to look for a part time job.

Additionally, the role of the media in the integration process deserves more qualitative research. Although mentioned by only one participant, and in passing in the male focus group discussion, the media were cited as portraying Islam and Somalis in Ottawa negatively, as well as showing images of African-Americans that conflict with Somali culture. In this sense, the media contributes to confusion over Somali identity, which can hamper integration.

As stated previously, integration is a process that occurs over time and unfolds differently for each individual. This study cannot conclude that the 19 Somali youth are completely or effectively integrated into Ottawa, Canada. Rather, given an opportunity to speak out about what hampers or assists their integration, this study shows how a particular group of Somali youth in Ottawa are experiencing the integration process, and reveals that it is too soon in the integration process to determine if they are socially, economically, politically and culturally integrated in Canada. An examination of these same youth in a few years would be able to provide a better indication of their integration status and would be a fruitful future research project to pursue as a follow-up to this initial study.

The data obtained from these young Somalis illustrates the ways in which social and economic factors can hamper or assist the integration experience. As well, based on

their own personal experiences, these youth reveal several ways in which the integration of young Somalis in Ottawa can be assisted. The life stories and focus group discussions reveal that, for this particular group of Somali youth, “failure is not an option”, and highlights, especially to policy-makers, the value of the data gathered through this kind of qualitative research, and the need to invest in the continued integration process of Somali youth – both for their benefit and that of Canadian society as a whole.

Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions for Life Story

1. How old are you?
2. Do you go to school?
If no - What do you do?
If yes -what grade/year of university or college
3. Where do you go to school?
4. Where do you live?
Explore how long and other places they may have lived
5. Who do you live with?
If live with parent or parents – What do your parents do?
If they do not live with parents – Where is your mother/father?
6. Where were you born?
7. Do you remember anything about your life in Somalia?
(explore school, memories of war, family, culture)
8. How old were you when you came to Canada?
9. Do you remember anything about coming to Canada?
10. Do you remember how you found out you were coming to Canada?
11. Do you remember why you came to Canada?
12. Where did you live when you first came to Canada?
13. Did you speak English when you first came to Canada?
(explore language abilities)
14. Did your parents [speak English]?
15. Do you remember your first day of school in Canada?
What was it like?
16. Did you know English when you went to school?
17. Did that make school hard?

18. Did you have any friends at school?
19. Did you notice any other Somali kids in your class or school?
20. Do you still [speak Somali/Arabic/other]?
21. Do your parents [speak Somali/Arabic/other]??
22. Do you think you are able to keep your Somali culture living in Ottawa?
How?
23. I understand that Clans and tribes play a big role in Somali culture. Are those things part of your life?
24. Do you consider yourself to be Somali, Canadian or Somali Canadian?
25. I have heard/read about Somali youth in Ottawa and the fact that there are some issues with the police. What have you heard/read?
26. What do you think about it?
27. Have you had any experience with the police?
28. Do you know anyone who has?
29. What do you feel are some of the issues affecting you as a young Somali girl/boy growing up in Ottawa?
30. What do you think are some of the issues affecting other Somali girls/boys in Ottawa?
31. If you were the Mayor, Prime Minister or person in charge of Russell Heights or the City of Ottawa what would you do or change to make things better for Somali youth?

Appendix B: Focus Group Questions (Male and Female Somali Youth)

1. Tell me your name, age, where you were born and how long you have lived in Canada.
2. Thinking back to when you first came to Canada and the first few years you lived here, what are some of the things you remember about that time (e.g., your first day of school, your house). What were some of the good things about coming to Canada? What were some of the bad things?
3. When you hear the words “community” or “Somali community in Ottawa” what do you think that means? What does it mean to you? Do you consider yourself a member of a community?
4. What do you think are the issue(s) that have had a positive and negative effect on the integration of Somali youth in Ottawa? Do you think these are different for boys and girls? If so, in what way?
5. What do you think is the single most important issue facing Somali females in Ottawa?
6. If you were in charge of Russell Heights of the City of Ottawa, write down the three to five things you would do to help Somali youth. After you do this each person will read out their recommendations and we will discuss them.

Appendix C: Sample Interview Questions for Organizations

1. What is the mission statement of the organization?
2. What programs do you run for youth?
3. How much money/year do you spend on youth programs?
4. How are these programs funded?
5. Do you have different programs for boys and girls?
6. What age groups are these programs for?
7. Who are some of your partners?
8. What do you think are the main issues facing Somali youth in Ottawa?
9. Base line data: How many Somali's in Ottawa? How many Somali youth in Ottawa? Where do Somali youth live in Ottawa.
10. Which area of the City do the youth serve come from?
11. How do you advertise your programs?
12. What recommendations do you have for the city, prov?
13. Which other groups, organizations or schools do you partner with?
14. Is there one united Somali community in Ottawa or a few different communities? Is this based on where people live?
15. Who speaks on behalf of the Somali community in Ottawa? How do you decide?
16. Are you a member of the Mayors Task Force?

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