Nicola Spawls

Award: PhD

‘What We Came Through to Get Here’:

The educational experiences of Somali women graduates in London

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

Middlesex University

School of Health and Education

October 2020

Supervisor: Dr Louise Ryan

Director of Studies: Dr Leena Helavaara-Robertson

Abstract

This study examines the educational experiences of British–Somali women graduates in London. By using an intersectional feminist approach and applying theories of social and cultural capital, the research examines how the participants experienced their education: the challenges encountered; the resources and strategies that enabled their achievements; and how they navigated and framed their identities through their experiences. The research aims to present a counter-discourse to the focus of early education studies of the 2000s that saw Somali pupils as an underachieving population.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 women graduates of Somali origin who had studied at London universities. Analysis of the data revealed that, despite the many disadvantages that they faced, the women were able to achieve during their school years by drawing upon ethnic forms of social capital within their families, specifically their parents' strong aspirations for their educational success that were motivated by their own incomplete and disrupted experiences of education. Whilst the participants' entry to higher education and their concomitant goals and desires were perceived as problematising the gender roles expected in their community, they were able to use their engagement in higher education as a form of negotiating capital, as leverage affording them the agency to pursue their own desires in academia and beyond.

Whilst facing structural and discriminatory obstacles during their higher education, the women graduates revealed how their participation in Somali Student Societies and related associational groups with Somali identity at the fore, were significant in shoring up their sense of visibility and belonging at their higher education institution. Further, the women showed that, despite encountering prejudice, including microaggressions, levied against them as Black Muslim women, they had a strong commitment to their Somali background and were engaged in a process of reframing identities and thus the parameters of British–Somali womanhood though their educational success. As such, they can be considered as pathfinders for a new generation

of young Somalis having acquired valuable ‘navigational capital’ with new insights into the education system, and with increased visibility and status in a range of professions they can act as inspirational role models to those following in their footsteps.

Contents

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my research supervisor, Dr Louise Ryan, and to my Director of Studies, Dr Leena Helavaara- Robertson, for their incredible depth of knowledge, their unwavering support and interest in my research topic, and their invaluable guidance. They were the dream team: a constant source of motivation and inspiration.

I am extremely grateful to my daughter, Rosalie, and my sister, Fran, who were always there to listen. Your support has meant so much to me.

Thank you for the invaluable support of my staff team at Middlesex University, who always expressed an interest in my research ramblings and allowed me to be barely present during the intense periods of writing up. In particular, I should like to extend my thanks to my Head of Department, Dr Debbie Jack, for her consistent support, to Dr Lee Jerome for his impartial advice for sharing his extensive knowledge and to Dr Phil Barter for sharing his newfound insights to the PhD process.

I cannot express enough my profound gratitude to the participants themselves, who took the time out of their lives to speak with me and who shared their insights and experiences with such great generosity. The data that they provided are so rich and powerful that I was inspired to the very end. I can only hope that, in amplifying their voices, I have done them justice.

Chapter 1: **Introduction to the Thesis**

The overall aim of this study is to explore the educational experiences of women graduates of Somali origin in London. The key areas of focus are the challenges that they encountered along the journey and their strategies to overcome them, and the impact on their identities of their experiences, both as migrants and of their higher education. The research uses as its theoretical basis theories of social reproduction, specifically social and cultural capital, approached through a feminist intersectional analytical framework.

1.1 Research Aims

At its core, this study has the aim of presenting a counter-discourse to the deficit model often seen in research, which has frequently focused on the underachievement of Somali pupils, not only in British schools but in Europe, America and Canada (Alitolppa Niitamo 2002; Diriye 2006; Demie, Lewis and Mclean 2008). I approached this research as an educationalist interested in issues of social justice. As an academic in a London university myself, aware of the increasing numbers of Somali young people entering the higher educational sphere and cognisant of the discourse being perpetuated about the failings of Somali pupils, I was intrigued: here they were, overcoming the suggested challenges and achieving in education, ultimately reaching undergraduate level study. This inspired me to explore their experience in reaching this level of academic attainment: what were the challenges that they faced and their strategies to enable them? How did the process impact on their identity and self-perception?

I chose to focus the study on young women from the Somali community as my knowledge suggested that the experience of young women in many Muslim communities is quite unlike that of men. As a feminist, my interest lies specifically in the voices of women from marginalised groups, and it is important to me that it is their stories that are foregrounded. The title is taken from a conversation that I had with a participant just as we were finishing up an interview. I was thanking her for taking the time to speak with me, to which she replied ‘ Thank you for being

interested, most people don't know about what we came through to get here'. I felt that this expression illustrated eloquently the underlying aims of this research.

1.2 Research Questions

Drawing upon rich qualitative interviews with Somali women graduates in London, this thesis asks the following research questions:

- How was the participants primary and secondary education impacted by their family history of migration and being refugees, and what resources did they draw on to negotiate their schooling? What challenges did they face and what strategies did they utilise to manage and overcome them?
- What issues did participants encounter in their pursuit of higher education and what sources of social and cultural capital did they draw on to achieve their academic goals?
- How can the participants navigation of educational aspirations and cultural expectations be understood through an intersectional lens?
- How did the women in the study frame their identities as they traversed the varied contexts, from education into the wider social environment?

The research is based on qualitative data elicited through 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with young Somali women graduates in London and five key informant interviews. Additional material was gained through engaging with Somali cultural events in London, as well as social media that featured Somali-centred issues both at home and in the diaspora. The focus of the interviews was the participants' educational experiences and aspects of their identity.

This study, I believe, will contribute to knowledge production, since there have been no similar studies published, to date, that have explored the identities and experiences of Somali women graduates in London. The research presented here will contribute to knowledge by foregrounding the voices of women from a specific ethnic minority population whose experiences have been marginalised due to their intersectional status as Black Muslim women who are first-generation

refugees in this country. There have been earlier studies on the intersections of ethnicity, gender and education for young Muslim and ethnic minority women. Several have heavily influenced this study (Ahmad 2001; Bhopal 2011; Ryan 2011; Mythen 2012), yet none has specifically focused on women and education in this specific recently migrated, largely Muslim Somali population. I use the term 'recently migrated population' because, as discussed in depth in Chapter 2, in contrast to Indian, South Asian or Caribbean families, who have been migrating to the United Kingdom for at least seventy years, the biggest migration of Somalis has been only from the 1990s. It is this recency – this specific context in time and space – that is of relevance to their stories, as is the historical background to that migration, impacting on the participants' identities and self-perceptions.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is made up of three main parts: the literature review (Chapters 2, 3 and 4,) the methodology (Chapter 5) and the analysis and findings (Chapters 6, 7 and 8).

Chapter 1, presented here, is an introduction and overview of the thesis.

Chapter 2 discusses relevant literature pertaining to Somalis in the diaspora and key areas of relevant research. It examines the recent history of Somali migration and settlement. It investigates concepts of identity and gender in Somali culture, with a particular focus on the role of women. Studies on employment, housing and socioeconomic status are discussed, as these are highly relevant to understanding the position of Somali families in the United Kingdom, where they are frequently perceived to face a raft of structural disadvantages. Research on the educational achievement/underachievement of young Somalis in the diaspora is also examined.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine the theoretical underpinnings of this research study, with a review of the existing relevant literature.

Chapter 3 introduces the concept of reproduction theory, with specific reference to social and cultural capital. These concepts are then explored as they pertain to this study, focusing on social

and cultural capital in education and migration studies. Specifically the concept of social capital as created and mobilised by migrant populations is examined. Early theories of social capital propagated by Bourdieu (1986), and Putnam (2000) which view social capital as fairly static in application to elite communities, are compared with more recent research such as that of Shah, Dwyer and Modood (2010), Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo (2015). These more recent studies illustrate how social capital can be acquired and utilised within migrant populations that may be seemingly low on resources and facing structural disadvantages, thus suggesting a more dynamic approach to our understanding of social capital. These more recent approaches to social capital are highly relevant to the study presented here as research suggests that Somalis in the UK are a highly structurally disadvantaged and with low resources of social capital resulting in poor educational achievement. The concept of cultural capital explored by Bourdieu (1986) as applied to educational achievement is examined alongside more recent analysis of the theory such as that by Yosso (2005) who argues for a more nuanced approach through analysing the cultural wealth that is garnered in migrant communities. The importance of examining the relationship between gender and social capital is also discussed within this chapter, moving on to show how gendered approaches are highly relevant, particularly in regard to migration and the acquisition of social capital (Takhar 2006). Anthias (2012) has suggested that social capital is differentially accessed depending on class, gender and generation, and suggests that an intersectional approach can allow for a more inclusive understanding of the interconnectedness of gendered power relationships. Within such an approach the concept of agency is significant, being closely interconnected to ideas about the gendered aspects of social capital, and has specific relevance to this research which, in the later analysis chapters, demonstrates the way in which young Somali women manage and negotiate agency, asserting control over their lives in the face of varied structural disadvantages.

Chapter 4 reviews theories and research concerned with the experiences of intersectionality as applied to studies of Black and Muslim women. It situates this current study within theoretical

frameworks, showing how a critical intersectional lens has been used to develop knowledge and understanding of the lives of Black women and, of Muslim women's experiences in the UK. This chapter focusses specifically on studies of Black and Muslim women within the realms of higher education (Ahmad 2001, Mirza 2009, Bhopal 2011, Takhar 2016, Thompson and Pihlaja 2018). Key studies have shown how young Black and South Asian women negotiate space for themselves and their educational desires, demonstrating their agency in seeking out autonomy over the choices in their lives and 'securing valuable social, cultural and economic capital' (Takhar 2006:303, Mirza and Reay 2000, Mirza 2009). Central to many such studies is an understanding of how young educated Black Muslim women negotiate their identities in the light of stereotyping, discrimination and Islamophobia. These studies are highly relevant in the later analysis as they are comparable to the experiences of participants in this study, who originate from a similarly marginalised ethnic minority population and who are also negotiating their personal, educational and professional identities in an environment that is arguably hostile to their aspirations.

Chapter 5 is the methodology chapter, and it gives a full description of the epistemological framework of the study. This research takes a feminist intersectional approach to the research, which is grounded within an interpretivist epistemology, placing the lived experiences of the participants at the centre of the research. The importance of a feminist stance: its meaning and application within this study, is discussed with reference to my positionality and the importance of reflexivity. Of particular significance in exploring my positionality is the inclusion of reference to #Cadaan Studies (White Studies) (Aidid 2015a, Aidid 2015b) – a conversation that took place on social media during the process of data collection and which bought to the fore issues of power and knowledge production.

Full details are presented on how the data collection was conducted and analysed alongside a discussion of the ethical implications of this research.

Chapter 5; part II explores the history of emotions in research noting how rich emotional content has frequently been overlooked and undervalued. It further explores the importance of acknowledging emotion in research studies that include complex life histories such as those included in this thesis. The chapter illustrates how feminist research has contributed to our understanding of the way in which a focus on emotions in research, of both participant and researcher, can enrich and contribute to knowledge production.

Chapter 6 is the first of the analysis chapters, and it examines participants' early experiences of education. The importance of their background as refugees and its impact on their approach to education is explored, alongside their early experience of schooling and the factors that either challenged or enabled them as they proceeded through primary and secondary education.

Chapter 7 provides the basis for answering the research question on the challenges encountered in participants' pursuit of higher education. It focuses on how they navigated their families' expectations regarding their gender roles and the impact of higher education in troubling the expected gender script. It shows the participants' use of agency in making space for themselves in higher education and negotiating and analysing their strategies to engender a sense of visibility and belonging in the academy.

Chapter 8 focuses on responding to the research question regarding how the participants framed their identities as they traversed higher education and beyond. The participants' identities and understandings of themselves as Somali Muslim women in navigating higher education are examined. The interplay of the multiple aspects of their identities is explored, alongside insights into how their higher education has influenced their self-perceptions, with a specific focus on their new-found roles as pathfinders for the new generation of young Somalis.

Chapter 9 presents the conclusions, based on the findings and analysis, to tie together the study's theoretical strands. The impact and contribution of the research to knowledge production and

theory are discussed in depth. The implications of the study are examined, and the potential is explored for future studies stemming from these implications.

Chapter 2: **Somalis in Diaspora**

Somalia is an East African country of some 14 million people, of whom 65% are currently under the age of 25. A beautiful region with a vast array of geographical flora and fauna, Somalia boasts the longest stretch of coastline in mainland Africa, some 3,000 kilometres of white sandy beaches. Originally a decentralised state, the country was colonised during the 1800s by both Britain and Italy, leading to artificial boundaries aligned to historical demarcations. Consequently, the Declaration of Independence in 1960 led into a complex power struggle, culminating in the civil war of the 1990s and the breakdown of infrastructure. Issa-Salwe (1996) argues that:

> The legacy of the colonial partition of the Somali people is one of the root problems of the Horn of Africa. After almost a century, the colonial powers left behind a centralised system of government alien to the Somalis… the problems led to its disintegration and dismemberment in a bloody civil war which has claimed more than three hundred thousand dead and wounded, with roughly four-fifths of its population displaced…. These displaced people have lost their past and their future and that of their children. Subsequently, the country has been divided into fiefdoms ruled by separate armed clans. (Issa-Salwe 1996: 4)

The conflict ultimately led to the mass migration of Somali people to varied regions of the world and the emergence of large communities elsewhere who have, as the current situation in Somali remains precarious, little hope of returning home. The number of people fleeing Somalia has been estimated at 60,000 per year since 1991, resulting in over 1.5 million displaced people – more than 10% of the total population of the country, currently around 10 million (Pew Research 2016; Hassan et al. 2013; Bradbury and Healy 2010). Over half of those displaced are still in temporary refugee situations, many in neighbouring countries; however, most Somalis in diaspora have settled in Europe, specifically in a few countries such as England, Sweden,

Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Italy (OSF 2016; Pew Research Centre 2016). Some regions of the United States have also seen considerable numbers of Somalis choosing to resettle and form significant communities, most notably in Minnesota, where more than 40,000 Somalis now reside out of the total of 140,000 in the United States (Abdi 2015;, Pew Research Centre 2016).

Due to the British colonisation of Somaliland in the late 1800s, Somali migration to industrial cities in the United Kingdom has been taking place for longer than to any other country. Since that time, there has been a trickle of Somali people into the United Kingdom, specifically to the port cities of Cardiff, London and Liverpool (OSF 2014; ONS 2015); however, the most substantial migration has taken place in the past thirty years (ONS 2015; OSF 2015). Most Somalis in Europe now reside in the United Kingdom where, the ONS have recorded up to 100,000 people in the UK who had been born in Somalia, an increase of 50,000 since the 2001 census (Change Institute 2009; OSF 2015, ONS 2019). Many of these people have become naturalised, taking on British citizenship or in the process of doing so, having applied for asylum. It is worth pointing out that, for researchers like myself, it can be difficult to gauge accurate figures on a range of measures of data relating to Somali communities owing to the way in which Somalis fall under the 'Black/African' classification in survey data, rarely having their own signifier (Demie et al. 2007, 2008; Harris 2004; Gidley and Jayaweera 2010). This has been argued to contribute to the perceived 'social invisibility' of Somali people in Britain (Demie, Lewis and Maclean 2007). The OSF (2014) suggests that British–Somalis are a 'silent minority':

> Despite the long history of British Somalis residing in the United Kingdom and being one the largest black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, British Somalis are relatively 'silent' and very little is known about them. Media representations of British Somalis are overwhelmingly negative, stereotyping young men as gang members, violent extremists and they also focus on piracy and FGM (Female Genital Mutilation). Furthermore, British Somalis are a 'group' which experiences significant inequalities in service provision and

> poorer outcomes in relation to education, employment, housing and health. (OSF 2014: 25)

The lack of distinct data regarding Somalis in Britain has been apparent when trying to attain statistics from social and population surveys, as well as in relation to education, specifically the higher education system, where my own investigations discovered that clear records on Somali participation are hard to obtain.

2.1 Identity in Somali Culture

Most Somalis identify religiously as Muslim, and this is a fundamental aspect of their identity (Valentine, Sporton and Nielsen 2009; OSF 2015: 25). Several studies have noted how there has been an increased focus on religiosity for Somalis in diaspora (Berns-McGown 1999). McGowan observes how, back home in Somalia, many had taken their religion for granted but that now, owing to migration and the experience of displacement, their faith has become a more central feature of their lives and identities (McGown 1999; Valentine, Sporton and Nielsen 2009), shoring up their identity as both Somali and Muslim. For Somali Muslim women, many of whom wear the *hijab*, this has important implications as adherence to this religious dress code on the one hand signifies a sense of their belonging to a minority ethnic and religious group and, on the other, serves as a visible marker of their 'otherness' (Langellier 2010).

A useful concept for exploring these interrelated aspects of identity is that of intersectionality. This term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe the ways in which the 'experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism' (Crenshaw 1991: 1244). She argued that at that time the discourses of neither feminism nor racism could adequately represent this multiple discrimination. She developed and refined the term so that its use is now much widely used to address the ways in which 'multiple forms of inequality and identity inter-relate in different contexts and over time' (Gillborn 2015). Since its inception, this approach has become regarded as fundamental to present-day feminist political

analysis (Yuval-Davis 2006a). Anthias and Yuval-Davis (2005) indicate that the concept has developed into a way of highlighting the 'triple oppressions', or disadvantages, that many Black women in the minority world suffer from in relation to their location in specific domains – as Black people; as women; and as members of the working classes (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 2005: 195). Its complexities are explored in much greater depth in Chapter 4, which discusses research into young Muslim women's identities and the impact of intersectionality, and in Chapters 7 and 8, where the complex interplay of gender, religion and ethnic identities and their meaning in the lives of the participants in this research study is analysed.

As indicated above, a noteworthy aspect of Somali life 'back home' is the way in which society is delineated by its clan system. Arguably central to socio-political life, clans have been regarded as responsible for much of the animosity and fragmentation experienced during the past 30 years in Somalia, contributing to the civic strife (Little 2003). Abdi (2015) argues that clan affiliations at the political level have led to corruption and nepotism and resulted in 'protracted instability' (2015: 40). Despite the significance of clans to Somalia's social and economic life, in my study I have chosen not to engage proactively with the participants over this aspect of identity for reasons that I aim to justify. On more than one occasion during my research interviews, the issue of clan arose naturally; for example, in one interview a woman describing her family history related that her parents had come from different clans and that this had been problematic for them, back home. In other interviews, the subject arose when asking participants about their interactions with Somali media and organisations, where several responses were in relation to the organisation entitled 'The Anti-tribalism Movement', an NGO with over 53,000 members whose goal is to eradicate clan-based sectarianism in Somalia and the related diaspora.

In this context, then, the topic of clans arose and I was given the opportunity to probe further. The overwhelming response was that manipulations by the clan divisions were significantly responsible for the troubles in the participants' homeland and, furthermore, were largely considered of relevance only to the elders in the community. When the topic of clans was

discussed, the responses suggested that such affiliations had little relevance to life in the diaspora, where the notion of Somali identity was of much greater significance to the communities than identity or social structure based on clan membership. Abdi (2015) confirms this, suggesting that, in her research with Somalis in diaspora, 'the only Somalis who ever inquired about my clan affiliation were in their sixties and seventies (Abdi 2015: 24).

Abdi (2015) notes in her book exploring Somali identity in diaspora that she chose not to discuss clan identity. Even as a fellow Somali, whilst in her role as a researcher she left it out of her literature review and investigations: she states that, 'Unlike most books written by Somalis and in some cases by non-Somalis, there is no section that outlines the Somali clan structure in this book'. This is intentional, she writes, as clan was of no relevance to her discussions with Somalis in the diaspora in her research. She states: 'I grew up in an era where asking others their clan was frowned upon'. Abdi posits a compelling argument for not acknowledging the clan system when exploring Somali identities in diaspora: 'all Somalis have extensive clan linkages that almost always crosscut clan lines'. Referring to her personal experience of multifaceted clan relations, she says that the clan system is not the rigid conceptualisation that the political leaders in Somali claim, arguing rather that it is 'fluid and organic' (Abdi 2015: 25). The Change Institute (2009) study of the Somali community in England similarly notes how successful settlement in the United Kingdom frequently leads to a weakening of clan affiliations in favour of networks with Somalis of varied clan backgrounds. Using these approaches as a guide, I have chosen not to engage proactively with clanship as a feature of Somali society in diaspora yet to acknowledge it when it was raised by the participants in their narratives.

What can be stated about Somalis in diaspora is that they are united in coming from a country that has been ravaged by war and civil conflict for several decades now, and that the majority will thus have faced displacement, the loss of family and community and a struggle in their journey to resettlement. Furthermore, this journey will inevitably have impacted on their identity. Somali identity in diaspora has been explored in several studies (Valentine Sporton and

Nielsen 2009; Langellier 2010; Hopkins 2010). The majority of Somali peoples living away from the homeland occupy multiple aspects of identity: they are at once Somali, Black, African and Muslim and, depending on their place of settlement, are remaking identities in relation to their host countries (Langellier 2010). Langellier further notes how, for many Somalis in diaspora, their religious identity is a unifying feature that 'transcends clan divisions', suggesting that 'Islam provides the single most stable source of strength and public communal identity for Somalis in the diaspora' (Langellier 2010: 79).

In their study exploring the relationship of young Somalis in the United Kingdom to acquiring British citizenship, the OSF (2014) study found in many a strong sense of belonging to both British and Somali nationalities. Others, they found, were more ambiguous, suggesting that:

> British Somalis have multiple, overlapping identities… There was recognition that identity was complex, and at times confusing and that identity formation is shaped by both an individual and collective 'sense of belonging' as well as being aware of how 'other' ethnicities and the indigenous population perceive and define minority groups. (OSF 2014: 49)

Ambiguities regarding citizenship and belonging are understandable, as many Somalis arrived in the United Kingdom after a number of other 'stop-offs' on the way, often in neighbouring countries such as Kenya and the Yemen, or in northern European countries such as Norway and Denmark. Experiencing such complex and challenging journeys means that it is unsurprising that some British–Somalis have mixed feelings about their sense of belonging to any single place. This is significant for this community specifically because its members have very recent experience of migration to the United Kingdom: many families have less than twenty years of settlement here and are still in the early stages of the pathway to UK citizenship.

Research into the identity beliefs of Somalis in the United Kingdom frequently makes reference to the impact of the external gaze, suggesting that they cannot feel entirely British when their

host country views them as ‘others’, arguing that ‘assumptions by others about Black people, ethnic minorities and Muslims precluded their acceptance as a British citizen’ (OSF 2014: 38). Langellier (2010: 71) notes how Somalis in diaspora are ‘narrating and negotiating identity in intercultural and intracultural spaces that cannot escape the changing constraints of bodies, situation and discourse’. Valentine, Sporton and Nielsen (2009: 236) argue that:

> We understand identities to be situated accomplishments in that they are enacted in and through different spaces such that one identity category may be used to differentiate another in specific spatial contexts and particular subject positions may become salient or irrelevant in particular spaces… while as individuals our identities might be multiple and fluid, power operates in and through spaces within which we live and move in systemic ways.

The authors point here to notions of the private self versus the public gaze. Such notions are illustrative of the importance of intersectionality in the Somali experience in diaspora, where their varied identity markers frequently result in discrimination against them on the basis of their ethnic-minority Muslim Black identity. Much research indicates how Somalis living in the United Kingdom have a strong awareness of how they are perceived by others and are cognisant of the varied discriminations based on these perceptions. The OSF report into Somalis in London (OSF 2014) notes that, for the participants in their study:

> being Somali, British, black and Muslim overlapped. On one level, such intersectionality was not problematic as it encapsulates the complexities surrounding identity formation and belonging. However, on another level, having multiple identities also compounded potential discrimination, as there were several ways in which people experienced this. (OSF 2014: 17)

Abdi (2014: 463) suggests that ‘the rhetoric of terrorism exacerbates Muslim experiences of racism, Islamophobia and social exclusions’. This is discussed further in Chapter 4, which

examines the impact of Islamophobia on identity and experiences, and in Chapter 8, where these concepts are applied to the lived experiences of the participants in this study.

2.2 Gender Roles in Somali Culture

Traditionally a patriarchal and highly gendered country, Somalia has disparities between women and men that can be illustrated by its data on primary education enrolment. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2016) estimates that girls' participation in primary education is only half that of boys; however, the figures for both are exceedingly low, with only 40% of boys and 20% of girls between 5 and 12 years of age being enrolled in full-time education. These overall figures are an indication of the continuing lack of infrastructure and the challenges of rebuilding a stable state governance, alongside a societal culture that values more highly the education of boys than girls (Gardner and El-Bushra 2004). Somali women in their homeland are subject to strict rules on behaviour, dress and social interaction. Gardner and El-Bushra (2004) suggest of Somalia that, 'living in a highly structured patrilineal society, women and girls are traditionally assigned as status that is inferior to men, who take the domain role in society, religion and politics' (2009: 9). They argue that, for both men and women, 'having children is key to one's place' in society (2009: 9).

Gardner and El-Bushra note how the war has weakened young people's chances of accessing schooling and increased the burden on girls and young women to support their mothers at home in domestic work and local agriculture, especially in the absence of young men, who may have left home to join one or other military sect, thereby diminishing further their chances of completing primary education. These changes have also meant a lack of young males in consistent work, a result of the breakdown of infrastructure that has also allowed women to carve out new economic niches for themselves. Some of these changes have transferred to the lives of Somali women in diaspora, where women have responded positively to the economic and social opportunities offered to them in their new locations.

Other research has also noted how the roles of Somali women in exile have adapted to the changing circumstances (Berns-McGown 1999; Abdi 2014, 2015). Abdi (2015) suggests that gender power has been partially 'recalibrated' in host countries where, for administrative purposes, a woman can be deemed the head of a household. This is bringing Somali women more into line with the mainstream culture of these societies, it is argued, leading to a shift in family dynamics towards their having greater access to the control and distribution of resources (Abdi 2015: 181). Migration, she argues, can be seen to have disrupted norms and gendered patterns of behaviour in Somali families; however, this change in the allocation of resources has not explicitly brought about consequential changes in political power or economic wealth. Abdi's extensive studies of Somalis in diaspora clearly indicate that men, as well as women, struggle to achieve economic stability, noting that, as refugees, they are faced with a plethora of challenges to upward mobility and are frequently unemployed or employed in unskilled, low-wage sector jobs (Rutter 2013, Kone 2019). Gidley and Jayaweera's (2010: 56) study into the economic activity patterns of male and female migrants of working age in the United Kingdom indicate that men are more likely to be employed or self-employed than are women, and women are three times as likely to be economically inactive than men. The challenges for Somali women migrants are even greater, with the language and the wearing of visible religious attire being seen as barriers to full economic participation (Abdi 2014, 2015; OSF 2014). This is an important issue for this study, relating as it does to the reworking of accepted gender roles through participation in higher education. For the participants, as Black Muslim Somali women, achieving in higher education has been part of a struggle to negotiate their place in spaces that might otherwise have been precluded to them. The analysis in Chapters 7 and 8 examines the ways in which participants grappled with issues of identity related to their gender in the home communities, the wider spaces of higher education and the wider world beyond academia.

2.3 Employment, Housing and Socioeconomic Status of Somalis in the United Kingdom

Like many other refugee communities, Somalis in Britain have been seen to experience a range of specific issues and characteristics regarding their socioeconomic situation (Bloch 2004; Rutter et al. 2007). The Change Institute (2009) states that Somali-born migrants have the lowest employment rates of any migrant group in the United Kingdom. The OSF (2015) notes that labour market participation for Somalis in many European cities is dramatically low – the highest rate of 40% for Somali men in Britain, and the lowest 24% in Finland. Osman and Månsson (2015) suggest that approximately 75% of the Swedish Somali population is unemployed. Rutter (2013) suggests that 'over the last 10 years, the employment rate of the Somalia-born population in the UK has rarely been above 20 per cent of the 16–64-year-old population'. This figure is significant compared to approximately 5% unemployment in the overall population, even when including the additional 22% who are economically inactive in other ways, for example being carers, students, retirees, and so on. For Somali women in United Kingdom, the employment situation is even lower at just 9.8% (Kahn 2008, ONS 2015). This figure can be partly explained by structural factors. For example, having English as a second language, lacking familiarity with the workings of the labour market in their host country and a disrupted experience of education may contribute, while other explanations have highlighted cultural and religious discrimination and negative stereotyping. Migrant women may be economically inactive owing to their role as carers for children and the wider family, and this is likely to limit their opportunities to participate in paid employment (Osman 2015). OSF (2015) reports how childcare resources may be limited for Somali refugees in Europe, as they often lack access to extended family and even a close-knit supportive network takes time to establish, whilst the cost of formal childcare is frequently prohibitive.

It is notable that these data vary in comparison to other European counties: in Denmark, Somali women's participation in the workforce is nearly equivalent to that of Somali men, at 26% and

30% respectively (OSF 2015). The generous and well-subsidised childcare system in Denmark may well account for this situation, which has seen labour market participation rates for Somali men and women reach figures nearly equal to that of the whole population (OECD 2010). Whilst offering a partial explanation, these considerations neither account for the low overall participation rates of Somali men and women in the United Kingdom or many other European countries, nor explain why the rates are lower than in other recent migrant groups. The OSF (2016) notes lower rates among Somali men, even those who have been in the country for 14 years, than in other refugee groups. Likewise, the study 'Somalis in London' (OSF 2014) found that British–Somalis have the lowest employment statistics of any migrant group, 'affecting all layers of society (the young, men, women, skilled and unskilled' (2014: 67). Harris (2004) refers to several studies that indicate that a high proportion of Somalis have never worked since coming to the United Kingdom. The OSF study (2014) further suggests that, despite their well-known business acumen, for Somalis issues such as an inability to raise capital, the UK's regulatory frameworks and the lack of the necessary support to help make sense of and use these financial systems may be partially responsible for the lack of clear participation in small business ventures.

Other studies indicate a range of issues, including the absence of Somalis from the public sector, as key barriers to furthering social mobility (Change Institute 2009); however, there are definite signs of improvement in the data. The figure of 40% employment of Somali men in the United Kingdom has increased by almost 100% since 1998, when the figure was only 21%, and a similar picture is seen elsewhere (Change Institute 2009). Alongside the fact that many Somalis run small businesses and are classified as self-employed and, like many other migrant workers, may be employed in the 'informal labour market' (Gidley and Jayaweera 2010: 54), this is a positive sign that the low figures for Somalis' engagement in economic activity may mask the true picture, suggesting a more optimistic view. These important changes do not, however, outweigh the structural factors stacked against the Somali population in the United Kingdom, which cannot be overstated. The difficulties facing an ethnic community struggling to progress from this low

position whilst facing ingrained racism, discrimination and negative stigmatisation have not been significantly diminished.

Alongside unemployment are related issues, such as housing. Like many migrant families and others on low incomes, Somalis face the problem in securing affordable housing, specifically in London where there is a recognised lack of available and affordable homes (Gidley and Jayaweera 2010; Hassan et al. 2009). Data from the OSF study 'Somalis at Home in Europe' (2014) found that many Somali families faced housing issues, including 'overcrowding, poor housing, and disrepair combined with substantial problems accessing social housing and private renting' (OSF 2014: 81). The Karin Housing Association report entitled 'No Voice, Little Choice; the Somali hosing emergency in North and East London' (2009) suggests that housing deprivation among the Somali community in these areas was extremely high, stating that most live in local authority housing and that 'very few of them buy their own homes and a much lower proportion of them rent privately than any other nationality' (Hassan et al. 2009: 5). The findings suggest that only 12% of the Somali participants regarded their current housing situation as satisfactory, compared to 85% of other Londoners. With disrepair, overcrowding and a lack of heating and hot water among the key issues cited, as well as the uncertainty of temporary housing, the report argues that there is likely to be an impact on the community's health outcomes, employment chances and educational capabilities.

The high unemployment rates and low level of professions among recently migrated Somalis in the United Kingdom do not reflect the experience and qualifications with which they arrived. 'Occupational downgrading' is the term to describe the situation whereby specific groups of refugees are unable to carry their qualifications or experience into relevant sections of the job market in their host country, and it is a common feature among some migrant groups in the United Kingdom and elsewhere (Harris 2004; Gidley and Jayaweera 2010). Thomas and Abebaw's (2002) study for the Learning and Skills Council found that the proportion of refugees and asylum seekers in professional and skilled employment is lower in the United Kingdom than

that in their home country. Their study, based in London, showed that whereas 20% of Somalis had been employed in professional roles such as teachers, doctors and lawyers in Somalia, only 4% were employed in commensurate positions in the United Kingdom. Discrimination may impact upon the chances of Somalis finding work and suitable housing in their newly settled locations and, for women, this may be exacerbated by their additional outward signs of being minority ethnic and Islamic and, perhaps most specifically, through the wearing of the *hijab*. This issue is explored in greater depth in Chapter 4, as well as in the analysis of this study's research findings in Chapter 7.

Others have argued that barriers to employment and satisfactory housing are exacerbated by a lack of trust in authority and a lack of representation in welfare institutions (OSF 2014: 68/73).

2.4 Research into the Educational Achievement of Somalis in the United Kingdom

The challenges faced by young Somalis in diaspora in their education have been widely documented. An overview is presented here but, as the topic is central to my research, a much deeper exploration is given in Chapter 2, which examines educational issues in research regarding migrant and refugee populations and explores studies specifically concerning British–Somalis.

A key focus of a range of studies has been the perceived underperformance of young Somalis in achieving formal academic qualifications. In the United Kingdom, a key indicator of academic performance is the number of GCSE qualifications obtained, specifically at grades A* to C, and additionally grades A* to C including English and Maths. A study in 2006 by Demie, Lewis and McLean (2008), from the Lambeth Research and Statistics Unit, presented data from 10 London boroughs that identified Somali pupils as being one of the poorest performing ethnic groups, with only 34% achieving five GCSEs at grades A to C, contrasted with an average of 69% among all other pupils. Similar was reflected in the KS1, KS2 and KS3 results. Rutter (2004) states: 'In

all LEAs that kept data on Somali students, they were the lowest or second lowest achieving ethnic groups at key stages one, two and three in the period 1999-2003' (Rutter 2004: 5).

Several reasons have been offered for these poor outcomes. These include a lack of parental knowledge and understanding of the education system, the language barrier, little parental involvement in children's education and also housing problems, as well as more complex issues such as the impact of trauma, racism in the education system and the lack of role models in academia (Demie et al. 2007; Rutter 2004; Diriye 2006). It is worth noting that concerns over Somali pupils' achievement were felt by some to be conflated with the failure to recognise Somalis as a distinct ethnic group in the data collection for population and social surveys, an issue that was identified in a previous section. Diriye (2006) notes in his article, 'The Ticking Bomb: The Educational Underachievement of Somali Children in British Schools', that Somalis 'remain largely ignored and their needs neglected by the local and national policy makers because of the failure recognise Somalis as a distinct ethnic group' (Diriye 2006: 2; Demie et al. 2014).

More recent data have shown that Somali students, particularly in London schools, are performing increasingly well and that there are notable improvements in outcomes. Demie et al. (2014) put forward data relating to Lambeth that show that Somali pupils increased their performance in Maths, reading and writing at KS1 and KS2 by approximately 16% between 2007 and 2013, with an even more remarkable increase of 57% in GCSE attainment in the same period in this borough, bringing them closer in line with average attainment levels and even higher in specifically Maths. Data from Camden and Tower Hamlets show major increases in performance, with 58% of Somali pupils achieving five GCSEs at grades A* to C, which is in fact above the average for White British pupils yet still significantly below the overall average for England, which is 83%.

A more nuanced breakdown of the data reveals a gender discrepancy. In both Camden and Tower Hamlets, Somali girls are achieving in GCSEs at higher rates than their male counterparts, with

10% more Somali girls in Camden and 20% more in Tower Hamlets achieving the five GCSEs at grades A* to C. There are likely to be complex reasons for this incongruence in outcomes, relating to education, gender and ethnicity (OSF 2014), and these are unpicked in more detail later in this study; however, it is data such as these that encouraged me both to explore this topic in the first place and to focus my research specifically on women in the Somali community. As noted above, the Somali community has been known to hold strong values and beliefs on gender that are tied intimately to their culture and religious beliefs. In this study, I explore the interactions of identity, gender, education and culture and hopefully contribute to our understanding of the changes taking place in the community with regard to and in consequence of the increased educational attainment of Somali women both in London and elsewhere.

Despite the challenges faced by young Somalis and their families, something that is rarely questioned is the value that Somali families place on education. Many show a strong degree of commitment and have high aspirations for their children in education, and much of the research on Somalis in diaspora reflects this (Hemmings 2010; Demie et al. 2014). Chapter 3 examines educational issues, with specific reference to the role of parental and family involvement in schooling as a form of valuable social and cultural capital.

2.5 Summary

This section has presented an overview of key features of Somali society in diaspora, aspects of the cultural, religious identity and some of the ways in which gender roles are reworked in their host society. The key issues facing this population have also been examined, illustrating the economic and social conditions faced by this recent migrant group. The chapter documents how, despite the fact that Somalis are not a homogenous group, research has identified shared characteristics of their experience, with key indicators stemming from a situation of uncertainty, resettlement in a new and often hostile social climate and from socioeconomic disadvantage. These shared characteristics suggest that this community may struggle to achieve in education

(Rutter et al. 2007); however, the narratives that make up this research show that another way is possible.

Through this thesis, I intend to demonstrate how the young Somali women participants stand in a unique space in regard to their position in society. Although frequently marginalised by their migrant refugee status and resultant structural disadvantages and discriminated against as Muslim women, these participants have successfully navigated a pathway to educational success. Their journeys will be analysed in relation to their family experience of migration, their own experience of engaging with the education system and the potential for their success to contribute to change in their community through collaboratively building and renegotiating social capital. This study explores their perspectives, analysing how the cultural backdrop of their lives has interacted with their experience of successful engagement with the education system, and how the combined force has impacted upon them and their identities as they navigate this new terrain.

Chapter 3: **Social and Cultural Capital in Education and Migration**

This chapter presents the theoretical background to this study, focusing on social and cultural capital. It explores the central importance of reproduction theory, with specific reference to social and cultural capital. These concepts are explored as they pertain to this research, viewing social and cultural capital in education and migration studies. The relationship between gender and social capital is discussed, moving on to show how these theories can be applied in the analysis of the present study.

3.1 Overview of Social Reproduction Theory

Theories of social and cultural capital are recurrent themes in this study and run through many aspects of the research and analysis. These concepts have been valuable in understanding how culture and family life can interact with one's life outcomes, opportunities and educational achievements (Coleman 1987; Bourdieu 1986). Social and cultural capital and their interaction in the study of educational achievement have become increasingly recognised as a sphere of research in their own right.

This section of the literature review is principally concerned with theories of social reproduction. It identifies key aspects of the theory of social and cultural capital (controversies and recent developments). It further explores the early integration of social reproduction theory into education research. Several studies that consider how theories of social and capital are approached in studies of migration are discussed. Finally, a summary is made of how such concepts have been applied and integrated into this analysis.

Defined by Bourdieu, social capital is 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a more or less durable network of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership of a group' (Bourdieu 1986: 248). Relationships are the basis of social networks that have the potential to allow people to connect and achieve things that they could not achieve on their own, or achieve only with great difficulty. In this way,

such networks can become a resource, a form of capital, that enables members of a community to get on in society. People are more likely to help those who share the same values, so a sense of community, of shared goals and values, is considered important in these interactions. Like other forms of capital, the metaphor of social capital implies that 'connections can be profitable: like any other form of capital you can invest in it and you can expect a decent return on your investment' (Field 2003: 12). Indeed, social capital is something that needs to be worked on or invested in in order to develop (Ryan 2008).

As far back as the 1800s, even before the term was coined, theorists have analysed the concept of social capital and the ways in which social and relational life might be regarded as a resource, most notably Alexis De Tocqueville, who described the 'vibrant associational life that underpinned American democracy and economic strength' (Field 2003: 5). From the 1980s onwards, a wealth of studies emerged exploring social capital, and as a term it became known to journalists, policy-makers and academics in a range of disciplines.

A key theorist in the field, Pierre Bourdieu was highly influential through his work from the late 1980s and 1990s. Bourdieu saw social capital as 'the sum of resources, actual or virtual that accrue to an individual by virtue of possessing durable network if more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 119). Like Marxist sociologists before him, Bourdieu was cognisant that economic capital was at the root of other forms of capital; however, he was interested in how it could be integrated with other types of capital to contribute to and reproduce inequality. He stated that:

> capital can present itself in three fundamental guises; as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and maybe institutionalised in the form of property rights; as cultural capital which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible,

> in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of a title of nobility. (Bourdieu 1986: 243)

Bourdieu was interested in the continued existence of social class and 'other entrenched forms of inequality' (Field 2003: 13) and how such inequalities are socially reproduced. He envisaged social capital as a dimension or aspect of cultural capital. Cultural capital was seen as constructed through familiarity with the dominant ideologies within society and described how some cultural symbols such as taste, cultural mores, activities and behaviours hold greater value than others. It includes language, knowledge about the ways of being and functioning in the world and cultural knowledge. It is important to note that cultural capital was not meant to reflect just one's economic resources but could be considered a resource independent of financial standing and even compensate for a lack of economic security, enabling power and status for an individual. Membership of a higher class and knowledge of the ways of being amongst those with power gave one a stepping-stone into that world, thus an added advantage. It is notable that, at that point, social capital was not seen as something that might also hold value among the lower classes: Bourdieu originally conceived of social and cultural capital as the exclusive preserve of the elite.

Bourdieu's early research focused on the way in which cultural capital could explain the differential educational achievement of children from different social classes, specifically how elite culture is evident in the lives of middle- and upper-class children, inculcated in their homes. He suggests that such families invest in cultural strategies to ensure that their children benefit the most from the education opportunities afforded them. These cultural strategies allow for familiarity with the concerns of the dominant culture in society, are recognised and valued in the realm of education and include practices such as reading, listening to opera, visiting museums and being interested in world affairs (Bourdieu 1974). Bourdieu illustrated the integration between social and cultural capital through the example of professionals such as doctors and lawyers, who have at their disposal a capital of social connections. In contrast, those who depend

upon just their educational qualifications are vulnerable to 'credential deflation because their weak cultural capital reduces their knowledge' of important cultural markers (Field 2003: 17).

According to Bourdieu, education represents a 'field' – a structure with an identifiable set of relations and an institution within which society is reproduced. The various arenas of education, for example primary schooling, secondary schooling and higher education, are all sub-fields, each with its own rules of the game and specific characteristics. Thus, the rules are played out by teachers, by students and by parents. Within this field is the 'habitus' – the inherent system of distinctive signs that mark out those more highly valued tastes, behaviours and dispositions. Internalised practices represent variations in lifestyle, of which some are more highly prized than others and exhibit the inculcation of specific class-based norms. Within education, it is argued that the habitus is illustrated by the relative ease and comfort that middle-class children feel when entering and engaging in schooling. Described by Bourdieu and Wacquant as the experience of being 'a fish in water…' (1992: 127), habitus is an attitude and a way of perceiving the world, but it is also an embodiment of a set of values and beliefs. As Reay suggests, the concept of habitus 'demonstrates the way in which not only is the body in the social world but the social world is in the body' (Reay 2004: 432). Habitus is performed through the ways in we talk, walk, stand, think and feel (Bourdieu 1990).

Inhabiting this habitus thus renders certain classes greater status and access to the institutions of power. The field of education is an ideal mechanism for reproducing social status inequalities, as Tony Bennet succinctly argues:

> the key mechanism… (is)… the role played by the education system in mediating the relations between the status hierarchies associated with different tastes and cultural preferences on the one hand and the organisation and reproduction of the occupational class structure on the other. (Bourdieu 2013: xx, in Introduction)

Children whose parents are from higher classes are suggested to be endowed with stocks of cultural capital and a certain disposition or habitus, both of which are rewarded in the education system, which maintains the differential values, affording certain forms of cultural capital greater value than others.

Education, according to Bourdieu, is thus a key means of maintaining and reproducing social inequality and, he argued, is 'one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives one recognition to the cultural heritage, that is to social gift, treated as the natural one' (Bourdieu 1974: 32; Sullivan 2001). Through achieving high educational qualifications and credentials and transition into the subsequently most highly valued professions, he argued, families from the higher classes are able to maintain their dominant positions in society and legitimise the social order. Although lower-class students do succeed, of course, this is further evidence of the meritocratic appearance of social mobility through education, sustaining rather than challenging the system.

Bourdieu's work is not without its critics. His argument that social and cultural capital is held exclusively by elites has been challenged, as has his conception of social capital as a relatively static model of social hierarchy (Lareau and Horvat 1999). Indeed, many researchers have gone on to demonstrate how social capital is created and developed within a range of communities (Yosso 2005; Ryan 2008; Shah, Dwyer and Modood 2010; Cederberg 2015). Others have argued that his implementation of the concept of cultural capital is weak and that he seemingly uses parental education as a substitute for cultural capital (Sullivan 2001). Nevertheless, the strong and convincing argument remains that education is related to cultural capital, although the direction and dynamics of this relationship are not as clear-cut as Bourdieu once thought. The complexities of the relationship have been explored by Preston (2003), among others, discussed in greater depth below (Kraaykamp and Eijck 2010; Dumais 2006; Shah et al. 2010; Thomson 2010).

James Coleman's pioneering work had a significant impact on developing the concept of social capital, specifically, the relationship between capital and educational achievement. His key studies focused on the availability of resources and support realisable through close, and closed, dense networks based on trust and obligation. From a study of high-school achievement among six ethnic groups in America in the 1960s, he argued that a pupil's family and background characteristics were of greater influence on achievement that those of their school (Coleman et al. 1966). He developed this theory through a mass study of achievement scores of some 50,000 high-school students, which concluded that those that who achieved highest tended to come from Catholic schools and schools with religious affiliations, over and above factors such as ethnicity and social class. His findings were particularly startling when applied to children from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds, whose families ostensibly had the least to offer their children's academic development. He went on to argue that this pattern of achievement could largely be explained by the impact of community, specifically religious communities, and his results illustrate how social capital can offset some of the social and economic disadvantages experienced by such children.

In his article 'Families and Schools', Coleman (1987) argued that the achievement effects witnessed in his 1980 study were 'not the result of greater curriculum demands or anything within the school but was due to a different relation of the school to the parent community… a community was of great importance in reducing dropouts among students at risk' (1987: 36). These communities were characterised by a high degree of reciprocity and trust, whereby one's connections to others offered a form of resource benefiting individuals by virtue of their membership and association with the community. Community social capital could be regarded as stemming from the networks, interactions and associations with those who shared similar values and interests and whose lives collided on a daily basis in shared community space. An interest in one another's lives, shared experiences and the sharing of associational resources all enhance the development of community social capital. Community social capital, Coleman

argued, is most effective for those children who may lack social capital within the home, for example for children of single parents.

The idea that lies behind Coleman's theory is that developments in employment patterns throughout the twentieth century had led to an overall erosion of social capital as families and society had become more disparate and more focused on the individual, a concept later investigated in more depth by Putnam in *Bowling Alone* (2000). The increased incidence of men working long hours outside the household, women's incorporation into the workforce and long hours of childcare outside the home all contributed to a reduction in social capital and detracted from people's ability to participate in community and associational events. Indeed, consumerism, Coleman argued, is replacing community; however, he believed that there were still families in tight communities based on trust and mutual association, communities able to give young people a strong support network of social capital that would benefit them in their educational and employment endeavours.

Coleman's focus on religious schools and organisations as the basis of community social capital may arguably be less relevant to the West's increasingly secular society; however, a number of underlying principles can be garnered from his theoretical approach. In order to succeed at school, young people needed an 'interaction of qualities... which can be loosely described as attitudes, effort and conception of self' – qualities that work together positively with those required for success in the school environment (Coleman 1987: 38). They may develop these from interactions in a supportive family, community or school environment that has interest and investment in their achievement and that value educational success. Relationships and connections within these communities allow access to resources – material, physical, emotional and non-economic – that can facilitate educational success.

Coleman has been criticised for his model in which families and schools can seemingly easily adopt certain practices that benefit children's educational success and life chances, as it fails to recognise the unequal power and structural inequalities that shape the relations between schools

and families (Lareau 2001). Lareau suggests that, whilst such structural inequalities do largely determine which aspects of cultural capital are valued, it is nevertheless a dynamic and fluid concept representing aspects that change through time and space. Whilst accepting the underlying principles of Bourdieu and Coleman's theoretical models, research has more recently turned to an exploration of the ways in which social and cultural capital can be acquired by families and communities that are seemingly low on resources due to their ethnic minority status as migrants or refugees, which has frequently resulted in them being excluded from fully accessing certain aspects of society.

3.2 Social Capital and Migrant Communities

The intricacies and nuances of how social capital benefits groups and individuals are explored in a number of studies that attempt to map the definition of social capital from a metaphor into a workable, operationalised concept (Lareau and Horvat 1999; Siegler 2014; Sullivan 200*1*). More recently, a range of theorists have explored how social capital has contributed to the development of migrant and refugee communities (Yosso 2005; Ryan 2008; Shah, Dwyer and Modood 2010; Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo 2015).

In the discussion of migrant capital, the further forms of bonding, bridging and linking and symbolic capital are identified as significant, arising from social networks. Putnam (2000) suggests, bonding social capital is inwards looking, shoring up identities within a group, hardening its features and promoting exclusivity, to some degree. He gives the example of country clubs and fraternities/brotherhoods. Bridging capital, on the other hand, is outward looking and connects people across social groupings. Here, Putnam gives the example of civil rights groups and youth organisations. Both concepts are useful in understanding the ways in which networks use social capital, specifically how these forms of capital operate in migrant communities, however Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo (2015:7) dispute the dichotomy between bridging and bonding forms of capital arguing that they are rather 'located on a continuum of social relationships'. They further emphasise the importance of bridging capital in vertical

hierarchies as a strategy for social mobility in migrant communities. They refer to Granovetter's (1973) conceptualisation, which suggests that bridging capital is particularly important in migrant groups that have what he referred to as 'weak ties' – these are instances where members of a group meet infrequently but where the instances are crucial for extending the network and sharing information. In contrast are the strong ties that come about in groups with high and frequent intimacy yet are of only low social value. Granovetter summarises thus:

> Weak ties provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circles, but strong ties have greater motivation to be of assistance and are typically more available. (1983: 113)

The 'information' flowing within these intimate ties may be of low social value – but the ties themselves may be very valuable as sources of support. This is relevant to my analysis as the family relationships discussed within the participant narratives are of significant value to them in their academic progress.

These forms of capital are relevant to the study of migrant communities and to our understanding of how migrant communities utilise and build on social capital. It is worth noting the words of Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo (2015), who remind us that the networking process does not operate in a vacuum but rather emerges within a context from the interaction of multiplex identities in wider social structures. The political opportunities in a host country determine, to some extent, the networking opportunities that shape migrant associations, and these may then limit or facilitate the growth of social capital, social mobility and a migrant group's access to power and resources. In addition, it has been suggested by some researchers that bridging and bonding capital are not mutually exclusive or contrasting but, rather, are on a continuum of social relationships that are influenced in part by the structural aspects of a community's wider host society (Bruegel 2005; Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo 2015; Patulny 2015). This is a useful way to

explore the dynamics of a community in flux, where the changes taking place can be explored through the way in which social and, indeed, cultural capital are acquired and mobilised.

Yosso (2005) contributes to this debate, arguing that we need to move away from a deficit model of cultural capital, especially in relation to ethnic groups. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital asserts that 'some communities are culturally rich while others are culturally poor' (Yosso 2005: 76). Consequently, she argues, we need a wider, more encompassing model that acknowledges the cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts that are held by marginalised ethnic communities and materialise into forms of cultural capital. Yosso proposes that critical race theory allows for an understanding of schools as potentially oppressive and marginalising, whilst harnessing the power to liberate and emancipate. It is therefore within the school that such cultural variations can be valued, given meaning and validated. Other forms of cultural capital can be recognised that, in themselves, present opportunities to students of colour and marginalised ethnic groups, yet these may not be cultural capital as traditionally recognised. Yosso gives the example of a Chicano student, who may bring the value of bilingualism, translation and inter-community support to their education – cultural wealth that may not be traditionally valued in the school context yet is valuable to the community. Such arguments serve to demonstrate that cultural and social capital are not held exclusively by the elite but are available to and garner prosperity in individuals within those communities in their educational and economic endeavours.

Yosso proposes a multidimensional understanding of cultural capital that includes six key elements of capital: aspirational; linguistic; familial; social capital; navigational; and resistant. In terms of reference to my own study, several of these are significant and worthy of further attention. Aspirational capital, Yosso suggests, refers to the 'ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of real and perceived barriers' (Yosso 2005: 73). Linguistic capital includes the cognitive and social skills acquired through communication in several languages, which allows young people to learn from storytelling and oral narratives, increasing

their awareness of linguistic nuances and leading to a greater ability to learn from the spoken word, teach and tutor others. Through their experiences of translating for others, this engenders a social maturity and sense of responsibility that can be applied to their academic skills. Familial capital comes about when families pass on their own cultural traditions outside of their homeland, valuing their importance in their social histories, developing a consciousness and connection to others.

The concept of social capital as a static and fixed is challenged through Yosso's interpretation, which views minority ethnic communities as providing strong networks of social contacts and community resources. Such resources may constitute the support needed to complete a college application or apply for funding. A sense of belonging that comes about through their embeddedness in a cultural community is an important element in developing a strong sense of self-concept and self-efficacy, which is vital to the young person in developing their goals and ambitions. Navigational capital denotes the range of skills necessary to manoeuvre oneself through the system, a system that Yosso argues is 'not created with Communities of Color in mind' (Yosso 2005: 80). This form of capital incorporates not only the knowledge needed to 'get on' in a hostile system but the psychological and emotional resilience necessary to survive, recover and even thrive in a range of circumstances and to 'manoeuvre through structures permeated by racism' [sic] (Yosso 2005: 80).

Lastly, resistant capital denotes the range of skills and knowledge established though 'oppositional behaviour', which allows one to challenge expected norms and stereotypes and existing inequalities (Yosso 2005: 80). This conception mirrors the work of Heidi Mirza (1992, 2015) and Ward (1996) in arguing that the mothers of young women of colour encourage their daughters to resist the swathe of subtle and not-so-subtle messages that undervalue them and, instead, teach them to value themselves as intelligent, ambitious and strong. As Yosso frames it, parents of colour consciously raise their daughters to 'engage in behaviours and maintain attitudes that challenge the status quo…. learning to be oppositional with their bodies, minds and

sprits in the face of ethnic, gender and class inequality' (Yosso 2005: 81). Resistance, in this context, is transformative, allowing young people to recognise the structural inequalities in the system and to challenge and overcome them. Such an approach offers a great deal to my own research study, whereby young Somali women lay down educational and career paths that have never before existed across what is frequently a hostile and negative social environment.

In Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo's work, *Migrant Capital* (2015), the authors explore how migrant communities 'develop, access and maintain networks, with different people and… how such networks are used to transfer, generate and activate resources' (2015: 3). Through a series of sophisticated analyses, they examine how social capital operates as a dynamic resource that changes over time as migrant communities alter and embed, and can be generated and activated within such communities in scenarios that challenge the accepted forms and definitions of social and cultural capital. Such studies have much to offer this research presented here, being concerned as it is with the building of bonding and bridging social capital in migrant communities. They are utilised further in the analysis as a theoretical technique to understand the intricacies and nuances of how these forms of capital can benefit us in understanding such experiences.

3.3 Social and Cultural Capital at the Intersection of Gender and Migration

Within this field is an aspect of research that has explored social capital as it relates to gender studies specifically in regard to migrant communities. It has been argued that both studies of social capital and migration have tended to overlook the role of gender and of women's interactions in these domains (Takhar 2006, Anthias 2012; Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo 2015; Kofman and Raghuram 2015). More recently, this has been addressed in the work of authors such as Anthias (2012), Bruegel (2005), Erel (2009) Erel (2015) and Kofman and Raghuram (2015) who have focused their research on the ways that women specifically engage with the process of creating and mobilising social capital. Anthias (2012) notes how social capital is differentially accessed within and across communities, depending on class, gender and age or

generation, and argues that an inclusive approach to migration studies must incorporate an understanding of the processes of intersectionality that impact on access to networks of power:

> an intersectional approach emphasises the importance of attending to the multiple social structures and processes that intertwine to produce specific social positions and identities. From this perspective, we need to simultaneously attend to processes of ethnicity, gender, class and so on in order to grasp the complexities of the social world and the multifaceted nature of social identities and advantage/disadvantage. (Anthias 2012: 106)

Such an analysis allows us insight into the interconnectedness of experiences that are racialised, gendered and class based and, in relation to social capital, helps one move away from the idea of networks as being homogenous and essentialist concepts. Anthias further posits that, whilst women are 'used as symbols of the nation or ethnic group… men are frequently given the authentic voice to represent their communities' (2012: 108), indicating that they are often lacking in access to real social and economic power. Whilst intersectionality can be a multifarious and slippery concept, it does provide an important perspective on the processes emerging from studies of migration and the interrelationship of social capital. An intersectional approach means that one acknowledges and challenges the multiple inequalities faced by ethnic migrants, specifically women, and in this context is fitting for a feminist approach that foregrounds women's identity and experience.

Of key significance in such an approach is the role of agency and its meaning when applied to the gendered aspects of social and cultural capital accumulation. Agency can be a complex and ambiguous term and, within sociological theory, has been intrinsic in the debate regarding structure vs agency; that is the degree to which individuals operate freely or within the constraints of overarching deterministic structures (Bilge 2010, Takhar 2016). Takhar (2006) argues that agency is a key component of social capital, and that an understanding of the shifting power balances attributed through agency can only be understood by reference to the contextual features of women's lived experiences across varied identity and power dimensions relating to

for example gender, class and socioeconomic status. Noting how women have frequently been absent from discussions into the acquisition of capital, Takhar suggests that 'women, even under the most oppressive conditions are able to create networks and organisations to challenge unacceptable cultural practices' (Takhar 2006:291), further noting that within this women are frequently to be found undertaking careful negotiations in which they manifest their agency, demonstrate their voice in decision making over aspects of their lives and in the process are able to accumulate and mobilise individual and collective social capital. The studies discussed in the following chapter (Chapter 4) show examples of women who have, despite disadvantages and discrimination, strategically negotiated and asserted their autonomy and agency to circumvent oppressive structures (Arbouin 2018), motivated by their aspirations to achieve in education, and utilise it as a tool for accumulating social capital. These themes are further developed in the analysis chapters, where the agency of the participants in this study is seen to be central in the ways that individually and collectively they forge re-imagined identities and grapple for power and autonomy over their educational goals and future aspirations.

3.4 Social and Cultural Capital in the Study of Somali Families in Diaspora

It is important to acknowledge the historical context when examining the importance of social capital to the Somali diasporic community. The vast numbers of Somalis who migrated in the 1990s and early 2000s were fleeing from the violent and protracted civil war that ravaged their homeland for over twenty years since the collapse of central government in 1991, during which clan denomination played a major factor. As refugees, they have seen their communities torn apart and dispersed around the globe. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that 14% of Somalis now live outside of Somalia (UNDP 2009). Many have reached a place of settlement only after a complicated and difficult journey, and the consequent displacement, discontinuity and alienation have impacted significantly on their experience as a migrant people. As a refugee community, Somalis initially face settlement issues, including

language barriers, frequently living in poverty with a limited understanding of the social security and education systems and initially weak ties to their community. In such a context, the need for and value of social capital are arguably paramount to their success, both economically and educationally.

It has been recognised in a range of contexts that young Somalis in diaspora have initially struggled to get on in the education system of the various countries in which they resettled (Demie, Lewis and McLean 2007; Diriye 2006; Bigelow 2007; Strand et al. 2010; OSF 2014). Strand et al. (2010) suggest that, of the three lowest attaining ethnic groups in the UK – Turkish/Kurdish, Somali and Bangladeshi – Somalis are the poorest achieving in educational terms: 'In 2007 41% of Bangladeshi pupils achieved 5 GCSEs at grades A*- C. The national figures for all pupils was 45%, and for Somali and Turkish pupils 24% and 29% respectively' (2010: 27).

Over time, though, there have been significant gains, and more recent evidence suggests an upturn in levels of achievement (Demie et al. 2014; OSF 2014). Several research studies have used analyses of social capital in Somali families in diaspora to provide insights into this issue. In Bigelow's (2007) study in the United States, she explored the ways in which certain forms of social and cultural capital are more highly valued in Minnesota schools, and her research attempts to redress this deficit model by demonstrating how Somali families bring into the classroom other forms of social and cultural capital that should benefit them academically.

Bigelow (2007) notes that, for many immigrant families, family and co-ethnic networks are the most available sources of social capital. She further notes how social capital is maximised when a group is welcomed to some degree both by its host society, even if that welcome is at an institutional level, and by their own co-ethnic community. In Bigelow's example, there is a strong, vibrant and burgeoning Somali community in Minnesota that offers newcomers a degree of support, access to resources and logistical know-how, which can ameliorate the climate of Islamophobia. Bigelow further demonstrates how, although the Somali family in her research

holds no traditional forms of social capital, in that it is neither affluent nor well educated in the host country and often has a fractured experience of education in the home country, it has important sources of social capital for its children and young people. In her example, the Somali community in Minnesota values education highly and understands its importance to social mobility – a common finding in many studies of Somali families in diaspora (Kapteijns and Arman 2004; Kruizenga 2010; Ramsden and Taket 2013). These families have strong opinions about schooling and are clearly involved in their children's educational endeavours, managing their lives to free their children from domestic tasks to allow time for study: although struggling financially, 'they pool their skills and resources and show they value success at school in tangible ways' (Bigelow 2007: 15). Bigelow further develops this strand of thinking by suggesting that the Somali community in diaspora has a strong religious and cultural identity that bolsters a young person's sense of self and self-esteem. The extended Somali community in which her participant Fadumo lives is a 'powerful social network' (Bigelow 2007: 17), allowing her access to range of resources, grounding her in her cultural identity and promoting her educational success.

In exploring social capital in this context, Bigelow finds that native-language speaking is an important resource that ties young people to their families and communities and serves as a pathway to social capital. As Yosso (2005) discusses above, Bigelow indicates how it is a form of linguistic social capital, allowing access to wealth of knowledge and resources that facilitate progress in several ways. Having friends and family members who speak your home language and know how to navigate the social and education system, access important information on social services and homework programmes, assist with your studies, understand the college admission process and navigate employment and immigration all serve as cultural knowledge that translates into social capital.

In more complex ways, shared native-language speaking can assist in the process of reinforcing identity formation. As Kapteijns and Arman (2004) note, native-language acquisition provides

a sense of continuity with migrants' parents and community, binding them to their history and forging a sense of identity. Their study on the education of young Somalis in the United States found that bilingual children had the highest self-esteem and the least conflict with parents. But, as Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo (2015) suggest, intra-ethnic ties cannot necessarily be assumed to have value as social capital; whilst these ties are strong, they may not necessarily provide real value in terms of social capital and, in fact, can have the opposite effect through keeping group members in the existing hierarchies and power structures. What needs to be revealed is how social capital can be realised and mobilised. Osman and Månsson (2015), in describing the experiences of Somali families in Sweden, suggest that: 'The parents' social network consisted of persons with similar sociocultural and material situations, and thus they are embedded in a network that cannot compensate or provide them with ideas or resources to help their children to achieve a successful school experience' (Osman and Månsson 2015: 47).

Whilst this might be an accurate reflection of their observations, it is my understanding that the changing picture of young Somali women's achievement in London shows that they and their families have been able to garner resources from within and across educational and cultural communities. It is these aspects of social capital that I hope to explore further in my analysis. Furthermore, it is evident from an evaluation of Osman and Månsson's (2015) article that they adopted a negative perspective on aspects of Somali life in diaspora, characterised, they suggest, by inter-generational conflict, weak ties and a passive school system that seems unable to change to meet the young people's needs.

What I hope to explore in my research is a more dynamic picture of how social reproduction and the acquisition of social capital in migrant communities in the Somali community in London is not static but, rather, dynamic. The transformative power of social capital is explored though an analysis of the way in which young Somali women graduates in London are supported to access social capital in their communities and, further, to contribute to its growth as facilitators of social change. Analysis of the narratives will demonstrate how these young women use their social

capital to challenge the stereotypes and expectations from both within and across social domains, participating more fully in the power structures around them in ways that have the potential to make a significant and positive impact on their communities.

It can be seen, then, that the concepts of cultural and social capital have much to offer our enhanced understanding of inequities in education and the differential achievement of certain social groups. There has been much analysis of this relationship, as applied to a range of communities, relating to specific features of family life.

3.5 Parental Involvement as Social Capital: The case of the migrant parent

One key area of investigation has been the study of parental involvement in education and how this might operate as a form of social capital. Generally regarded as a crucial element of educational success for over half a century, wide-ranging research suggests that parental involvement in their children's education is effective in facilitating academic success (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003; Hornby and Lafaele 2011). Classified in a number of ways, it is generally measured through various home-based behaviours, such as help with and monitoring homework and discussing school and education, as well as school-based behaviours, such as going to parents evenings, attending parent–teacher association meetings, volunteering at school events or even joining the school board of governors. These behaviours have been argued to lead to improvements in educational outcomes for children and also to contribute to improved parent–school relations, better attitudes towards school by children, improved attendance, behaviour and mental health outcomes for children and increased parental satisfaction and wellbeing (Hornby and Lafaele 2011).

A problematic aspect of parental involvement research has been the difficulty in separating out the effects of parental involvement from those of factors such as parental education and socioeconomic status, themselves both strong indicators of academic achievement. What is seen is a complex interplay of factors in which it is problematic to determine what exactly is having the greater effect in a child's outcomes and achievement. Alongside this are the findings that

class and ethnicity effects are closely integrated with parental involvement, yet these facets are ignored in traditional parental involvement discourse (Crozier 2001).

McNeal (1999) conceptualised parental involvement as social capital in an analysis that did much to explain the issues above. He focused on what he regarded as the three central tenets of social capital, namely the structural form of social capital, the norms of obligation and reciprocity and the existence and degree of resources. By structural forms of social capital, he was referring to the breadth and depth of social relations within the network and the extent of structural holes. This structural form can include the relationships between the family and community as well as between the parent, child and the school, which can act as strong or weak ties. The norms and obligations refer to the sense of investment resulting from relationships within the family and the community that are built on trust, obligation and reciprocity. McNeal argues that the norm of investing in child development and education is well-established and that there are sanctions against those who are regarded as not conforming to these expectations. These are on a spectrum from, for example, fines for school truancy to prosecution and imprisonment for neglect and abandonment. A further form of social capital arising from parental involvement is the extent and degree of resources that may be drawn upon, both with and beyond the network. Parents have varying degrees of resources to invest in their children, closely linked to their physical capital, human capital and cultural capital. McNeal further argues that the variations witnessed in the extent of parental involvement in regard to class and ethnicity are, in fact, variants of the families' resources of social capital.

Crozier (2001) extends this discussion in her critique of parental involvement discourse, suggesting that parental involvement rhetoric provides a 'one-size-fits-all model' that simply serves to replicate existing inequalities by failing to acknowledge the racial and ethnic differences in parental involvement. Such a blanket approach to parental involvement pays little attention to the variance and complexities of school–family engagement, which are shaped by numerous factors and constraints, including structural racism.

This analysis strongly echoes the findings of Lareau and Horvat (1999), who suggested that approaches to cultural capital in schools are based on a model of White, middle-class experience. Lareau and Horvat's (1999) analysis made the valid point that 'the field' in which the game is played is not the same for Black and ethnic minority parents as it is for White parents. They found in their study that the Black parents' recent experience of discrimination in the education system meant that they justifiably found it difficult, if not impossible, to comply entirely with educational institutions and were therefore perceived to be 'not playing the game'. Their study fits well alongside Gillborn and Youdell's (1999) critique, which purports that colour-blind approaches to parental involvement and compliance are not neatly packaged issues but are situated in a web of complex historical and situational factors. These need to be carefully analysed and considered in regard to class and ethnicity, and the use of the lens of cultural capital can serve to improve our understanding of the varied research outcomes.

Gillborn and Youdell's (1999) critique, argued that parental involvement policies fail to recognise ethnic diversity and institutional racism. Family responses to parental involvement are determined by prior experiences within and understanding of the school system, which are themselves valuable aspects of social and cultural capital. Crozier argues that policy approaches to parental involvement are predicated on the notion of 'the good parent', whose principles are to be shared by everyone, regardless, and are therefore indifferent to the 'complexity and diversity of family groupings and contexts' (2001: 352). Rather, such approaches consider parents as a 'homogenous, undifferentiated group', many of whom are 'not doing their duty' in regard to supporting and engaging in their children's education (Crozier 2001: 352). Home–school agreements, which are intended to manage how parental involvement takes place, Crozier argues, are a form of social control and surveillance, monitoring parents, children and teachers, neither allowing any differentiation between social and ethnic groupings nor showing any understanding of the differing relationships of parents with parents who have a social and economic background unlike that anticipated by those in the education system? Social capital

that indirectly emanates from parental involvement is dependent on an active community with a common purpose, whereby a parent is considered an active citizen and a stakeholder participating in a shared vision and goal. There is no room within such policies for the parent who may be marginalised, who may not consider themselves an active or valued member of the school community or who may feel that they exist on its periphery.

Barriers to parental involvement may include the parents' own perspectives about themselves and their inclusion in the school or wider community and, further, may be impacted on by their home context. Research has found that parents' beliefs in their ability to be involved in their child's education are partially dependant on their personal or cultural understandings of the degree of connectedness between the school and home domains. For example, their degree of parental involvement depends in part on whether the family feels that they have something to bring to the table – what has been the parents' own educational experience and how confident do they feel about supporting their child's education? To what extent does the family feel that their cultural and home background is valued by the school community? Are their children's schools appreciative of the cultural diversity and differing relationships that make up their home life? Is there an understanding of their varied pathways to education and the challenges that they may have faced along the way? (Hornby and Lafaele 2011; Desimone 1999).

Starting with the premise that parental involvement is most effective in the primary/elementary school years, Domina (2005) demonstrates how many of the class and ethnic variations in outcomes from such involvement are diminished when the focus is relocated to predicting behavioural rather than academic aspects. This is a valid discussion, as it illustrates the way in which social capital in the form of volunteering in the school, for example, may be subtle in effect, with more nuanced outcomes such as decreasing any behaviour problems, effects that she argues contribute to socialisation practices, increasing children's valuing of education. These effects are seen to be even more effective in families of lower socioeconomic status, suggesting that in the long term such pupils are likely to stay engaged in education for longer. The adaptation

of particular groups to habitus that benefits them in education, in these cases, can be seen as a valued element and explains some findings on how social groups vary in educational outcomes. Reay discusses habitus as a continuum that is flexible and malleable and, whilst reproducing social conditions at one end of the spectrum, at the other is able to 'be transformed through a process that either raises or lowers and individuals expectations' (2004: 435). She describes habitus as expressed in the choices that we make, choices that are bound in a web of matrices of possibilities within which there are limits but also possibilities and flexibility. The concept of habitus and social capital as having 'elasticity' is significant when discussing the changing achievements of minority ethnic pupils, and it is examined later in the analysis chapters.

3.6 Summary

Within this study, I use the concepts of social and cultural capital to examine their relevance to the participants' lives. Aspects of their educational and family experiences, as well as of those in the wider social domain, can be understood through the lens of social, cultural and migrant capital and through the use of an intersectional lens. More specifically, I examine how social capital and cultural capital are produced and used by the participants in their lives through their negotiations for greater autonomy and agency in dealings with family, community, within higher education as well as within structural fields.

Chapter 4: **Experiences in Higher Education and the Impact on Identity: Black and Muslim Women in the Academy**

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to bring together the various theoretical and research strands that run through the analysis. These include the concept of intersectionality and the role of culture and religion in the lives of Black and Muslim minority ethnic women. It will examine research in relevant fields that explores the issues of identity, gender and agency and their implications for young Muslim women graduates and undergraduates in the United Kingdom. The research drawn upon is not directly about Somali young women graduates but, rather, makes use of research that is considered useful to the analysis. The experiences and scenarios described do not mirror the research that I have undertaken yet raise valuable issues that contribute to its discussion. Women of Somali origin in the United Kingdom are in a highly specific context in terms of their experiences of intersectionality. As a fairly recent migratory refugee ethnic minority population, Somalis identify as Black, African and largely Muslim in religion and, in the current socio-political climate, are considered to be structurally disadvantaged in numerous ways, as discussed in Chapter 2 and 3. (Change Institute 2009; OSF 2014; ONS 2015).

It is argued that BME women are not well represented in the research and the data on higher education and that there is even more neglect of the Black Muslim woman's experience (Ahmad 2001; Mirza 2009; Gabriel and Tate 2017). This study intends to help to fill this gap in the literature with specific reference to British–Somali women graduates in London, thus this chapter examines some authors who have explored the higher education experiences of women of colour, as well as those who have examined the experiences and perceptions of Muslim women, to provide a backdrop to this aspect of the research. To this end, this chapter discusses the impact of intersectionality on the lives of BME women in education and society and the relationship between intersectionality and marginalisation. The literature on Black Muslim

women in higher education is further reviewed and, lastly, the impact of higher education on identity and gender for Black and Muslim women with particular regard to the role of agency will be explored.

Much educational research in the past forty years has examined issues of gender, and more recently a focus has turned to ethnicity yet less attention has been paid to an examination of both, and how they intersect in the experiences of Black women in the United Kingdom in higher education.

A significant theoretical approach to explore here is the concept of intersectionality, which is proven to be a valuable concept in making sense of educational inequalities, as well as in understanding migration experiences. As discussed in Chapter 3 intersectionality, as a concept, is fundamental in theorising gender and migration experiences (Anthias 2012; Yuval-Davis 2006a). Since its introduction, the approach has become regarded as fundamental to present-day feminist political analysis (Yuval-Davis 2006a). Anthias and Yuval-Davis (2005) indicate that it has developed as a way of highlighting the 'triple oppressions' or disadvantages many that Black women in the minority world suffer from in relation to their position in specific domains: as Black people; as women; and as members of the working classes (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 2005: 195).

Several authors have argued that, to understand the experiences of Black women in education and in society, it is necessary to approach one's studies using the lens of intersectionality (Museus and Griffin 2011; Mirza 2009). Intersectional analysis centralises the complexities of multiple identities that characterise the lives of BME women. Simultaneously oppressed by racism, patriarchy and social class divisions, ethnic minority women's relative position at any specific moment in time can be more fully explored by taking into account these interactions that cut across their lives, interacting alongside age, sexuality, religion and culture at specific historical moments (Yuval-Davis 2006a; Mirza 2009).

Mirza writes that, 'that despite awareness of multiple discriminations, there continues a pervasive assumption that the experience of inequality and social exclusion is gender neutral' (2009: 77), yet the evidence strongly indicates that this is not the case. Black women tend to be disproportionality negatively affected in terms of their rights in numerous arenas, especially in regard to gender, health and socioeconomic status. This is reflected in the fact that BME women are poorly represented in employment data within higher paid professions and are simultaneously over-represented in poorly paid workforces and in the unemployment statistics (EOC 2006). Black women tend to be over-represented in poorly paid jobs, specifically in the caring professions, and are excluded from higher-ranking positions in these fields. BME women are twice as likely to be unemployed as White women. One in five women from BME backgrounds has taken a job below the academic level at which they are qualified, compared to one in ten White women. One-third of Black women and one in five women of Asian origin have experienced discriminatory and racist comments in the workplace (EOC 2006).

This status on the edge of society, reflected in a position on the periphery of the fields of research and policy, has led to the concept of marginalisation: the acknowledgement that some groups exist on the outer limits of social consciousness (Sue 2010: 5). Intersectionality and marginalisation frequently co-occur and are expressed succinctly in the concept of structural intersectionality, which refers to how multiple social systems intersect to shape the experiences of, subjugate and oppress individuals from specific groups (Crenshaw 1991). Furthermore, it is notable that, within one ethnic group or even within one gender, the forms of marginalisation depend on various factors, for instance, in migrant groups, the length of time that an individual has been in the country of settlement or whether they are first- or second-generation migrants impacts on their experience of marginalisation. Yuval-Davis (2006a) argues that research needs to focus on distinguishing the various levels on which social divisions are constructed and analysing how intersectional aspects are intermeshed in specific historical situations (pp.80-81). This is of relevance to my study, as it focuses on a specific time frame in the history of settlement

of this specific community in London. I would argue that the issues being explored in regard to intersectionality for these participants are unique, located in a changing dynamic of space and time.

Yuval-Davis (2006a) and Mirza (2009) highlight the ways in which BME women often fall between separate legislative and policy provisions, and suggest that the true embrace of intersectional experience comes about only when we take into account the impact of White power, privilege and hierarchy, alongside an holistic understanding of identity, disadvantage, and inequality. As Maynard in 1994 noted, 'racism and sexism are interlocking systems of domination that uphold each other. It does not make sense to analyse race and gender as if they constitute discrete systems of power' (Maynard 1994: 21). Likewise, studies have shown that class interacts with ethnicity and gender in complex ways to impact on educational achievement and higher education participation (Gillborn and Mirza 2000; Brah and Phoenix 2004).

Mirza (1992, 2009), similarly, has consistently argued that Black women have been overlooked in education research and data. Whilst there has been much research exploring racial inequalities in education, the data for Black males and females is not clearly demarcated, causing the women's experience to 'fall between the cracks' or be taken for granted when, in fact, a closer examination suggests that the data are quite different and require separate analysis (Mirza 1992, 2009; Gillborn and Mirza 2000). In education research, she argues, Black women have been invisible on the one hand and pathologised on the other. She cites invisibility, for example, due to the lack of attention in the literature to the experiences of young Black women in education and the concurrent lack of Black professors in higher education, contrasting with these women's pathologised visibility, 'characterised by a form of cultural relativism, highlighting only specific cultural issues to do with these othered women' (pp.83), for example the discourse on honour killings and arranged marriages.

Museus and Griffin (2011) propose the importance of acknowledging intersectionality when carrying out qualitative research into higher education contexts:

> there is a unique experience at the intersection of individuals' identities, and efforts to isolate the influence of any one social identity fails to capture how membership in multiple identity groups can affect how people are perceived, are treated, and experience college and university environments. (2011: 7)

They note that, when questioned about their identity, most people would struggle to label themselves by a single characteristic; rather, an individual's identity is made up of the many groups of which they are a member and can be simultaneously identified by their ethnicity, gender, religious belief, sexuality and other aspects. Notable is Museus and Griffin's proposal that an intersectional approach is needed in education research because this most accurately reflects the diversity now seen in higher education, suggesting that intersectional analysis allows for a maximal understanding of the student situated at the intersections of various social identities and groups. Furthermore, they note that 'intersectional analyses facilitate the excavation of voices and realities at the margins', adding that 'there is a dearth of research illuminating the experiences of other groups at important identity intersections' (2011: 9). These ideas all point to an important aspect of my research. Intersectionality is a highly significant concept within this study, where my participants have multiple aspects to their identities, being at once Somali, Black, Muslim women, who originate from a recently migrated refugee population, impacting on their experiences in differing social and educational contexts. This research will attempt to explore how the women's educational journeys are impacted upon by these multiple and intersecting social identities and the ways in which they combine to shape the women's experiences. Rather than focusing attention on single aspects of identity, I endeavour to examine some of the distinctions in how participants experience and engage in their environments as a result of their unique position at particular intersections.

4.2 Black Muslim Womanhood in the United Kingdom

Of overwhelming significance at this juncture is the participants' positioning as both Black and Muslim women. The experience of Black Muslim womanhood in the United Kingdom and in

Europe has been the subject of a range of research studies (Ahmad 2001; Ryan et al. 2009; Cederberg 2015; Takhar 2016; Thompson and Pihlaja 2018, among others) pointing to the emergence of several key themes. Of particular relevance are studies regarding identity, education, gender roles and agency, all of which are closely integrated aspects and are examined here.

Whilst young Muslim women face the intersectional oppressions of being women of colour, they have also been recognised as facing additional challenges in relation to their religious identity. Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) discuss this with reference to their greater visibility owing to wearing the *hijab*, which marks them out as 'other' and renders them susceptible to gendered stereotypes. In many ways, such stereotypes are contradictory: on the one hand, young Muslim women report being perceived as the ubiquitous 'oppressed and subservient' Muslim woman, whilst on the other they may be seen as 'visually threatening' (Tyrer and Ahmad 2006: 20; Mirza 2009: 83). Common tropes about Muslim women seen in daily in the media perceive them as subject to patriarchal oppression, holders and bearer of their families cultural traditions and 'synonymous with backward cultural practices' (Mirza 2009: 83), with fixed religious identities and as 'secluded and passive' (Ahmad 2001: 140).

Mirza argues that these stereotypes largely negate the impact of female identity and agency for Black Muslim women, depoliticising their embodied struggle for self-determination. Ahmad and others have also noted how common tropes around South Asian Muslim women portray them as uneducated, possessing no formal or professional qualifications (Ahmad 2001; Bhopal 2011). This rhetoric is in contrast to the generic perception of White British women, seen as characterised by a sense of 'freedom, democracy and mobility' (Mirza 2009: 84).

It is important to acknowledge that in several Islamic countries women do hold less power than men, specifically political and economic power, and this is frequently modified when the community resettles, as noted in previous chapters, relating to changing roles for women in the Somali community in diaspora. Carment and Sadjed (2017) suggest that a gendered lens is

crucial in analysing the configurations of power, justice and inequality, arguing that such an approach is attuned to the ways in which gender is constituted. They note that:

> a female migrant is a woman in two unequal gender regimes, that of her country of origin and that of her country of settlement. But simultaneously she's positioned in regard to unequal relations of economic class, of nationality ethnicity, religion sexuality and so on. And it's the way these various positionalities intersect and that shape each other's influence on her, her chances in life, her own relative power or powerlessness. (2017: xv)

Educational achievement is argued to be a factor that can contribute to a greater sense of agency in negotiating power and gendered relations, as discussed below.

4.3 Higher Education and the experiences of Muslim Woman in the United Kingdom

As noted above regarding the omission of Black women's voices and experiences from the education research literature, it has been argued that Muslim women's voices and experiences have also tended to be overlooked. Ahmad (2001) points to several factors that may have contributed to this. Firstly, she notes that until now the number of Muslim women in education may not have been regarded as large enough to warrant analysis. In addition, she argues, there is the combined factor whereby, in the multiculturalism and ethnic minority-focused studies of the 1980s and 1990s, Muslim women 'fell under the radar', partially due to the perception that the settlement of many South Asian migrants was temporary. In this respect, Muslim women were deemed invisible and their voices unheard in the literature until the early 2000s.

As some of these ethnic minority communities have settled, their place in society has become increasingly recognised as permanent and, of course, as their families have grown so has the number of British Muslims. The Annual Population Survey showed that in 2018 there were 3,372,966 Muslims in Britain, making up approximately 5% of the population, of whom over 50% were born in the United Kingdom (ONS 2015).

4.4 Islamophobia and the Impact on Young People's Identities

As the number of Muslims in Britain has increased, so has their visibility; alongside that, there has been an increase in negative discourse regarding this religious group.

Writers have noted the significance of several events that brought Muslims heightened visibility to the wider social world and, next, to education research. Most notable events were the terrorist attacks of September 2001 in New York and July 2005 in London, and the consequent 'War on Terror' (Yuval-Davis 2006b; Phoenix 2011). These attacks increased awareness in Europe and America of the presence of Muslim communities and led to the negative discourse and portrayal of Islam in the media and society (Thompson and Pihlaja 2018; Mirza 2009). Thompson and Pihlaja (2018: 2) refer to this as a 'contemporary moral panic' and point to initiatives in education, such as the 'Prevent' strategy and Fundamental British Values, as contributing to the problematic exclusionary discourse and consequent public hysteria. Whilst there have been some more positive events, such as the election of London Mayor Sadiq Khan and the appointment of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar in Minnesota, these have not outweighed the acknowledged negativity that has impacted on the lives of many young Muslims in the West. Research notes that there has been a significant rise in anti-Islamic hate crime, year on year. A report by the charity Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) notes that Islamophobic attacks in the United Kingdom increased by 26% in 2017/18 alone. Two-thirds took place in person and the rest were on digital forums. Furthermore, it notes that the greater proportion of these attacks were against Muslim women, making up 58% of all reported incidents (Tell MAMA 2018).

This preponderance of attacks against Muslim women is arguably due to their wearing of the *hijab*, which serves as a visible identifier of their religious beliefs and, as indicated above, serves to 'other' them (Ryan et al. 2009; Thompson and Pihlaja 2018). Several studies have suggested that young Muslim women are well aware of the anti-Muslim sentiment that enshrouds them, are concerned about Islamophobia and may have experienced feelings of exclusion from education and wider society (Ryan et al. 2009; Stevenson et al. 2017; Thompson and Pihlaja

2018); however, it is notable that these challenges do not motivate them to negate their culture and religiosity (Ahmad 2001; Ryan et al. 2009; Thompson and Pihlaja (2018). Rather, young Muslim women are situated in the unique position of negotiating their identities amid this metaphorical minefield (Thompson and Pihlaja 2018). Ahmad (2001) describes how her participants – young British Muslim women of South Asian descent who were studying in higher education – were seen to be constructing and reconstructing their identities and hence redefining the perceptions of Muslim womanhood, as she argues, 'both within and despite patriarchal structures in both public and private domains' (2001: 149). They did not reject their religious lives, nor did they see them as inconsistent with their educational goals. In contrast, Ahmad suggests that the young South Asian women were more religiously awake than their parents, as they actively grappled with the challenge of maintaining their religious identity in largely secular spaces. Langellier (2010) notes how religion can operate as a stabilising factor in the lives of migrant populations in diaspora to give them a sense of meaning in what are frequently changing and challenging circumstances. She argues that wearing the *hijab* is a performative notion that visibly indicates their strong ties to their culture and religion, as well as marking their opposition to formal Western culture, a point that has been reiterated elsewhere (Dwyer 1999; Williams and Vashti 2007).

Tiilikainen (2003) examines aspects of Islamic identity for Somali women in Finland, and notes that some have rediscovered Islam in their newly settled state and intensified their religiosity in diaspora. As indicated previously, many Somali women wear the *hijab* now when they did not, back home, and she suggests that, for them, wearing the *hijab* is a means to demonstrate outwardly this religious Islamic aspect of their identity in a secular society, as well as indicating a clear link to their culture and identity. Yuval-Davis (2011: 15) similarly notes that 'people's constructions of themselves and their identities become more central the more threatened and the less secure they become', and that dress is one way in which people express outwardly their culture and sense of belonging. Dwyer (1999) suggests that dress is actively used as a central

signifier by young Muslim ethnic minority women in the construction of their identities, and argues that wearing the veil should not be read as an essentialised marker of binary identities: as traditional or as Western. Rather, she observes that young Muslim women are reworking traditional associations of gender and identity and that the veil is a 'contested signifier', reflecting a process of negotiating and reimagining religious and cultural identities.

This discussion has much relevance to this current study, concerned as it is with the participants' narratives of identity in educational institutions, as faith, religiosity and culture are significant aspects of the interviews. These perspectives are examined in relation to these narratives in the analysis chapters.

4.5 Higher Education and Identity

Ahmad's (2001) study, like others concerned with the experience of South Asian women, resonates with my research in that, like Somalis in the United Kingdom in the past, South Asians had poor outcomes in terms of educational qualifications. Her research attempted to explore how internal and external factors impacted on the young participants' aspirations in light of their academic achievement. She describes how the young women were engaged in negotiating their cultural religious and personal identities and, further, explores the role of higher education in this dynamic. As does Ahmad (2001), Bagguley and Hussain (2016) note that the inclusion of South Asian women in higher education represents a process of fairly rapid social change, and their research focuses on examining the underlying causes and implications of such change. They note that this inclusion has been transformational in terms of their ethnicity and in regard to gender relations in their social milieus.

Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) examine similar themes, presenting narratives of young South Asian women and their participation in higher education. Faced with ongoing intersectional challenges of Islamophobia, a lack of role models in the academy and more direct cultural constraints, South Asian Muslim women and other BME women have not been deterred from high aspirations to succeed. This is reflected in their increasingly high rate of participation in British universities

(Ahmad 2001; Mirza 2009; Takhar 2016). Mirza has written extensively on the dearth of Black women in positions of authority in higher education institutions (HEIs) (2006, 2009, 2015). She notes the apparent 'contradiction between the persistent marginalisation of Black women in higher education and the continuing desire among Black women to educate and be educated' (2006: 101). This desire is clearly seen in several key studies discussed below, indicating that, despite the challenges facing them, such young women strongly believe that there is something valuable to be gained from pursuing higher education qualifications, which they are prepared to struggle and fight for.

For many young Black and Muslim women, like other young people, higher education is seen as a route to greater social mobility. Qualifications at degree level and above are perceived to offer opportunities to develop professionally and further their career objectives (Ahmad 2001; Bhopal 2011; Thompson and Pihlaja 2018), yet it is apparent that there are other benefits to be gained, apart from this. Thompson and Pihlaja's 2018 research suggests that universities are important as sites of self-identity formation and that, for some young Muslim women, they represent a space in which they can explore their construction of self. Thompson and Pihlaja (2018) describe this as 'a site of temporary liberties', within which autonomy and diversity are embraced. Their participants felt a tolerance within HEIs that was not experienced in wider society, a greater acceptance of their religious identities and a freedom that they did not encounter elsewhere. In our current climate, as indicated above, where young Muslim women can feel that their identities and religious beliefs are both threatened and threatening, university is a space where they can foster their agency and sense of self. This aspect of university life is relevant to my research analysis, as it resonates with the data collected from participants.

Higher education provides such women with additional prestige that can be used in their domestic lives. Several studies have indicated that in patriarchal South Asian and Indian cultures there is pressure on young women to focus on marriageability, from adolescence into young womanhood. From one perspective, higher education can be seen as an obstacle to marriage and

a family; however, for the women themselves, engagement in higher education may be perceived as a strategic device to give them the leverage to postpone such expectations (Ahmed 2011; Bhopal 2011; Bagguley and Hussain 2016). Thus, the higher education experience itself becomes a form of strategic cultural capital with which to negotiate in their families and community. Bagguley and Hussain suggest that the decision to enter higher education gives young Muslim women the potential to challenge parental and cultural expectations as they grapple over education issues, such as the topic and location of study, as well as decisions over the timing of their marriage. Of the women in their study, they note that they were:

> negotiating their own ideals with commitment to their parents and communities… complex inter-weavings of collective ethnic identification, religion and gendered expectations were the result. Moreover, they were successfully challenging parents' aspirations for them but were also resisting wider community expectations, … transforming what was seen as commensurate with their ethnicity, and how that ethnicity should be performed and reproduced. (Bagguley and Hussain 2016: 54)

Two important issues thus emerge from the literature; firstly, the strong sense of agency demonstrated by young ethnic minority women in their pursuit of higher education; and, secondly, the potential for higher education to be a site of struggle and also of openings and identity development, whereby young women from minority ethnic groups can resist and transform the expectations on them and thus can develop new and significant ways of being.

Takhar (2016) suggests that previous research into young people from migrant communities and the role of social capital and cultural capital have put much emphasis on the role of parents in facilitating educational achievement. This is undoubtedly an important factor, and many studies have noted that openness to and support of their daughters' educational endeavours have been important facets of their education journey and success; however, Bagguley and Hussain (2016) note that, if this process is seen to threaten cultural tradition, social capital may also be mobilised

to prevent young women from entering higher education and realising their aspirations. Strong opposition to daughters staying on in education post-16 has been reported in Sikh, Pakistani and Bangladeshi families and has led to ambiguity about these forays into higher education for some in these communities. Ahmad (2001), Bagguley and Hussain (2016) and Takhar (2016) all note that, in these contexts, analysis using social capital and cultural capital theory can fall short of explaining the changes in young BME women's educational outcomes and their increasing participation in higher education. It is unable fully to account for the revisioning taking place in these ethnic groups. Most significantly, they note that theories of social capital and cultural capital largely underplay the importance of young women's own agency in furthering their educational careers. Bagguley and Hussain (2016) propose that:

> social capital approaches risk treating young people as empty vessels without their own agency, motivations and strategies. Highlighting the social capital of the family or ethnic group could treat educational outcomes as solely the result of social capital of the parents, neglecting the importance of the agency of young people. (Bagguley and Hussain 2016: 45)

They suggest that norms regarding key issues in the education of young Muslim women in the United Kingdom are being redefined by them and demonstrate that such norms are 'subject to debate, discussion and contestation between parents and young people' (Bagguley and Hussain 2016: 45) and, in this context, are being co-created through a process of careful and balanced negotiation. The power of their agency in this process should not be overlooked. Takhar (2016) uses the concept of agentic autonomy to illustrate how the young women in her study negotiated access to HEIs, took advantage of any opportunities open to them and were 'actively engaged' in securing a better future for themselves and their communities, despite the absence of role models or representation in the fields to which they aspired. In this respect, they were strategic autonomous agents who were able to negotiate to achieve their aspirations. She highlights that this engagement in education brings about social transformation, which has implications for

future gendered relations. Takhar (2016) further states that, whilst social capital theory can give valuable insights into how gendered powered structures can be reproduced, it can also be used in combination with understandings of agency and resistance to analyse how these rules can be challenged and modified.

Agency can be slippery term, leading one to imagine its role as clear demarcation of freedom versus constraint; however, it is arguably best understood less rigidly as a process that continually needs contextualising to the framework of everyday lives in which, in this context, women are not passive victims but active agents in opposing structural constraints in the 'micro-politics of everyday life'. (Takhar 2016: 3; Mirza 2009). Mirza (2009) discusses how socially marginalised women from BME backgrounds have been involved in strategic forms of engagement in a range of racially and contested public and private spaces. Mirza and Reay (2000) use the term 'the third space', coined by Bhabba (1990), to describe a place of reflexive and agentic autonomy in which they strategically redefine the parameters of success, troubling expectations and redefining prevalent discourses. Through their educational desires, they refute and resist the passive gendered roles assigned to them. Takhar states:

> The 'third space' has been used to demonstrate that although racism and sexism experienced in educational institutions by minority ethnic women, they demonstrate a resistance, … despite being 'out of place' the third space is where a type of disruption and coming together of history and identity occur. (Takhar 2016: 49)

Within this 'third space', marginalised ethnic minority Muslim women can contest the dominant discourse and redefine their agency and identity. As Takhar further notes, 'being located at the margin does not necessarily imply a position of weakness… rather it has been regarded as a site of resistance' (2016: 49). Bagguley and Hussain note that the South Asian women in their study were able to navigate their social mobility in part because of their ambiguous and marginal

position: their social marginality as women in their community means that they have ‘skills of cultural navigation enabling them to move between various positionings’ (2016: 45).

4.6 Summary

This literature discussed here is used as a background to my analysis, as the concepts and understandings emanating from it provide rich theoretical insights into the narratives of the Somali women graduates in my study. It reveals a complex picture of emerging identities and a reframing of gendered discourse that come about through the engagement of young Muslim and ethnic minority women in higher education.

Research has shown that the educational credentials gained from higher education are evidence of and enhance young British Muslim women’s agency and can transform their personal lives as well as the gendered roles and expectations of women in their social communities. The studies illustrate how, despite the challenges facing them at the structural, institutional and micro-levels, young minority ethnic and Muslim women in the United Kingdom have been central to negotiating access to higher education and have used that position as a lever in negotiating for change in their cultural lives, resisting expectations and challenging the negative discourses that surround them. These are all themes to be developed further in respect of my own participants in the analysis of their narratives.

Chapter 5: **Methodology**

Part I: Methods

In this chapter, I explore my epistemological framework, methodological approaches and chosen methods. Method refers to the processes undertaken to gather data or evidence, whilst methodology is the underlying philosophy of knowledge and knowledge production that shapes the epistemological framework. Within this, I will explore epistemological frameworks that have shaped my research practice and the importance of reflexivity and positionality. The full details of the data collection process, the approach taken to data analysis and an overview of the ethical considerations are also presented.

5.1 Methodological Approach

My methodological approach is largely inspired by an interpretivist epistemological stance. The interpretivist paradigm, developed in opposition to the positivist approach in social sciences, acknowledges that there are multiple realities, not single truths, and that social sciences research should move from attempts to discover universalities to the exploration of the everyday lived experience. As Sandra Harding suggests, 'There is no universal man, but only culturally different men and women' (1987: 7). Phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl in the early 1900s proposed oppositional claims to the overwhelming scientific approach of the time, arguing that consciousness is not determined by natural biological process but, rather, that our 'understanding of the world is constructed' by our own experiences and perceptions, which in turn are an outcome of our social and cultural interactions (Walliman 2016: 19). Our unique experiences formulate ourselves, with our own individual subjective interpretation of the worlds in which we live. We are shaped by the culture and society in which we live in the development of our understanding.

Such a focus on interpreting the rich cultural variations in human life and experience – values, beliefs and meaning-making processes – influenced the work of the early anthropologists, whose aims were to interpret and reflect accurately the world views of the diverse cultures under study. Lather refers to interpretivist approaches as a 'paradigm shift in the beliefs values and techniques that guide scientific enquiry' and which have turned attention to 'interpretive social theory where the focus is on constructed worlds versus found worlds' (Lather 1992: 89).

Early forays into Interpretivism continued to value the attempt to 'interpret' from an objective viewpoint, but later proponents of the interpretivist approach recognised the significance of the relationship between the researcher and the researched by virtue of their shared humanity. In this view, the research process is regarded as an interactional encounter, one that creates rather than just uncovers research findings, as the social world is 'interpreted' via the perspective of the researcher as well as that of the researched.

The interpretivist paradigm is central to my research aims, and is concerned with uncovering the varied realities of the young women participants who, although with common features that unite them, each has their own story to tell about their educational journey. An interpretivist model also allows for the flexibility to discover the individual and shared features of their realities. A key issue of interest is the young women's dynamic identities, especially in relation to their intersectionality. Somali women in the United Kingdom who are young and academically high achieving occupy a complex and dynamic social space: Black, African, female, Muslim and British. They are establishing new spaces in society, coming to occupy unexplored spaces in the social world. Existing in such dynamic circumstances and with the nature of my research being their stories, their educational journeys, it feels only right that a constructivist, interpretivist methodology is used to make sense of their experiences.

The participants' stories are subjectively told, their experiences shaped by circumstance, and each has their own individual perceptive. This, then, requires a qualitative approach, one that is sensitive to the nuances of their narrative. Knowledge is not a 'grand narrative' and should not

be accepted as such; rather, Interpretivism critiques the belief in the necessity for objectivity, accepting that such grand narratives 'exclude other ways of seeing, privilege accounts from those with power' (Davies and Gannon 2011: 72). This is an important concept in relation to my research. It is my belief that young British–Somali women graduates are occupying new and hitherto unheld spaces and are therefore in a position to challenge and destabilise existing discourses and create new narratives about women's roles in their communities, as well as in society as a whole, through their subjective retelling of their educational and life histories.

5.2 Feminist Research

The most important aspect of my methodological approach is my feminist stance. Feminism can largely be defined in the following beliefs: that women have something significant to offer society; that women as a group are frequently oppressed and, due to this oppression, are able neither to fulfil their potential nor contribute fully to society; and that feminism seeks to initiate change to such inequalities through 'activism, scholarship, policy making and individual actions' (Ropers-Huilman and Winters 2011: 670). Feminist research applies these principles to research practice and can be broadly considered as recognition that past research has tended to marginalise women and women's experiences and that understanding these experiences will contribute to both the advancement of scholarship and a more equal society. Therefore, feminist research centres on women's lives in the search for knowledge. Hesse-Biber, who has written extensively on feminist research, suggests that 'research can be considered feminist when it is grounded in a set of theoretical traditions that privilege women's issues, voices and lived experiences' (Hesse-Biber 2014: 3). As such, feminist research has the power to uncover counter-narratives and to present alternatives to the male-orientated 'master narratives' that dominated research in the early- and mid-twentieth century.

Initially troubling feminist researchers' focus on the dominant White middle-class accounts of their experiences, in the past thirty years feminist authors have developed a powerful critical approach that has contributed to a more nuanced theoretical focus for feminist research. The

combination of interpretivist and feminist models has created new frameworks for research, within which the goals are to emphasise the contested nature of realities, to give voice to marginalised groups of women, to reflect the subjective nature of experience and to pay close attention to the subjectivity and positionality of the researcher (Harding 1987; Lather 1992; Davies and Gannon 2011).

What constitutes a feminist research model is a complex discussion, but what can be agreed upon is that beliefs about the means by which knowledge is constructed have a profound effect on the research process and on the outcomes of the research itself (Ropers-Huilman and Winters 2011). To take a feminist stance means to pay close attention to the underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions regarding the process of knowledge construction and to consider deeply how the methods of data collection and subsequent processes of analysis will impact on the resulting knowledge. Lather argues that postmodern feminism has allowed for a reframing of the research focus in social sciences through posing critical questions regarding whose voices are heard, whose truths we accept and what knowledge is represented and valued. It is important, then, for a feminist researcher to scrutinise whose voices will be heard, validated and reinforced through the research.

There is no single methodological approach that fits a feminist research model. Such a model may be valuably applied to many subject disciplines; equally, a feminist approach is one that 'values multiplicity in methods and disciplines, an openness to critique human diversity both among researchers and participants and a belief that research can create positive social change' (Ropers-Huilman and Winters 2011: 671). Hesse-Biber (Hesse-Biber, Gilmartin and Lydenberg 1999) considers that feminist research can come in all shapes and forms and is closely aligned to concepts of interdisciplinarity, something that she believes provides a quality, a richness and depth to feminist research studies.

As Lather (1992) argues, 'Correcting distortion and invisibility, generating new theories, exploring alternative approaches to data generation and analysis… such work exemplifies that

to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the centre of one's enquiry' (Lather 1992: 91). Feminist research practices use gender as a lens through which to focus on social issues, and such definitions foreground that feminist research is fundamentally concerned with social justice and social transformation, seeking to redress many of the gender inequalities in society and, concomitantly, in education. A feminist research approach can be considered as an 'advocacy' approach, one that openly critiques ideological positions that contribute to the oppression of women and is change-enhancing, promoting the transformation into a more egalitarian and just society. Such approaches are frequently committed to giving voice to marginalised individuals and groups, allowing for data collection techniques capable of exploring social justice agendas, examining power relations and troubling these through deconstruction of hegemonic discourses. This approach is necessarily well applied in educational spaces that are currently under scrutiny for the recognised lack of presence of Black academics, specifically Black female academics, and the 'White' curriculum (Alexander and Arday 2015; Mirza 2015; Gabriel and Tate 2017; Ahmed 2012; Peters 2015; Gillborn 2006). I endeavour here to present such an advocacy approach by amplifying the voices of British Somali women graduates and by clearly stating my positionality in the research process.

5.3 Feminism and Qualitative Research Methods

This study is based on qualitative data acquired through a semi-structured interview technique. There are significant assumptions underlying the use of qualitative research, related to its epistemological aspects. According to Walliman (2016), qualitative research is based on three ideas: qualitative research 'uses an inductive approach to generate theory, epistemologically it rejects positivism by relying on individual interpretation of social reality, and in terms of ontology it is essentially constructionist in that social reality is seen as a constantly shifting product of perception' (Walliman 2016: 32). Qualitative research, then, is primarily constructivist in its approach, believing that there is no single truth or reality; rather, that reality

is constructed by individuals. These individuals may be representative of certain groups and, therefore, their understanding of the world, events and experiences needs to be imagined through the meaning that they bring to them.

Sprague (2016) argues that the 'qualitative method emphasises interpretation and nuance… with an intensive focus, seeking a detailed analysis of process and/or meanings – what Clifford Geertz described as thick description' (Sprague 2016: 145). She states: 'Qualitative research for example frequently uses in-depth interviews to obtain people's "witness accounts of the social world" to encourage interviewees to reflect on their experiences, beliefs, values and behaviours' (Sprague 2016: 145). This can be aligned to the feminist approach to qualitative research methods. Anne Oakley in 1998 suggested that 'To be a feminist social scientist one must have a certain allegiance to the qualitative paradigm' (Oakley 1998: 716), further indicating that qualitative approaches allow us to 'acknowledge the authenticity of multiple viewpoints' and heighten our sensitivity to 'the role of values, and the subjectivities of both researcher and researched' (Oakley 1998: 716), principles that are central to a feminist approach. Bhopal (2010) has similarly noted that 'qualitative methods are flexible, fluid and better suited to understand the meanings, interpretations and subjective experiences of those groups who may be marginalised, hard to reach or remain silenced' (2010:189)

It is for these reasons that I chose to focus on qualitative methods of data collection in this research, as my belief is that such methods allow my study to be more closely attuned to the nuances in the narratives of subjective lived experience in a way that quantitative methods cannot.

Qualitative methods, however, do not preclude the problems of validity and bias present in the collection or analysis of any research data (Oakley 1998; O'Shaughnessy and Krogman 2012; Sprague 2016), and it is important to note that both qualitative and quantitative research can contribute to feminist methodology. Oakley (1998) and Sprague (2016) both highlight how it was quantitative approaches that enabled researchers to reveal structural inequalities, such as the

gender wage gap and the under-representation of women in government, and their value cannot be overstated. In the context of this study, qualitative methods are a better fit, being concerned with the experiences and perspectives of women, allowing for richer, detailed data to be collected from the participants.

A key technique for the qualitative researcher is the use of in-depth interview techniques that seek to 'understand the lived experience of the individual' (Hesse-Biber 2014: 189). The in-depth interview is my chosen data collection technique , selected because it gives 'access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words, an attribute that is particularly salient when researching women's lives', and an 'antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or for having men speak for women' (Reinharz 1992: 19).

In-depth qualitative interviews allow for discussions regarding the intersection of past and present experiences and allow for valuable insights into attitudes and emotions. This is especially relevant when using semi-structured interview techniques that allow the informant to take the interview into divergent yet relevant arenas. Semi-structured interviews allow for thematic matters pertaining to the research question to structure the discussion loosely, but neither the researcher nor the informant is bound to the questions that frame the interview, thus preserving the natural flow of conversation. This lets the participant shape the discussion, paying greater emphasis to the issues that are most salient to them, and prevents the researcher from being over-deterministic about the direction of the research. This proved to be a valuable tool in this study and meant that certain topics were illuminated and bought to the fore that might otherwise have been omitted from the study.

It is fundamental that the researcher is cognisant and reflexive of the issues of authority and power in the interview process and examines carefully the underlying processes that impact through this differential. The researcher holds the power to decide the structure and content of the research questions and, ultimately, within the analysis, to decide what aspects of the data to attend to. The research informant holds the power over their ideas and authority over their

exercise and over what to proffer or withhold. There are, of course, much wider structural power differentials that come through the identity and characteristics of the researcher and researched and their relationship to one another, relating to ethnicity, class and gender, and these also have the potential to disrupt the integrity of the research.

Whilst these structural factors warrant acknowledgement and analysis in any research study, Letherby (2004) warns that it is important that the nature of power in the research process is not taken for granted, for power oscillates between the researcher and respondent during the process. Sprague (2016) is similarly cautious about the emphasis on attending to power relations in research, suggesting that there is a risk in stereotyping all researchers as holding power and authority, premising a 'chasm' between researcher and researched that may not exist and understating the power that participants have over the process. She argues that respondents in qualitative research do hold power in that they are voluntarily involved and can choose what questions to answer and what to offer in response. Despite this, the interpretation and meaning given to their responses represent a power that remains with the researcher, and this needs careful consideration. The use of specific methods of analysis can aid the researcher in ensuring that their participant's voice is heard, that their ideas and concerns are accurately reflected in the research and that sufficient emphasis is given to their narrative.

Although it is true that the researcher has the final say in the representation of ideas, Sprague further debates that researchers should be less concerned about the transfer of power in the research as what is ultimately of import in feminist research is gender inequality and social empowerment. I take heed of this perspective. As a White woman in the academy I do, of course, hold some representation of power, yet my focus is to examine the degree of social empowerment offered to the women in my study through their educational successes and the potential impact of that empowerment on developments in the community. In this respect, I endeavour to focus closely on the analysis of power in my research through reflexivity and introspection on my place and positionality; however, ultimately I aim to focus on the power

that my participants hold and, through close attention to their narratives, to place their voices firmly at the centre of my research. The interpretation and telling of their narratives will, I hope, be a valuable step in recognising the importance of their dynamic experience as women from a marginalised population who are seizing the power to change themselves and their communities.

5.3.1 Reflexivity and positionality

Within feminist approaches, much importance is placed on attending to the relationships expressed in the discourse. Central to these movements is the belief that reflexivity is a fundamental aspect of the research process, allowing one to analyse and deconstruct the question of voices and who represents whom. Reflexivity, Ryan and Golden (2006) argue, 'involves honesty and openness about how, where and by whom the data were collected and locates the researcher as a participant in the dynamic interrelationship of the research process' (2006: 1192).

Reflexivity is now understood to be integral to any research process, and its centrality has been heightened in the realms of feminist, critical and postmodernist research for reasons that are discussed here. Questioning why one is undertaking the research, one's interest in the subject matter and the stance one takes are crucial to any current social science study and should not be overlooked. Hesse-Biber (2014) suggests that:

> Reflexivity means taking a critical look at one's own lived reality and experiences, including how your biography affects the research process? What shapes the questions you choose to ask and your approach to studying them? How does the specific social, economic and political context in which you reside affect the research process at all levels? Reflexivity is the process whereby the researcher recognises, examines and understands how their own social background and assumptions can intervene in the research process, and its inclusion has ontological significance. (Hesse-Biber 2014: 200)

It is thus argued that reflection on the researcher's personal involvement in the research is important in understanding the processes and outcomes of knowledge construction. Like the

research participants, the researcher is a product of society's structures and institutions; one's beliefs, backgrounds and values all contribute to the process. To practise reflexivity is to acknowledge that 'all knowledge is affected by the social conditions under which it is grounded in both the social location and the social biography of the observer and the observed' (Mann and Kelley 1997: 392). It is valuable, then, for the researcher to frame their positionality and, within this, to take into consideration how and why the research topic was approached, how the research relationships that emerged contribute to and shape the knowledge produced and how the researcher's experiences of life and of the research-gathering process affect how the research is interpreted (Ropers-Huilman and Winters 2011). Harding (2007) is adamant that researchers examine the questions that they ask, highlighting that these are not 'value free' for, in many ways, they reflect the researcher's values, attitudes and agendas.

When considering the value of reflexivity in feminist research, Ropers-Huilman and Winters identify how the relationship between researcher and participants needs careful consideration and propose that the 'feminist belief that the oppression of diverse women should be alleviated so that their contribution can be understood and valued, also affects the relationships that feminist researcher seeks to establish with participants in their research' (Ropers-Huilman and Winters 2011: 678). They cite Harding in arguing that 'feminist researchers emphasise researcher reflexivity and the need to attend to research processes, as well as research outcomes, acknowledging the standpoints of all those involved' (Harding 1987). In addition, it is noted that relationships of power between researcher and participants need to be closely explored, as these have the potential to affect the quality of their interactions and to reproduce social exclusion. Their words reiterate Harding's ideas stated above, reinforcing the importance of acknowledging the origins and context of the research framework, arguing that 'feminist researchers generally draw attention to both the relationships that are formed through their research endeavours and the ways that those relationships effect knowledge productions, participants lives and the potential for change in specific contexts as embedded in the broader society' (Ropers-Huilman

and Winters 2011: 679). These issues are all discussed further in relation to my own research in my reflexive section below, and throughout.

Whilst promoting awareness of the relationship between researcher and participants is important in developing a fully rounded approach to methodology, there is a need to recognise how reflexivity is synonymous with a notion of accountability: the ethical dimension of the research framework. To this end, feminist researchers have put forward general principles to guide their relationships with participants. The themes include: research participants having the opportunity to be partners in the research endeavour; researchers being reflexive in the research relationship; and for research relationships to aim to be empowering, encouraging or enabling participants to take action to improve their situations. These principles fit well within the feminist approach to research, in keeping with its essentially emancipatory approach (Gannon and Davies 1997). For research to be emancipatory means that all aspects of its context need to be examined with the construct of power at the forefront – the power structures that impact on the researcher's lived experiences and on the relationship between researcher and researched. As Knight (2000) proposes, 'A focus on self and positionality allows researchers to confront and consider the process of situating oneself in a conscious manner that examines the nuances of relationships of power' (Knight 2000: 171).

Reflexivity, objectivity and subjectivity are thus all relevant concepts in the feminist methodological discourse, most importantly because, in the past, claims of objectivity have resulted in the validation of certain voices over others, some voices as more authoritative or qualified than others and, specifically, the voices of women silenced as male-dominated narratives have been propounded about women. Feminist research is a necessary counterbalance to dominant perspectives, providing counter-narratives and as a movement towards change; however, there must be recognition that within these overarching social structures are the researcher and the participant, themselves subject to experiences, ideology and pre-existing power frameworks. Therefore, it is necessary that feminist researchers articulate their lenses and

frameworks for analyses in order that the subjectivities are made clear, as well as to reveal how the research is situated and shaped by the subjectiveness of experiences and the local socio-political, global contexts in which meaning is constructed.

The debate on the desire for researcher reflexivity is particularly pertinent in feminist research practices, as Ropers-Huilman and Winters propose that 'feminist researchers' acknowledgement of their relationship to the research allows them, their participants, and/or their readers to see the ways in which multiple subjectivities may affect both the processes and outcomes of knowledge construction' (Ropers-Huilman and Winters 2011: 682).

A key issue for feminist researchers to address, therefore, emerges in the question: 'How am I situated in the research?' Jones wrote eloquently about this complex notion in her article 'Writing Feminist Educational Research: Am I in the Text?' (Jones 1992). In it, she discussed how the personal voice that had hitherto been silenced was now realised to be central to our understanding of research and its processes. Suggesting that new traditions are challenging the notion of objectivity in the social sciences and that a new movement has emerged in which 'I' is central to the account, she wrote: 'The old distant voice of the objective observer/writer is seen as a fiction, and as a mechanism of power which ensures the domination of certain accounts' (1997: 23). She wrote about the now-accepted value of acknowledging the 'constructedness' of research, and I relate strongly to her description of how to enter academia, was to be taught the importance of objectivity: 'To enter the academic endeavour was to develop an authoritative stance through forms of language and accounts of research method which reassured that I had reliably tapped reality… and would not impose my own prejudices on the data' (Jones 1992: 19). She discussed the way in which retrospective reflexivity came to reframe her later rewritings of a core research study and how the insertion of 'I' into her text modified the lens through which she analysed the research material.

Significantly, Jones problematised the incorporation of the self-conscious in the reflexive research process; however, equally she proposed a means of analysis that can safeguard

academic credibility and suggested ways in which one can make the research still hold meaning and value. Both Jones (1992) and Alcoff (1992) explored the complexities of reflexivity when attempting to validate the voice that one inevitably brings to the research process and findings. Alcoff revealed the tensions between speaking for others where there is a strong need to position oneself in relation to those being spoken for and about. She suggested that 'feminist scholarship has a liberatory agenda which almost requires that women scholars speak on behalf of other women, and yet the dangers of speaking across differences of race, culture, sexuality and power are becoming increasingly clear to all' (1992: 5). How, then, can we acknowledge our preconceptions in the reflexive process and still produce research that is of value, meaning and holds weight in academic terms? What is necessary is to acknowledge at all stages in the process who is speaking, which are the voices of the participants and which is the voice/the language of the researcher. Jones presented this as the researcher being 'explicitly partial and positioned in the texts they write themselves' (Jones 1992: 25).

Alcoff (1992) and Jones (1992) identified the value in acknowledging the 'constructedness' of accounts and how the researcher must be recognised as one of the key constructors; however, they additionally identified issues that can arise from certain forms of positionality, especially in regard to outsider research. How can outsider research be validated in regard to class, gender and sexuality, for example? Reflexivity, they both argued, is a means to counter ideological concerns about the construction of discourse; it is, Jones declared, 'a political issue'… the explicit consciousness about ones shaping of a text' (Jones 1992: 25). To be reflexive is to call in into question the hierarchies of power between the researcher and the researched – but how does the researcher deal with the ensuing tensions that go with it, such as how is one self-consciously partial and yet still to be accepted as an authority in the dominant structures of the academy? What is required here is a need to be open, carefully considered in one's positionality in regard to all aspects to the research process – epistemological assumptions, ontological frameworks, positionality personal and political perspectives – and possibly most significantly

to be open to being scrutinised, critiqued and responding to all these varied aspects of the research.

This may lead to the issue of who is 'allowed' to research whom? We live in an unequal world where the characteristics and identity of the researcher and researched hold great meaning. Following an interpretivist model heightens the importance of constructivist accounts, which are intended to view the research scenario as one in which 'specific accounts are produced rather than being producers of truths' (Phoenix 1994: 18). Both the researched and researcher occupy multiple positionalities in the research process, relating to one another in varied and dynamic ways throughout the course of the research. For example, a participant may be a person of colour, yet she is also a woman – perhaps a mother, perhaps a student. The researcher might be White, yet she might also be a woman, might also be a mother, might also be an academic and might also be a student. The positionalities of the researched and the researcher will ebb and flow throughout the research as these varied and multiple positionalities shift and resettle and then shift again throughout the research relationship. Ryan (2015) explores these 'multi-positionalities' in her article discussing insider/outsider status in research. She proposes that research needs to take account of the 'multi-layered identities of researcher and participants' and the 'dynamism through which varied dimensions of identity may be enacted during an interview' (2015: 1). In her long history of research investigating aspects of migration, she notes that migration is a site wherein ethnic identities themselves become fluid and are constructed and reconstructed. The interview process, she argues, 'should be understood in terms of the dynamic rhythms of multi-positionalities', allowing researchers to be 'reflexive about the instability and contingency of empathy and rapport and how these need to be continually negotiated across layers of power differentials' (2015: 3). Gunaratnam describes this conceptually as 'abandoning singularity' (2003: 43).

These concepts resonate firmly with me in my research process. I am essentially an 'outsider' in that I do not belong to the ethnic group that I am studying, yet reconsidering the process of my

research reflexively has allowed me to understand that the women participants in my study might similarly relate to me in differing ways throughout the process – from initial connections to later interactions within the interview, especially, at varied moments our conversations bring to the fore the similarities and commonalities in our approach. I am a White woman academic yet I am also a student, a researcher, a mother – identities that they will all relate to in differing ways at differing stages of the interview process.

The underlying commonality of our views about education and of our belief in its value and potential for social change was, I believe, central to the rapport that I developed with my participants, illustrated and reinforced through the conversations that emerged from the interviews. In this respect, I am not neutral but partisan. From the outset of each interaction with the participants, there was a clear, common focus. When participants asked, 'What is your research about?', I responded along the lines of, 'It's about Somali women graduates and their experience of education'. They were Somali women graduates and so, immediately, there was a connection in the nature of the research focus. Then they often enquired further: 'Why are you interested in this?' I would then explain how I was an educationalist interested in inequalities in education. I further explained that there had been a focus in research on identifying how young Somalis were underperforming in education and that this was entirely conceivable, owing to their presence in a recent migratory community to the United Kingdom, yet that I was interested in the changes that were unfolding as young Somalis were reaching higher education in increasing numbers. I emphasised that it was the process of change that I was specifically interested in. Sometimes, I went on to discuss how I had witnessed a gradual increase in numbers of Somalis, specifically women, in higher education and especially in the institution where I work, and that this was of interest to me; for example, I was interested in looking at the processes that had enabled them to achieve these successes in education, how they had experienced their education and what this meant to them and their communities. The study of capital, specifically social and cultural capital, has been central to my teachings in regard to understanding the

inequalities in education and this, I believe, is a vehicle and central focus of my study that has endorsed my validity as a researcher in exploring the current situation for this population.

This explanation was always well received by my participants and I took their willingness to engage in the interviews as an indicator of a common interest. Indeed the length and intensity of the discussions that we had in the interviews clearly indicate that they, too, were interested in such issues of relevance to themselves and to the British Somali community perceiving of it as something worthy of researching. On more than one occasion the participants suggested that they, like me, believed that there was a gap in the research exploring these stories of success and achievements. In particular, it was noted that this was a perspective that was frequently overlooked in the everyday tropes and narratives of Somali people in Britain. In person, I saw them nodding in agreement when I spoke about this backdrop to my research project. The conversations that we later had in the interviews attested to this shared knowledge, many indicating that they were aware of the discourse surrounding Somali underachievement, but that they, too, perceived a certain power, a potential for change that was manifesting as a result of *their* educational successes.

Reflexivity and a careful analysis of positionalities are thus a fundamental aspect of any research process analysis and can illuminate our perspectives, contributing to the methodological process and giving value to the outcomes of the research. It is important, however, that researchers foreground the research and the participants' narratives and not let the 'self-indulgent narcissism of reflexivity' mire the voices, views and narratives of those whom we seek to represent (Ryan 2015: 2). Reflexivity is not in itself enough to address the complexities of difference, yet it contributes to the value of research by exposing underlying positionalities and making the researcher accountable for their role in the research process. This issue was bought to a fore by the following incident that happened just as I was entering my first stage of data collection.

5.3.2 A juncture in the reflexive process: #Cadaan Studies

Knight (2000) suggests that 'Most teachers, administrators, and community members engaging in multicultural feminist research are not attempting to enter a new culture to conduct research. Their questions arise within the experiences of their daily lives' (2000: 171). How could I reconcile this with my own experience as, by all accounts, I appeared to be attempting to carry out research into a community, a culture and experiences to which I was ostensibly an outsider? What was my positionality, my interest in speaking this story? This question required some serious consideration, not least in response to the controversy that resulted in the concept of #Cadaan Studies.

In 2015, just as I was undertaking my initial forays into data collection and attempting to build relationships with key participants, a situation emerged that resonated and troubled my research, bringing to a head concerns regarding reflexivity and the constructedness of accounts. The first edition of the Somaliland Journal of Africa Studies (SJAS) was published without any contribution from a single Somali individual – researcher, academic or otherwise. The journal editors faced strong condemnation, stemming principally from Dr Safia Aidid, a Somali–Canadian PhD candidate (at that time) in African History at Harvard. Writing on social media, Dr Aidid criticised the lack of representation of scholars of Somali origin in the journal and justifiably argued that more effort should have been made to include contributions by Somali researchers, academics and editors in its production. Aidid declared a Twitter feed open for responses to the journal's omissions – #Cadaan Studies – which was soon widely populated with discussions regarding the ownership of knowledge production and post-colonialism in research (*Cadaan*, meaning White or Whiteness in Somali). Rather than issuing an apology for serious oversight, the academic and advisory board member to the SJAS, Dr Markus Hoehne, waded into the argument, defensive of the position of the SJAS, stating that it had been as inclusive as it could be because, as he suggested, 'I did NOT come accross [sic] many younger Somalis who

would qualify as serious SCHOLARS – not because they lack access to sources, but because they seem not to value scholarship as such'. He continued to plough into the debate, stating:

> Sorry to say, but to become a successful political scientist, social anthropologist, sociologist or human geographer, you study many years without an economically promising end in sight. You have to work hard before you get out one piece of text and even then, you often get more criticism than praise. You certainly do not become rich quickly as a social scientist, at least if you have to pay your bills in Europe or North America. Now, where are all the 'marginalised' Somalis who do not get their share in academia? I guess you would have to first find all the young Somalis who are willing to sit on their butt for 8 hours a day and read and write for months to get one piece of text out. (Hoehne 2015)

This highly contentious and inflammatory statement and the consequent discussions between Hoehne and several key individuals caused a furore in the diasporic Somali community online and related allies. Hoehne was roundly disparaged. An open letter written by Safia Aidid and signed by several hundred Somali and non-Somali academics, professionals and others was published, entitled 'Can the Somali Speak?: Open Letter to Dr Markus Hoehne and the Somaliland Journal of African Studies'. The letter stated:

> Not a single Somali student or scholar from Hargeisa, the broader Somali region, or the vast Somali diaspora is represented in SJAS. Instead, the editorial and advisory board is made up of nine Europe and US-based academics – as well as two graduate student editors – and three Ethiopian academics affiliated with Addis Ababa University.

The subsequent debate became entitled '#Cadaan Studies', after the Twitter tag for the discussion that sprung up in response. A critical line of questioning developed with the theme of 'who owns the production of Somali knowledge?' The open letter continued the line of argument:

> What Dr Markus Hoehne's comments and the exclusionary Somaliland Journal of Somali Studies show us is the necessity and urgency of discussing and deconstructing issues of power and authority in Somali Studies' and that '…inextricably linked to the expansion of European power in the Horn of Africa was the production of cultural and historical information about Somalis'. (Open Letter 2015)

The centrality of this debate at a moment in time when I was initiating my research interviews was troubling, but it necessarily problematised issues that I was already aware of and heightened, for me, the importance of positioning myself and my research within this discourse. I was, of course, already keenly aware that that I would need to justify my outsider status in documenting the educational journeys of young Somali women, but the introduction of the Cadaan Studies debate and the discourse regarding authority, power and knowledge production bought the issue of my reflexivity and positioning to the fore. How would I locate myself and my interests to the Somali individuals and community that I would be working with? How would I justify my position as a producer of knowledge 'about' this cultural group that I was not a part of?

This period was, in many ways, crucial to my development as a researcher. I was already an acquaintance of Dr Safia Aidid through social media when the #Cadaan Studies issue arose, and I watched in front of me the debate unfolding day by day in real time. Although nervous of the controversy, of being an outside researcher within this newly emerging discourse, I felt resolute in my research focus. Being cognisant of the critical approaches to colonialist methodologies, I was willing to engage and attempt to place and locate my position as an ally. Again, I refer to Dr Safia Aidid in aiding me to understand this role. Writing about the debate on the website 'Africa is a Country', Aidid suggested that:

> While recent decades have seen more and more Somali social scientists, knowledge production about Somalis remains largely in the hands of European and American academics. It's a field that has never subjected itself to the self-critique and self-reflection

> anthropology was forced to do when confronted by its colonial heritage in a postcolonial world. It has not rethought the ways in which colonial dynamics re-inscribe themselves in non-Somali scholarship on Somalia, nor has it critically interrogated the power dynamics embedded in the Western researcher's position vis a vis his Somali subject. It has not questioned its overwhelming Whiteness, and at its most violent, marginalized contributions of Somali scholars and writers and rendered them invisible. (Aidid 2015a: 2)

What has been necessary is for me to be informed about the issues that Aidid illustrates here, to be prepared to take on these concerns, grapple with them and, through reflexivity, attempt to locate the parameters and limitations of my research. This is manifested in my understanding that I should be always open to interrogation regarding these concerns and ready to acknowledge and respond whenever they arise. I will continue to do this throughout the whole process of my research, extending into my analysis.

I sought to enter into the research process with humility and respect, seeking to reflect, question, listen and make sense of the varied experiences of my participants. My positionality was thus informed – I was a lecturer and researcher in education, working in higher education, and one of my key interests was specifically educational inequality. Young Somalis had been identified in the early 2000s as an underperforming group. Challenged by dislocation and structural inequalities, this struggle to achieve in an alien education system was not an uncommon theme in newly migrant communities.

My daughter was born in 1992 and, alongside her in her early schooling, I had seen the gradual appearance of Somali children and young people arrive and assimilate into urban London life. I had studied East African societies in my Anthropological Studies at both undergraduate and Masters' level. Having studied the challenges of displacement and relocation faced by refugees as part of my Master's studies, I was well aware of the difficult circumstances from which these

Somali families had come. As I moved from teaching in further education to lecturing in higher education, I witnessed the numbers of young Somalis gradually increasing as they trickled through the education system onto undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Together, these factors conspired to spur my interest in this dynamic social situation that was taking place in the Somali community in the United Kingdom, especially in London.

Much literature has focused on the factors contributing to the low educational achievement of young Somalis, and these are discussed in the literature review. Keen not just to be part of a deficit discourse when approaching educational inequalities, I wanted to explore the stories of this specific population who had negotiated a range of hurdles to get to a place of achievement and success. I hope to be perceived as an ally, someone who is retelling the participants stories and in the process amplifying their voices. I would like to feel that I am writing for my participants rather than writing about them. I feel a huge responsibility to tell their story accurately, to represent their narratives meaningfully, authentically and, to acknowledge the strength of their agency. I am convinced that there are stories worth telling about negotiating new identities within and through education. My commitment to education studies and my use of critical education theory as a means for exploring these educational journeys is an area in which I feel solid and resolute.

Early on in my studies, I attended an evening seminar by the East African Society at SOAS University of London, entitled, ‘Somalis in Diaspora: Turning Common Narratives Around’. Four out of five of the speakers on the panel were of Somali origin and the focus seemed to be on challenging common tropes and narratives of Somali identity that many are familiar with: pirates, refugees and asylum seekers from a ‘lawless land’. The lecture theatre was only half full by 6.30pm, but by 7.00pm the place was heaving with people, women and men of all ages, the vast majority from the Somali community. With every one of the 200 seats taken, people were seated in the aisles all the way from top to bottom of the lecture theatre. Over half of those in attendance were women. The discussion that took place following the panel presentation was

lively, heated even, and went on long past the official end time. I recall feeling at this moment that, above all else, this community and specifically the women merited having their voices heard, that they had a story that needed to be told, albeit a story that was still unfolding, and that it was one that deserved closer investigation.

5.4 Data Collection and Analysis

There were two main phases in my data collection: key informant interviews; and interviews with young Somali women graduates.

5.4.1 - Data Collection

In order to establish some broad-base characteristics, I carried out five semi-structured interviews with key informants from the Somali community in London. These were all people with some status in the community and included researchers, educators and community workers. These helped me to understand a range of general views and perspectives relating to women and education as it was perceived within the community. For these key informants, I sought out people of prominence in the London-based Somali community. These were accessed by purposive sampling and identified through Somali community centres and social media. The interview schedule for the key informants can be seen in Appendix 4.

I then moved on to undertake 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Somali women graduates who had lived and were educated in London, specifically at London-based universities. I did not include in the study any women from the university where I work owing to the potential concerns regarding perceived power relationships as discussed above. I thus utilised a snowball sampling technique to identify the participants. Two key contacts from my key informant interviews were invaluable in this process. One was the daughter of one of my key informants who, like her mother, was involved in Somali cultural affairs. The other was a PhD graduate and researcher at a London university. From these sources I was able to implement a successful snowball sampling method that allowed me to access a group whom I might have

had difficulty accessing otherwise. From July 2016 to September 2018 I carried out 20 interviews of approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. The women participants ranged from 22 to 30 years and were from various locations around London, all of whom had achieved a graduate or higher degree at a London university. The Interview schedule was agreed upon after several drafts with the support of my supervisors. A copy of the questions included can be seen in Appendix 3. *T*he interviews were semi structured and that meant that the conversations I had with participants often took the form of a more informal conversation. The interviews focused on the young women's educational journeys and experiences, and the questions explored key themes of family history, parental and community support, challenges and experiences of discrimination, culture, gender politics and identity,

As I negotiated undertaking the interviews, I offered the participants a number of places where we could meet, including me coming to their homes. Only one participant took me up on the offer of coming to her home. She had her own home, was married with two children. A few of the women I interviewed in their place of work, one in her university library, another in her local library. All the rest of the interviews took place in coffee shops and cafes. Initially I was surprised by their reluctance to allow me into their homes. However I later realised that many of them sharing their homes with parents and siblings of all ages, finding the space and privacy to speak with me would very likely have been an issue. I also realised that the conversations were much more emotive and full of potentially critical content than perhaps I had anticipated; the women were, as the analysis chapters reveal engaging in complex wrangling regarding their dilemmas about religion identity, gender, power and freedom. We needed to be in these neutral spaces so they could talk freely on their experiences and feelings about these issues. My second concern was the coffee shops would be too public and, lacking privacy, we might not be able to have in depth discussions. I can firmly contest that this is not the case. They are truly anonymous spaces. Often noisy with lots of coming and goings I was surprised to find that that huddled over our hot chocolate and coffees we were 'locked in' to our conversations; discussions flowed freely

and in these intimate moments the participants seemingly felt able to disclose their insights, feelings and experiences. There is lot to be said for a good voice recorder! Luckily I found one which was excellent at drowning out ambient noise. I still recall these interviews fondly and with immense gratitude at the participants willingness to share with me, a relative stranger, some of the complexities and challenges of their lives. I felt that in their frank and open responses to my questions as an indication that they accepted me as an ally.

They proffered a wealth of information that I have transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. Some basic participant details can be seen in the table in Appendix 5 however it should be notes that these details have been kept to a minimum to preserve the anonymity of the participants.

5.4.2 Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed I had them professionally transcribed owing to time restrictions: I have been working full time throughout my PhD so this was a pragmatic decision. Once transcribed I set about working my way through each of the transcribed interviews whilst listening carefully to the recordings to erasure their accuracy and to fill in any gaps. This also gave me the opportunity to familiarise myself closely with the data. The interviews produced a huge quantity of data and the transcripts ranged in length from 10,000 – 20,000 words. This meant that had a great deal of information to work though and whilst this was challenging it was also highly rewarding as the conversations had produced much rich and interesting data to work with.

To analyse the data I used the tool of thematic analysis, initially coding and separating out different themes that were related to the questions topics. Searching for patterns in the data, extracting and ordering text thematically. I used the approach of open, axial and abstractive coding. Within the initial stages of open coding I worked on data reduction, separating out data sections and tabulating them under thematic codes. Initially I used generalist labels based on the themes of the interview sections in a process that can be described as Topic Coding (Punch

2014). In the Axial coding stage I began to look for patterns in the themes and seeking out the subtopics within the topic areas, for example in the area of parental involvement I separated out the types of support that was offered, the barriers to parental involvement and then discovering and emergent them, the participants feelings about the level of parental support and so forth. I compared and analysed responses, looking for patterns and also looking for the exceptions. This process served to remind me that the participants were not by any means a homogenous group. They held different perceptions and different experiences In relation to the issues we discussed. Nevertheless it was also reassuring that there were cogent themes emerging that were of significance to the women in the sample population.

The process of Analytic or Abstract Coding allowed me then to search more deeply for the meaning in the text, the richer messages that were being conveyed. Through this process I could begin to interpret the responses in light of the research questions, as well as to place the data in the wider context of the theories that were central to my approach. The process was iterative as I went over and over the data repeating these processes, relating them to wider themes and then when a new concept emerged, going back to the original interviews to seek out more that applied or that I may have missed in the original open coding process. This was really useful practice as it kept me fully connected to the narratives and the context of the conversations in which the topics emerged. Finally I was able to analyse the data more meaningfully, interpreting the findings and drawing some conclusions about the important underlying messages that the data revealed.

Two issues that were challenging to manage I would say were closely related. One was the fear of fragmenting the data so that it was 'decontextualized' (Punch 2014), losing meaning as it was detached from its original individual context. The other was simply dealing with huge quantities of data and not wishing to overlook the 'other' stories that are being told in the participants narrative accounts. To balance these concerns I have tried to frequently use the quotes that are provide as evidence in their fullest context so as the wider meaning in which they were situated

can be made visible. Secondly I have reassured myself that having sought out the most illustrative data as evidence for the research, that within the quantity of data collected there are intriguing aspects of the data that I will return to at a later date, writing these into research articles.

To enrich my understanding of issues pertaining to Somalis in diaspora, specifically Somalis in London, I involved myself in a range Somali community groups and activities. I attended Somali-based events, listened to podcasts and watched YouTube channels created for and by the Somali community in London and joined networks and organisations with Somali concerns at their forefront. Through these events, as well as through social media interactions, I developed informal rapport with several participants, and these have been crucial in helping me to understand aspects of life for Somali families living in London that I might otherwise not have had insight into.

I have carried out extensive research into the recent studies of Somalis in diaspora and there have been, to my knowledge, no published studies of British Somali women graduates in London and their educational experiences. I feel strongly that my research fills a gap in the literature and has a significant role to play in the contributing to the wider theoretical frameworks within which this study is couched, with the potential for significant impact..

5.4.3 Ethical Issues And Considerations

All research practice needs to take account of the ethical dimensions of the process, from accessing participants, through the methods of data collection and into the analysis and publication of the study. Throughout this chapter I have identified a number of areas of ethical consideration but these will be consolidated here.

In order to attend to the ethics of research practice it was important that participants were fully aware of what the research was for, how it would be utilised, and what their role in the research entailed. To this end the introductory emails that I sent out to participants tried to give as much

information as possible about my interest in the topic and key aspects of the study so that they were able to give their informed consent to participate. Prior to the interview all the interviewees were given a participant information sheet, which offered them some information on the study and allowed them the right to withdraw from the research at any time (see Appendix 1). All participants signed a consent form to indicate that they were happy to take part and understood what was being asked of them (see Appendix 2). The data was stored securely: both the recordings and the transcripts were password protected and all participants have been given a pseudonym to protect their identities. On occasions, within the analysis chapters, I have removed participants' names altogether when the details being discussed might allow the individuals to be identified by the content.

A key ethical issue to be considered would be my outsider researcher status. Much has been written about the 'insider/outsider debate' in research, some aspects of which are discussed in this section above (p.74) (Gunaratnam 2003, Mercer 2006, Ryan 2015). Whilst on the one hand insider status might arguable enable access to more valid data allowing for greater insight and empathy (Phoenix 1994), it is arguable that an insider researcher might be 'too close to the subject matter and take certain things for granted' (Bhopal 2010:191). Song and Parker (1995) argue that distance from the research subject may in fact encourage some disclosures. Participants may feel that it is easier to discuss the more complex issues of their lives with researchers who are outside their socio-cultural milieu. These issues resonated with me as I was in many ways an outsider, not having full access to the realities of the lives that my participants held, as black, Somali-British Muslim women. Reflecting on the free-flowing and often frank conversations that resulted in the interviews, I did question if my outsider status may have allowed the women participants to be more open in their conversations with me, perceiving me as perhaps as one step removed from their intricacies of their lives.

Such reflection on my role as an outsider researcher has been a necessary part of a feminist approach, as has an examination of my own positionality as a white female academic who

benefits from white privilege (Bhopal 2018). This was particularly complex for me to disentangle, questioning as I was in the interviews, about the discriminations and injustices that were experienced by the participants. I felt that it was important then for me to express openly to participants my belief in social justice and similarly to present myself as an ally. This belief and the concomitant interest in related educational issues provided a form of connection; a commonality that proved to be sufficient in forming a respectful relationship with participants. As noted in the chapter above, both researcher and participant hold multi-layered identities. Whilst different in ethnicity and background, we connected on our understanding and opinions of various aspects of the research: a connection that I believe was demonstrated in the participants' willingness to discuss openly with me what they apparently felt were important topics, worthy of study. I approached the interviews with humility, working to build a gentle rapport that demonstrated to them that I immensely valued their insight and contributions, and moreover that I felt they had much to offer to knowledge production through the sharing of their experiences.

Within feminist research it is integral that the researcher attends to the power relationship between researcher and researched (Hesse-Biber 2014). Bhopal (2010) suggests that the research interview relationship should aim to be 'non-hierarchical, non-exploitative and work on a participatory model in which the researcher shares their biography with the researched' (Bhopal 2010:188). To this end I tried to be as open in my communications with the participants as possible about my background, my goals with this research and why I considered it to be of importance. Trust is a crucial aspect of the participant researcher relationship, developed through openness, transparency, authenticity and empathy. Bhopal (2010:193) suggests that 'all qualitative research is predicated on establishing personal, moral and political relationships of trust between the researcher and the researched'; features that are integral to the effective qualitative interview process (Gunaratnam 2003), and which are particularly important when researching with marginalised groups. I feel that being open about the origins of my research

questions went a long way to establishing a trusting relationship with my participants, and I was honest in expressing the feeling of respect, admiration and thankfulness to them for sharing their insights with such generosity for the benefits of the research. In the analysis and writing up I worked hard to ensure that the interpretations I made were a true reflection of the participants' accounts, that their voices were accurately represented, and most importantly, that I did not present their narratives as victim stories but rather as accounts of resistance, agency and power.

Part II: Methodology and the Study of Emotion

5.5 Emotional Journeys: Navigating the impact of complex life histories on the research process

I found myself navigating the complex issue of emotion within research after a particularly complex interview experience whilst gathering data for my PhD study. Although my topic is generically about the participant's educational experience, the material has the potential to arouse complex emotions in participants, dealing as it does with multifaceted issues including family, identity, discrimination, challenges and success. It emerged that asking the young women in my study about, for example, the factors that bought their family to this country, about the support they had or had not received during their education and about the factors contributing to their achievement all had potential for charged emotions. These emotions, I came to realise, would be raised in the participants as well as in me, the researcher. Vince (2020:518) argues that researchers can be

> …. daunted and energized by research. The role of doctoral researcher and the process of conducting research is a balance of tensions between negative and positive emotions; one that offers an insight that such feelings are integral to qualitative research, not a contradiction or bias to be excluded from it.

A strong mix of emotions were aroused in the example of the interview with participant, Maryam. She, told me about how she came to the United Kingdom without her parents and in the care of a distant aunt and her family. This experience of Somali families without access to the financial resources to relocate the whole family was a familiar one, and stories are related regarding the difficult decisions that parents had to make deciding who would be given the chance to escape from the war, to be given a better chance and an opportunity to start a new life. Maryam talked about the challenge of leaving her family behind and then went on to allude to the fact that she felt undervalued in the new family that she lived with. She described how, as the eldest in the new family structure, she felt strongly the expectation to become an unpaid carer for the younger children, helping them to dress and get to school, cooking for them and aiding the mother in their daily care. She described how the family played down her education ambitions and she expressed with regret the low expectations held in regard to her education.

When Maryam decided to focus on becoming a health professional, her new family ridiculed her. however, despite her difficult circumstances, Maryam had a strong sense of self-efficacy and went on to achieve a degree in Biomedical Science and was now working as a clinical assistant. Maryam's story was full of weighty emotional content that portrayed the struggles she had come to face during her life. A particularly pertinent emotional complexity was the 'contradiction' between her sense of achievement contrasted with the pain of having left her mother and family behind. Her success was tainted by this and several times, when talking about the mother and siblings whom she had left behind, it was clear that Maryam was feeling strong emotions about the memories that she was describing to me. At several points in the interview, I also felt moved to tears, sometimes of sadness for her predicament and sometimes out of a sense of happiness and amazement at how she had overcome and succeeded in a situation of adversity when the odds were stacked against her. Whilst offering supportive responses to her story, I struggled to contain my empathetic emotions and was left wondering how a researcher can manage these difficult emotional experiences, and how to make sense of them in relation to

the knowledge gained regarding the research topic and give due weight and value to their feelings about these experiences?

Maryam's story is unique, but many of the components are familiar in the narratives of Somali children in diaspora and in the lives of my participants. They resonate with the experiences of many migrant refugees, the challenges of having experienced disturbing and traumatic circumstances in their lives; of being displaced, of having to make a place for themselves in a new society, of being a non-native speaker struggling in education, and, specifically for women like these in my study, the complexities of redefining identities that integrated their heritage and their host culture. All these issues are emotionally weighty; there is a strength of feeling associated with them that is undeniable and they are a significant component in the narratives that I am seeking to analyse.

One highly thought provoking scenario that occurred in a later interview, as indicated in the opening of this section, stimulated the need for me to deal with/grapple with the topic of emotion in research in greater depth. I had met the participant before at an event and when she arrived we exchanged pleasantries and the interview began. However it quickly became apparent that the interview was not heading in the direction that I had anticipated. The interview schedule starts with some basic demographic questions, 10 in total, then moves onto the more experiential questions. I had reached Question 3 of the demographic questions, 'How many GCSEs or equivalent do you have?' 'Well,' Leyla began, 'I don't have any because...', and she continued to tell me the story of her education, or rather lack of it.

Without interruption, for a period of nearly one hour Leyla told me how, following a period of mental ill-health in her teenage years, Leyla was taken from London to Somalia to stay with her grandparents for what she thought would be a short period of recuperation. She described in intimate detail how she had been taken to Somalia to stay with her grandparents in a small village, thinking that she was staying for a couple of months, and then on the expected day of

departure, was then literally held back by her grandmother whilst her mother left for the airport. She described what happened;

> I'm trying to lunge my suitcase out of the room and my mother is quickly rushing to take her suitcases out and she's kind of whispering to the others in hushed tones, "Take the suitcases, take them with you". And as for me she's kind of stalling and as I'm grabbing my bag and I'm saying, "Mum, we need to leave; you need to get out of the way", then she kind of… she lets out a breath and then holds my shoulders and then says to me, "Listen, you're not coming with me to the airport, my little girl…"I'm leaving you here"… And so she drove away... And I remember it took me two months and I never spoken a single word to anyone. They wouldn't let me lock myself in a room … So I wasn't even allowed privacy; I was just sort of watched daily, surveillance.

Leyla stayed for over two years in Somalia having little contact with her immediate family who remained in the UK. The story that she told me was shocking and unexpected. Leyla was using the story to relay how her education had been seriously interrupted, meaning that when she finally returned to the United Kingdom she had missed a significant period of her schooling, but the detail of the story, in particular the section where she had been 'left behind', was emotionally fraught. I found myself reacting in unexpected ways to her story. I began to experience something like a panic attack in response. My breathing was restricted and I felt at moments as though I might pass out. Whilst I was a little concerned that I would not have time to ask all the questions, it did not feel appropriate to return to the schedule. Furthermore, it felt important that Leyla had this opportunity to relate her story as she had clearly intended; however, as a researcher, I was troubled by the experience and somewhat incredulous at the strength of my reaction.

In a subsequent supervision meeting I relayed the incident to my supervisors. As the interview had taken place recently, its memory was fresh and the strength of the emotion was clear. They

both strongly encouraged me to reflect on the process and to delve into this experience and approach it reflexively as part of my methodology.

5.6 Emotions in Research

Looking through the index of any research methods textbook alerts one to the fact that emotionality is not a well-recognised aspect of the research process, yet a number of researchers argue strongly that qualitative research work is fundamentally concerned with participants' emotional responses (Hochschild 1979; Jaggar 1989, Game 1997, Hubbard et al 2001). One of the difficulties that researchers in social sciences face when grappling with emotional content is the historical framework that we are grounded in where there has been little or no room for examination of emotional processes.

Historically within social sciences emotions as a subject of study, as well as being negated within the researcher, were not considered a valid topic for research; rather, they were seen to be simply 'disruptive to rational judgments, thoughts and observations' (Jaggar 1989: 155). However as other epistemological approaches established their prominence during the second half of the 1900s, so arguments developed that questioned whether social science research and, indeed, science research even, could or should be completely value-free. A wealth of dissenting voices grew, formed of feminist and critical theorists arguing that there could be no abstract investigation in the social sciences, that the dualism between rational and emotional in qualitative research is a false dichotomy and that such research could never be, nor should aim to be, dispassionate. Social scientists started to place value in considering emotional content as both a valid knowledge source and as worthy of consideration in research methodology. Sociologists started to include the study of emotion in their discussions, acknowledging the significance of emotions in our understandings of everyday life. One of these was Arlie Hochschild, who contributed significantly to the discourse with her theory proposing that emotions are governed by social rules and therefore were worthy of sociological analysis. Emotion, she argued, 'is governed by latent rules' and 'can and often is subject to acts of

management' (Hochschild 1979: 551). She is credited with coining the term 'emotion work', identifying social roles and professions where individuals necessarily manage their emotions in the course of their daily practices. She cited the example of the airline stewardess who offers passengers warmth and a sense of security, managing her own real feelings in the process (Hochschild 1979).

The concept of emotion work is synonymous with that of 'emotional labour', which perhaps applies more to roles, often held by women, that require not only the management of feelings but emotional investment. An example would be childcare workers or teachers who offer the children in their care unconditional positive regard, whilst masking or withholding their own real feelings. By bringing attention to emotion work in their studies, authors such as Hochschild and more recently Wharton (2009) have contributed to forging a way for emotion to be considered in social science in real terms, not as something separate from cognition or unworthy of study at all, as has previously been the case.

5.7 Placing the Study of Emotions in Research Practice

Takhar (2015:2) argues that:

> If we understand that emotions form a central role in our lives and what it means to be human, then this must be extended to research in all disciplines

Developments in epistemology, including the interpretivist movement, feminist approaches and related developments in qualitative research, have opened up the possibility of recognising emotions as significant in research practice. Interpretivism necessitated the importance of acknowledging emotions due to the desire within this framework to make sense of others' means of knowing. The interpretative paradigm focused attention on the importance of individuals' experience and beliefs, and thus challenged the premise that social facts could exist independently of one's interactions and the constructions of society. This infers that emotions are inevitably of greater significance, as our understanding of the world is shaped by our

'feelings' towards things in our lives and the interpretative paradigm can be seen to have in many ways paved the way for a more nuanced exploration of the role of subjective experience in the research process (Hubbard et al. 2001). Hubbard et al. (2001) suggest that it is feminist research practices that have really helped us to shape and make sense of emotional content in research, both in the analysis of the data and in understanding the research process: 'whilst the interpretative paradigm placed subjective experience at the heart of sociological research, it was feminist methodology that made researchers' emotions explicit to the research process' (2001: 124). Haynes reinforces this, arguing that 'feminist methodology derives from three principles: firstly it should start from an exploration of women's experience,… secondly it should act as an instrument of change and avoid exploitative relationships between the researcher and the researched and thirdly, it should locate the researcher firmly in the research process, intellectually and reflexively' (Haynes 2006: 208).

Alongside Interpretivism, feminist approaches to research have been interested in addressing omissions and constructing and deconstructing existing knowledge bases. Exploring how knowledge is created and by whom, has been a significant consideration in feminist research studies (Ropers-Huilman and Winters 2011). Focusing on women and their subjective experience means that feminist research has been able to embrace emotionality as a valid way of knowing (Game 1997). Furthermore, emotionality is a gendered concept, and cultural beliefs regarding women's greater tendency to be emotional beings have pervaded research enquiry. Research has arguably been shaped along such gendered lines, where the dominant discourse of emotion demarcates the boundaries between the rational, objective and value-free male gaze and the subjective, irrational and passionate female position. To counter such views, Alison Jaggar (1989) has argued that we should take emotional content into account in research and attend to participants' emotional responses. Specifically, she suggested that the emotional responses 'of subordinated people and of women, are more likely to be appropriate than the emotional

responses of the dominant class… that is they are more likely to incorporate reliable appraisals of situations' (Jaggar 1989: 168).

Adopting an emotionally focused approach, however, necessitates reflexivity: if we acknowledge that the researcher position requires analysis, then it is essential that we acknowledge the relationships between the researcher and the research content, between the researcher and the research participants. Such human introspection cannot be real and meaningful without consideration of the feelings in these relationships. If we are explicitly aware of these dynamic relations, then we can integrate this knowledge into our interpretations. In this way, a contemplation of emotional content and application of emotion theory fits well to the feminist model, with its focus on the inclusion of women's perspectives and the inherent emphasis on critically reflective research practice to examine further the knowledge-gathering process in its wider context. Both exploring the meaning of emotionally nuanced responses in our research participants and using these in the development of theory, as well as recognising our efforts to manage our emotions and responses as researchers, can contribute to the development of knowledge.

5.8 The Impact of Emotions on the Researcher and Research Process

The concept of emotion work has also been applied to researchers themselves who, in the course of undertaking qualitative research, may be impacted upon by the nature of the topic. Hordge-Freeman (2018:5) argues that:

> Confronting emotions requires that we acknowledge how it pervades the entire research process. Not only do emotions drive what we choose as the object of our study, but researchers also develop an emotional investment in the research. Following this, researchers become emotionally embedded in the communities they study and then become emotionally invested in the experiences of their respondents and must exert considerable labor to manage these dynamics.

Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) explores how emotion had been considered largely only in terms of the impact on the participant, noting how ethical guidelines for many social science disciplines argue for the protection of the participant from physical and psychological harm yet that there has been less recognition of the emotion work of being a researcher in qualitative research on the varied ways that strong emotional content may impact on the researcher themselves, especially when applied to researching sensitive topics. Hubbard et al. (2001) argue that 'those of us who carry out qualitative research involving in-depth interviewing are well aware of the issues that are raised when we tap into areas that are emotionally sensitive for the participants', and that 'protecting the participant from emotional threat regularly appears in methodological texts'; however, 'researchers are 'not merely instruments to facilitate data collection. They are not immune to emotional experiences, despite their best efforts to anticipate this in their preparations' (Hubbard et al. 2001: 120). In this way, such authors profess that it is necessary to consider such interactions if we are to include emotional content in our research and to make sense of it in epistemological terms.

A study by Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) focussing on public health researchers suggesting several ways in which researchers may be emotionally impacted by the research process in which they are engaged. The authors discuss how, when participants project strong emotions, the researcher may feel a strong sense of empathy for their situation. When participants are angry, troubled by a difficult memory or present a tale of injustice, it is possible that the researcher themselves will be drawn into that story and experience their own strong feelings relating to that information. To what extent researchers 'manage' their emotions may depend on several factors, including how well they are acquainted with the participant, how strongly they are affected by what they are hearing, which may well relate to their personal biography, and their epistemological approach. Dickson-Swift et al. found that some of the health researchers whom they interviewed felt that it was not appropriate to be openly emotional during the interview and that it was 'preferable to hold back until the interview was complete'. Others disagreed, relating how they felt that

‘becoming openly emotional was an important part of the research, signalling that the researcher had connected in a very personal way with the story their participant was telling’ (Dickson-Swift et al. 2009: 65).

Ryan (2008) considers the impact of emotions on the research process and explores how emotion work can contribute to the epistemological approaches being used, and therefore the outcomes of the research. Ryan demonstrates how emotions can both be a valued topic of research and be recognised to impact on the research process itself. Her article echoes the work of Arlie Hochschild in arguing that emotions are a highly valid aspect of research, because understandings and constructions of the world are mediated through our emotions and that humans are subject to ‘feeling rules’. Ryan’s article is in part a reflexive analysis of the emotional terrain of in-depth qualitative interviewing. Whilst exploring the stories of Irish migrants women, their perceptions and feelings regarding their experiences of migration and the ‘culture rules’ that govern their emotions, she found her own biography was implicated in her analysis of their responses. As an Irish woman herself who had emigrated to England, and as a mother, the stories that they told resonated with her own experiences of ‘negotiating transnational ties and obligations to family members “here” and “there”’ (Ryan 2008: 302). Ryan uses reflexivity to examine how she empathised with her participants’ life experiences and how her reactions, when confronted with the complex, difficult and ‘disturbing’ content of their stories, impacted on her perception of the research. In this way, she demonstrates how the life circumstances of the researcher can impact in varied ways on their emotional response to the data being collected. Whilst this can seem problematic, Ryan and other academics have thus move on to acknowledging, problematising and analysing how the researcher’s emotions can be made sense of epistemologically. Reacting to the stories of others can therefore be seen to impact upon the research process as our individual biographies interact with those of our participants.

5.8.1 Embodied emotions

Some researchers have described the sense of being emotionally affected as a physical, bodily sensation. Strong emotion is often integrated with a tactile feeling – the senses of anger, anxiety, disgust, fear, embarrassment and shame all have parallel physical sensations. Theorists have described such 'feelings' as 'embodied emotions' (Game 1997). The health researcher participants in Dickson-Swift et al.'s study described such reactions, for instance when a participant related the injustice done to them: 'When she told me her story, so much detail, so sad. I felt my body tense up, feelings of anger, nausea' (Dickson-Swift et al. 2009: 67). Others talked about their face going red in embarrassment, shaking with fear or having a lump in their throat, all clear demonstrations of the embodiment of emotional response. These discussions resonated strongly with me, as my experiences related earlier are an example of such 'embodied emotion'. The sense of panic overwhelming me, the feeling that I might pass out and that I needed to regulate my breathing were symptomatic of the situation that I found myself in; the weighty emotional content of Leyla's story and my inevitable human empathy with the complex emotional circumstances that she was recalling.

My own reading and research on the topic of emotion have allowed me to reflect meaningfully on the processes taking place in this interview and afforded me a new analysis of the situation. Over empathising with Leyla's story was initially seen by me to be a weakness, an inability in myself to manage the research process effectively. I now see it differently. I can see that I was responsive, sensitive and engaged in the experience being relayed to me. As Wilkins (1993) argues 'the research experience is arguably an existential and not a purely cerebral matter:, 'the researcher is active in the making of the moment' (Wilkins 1993: 97).

In this situation, I sensed strongly that Leyla needed this moment to tell her story, perhaps to make sense of it for herself; it was a story that needed to be heard. Ultimately, it was a story with some successful outcomes. Leyla overcame missing two crucial years of her education and successfully managed her way back onto the English education system. As we reached the

section of her narrative where she returned to the United Kingdom and attained her place to study in further and then later, in to higher education, I felt a wave of relief wash over me and my breathing returned to normal. The story had come full circle. Leyla had used her agency, her strong sense of motivation and drive to overcome the adverse circumstances facing her, re-establishing her self-esteem and the focus of her direction in her life. 'Embodied responses are markers of meaning from which researchers can learn', suggests Dickson-Swift et al. (2009: 68), and reflection on these reactions can benefit us in understanding the research process and remind us to take care of ourselves in our process.

Incorporating emotion and feelings into the study of research process is not without its pitfalls. Primarily, researchers need not to privilege their own experience over those of their participants nor allow their reflective considerations to become the focus of the study. It is, rather, another string to one's bow that can add layers of meaning to the study, enabling us to 'analyse the mutually evocative situation that we are placed within when researching sensitive, emotionally charged subjects, locked in process of collaboration' (Jaggar 1997).

As researchers, we can use our engagement with the subject matter to bring us closer to our participant's worldview through empathy and understanding. Haynes (2006) propounds that her forays into emotion content had meaning for her epistemological approach: 'I learned the importance of empathy and reciprocity which are central feminist tenets. To listen carefully to the narratives of other, respecting their views, experiences and selves is essential' (Haynes 2006: 216). These are valid tools that, when utilised appropriately by researchers, help to build rapport and establish a safe research space as well as show respect for participant's ideas (Hubbard et al. 2001). Researchers, as human beings, are inevitably attached to the subject matter to varying degrees, sometimes in greater depth due to their own personal biographies. There is a risk of empathy and understanding being overplayed so that the researcher's views are so manifest that they heavily influence the outcomes of the study. Ryan (2008) argues that 'shared experience is not necessarily good for the interview process' and that it might then be 'easy to skim over things

which you assume to be shared and taken for granted… because we assumed a shared understanding' (p.302). However, there is a need to 'take a step back' even after the event, to reflect existentially on the process. Primarily, the research is about our participants and we are part of the research process, so our feelings matter, but they are not where the main emphasis should lie.

Listening back to the interview, there is no real indication of the strong emotions that I was feeling, and I think that is appropriate. I was sympathetic, making reassuring responses and the odd utterance that demonstrated my empathy for the situation in which she found herself, but I did not break down crying or wail with stress at the difficult moments: the stage is rightfully Leyla's. What was right was that I was able to come away with an awareness that this interview needed some reflecting on. It is right and necessary to be critically reflective about our part in the research process.

Fortunately, I had my supervisors to discuss this experience with and several authors have suggested that this is something that we need – a supportive network of co-researchers with whom we can share unexpected and such overwhelming research experiences. Hubbard et al. (2001) suggest that 'discussion about emotion is not mandatory, rather we are suggesting that researchers are given the opportunity to talk about emotional labour in a receptive and supportive environment which acknowledges that these are shared concerns' (200: 135). Similarly, Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) state that 'if we are going to advocate for the acknowledgement of researchers undertaking emotion work then we must also consider the types of support to be made available to researchers' (2009: 73). I was initially concerned about how the interview had gone, but the discussion with my supervisors gave me positive reassurance about the value of the experience. This process of reflection and deepening of my epistemological comprehension of emotion enabled me to realise that, as researchers, we can be more aware and prepared for emotive content and reactions, we can learn how to assimilate this knowledge effectively and accept that emotions are a way of knowing. Through reflection, collaboration and discussion

about such experiences, with other researchers we can make meaning from our responses that will allow for our acknowledgement of 'feelings' to make a meaningful contribution to our research.

5.9 Conclusion

We should not, as researchers, shy away from dealing with strong emotional content, nor should we negate the value of emotion content and responses in our data analysis. Vince (2020) suggests that a focus on the emotions within qualitative research is not always comfortable but it is necessary, arguing that 'these feelings are integral to the role of researcher and the depth of insight that can be generated from data' (Vince 2020:520) Qualitative research and in-depth personal narratives are frequently personal and intimate, and disclosure is an accepted part of the process. Far from being dispassionate, we need to accept the value of such intimacy, as developing a trusting empathetic approach is more likely to get us the ecologically valid responses to our enquiries. It is then necessary to realise these and make use of them by creating real human interactions in which participants feel safe and supported to express themselves to be open and reflexive. Haynes (2006) writes that such qualitative research using in-depth qualitative interviews can have therapeutic value for the participant and the researcher: 'Oral histories,' she argues, are a means of 'evaluating the present, revaluating the past and anticipating the future without fracturing the life experience' (2006: 208).

Reflecting on the interview with Leyla, I can observe that she was using the interview experience to explore and make sense of her own history. In her narrative, there is strong evidence of Leyla assimilating aspects of her past into her present. She articulately framed herself as a product of her varied experiences, blending her difficult past experiences with those more recent and successful outcomes in her life. When I asked her for examples of how important being Somali was to her, she talked eloquently about how her recent creative works had given her the opportunity to express her Somali identity through art, with potent evidence of her personal history built in. These reflections may have been precipitated, or at the very least reinforced, by

the process of sitting down and relating her story in the interview context. This was also to prove a highly developmental process for myself, the researcher, as I reflected on the interview and worked towards dealing in an epistemological way with the subject of emotionality. I grew as an academic and expanded my understanding of what research could be about.

As stated by Haynes (2006), I now realise that 'I both act within the research process and am acted upon by it' (2006: 218). This has allowed me to revisit Leyla's story and those of my other participants with a new lens that is more closely nuanced to participants' feelings and how these contribute to their self and their world views. It has encouraged me to explore what their feelings and responses reveal within the rich data that their emotional content provides. If we fail to accept and acknowledge emotional content, then we risk omitting it from the research and overlooking opportunities to assimilate it, and therefore exclude significant data from our analysis.

Chapter 6: **Family History and Early Education Experiences**

This chapter examines participants' early experiences of education. The importance of the participants' background as refugees and its impact on their approach to education are explored alongside an examination of their early experience of schooling - the factors that challenged or enabled them as they proceeded through primary and secondary education. The families of all the women in this study had come to the United Kingdom to flee war and displacement in their homeland of Somalia. Several of the women were born in the United Kingdom shortly after their families' resettlement, but most were born in Somalia or in a refugee camp en route to the UK. The interviews revealed that the experience of leaving Somalia under these difficult circumstances had had a great impact on their lives, especially in regards to their views on and attitudes to education. Whilst each of their stories was individual and idiosyncratic, several common themes emerged.

Researchers have suggested that although the literature on the topic of refugees and education is growing, it remains relatively sparse (Student et al. 2017; Gateley 2015). This chapter will contribute to scholarship in this arena, examining as it does the lived experience of young Somali women and the way in which their families' history of displacement, migration and struggle intersects with their education narrative.

Research in this area has shown how individuals' history as refugees can impact on their interactions and experiences as students. On the one hand social, economic and cultural factors can act as obstacles to one's aspirations but, in another sense, their personal and family histories can act as a motivational factor, inspiring them to pursue a future in which they might overcome some of the challenges of their past (Refugee Support Network 2012). Morrice (2013) suggests that education can be a means to re-establish fractured lives and build professional identities that may offer refugees a route into a new and more prosperous life. This is significant when one notes that unemployment and underemployment are high among refugee communities (Morrice

2009), whilst those who are employed are often in a low-skill sector (Gateley 2014). Like other minority and disadvantaged groups, refugees are likely to experience higher levels of poverty and trauma, violence and threat, be victims of abuse and face linguistic challenges (Stevenson and Willott 2007: 672).

Refugee families face other distinct challenges. Stevenson and Willott (2007) state that they are more likely to be living in poverty than any other social group, standards of accommodation are frequently poor and unemployment is significantly above the national average. Whilst facing structural and personal barriers to employment, they are likely to be subject to discrimination and xenophobia and to face challenges in acquiring similar career roles to those that they held back home. Previous experience and qualifications are often not recognised, leading to downward mobility (Rutter 2013, Kone 2019). In one interview, Master's student Khadra noted the way that structural barriers and discrimination against refugees could hold people back: 'People say you have to work twice as hard to get half of what other people have.' When probed further for who she was referring to, she responded:

> Immigrants, refugees… to get half, to even have the same amount… there's discrimination, a lot of racism. People just employ people that look like them and if you don't look like them, you just won't – get anywhere, I can't imagine what my experiences would be if I didn't look the way I did. (Khadra)

Whilst there are education policies designed to promote the inclusion of several disadvantaged groups in education, there are none on the inclusion of refugees. More specifically, there are none relating to the inclusion of refugees in higher education in same way that there are for other minority and excluded groups. This should be considered as an oversight, as research has noted that education holds 'emancipatory potential' for refugees and their families, contributing to personal growth, social development and increased integration and allowing for long-term improvements to outcomes economically, as well as a means to give voice to displaced

populations who might otherwise occupy a vulnerable place in society (Dryden-Peterson and Giles 2012: 4; Gateley 2015). Education, specifically higher educational qualifications, are often a key aspiration for refugees, allowing them to find a foothold in their host society and giving them the potential to escape from poverty and overcome some of the structural barriers to inclusion.

This chapter will investigate some of these issues as they relate to the participants in this study. It explores the way that their family history of displacement and their concurrent lives as refugees intersect with their identity and educational narratives.

When discussing the participants' family histories for this research, there was a great deal of similarity, with prevalent underlying themes of displacement, loss and separation. All participants spoke of families having migrated as refugees to various countries to escape the protracted civil war in Somalia and its related complexities, often undertaking difficult journeys before finally settling in London.

Najiyah described her a familiar tale from her family's experience of loss, explaining:

> when the war broke out everything kind of crumbled…. People didn't have access to their capital anymore; everything disappeared really. (Najiyah)

Similarly, Hana suggested that her family had to leave Somalia 'because of the civil war and because there was problems back home, … they came in search of a better life'.

Master's graduate Ummi told me that in Somali/Arabic there is a word, *tahriib*, to describe the often-hazardous journey to Europe by land and sea to seek safety and security, a common feature in Somali family narratives. She talked intently about the long and difficult struggle that her family had been though to establish themselves in the United Kingdom and how deeply ingrained this experience was in her understanding of her current situation:

> Having a parent who didn't speak a word of English who had to struggle and try to, like, constantly try to, like, better herself. So, nothing was handed to us on a plate. Do you know

> what I mean? So, she had to strive and struggle and do all of this... So, yeah… it is the fact that we were once, like, running from war and we just literally came to this country with the clothes on our backs, and then now having so much better**…** I've had so many experiences that I would never have had in a million years had I not come here and obviously I am very grateful for the opportunity that I have been given, and now it's kind of like I'm taking advantage of that… things that I wouldn't have had back home. (Ummi)

Later, in a discussion about experiences of going back home to Somalia to visit relatives, Ummi discussed how friends there might underestimate the arduousness and long-term challenges that individuals faced during the journey and resettlement. She relayed the trials in trying to get back on her feet. She explained that:

> they don't know the struggle.… They don't know how many hours we put in… people don't tell them.... Do you know what I mean? The amount of hours we have to work and the gripe. Starting from the bottom every job we go to… (Ummi)

Ummi's reference to 'starting from the bottom' can be summed up by the concept of downward mobility. A common feature of many refugees' lives are their achievements, experiences and qualifications not being recognised, and losing their professional status when seeking employment or applying for further education or training. Gans (2009) argues that 'downward economic mobility is to some degree painful for every one of its victims, because it means a reduction in standard of living, social position and prestige. It can also result in a decline in personal autonomy, control and self-respect' (Gans 2009: 3 Kone 2019).

Such complex and emotionally charged stories featured frequently in the narratives of the young women interviewed, acting for some as a form of motivation for their ambitions. Computer Science graduate Zayneb summarised this feeling:

> Your parents came from a war-torn country. They had nothing and they brought you here so that you can do something with your life, so you need to, kind of, show them… you're

> doing it for them as well. So, that's, kind of like, always been my thing – right now, is everything I do is for them. So, just, kind of, having that in the back of my mind… constantly... (Zayneb)

These narratives were integral to many of the women's experiences, illustrating a strong degree of connectedness to their family's journey to their current situation and demonstrating how that history filtered through to impact on their own aspirations.

Some of the women had difficulty in assimilating their current identity in education into their past and present struggles. Maryam, whose personal history is discussed in Chapter 5 Part 2, had experienced a complex journey as a refugee that included separation from her family and siblings during her relocation to the United Kingdom. She suggested in her interview that she did not let on to her friends and classmates how difficult her life was for her, being from a refugee family. She told me:

> I used to hang around with the top class because I used to find it was a form of motivation; they were all doing really great… so those were the type of friends who were ambitious and were I would say, well off, not middle class but who were not on benefits, if you will…. The thing is, I've always kept to myself, so they would think I'm just like them, I would never disclose my family life back home or here… I just wanted people to think 'This is who I am'. I guess I wanted to be someone else so I didn't want to drag the past in the present. (Maryam)

This corresponds to research by Morrice (2013), who found in her work with refugee undergraduates that some did not want to reveal the extent of the difficulties they had faced and were facing and chose to keep their refugee status a secret in order to avoid the complex and problematic identities that might consequently have been imposed upon them.

When discussing her early school experience, Maryam further explained how she had been challenged emotionally by her early experiences of dislocation:

> I think psychologically I blocked all that out… I did grow up at a young age a bit angry, very withdrawn in school, I was very quiet, at home I was very quiet – also because of my language barrier as well…. So I think what happened was I just kept to myself as a coping strategy, just didn't want to speak about it, didn't want to access my mind in to it. It was only at a later stage I wanted to know more and in fact I still want to know more. (Maryam)

Maryam talked a great deal about the difficulty of coming from a family where both her guardians were unemployed and who were entirely supported by the welfare state, and this aspect of her life featured highly in her narrative. Avoidance of similar financial hardship was a key motivator in her pursuit of educational success, her later undergraduate studies and a concomitant professional career. Significantly, though she had also been working since she was sixteen and a wage earner, she had been supporting her family back home (her biological mother and siblings) by sending them a proportion of her wages in the form of remittances every month. This is a common practice in Somali communities, as in other nationalities in diaspora, and demonstrates the strength of connection between resettled Somalis and their homeland. In 2016 the World Bank stated that £1.4 billion is sent to Somali each year in the form of remittances, making up approximately 23% of its gross national product.

6.1 Suitcases and Uncertain Spaces

Several participants remarked that, like other recently settled refugees, there was always at the back of their mind the hope or notion that they would return home when things became more stable. Within this narrative there was often also a more subtle indication that, as migrants, they might never feel fully at home in their host country whilst this uncertainty remained. One example came from Warda, who told me:

> Everyone's always saying, 'Maybe in the next ten years, when everyone finishes education, when everyone is kind of established, experienced, then we'll go back'. But they never anticipated that it would be this long, that they'd be here this long. I think with

> all refugees, it's like that. There's always a feeling that your country will become safe at some point when you can go back and live and move no more, because everybody longs for their own home. You're somewhere where you're strange, and it doesn't matter how long you stay, you're always going to be strange. It isn't ideal for people, especially immigrants. So, I think there is always at the back of their mind that I'm going to be going back home at some point. (Warda)

Zayneb noted a similar phenomenon and, in turn, indicated the issue of difference between being a refugee and an economic migrant:

> The problem is we are not economic migrants… if you compare us to the Bangladeshi or the Chinese community, they came here to work and to get a better life and so if you come with that mind-set I think they treat their environment differently, whereas if you are escaping a war and you are suffering from all kinds of trauma and you have left everything behind… so people kind of lump Somalis in with them and they are not comparable. A lot of parents still want to go back as well,… like there's this analogy of that they are living out of their suitcases for many years because they might have to pack up and leave again, so I think if you have got that kind of mind-set it may be difficult to maybe invest in your child's education. (Zayneb)

This analogy of the of 'living out of a suitcase' was mentioned at other times in the interviews, as well as at the Somali events that I attended. In one such event, an open panel discussion held at SOAS, University of London, 'Somalis in Diaspora; Turning Commonly Held Narratives Around', the idea was discussed in relation to the apparently central dilemma facing many: whether their stay in the United Kingdom now constituted settlement. These vignettes indicate some of the issues that are faced specifically by refugees who may have not known about or have fully decided on the permanence of their settlement, having come as displaced peoples rather than an active choice. It further illustrates how refugee status can lend a sense of

impermanence and fragility to one's situation. Abdi (2015: 231) suggests that displacement leaves a permanent mark on people's lives and is a 'perpetual search for physical, economic and cultural security'.

Such a state of impermanence can impact on the identity and sense of belonging of the young refugee. Najiyah related how her family were 'adapting' to being British, with the underlying notion that this might not be a permanent state of being:

> I think I definitely identify with being Somali more so than being British I would say because our culture is so rich… and like we have adapted, of course, to be able to live here… but there is always that perception that you want to go back to your country. (Najiyah)

Stevenson and Willott (2007) argue that this insecurity over status and residency is a factor that marks refugees out in their experiences of resettlement. They have neither agency in this process, nor full control over the outcome of their journey, owing to the manner in which those journeys take place. Until residency is confirmed, their status can seem vulnerable and precarious. Even when a refugee does achieve permanent residency, the adjustment to accepting the new status may take some time. In one sense, then, as some of my participants noted, some families may sense a dilemma over how much a family should invest in their child's long-term educational qualifications when their status feels impermanent or fragile; however, education and specifically graduate qualifications do offer refugees the potential to put down roots, enabling them to carve out a better and more secure life for themselves life and their families. Dryden-Petersen and Giles (2012) suggest that higher education can be a crucial tool to reverse the stereotypical narrative, allowing refugees to become their own agents and to gain a sense of control about the trajectory of their lives. This is discussed in further depth in Chapter 9, which explores how the participants negotiated their new status and the aspects of identity that emerged from their educational achievements.

In the interviews there was evidence of the young women's awareness of the negative perceptions and stereotypes regarding Somalis in society, both in education and in the media, and this could be seen to have impacted on their sense of belonging, inclusion and exclusion. Some referred to the stigma associated with Somali underachievement. Science graduate Mulki, related her awareness of this whilst in school. She stated that:

> There was this image of other Somali students who are nowhere near the top set, you know? … But I wanted to challenge that. (Mulki)

Selma, now a secondary-school teacher, also noted how she felt that her teachers did not have great expectations of her. She stated:

> I would say that my teachers sometimes would not have high expectations of me because of my background or because I didn't have a certain standing in society… they wouldn't expect much of me because of the colour of my skin or because of, you know, my social economical standing. (Selma)

It is arguable that what is being described here is the sense of habitus that Selma perceives separates or 'others' her in this context. More specifically, she is describing embodied social capital, which Bourdieu (1986) referred to as the long-lasting dispositions of body and mind that are largely acquired unconsciously. Morrice (2013) suggests that habitus is a valuable conceptual framework for understanding refugee experiences and identity, as they are framed by the new and different social spaces that the refugee inhabits. She suggests: 'Habitus represent durable embodied dispositions, expressed through speaking, standing, thinking and feeling, deriving from social background and upbringing so that not only is the body in the social world but the social world is in the body' (2013: 655). Morrice further notes how it is important to acknowledge that, whilst habitus is deeply ingrained, it is not immutable. Rather, habitus is permeable, 'continually being reconstructed by the individuals engagement with the social world' (2013: 655). This is important to my research as a fundamental aspect of the study is

concerned with the notion of change and transformation. As will be discussed in later in this and other chapters, educational achievements have the potential and possibility for all to change lives and, for refugees in particular, the possibility to renegotiate their identities, professional and social, and to impact on their cultural and economic situation. Like the participants in Morrice's work, the women in my study had varied perspectives on their heritage culture and the way that this intersected with their own attitudes and behaviour, and we talked in depth about how their visual and embodied characteristics influenced their identity and experience. This is discussed in much further depth in Chapter 8.

6.2 Navigating the Schooling System

When discussing their parents' educational levels, it was apparent that their schooling experiences of were often sparse and incomplete. One of the participants parents was a doctor qualified in Somalia and three held graduate degrees obtained in the United Kingdom. The majority though had only a partial education and this was particularly the case for their mothers. In discussions around this it emerged that for some parents their partial education was largely due to impact of the long and protracted civil war and disruption in their home country as well as the already weak infrastructure for schooling young people in rural /agricultural areas: many of the women described their parents coming from rural areas where there was no real schooling system established and some further noted how when their mothers were young girls, education had not been a priority for them, in particular owing to their gender and the perceived lack of value that was placed on female participation in education. Demie et al. (2007) suggest that, even before the civil war, fewer than 20% of Somalis were in education. Gardner and El-Bushra (2004) suggest that, prior to the conflicts of the 1990s, Somalia had the lowest literacy rates in the world and, although there were schools in towns and cities, not all young people had access to them. This was particularly true of girls living in pastoral and agricultural areas, owing to their important role in these economies (Gardner and El-Bushra 2004).

One participant, Ayan, told me that her understanding was that her mother had no previous schooling, because 'girls didn't go to school in Somalia', whilst Jennah told me of her parents:

> They grew up in Northern Somalia, so it was a nomadic culture, but I do know my father did get some (schooling) at least in terms of reading and writing, he had some basic formal education. For my mother it came later on, because she was an orphan, she was taken care of relatives, but just barely learnt I think, more as a teenager how to read and write. (Jennah)

Jennah's story is illustrative of the significant educational journey that the participants and their families have taken: from a nomadic culture to embeddedness and success in an unfamiliar formal education system. Even those parents who had a personal history of formal education had often had it disrupted by the war, which caused the breakdown of infrastructure in their home country, closing down many schools, and in combination with the lack of educational opportunities in refugee camps meant that many Somali refugees arrived in their host country with little or no formal schooling (Kruizenga 2010). Furthermore, it was noted that of those who did hold qualifications, these were often not recognised in their host country and certainly did not map to commensurate professional roles in employment.

The lack of consistent schooling of their parents acted as strong motivator for many of the women. Like many parents, those of my participants had high aspirations for their children's early academic achievements, framed in a unique way by their own complex relationship with education. Despite their own disrupted and sometimes non-existent formal education, many strongly emphasised the importance of education to their children and aspired for them to attend university. Ayan told me that neither of her parents had been to school in their hometown of Mogadishu, nevertheless her mother had always told them '"You are going to university!"… like it was drilled into my brain…'.

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), in their meta-analysis of research into parental involvement, found that parental aspirations are a significant aspect of parental involvement, suggesting that 'Parental involvement, especially in the form of parental values and aspirations modelled in the home, is a major force shaping pupils' achievement and adjustment. The precise details of how values are conceived and expressed are located in the ethnic culture of the family' (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003: 41).

Shah, Dwyer and Modood (2010) further explore this in relation to British-Pakistani families who, whilst they may be low in economic capital and lacking the accepted forms of institutionalised cultural capital that comes in the form of educational qualifications, many parents were able to pass on important social and what they describe as 'ethnic capital' in the form of 'the transmission of values and aspirations related to education' (Shah, Dwyer and Modood 2010: 1123).

As discussed in Chapter 3, a range of research studies have shown that parental involvement is closely correlated to academic success. Parental involvement includes a range of activities and behaviours, including those that take place at home: providing space and time for learning; encouraging learning at home; communicating with children about school; helping with decision-making about school-related issues; and supporting homework. In addition are activities that take place between the parent and school: volunteering in school; attending parents' evenings and school/community events; being on the board of governors; and supporting community/school events (Epstein 1995; Kahin and Wallace 2017; Desforges and Abouchaar 2003).

Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) state that 'School improvement and school effectiveness research consistently shows that parental engagement is one of the key factors in securing higher student achievement' (2011: 3); however, it has also been argued that the cross-over between home and school may be problematic for some parents, where their home culture may have had a clearer demarcation between what happens in school and at home (Kahin and Wallace 2017). This

resonates with what a number of my participants noted, demonstrating something of a divergence between beliefs. Maryam stated that for some parents, their understanding was that:

> Back home you send a child to school quite independent and that's it, the teacher deals with (them)… 'It's you and the teacher and it's nothing to do with me, as long as you're not causing a problem.' It's not a bad thing, it's a school business. (Maryam)

This was also illustrated by some of the key informants I interviewed, who suggested that the relationship between schools and parents was previously perceived differently. Feyisa Demie, Head of Research for School Self-evaluation at Lambeth LA, who has worked closely with Somali parents and pupils in East London around the issue of pupil achievement, suggested that:

> In Somali culture you don't talk to the teacher,…. a headteacher is big thing, a powerful thing, higher than the president, whatever is said is final… it took us some time till we change their mind. (Demie)

Participant Najiyah, who is now employed by a high-ranking finance organisation, illustrated this by commenting that, whilst her mother was supportive of her education:

> in the traditional sense, just like being there for you and doing, providing a roof over your head, always there to talk to you and encourage you but just in a general sense. I wouldn't say my mum went far and beyond but she always was there and… because I think herself, it's just a different custom, you know? She's also adjusting so she doesn't necessarily get it, you know? (Najiyah)

However, most participants demonstrated that although there had been such a distinction in their parents' former understanding of education, they were willing to engage with this newly received discourse regarding home/school partnerships that permeates the British education system. The great majority of the women suggested that their parents demonstrated a good degree of

involvement in their education through both their home life and through parent–school engagement.

Creating the time and the opportunity to study are aspects of parental involvement, and these were behaviours that participants discussed in several of the interviews alongside their motivation and encouragement. This space that parents afforded their daughters to enable them to focus on their studies was a significant theme in the interviews and resonates with what has been noted previously by other studies into parental involvement with Somali families in diaspora (Kruizenga 2010; Kapteijns and Armen 2004). Mulki, described how her parents had enabled her in her education through creating the time for her to study:

> My mum, well, both my parents actually just– like, for example, if there's work at home and I've got an exam, for about three months I don't do anything. I literally– my mum would even bring me my food to me in my room so I just like do work and even I try it's like, 'No, sit down. You're going to do your work,' because she expects me to achieve high grades and she doesn't want anything else to be an excuse for that. (Mulki)

She added:

> I feel like my parents have supported me emotionally. There's been times when I've wanted to break down and I've gone to them and they've basically just told me it's okay whatever happens, you've tried and that's the most you can do and… just– having their support has been amazing throughout the entire process, financially, emotionally, everything. They've just been my rock. (Mulki)

Similarly, Ilhan, a primary schoolteacher, told me:

> I think my mum… I think she was always there for us. Like, you know obviously, you come home, the food's cooked, house is clean, you know you've got clean clothes, and that was a big thing in itself, do you know what I mean? (Ilhan)

Coming from a family of eight children with two sets of twins, Ilhan is right to suggest that 'this was a big thing' and it demonstrates her mother's support and efforts to enable her daughter in her education, regardless of the complexities of their home life. However, some of the women felt that space-making by parents was something that was afforded more readily to the sons in a family than the daughters. Taaliah told me how her parents subtly demonstrated a stronger value for her brothers' education than hers:

> I remember when my brothers were doing GCSE, it was like 'You have to do more housework because your brothers are doing GCSEs', But, then when it was me doing the GCSE I didn't get that. And, then it was like, oh your brothers are doing A Levels, but it never mattered when I did any of that stuff, it was just, I still had the same workload, if not more…. I remember one day very particularly, I was studying something, doing homework or an essay and my brothers, all of them, were doing PlayStation, basically nothing important but my mum asked me to do the housework, I'm the one who was studying…. They freed my brothers up ironically, but not me…. That's just one of the many misogynies that happen in the culture. (Taaliah)

This issue regarding the value of women's education, it became apparent from the discussions, was an ongoing debate and a topic of much contention, specifically regarding daughters attending university and pursuing careers. This aspect of the participants' experience is discussed in much more depth in Chapter 7, which explores the complex negotiations over gendered roles and expectations that took place when they traversed into higher education and beyond.

The forms of parental involvement that the participants' parent provided may be more significant when one considers the structural inequalities that face many Somali families in Britain, as outlined in the previous literature review chapter. Within their study, which explored factors impacting on young Somalis in education in the United States, Kapteijns and Arman (2004) argue that positive benefits can be derived from within 'immigrant communities themselves'.

They suggest that ‘scholars are convinced that parents, on the one hand, and the wider ethnic community, on the other, can help their children succeed in school and cushion the negative impact of low economic status and discrimination, even in the difficult circumstances described’ (Kapteijns and Arman 2004: 9). They further add that ‘Immigrant parents often have a fiercely positive attitude toward education’ (2004: 26), and suggest that this may be linked to their own, often disadvantaged, situation. Kahin and Wallace (2017) suggest that Somali parents may ’pin their hopes on their children… and exhort their children to work hard in school in order to improve their lot’ (2017: 53).

Despite the difficulties encountered, the majority of the young women interviewed felt that their parents had done as much as they could to assist them in their educational endeavours. Support came through varied means and there was a sense of parents being aware of the deficits in their own education, as well as the challenges in their current socio-economic situations, therefore making strong compensatory efforts to provide assistance to overcome some of these issues.

Selma, who came to the United Kingdom from Somalia aged five and is now a secondary schoolteacher, told me:

> My mum from a young age… because I hadn’t, you know, attended nursery or reception in this country, was very worried that I might be behind, so she used to get me a lot of books and that’s where I got into the habit of reading. I hardly ever used to watch TV and to this day I don’t watch TV, even on my phone I’m reading something, so I would say that that really helped a lot in terms of learning the language and catching up with the other children. (Selma)

Mulki, illustrates this clearly. In the following quote she describes how her mother assisted her when she was in sixth-form college:

> I was struggling with Chemistry quite a bit because it got tougher and I was struggling to understand the concepts, so my mum actually got a private tutor for me who’d come to the

> house. She would tutor me one hour each week and my mum would be there every time in the kitchen. She'd just be there in case I needed anything and then she would just drop me off back at college straight afterwards…. I told her 'Mum, I don't need someone; I don't want to'. But she was like, 'You're going to do it because I know, at the end of the day, you're going to say you don't want to and then you're going to struggle again and then you're going to have to – so you're going to just stick through this until the exam at least and then we'll see what you get'. So, she was always heavily involved in my education. (Mulki)

Support through the provision of private tuition, as indicated by Mulki, was a notable feature in many of the conversations with participants. Several students had received tuition support and many of those who had not still referred to it as one of the more popular recent strategies that British–Somali parents now tended to put in place. One participant Ilhan told me:

> If I needed any tutoring, she'd provide it. Just kept on pushing me, really, to work hard. Yeah, she kept pushing me to work hard and provided me with any support that I asked for, really. Space. The laptop if I needed to work and study. (Ilhan)

Others went to a combination of Saturday supplementary schools and after-school clubs, where the focus often combined Islamic and Arabic studies and supplementary curriculum tuition in English, Maths and Sciences.

Overall, most participants noted that their parents did a variety of things to support their daughters in their educational endeavours. Many seemed cognisant of the challenges that they faced in their schooling and had a keen motivation to provide what they could to enable their success.

Whilst their parents had aspirations for them and often attempted to support their education, there were distinct challenges for the participant group in their early schooling. Although many proposed that their parents were supportive of them in their education, the degree and type of

parental involvement were not without complications. A key issue for many Somali parents and young people is having English as their second language (Demie et al. 2007). Participant Maryam, related the complexities of this for both herself and for her parents. Having been born in Somalia and coming to the United Kingdom at age seven, she was put into schooling with no knowledge of English, either spoken or written. This lack of understanding was compounded by emotional trauma in that she had left her immediate family – her parents and siblings – back home in Somalia, and was being brought up by the aunt with whom she had travelled to Britain. Maryam relayed the discomfort of her aunt (whom she now calls her mother) in coming to parents evening and not being fully able to communicate with the teachers regarding her education. She told me:

> I don't know why you have to bring your parents; I don't like it. So you go in a room and they're going to talk about me. But anyway I had to listen because when it finished she (her aunt/mother) would ask me, and I had to feed back all over again because of the language barrier and I have to explain myself about what's being said and it was quite distressing, I didn't like it. (Maryam)

Jennah, similarly, expressed this unease, stating of her mother:

> She wasn't able to help in any way and it was difficult for her to come along to the parent–teacher meetings, because then I would have to translate and I felt really uncomfortable. (Jennah)

Despite such difficulties, there was often evidence that parents tried their best and demonstrated their value of education by coming along to school events to show willingness and support. Najiyah told me about her mother attending parents evenings:

> Sometimes she couldn't articulate a response you know? It would be a very mixed or you know, the way she would phrase it would be kind of a bit jumbled but you'd kind of get a sense of like okay, she's understood…. it was just her way of making an effort. (Najiyah)

These challenges were compounded for some by their family's lack of familiarity with the British education system, an issue faced by many migrant communities but maybe especially pertinent when there has been little or no education infrastructure in their home country of Somalia, therefore little familiarity in interacting with educational institutions. Strand et al. suggest that a key challenge for many Somali parents is a lack of knowledge regarding how the British education system works. His research demonstrated that 'many parents, in particular… Somali parents, are not fully familiar with the education system and do not always know how to support their children's education (2010: 16). Demie et al. (2007) propose that, in such a situation, the parents are dually challenged by not speaking the language of their host country and, additionally, may be unfamiliar with the language of education and schooling.

PhD student Ambara illustrated this, suggesting that 'It felt like a lot of Somalis were just a bit sort of lost, you know', adding: 'I guess maybe now that we understand the educational system it's not so frightening anymore…. Now that the Somali communities have seen that there are Somali youth out there doing this and doing that… it's a lot easier now'. Such statements are illustrative of this changing milieu and several of the participants discussed how they and their family's personal histories of education are different from those of younger Somali British pupils currently. Nasra demonstrated this belief:

> My mum's sisters who have children that are like four or five years old, they are a bit more involved with the school, and figuring out what is going on here. Because, they have sort of seen how we went through school. But, with my mum it was just her doing it, without having the blueprint of how to do it. (Nasra)

Najiyah also discussed this in her narrative and, further, showed how her experience a decade earlier, as a young pupil whose parents were still new to the education system, was unlike the current situation. Here she describes how much they had learnt together in their shared journey of engagement with the British education system:

> That was back then but now, she's completely fine. She can speak decent English. So, I think it really helps my younger siblings because she can provide that now. I feel like back then because my parents hadn't gone to like secondary school here or primary school here or even university here, you can't go to them for help. (Najiyah)

Noting the changing landscape for her younger siblings, Najiyah observes how the longer time in their host country means that their families are more aware of the UK education system and how it works:

> I always tell my siblings, 'You're really lucky'… because they can rely on me; they can rely on my brother; they can rely on my stepdad. They can rely on us whereas for me, we didn't have that so we'd always try super-hard to try and understand ourselves but now, you have all your older siblings and cousins who can really help you…. It's different… so it really helps when there is somebody… you can always go to them for help or subjects like, 'can you fill this form out because I want to apply for this at primary school,' or do this trip or whatever. You know, the simple things. They don't have to struggle with that anymore.

What is notable in this statement by Najiyah is that she and her family have engaged together in becoming more knowledgeable about the vagaries of British schooling. Notably for my research findings, it includes reference to herself and her agency. When she states that 'they don't have to struggle with his anymore', she is placing herself as an agent of change within this new context. She has grappled with the education system and, as a consequence, her parents and siblings are now more cognisant of it. She and the other participants, are co-creators of what Yosso (2005) referred to as 'Navigational capital'; skills, knowledge and insights that have enabled them to successfully navigate through the educational system despite the structures of inequality that have faced them.. Furthermore, in placing herself in this role, Najiyah is one of those who can now be called on to provide support to her younger family members.

Unselfconsciously, Najiyah refers indirectly to her position as a role model and support to her younger siblings. This issue of the transformation in identity that results from becoming an educational achiever and a role model in the family and community will be explored in Chapter 8 which explores the role of these participants as pathfinders for an upcoming generation of young British Somalis.

A theme that emerged from the interviews is the feeling of being different from others and standing out in early education. This tended to be equated in part to the characteristics of the school that they attended, specifically regarding the ethnic, cultural and religious makeup of the setting, as well as experiences of racism in education. In Gabriel and Tate (2017), Deborah Gabriel describes her experience of school, stating that 'School and formal lessons were not, however, my only learning nor indeed what had the most lasting impact. I was a small Black girl in a sea of Whiteness' (2017: 7), adding that the feeling of isolation was reinforced by her 'complete inability to relate to any of the teachers or visual images I encountered in school'. She notes that this 'othering' is reflected in both the lack of an inclusive curriculum and the social environment of her schools. Such a feeling of isolation and alienation resonated in many participant interviews in this study. Taaliah undertook her primary education first in Catholic school, at which she describes being the 'other':

> There was hardly any representation of Muslims, so it was just no one really understanding your way of life, nor really understanding your background… with the added pressure of normal bullying and stuff, it felt like I was being alienated. I felt like I just don't belong in this school. (Taaliah)

Psychology graduate and Master's student, Ummi, described how she was one of just a couple of Somalis in her first years at school. Describing her increasing awareness of other Somalis in her school setting, she noted:

> A lot of them started coming when I was in Year 6 or 7. Before that, I didn't really have any Somali friends. But after that, a lot more started coming. A lot more. There was, like, a whole group of them so I felt a bit more at home and a bit more, like, 'Oh. I have, like, people that I share… that I can identify with…'. But it was a very multicultural school. So, even whether they were Somali, Blacks… or even Muslims to be honest. I still felt, quite, at home. (Ummi).

Ummi described how her early school life was beset with troubles that included bullying and getting into fights. She talked about being the 'black sheep' in her family, but her narrative indicates that the problems she encountered were largely due to a lack of diversity in her school and its failure to understand or support her in her encounters with overt racism. She noted that:

> At that time, there wasn't many Somalis, so I was, kind of like, the ethnic minority in that setting. So there was a lot of racism… a lot of, like, racist remarks and stuff. But I said, I'm not going to get into that kind of, mind-set. I was like, 'I'm not going to back down and let you bully me…' Obviously I was doing a lot of defending and like, I never started anything. It was always them starting on me, sort of, then me just, kind of, defending myself. (Ummi)

She further noted that her school did not deal well with the bullying: 'Their solution was to call in my parents every week and tell them how bad I was. Not try and understand why I did X, Y, Z'.

A 1998 report by Blair et al. explored the characteristics of school settings that facilitated academic achievement for minority ethnic students. Their report highlighted how the effective schools are those that included strategies for working with and understanding the whole child, for listening and responding to the viewpoints of parents and children and, significantly, those that had clear procedures for responding to racist bullying and harassment. Such findings were correspondingly noted by Bhattacharyya et al. (2003) in their study on minority ethnic

participation and achievement. Blair et al.'s report (1998) noted the importance of teachers having high expectations of pupils and of schools having high expectations of teachers, a point reiterated by several other studies (Demie et al. 2008; Kahin and Wallace 2017). Participants in my research frequently pointed to variations in expectations that were frequently indicative of racialised perceptions. Of course, it needs to be noted that teachers are not the sole problem here, as they are operating in institutions that are themselves fraught with problems of inclusion, inequalities and social injustice. Nevertheless, many participants felt that they had at times been subjected to stereotypes and discrimination that functioned in varied, intersectional ways.

Ilhan, now a primary schoolteacher herself, related a scenario in her secondary education where a teacher effectively separated out her and the other Black and Somali pupils who were sat together, perceiving them to be 'not interested' in their studies:

> There was one incident (when) there was a group of, me, my cousin and some Black girls, and we were all friends so we sat in on the other side. But, the girls, they were a bit loud, the ones I used to sit with, but they were nice girls, like they used to get on with their work, I think maybe it was just the tone of their voices, but the teacher, I could see whenever she asked questions, she'd always spoke to the other side – But I remember one day I questioned her on it…. I said something to her and she just stood back and she was like, oh. Because I don't think she understood what she was doing, because if you were there you could see it for yourself. She was talking to them but we were in the room, I mean we were part of her student form and she wasn't addressing us at all. It was only when I said it, and I was like, I was shocked because I thought I would never say something like that. But, when I said it, I was like you know what, I have to say it because it was so blatant, like, they're there, we're here and you know there's nothing that's dividing us, do you know what I mean? (Ilhan)

In this scenario, Ilhan was able to confront the teacher's stereotypical behaviour and resist the labelling that she and the other Black girls were subjected to thus resisting stereotypical discourses levied against her. Participants Zayneb and Jennah also noted how they felt a perceived lowering of expectations owing to their ethnicity, gender and refugee identity. Jennah related some of the difficulties that she had in her realisation of her otherness and further indicates how it was her family's strong sense of the value of education and their support and encouragement that promoted her belief in her ability to achieve. In discussing her secondary schooling, Jennah noted that:

> Now looking back over, I'm not sure whether I should mention it but then I started feeling different from everyone else and having the problems of being, like an immigrant in society... And in terms of my studies... I wasn't really pushed for higher education. And, that's the difference, so I wasn't really expected to perform at certain things, but our parents, because they didn't have the opportunity for any besides basic education when they were growing up they just encouraged that education is the key to success. That's what I was sort of encouraged to believe. (Jennah)

For Jennah, the value of her parent's encouragement was a significant factor in overcoming the low expectations of her teachers. It echoes the previous discussion of the value of parental aspirations in young people's academic success. Now a PhD graduate, she tied together the themes of the lack of role models and the impact of parental involvement when she added:

> I had the problem of not having roles models, doubting myself, questioning myself, but they (her parents) encouraged me at least, to take the next step every time… not really seeing clearly from the beginning where the end results lay. (Jennah)

The lack of exposure to role models in the school hierarchy whom they could identify with, together with the lack of representation within the curriculum, was a significant feature in the interviews. The results revealed that the participants themselves have a significant part to play

as being role models for a future generation of young Somalis, and this is explored in greater depth in Chapter 8. In the discussions with the participants I asked if they had encountered anyone of authority within their early school life who was from a Somali background. Only one had come across such a figure, a male secondary-school Maths teacher. Two others had come across the same female academic when they were in in higher education, who was a notable figure in several Somali societies and mentoring organisations. For all the other participants, the only academics and teachers representative of their cultural background whom they had encountered in their entire school and higher education experience were their contemporaries. For example, Ilhan and Selma were primary and secondary schoolteachers, respectively, and on their PGCE programmes had met others from a Somali background. This point is significant, as it is linked to the concept indicated previously whereby the Somali women graduates on the study can be seen to be part of a vanguard who are co-constructing social and cultural capital and changing the landscape for the others, specifically women, in their community.

Role models in the school community have been noted by a number researchers to be an important facet of BME educational achievement (Bowl 2009; Arbouin 2018; Kahin and Wallace 2017). Demie, Lewis and McLean's (2008) study, 'Raising Achievement of Somali Pupils; Good Practice in London Schools', stated the importance of staff who represented the culture and diversity of the pupil population, which they saw as a two-way process: Somali pupils valued the presence of Black and Somali staff members, and these staff, in return, saw their role as important in raising the achievement of all their pupils.

Although there were obstacles and barriers in their early educational journeys through primary and secondary schooling, the participants in this study had also encountered positive aspects. These enabling factors within themselves, their families and their schools had allowed them to feel a sense of potential and self-efficacy about their ability to progress to the next stage and onto higher education.

6.3 Enabling Factors

When discussing their early educational experiences, many of the young women described enjoying school, building positive social relationships with teachers and other pupils and gaining pleasure from learning and achieving. These contributed to their self-esteem in regard to their academic achievement and acted as motivators for them to succeed and progress through their education. Najiyah told me, 'I think I really enjoyed secondary and primary school. I have really fond memories. I always felt supported…. I didn't really struggle too much' (Najiyah). Nasra similarly her schooling:

> It was a smooth ride. The school I went to was quite noisy and there were quite a lot of disruptive kids there, but I didn't mind that so much, because I always did my work, but I also enjoyed the laid-backness that came with it. So, I don't think a lot of teachers had a problem with me, mainly because I was doing my work. So, even if I was being a little naughty, or a bit silly, it wasn't a big deal because I was doing my work as well. (Nasra)

Mulki related to me how she felt that the teachers were able to see her potential and supported her accordingly:

> I felt in primary school, I guess the teachers were very supportive and they helped quite a lot and they noticed maybe that I– on certain subjects maybe I picked up things a lot quickly so when we were split into sets, I was put in the top set and I was more or less in the top set I think from Year 5 onwards… the teachers did understand; they did encourage me. (Mulki)

The interviews also revealed that many of the women had encountered significant individuals in their school life and home life who had impacted both directly and indirectly on their lives, promoting their motivation to succeed. A frequent discussion involved specific teachers who had made an impact on them and, in many instances, unlocked their understanding, knowledge or passion for a topic. Mulki, for example, told me about a teacher in her secondary school:

> My science teacher, she stayed quite constant and she'd known me from Year 7.… She knew my mum as well. Throughout that time, she'd got to know my family as well so she was quite supportive and constantly was pushing me, pushing me to achieve better. (Mulki)

Ummi originally failed her AS level Science exams, but was encouraged by a friend to return to try taking a Psychology course. She told me about a Psychology teacher who had taught her in college and the transformative role that he had on her motivation to study the subject:

> I had this teacher… I remember him so well. The way he spoke about it with such passion and I was like, this is something that I really want to do!… And the rest is history, as they say (laughing)… That literally transformed the rest of my life. (Ummi)

She later went on to study BSc in Psychology, and an MA in Clinical Psychology.

Arbouin (2018) describes these significant others as 'catalysts' – individuals who facilitate and promote the academic direction of young people into further educational successes (2018: 40). These enabling individuals may be from within the school environment, maybe teachers or support staff whose interactions directly influence their academic trajectory or family or community members who indirectly inspire them. Notably, Arbouin argues that such individuals have an important part to play in young people's educational journeys, especially in relation to young ethnic minority pupils who may lack easily identifiable role models in their academic lives.

Other conversations with participants focused on the importance of a high achieving and progressive school environment. Selma, who went to an all-girls secondary school in North London, told me: 'There was a lot of female empowerment in that school and that ethos was really strong, you know we had Michelle Obama visit us twice!' The importance of visionary, and progressive school environments has been much discussed in education literature. Bhattacharyya et al.'s (2003) study into factors impacting on ethnic minority achievement in

schools and colleges found that a key factor was ‘a strong school ethos based on the expectation that all pupils would strive to achieve their best’ alongside a ‘culture of achievement with high expectations of pupils and parents’ (2003: 22).

When discussing the positive aspects of their schooling, a number of informants discussed the ways in which they felt valued and included. Selma, talked about the constructivist pedagogies that she encountered and how they created an ethos where everyone had a voice. She described how:

> There was a lot of class discussions and everybody’s views were considered. They’d ask ‘why do you think that Selma?’, and I could give my standpoint…. Same in secondary school. So I feel like, you know, everyone was included.

Nasra described similar experiences.

> I felt like if you had an idea, or the things you were saying were of value, people just ignored what colour you are, they were just interested in this idea. So, I never felt like I was excluded. And, it was never a conversation that I felt included, I just felt normal, and it was all moving smoothly. (Nasra)

Yasmiin also noted this but demonstrated an awareness that this was not necessarily the case for all students:

> I don’t think I had a problem with school. I had a good experience. I do see– I would see like friends and that saying, I don’t know, saying they felt like that they were left out. That’s generally stories that I’ve heard; it’s not something that I’ve experienced. (Yasmiin)

Yasmiin’s comments indicate that it was perhaps partly her clear motivation and conscientiousness that set her apart from other students. Participants Ambara and Ilhan felt that their own hardworking demeanour may have been in alignment with the teachers’ expectations

of capable students, meaning that they were more supportive of them and that perhaps other, more troubled students did not do so well in their education.

6.4 Summary

Whilst each participant related their own individual narrative, common themes emerged regarding the challenges experienced and the factors promoting their achievements. Many were strongly motivated by their families' history of struggle and displacement, and were encouraged in their pursuits by the need to counter their parents' own experiences of disrupted or non-existent education. Families often perceived of education as a means to cement their fractured pasts and the participants spoke about the importance of family support and encouragement. Whilst sometimes low in traditional forms of institutional cultural capital that extends from a parents educational qualifications and knowledge of the education system (Bourdieu 1977), parents did offer aspirational support and encouragement, transmitting to their children of aspirations and values related to education. As Shah, Dwyer and Modood (2010) argue, these represent a type of social capital that is available to migrant families who may be low in other form of social capital. In this respect parents and participants could be seen to strategically negotiating ' the field' maximising their chances despite structural disadvantages.

Where that support was lacking, as in the case of Maryam, a strong personal motivation and love of learning provided the drive, the inspiration to achieve.. In the narratives the participants talked of highly significant encounters and a supportive school environment as central to facilitating their engagement and success. However, it is worth noting that these perspectives were not applicable to all the participants, some of whom struggled to fit in and to feel fully accepted in their schooling. There is evidence here that schools still have a way to go when it comes to promoting the success and achievement of all minority ethnic pupils, especially those with a recent refugee migratory history. Participants spoke of the lack of role models with which they could identify in school settings and therefore inclusion of more role models in positions of status and authority within educational institutions with whom Somali pupils could identify, would be

one step in the right direction. However their successes can be seen to be in themselves an important step in increasing flows of social capital as they have successfully navigated the education system. It will be argued in the chapter 8 that the participants in this study are contributing to increasing the visibility of British Somalis in higher education and consequent professions, and therefore have much to offer themselves as role models for an upcoming generation.

The following chapter examines the challenges faced by the participants as they moved in to the realm of higher education: it examines how they grappled with the obstacles to their engagement that were transmitted to them within their families, and further explores their experiences of being 'othered' once they had enrolled in higher education. It goes on to examine the strategies they utilised in order to enhance their sense of visibility and belonging in the academe.

Chapter 7: **Experiences in Higher Education: Negotiating the third space**

This chapter addresses the issues encountered by the young Somali women participants of this study in their pursuit of higher education and the strategies they used to managed and negotiate their way through this space. It explores the journeys of the participants in higher education and beyond, examining their experiences as they moved beyond formal schooling into the world of higher level qualifications. It demonstrates the ways in which they grappled with their beliefs about inhabiting that space as young Black Somali Muslim women and the associated challenges. Issues that were raised in the literature review regarding being Black in the academe, intersectionality as experienced by this specific group and the related aspects of visibility and invisibility are discussed. The significance of role models and of building networks are analysed in relation to the narratives. It explores the meaning of success and how that success impacted on their sense of self, with particular focus on the impact on their identity of their agency and the power that they acquired from their academic successes. The ways that the participants grappled with and made sense of their identities and the impact of these contexts are explored.

This section will examine relevant factors within their immediate social group and in their educational institutions, as well as issues beyond in the wider social context that have challenged and enabled them in their pursuit of higher education. Woven into this analysis are the issues of social and cultural capital as they relate to the participants' stories, specifically on issues of exclusion and space-making as they move into occupying these locations.

This chapter addresses a gap in the literature as there have not, to my knowledge, been any studies of this kind that deal with the educational journeys of young British–Somali women in London and their higher education experience specifically regarding the intersectional and gendered context of their lives. The data collected show strongly that this journey into higher education and beyond was, for all the participants, marred by social, structural and cultural

challenges to their ambitions. Despite these challenges, the women showed a notable ability to navigate what was, for them and for their families, new terrain.

Despite the generally positive approach to their early educational goals of family and their close community, as discussed in Chapter 6, the decision to enter higher education and pursue concomitant careers was not always easily navigated, troubling as it did gendered expectations for young women in the Somali community to settle down in early adulthood to fulfil traditional family roles, such as becoming a wife and mother. This was often more complex when the women took decisions to continue past undergraduate studies and develop a career or pursue further academic studies at Master's and PhD level.

7.1 Troubling Gender Roles and Expectations

As discussed in Chapter 3, Somali culture has historically maintained strong divisions between men and women's roles in both public and private space. The highly patriarchal society in which men's roles were idealised as the head of the household and women inhabited power only in the domestic arena has meant that women's education has not been always been highly valued (Kapteijns and Arman 2004; Abdi 2014). Despite some minor progressive changes in the 1970s, the civil war from 1990 and the associated move to increased religiosity and an Islamisation of daily life, have meant that in Somalia women continue to be denied access to public, economic and political power (Ingiriis 2015; Gardner and El-Bushra 2004).

Yuval-Davis (1997) has noted that women are often perceived as the guardians of culture who symbolically bear the group's identity and values: Mirza (2009) suggests that women are 'deemed central to the ideological construction and reproduction of national identity' (Mirza 2009: 85) and within this are often subjugated, policed and needed to be controlled. Responsibility for this guardianship is frequently tied to and embodied by women, resulting in codes of honour and rules of behaviour on dress, freedom of movement and the control of sexuality. For young Muslim women in the modern age, especially those living in diaspora,

negotiating these gendered restrictions carries complex dilemmas for the participants and their families.

The interviews revealed that the participants found some of the gender-based restrictions on their behaviour challenging, and they discussed how they were engaged in a process of negotiating new roles, spaces and identities that could potentially move them away from what might be considered the 'traditional' expectations of Somali womanhood. Some authors have written about the way in which these highly gendered conceptualisations have been challenged and reimagined for Somali communities in diaspora (Berns-McGown 1999; Abdi 2014, 2015). Abdi (2014) notes that, for the Somalis in Minnesota, the group's migration status alongside its interaction with the structures and institutions in the wider host society has informed gender negotiations, resulting in a change to accepted practices and beliefs. For the women in this study, the acquisition of higher educational qualifications has similarly emerged as a significant catalyst to changes in their perceived roles and has impacted on them, forcing them and their families to renegotiate the gender dynamics in their communities.

An emerging theme within the interviews was that of the expectation for women in the Somali community to settle down in early adulthood, to be married and have children and how this conflicts with the women's own aspirations to pursue higher education and a consequent career. Abdi (2014) has written about the ways in which migration for Somali families can impact upon the ways that they 'enact and practice gender relations', and consequently may challenge commonly accepted 'patriarchal gender arrangements' (Abdi 2014: 461). For the participants in my study this was evidently an ongoing concern, and many of the women talked freely about their efforts to resist and renegotiate the expectations placed upon them.

Jennah described how there was still a strong expectation to look for marriage partners early in young women's twenties and to begin a family. She simultaneously noted how larger family sizes are a fairly well-established norm in the Somali population, in contrast to the European

norm of small, nuclear family. In this quote, she acknowledges the tension between high educational goals for young women and the expectation to be married and begin parenting:

> I think they (men) are more encouraged in seeking a career than the girls are. It's kind of ironic though that they encourage you to study up to undergraduate, and you become quite skilled but maybe not encouraged to have the career that you studied for, it's just they encourage you to study as such. And, of course you can continue on, but once you have the family it's very different. You're likely to have more responsibilities and maybe this is controversial but it's true, you have not one kid, but two kids, then three kids, and so on and if you have a number of children it's very difficult to still maintain a career actually. We do tend to have large families and that culture is still is quite prevalent in London among my relatives.… It's as soon as you finish your undergrad…. From a personal perspective, my relatives they all got married around 21, 22, so they are having children immediately after that. (Jennah, PhD graduate)

This issue was discussed in many of the interviews and illustrates some of the ways in which the Somali community in London is still grappling with gender politics over whether women should be able to prioritise the pursuit of higher education and consequent professional career over settling down and starting a family. Nadifah, now a laboratory research assistant came to London from Somalia at age 16 and had only a little education back home. With no primary-school attendance, she had entered education in her late-teenage years after only a short period of secondary education in Somalia, which she had understandably struggled to keep up with. After a long and complicated journey, she finally settled in London and almost immediately began attending a further education college, undertaking entry-level courses (equivalent to pre-GCSE). A remarkable amount of perseverance saw her steadily gain the necessary qualifications finally to reach university in her early twenties to start undergraduate studies. Education had been a major motivation for her and, because she had struggled so hard to achieve it, it was hugely

significant in her narrative. She described negotiating for the space to fulfil her education and resist the expectations from the others in her cultural group:

> Something was motivating me saying, 'I have to study. I have to go to university' but I had friends that would say to me, 'Nadifah, don't do this to yourself. You are getting older; you need to get married and have kids. This will not take you anywhere'. I'm like, 'It doesn't have to be like that. I can still get married. I can go to university. I can do whatever'. You cannot say, 'Do this or have your faith'; you can do both. You can do both and be able to go to university. (Nadifah)

Nadifah shows the ways in which she negotiated a delicate balance between the expectations of being academically successful and, at the same time, maintaining the power of family tradition. This tension was seen in several of the women's narratives and their grappling with these issues can be seen as a demonstration of their agency and autonomy as they wrangled possession of decisions regarding their future interest and long term desired goals.

Maryam, whose family had openly disagreed with her educational and career aspirations, described this experience as being 'in between', telling me how her (adopted) mother's family wanted her to settle down, whilst her geographically distant father was more keen for her to achieve academically. Maryam noted how Somali families were frequently concerned that for women there is a limited time span in which they are seen as highly marriageable:

> They use words like 'expired'…. (but) we're not fruit… so there's a lot of cultural rules – and because we have – I wouldn't say arranged marriage but people come and ask for your hand, if you will,... and the moment you've got a degree suddenly you're a good prospect, a good candidate. 'Oh she's got that degree' – it doesn't matter what you – as a person who you are, it's just, 'Oh you've got that'– and for me I'm very anti-arranged marriage. I wouldn't like it because… I'm an individual, and I have choices so I'll find my own spouse, thank you! (Maryam)

Maryam was not completely dismissive of the importance of accepted gender roles and showed cognisance of the way in which culture is perpetuated though family hierarchies, as well as the perceived threats to that culture that arise from migration. She noted that 'we have a system that we need protect', illustrating how she sees herself implicitly responsible in maintaining Somali cultural norms. Her negotiations in managing this balance between her own educational and professional aspirations and the demands of her family are illustrative of her agency.

As discussed in the literature review Chapter 4, Ahmad (2001) explores similar tensions in the Muslim South Asian community in Britain, whereby a cultural background of highly gendered patriarchal relations means that it has not always seen education as a valuable investment in a women's own personal or professional future. Instead, a good degree qualification is seen as an investment for her family. Ahmad (2001) and others describe how in South Asian Muslim migrant families a daughter's higher-level qualifications and resultant career can be seen to have other values that benefit the wider family, for example as an insurance policy, a fall-back in the case of the parents' ill-health. In addition, a daughter's qualifications can be seen as adding to her marriageable value, a form of 'prestigious capital' that enhances her prospects in the marriage market. She notes that this does not come without complications, arguing that high educational qualifications can be seen as 'a double bind for the parents: too little education and one could be "priced out of" the marriage market, too much education and one could 'go past their sell by date' (Ahmad 2001: 145; Bhopal 2011; Bagguley and Hussain 2016). This point was clearly echoed by Selma when she suggested that:

> A lot of the men as well are quite intimidated if you're educated, even if they're educated… I know it's not all Somali men but it's the idea that's held, you know, in the community that if a woman is educated, she's smarter than you or she's going to do better than you or she's going to make your life miserable because she's smart. It's ridiculous in a way but it's an actual held view within the community… men are intimidated by women who are more educated than they are or even on the same level, you know. Even if the

> man has a Master's, even if he has a PhD and a woman has a Master's they don't like that, they'd rather a couple of girls who would just had a high-school diploma. (Selma)

Somali Muslim young women are still fairly restricted when it comes to living alone and travelling without companions and, as a consequence, all but one participant still resided with their immediate or extended family. This is illustrated here by Mulki when discussing the type of concerns that parents may have about their daughters' lives at university. She noted that as long as they stayed at home to study, there was little problem:

> The thing that they would be a bit worried about was like residential and things like that… I think I had one in college and that was a residential in Oxford but because they understood that that was such a great university they were happy to let me go but I think if it was something like, 'Oh, we're going for a weekend in Paris,' they would have said, 'No way you're going'. (Mulki)

Mulki intimates here the gender-role expectations that are part of her culture, and also notes how she was involved in managing these 'gender struggles' (Bhopal 2011a:444), negotiating her relative freedom with her parents and thereby contributing to reconstructing the parameters of the gender norms regarding what is and is not acceptable in women's behaviour.

Warda who, at 22, was studying for a Master's degree in Science described how she, too, felt the societal pressure to settle down and how these contrasted with her own goals. Her quote indicates the tensions she felt, noting how this this was problematic for her and also how she negotiated the expectations for her gender alongside her own desire to travel:

> I had an opportunity to (travel)… present my work at a conference. But I didn't take it because I was like, I'm going to be by myself and I'm going to have to travel… I can't do that. Basically, within Islam, as a woman, if you don't have a male you can travel with… or a group of people, you can't go... If it is with a group of people you can go, but not by

> yourself, that's the thing. Travelling alone, doing things alone, living alone, that sort of stuff…. It's very challenging, actually, bringing that up… (Warda)

Discussing this dilemma and her family's concerns about her future, Warda weaves in her own goals whilst incorporating the controls that her culture determines. She said that her family were saying:

> 'You need to start thinking about not a family… for a partner who's there for you and can protect you when we're not around.'…. So it is a big thing that I think about now, whereas maybe six months ago if you would have asked me, I would have been… it's not on the table for me, … but now it is becoming a necessity…. But I'm so career and goal-focused, I would get married for necessity. Like, if I needed somebody, a chaperone to travel to places, go to conferences. (Warda)

Warda's story indicated how she is still strongly influenced by the expectations of the gender codes in her community, specifically the code of honour regarding single women's relative freedoms. To manage these expectations alongside her own goals, she surmises that she may have to take important life decisions in order to allow her to combine her ambitions to succeed in her field and concomitantly uphold the accepted gendered practices, thus both resisting and perpetuating the restrictions that are placed upon her.

Others were less keen to modify their goals and wanted to purse their careers without the pressure of a spouse and children holding them back, as they perceived it. Selma's narrative suggests that she was railing against the pressures from within her family and was set on carving out another life course:

> It is challenging trying to please the community and your parents and trying to please yourself and do what you want to do in your life.… I feel like the community, parents need to make things easier…. I told my parents I was going to do a Master's… I was applying a couple of days ago and my mother was like you should be more busy focusing on finding

somebody rather than this. (but) I'm going to live my life. I'm not going to be constrained by the idea that I could meet somebody and I shouldn't be in education. I'm not going to do that and if that's what you expect then you're surely mistaken. (Selma)

Selma felt that her mother, who had had an inconsistent experience of education and, having finally become a nurse, had had to give up her job to raise her family, should understand her ambitions. In conversation with her mother, she had told her:

> I was like 'you should understand out of all people on the planet, you should understand'. She was like I understand, I just want you to be happy, I just want to see you settled down. I'm 23. There's just so much time. Not to them, to them it's like it's approaching that big 25. (Selma)

Many of the women interviewed indicated how their mothers themselves were torn between their desire to meet with the social approval of their wider heritage community and their wish to support their daughters in their educational and career aspirations. Several of the participants noted the age of 25 as being something of a cut-off age by which it is believed a Somali woman should have moved into the realm of marriage and motherhood.

Ummi, who was 26 and studying for a Master's degree, found this belief restrictive and, in the interview, strongly expressed a desire to subvert the commonly accepted gendered expectations. She related how her family felt that her desire for higher education and consequent professional goals in life separated her from her heritage culture, making her 'Western', and her family expressed concern that becoming a parent after the age of 30 would mean that she would have little time to raise a large family. She described the struggles that she faced and how she asserted her agency over this important aspect of her life:

> I tell them 'I've got a five-year plan…' … I'm like, 'Dad. We're not back home where you get married at 17/18. Like here (in the United Kingdom) the average is, like, 30 something. People are getting married later on'. They're like, 'But you can't have kids

> then'. I'm like, 'Yes you can'. They're like, 'But you can only have one or two'. I'm like, 'Who is trying to have 10 kids anyway?' Do you know what I mean? So, it's kind of like, they still have that kind of back-home mentality and sometimes I get called Western for whatever reason and, like I forgot my culture. I get told that all the time – 'you're too career orientated'. They still have the mentality for back home. So, I think they just need to change that a bit… hopefully with time…. Obviously I'm going to try and keep my culture and stuff, things like talking my language and wearing my whatever, I'm going to keep that. But things like, in terms of living and stuff, I'm not living back home anymore so obviously I'm going to live in the time that I'm living. (Ummi)

Illustrated here is how the young women participants positioned themselves at the cusp of social change in their cultural community. Ummi and Selma's remonstrations with their parents indicate how they have assimilated the struggles and difficulties that they and their parents experienced into their own personal goals as young women in present-day British society. They use higher education as a form of capital to engage in negotiations on their futures to renegotiate the expectations upon them. In these scenarios, they can be seen to be resisting the stereotypes placed upon them for their gender and age and engaging in redefining the accepted gender roles, carving out identities that fulfil their own needs and desires whilst honouring their parents and community's expectations. Valentine, Sporton and Nielsen refer to this process as 'producing their own narratives of the self' (2009: 236). Takhar (2016) similarly observes among the young South Asian women in her study, the nuanced negotiations engaged in by her participants as they grappled with asserting their agency in response to familial expectations:

> What they have done through a self-realised agency is to bring about gradual social change by refusing to comply with dominant discourses. When we desire something we try by different means to get what we want and need in order to arrive at a self that is acceptable to us. (Takhar 2016: 46)

In these negotiations on access to higher education, the young women in this study demonstrated a strong sense of agency through their resistance and subversion of commonly held expectations regarding their roles as women and homemakers. Their engagement in higher education can be seen as a form of cultural capital that allowed them to confront and renegotiate these gendered expectations. They can be seen to be using higher education achievement as a lever, giving them access to a site of 'temporary liberties' (Thompson and Pihlaja 2018). Thompson and Pihlaja (2018) describe higher education as a space in which young Muslim women are able to act as adults, with a sense of autonomy not experienced in their families or their early schooling, a space in which, they suggest, they can foster their agency and sense of self. Nonetheless, these liberties were tempered with other challenges as they moved through their university lives, such as a range of discrimination. The following sections explore the experience of the participants in higher education from an intersectional perspective (Yuval Davis 2006, Bilge 2010, Ryan 2011) and then examines further the strategies that they draw upon to enable their success. The use of an intersectional lens enables us as researchers to see the way that identities are constructed and contested in various spaces and contexts in the lived experiences of black, Muslim women (Mirza 2012).

7.2 Being Black Muslim Women in the Academe

Black women in higher education are faced with a distinct set of challenges as discussed in chapter 4. For the participants of this study, being Black Somali Muslim women means that these challenges are compounded by a range of factors. Somali families in Britain face numerous structural challenges that have been explored in more depth in Chapter 2, downward social mobility; unemployment and housing issues; and the additional factors of racism and discrimination. The participants noted how these issues were brought into new light when transitioning into the university system. The women faced personal challenges relating to their own self-perception of their ability and belief in themselves as learners, as well as institutional challenges such as attitudes and behaviours and a lack of representation in their HEI.

When discussing transitions to university, the women talked about difficulties in managing their studies, learning new skills associated with undergraduate study and other academic challenges. For many, the biggest concerns that they faced were in regard to their identity as Black Muslim women.

Ambara, who is currently studying for a PhD, described the experience of transitioning to a higher education Russell Group institution and expressed how it was notably different from her school experience. Lecturers as well as students asked what she felt were personal questions about her religion and home background, which she felt stereotyped her. Talking about the transition to a university that was less diverse than her previous school, she found that the attitudes of her peers and her lecturers lacked cultural sensitivity:

> I was very fortunate to go to schools that had… amazing teachers.… It was very multicultural background as well… the teachers were very open minded… they were more knowledgeable about the world, about other people's cultures, they were very sensitive to all that. But when I transitioned to go into university, I felt like it was a little bit more different, so you know, the lectures were… let's say they were a bit more… difficult, I would say, in the sense that some of the certain views that they held, you know, like, I faced quite a bit of prejudice.… I could tell they hadn't come across many students who were from a BME background. (Ambara)

She told me how she sometimes felt the taint of their prejudice in the form of racist and sexist microaggressions; subtle, sometimes almost imperceptible prejudices and put-downs (Solórzano 1998; Bernard 2017; Arbouin 2018). Solórzano employed critical race theory to explain how 'it is in private conversations and interactions that racism and sexism can exist in subtle and covert ways in the form of microaggressions' (Solórzano 1998: 124) against students of colour. Barnard (2017: 82) describes these as 'the commonplace verbal and behavioural racial slurs that subtly communicated to me that I did not belong, and relegated me to a subordinate status'.

Ambara described how she experienced such encounters within her university studies specifically from the teaching staff and how she felt that she responded:

> I felt that I was treated differently at time and I wondered 'how could you hold such prejudiced views about people's cultures', you know, and… basically you should be smarter than to believe what's written in the media… And just in general the way that the, you know, the way that they sort of deal with you as opposed to other people.

Ambara further described her perceptions, discussing how she is impelled to mediate her behaviours to present a version of a 'good' Muslim woman and resist the stigma and negate the negative stereotypes attributed in the West to Muslims (Ryan 2011). She stated how she often felt the weight of others' opinions:

> You see it a lot…. So I had to grit my teeth, and sort of just… well – it makes you a lot more aware of yourself, you know, because you think… in that instance you're not only representing yourself but you're also representing like a whole community of people, possibly even the whole country at the time, you know? Sometimes it feels that way, so you have to carry yourself, you know, very highly and I often tell myself, there's no use in getting, you know, angry about it and annoyed about it, because you don't want to feed certain stereotypes that people have… people have a lot of stereotypes in mind when they meet you and when they see you and sometimes they make, the off-kind of joke here and there… And so, I have to sort of mentally check myself all the time, whenever I go through these experiences I just tell myself, 'You know what? Just give them the benefit of the doubt and just, you know, maybe they just don't know or maybe they, you know, weren't brought up to be more open minded or whatever', but it's up to you to change their mind, so I sort of try to deal with things very passively and I sort of just, you know? If they make a comment, you know, I will try and educate them rather or I let them know and, so I just try to carry myself… (Ambara)

Ambara's description of this experience illustrates how she perceives herself in these contexts as the visible representation of Black Somali women in diaspora – the markers of her identity suggesting an embodied intersectionality (Mirza 2012). Rather than succumbing to the power relationships at play, she can be viewed as resisting their microaggressions by confronting the stereotypes that limit her aspirations, disallowing them to alter her focus on her goals. She is at once passive and assertive, stating 'I try to deal things passively'; however, she says, 'I will try and educate them', suggesting that she does not allow these discriminations to pass. Instead, she confronts them, sensitively but not submissively. By the act of forging a path in higher education and even further to doctorate studies she demonstrates her strong sense of agency and active determination to overcome some of the values and disadvantages facing her and thereby to navigate better prospects and outcomes for herself and family.

Samia, who holds a degree in Business, described how she felt that her lecturers seemed surprised when she asked many questions and sought advice. She felt that her dress and identity as a Muslim woman suggested to others a passiveness that she did not succumb to:

> People think that you're submissive… people project all these things onto you. It's difficult trying to navigate that. It's quite tiring... I don't want to be all like philosophical, but it would just be good if… if you just weren't judged on your appearance, because you just have to constantly work to break that stereotype, and you're always responding to that. Everything you do is trying to challenge that. (Samia)

Other participants related similar experiences of discrimination and micro-aggression in their higher education and how these were, at times, difficult to respond to, leaving them feeling powerless. Masters student Khadra described:

> Well, it's difficult to deal with because it's never overtly done. People talk about microaggressions…. It's very subtle, and so it's your word against another person's word who's probably more senior than you and has a bit more clout. So you can never fully

> pinpoint what it is. And it's a feeling that you get, and it's hard to kind of actually deal with that. That's maybe something that's more structural, I don't know… so it's very often difficult to deal with. I think it's very hard to kind of – I mean, if you had a grievance against someone, it never ever goes in your favour and you need all this evidence, and you can't really prove it unless you have like a recording kit with you and a camera.…You have anger towards the situation but you feel like you can't really change it. (Khadra)

Pérez Huber and Solórzano (2015) explore the impact of such racialised microaggressions on those subjected to them, arguing that 'the effects are cumulative, taking a toll on the bodies, minds, and spirits' of those they are directed at, adding that they 'found that there were negative psychological and physiological effects of microaggressions' (Pérez Huber and Solórzano 2015: 310). These are the effects that Ambara, Samia and Khadra describe above, noting the frustration, despair and weariness at having to encounter these reductive perceptions of their being.

Despite the negative encounters that the women in this study experienced in their higher education studies, they showed a clear determination not to be swayed in their ambitions and were undeterred from achieving their goals. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 4, Mirza (2006) reports a similar determination amongst the young African Caribbean women in her research, stating that, 'despite the apparent contradictions between the persistent marginalisation of black women in higher education', they maintain a desire to achieve and to make a difference to their lives (2006: 101). Showing a strong sense of agency and autonomy, the participants in my study carved out a space for themselves in the echelons of higher education despite the often-adverse circumstances.

A key theme in the interviews was the strength derived from forming social networks focused on education, both within and out of university, specifically through organisations and groups that placed being Somali at the fore.

7.3 Visibility and Belonging: Building networks

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 3, it is important for minority groups to have sense of visibility in their places of study and work in in order to engender a sense of belonging. Role models who are of similar ethnic identity can promote these feeling of fitting in and support aspirations. In the interviews, the subject often arose regarding the importance of visibility and representation in these spaces hitherto unoccupied by Somali British women. As discussed in the analysis in Chapter 6, the women participants, as students, had faced a dearth of role models in teaching and mentoring roles who had a Somali background.

Mirza (2006: 137), writing about the experience of Black women in higher education, states that 'being a body "out of place" has emotional and psychological costs to the bearer of that difference'. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 3 and analysis in Chapter 6, it is important for minority groups to have sense of visibility in their places of study and work in order to engender a sense of belonging. Role models who are of similar ethnic identity can promote a feeling of fitting in and support aspirations. This was acknowledged as an issue for many of the women whom I spoke to, who had rarely encountered any Somalis in their schools in positions of authority. Mirza (2009) notes that this is exacerbated for all Black students in higher education, where Black Minority Ethnic staff make up only 2.5% of those working in the sector and only 1.6% are Black women. In these spaces students' need for a sense of belonging and acceptance is heightened and one place where they can look for meaningful connections is among their peers.

A discussion of habitus is relevant here, as social space is a 'contested and dynamic entity' (Law et al. 2004) and, as Law (2004: 51) further posits, 'over time through processes of historical sedimentation, certain types of bodies are designated as being the 'natural' occupants of specific spaces'. Puwar (2004) and Mirza (2009) both emphasise that visibility does not equate to full inclusion or acceptance, and further that 'just being there' is not enough (Mirza 2009: 126). However, visibility and collective identities are a means to realise networks and to build valuable

social capital. In response to the research questions regarding the resources and strategies used by the participants to build social capital, this section will explore the value of societies and organisations that they used that aided their feelings of visibility and belonging and that were one step towards realising social and cultural capital.

Takhar (2013) examines the way in which South Asian women's organisations became critical spaces that 'provided for participation, mobilisation and engagement with power structures' Takhar (2013: 198). This approach is thus the starting point for the following discussion. As the participants in this study moved into the much larger institutions that make up the London-based universities, although there were some young Somali students like themselves the size of the institutions meant that their contemporaries could be disparately placed and difficult to identity. However, a theme emerging from the interviews was the formation of social networks and societies that had links to Somali cultural and political life and their benefits in increasing a sense of participation and visibility. This section examines the value of these groups and societies at university and further explores the influence of other associations for Somali interests, specifically those with educational aims, as linked to the participants' experiences and the value of building such social networking forums.

During the interviews the subject often arose of the importance of visibility and representation in spaces hitherto unoccupied by Somali women. When discussing the transition to university life, some of the participants talked of the loneliness that came with that and the initial feelings of isolation and anxiety. Seeing others whom one can identify with can help to reinforce a sense of belonging. In discussions in the interviews in my study, the subject of Somali Student Societies was raised and participants expressed how they are an important space for them, manifesting as a visibility, indicating that they were present and included within the institution.

A key finding that emerged was that although in their individual courses they might not encounter many other young Somalis, the Somalis society events were a chance to bring students together from all across the university, thus demonstrating the strength of their presence. The

societies brought people together for a variety of activities, such as social events that included cultural evenings with Somali poets, musicians and storytellers and charity evenings, also political and careers events. Some events were specifically for networking and meeting others from professions. For example, one was specifically for health professionals and those wanting to build careers in the sector. Some events incorporated other political organisations that were related to the Somali community, for example The Anti-Tribalism movement (https://theatm.org/) and the Worldwide Somali Students and Professionals (http://worldwidesomalistudents.com/). Mulki, who was central to the formation of the Somali students society at her university, described some of the activities they held:

> We held a meet and greet at the beginning of the year and we had a games night. Then we also had had someone who is campaigning for like Anti-Tribalism Movement and things like that…. We had a networking event where we brought in Somali professionals from the various industries reflected by the university… and people were able to go up and speak to professionals and get their contact details and just network like however they wanted… also there was a charity event so there was like a month-long charity event where it was all the Somali societies within London that got together and they just basically had quiz nights, they had a big auction night, they had a variety of different events all over one month to raise money for a hospital back home. (Mulki)

Cross-university events were also held, and several participants talked about going to other universities to join in. Samia talked about the importance of the visibility that came from joining the Somali Society:

> When I was in primary school, there didn't seem to be many Somali students doing things. But now when I think about it, I feel like maybe they were there, it's just that we weren't exposed. And now going to university… seeing them a lot more through the Somali Society and things like that, I feel like there's more out there. (Samia).

Zayneb, who worked part time for a community organisation supporting the local Somali population, also discussed the importance to her of seeing Somalis in a range of courses and professions:

> I'd never really seen Somalis in different professions… we wouldn't see role models like that and it was difficult. Even now it's still scarce so when we've had the events where all the universities came together and we would speak to people, 'What do you do? What are you doing?'… and you'd see all these people at university or in work and doing various things and actually successful, it was motivating for me and it inspired me and it showed me, well, there's others… (Zayneb)

Master's student Warda expressed a similar sentiment. Talking about the events held by the Somali society in her central London university that were related to professional development, she noted the potential that was manifested was inspirational:

> I think whenever I've gone, I'm always inspired, honestly, because you see people that are in either different fields or you see people who are in the fields that you really want to be in. You see people who have progressed into their careers, and then you see the possibilities. Through every Somali person there, you see a possibility, and you see the possibility of yourself, as well. It's obviously very different from seeing somebody else from other races In these positions because I feel like all Somalis have, culturally, the same things that occur in their households, as in restrictions or things that you can or can't do, especially when I see women who have done it…. (Warda).

Ummi viewed the opportunity to network, observe and celebrate other's areas of achievement to be a highly valuable aspect of the Somali Student Societies:

> I think just having a voice.., kind of like, having your own narrative, not letting other people, say who you are or what you are, … I think having that, kind of like… not letting people decide who we are and coming together and talking about our achievements and

> not letting other people, kind of like, take away from us or letting other people talk about us as if it's just like, 'Oh, the one in a few'. There's actually, a lot of people that I have met at my university who were doing so many other things…. So many people I met in my (student) society who were doing so much with their life and that's not the Somalis you see in the news. The Somalis you see in the news are the ones who are in gangs or in prison… we're sick and tired of that to be honest. So, it's kind of like coming together and just trying to have something positive to celebrate. To celebrate us. (Ummi)

It was during one of these events that Warda, quoted above, met a Somali women doctoral graduate and science researcher, and asked her to be her mentor as this individual was working in a similar field to her studies. This proved to be an important relationship for her. The individual in question was in fact already working as a mentor at an educational mentoring organisation. Of the women interviewed, two were involved in an educational mentoring scheme for young Somalis and one had been a mentee. This organisation operates, they state, to empower young people, exposing them to a network of positive Somali role models, to offer opportunities to them to work in the public sphere, leading to greater job opportunities. They ran various events, for example the one that I attended, to which young people are invited to hear from a range of speakers from various professions about their career journeys, whilst giving advice on how to achieve and succeed. They also set up mentoring programmes that run for five years at a time, matching young people with professionals who can support them in their endeavours. On their books are men and women from the Somali diaspora in London who include a lawyer, a solicitor, several engineers – both men and women – scientists, bankers, a film director, researchers and journalists.

One of the young women participants (not named to preserve anonymity) involved in the development of this educational mentoring organisation described how she felt the programme was effective:

> It is all about getting young people better prepared for the career sector, opening up opportunities, so it's not even just about, on a professional level, it is all about character development as well. But then, it's a spiral, so those who have been mentees, become mentors for the next generation, so it's about uplifting each other…

She elaborated on this, noting how the very recent migration of Somalis to the United Kingdom and their socioeconomic situation meant that there was not a huge resource of people to connect with to build valuable social and cultural capital, which she recognised as valuable in achieving, both educationally and professionally:

> Well, because they are first- or second-generation migrants, so they are probably the first generation to go to university. Whereas, for others, their peers, their parents went to university, or they knew someone…. For these people (who developed the mentoring organisation) it was never their parents saying to them, 'Oh, I know so and so, who can get you a job in the bank,' or something like that. So, they felt, 'Okay, we have done our degree, but we don't have those networks'…. Everyone says that your network is your net worth, and it opens a lot of doors for you but because they were from this migrant community, and they weren't exposed to professionals, it was very hard for them to break that barrier…. What I realised was there are so many young Somali professionals working in London, but there is just this huge divide, because they are not necessarily in that young person's family, but there are young Somalis that are doing a lot of amazing work. So (this organisation) is literally a platform that brings the young Somalis and Somali professionals together. And, when I spoke to the Somali professionals as well, they were saying, 'I would love to be able to help other Somalis, but I don't know how to approach them'….

In this way, such an organisation does the job of helping to build networks and mobilise social capital by directly linking young people from the Somali community to those in a range of respected professions, setting them up with mentors who can later be their advocates, providing

them with references and highlighting opportunities to access their goals. Puwar (2004) suggests that all people need advocates or mentors. Quoting Bourdieu, she suggests that advocates are a person's 'most powerful protectors' (2004: 91). Puwar later notes that:

> In order to rise in hierarchies those who don't fit the traditional somatic norm in the higher echelons of the public realm, that is, women and racialized minorities most especially, need advocates. Thus a sponsor or mentor can facilitate this boundary crossing.... Visibility is crucial to all the professions: it is necessary for one to be known amongst one's peers for opportunities to be opened up. (Puwar 2004: 121)

Puwar indicates here the potential for such advocacy and mentoring to enhance and facilitate upward social mobility. I would argue that, in this context, mentors have the power to be a source of valuable social and cultural capital, linking mentees to others in the wider social sphere and facilitating access to resources to aid their professional development and engender a sense of belonging in that space. The Somali Student Societies can be viewed as having an important role in promoting bridging capital, which, as discussed in the literature review in Chapter 3, links people across social groupings. Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo (2015) note how bridging capital for migrant communities can facilitate the 'flow of valuable information' and provide access to others with 'more resources and knowledge' (p.8). Such networks increase cultural capital, specifically in the form of imparting strategies for 'how to get on': this is one of the main outputs from the mentoring organisation discussed above. Bhopal (2011), discussing the value of the student support network for British Indian women in HEIs, suggests that mutual support groups offer 'network capital' that is highly valuable and can contribute to increased participation in university life, benefiting achievement and further ensuring success (Bhopal 2011: 530).

In discussing with the participants the role of Somali Student Societies and related organisations, the role of social media was often raised. Many of the student societies promote their events and activities on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. One of the participants, who was central

to the formation of the educational mentoring programme, prior to this had been involved in a major research project on Somali political and civic engagement in London. It was through her membership of the Worldwide Somali Student and Professionals Facebook community that she had approached and been encouraged to apply to be a researcher on that project, resulting in a widely published report. Being part of this project had been an important stepping-stone for her and, as she saw it, it 'opened more doors for me'. This chain of organisational links thus develops into a closer network that operates across time and space to link individuals who might never encounter one another in physical space. Keles (2015) explores the use of the internet by migrants to communicate and share information across boundaries. He argues that it provides a space for them to communicate virtually with others who may not share physical proximity, contributing to:

> building and constructing a sense of community that may contribute to building mutual benefits, reciprocal trust, strengthening pre-migration and new social ties and the exchange of information and opinions.… As a result of this process diasporic individuals may share and accumulate social capital and mobilise individuals and communities for social, economic and political benefits in their settlement country and beyond. (Keles 2015: 105)

Najiyah works for a financial organisation in a well-known and prestigious office building in the 'secondary central business district of London'. In her role as community development co-ordinator, she orchestrated a one-day professional development event specifically for young Somalis to enhance their job application, CV writing and interview skills, and it took place in this building. The event was promoted entirely through social media that had Somali identity at their core. She expressed the powerful potential for such platforms to draw people in from diverse regions and across boundaries of time and space:

> What was amazing was that some people turned up from like Leicester and Birmingham because it was all promoted on social media. It was really powerful…. This was a way to

> help young people like myself, who are struggling, who don't necessarily know how to put together a really kind of professional CV. Just simple things that get your foot in the door. (Najiyah)

This seemed to be a particularly empowering act, a strategy that bought young people from a range of locations, all of Somali origin, into a space that might otherwise feel precluded to them and, specifically, to see Najiyah herself, with a similar background and with whom they could identify, working there as a visible individual.

There are, of course, limitations to social media as form of social capital; it can be exclusive, open only to those who have access to computers and broadband and are computer literate (Keles 2015); however, they are an increasingly important means to develop networks, enhance a sense of community, share information and increase political and activist participation. The recent events in May 2020 arising from the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis at the hands of the police and the consequent protests, synchronised through the Black Lives Matter movement, are testament to the power of social media to coordinate and synthesise a collective response to injustice.

The societies and organisations discussed above are not specifically related to women, in their remit, and most of the activities and events organised are not gender specific; however, they are a forum where women from the Somali community can interact and network with other women in public space and where they can demonstrate their visibility, engagement and agency. All the Somali-based events that I attended during my research were attended at least equally and often by a majority of women. At the university where I teach, the Somali Student Society organised an event on female circumcision at which the panel comprised health workers and activists from the Somali community. The events was well attended and the lecture theatre was full of women from all disciplines across the university. This was an important forum for the discussion of an issue that is both complex and frequently difficult to discuss, and which is of great relevance to

the women in this community. Another panel event that took place in a University of London premises was promoted though Somali Student Societies using social media and focused on the changing roles of women in the Somali community in diaspora. It was similarly well attended, the majority of attendees being women.

These forums can be seen to be as important locations for increasing visibility, building a sense of belonging and, most significantly, creating bridging social capital. Within the research interviews they emerged as a valuable strategy to create a space in which the young women in the study could network and mobilise resources. These societies and the related organisations that grew from their association have the potential to promote a sense of visibility and belonging in spaces that might otherwise feel exclusive to young Somalis. They also have the power to promote the building of social capital though fostering supportive networks and associations and, in the long term, to provide opportunities that can facilitate the upward social mobility of a currently marginalised group.

7.4 Summary

This chapter has attempted to illustrate the complex array of factors that might challenge young British Somali women in London in the pursuit of their goals in higher education and beyond, and the strategies they utilised to overcome these obstacles. Although the participants grappled with their family's concerns over their expected gender roles as they moved into adulthood, they were able to use their agency, enhanced through their engagement in higher education as a negotiating tool in decision making about their futures allowing them to secure and fulfil their own aspirations. In this respect they can be seen to redefining identities and notions of the British Somali womanhood. Other challenges faced in higher education included their experiencing intersectional oppressions including micro-aggressions levied at them owing to their gender, religion and ethnicity. Whilst these experiences 'othered them' they were able to counter these discriminations through a strong sense of agency and belief in the importance of their qualifications in contributing to social change. As Mirza (2009:129) notes in her study 'black

women appear to seek social transformation through educational change', and this is arguably the case here, where the participants maintained a strong vision of their future goals a despite the challenges facing them. The multiple aspects of their identities as black, Muslim women of refugee backgrounds could have seen them marginalised in various spaces and places but they have utilised their agency creating legitimacy for themselves in the realm of higher education (Mirza 2012). Using strategies such as their links to Somali Student Societies, associations with educational mentoring programmes and social media with Somali concerns at their fore, they have been able to increase their visibility and build positive associational networks. These networks can be seen to have been significant in building social capital for them and the communities in which they live, acting as valuable bridging social capital by providing access to 'information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle' (Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo 2015: 8).

The following chapter explores how the young women participants, whist engaged in creating new aspects of their identities as educated British Somali women but were still strongly committed to the Somali aspects of their identities. It further examines the meaning of their education to their identity and how they are committed to using the skills they have acquired in contributing to advancement in their heritage culture at home here in the UK and 'back home' in Somalia.

Chapter 8: **Navigating Identities, Power and Agency**

This chapter explores the themes of identity and how the participants navigated their identity in light of their educational experiences.

It addresses the research question asking how the young British–Somali women participants in this study framed their identities as they traversed the varied contexts from education into the wider social environment. It further examines the impact that their higher education experiences have had on their identity and future aspirations. Finally, it explores the important position that these participants have attained as pathfinders for a younger generation of young British–Somalis.

8.1 Kaleidoscopic Diasporic Identities

The term ‘kaleidoscopic identities’ refers to the shifting patterns and perceptions related through the narratives when discussing the participants’ identity. Identities are not inert: Bhopal and Preston (2012: 1) suggest that concepts of self are not static, rather that identities are ‘fragmented, fragile even, yet constantly evolving through multiple engagements and relationships in society’ and, further, that ‘identities is a journey, one that changes through different times in history and transforms though different spaces’. These concepts are central to this chapter as it seeks to examine the ways in which the participants’ identities are shaped, negotiated and modified through their experiences in and through higher education. Central to this exploration is the use of an intersectional lens, which enables us to understand how the women in this study experienced the multiple and shifting aspects of their identities – as refugees, as women of colour, as Muslim women, and as British–Somalis – and how these contribute to framing their identities. The following section will examine the way in which the participants grappled with their heritage and negotiated their identities in light of their educational experiences.

In speaking to the women in the study about their perceptions of themselves, it was clear that they were grappling with varied aspects of their identity: with their perceptions and experiences as Black, as African, as British–Somali and as women. Identity, for many, was also intricately tied to their religion as Muslim women and to the wearing of the *hijab*. Discussion with the participants indicated varying degrees of importance in how these relational characteristics were regarded. What was apparent in these shifting identities was the importance of context, age and place.

In discussion with secondary-school teacher Selma, she told me that 'Obviously I'm a Somali and I feel like that's a huge part of who I am… at home culture comes first', but she later notes that 'It is just as important as being British'. In these quotes, she illustrates clearly the duality of her identity as just one of many planes of intersection.

For many of the women, assimilating varied aspects of cultural identity was, I would argue, an ongoing process. Maryam, a staff nurse, illustrated the complexities of this in the following discussion:

> I would say I'm British influenced, I don't consider myself fully Somali, I'm adapted to being here. I guess it's important you know who you are and where you come from, but you have to… integrate into a different community. You can't say – 'Oh I'm only a Somali' – to be a Somali is to be proud… you're not ashamed of where you're from, you understand your nationality, you understand your culture, your food. It doesn't mean you have to completely integrate… you have to have a balance and I think the only thing that I say I'm proud of is – I know where I am and who I am and that's not going to change. (Maryam)

As indicated in her statement, Maryam is engaging with the components of her identity and how to mediate her notions of being both British and Somali. These nuances in how the young women perceived themselves illustrate clearly the complexity of identity for young British–Somali

women, who may have a strong cultural heritage to which they wish to stay connected, whilst wishing to be fully recognised as British. Like the Muslim women participants in Mirza's (2013 research, my interviewees frequently were similarly 'rooted in their ethnic culture and religious identity through attachments to place, which was expressed through language, dialect, food, memories and family' (Mirza 2013: 8).

For some of the young women, their perceptions of their cultural identity had shifted over time, demonstrating how maturity had enabled them to contemplate more fully their understanding of their heritage identity and its relevance in their lives. Hana, a trainee teacher, described this:

> Our culture dictates so much of our life because there's certain ways we do everything so that's why it's a strong part of my identity and a strong part of who I am so I think it dictates quite a lot… to the extent that when I walk down the street and there's people that probably have no like family relation to me but because I always see them, they'll all like hug me and like say, 'Oh hi, how are you? How's everything going?' And they're probably just, I don't know, probably just people I might see once in a blue moon. (Hana)

In this respect, Hana demonstrates the importance of a sense of belonging that comes from being a visible member of a minority ethnic community, yet she shows a strong consciousness of the multiplicities of her identity. When talking about how she wants her nieces and nephews to feel proud of their Somali identity, Hana suggests that:

> I want them to be proud of who they are and be proud of where they came from and where their parents came from… I'm British and I'm Somali but those are both really big, big parts of who I am so I want people to not just like, sweep the Somali part under the rug. Because I've seen a lot of people when you say to them, 'Where are you from?' and they're like, 'I'm British'. And they just throw the Somali part away. You can be both. You can do amazing things by being both. (Hana)

Yasmiin also noted how, with age, she had come to feel increasingly strongly about her Somali heritage and identity, and that this was reinforced by her perception of being othered specifically, she noted, as she graduated from her neighbourhood area of home and school into the workplace:

> I think after 18, it's become very important. Before that I saw myself more as English.... Like before, whenever someone asked me, 'Are you Somali?' The first think I would be like, 'I am British–Somali'. I will try to bring up my British side more but now it's just like, 'Yeah, I am Somali'…. I feel like ever since I started to work and started going out there like more, ever since I left education, there's so much stuff that reminds you that you're not an English person. You don't sort of fit in especially in the workplace and in the work culture and stuff like that. I think that's when I started to feel so lost and I was like, 'Okay, I don't fit in here. These people don't look like me'. Growing up in (East London) was different, you know? It's a multicultural area but when you go to work in the inner-city, you're like, 'Okay, I don't speak like these people'. When they ask me, 'How was your weekend?' it's totally different from how their weekend was. (Yasmiin)

In this narrative, Yasmiin notably slips between the use of the terms 'British' and 'English', signifying another aspect to her understanding of belonging within these two realms. She uses the term 'British' as more widely encompassing concept, including ethnic minorities, and considers the concept of 'Englishness' as decidedly more exclusive: a group that seems more closed to access and belonging.

Yasmiin's feeling of otherness and discrimination was exacerbated when she was subjected to an Islamophobic attack on a London bus:

> It was all over the news… a guy spat at me because I was wearing the scarf… he was racially abusive and shouted Islamophobic things and I think that was when I was like, 'ok I do not belong here'. (Yasmiin)

As indicated in the literature review, Islamophobia in the United Kingdom has become more perceptible in the past few years. A Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) (2018) report notes that Islamophobic attacks are on the rise, perpetuated by the culture of hatred associated with Brexit and the rhetoric of xenophobia, and that this has increased the vulnerability of those who are visibly othered.

This violent attack had a marked effect on Yasmiin's feelings of security and also on her sense of belonging and acceptance: however, in no way did it lessen her sense of agency in her life or call into question her wearing of the *hijab*. Rather, it reinforced her belief that she needed to immerse herself in Somali civic life and further promote the integration of Somalis into British society. Ryan (2011) discusses how, 'within the context of stigmatisation, individuals may increasingly turn to a form of collective belonging as a source of support, security and strength' (Ryan 2011: 1051). This interpretation resonates with Yasmiin's response in this context. As Yuval-Davis (2011: 15) suggests, 'people's constructions of themselves and their identities becomes more central the more threatened and the less secure they become', and this is apparent in the case of Yasmiin, who directly related her decision to become involved in several projects that placed being Somali at their core to her experience of this racist attack.

Following the attack, Yasmiin first began working as a researcher on an international project concerned with Somali political and civic engagement in Europe, a role that lead to her becoming a central figure in the creation of an educational and professional mentoring programme for young Somali people. These actions and associations helped Yasmiin to shore up her identity, as well as proactively to support her heritage community. The goals and benefits of such mentoring organisations and other networks and their relevance to the integration and professional development of young Somalis in London have been discussed in greater depth in Chapter 7.

Ambara, a PhD student, noted how her heritage and culture were an important facet of her identity, but she was highly cognisant of the underlying negative stereotypes that pervade media perceptions of Somalis:

> It's very important to me. I'm very into my culture. I think we have a very rich history that is often ignored by people. And we're sort of painted all in one brush I think. So, you know, because of recent events and things like that, what the media portray, that sort of paints an image of us in people's minds, but I studied about the history and our culture and the ways of Somali people… it's important to know your roots and the where you come from. (Ambara)

Although aware of the negativity addressed to refugees and Somalis in particular, Ambara demonstrates how her heritage is fundamental to her identity and something that she feels, like Yasmiin above, that needs reinforcing. In addition, she infers that what is needed is exposure to positive aspects of Somali life and positive role models to counteract the negative imagery.

Many of the women felt strongly about their identities as Somali, but some felt that their religious identity as Muslims was of similar importance in framing their perceptions of themselves, as well as in influencing the perceptions of others. This section examines the meaning of the *hijab* to these young women and their perceptions of its importance to their identity.

8.2 Religiosity and Wearing the *Hijab*

Of all the women interviewed, including the key informants, only one did not currently wear the headscarf or *hijab*; however, there was a wide range of styles and interpretations of this outfit. Some wore the full *jilbaab* or *abeya*, a long, loose, flowing black robe that covers the wearer from head to foot, whilst some wore a full-length gown and headscarf in varied colours and others had just a headscarf over their hair, worn with essentially Western-style clothing. This variation is seen in other Somali communities in diaspora (Akou 2004; Abdi 2015), but the key similarity is that the head and hair are covered.

Bilge (2010) has problematised the significance of this religious dress code, suggesting that the wearing of the veil holds 'multiple and shifting meanings', as does a woman's motivation for wearing it (Bilge 2010: 14). Frequently regarded by Western media as a symbol of oppression and its wearers as 'unconscious agents of their own manipulation' (Bilge (2010: 17), authors such as Bilge (2010) and Ryan (2011) have shown that it does not preclude the wearer from free will and agency. Rather, Bilge (2010) argues that wearing the veil can be seen as a symbolic act of resistance to Western ideology and hegemony. Simultaneously, it is argued that, for Muslim women living in diaspora, wearing the *hijab* connects them to others, engendering a sense of belonging to a frequently marginalised community and displaying clearly to others their 'corporeal group identity' (Ryan 2011: 1057). As Tarlo (2007) notes, 'for many women the adoption of *hijab* transforms not only their sense of self but also their relationship to others and the wider environment. To this extent it becomes possible to speak of the agency of *hijab* in people's lives' (Tarlo 2007: 132). Therefore, to pay attention to the voices of those who wear the veil it is important to understand its meaning, as this has been frequently neglected in the discourse (Bilge 2010; Ryan 2011).

Most participants in this study considered their belief in Islam and the consequent wearing of the *hijab* as a fundamental aspect of their identity and experience. Many spoke about their faith freely in reference to various questions and felt that religion had been a guiding principle in their success. They also spoke a great deal about the wearing of the *hijab* and its impact on their identity – both how it was important to their own self-perception and also with strong awareness of how it impacted on how others perceived them.

In the context of this research, I use the terms *hijab* or headscarf interchangeably and generically to refer to the range of garments worn, always including a head covering and commonly accompanied by a full-length dress covering the arms and shoulders. Historically, the *hijab* has not always been worn by women in Somalia. Following Independence and the political coup led by Siad Barre in 1969, in the 1970s Somalia took a liberal approach to women's dress. Many

participants told me that they had seen pictures of their parents back home with 'natural' afro haircuts and Western clothing. Najiyah described the style of clothing and haircut that her mother wore in the 1970s as 'Afrocentric'. She expanded, stating that, in contrast, even women's hair was now seen as something to be controlled: 'Every time I have my hair in its natural state, my mum is, like, "Can't you just straighten it?"' (Najiyah).

Many noted an increased focus on Islam and religiosity amongst Somalis, both at home and in diaspora, which started in the period of the civil wars in the early 1990s and continued, reflected in the emphasis on women wearing the *hijab*. Ambara talked about her family becoming 'more religiously aware, culturally aware' during this period and into their resettlement.

All the women interviewed described starting to wear the *hijab* between the ages of 10 to 15 years, and they gave varied reasons. Some noted how they felt it had just happened, seemingly without conscious decision: like a natural occurrence. Sumaya told me that she could not remember when she started wearing the *hijab*:

> I don't really know when it started, I've been wearing it since I was really young, it's just like wearing a coat, it's something you wear outside. (Sumaya)

Nasra similarly noted this apparently seamless transition:

> My sister was in college, or she was starting college, my elder sister, and she decided to wear it. And, we were all just close, so she wore it and we were like, 'Okay, we're all going to wear it'. So, we all just started, my sisters, one was in Year 8, I was in Year 9 and then the other was in Year 11, so it just happened. (Nasra)

These quotes suggest what can be described as a sense of casual normalisation regarding the wearing of this powerful signifier of religious observance (Ryan 2011), underplaying its significance to its audience. Many of the participants, however, indicated an element of conscious choice in their decision to begin wearing the *hijab*. Najiyah described the decision-making regarding at what age her and her sisters would begin wearing the *hijab*:

> I think my mum never– she didn't pressurise me, but she wanted me to get used to wearing it because I think there's that fear that 'she will never wear it'… so she really encouraged me and at first, I wasn't resentful… but I just felt like, 'I don't want to wear it. Why do I have to wear it now? I'll wear it one day. But then one day I kind of just thought, you know what? I'll wear it now, you know? Because my mum's not a forceful person. She made good points and things like that so I wore it (and it) became comfortable. (Najiyah)

She further notes how she sometimes 'wore it backwards' in the more trendy and fashionable style sometimes seen among young, more Westernised Muslim women.

Others noted the subtle negotiations over whether and when to begin wearing the *hijab*. Ambara, for example, told me:

> Yeah, so with the hijab… because my parents were quite… liberal in the sense that they knew that it's important for everybody to have a choice, so they never ever, you know, told us that you had to wear it… if anything they would teach us the reasons why we should wear it, and then it was, the choice was up to us, so it was whenever we were ready to wear it. (Ambara)

Selma similarly indicated her own involvement in the decision to begin wearing the headscarf that she had from her parents:

> I've worn the hijab I think since I was about 12, so when I started secondary school, I started wearing it then out of choice. My mother was like you can wear it when you're ready because in our religion you don't have to wear it before you're 15…. new school, new move, I might as well do it now. (Selma)

Expanding further on this, she stated that:

> It's like I feel very exposed if I go outside without it.… Nobody forces me but I just don't think I could ever walk outside without it. I mean sometimes, yeah, it feels nice when I

> take it off and I feel the breeze on my arms, you know, but it's a choice and it's something that I enjoy wearing, yeah, definitely. (Selma)

For many of the participants, the decision to wear the *hijab* was primarily as a mark of their religious and/or cultural observance, and they indicated their agency within the decision to wear it. In the interviews, it was further indicated how the wearing the *hijab* was an outward signifier of their modesty and a symbolic modifier of behaviour that was closely aligned to their Islamic beliefs and to their identity. Sumaya demonstrated this explicitly, stating: 'I feel like if I didn't wear a hijab I would be more wild' (Sumaya). Najiyah described similarly how the wearing of *hijab* was an intricate part of her and also the outward expression of her personhood:

> It is a part of who I am I think, because my religion is part of who I am… being modest like is definitely part of who I am but I also think it's about how you behave. It's also about how you carry yourself, it's about how you articulate yourself to others. (Najiyah)

Ilhan suggested that it was a symbolic indication of her religious observance and practices, but noted how that religious observance visibly represented her separation from the majority at her university, symbolically demonstrating the constraints on her behaviour that her religiosity demanded. She stated:

> I didn't feel excluded because of my faith but I know that there are certain things I cannot do… I couldn't get involved in certain things. (Ilhan)

Some participants saw it more critically as a form of control, specifically indicating how religious and cultural laws were upheld through the policing of women's bodies. Jennah, who wore an informal version of the headscarf, suggested that:

> Yes, they (Somalis) just love the exterior, very little about the spiritual interior things, it's about how you appear and especially very much focused on the female how she looks… I

think this is true in the way that girls are treated differently compared to the boys in Somali families… (Jennah)

Akou (2004), who studied the dress of Somali women in Minnesota, suggests that the renewed focus on religion and its investment through women's attire specifically for Somali women in diaspora was a means to 'cope with the stresses of migration living in a non-Muslim country' and part of an effort to demonstrate nationalism for a displaced and stateless group. She argues that, 'for Somali refugees, a strong sense of collective identity – projected through clothing – is almost all they have left of their nation' (Akou 2004: 50). She does, however, further note how some Somalis debate the wearing of the full-length *jilbaab*, regarding it as an Arabisation linked to Islamic states such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, where strict laws mandate the wearing of such religious dress for women (Abdi 2007). This was brought up in several interviews.

In a panel discussion that took place in a London university in 2019 regarding the changing role of Somali women, I saw this very issue hotly debated. The panel of five women, academics, researchers, writers and health practitioners were all wearing variations on Islamic dress and two, including the chair of the panel, wore no head covering. When one of the women on the panel, herself wearing a headscarf, suggested that wearing the full *jilbaab* or *abeya* was an Arabisation of the dress code and was thus linked more to culture than religion, several women in the audience walked out, indicating the strength of feeling and controversy surrounding the issue of religion versus culture.

Williams and Vashti (2007), Tarlo (2007), Bilge (2010) and others have noted how the ways in which adherence to Islamic dress codes for Muslim women in diaspora can be a signifier of their cultural separateness from the dominant group in society and concomitantly a symbol of belonging that joins them to others with similar cultural and religious beliefs: 'women in hijab instantly signal who they are and what groups they identify with, making clear their religious and community connections' (Williams and Vashti 2007: 282). It has further been suggested, as

discussed in Chapter 4, that wearing of the *hijab,* for those who may have experienced displacement, is a means to maintain a connection to their traditional cultural heritage. Taaliah suggested the following:

> I think when they (her parents) were growing up in Somalia it wasn't something that was forced upon them… and then because of the war, probably because of the war people started to look for answers in their religion or whatever, so they started adopting a very stricter version of religion, and then they sort of just took that forward. And, then I think by the time they came to this country, it's like you have to preserve what you are, especially because you weren't in Somalia anymore. So, it's like, you know, keep your culture. (Taaliah)

Ayan stated similar views:

> By the time they came to London, especially because they wanted to keep the tradition and the culture, they did start getting more stricter…. Like, people were more serious about it. Like, we're, over here, 'We don't want our children to lose tradition'. (Ayan)

Mulki noted how wearing the *hijab* linked her to a wider Muslim community. She rationalised how her parents might have been more influenced by their faith and the symbolic performativity of their religious beliefs:

> I think people here were wearing it as well, whereas back home it was more of a relaxed situation. But now there are lots of different communities here as well, different backgrounds, and perhaps that maybe opened up their eyes to something else. Whereas, back home it was just Somalis. (Mulki)

In this statement, Mulki is arguably noting how the wearing of the *hijab* affirmed Somalis' identity as Muslims, connecting them to a wider but minority population of those practising the faith. What is visibly indicated through dress is whether people similar to yourself are present or

represented. As discussed in Chapter 7, representation and visibility are important aspects connecting one to a sense of belonging and inclusion. Nasra, who is a researcher and PhD student at a London Russell Group university, explained:

> Where I work, a lot of the people are Caucasian, and I am perhaps the only Black female hijabi, well, I am the *only* Black female hijabi… but I am also one of the few Black people that are in that area… it is not necessarily a thing of discrimination, but I just think, 'Why are we not here?' sort of thing. It is not necessarily a fault on the other side, but more maybe, 'What do we need to do, to be occupying these spaces as well? (Nasra)

What can be seen in these discussions is how the women negotiated the use of this important and 'contested signifier' (Dwyer 1999: 5) and perceived it in multiple ways to emphasise their separateness from the dominant culture and indicate their belonging, both religiously and culturally, to a minority group – both Muslim and Somali – thereby shoring up their sense of identity. This became particularly significant as they experienced the transition to higher education and beyond.

In the interviews, it was frequently apparent that the women, whilst observing gendered codes of behaviour, were aware of their more complex interpretations. As such, they could analyse the importance that their culture and religion had held in the resettlement lives of their displaced parents and families. This could be seen from our conversations where they were actively grappling with the finer aspects of their identity, negotiating their agency in this process.

Whilst each of the women interviewed expressed their own perspectives on wearing the *hijab* and their personal relationship to their home culture and religious identity, it was apparent from their narratives that both the Somali and Muslim aspects of their identities were closely intertwined and were being carefully constructed and played out in their everyday lives. They were essentially making it work for them, cognisant of the negative connotations that were sometimes aroused in others yet simultaneously aware of the ways in which their religion and

dress tied their community and enhanced their sense of belonging to a wider cultural group. In this way, their observance of religious dress could be seen as a form of symbolic capital.

As noted in the literature review in Chapter 3, Ahmad (2001) asserts that the South Asian Muslim women in her study did not negate their religious lives in order to maximise integration, nor did they see religious observance as incompatible with their educational goals or their efforts to mobilise their agency. This corresponds to the findings from most women in this study who felt strongly about the religious aspects of their lives and similarly positive about their wearing of the *hijab*, despite being cognisant of its sometimes-negative connotations. Rather, the women in this study perceived wearing the *hijab* as a means to allow them to move in spaces that their families might otherwise be concerned about and to show connection to their cultural and religious beliefs, linking them to other Somalis and to a wider Islamic community.

As Ayan told me, 'it never held me back'. The undercurrent of this message is that it might have held her back. In this, she demonstrates her agency and negotiation of this symbolic capital.

8.3 Reframing Identities Whilst Maintaining Links to Home: Past and future

It was notable that, for many of the women, their education was linked to a desire to maintain a connection to Somalia and to go back, even temporarily, to contribute to the development goals of their homeland. Ummi explained that one of her ambitions after completing her Master's degree in Psychology was to work in the mental health sector in her hometown of Hargeisa. She had undertaken work experience in a psychiatric hospital there for several months previously and had felt that the system was archaic, lacking an academic understanding of mental health issues. She wanted to contribute to advancing its care of patients with mental health problems, suggesting that this was fundamental to her studies, stating: 'That's my role. That's what I want to do.' PhD student Ambara studies' focused on food production in agriculture and she, too, explained that this was linked to her desire to improve food production in Somalia: 'I'd love to be able to set up a project that helps agriculture in Somalia… somewhere in the future I'd like to be able to move back.'

As well as talking about their future goals, the young women spoke often about how their families reminisced about their past lives. There was evidence in many of these narratives of a strong desire to remain connected to their homeland and maintain a thread of continuity between their lives here and life 'back home'.

One of the participants (not named for anonymity), a young mother who was studying for Master's degree, was involved running a project, in conjunction with several major London based institutions, related to archiving Somali history through cultural artefacts, both pictorial and physical. She ran a social media page about Somali society before the war, and in addition was involved in an audio-visual project that recorded Somali young people's stories about their families, overlaying the clips with family portraits and photographs from home. Attending one of her popular events was testament to the desire of young people of Somali origin to maintain a close connection to the past that existed before being fragmented by war and displacement.

Nasra, a PhD student who was born in an East African refugee camp, had returned for only short time to Somalia before coming to London at age five. She told me that, 'essentially back home is home to me. Like, here is a home away from home, but that is like, home'. Rutter et al. (2007) describe this emotion, as experienced by refugees, as a dualistic notion of home. Their study found that multiple identities and sense of belonging to more than one state did not preclude integration into a host society, noting specifically that 'all of those who had dualistic notions of home nevertheless formed a strong attachment in the UK' and that 'we should not feel therefore, that multiple homes and these multiple attachments threaten integration and social cohesion' (Rutter et al. 2007: 9).

My research found that participants were able to 'put down roots' and invest in their present lives in their host country alongside maintaining strong connections to their heritage home, effectively negotiating the multiple aspects of their identities. It is worth considering that a sense of belonging in both these contexts was far from simple and, as indicated in the narratives,

represented a complex process of mediating between spaces and contexts. Ryan (2017) discusses how migrants' 'embedding' is a continual, dynamic process:

> Embedding is neither one unidirectional nor irreversible. Migrants do not simply continue to embed over time: on the contrary it is apparent that life events…. may result in ambiguous or even reverse embedding. (Ryan 2017: 16)

Yuval-Davis (2011: 4), discussing the meaning of belonging, notes similarly that 'Belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling "at home"'; however, she notes that it does not necessarily follow that one is safe, settled, comfortable or content in such spaces. She states:

> It is important to emphasize that feeling 'at home' does not necessarily only generate positive and warm feelings. It also allows the safety as well as the emotional engagement to be, at times, angry, resentful, ashamed, indignant. (Yuval-Davis 2011: 4)

When discussing whether participants had ever been back to visit Somalia, Ummi expressed the complexities of having been outsiders when she initially migrated to the United Kingdom and now, on return visits to her family's homeland, she was considered an outsider. She described how, when visiting Somalia, she was treated as if she and her family no longer had any problems, as if they now had it all. Here she illustrates the complexities of this experience:

> We are so happy, so much that we are proud of, like, do you know what I mean? I've travelled, I've had so many experiences that I would never have had in a million years had I not come here (to the United Kingdom)… and obviously I am very grateful for the opportunity that I have been given, and now it's kind of like I'm taking advantage of that… I'm getting my education. (But) They don't know how many hours we put in… people don't tell them what we went through … little do they know, what is on the other side when they come, like the starting again, no language, the discrimination… (Ummi)

Intersectionality can allow us to see how varying identity characteristics play out in different times, spaces and locations.

8.4 Higher Education: Transforming identities and forging new paths

A key issue for this study was the impact of higher education on the participants' identity and agency. As noted in the literature review, several studies have examined the role of higher education in developing identities and negotiating agency for young women from both ethnic minority and refugee populations.

For the young Somali British women participants in this study, the higher educational experience emerged as transformative in several key ways. Many were the first in their family to go to university and, if not the actual first, then they were in the first generation to attend higher education. As discussed in Chapter 6, for a population that has experienced a disrupted early education and a complicated entry into the English education system, as well as a raft of structural barriers, this is a significant achievement. They had gained skills, made use of opportunities and resources and developed strategies for managing their goals. They had faced challenges that were unique to them and had developed skills and qualities that were particularly well developed for becoming role models to a new generation of young British Somalis. They then garnered these into their personal repertoires to be applied in their pursuit of their future goals and professional development. Importantly, they have been able to use their newly acquired status as a form of hard-won social and cultural capital to allow them to become pathfinders for the next generation of young British–Somali women. This section explores in depth these findings.

An important issue that was discussed in the research was the change that they perceived had come about in themselves as a result of their higher education. A sense of resilience emerged as an aspect that most women felt that they had gained, but it came about as the result of considerable challenges and hardships. Some participants talked of experiencing mental health challenges during early days of higher education, including anxiety and loneliness.

Khadra said that she initially struggled with feeling a lack of self-worth, stating: 'I didn't have a very positive view of myself and that impacted on my mental health'. Taaliah told me that she suffered from anxiety and depression in her first year of undergraduate study:

> University was probably one of the biggest learning curves of my life – learning to accept that you're different, like that was sort of like a lot to learn, accepting sometimes loneliness… like in my first year sort of out of place, so having to deal with a lot of uncomfortable things like that. (Taaliah)

She further noted how it had forced her out of the comfort zone that she had become accustomed to in her local school environs, something that other participants also described. Overcoming these challenges and their consequent achievements led to increased resilience and, as Warda described it, a sense of adaptability. Warda said of her university tutors that 'They really, really challenged you and it made me extremely adaptable'.

Maryam, now a qualified health professional, had faced some highly complex challenges in her educational journey, as discussed in Chapter 6, including her lack of family support for her educational endeavours. She stated how her degree and consequent profession had enhanced her feelings of self-esteem:

> It gave me a sense of worth, a sense of individualism, that's who I am, I can achieve anything I want. It's shaped my view of life as well and influenced my personality so the view of – it gave me positivity, encouragement, ability to keep going. I do have times when I fall back and then I stop and I look at my past and I tell myself there was a point when you didn't have anything, you've come far, you keep going and keep going so it gives you that subconscious ability to keep saying, 'Look, you can keep going'. (Maryam)

Ambara, who came to the United Kingdom aged eight and is now a PhD student at a Russell Group university, described how her achievements had enhanced her sense of self-esteem, affirming her belief in her abilities and fostering her ambitions:

> I feel like the milestones that I've hit with my education… it kind of reaffirmed that I can … that I can sort of achieve anything I put my mind to it which is something that I didn't think I could do when I was younger.… I've told myself, 'I mean you got through your undergrad, you got through an MRes, you're doing your PhD now, and all of it has been very difficult (but) at least you're doing something right, you can do it, you know?' So, it's given me a lot of reassurance I think. In my ability to do things. So, I don't really doubt that I have the potential to do anything anymore which I used to do a lot when I was younger. (Ambara)

The impact on self-esteem was also felt by Najiyah, who noted how the increased sense of confidence that arose from her achievements, as well as the benefits of working alongside a more diverse group of people in her university studies, had enhanced her interpersonal skills. Najiyah works as a community development co-ordinator for a finance organisation, a job that requires her to work with professionals in the banking sector as well as disadvantaged groups in her outreach work. She noted how:

> I've become a bit more like… out there. I'm not as super, super quiet anymore… and that was through university and meeting different people and your peers and your lecturers. Sometimes a question needed to be answered and I was always that person who was thinking 'Don't make me answer that; don't make me answer that,' but then second year, third year, I just became the person who was – 'I don't care. I'll answer the question'. And you need to be like that in the working world, you can't be in a meeting with like four people and everyone just staring, you know… you're not going to achieve anything. (Najiyah)

Warda similarly suggested that she developed a sense of confidence from achieving her degree, a confidence that had allowed her to explore other aspects of the professional world of science research and that quality, combined with her alignment to the university, had given her

opportunities to network into domains that she might not otherwise have been able to access. When discussing the recent projects that she was undertaking in regard to clinical trials on her Master's degree study, she stated:

> If I was not within the university, if I wasn't affiliated with any kind of institution or any kind of education, I don't think I would be able to have these contacts and have these opportunities or access. I believe that access really gets you places. (Warda)

Nasra, who was studying for a PhD, elaborated on this idea, indicating the importance of the networking opportunities that she had gained through her higher education experiences and how this, combined with her increased sense of confidence, had given her access and opportunities to a broader spectrum of society and consequent ambitions. She described how:

> It opened my eyes up to other things, because I met a lot of people… people who were not just doing their degree, but were doing a lot of things on the side, and it got me thinking I could do a lot of things on the side. And, just having conversations with incredibly smart people that were either entrepreneurs, or starting up their own companies, or doing something extra. And, that is why now, even with my PhD, I feel I am not just trying to get a PhD, I am trying to trying to open up more opportunities for myself. (Nasra)

The evidence from these accounts suggests that the participants' perceptions were that their higher education experience had enhanced their skills and qualities that were transformative, and could thus be applied to their future professional selves. Higher education had widened the scope of their possible future careers and provided them with opportunities to build connections and thus gain valuable social capital.

In these narratives, a theme that cannot be underestimated in significance is that, for many of the young women graduates interviewed, they were the first in their families or in the first generation to have advanced to higher education. This was borne out by many of the interviews and several

participants discussed feeling pressure and a sense of responsibility to succeed as they traversed these new pathways in education. Mulki describes this situation aptly:

> I think maybe… because I'm the oldest child my siblings will look up to me and whatever I do is what they're going to follow. So I felt maybe I did sometimes feel pressure like I needed to work hard and I needed to get those high grades so they would see that and they would do the same… I wouldn't say it was a pressure that just was constantly on my mind. (Mulki)

When discussing the importance of higher education, participants' answers were varied yet with some common themes. For some, it was the chance to make something more of their lives. Khadra told me:

> Education is vital, to be honest. That's the only thing that can really change your circumstances, I think, is education. And so coming from like an African background, education is so important, so valued. (Khadra)

In this quote, Khadra reflects on her family background and how it has impacted on her positionality in relation to educational qualifications, a theme that also resonated in other narratives.

Ilhan, who was now a primary schoolteacher, similarly reflected that she felt that she needed to go to university because her parents had not had that opportunity:

> because my Dad had not gone to uni, and not had the education, and so I needed to go and needed to finish it, because I had so many younger siblings and it was good for them yeah. But for me as well, I thought – you know what, I need to make something of myself. (Ilhan)

Bhopal (2011a) discusses how graduate degrees widen the opportunities for ethnic minority women, giving them greater economic power, which can then translate into wider social capital

within their communities. Alongside this is the freedom and a greater degree of economic independence from traditional 'social structures' and the potential for greater decision-making power over their lives. Higher educational qualifications act as a valuable resource, allowing them to secure their own future. This has been demonstrated in both this and the previous chapter, showing the strength of agency of the women in their negotiations to avoiding succumbing to gendered scripts regarding issues such as the age and timing of marriage and parenting. Taking this alongside the evidence from this chapter regarding shifting identities, what can be understood is that the women participants in this study were not seeking to march out on their own, severing all ties with their family and community; rather, as indicated previously, they often demonstrated strong feelings about the importance of their home culture, their family life and connections to their community. They were fully invested in their home culture to the extent that they wanted to stay embedded in their community and, moreover, to offer something back.

One place where they evidenced commitment was in discussion about being a role model to the future generation of young British–Somalis. Many of the participants recognised their potential impact, having themselves successfully navigated through the varied pathways into higher education, further academic studies and professional careers. Ummi, who was studying for a Master's degree in Psychology, described the importance that she attached to navigating these new pathways. Talking about her younger sisters, she said:

> I want to inspire them and I want them to feel like, 'Yeah. I can do this'. And I guess, I just, kind of want be a role model for them… let them have someone to look up to and be like, 'Oh. I can do that as well'. (Ummi)

Ummi's comments indicate the responsibility that she has taken on within her family and community and further positions her as a role model in relation to the younger people in her life. As discussed in previous chapters, being part of a relatively recently established migrant

community means that there are relatively few role models for them in higher professional roles in the United Kingdom. In this respect, the educational achievements of these young women suggest the potential for a significant impact on their communities, as well as in the wider societies in which they live. Role models can offer an important sense of belonging and visibility to young people in marginalised communities and lead to greater inclusion. In this respect, they can be perceived as pathfinders for their family and community, carving out new models of what an educated British–Somali woman can be, and equipped with the necessary navigational capital to support and guide others in the process.

When discussing this issue in the interviews, it was apparent that taking on this role was important to the women and that they saw it as a motivational force closely tied to their future aspirations. Warda described feeling proud of her achievements and could see the value of role modelling to her younger family members:

> Obviously, it makes me proud because I know that they have something to look to, and all those things that seemed like they were out of reach for me, like doing this (particular) research, I can maybe translate that and one day save lives. And they can be like, 'Yeah, my sister used to do that, so I have a chance at doing that too'. (Warda)

Early Years practitioner Hana described similarly how she felt that she could impact on the younger generation:

> With my siblings especially being the eldest it's very important… my Dad's always saying 'look at her, you know, she's finished her education, she's continued to go onto further education, she was working part time all through studying so it can be done. She's done it, she's a woman with a headscarf' so I feel like I'm a huge role model to my siblings. (Hana)

Mulki held a first degree in a science subject and, alongside her job, she tutored young people from the Somali community in her local area. She had originally wanted to be a doctor, and in

the interview she described how she felt her role was important to the young pole whom she worked with:

> When I was younger I remember there wasn't a lot of role models. There wasn't people when I said I wanted to go to become a medic and to go to medical school and become a doctor… there wasn't another Somali student that I knew that went to medical school…. There was no one I could really go to and be like, 'How did you do it? How did you get around it? How did you balance life, like family, work? How did you do all of that?' So the reason why I tutor is because I want the kids to see that you can succeed, you can do things whether it's medicine, whether it's a history degree, … even if you don't go to university and do something else with your life, start up a business, become an artist, do whatever you want. You can always do it so I tutor them in Maths, English and Science but also if they need help writing applications, if they need help, whatever it is I help them with that as well. (Mulki)

The participants whose stories are related above indicate how they are aware of the historical and structural disadvantages that may be faced as a recent migrant community making headway into education and professions in a new host environment. They demonstrate their recognition of their important role in supporting younger people in that population in making their own paths in education and career development. This pathfinding role is a valuable resource that operates as a form of social and cultural capital that they can offer to others in their families and communities. Alongside the skills and strategies to offer to younger members of the Somali population, they also provide much needed visibility and representation of an often-marginalised community in roles that hold status and respectability. Secondary schoolteacher Selma describes the power she has to influence a younger generation of young Somali women:

> When I first went into a school I was very scared of how the people were going to, you know, sort of perceive me with the headscarf at school.… I thought they were going to

> give me a headache but a lot of the kids see themselves in me, especially young girls wearing the headscarf think oh my god, look, she's teaching us and she's got here and she's a wearing a headscarf, I could do it too.… And, yeah, that's a tremendous feeling to know that I can inspire them. (Selma)

8.5 Summary

This chapter has explored the recurrent themes of family history, home, identity and belonging that emerged from the research interviews. It serves to demonstrate how the young women participants were influenced in their lives by the journeys and struggles that they and their families faced as refugees integrating into UK society and how this experience is interwoven with their self-identities and ambitions. It shows how many of the young women were strongly attached to their sense of 'home', back in Somalia, yet were simultaneously motivated by a desire to integrate and put down roots here, in their new home country.

Frequently showing an awareness of the hardships facing them, the negative stereotypes directed against them and their visible 'othered' identity in regard to their intersectional status as refugees and status as Somali Muslim women, they nevertheless had high ambitions and were intent on subverting commonly held stereotypes that view them as 'passive and disengaged' (Ryan 2011:1046). These ambitions included the desires to grow and develop academically and to bring about improvements to the lives of those in their current community, as well as long-term goals to contribute to the redevelopment of their homeland.

Despite this weight of problematic structural factors that had impacted on them, an analysis of the narratives suggests that these women continue to negotiate their identities in the United Kingdom. They view higher education as a means by which to cement their fractured pasts, to build new professional identities and, having acquired the navigational skills necessary for academic success, to reposition themselves as role models and as pathfinders for their family and community. I argue that, as indicated in the literature review, higher education has been for

these participants, a space in which they have strategically wielded their agentic autonomy (Takhar 2016), troubling expectations and redefining discourses. Through their educational desires, they have refuted and resisted the passive gendered and racist roles assigned to them as black Somali Muslim women and in the process are reconstructing an alternative narrative of identity. But within that they maintained a strong sense of belonging to their homeland and a commitment to their ethnic identity. In framing their identities in this way they show how the intersectional aspects of their experiences; identities that are continually shifting and being negotiated in varied contexts and under different gazes.

The following chapter will conclude the thesis offering a summary of the finding in relation to the wider theoretical framework in which it is situated and presenting the contributions and impact of this research.

Chapter 9: **Conclusion**

The main focus of this thesis has been the higher education experiences of young women of Somali origin in London. This chapter will draw together the findings from the research and situate them in the wider theoretical frameworks that form the foundations of the analysis. This chapter thus examines the analysis of the data in relation to the main research questions, referring back to the key themes in the literature review to explore the place of this study in these wider research contexts, illustrating what the findings contribute to theory and practice, and their potential impact. Reproduction theories of social and cultural capital and their application to education and migration research, as well as the use of an intersectional, feminist lens, have been the main theoretical basis of these studies and have been used in the approach to analysis. Therefore, this section demonstrates the contribution that this research makes to these wider theoretical frameworks and how the findings add to our academic understanding of such concepts as applied to this specific context.

As stated in the methodology, this thesis does not attempt to suggest that young Somali women graduates in London are a homogenous group; rather, they are individuals with varied circumstances, their experiences however are both at once individual and collective (Takhar 2013:102). The use of a feminist and intersectional lens allowed for key themes to emerge and these as discussed in the conclusions drawn below.

This study utilised a feminist approach, centring as it does the voices and experiences of Somali women graduates and focusing on the realities of their lives, as interpreted through their narrative accounts. I hope the impact of this research to be the disruption of accepted power relationships in knowledge production by platforming the voices of a marginalised group, thus contributing to an understanding of the impact of intersectional oppressions on the lives of British Somali women, and by evidencing the agency that they have exhibited in their journeys to achievement in higher education and the potential this success offers for social change in their communities.

(Takhar 2016:57). It is important to acknowledge that I am not giving these women a voice: they already have their own voices. I am, rather, attempting to give a forum to their narratives, to recognise the importance of their voices in the pursuit of knowledge production. This thesis aims to amplify those voices: to provide a space for the educational experiences of the participants to be recognised and heard.

A key aim of this thesis is to present a counter-discourse to previous research which has focussed on British Somali students as an underachieving population (Rutter 2004, Diriye 2006, Demie, Lewis and McLean 2007). By focusing on British Somali women who had high aspirations for themselves in their academic and professional lives, and through examination of their experiences, this study aims to present an alternative to the deficit model of achievement that has been the focus of much of the research looking at Somalis in education in the United Kingdom.

Analysis of the findings showed that, despite a number of distinct challenges including participants' aspirations being perceived as problematic to others in their cultural community, and the experiences of discrimination and racism in HEIs and the wider social context, they were focused in utilising their agency to carve out successful academic and professional lives for themselves. Whilst the participants could be seen to be in a continual process of negotiating their identities as black Muslim women with refugee origins, they showed a strong attachment to their cultural heritage as Somalis. For many, their educational and future endeavours were tied to strong sense of social justice and the potential to contribute as role models and agents of social change for a future generation of young people from their community (Takhar 2016). In this respect, my thesis argues that they are pathfinders, managing and negotiating progressive opportunities that are at once concerned with furthering the educational and professional advancement of other young Somalis and promoting a strong sense of Somali identity. This chapter will explore these findings in more depth in relation to the research questions.

Employing a qualitative, feminist, intersectional approach based on extended interviews with Somali women graduates in London, this thesis set out to respond to the following research questions:

- How was the participants' primary and secondary education impacted by their family history of migration, of their collective experience as refugees and what resources did they draw upon to negotiate their schooling? What challenges did they as children and young women face and what strategies did they utilise to manage and overcome them?
- What issues did the participants encounter in their pursuit of higher education and what sources of social and cultural capital did they draw upon did they draw upon that enabled the achievement of their academic goals?
- How can the participants navigation of educational aspirations and cultural expectations be understood through an intersectional lens?
- How where the participants' identities framed and negotiated as they traversed the varied contexts from education into wider social environment?

This chapter addresses each in turn.

1. *How was the participants' primary and secondary education impacted on by their family history of migration as refugees and what resources did they draw upon to negotiate their schooling? What challenges did they face and what strategies did they utilise to manage and overcome them?*

Research into the educational achievement of migrant and refugee communities has found that many face distinct challenges, resulting in lowered rates of academic achievement (Rasmussen 2009; Demie 2015). My study has taken a counter-discourse approach by examining the challenges faced but also importantly, the factors that contributed to the participants' achievement.

The findings of my study lead me to argue that the early education experiences of the participants were influenced in significant ways by their own and their families', recent migratory history as refugees. A protracted period of displacement and struggle formed the backdrop to their settlement in London and the study showed that, for many of the women, this recent personal and family history of the migration/refugee experience, as well as their parents' disrupted experiences of education, played a significant role in their educational aspirations. These experiences translated into a strong desire to achieve in their education, which they viewed as a means to overcome their adverse situation and to elevate their position and social standing.

A key finding from this study is that there was a lack of role models of similar gender and ethnicity in their early educational settings for the participants to identify with. As discussed in Chapter 8, this study demonstrates that the participants have an important role to play as role models for future generations of young British–Somalis, and this was seen to be a significant aspect of their reimagined identities as graduates and professions. This is elaborated on further in the discussion below.

Facing challenges including the language barrier and unfamiliarity with the British schooling system, their parents were not always able to provide the commonly accepted forms of parental involvement that translate easily into social and cultural capital; for example, the physical resources as well as the cultural and social milieu of academic studies. Their parents were, however, able to provide parental support and aspirations as a resource, making space for study in their children's lives, showing a positive interest in their pursuits even if they were less able to help them to navigate the schooling system. Therefore, whilst not possessing what Bourdieu (1977) described as the typically accepted forms of institutionalised cultural such as educational qualifications themselves, their parents endeavoured to support their children, doing what they could to support them by making space in their lives to study as well as through the transmission of aspirations and values related to education. Shah, Dwyer and Modood (2010) refer to this form of social capital as ethnic capital and have used it as a concept to explain the ways that

British–Pakistani parents in their study, holding little economic capital and facing similar structural disadvantage, can nevertheless contribute to their children's academic success through these means. This research reveals how parental support was considered of great significance to the participants: being there for them in a supporting role, both physically and emotionally, from primary schools to secondary schools and on into higher education was consistently stressed as being one of their primary enabling factors.

Alongside the support from their families, participants frequently referred to good school experiences as being those where they felt that they were valued and encouraged to be aspirational about their educational goals. This often happened through the interaction with specific individuals, who developed supportive relationships with them and whose teaching style was felt to be inspirational.

Despite the disadvantages experienced through low socioeconomic and refugee status, the outcomes of these participants were ultimately fruitful in that they all managed to achieve the necessary qualifications to progress to higher education. I argue that, whilst they navigated these new pathways, they were themselves co-creators of cultural capital that would be of value to them and their families, siblings and communities in future endeavours.

As a recently migrated ethnic minority refugee population, their families had started out with few resources for navigating the education system but, with a strong commitment to supporting their children, their families had mobilised their support, building social and cultural capital through their aspiration, helping their children when they could and by showing interest in their achievements. The participants, as young pupils, had successfully negotiated their success, and were now in a position to create and mobilise cultural capital that they had gained through their achievements, procuring the necessary habitus and then 'bringing it back home' in their interactions with their younger siblings, cousins and community members. They had overcome the structural barriers facing young Somali women, had learnt the necessary skills to ensure their academic success. In this respect they had become co-creators of new navigational capital; as

Yosso refers to it, 'the skills of manoeuvring through social institutions:….not created with communities of color in mind' (Yosso 2005:80). The influence that these young women had to offer was further extended when they later became graduates, as role models and pathfinders for the next generation of young British–Somali young people. The impact on their identity of this new status is discussed in greater depth below. An understanding of the ways that the participants, as refugees in a new and sometime hostile climate, have produced and co-created ethnic navigational capital is valuable in the current world where numbers of displaced people are rising every year and therefore a key contribution of this study is both timely and important. Insights gained can benefit our knowledge of these processes and can in time enable us to support others who have taken similarly treacherous journeys to re-establishing themselves through the power of education.

2. *What issues did the participants encounter in their pursuit of higher education and what sources of social and cultural capital did they draw upon did that enabled the achievement of their academic goals?*

The women faced a number of distinct challenges in their aspirations to enter higher education, specifically the way that higher education was sometimes perceived within their community to be an obstacle to traditionally ascribed expectations for women to marry and have children in early adulthood. Whilst most of their parents were supportive of their daughters' educational goals, the desire to enter higher education was not straightforward for some of the participants. Many revealed that although on the whole their parents wanted them to succeed in education, they were uncertain about the paths that higher education and the concomitant professional careers that might develop from these and whether these would inhibit them from staying within the culturally expected gender norms, which prescribe that young women should be 'settling down' in their early twenties. Nearly all of the participants described having had conversations with their parents about whether higher education would explicit pressure on the participants to conform to their stereotypical gendered roles. In navigating space for their education and careers,

the women participants' narratives showed that they were able to use active agency in negotiating these important decision-making processes over their life events, resisting and 'defying the normative gender order of their community' (Abdi 2014:479). They used higher education as a tool with which to resist and remonstrate and, in the process, to disrupt and reconfigure the accepted norms for their gender and ethnicity. Whilst at once asserting their autonomy they were not however rejecting of their attachments to their cultural heritage, They were involved in a process of negotiating their desires and aspirations, demonstrating autonomy over these key aspects of decision making, using higher education as a tool of leverage to assert their own interests whilst maintaining a strong commitment to their Somali identity.

Enrolled in higher education, the participants encountered further challenges. As well as the difficulties that many students face in the transition to undergraduate and postgraduate study, they identified areas of discrimination and stereotyping. These often took the form of microaggressions against them: as Arbouin (2018) describes, 'subtle, offensive, put-downs… experienced by black scholars… which occur in institutions in interactions... which convey racist and sexist attitudes' (Arbouin 2018:64). Whilst the participants felt the sting of these taints, slurs and stereotypes directed at them, they were not deterred; rather, they were motivated to make more visible their presence. As seen in the discussions relayed in Chapter 7, they questioned why they were not well represented in these spaces and felt a sense of responsibility in confronting and resisting the discourse that would see them as black Muslim women, rendered invisible and absent from the academe.

A contribution to research knowledge gained from this study, is an understudying the impact of micro-aggressions as well as macro and how they are experienced by Muslim women of colour in the academe. This has implications for higher education lecturers and others invested in higher education and can act to raise awareness of the impact of discriminations faced by minority ethnic and Muslim women and the importance of challenging such discriminations in both personal and institutional domains.

Analysis of the data revealed that participants had utilised strategic means to increasing visibility and belonging in HEIs, and this was evidenced through their association with Somali Student Societies, which, it was demonstrated, were a place in which they could feel the power of their presence, meet and socialise with others and, through their activities and events, involve other organisations that had Somali issues at their fore. As discussed in Chapter 2, Ryan, Erel and D'Angelo (2015) examine the ways in which migrant communities 'develop, access and maintain networks, with different people and… how such networks are used to transfer, generate and activate resources' (p.3). The evidence from this research would suggest that Somali Student Societies are a means of engaging with a range of networks, exposing Somali students to organisations that can engender valuable social and cultural capital. The types of events and meetings described by participants showed that they created spaces where students could socialise, engage with issues of Somali identity, as well as provide a platform for building networks of Somali professionals, educators, mentors who they might not otherwise have the forum to access, from a range of disciplines and professions. Often linked by social media, these societies are an important means for the participants to collectivise, reinforce a sense of Somali identity whilst at times dealing with complex issues related to their ethnic identity and heritage. Such support networks are an effective strategy to build valuable social capital through both bonding and bridging ties, as they link them to wider networks outside of their university and family groups.

Many of the events that I attended that included political, cultural and identity issues took place in universities and were promoted through the Somali Student Societies. Frequently promoted through digital means, they showed the power of social media to activate and mobilise, promoting engagement of with issues and concerns regarding education, cultural heritage, and gender and identity politics. This finding offers an important contribution to our knowledge of the way that social media can inform and mobilise around issues of identity and education. Social media has immediacy and is inclusive in that it is virtually available to all regardless of ethnicity,

socio-economic status, and can link people and ideas across the global sphere. This is a topic that is worthy of future study; exploring how social media contributes to knowledge distribution and the politics of identity.

3. *How can the participants' navigation of educational aspirations and cultural expectations be understood through an intersectional lens? And*
4. *How did they frame their identities as they traversed the varied contexts from education into the wider social environment?*

The use of an intersectional approach to the participants' narratives reveals how many of them experienced a fusion of identities: as educated Black British Muslim Somali women and as refugees, their day-to-day lives were impacted on by the intersections of these markers of identity, framing their experiences. These varied aspects of identities shifted in meaning becoming more salient depending on the context or location, in different places – in their home lives their age and gender was a key defining feature of their experience, whereas in the institutions of higher education it was their ethnicity and religion that was most visible. Their journey into higher education and laying down paths for their future careers emerged as a site of struggle on several planes. They were involved with their parents in careful negotiations around accepted gender roles regarding the pursuit of higher education and careers versus the expectation to settle down, marry and have children early in their adult lives. Many of the participants resisted this pressure and used education as a lever with which to negotiate with their parents over their own goals and desires. In doing this, they showed a sense of 'active agency' (Takhar 2013: 1990), as they wrangled control in important decision-making activities that would, in previous times, have been the preserve of their parents. Similar to Takhar's (2013) findings in relation to the South Asian women in her study, 'they have shown the ability to challenge sexist, racist and oppressive practices of families, the community and the state' (Takhar 2013: 198). Although not involved in organisations of the same size or scale that Takhar

(2013) discusses, there is still evidence that they are building between them and their contemporaries, through the Somali Student Societies, through social media and through their relationships with other small- and large-scale organisations, a presence that provides them with a form of solidarity with others who, like them, had experienced structural and institutional discrimination and who were focused on creating a new narrative for them and their communities.

In resisting the norms attributed to them regarding their gender, ethnicity and religion, participants had negotiated space for their aspirations and desires to be realised. At once resisting and troubling the norms of gender roles that were commonly ascribed within their cultural communities, they consistently showed a strong commitment to their identity as Somalis: they were, moreover, redefining their identities as young Somali women with refugee backgrounds, making new pathways.

The discussions and analysis in Chapter 9 provide strong evidence that, within the domains of the academe, despite feeling the sense of otherness perpetuated by attitudes to their wearing of the *hijab*, towards them as Black Muslim women, they did not reject nor lose their cultural identities. Instead, they were able to maintain their 'cultural markers' (Mirza 2006b), celebrating their Somaliness through their associations and relationships with Somali-based organisations and their extramural activities. These activities in which the participants were involved, some as paid employees, some as volunteers, frequently had at their core aspects of Somali identity. They actively demonstrated a strength of connection and attachment to their heritage identities in significant ways: as artists; as tutors to young people in their community; as archivists of Somali history; and as members of educational mentoring organisations.

The wearing of the *hijab* was seen by them to be at once a signal of their religious observance and also as a mark of separateness from the dominant culture in which they reside, simultaneously linking them to others like them, both religiously and culturally, symbolising a sense of belonging to an imagined and real community (Takhar 2013). The issue of faith was a

complex one for the participants. Many felt strongly about their Islamic identity, viewing it as virtually synonymous with their Somali identity, and many said that their faith had been important in their struggles and educational journeys. Other participants, whilst still believing strongly in Islam, were critical of the ways that religion was used, unjustly they felt, to subjugate women. One participant fully distanced herself from organised religion and was the only one who did not wear the *hijab*. She spoke at length about her alienation from Islam but had, however, maintained strong links with her heritage identity as a creative writer and performer whose works are entirely bound up with Somali identity, history and culture.

These stories serve to demonstrate that, as stated above, although each individual participant's narrative was unique: they were not a homogenous and undifferentiated group; important unifying themes emerged from within their stories. The most significant theme is how, as highly qualified Black Somali women, they were redefining the nature of Somali female identity as recreated in diaspora. Culture and identity are not static entities: rather, they are dynamic, shifting and socially constructed. The participants' stories are strong evidence of how the intersectional aspects of their identities consistently framed their experiences as they navigated their educational careers. Higher education was a site in which they could explore and reaffirm their identities in resistance to the 'stereotyping and dominant discourses' that might otherwise subordinate them (Takhar 2016:49).

The themes that emerged are not exceptional: some have been seen and documented in the lives of other Black, Muslim and diasporic women. However, they are singular in that they provide a picture of a specific set of intersectional identities, at this particular juncture in time and space, and in that their stories are distinctive. I believe that this analysis has great value in the realms of knowledge production in offering us an understanding of the complex interplay of identity, culture and education for women experiencing these particular matrices of intersectionality.

The intersectional lens applied to the participants' experiences and identities, as refugees, as British–Somalis, and Black women revealed an important facet of their educational histories.

Their achievements were transformative for them, taking them into new locations and spaces not previously been well-occupied by British–Somali women. But within these spaces they did not reject the ethnic markers of their identity and religion: in the wearing of the *hijab* and in their belonging to Somali Student Societies and associations with other Somali based networks and organisations, they showed a strong attachment and commitment to their ethnic identity.

To summarise the contributions of this thesis: As an under researched area, this study reveals an insight into the role of young Somali women graduates as creators of social capital. Using a feminist approach the research shows how the women participants are mobilising valuable social *and* cultural capital in the process of successfully navigating the British education system. In this respect they can be considered pathfinders for a future generation of young British Somalis.

Through an exploration of the participants' lived experience, the analysis presents a valuable contribution to knowledge production offering an intersectional perspective into the ways in which the women's varied identities and subject positions, are negotiated and reframed though their educational struggles.

A key contribution of this study is its uniqueness, offering as it does, the perspectives of young British Somali graduates, who make up an overlooked section of the population in both the previous research as well as in educational and policy approaches. It is further demonstrated the ways in which higher education can be transformative widening the scope of future professional careers and enabling greater power to change the circumstances of one's existence.

Epistemologically this research contributes to an understanding of the ways in which an intersectional lens can allow us to explore the kaleidoscopic and shifting nature of identity showing as it does, how the women participants were able to utilise their agency to

strategically navigate their educational goals and reframe their subjective and collective identities in this process.

In some respects this study can be considered a starting point, for there are lots more important issues raised here that are worthy of further research. The issue of which types of universities the participants chose to enter and their experiences within them; whether Russell Group, Post 92 or red brick, was a topic that was touched upon in the interviews, and would I believe, be highly illuminating if investigated further. The participants journeys beyond higher education and into the world of work is a related issue; whether they are able to fulfil their potential in their chosen careers, alongside a closer examination of the structural barriers to their progression, what Arbouin (2018:11) describes as 'glass ceilings and sticky floors', would without doubt be worthy of further research.

The meaning of success; Bhopal (2011) argues that success in higher education can bring multiple benefits. Discussing social support networks for British–Indian women in university settings, she argues that success in higher education would 'enable women to enter the labour market in which they can transform social capital into financial capital (high earnings), human capital (gaining skills) and further social capital (contacts with other people)', further stating that 'Women's access to social capital increases their chances of social mobility once they leave the world of the academe' (Bhopal 2011: 530). This potential has great resonance for this specific social population, who have been multiply disadvantaged socially, economically and institutionally. Though higher education is not a panacea for all social issues, nor does it always come with the guarantee of social mobility, it is a step towards elevating British–Somalis out of the depressed economic circumstances that many find themselves in. The evidence from the data collected here demonstrates the strength of feeling that these young women held about their potential to contribute to positive social change in their communities, through the realisation of their educational potential and the commensurate employment, careers, and economic security that such higher level qualifications could secure.

A key focus and strength of this thesis is the amplification of voices from a frequently marginalised group. There has been no other research that I am aware of that has foregrounded the experiences of British–Somali women graduates in London. Mirza (2006b) suggests that in order to build a sociology of gendered aspirations, we have to 'to look for the patterns which go against the grain of formal social expectations… to "see round corners"… to chart the hidden histories'. These narratives, I believe, are an example of these hidden histories (Mirza 2006b: 153). The women participants whose stories are explored and analysed here are women seeking transformation through educational achievement and, conversely, for whom education is transformative. Having encountered and successfully overcome a range of barriers to their inclusion in higher education the participants in this study have been transformed into pathfinders for a future generation, equipped with new navigational capital they can become facilitators and visible role models through their accomplishments. Their struggles and their achievements are evidence of their roles as active agents, resisting and renegotiating the parameters and expectations of stereotypical discourse, and in the process reforming their identities as Black British–Somali women.

Bibliography

Abdi, C.M. 2007. Convergence of civil war and the religious right: Reimagining Somali women. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 33*(1), 183-207.

Abdi, C.M. 2014. Threatened identities and gendered opportunities: Somali migration to America. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* 39(2), 459-483.

Abdi, C.M. 2015. *Elusive Jannah: The Somali diaspora and a borderless Muslim identity.* University of Minnesota Press.

Ahmad, F. 2001. Modern traditions? British Muslim women and academic achievement. *Gender and Education, 13*(2), 137-152.

Ahmed, L. 2011. *Quiet Revolution: The veil's resurgence*. US: Yale University Press.

Ahmed, S. 2012. *On Being Included: Racism and diversity in institutional life.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Aidid, S. 2015a. 'Can the Somali speak?' In *Cadaan Studies, Africa is a Country*, 30 March, available at: http://africasacountry.com/2015/03/can-the-somali-speak-cadaanstudies/

Aidid, Safia. 2015b. After #CadaanStudies. *The New Inquiry*, December 4. available at http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/after-cadaanstudies/

Akou, H.M., 2011. The politics of dress in Somali culture. in Allman, J.M. ed., 2004. *Fashioning Africa: Power and the politics of dress,* pp.51-63. Indiana University Press.

Alcoff, L. 1992. The problem of speaking for others. *Cultural Critique,* 20, 5-32. University of Minnesota Press.

Alexander, C.E. and Arday, J., eds. 2015. *Aiming Higher: Race, inequality and diversity in the academy.* London: AHRC: Runnymede.

Alitolppa-Niitamo, A. 2002. The generation in-between: Somali youth and schooling in metropolitan Helsinki. *Intercultural Education, 13*(3), 275-290.

Allman, J.M., ed. 2004. *Fashioning Africa: power and the politics of dress*, pp.51-63. Indiana University Press.

Anthias, F. 2002. Where do I belong? Narrating collective identity and translocational positionality. *Ethnicities, 2*(4), 491-514.

Anthias, F. 2012. Transnational mobilities, migration research and intersectionality. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research, 2*(2), 102-110.

Anthias, F. and Yuval-Davis, N. 1983. Contextualizing feminism: Gender, ethnic and class divisions. *Feminist Review, 15*, 62–75.

Anthias, F. and Yuval-Davis, N. 2005. *Racialized Boundaries: Race, nation, gender, colour and class and the anti-racist struggle.* Routledge.

Arbouin, A. 2018. *Black British Graduates: Untold stories.* London: IOE Press/Trentham Books.

Bagguley, P. and Hussain, Y. 2016. Negotiating mobility: South Asian women and higher education. *Sociology, 50*(1), 43-59.

Barnard, C.A. 2017. Reflecting on a journey: Positionality, marginality and the outsider-within. In D. Gabriel and S.A. Tate, *Inside the Ivory Tower: Narratives of women of colour surviving and thriving in British academia*, pp.80-90. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

Berns-McGown, R.B. 1999. *Muslims in the Diaspora: The Somali communities of London and Toronto.* University of Toronto Press.

Bhattacharyya, G., Ison, L. and Blair, M. 2003. *Minority Ethnic Attainment and Participation in Education and Training: The evidence*. Annesley, Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills.

Bhopal, K. (2010) 'Gender, identity and experience: Researching marginalised groups', *Women's studies international forum*, 33(3), pp. 188–195.

Bhopal, K. 2011a. ‘Education makes you have more say in the way your life goes’: Indian women and arranged marriages in the United Kingdom. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 32*(3), 431-447.

Bhopal, K. 2011b ‘“We tend to stick together and mostly we stick to our own kind”: British Indian women and support networks at university’, Gender and Education. Routledge, 23(5), pp. 519–534.

Bhopal, K. and Preston, J. 2012. Introduction: Intersectionality and ‘race’ in education: Theorising difference. In *Intersectionality and Race in Education*, pp.9-18. Routledge.

Bhopal, K., 2018. *White privilege: The myth of a post-racial society*. Policy Press

Bigelow, M. 2007. Social and cultural capital at school: The case of a Somali teenage girl. *In Low-Educated Adult Second Language and Literacy Acquisition: Proceedings of Symposium,* pp.7-22. Richmond, VA: Literacy Institute at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Blair, M., Bourne, J., Coffin, C., Creese, A. and Kenner, C. 1998. *Making the Difference: Teaching and learning strategies in successful multi-ethnic schools*. London: Department for Education and Employment.

Bloch, A. 2004. *Making it Work: Refugee employment in the UK* (vol. 2). London: Institute for Public Policy Research.

Bourdieu, P. 1974. The school as a conservative force. In J. Eggleston (ed.), *Contemporary Research in the Sociology of Education*. London: Methuen.

Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1986. The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education,* pp.241–58. New York: Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1990. *The Logic of Practice.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. 2001. *Homo academicus.* Oxford: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. 2004/1986. In J. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, pp.241–58. New York: Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, P. 2013/1979. *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste.* US: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bowl, M., 2003. *Non-Traditional Entrants to Higher Education: 'They talk about people like me.'* IOE: Trentham Books

Bowl, M. and Bathmaker, A.M., 2016. Non-traditional' students and diversity in higher education. *Routledge Handbook of the sociology of higher education*, pp.142-152. Routledge.

Brah, A. and Phoenix, A., 2004. Ain't I a woman? Revisiting intersectionality. *Journal of international Women's Studies, 5*(3), 75-86.

Bradbury, M. and Healy, S., eds. 2010. Whose peace is it anyway?: Connecting Somali and international peacemaking. *Conciliation Resources, 21,* available at: https://www.c-r.org/accord/somalia.

Bruegel, I. 2005. Social capital and feminist critique. In J. Franklin, *Women and social capital*, Working paper 12, pp.4-17. London: Families & Social Capital, ESRC Research Group.

Butler, J. 1990. Gender trouble, feminist theory, and psychoanalytic discourse. In Linda J. Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*, pp.327-343. New York: Routledge.

Carment, D. and Sadjed, A., eds. 2017. *Diaspora as Cultures of Cooperation: Global and local perspectives.* New York: Springer.

Carter, J., Fenton, S. and Modood, T. 1999. *Ethnicity and Employment in Higher Education* (no. 865). London: Policy Studies Institute.

Cederberg, M. 2012. Migrant networks and beyond: Exploring the value of the notion of social capital for making sense of ethnic inequalities. *Acta Sociologica, 55*(1), 59-72.

Cederberg, M. 2015. Embodied cultural capital and the study of ethnic inequalities. In L. Ryan, U. Erel and A. D'Angelo, *Migrant Capital: Networks, Identities and Strategies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Change Institute 2009. *The Somali Muslim Community in England.* London: Change Institute, Communities and Local Government.

Coleman, J.S, Campbell, E., Hobson, C., McPartland, J., Mood, A, Weinfeld, F. and York, R. 1966. Equality of educational opportunity. *Health, Education & Welfare Supplement.* Office of Education Washington: US Govt. Printing Office.

Coleman, J.S. 1987. Families and schools. *Educational Researcher, 16*, 32-38.

Coleman, J.S. 1988. Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology, 94*, 95-120.

Crenshaw, K. 1989. Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989*, 8.

Crenshaw, K. 1991. Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241–1299.

Crozier, G., 2001. Excluded Parents: the deracialisation of parental involvement [1]. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 4*(4), 329-341.

Danso, R. 2002. From 'there' to 'here': An investigation of the initial settlement experiences of Ethiopian and Somali refugees in Toronto. *GeoJournal, 56*(1), 3-14.

Darboe, K. 2003. New immigrants in Minnesota: The Somali immigration and assimilation. *Journal of Developing Societies, 19*(4), 458-472.

Davies, B. and Gannon, S. 2011. Feminism/Post-structuralism. In B. Somekh and C. Lewin (eds.), *Theory and Methods in Social Research*, 2nd Ed, pp.312-319. London: Sage.

Davies, B. and Gannon, S., 2005. *Feminism/poststructuralism. Research methods in the social sciences*, pp.318-325. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Demie, F. and McLean, C. 2007. Raising the achievement of African heritage pupils: A case study of good practice in British schools. *Educational Studies, 33*(4): 415-434.

Demie, F. and McLean, C. 2015. *Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Good practice in schools.* Lambeth Research and Statistics Unit.

Demie, F. et al. 2015. *The Achievement of Somali Pupils in Lambeth Schools – Empirical evidence.* London: Lambeth Research and Statistics Unit.

Demie, F., Lewis, K. and McLean. C. 2006. *Raising Achievement of Somali Pupils: Good practice in London schools.* London: Lambeth Research and Statistics Unit.

Demie, F., Lewis, K. and McLean. C. 2007. *Raising the Achievement of Somali Pupils: Challenges and school responses.* London: Lambeth Research and Statistics Unit.

Demie, F., Taplin, A. Butler, R., Tong, R., McDonald, R., Hau, A. and Dimaano, R. 2013. *The Achievement of Somali Pupils in Lambeth Schools – empirical evidence.* Research and Statistics Unit, Lambeth Children and Young People's Service.

Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A. 2003. The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A literature review. *Research Report no. 433.* London: DfES.

Desimone, L. 1999. Linking parent involvement with student achievement: Do race and income matter? *Journal of Educational Research, 93*(1), 11-30.

Devine, D. 2009. Mobilising capitals? Migrant children's negotiation of their everyday lives in school. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 30*(5), 521-535.

Dickson-Swift, V., James, E.L., Kippen, S. and Liamputtong, P. 2009. Researching sensitive topics: Qualitative research as emotion work. *Qualitative Research, 9*(1), 61-79.

Diriye, A. 2006. The ticking bomb: The underachievement of Somali children in British schools. *Hiiraan Online, February*. Available at: http://www.hiiraan.com/op/2006/feb/Abdull_Diriye190206_2.htm, accessed March 2015.

Domina, T. 2005. Leveling the home advantage: Assessing the effectiveness of parental involvement in elementary school. *Sociology of Education, 78*(3), 233-249.

Dryden-Peterson, S. and Giles, W. 2012. Higher education for refugees. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees, 27*(2), 3-9.

Dumais, S. 2006. Early childhood cultural capital, parental habitus and teachers perceptions. *Poetics, 34*, 83-107.

Dwyer, C. 1999. Veiled meanings: Young British Muslim women and the negotiation of differences. *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography, 6*(1), 5-26.

Epstein, J.L. 1995. School/family/community partnerships. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(9), 701.

Erel, U., 2016. *Migrant women transforming citizenship: Life-stories from Britain and Germany*. Routledge.

Erel, U. 2015. Thinking migrant capitals intersectionally: Using a biographical approach. In L. Ryan, U. Erel and A. D'Angelo, *Migrant Capital: Networks, identities and strategies.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). 2007. *Moving On Up? The Way Forward. Report of the EOC's investigation into Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean women and work*. Manchester: EOC.

Field, J. 2003. *Social Capital*. London: Routledge.

Franklin, J., ed. 2005. *Women and Social Capital.* London: Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group.

Frost, N. and Elichaoff, F. 2014. Feminist postmodernism, poststructuralism, and critical theory. In: S.N. Hesse-Biber (ed.), *Feminist Research Practice: A primer,* 2nd edn, pp.42-72. Los. Angeles: Sage.

Gabriel, D. and Tate, S.A. 2017. *Inside the Ivory Tower: Narratives of women of colour surviving and thriving in British academia.* London: IOE Press/Trentham Books.

Game, A. 1997. Sociology's emotions. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie, 34*(4), 385-399.

Gannon, S. and Davies, B. 2007. Postmodern, post-structural, and critical theories. In S.N. Hesse-Biber (ed.), *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis,* pp.71-106. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gans, H.J. 2009. First generation decline: Downward mobility among refugees and immigrants. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 32*(9), 1658-1670.

Gardner, J. and El-Bushra, J., eds. 2004. *Somalia – The Untold Story: The war through the eyes of Somali women.* London: Pluto Press.

Gateley, D.E. 2014. Becoming actors of their lives: A relational autonomy approach to employment and education choices of refugee young people in London, UK. *Social Work & Society, 12*(2).

Gateley, D.E. 2015. A policy of vulnerability or agency? Refugee young people's opportunities in accessing further and higher education in the UK. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 45*(1), 26-46.

Gidley, B. and Jayaweera, H. 2010. *An Evidence Base on Migration and Integration in London.* Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford.

Gillborn, D. 2006. Critical race theory and education: Racism and antiracism in educational theory and praxis. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 27*(1): 11-32.

Gillborn, D. and Mirza, H.S. 2000. *Educational Inequality: Mapping race, class and gender – A synthesis of research evidence*. London: Office for Standards in Education.

Gillborn, D. and Warmington, P. 2014. *A Conversation on Race and Education.* Education at Illinois. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLaC4zHmgBo

Gillborn, D. and Youdell, D. 1999. *Rationing Education: Policy, practice, reform, and equity.* Buckingham: OUP.

Goodall, J. and Vorhaus, J. 2011. *Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement*. Department for Education.

Gunaratnam, Y. 2003. *Researching 'Race' and Ethnicity: Methods, knowledge and power.* London: Sage.

Harding, S.G. 1987. *Feminism and Methodology: Social science issues.* Indiana University Press.

Harding, S. 2007. Feminist standpoints. In S. Hesse-Biber (ed.), *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and praxis,* pp.45–69. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Harris, H. 2004. *The Somali Community in the UK: What we know and how we know it.* London: ICAR, International Policy Institute, King's College London.

Hassan, M.A., Lewis, H. and Lukes, S. 2009. *No Voice, Little Choice: The Somali housing emergency in north and east London*. London: Karin Housing Association.

Haynes, K. 2006. A therapeutic journey? Reflections on the effects of research on researcher and participants. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management, 1*(3), 204-221.

Hemmings, J. 2010. *Understanding East London's Somali Communities.* London: Options UK. Available at: http://karin-ha.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Understanding-East-Londons-Somali-Communities.pdf accessed Jan 2017

Hesse-Biber, S.N. 2014. Feminist approaches to in-depth interviewing. In *Feminist Research Practice: A primer,* pp.182-232. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hesse-Biber, S.N., Gilmartin, C.K. and Lydenberg, R., eds. 1999. *Feminist Approaches to Theory and Methodology: An interdisciplinary reader*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hochschild, A.R. 1979. Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure. *American Journal of Sociology, 85*(3), 551-575.

Hopkins, G. 2010. A changing sense of Somaliness: Somali women in London and Toronto. *Gender, Place & Culture, 17*(4), 519-538.

Hordge-Freeman, E. (2018) 'Bringing Your Whole Self to Research: The Power of the Researcher's Body, Emotions, and Identities in Ethnography', International journal of qualitative methods, 17(1),

Hornby, G. and Lafaele, R. 2011. Barriers to parental involvement in education: An explanatory model. *Educational Review, 63*(1), 37-52.

Hubbard, G., Backett-Milburn, K. and Kemmer, D. 2001. Working with emotion: Issues for the researcher in fieldwork and teamwork. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 4*(2), 119-137.

Hughes, C., Perrier, M. and Kramer, A.M. 2009. Plaisir, jouissance and other forms of pleasure: Exploring the intellectual development of the student. *Academic Futures: Inquiries into higher education and pedagogy*, pp.28-40. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Hussein, S. 2011. British Black and minority ethnic groups' participation in the care sector. *Social Care Workforce Periodical, 15.* Available at: http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/scwru/pubs/periodical/2011/issue15.aspx

Hylton, K. 2012. Talk the talk, walk the walk: Defining critical race theory in research. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 15*(1), 23-41.

Ingiriis, M.H. 2015. 'Sisters; was this what we struggled for?': The gendered rivalry in power and politics. *Journal of International Women's Studies, 16*(2), 376-394.

Ipsos MORI. 2018. *A Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain*. https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/review-survey-research-muslims-britain-0

Isik-Ercan, Z. 2015. Being Muslim and American: Turkish-American children negotiating their religious identities in school settings. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 18(*2), 225-250.

Issa-Salwe, A.M. 1996. *The Collapse of the Somali State: The impact of the colonial legacy.* London: Haan.

Jagger, A., 1989. Knowledge: Emotion in feminist epistemology. *Inquiry, 32*(2).

Jaggar, A. 1997. Love and knowledge: Emotion in feminist epistemology. In S. Kemp and J. Squires (eds), *Feminisms*, pp.183-193. Oxford University Press.

Jaggar, A.M. 1989. Love and knowledge: Emotion in feminist epistemology. *Inquiry, 32*(2), 151-176.

'Jobseekers Allowance for Lone Parents'. 2013. *Jobseekers Allowance for Lone Parents.* London: Department for Work and Pensions (withdrawn 2018, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jobseekers-allowance-for-lone-parents

Jones, A. 1992. Writing feminist educational research: Am 'I' in the text. In S. Middleton and A. Jones (eds), *Women and Education in Aotearoa*, vol. *2*, pp.18–32. Wellington NZ: Bridget Williams.

Jones, A., 1997. Teaching post-structuralist feminist theory in education: Student resistances. *Gender and Education, 9*(3), 261-269.

Kahin, M. and Wallace, C. 2017. *Somali Parents and Schooling in Britain.* London: IOE/Trentham Books.

Kaplan, S. 2008. The remarkable story of Somaliland. *Journal of Democracy, 19*(3), 143-157.

Kapteijns, L. and Arman, A. 2004. Educating immigrant youth in the United States: An exploration of the Somali case. *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies, 4*(6), 18-43.

Keles, J. 2015. Diaspora, the internet and social capital. In L. Ryan, U. Erel and A. D'Angelo (eds), *Migrant Capital: Networks, identities and strategies,* pp.102-116. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137348807_7

Khan, K. 2008. *Employment of Foreign Workers: Male and female labour market participation.* London: Office for National Statistics.

Kleist, N. 2008. Mobilising 'the diaspora': Somali transnational political engagement. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 34*(2), 307-323.

Knight, M.G. 2000. Ethics in qualitative research: Multicultural feminist activist research. *Theory into Practice, 39*(3), 170-176.

Kofman, E. 2003. Women migrants and refugees in the European Union, paper for OECD Conference, *The Economic and Social Aspects of Migration*, January, Brussels.

Kofman E., Raghuram P. (2015) Gendered Migrations and Global Social Reproduction: An Introduction. In: *Gendered Migrations and Global Social Reproduction.* Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship Series. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Kraaykamp, G. and Eijck, K.V. 2010. The intergenerational reproduction of cultural capital: A threefold perspective. *Social Forces, 89*(1): 209-231.

Kruizenga, T. 2010. Teaching Somali children: What perceived challenges do Somali students face in the public school system? *International Journal of Education, 2*, 11-17.

Langellier, K.M. 2010. Performing Somali identity in the diaspora: 'Wherever I go I know who I am'. *Cultural Studies, 24*(1), 66-94.

Lareau, A. 2001. Linking Bourdieu's concept of capital to the broader field. In B.J. Biddle, *Social Class, Poverty, and Education,* pp.77-100. New York: Routledge Falmer.

Lareau, A. and Horvat, E.M. 1999. Moments of social inclusion and exclusion race, class, and cultural capital in family-school relationships. *Sociology of Education, 72*, 37-53.

Lather, P. 1992. Critical frames in educational research: Feminist and post-structural perspectives. *Theory into Practice, 31*(2), 87-99.

Law, I., Phillips, D. and Turney, L., eds. 2004. *Institutional Racism in Higher Education*. London: Trentham.

Letherby, G. 2004. Reply to Anne Oakley. *Sociology, 38,* 193-194.

Lewis, K., Demie, F. and McLean, C. 2007. Raising Achievement of Somali Pupils: Good practice in London schools. London: Lambeth Education.

Little, P.D. 2003. *Somalia: Economy without state.* Indiana University Press.

Mann, S. and Kelley, S.R. 1997. Standing at the crossroads of modernist thought: Collins, Smith, and the new feminist epistemologies. *Gender and Society*, *11*(4), 391-408.

Martínez-Salgado, C. 2009. Qualitative inquiry with women in poverty in Mexico City: Reflections on the emotional responses of a research team. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 22*(3), 297-313.

Maynard, M. and Purvis, J., eds. 2013/1994. *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. London: Routledge Revivals.

Maynard, Mary. 1994. ‘Race’, gender and the concept of ‘difference’ in feminist thought. In H. Afshar and M. Maynard (eds), *The Dynamics of ‘Race’ and Gender.* London: Taylor and Francis.

McNeal, R.B. Jr, 1999. Parental involvement as social capital: Differential effectiveness on science achievement, truancy, and dropping out. *Social Forces, 78*(1), 117-144.

Mercer, J. (2006) 'The challenges of insider research in educational institutions: wielding a double-edged sword and resolving delicate dilemmas', Oxford Review of Education, 33: (1) 1-18

Mirza, H.S. 1992. *Young Female and Black*. London: Routledge.

Mirza, H.S. 2006a. Transcendence over diversity: Black women in the academy. *Policy Futures in Education, 4*(2), 101-113.

Mirza, H.S. 2006b. ‘Race’, gender and educational desire. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 9*(2), 137-158.

Mirza, H.S. 2009. *Race, Gender and Educational Desire: Why black women succeed and fail.* London: Routledge.

Mirza, H.S. 2013. ‘A second skin’: Embodied intersectionality, transnationalism and narratives of identity and belonging among Muslim women in Britain. In *Women's Studies International Forum* (vol. 36, pp.5-15). Pergamon.

Mirza, H.S. 2015. Decolonizing higher education: Black feminism and the intersectionality of race and gender. *Journal of Feminist Scholarship, 7-8,* 1-12.

Mirza, H.S. and Reay, D. 2000. Spaces and places of black educational desire: Rethinking black supplementary schools as a new social movement. *Sociology, 34*(3), 521-544.

Mirza, H.S. and Reay, D. 2014. Redefining citizenship: Black women educators and ‘the third space. In *Challenging Democracy,* pp.72-86. London: Routledge.

Modood, T. and Ahmad, F. 2007. British Muslim perspectives on multiculturalism. *Theory, Culture & Society, 24*(2), 187-213.

Morrice, L. 2009. Journeys into higher education: The case of refugees in the UK. *Teaching in Higher Education, 14*(6), 661-672.

Morrice, L. 2011. *Being a Refugee: Learning and identity – A longitudinal study of refugees in the UK.* Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Morrice, L. 2013. Refugees in higher education: Boundaries of belonging and recognition, stigma and exclusion. *International Journal of Lifelong Education,* 32(5), 652-668.

Museus, S.D. and Griffin, K.A. 2011. Mapping the margins in higher education: On the promise of intersectionality frameworks in research and discourse. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 151,* 5-13.

Mythen, G. 2012. Identities in the third space? Solidity, elasticity and resilience amongst young British Pakistani Muslims. *British Journal of Sociology, 63*(3), 393–411.

Oakley, A. 1998. Gender, methodology and people's ways of knowing: Some problems with feminism and the paradigm debate in social science. *Sociology, 32*(4), 707-731.

ONS. 2015. *Census* A*nalysis: Ethnicity and religion of the non-UK born population in England and Wales: 2011* https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/2011censusanalysisethnicityandreligionofthenonukbornpopulationinenglandandwales/2015-06-18

ONS 2019 UK Population by Country of Birth https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/populationoftheunitedkingdombycountryofbirthandnationalityunderlyingdatasheets

Onyx, J. and Bullen, P. 2000. Measuring social capital in five communities. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 36*(1), 23-42.

Open Letter. 2015. *'Can the Somali Speak'; An open letter to Dr Marcus Hoehne and the Somaliland Journal of African Studies.* Available at: http://www.warscapes.com/blog/can-somali-speak-open-letter-dr-markus-hoehne-and-somaliland-journal-african-studies

Open Society Foundation (OSF). 2014. *Somalis in London.* Open Society Foundation Report. OSF.

Open Society Foundation (OSF). 2015. *Somalis in European Cities.* Open Society Foundation Report. OSF.

O'Shaughnessy, S. and Krogman, N.T. 2012. A revolution reconsidered? Examining the practice of qualitative research in feminist scholarship. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 37(2), 493-520.

Orakzai, S.B. 2014. The rights of women in Islam: The question of 'public' and 'private 'spheres for women's rights and empowerment in Muslim societies. *Journal of Human Rights in the Commonwealth, 2*(1).

Patulny, R. 2015. A spectrum of integration: Examining combinations of bonding and bridging social capital and network heterogeneity among Australian refugee and skilled migrants. In L. Ryan, U. Erel and A. D'Angelo, *Migrant Capital*, pp.207-229. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pérez Huber, L. and Solórzano, D.G. 2015. Racial microaggressions as a tool for critical race research. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 18*(3), 297–320.

Peters, M. 2015. Why is my curriculum White? *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 47*(7), 641-646.

Pew Research Centre. 2016. 5 facts about the global Somali diaspora. *Fact Tank*. Pew Research Centre. Available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/01/5-facts-about-the-global-somali-diaspora/

Phoenix. A. 1994. Practising feminist research: The intersection of gender and 'race' in the research process. In M. Maynard and J. Purvis, *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*, pp.201-216. London: Routledge Revivals.

Phoenix, A., 2011. Somali young women and hierarchies of belonging. *Young*, *19*(3), 313-331.

Platt, L. 2007. *Poverty and Ethnicity in the UK*. York: JRF.

Preston, J. 2003 ''Enrolling alone?' Lifelong learning and social capital in England. International *Journal of Lifelong Education*, *22*(5), 235-249.

Putnam, R.D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community.* Simon and Schuster.

Puwar, N. 2004a. *Space Invaders: Race, gender and bodies out of place.* Oxford: Berg.

Puwar, N. and Raghuram, P. 2003. *South Asian Women in the Diaspora.* Oxford: Berg.

Ramji, H. 2003. Engendering diasporic identities. In Nirmal Puwar and Parvati Raghuram (eds), *South Asian Women in the Diaspora,* pp.227-242. Oxford: Berg.

Ramsden, R. and Taket, A. 2013. Social capital and Somali families in Australia. *Journal of international Migration and Integration, 14*(1), 99-117.

Rasmussen, J. 2009. *Education for Somali Students in London: Challenges and strategies.* London: Foundation for International Education.

Reay, D. 2004. 'It's all becoming a habitus': Beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 25*(4), 431-444.

Reay, D., Davies, J., David, M. and Ball, S.J. 2001. Choices of degree or degrees of choice? Class, 'race' and the higher education choice process. *Sociology, 35*(4), 855-874.

Richardson, J., ed. 1986. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education,* pp.241–58. New York: Greenwood Press.

Refugee Support Network. 2012. *'I Just Want to Study': Access to higher education for young refugees and asylum seekers.* London: Refugee Support Network.

Reinharz, S. 1992. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. London: Oxford University Press.

Robertson, L. Helavaara, and Hill, R. 2001. Excluded voices: Educational exclusion and inclusion. In Mike Cole and Dave Hill (eds), *Schooling and Equality: Fact, concept and policy*, pp.73-94. Abingdon: Routledge.

Ropers-Huilman, R. and Winters, K.T. 2011. Feminist research in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education*, *82*(6), 667-690.

Rutter, J. 2004. *Refugee Communities in the UK: Somali children's educational progress and life experiences.* London: Multiverse.

Rutter, J., Cooley, L., Reynolds, S. and Sheldon, R. 2007. *From Refugee to Citizen: 'Standing on my own two feet'.* London: Metropolitan Support Trust and the Institute of Public Policy Research. Available at: https://www.metropolitan.org.uk/images/From-Refugee-to-Citizen-Exec.pdf

Ryan, L. 2008. Navigating the emotional terrain of families 'here' and 'there': Women, migration and the management of emotions. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 29(*3), 299-313.

Ryan, L. 2011. Muslim women negotiating collective stigmatization: 'We're just normal people'. *Sociology*, *45*(6), 1045-1060.

Ryan, L. 2015. 'Inside' and 'outside' of what or where? Researching migration through multi-positionalities. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 16,* 2.

Ryan, L. 2018. Differentiated embedding: Polish migrants in London negotiating belonging over time. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *44*(2), 233-251.

Ryan, L. and Golden, A. 2006. 'Tick the box please': A reflexive approach to doing quantitative social research. *Sociology, 40*(6), 1191-1200.

Ryan, L., D'Angelo, A., Sales, R.A. and Rodrigues, M. 2010. *Newly Arrived Migrant and Refugee Children in the British Educational System: Project Report*. Middlesex University, London. Available at: http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/9399/

Ryan, L., Erel, U. and D'Angelo, A. 2015. *Migrant Capital: Networks, identities and strategies.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ryan, L., Kofman, E. and Banfi, L. 2009. *Muslim Youth in Barnet: Exploring identity, citizenship and belonging*. Middlesex University: Social Policy Research Centre.

Ryan, L., Sales, R., Tilki, M. and Siara, B. 2008. Social networks, social support and social capital: The experiences of recent Polish migrants in London. *Sociology*, *42*(4), 672-690.

Schuller, T., Baron, S. and Field, J. 2000. Social capital: A review and critique. In Stephen Baron, John Field and Tom Schuller (eds), *Social Capital: Critical perspectives,* pp.1-39. Oxford: Open University Press.

Shah, B., Dwyer, C. and Modood, T. 2010. Explaining educational achievement and career aspirations among young British Pakistanis: Mobilizing 'ethnic capital'? *Sociology, 44*(6), 1109-1127.

Shakya, Yogendra B., Sepali Guruge, S., Hynie, M., Akbari, A., Malik, M., Htoo, S., Khogali, A., Abiyo Mona, S., Murtaza, R. and Alley, S. 2010. Aspirations for higher education among newcomer refugee youth in Toronto: Expectations, challenges, and strategies. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees 27*(2), 65-78.

Siegler, V. 2014. Measuring social capital. *Measuring Social Capital:* A report by the Office for National Statistics, available at: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_371693.pdf, accessed 15 June 2016.

Song, M. And Parker, D. (1995) 'Commonality, Difference and the Dynamics of Disclosure in In-depth interviewing', Sociology (Oxford), 29(2), pp. 241–256

Solórzano, D.G. 1998. Critical race theory, race and gender microaggressions, and the experience of Chicana and Chicano scholars. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11*(1), 121-136.

Sprague, J. 2016. *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*, 2nd edn. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Stevenson, J. and Willott, J. 2007. The aspiration and access to higher education of teenage refugees in the UK. *Compare, 37*(5), 671-687.

Stevenson, J., Demack, S., Stiell, B., Abdi, M., Ghaffar, F. and Hassan, S. 2017. *The Social Mobility Challenges Faced by Young Muslims*. Project report. London: Social Mobility Commission.

Strand, S., DeCoulon, A., Meschi, E., Vorhaus, J., Ivins, C., Small, L., Sood, A., Gervais, M. and Rehman, H. 2010. *Drivers and Challenges in Raising the Achievement of Pupils from Bangladeshi, Somali and Turkish Backgrounds*. Research Report DCSF-RR226. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Student, R., Kendall, K. and Day, L. 2017. Being a refugee university student: A collaborative auto-ethnography. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 30*(4), 580-604.

Sue, D.W., ed. 2010. *Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, dynamics, and impact.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Sullivan, A. 2001. Cultural capital and educational attainment. *Sociology*, *35*(4), 893-912.

Takhar, S. 2006. South Asian women, social capital and multicultural (mis)understandings. *Community, Work and Family*, *9*(3), 291-307.

Takhar, S. 2013. *Gender, Ethnicity and Political Agency: South Asian women organizing.* London: Routledge.

Takhar, S. 2015. 'Revealing too much?': Reflecting on emotions in research with south Asian women. In K. Bhopal and R. Deuchar (eds), *Researching Marginalised Groups.* London: Taylor & Francis Routledge.

Takhar, S. 2016. Bangladeshi female students in higher education: 'Agentic autonomy' at the race/gender trajectory. In *Gender and Race Matter: Global Perspectives on Being a Woman*, pp.41-62. Bingley: Emerald.

Tarlo, E. 2007. Hijab in London: Metamorphosis, resonance and effects. *Journal of Material Culture, 12*(2), 131-156.

Tell MAMA. 2018. *Gendered Anti-Muslim Hatred and Islamophobia.* Tell MAMA. Available at: https://tellmamauk.org/gendered-anti-muslim-hatred-and-islamophobia-street-based-aggression-in-cases-reported-to-tell-mama-is-alarming/

Tell MAMA. 2018. *Normalising Hatred. Tell MAMA Annual Report.* Tell MAMA. Available at: https://tellmamauk.org/tell-mama-annual-report-2018-_-normalising-hate/

Thapar-Bjorkert, S. and Sanghera, G. 2010. Social capital, educational aspirations and young Pakistani Muslim men and women in Bradford, West Yorkshire. *Sociological Review 58*(2), 244–264.

Thomas, F. and Abebaw, M. 2002. *Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Learning and Skills Council London North Area.* London: Learning and Skills Council.

Thompson, N. and Pihlaja, S. 2018. Temporary liberties and uncertain futures: Young female Muslim perceptions of life in England. *Journal of Youth Studies, 21*(10), 1326-1343.

Thomson, P. 2010. Bringing Bourdieu to 'widening participation' policies in higher education: A UK case analysis. In M. Apple, S. Ball and L. Gandin (eds), *The Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Education*, pp.318-328. London: Routledge.

Tiilikainen, M. 2003. Somali women and daily Islam in the diaspora. *Social Compass, 50*(1), 59-69.

Tomlinson, S. 1991. Ethnicity and educational attainment in England: An overview. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 22*(2), 121-139.

Tyrer, D. and Ahmad, F. 2006. *Muslim Women and Higher Education: Identities, experiences and prospects. A summary report*. Liverpool: John Moores University and European Social Fund.

UNDP. 2009. *Somalia's Missing Millions: The Somali diaspora and its role in development.* Report, March. United Nations Development Programme.

UNESCO. 2016. *UNESCO Institute of Statistics Country Profile: Somalia.* Available at: http://uis.unesco.org/country/SO

Valentine, G. and Sporton, D. 2009. 'How other people see you, it's like nothing that's inside': The impact of processes of disidentification and disavowal on young people's subjectivities. *Sociology, 43*(4), 735-751.

Valentine, G., Sporton, D. and Nielsen, K.B. 2009. Identities and belonging: a study of Somali refugee and asylum seekers living in the UK and Denmark. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 27*(2), 234-250.

Vince, R. (2020) 'Experiencing Emotion in Conducting Qualitative Research as a PhD Student', Journal of management education, 44(4),

Vincent, C., Rollock, N., Ball, S. and Gillborn, D. 2012. Being strategic, being watchful, being determined: Black middle-class parents and schooling. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 33*(3), 337-354.

Walliman, N. 2015. *Social Research Methods: The essentials.* Sage.

Ward, J.V. 1996. Raising resisters: The role of truth telling in the psychological development of African American girls. In B.J.R. Leadbeater and N. Way (eds), *Urban Girls: Resisting stereotypes, creating identities,* pp.85-99. New York: New York University Press.

West, L. 1995. Beyond fragments: Adults, motivation and higher education. *Studies in the Education of Adults, 27*(2), 133-156.

Westmarland, N. 2001. The quantitative/qualitative debate and feminist research: A subjective view of objectivity. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 2*(1).

Wharton, A.S. 2009. The sociology of emotional labour. *Annual Review of Sociology, 35,* 147-165.

Wilkins, R. 1993. Taking it personally: A note on emotion and autobiography. *Sociology, 27*(1), 93-100.

Williams, R.H. and Vashi, G. 2007. Hijab and American Muslim women: Creating the space for autonomous selves. *Sociology of Religion, 68*(3), 269-287.

World Bank. 2016. *World Bank Makes Progress to Support Remittance Flows to Somalia.* Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2016/06/10/world-bank-makes-progress-to-support-remittance-flows-to-somalia

Yosso, T. 2005. Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 69-91.

Yuval-Davis, N. 1997. *Gender & Nation.* London: Sage.

Yuval-Davis, N. 2006a. Intersectionality and feminist politics. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *13*(3), 193-209.

Yuval-Davis, N. 2006b. Belonging and the politics of belonging. *Patterns of Prejudice*, *40*(3), 197-214.

Yuval-Davis, N. 2011. *Power, Intersectionality and the Politics of Belonging.* Denmark: FREIA (Feminist Research Center in Aalborg), Aalborg University.

Nicky Spawls

PhD Student

Director of Programmes

Middlesex University

Appendix 1 – Consent Form

Title of Research Project – Somali Women Graduates in London: Experiencing 'Success'

I…….(print name) confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet and that I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

I understand that:

- the research data will be completely anonymised, with all participants' personal identifiers (name, residential location, place of employment etc.) being changed to protect confidentiality
- the anonymised data will be archived and stored securely by the researcher
- the results of the research will be disseminated via a project report and potentially in a number of articles and academic presentations
- any recordings will be transcribed exactly but any quotes used in publications will not be identifiable and will be completely anonymous
- a translator may be used and that this translator will abide by the ethical code of practice adhered to for this research and will maintain confidentiality at all times
- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without having to give any reason
- I agree to take part in the study.

_____ _____ _____

Name of Research Participant Date Signature

For any further information please contact the researcher, Nicky Spawls, Director of Programmes, Dept of Education, Middlesex University, The Burroughs, Hendon, NW4 4BT n.spawls@msdx.ac.uk Tel: 02084116198

Appendix 2 - Participant Information Sheet

Title of Project: Somali Women Graduates in London, Experiencing 'Success'

The project is being carried out by: Nicky Spawls as part of a PhD research project

The project is about? The project is a study of the factors impacting upon the educational success of Somali women graduates and undergraduates, and how their family experiences interrelated with their education.

What will I have to do? Just answer the questions as you see fit

What are the benefits of participating in the study? There will be no personal gain from partaking in the study but the research produced will help contribute to a wider field of research into British–Somali women, higher education and identity.

Are there any risks for me if I agree to participate? Not that I can foresee. All the information held will be confidential and anonymous and so nothing that you say will be identifiable as coming from you.

Will the study cost me anything? No

What if I do not want to take part? You are under no obligation to take part. Participation is completely voluntary

What happens to the information collected? The information collected will be stored by myself in a safe place, data protected and held confidentially and anonymously. The information will be used in the study and ideas and information that you have given me will be related in the body of my research.

What if I change my mind and decide to withdraw from the study? You can change your mind at any time. You just have to tell me, the researcher, and I will remove all your data from the record and will no longer contact you.

What I have any questions or do not understand something? If you do not understand anything then feel free to ask me questions at any stage of the process, before, during or after the data collection.

What happens at the end of the study? At the end of this study the research will hopefully be published in various formats; research journals, conference papers etc.

For any further information regarding any aspects of the research, please contact the researcher, Nicky Spawls, Director of Programmes, Dept. of Education, Middlesex University, The Burroughs, Hendon, NW4 4BT n.spawls@msdx.ac.uk Tel: 02084116198

Appendix 3 – Interview schedule for Somali women graduates in London – Semi-structured

Demographic Information Questions

Name:

Age:

Country of Birth:

Age and year of coming to UK if relevant:

Year when Family came to UK if different from above:

Area of Somalia parents came from?

Languages Spoken

Place of Residence:

Where do you live?

Own home / living with parents/ living with spouse/ living in a shared house

Whom do you live with?

In what area of England / London?

Family Variables:

Did you grow up in a: dual parent household / single parent household

What are your parents' occupations?

Siblings /Brothers and sisters

Education:

How many GCSE's do you hold?

Do you have any post- 16 qualifications? A-levels. BTEC or equivalent -

Do you hold an undergraduate degree?

If yes, in what subject: From which university:

Do you hold a postgraduate Degree or are studying for one currently?

General Background

What subject did you study for your degree and where?

When did you graduate?

Are you currently employed / studying / volunteering?

If so what is your current occupation?

Educational Experiences.

Can you tell me something about your experience of formal education to date?

Where did you study for your primary, secondary and your undergraduate education?

Can you tell me anything about the transitions in your education – from primary to secondary? From secondary to FE / HE?

How different were the challenges from your secondary education to your undergraduate education?

Did you ever have any form of supplementary schooling of any sort – Saturday school/tutors etc.?

Did you always want to go to university?

What did you hope to achieve from / get out of your degree? What do you think your parent/s wanted you to achieve from your degree? Where did you hope this degree will take you / will do for you? What do you think have gained from the experience of studying for a degree? Has your perception of yourself changed through the process of becoming a graduate?
Home, family & community support. How do you feel your parent/ parents supported your education? (Do you feel they were able to support you academically or in other ways?) Have any other members of your family studied for a degree? What do you think about the relationship between yourself, your teachers and your parents? Did you feel that your school was supportive of your educational endeavours? How did you perceive the relationship between your cultural background and your educational aspirations? Do you think your parents had any concerns about your education? (i.e. the experiences you might have, the curriculum, religious / cultural tensions) As a student did you joined any networks or societies for Somali students? If yes, then what did you experience from being part of one of these groups? (Extend this as ness) What did being bilingual mean to you in your education? Do you think there are different expectations on young Somali women in comparison to young Somali men? – in terms of education, families, careers How do you deal with these in relation to your own aspirations?

Challenges faced in the Education system What would you say if any, were the challenges you faced in your education? Do you feel that you experienced any discrimination in your education? *If so, how was this* manifested? How did you deal with that? Do you have any reflections on the curriculum that you encountered in your secondary / undergraduate studies?
Identity and aspirations. How would you define / describe yourself? (in 3 words) Who were your role models in life / your academic aspirations? Can you think of any way your education has contributed to your sense of identity? Do you think it has altered how you perceive yourself? How you view / think about yourself? How important is being Somali to you? If relevant - what does wearing the hijab mean to you? Do you see yourself as a role model in your community? A big question – what / who do you feel has been the biggest enabling factor in your educational achievement? Are you linked to any social media that has being Somali at the forefront of their aims? (e.g. SPSS, Academic societies reparation societies, Int Somali Student awards)

Culture

When you were growing up was your family interested in Somali Arts Culture history?

Can you tell me anything about the young Somali person and their relationship to their home country – do you have any views on this?

Have you been back to Somalia or do you intend to?

Is there anything else about your educational experiences that you think might be of interest or are there any questions you would like to go back over?

Do you know any Somali teachers, academics or Somalis working in education?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my study. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

All information that you have provided will be stored confidentially and will be anonymous. In addition, you have the right to withdraw at any time and may ask for your responses to be withdrawn even after the interview has taken place.

Appendix 4 – Interview schedule for key informants

What is your current occupation?

Could you tell me a little bit about how you came to be in the position you are in today?

What has been your involvement in your local or wider Somali community?

What do you think have been the major changes, if any, in regard to Somali community around you (in London) over the last 10 years?

Have you seen any major changes in regard to the educational experiences of Somali people/ family members etc. in your community?

Have you been aware of any issues with secondary school achievement of young Somali's *now or* in the past. What type of issues?

Research suggested that Somali young people have in the last decade been regarded as an underperforming group in the English education system. Do you think this situation has changed?

If so , what do you think these changes may be attributed to?

If there have been increases in attainment that you have perceived, what do you think this may have been due to?

Prompt here about; any experience knowledge of Somali supplementary schools, educational support services for Somali pupils, Somali community engagement in / about educational provision, community education groups etc.

What changes if any have you perceived in regard to Somali young people and university enrolment?

Have any of these changes been specifically focused on the role or participation of Somali women?

Have you witnessed any changes taking place within the Somali community due to the inclusion of Somali women entering into and succeeding higher education?

Do you foresee changes taking place within the Somali community due to the inclusion of more Somali women in higher education?

What do you think could be done (in all areas… schools, community, wider LA, etc…) to improve the outcomes for these young people and to encourage them into higher education and professional sectors?

Appendix 5 - Participants' biographic details

Name	Age	Born	Qualifications
Selma	23	Yemen, moved to Somalia then entered UK aged 5	BSc, PGCE
Khadra	26	Riyadh Saudi Arabia, entered UK aged 5	BSc MA
Ilhan	28	Somalia Entered UK aged 3	BA PGCE
Ummi	26	Somalia entered UK aged 2	BSc Currently studying for an MA
Ambara	24	Somalia entered UK aged	BSc MSc Currently studying for a PhD
Leyla	22	UK: family entered UK 1 year before she was born	BA
Samia	24	born Somalia entered UK age 3	BA
Najiyah	22	Born Somalia entered UK aged 4	BA
Nasra	25	Born East Africa - Somali Refugee Camp, Entered UK aged 5	BSc MA Currently Studying for a PhD
Taaliah	28	Born in Somalia. entered UK aged 6	BSc Currently Studying for a MA
Maryam	29	Born Somalia; Entered UK age 7	BSc
Ayan	22	London: family entered UK 2 years before she was born	BSc
Yasmiin	21	South Africa Entered UK age 4 months	BSc
Sumaya	24	Somalia Entered UK aged 3	BA
Jennah	28	Somalia, Entered UK age 6	BSc PhD
Hana	25	Somalia came to UK aged 6	BA
Mulki	22	Born UK, family entered UK 2 years earlier	BSc
Nadifah	29	Born Somalia Entered UK age 16	BSc
Warda	22	Born in London Parents Entered UK 2 years before she was born	BSc Currently studying for MSc
Zayneb	27	Somalia till aged 5, then Yemen, entered UK aged 8	BSc

Appendix 6 - Candidate's Declaration Form

MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY FORM **RD(Decl)**

Candidate's Declaration Form

Note: This form must be submitted to the University Research Office with the candidate's thesis.

Name of candidate: **Ms. Nicola Spawls**

Thesis Title: **'What We Came Through to Get Here': The educational experiences of Somali women graduates in London**

Degree for which thesis is submitted: **PhD**

1. **Statement of associated studies undertaken in connection with the programme of research** (Regulation 03.1 refers) While a registered student of the University, I attended the following courses/ workshops / conferences:

- Presentation to the CERS Seminar Series; Emotional Journeys: Navigating the impact of complex life histories on the research process 24/01/2018
- CERS Qualitative Research Seminars
- Issues in research design
- Preparing for your transfer / viva

2. **Concurrent registration for two or more academic awards**

I declare that while registered as a candidate for the University's research degree, I have not been a registered candidate or an enrolled student for an award of another university, academic or professional institution.

3. **Material submitted for another award**

I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award

Signature of candidate .... Date: 01/10/2020