

M.Sc.

THE ROUGH ROAD TO INTEGRATION: THE CASE OF SOMALI IMMIGRANTS' INTEGRATION IN NORWAY

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MASTER THESIS 30 CREDITS 2010



The Rough Road to Integration: The Case of Somali Immigrants' Integration in Norway

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2010

Noragric MSc Thesis

Dedication

To my family

I dedicate this research to my family. My wife, Nafisa Shek Sharif has for her moral support and encouragement during my studies. I am also grateful to my children Sharmake, Muna, Mohamed and Mubarak for their patience and support.

Dedication2

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	5
ABSTRACT	6
Chapter One	8
<i>Background</i>	8
<i>Types of Integration</i>	10
Chapter Two	12
<i>Integration History Norway</i>	12
<i>The Norwegian Integration Policy</i>	13
<i>Laws and Regulations in Norway about Integration</i>	14
Chapter Three.....	15
<i>Social Segregation of the immigrants</i>	20
<i>The Integration Conundrum</i>	22
<i>Case of Somalis in Norway</i>	23
Chapter Four	26
<i>Research Objectives</i>	26
<i>Research Method</i>	26
<i>Selection of the Study Area and Justification</i>	26
Figure 3: Map of Norway Showing the Study Area	27
<i>Selection of Interviewees and Interviews</i>	27
<i>Analysis and Presentation of Data</i>	28
<i>Limitations of the Study Design</i>	28
Chapter five.....	29
<i>How Somali Refugees Arrived in Norway</i>	29
Another interviewee had a similar story	29
<i>Language Proficiency</i>	31
Educational level	31
Figure 6: Academic competence of interviewees	32
<i>How Somalis perceive the concept of integration.</i>	33
Chapter Six	35
<i>Employment of Somalis in Norway</i>	35
Table 1: Types of jobs secured by Somali immigrants in Norway	36
How Jobs are secured by Somali Refugees	37
<i>Housing</i>	38
<i>Political/Community Participation</i>	39

<i>Discrimination and Racism</i>	41
Another interviewee had the following observation	42
Such views were also made by another observant	42
Chapter Seven	43
<i>The Social Challenge</i>	43
<i>Pampered to be Un-integrated</i>	44
<i>Cultural and Religious Inertia</i>	45
This is a response from another.....	45
Chapter Eight.....	47
<i>Recommendations and Conclusion</i>	47
<i>References</i>	49

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My foremost thanks go to the Almighty Allah who for giving me the strength and ability to write and complete this work. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Gufu Oba for his advice and guidance throughout this study.

This research would not have been possible without the help of many friends and colleagues. First I would like thank the support of the more than 100 members of Bader Islamic and Culture Centre in Ås (B.I.C.C.) for participating in the survey. I also wish to thank the people of Norway for giving my family a safe haven in their country and for giving me the opportunity to pursue my educational career. Further thanks go to all the academic and non-academic staff of the Department of International Environment and Development Studies (NORAGRIC) for their support. I give especial thanks to Ms. Borghel Drie, the Director of adult education at Molde, Norway. Her invaluable advice was vital in shaping my academic career. Thanks Brorghil !! You will always have a special place in my heart.

I will also like to thank Ms. Ingun Bahama, Master program coordinator in NORAGRIC who gave me support during my thesis writing. However, in the writing up process, I am thankful to Umar Abdi Moahamed (Affey) for his invaluable support.

ABSTRACT

Integration more than ever before, has become a major issue defining and shaping the contours of policies on social cohesion in most European countries including Norway. In Norway, Somalis are undeniably the most predominant and conspicuous African refugee group and have been identified as the most difficult group to integrate. In this thesis, the integration of Somalis in the *Akershus* region of Norway was explored. The aim of the study was to identify the challenges associated with the integration of Somalis in this region and to formulate recommendations for facilitating their integration. Even though the study focused on the *Akershus* region, the findings made can contribute to the formulation of better Norwegian policies on integration. The study identified several key challenges that inhibited the full integration of Somalis into mainstream Norwegian society. These challenges included unemployment, inadequate housing, language barrier, discrimination and humiliation, cultural and religious differences, limited space in the political decision making processes, inadequate participation in community activities and limited institutional support. On employment, it was found that about 27.03 % of the Somali group interviewed was engaged in menial jobs ranging mainly cleaning. A proportion had higher education from Somalia but was engaged in jobs completely different from their qualification. Language remained a major barrier for the integration of the Somalis, and was a vital ingredient for securing jobs. A major finding was the disparities in the cultural and religious norms and beliefs of the Somalis on the one hand and their Norwegian hosts on the other hand with respect to lifestyle. Some of the study participants also indicated they were discriminated or humiliated at the workplace, schools and streets. Most of the study participants were either totally oblivious about the political process in Norway or had no interest in participating in the political space. Similarly, there appeared to be limited engagement of the study participants in community activities involving the host Norwegians. The study found that religious festivities marked the only prominent occasion where both Somalis communities and the host Norwegians inter-mingled. The study recommends an effective introduction programmes for Somali refugees with strong education elements in the Norwegian language, skill development for job placement, among others. It is also recommended that Somalis already fully integrated into Norwegian society are involved in the introduction programme. This way, they can provide detailed information about the Norwegian society from the Somali cultural perspective to assuage

any negative influences from other Somalis who may be against integration. Also, it is recommended that fully integrated Somalis be employed in the refugee camps, social welfare offices, and job search centres. It is further recommended that the case processing time in the asylum camps is shortened so as to provide enough time for prospective Somali refugees to join the society.

Chapter One

Background

Integration in its most political form is the incorporation of newcomers (foreigners) into a host country's economic, political and social fabric (Papademetriou 2003). It has been viewed in different ways by different organizations and states that are concerned with the welfare of refugees and their host countries. Over the years, many of European countries have followed a strategy of assimilation with respect to integrating refugees. This approach has led to the substitution of the values and beliefs of refugees for those of the host countries. This model of integration was also developed in the largely composed immigrant countries like USA, Canada and Australia, and was considered "the melting pot theory" for the integration of immigrants (Gordon 1964).

"Ideally speaking, integration is not the same as either assimilation or segregation. Assimilation implies that the minorities gradually become culturally identical with the majority and melt into this community. Segregation is the opposite of this: when groups are kept strictly separated as in South Africa under apartheid. Integration means that minority groups participate in the common activities of the community - work, school, and politics but reserve the right to remain culturally separate from this majority". (Eriksen 2001)

Classic assimilation theory includes general assumptions about the absorption of 'extrinsic' cultural characteristics (such as language, dress and tastes for particular foods or music), but is less clear about adherence to more 'intrinsic' characteristics, such as religion (Alba and Nee 1997). In contrast, Nagel (1994) discusses the resilience of cultural, linguistic, and religious differences that question assumptions about the inevitability of assimilation. She notes that ethnicity is a dynamic and socially constructed process, negotiated out of language, religion, culture, appearance, ancestry, and region.

However this "melting pot theory" of integration is a one-way adaptation process and often leads to a lot of ethnic tensions. It has failed in Australia, Canada and Post Apartheid South Africa. The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) had also redefined this kind of approach to integration. According to ECRE (2005), integration is a two-way process

that is the first day that a refugee comes to the host country. This two way process encompasses the promotion of positive attitudes from the media and politician towards the refugee who have newly arrived. If the refugees are welcome into the society, it will ensure their total involvement in all facets of the society of their host countries. Hence, the refugee will invest in their future, which will benefit not only them, but also whole the society.

This definition imposes responsibilities on both sides; the refugees and their host countries. On the part of refugees, it involves their vigilance to the idiosyncrasies they may experience in the new country that came to. On the hand then are duty-bound to respect the laws and institutions of the host countries without giving up their own cultural, religion and identity. On the part of the host countries, this *two-way* process demands that they provide the enabling environment to ensure the full integration of refugees. Therefore, the core responsibility of the host countries is to facilitate access to resources, education and decision making processes to promote a good relation between refugees and local communities. This is well captured in the statement of 1968 by Roy Jenkins, which says “integration” should be viewed “ not as a flattening process of uniformity, but cultural diversity, coupled with equal opportunity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance” (Rex 1996)

The *dynamics and long-term* aspect of this definition means that integration is not a ‘one-off’ activity that is undertaken with a specific time line. It is a gradual and continuous process, which starts when the refugees first arrive in the country. It also continues even after they have become active members of the fabric of the host countries from all perspectives. This means that integration is not just about introduction programmers for newcomers or even first generation as is the case in many European countries including Norway, is a processes that will continue for many years.

Because of it’s *multi-dimensional* nature, integration should relate to both sides for actual participation in all aspects. In relation to this comprehensive approach to integration ECRE has outlined the different elements of integration that should be fulfilled by the host nations in order to facilitate successful integration. Pertinent among these elements are to facilitate for newly arrived refugee to improve or adapt their skills from the first day of their arrival.

Types of Integration

Social integration of refugees is a concept that suggests ideas of equal opportunities and rights for all human beings. In this case, becoming more integrated within a society implies improving life chances of the newcomers. In terms of delineating the different social integration facets there are four types of social integration (ECRE 2005):

First, *Civic integration* is the full participation of refugees in the civic life of their host countries. This is encouraged by the host countries through the promotion of access to citizenship and political rights for the refugees. According to (ECRE 2005), the acquisition of citizenship is the most potent means by which refugees can be integrated. However, in most countries, including Norway the process of gaining citizenship is encumbered by many legal structures that make it difficult for refugees to get it. This isolates many refugees who have attempted their best to be integrated into their host societies. On the other hand, the legal procedures of most Western societies are mainly based on norms that contradict with the religious and traditional boundaries of the refugee. Thus, even where citizenship is granted, refugees are viewed not to be a part of the social fabrics of the host country. They are considered as second-class citizens by the virtue of their background and race. Another important gateway to civic integration is the participation of refugees in the political decision making process. Where refugees are given the right to vote and stand for election, politicians tend to give them a high priority and thus ensure that their concerns are tailored into their political agenda and policies (ECRE 2005).

Second, *Socio-economic integration* is the unfettered access of refugees to the social and economic systems of their host countries to enhance their well-being. This involves the existence of an enabling environment and legal regimes that provide refugees with access to accommodation, employment, family reunification, education, health care services and involvement in the social life and political activities of their host countries. However, in many cases, the institutions in their hosting countries do not recognize the refugees with high educational qualifications. Hence, they are not integrated into the labor market. Countries, like Norway, where good knowledge of language is first key to labor market, it is very common to find refugee with high educational qualifications that have no jobs or are engaged in menial jobs to make their daily life bread.

Another significant issue for refugees is their ability to reunite with their families once they are settled in their host countries. In most European countries including Norway, there are restrictions on the family reunion of refugees with legal status and their family members. This makes it difficult for refugees to rebuild their lives and integrate with societies they live with (ECRE 2005).

Third, *Cultural integration* involves the complete absorption, acceptance and practice of the core values, norms and traditional practices of the host country by refugees. This does not mean that refugees have to abandon their own culture, but rather join theirs with that of their host countries in a harmonious manner to ensure a peaceful co-existence between them and their host communities. To ensure this, the ability of refugees to utilize the language of their host communities so as to communicate with them is very vital. It builds a crossing bridge between the two sides. It is also a channel to understanding the core values and norms of the host country. Therefore, refugees have the responsibility to learn the language and respect the rules and cultural aspects of their host countries. The hosting country has also the same responsibility for respecting the cultural background of their guest so as to provide a good environment, which can create a peaceful harmony with the society (ECRE 2005).

Based on the foregoing, integration can objectively be measured by using clear indicators that compare refugees' position to that of the dominant majority of the host country. These indicators include employment, education, housing, political representation and participation. All of these factors hinge on aspects of equality. They provide a comprehensive measure of the level of pluralism and social inclusion among the refugees and hosting societies. In addition to the above objective measures, the perceptions and experiences of refugees on discrimination, racism and social exclusion are also among the indicator level of integration (ECRE 2005)

Chapter Two

Integration History Norway

Compared to other major refugee host countries, the phenomenon of the overwhelming refugee waves coming to Norway has rapidly been increasing for several decades. The increasing number of immigrant, both of work and refugees, coming to Norway has its bases in Norwegian immigration history. The Norwegians had begun to emigrate a long time ago. This dates back to nineteenth century when a great number of Norwegian men emigrated to United States. During this period, a large number Norwegian families emigrated and settled in the States. The emigrations of the Norwegians continued until the 1960s. Mainly, the Norwegian emigrants were economic refugees who were seeking greener pastures. During the period between 1825 and 1945, about 850,000 Norwegians emigrated from the country to escape the paroxysm of economic deprivation and poverty. By 1890, many Norwegians were temporarily labor immigrants in the United States of America (Cooper 2005).

However, by the turn of the 1960s when Norway discovered its major oil reserves and the vision of planning for a booming economy development, the country became a destination for both economic and political refugees. At the beginning of its economic improvements, Norway had accepted temporarily a number of workers to support the infrastructure building, such road and railways. Most of these temporary workers were from Pakistan, Morocco, Yugoslavia and Turkey. Some of these workers eventually established themselves in Norway and became part of the Norwegian society.

However, by 1975 the country's voluntary acceptance of immigrants, particularly, those from developing countries was frozen, because of the enactment of stringent immigration policies for curtailing the inflow of this category of people into the country. Economic immigrants were rarely accepted from these countries. From that time, the only reasons that immigrants were accepted in Norway were entirely on asylum, humanitarian grounds and family re-unifications. Because of that, a large group of asylum seekers, mostly refugees fleeing from devastating conflicts, religious and political persecutions arrived in Norway during the last four decades. Mainly these refugees are from countries of chronic conflicts and devastating civil wars. Chileans, Iranians, Sri-Lankans, Vietnamese, Turkish,

Kurdistan, Somalis and the former Yugoslavians are among the huge refugee waves that came to the country during 1980s and 1990s. This phenomenon has been continuing till date and now the country has a large population of immigrants of several generations. The total immigrant population has soared up over these years (SSB 2008). By the year of 2008, about 132,000 of the population of Norway had a refugee background. Of this number almost 12% were Somalis and with people of Iraqi origin being the dominant comprising 13% of the population (SSB 2008)

The Norwegian Integration Policy

The immigrants coming to Norway have been increasing steadily. According to the Statistics Bureau of Norway (SSB), immigration to Norway increased during and after the Balkan wars of the 1990s. In recent years, the majority of new immigrants have come to Norway as a result of family immigration. Adjacent to those who are coming as asylum seekers and through family reunification processes, there are also a huge number of labor immigrants, mainly from Eastern Europe that have arrived in the country in the last three years. Data provided by SSB show that the total of non-Nordic citizens immigrants who were granted residence in Norway from 1990 to 2008 is 377 000 (SSB 2009). Of these, 24 % came as refugees, 24 % as labor immigrants, 11 % were granted residence for education purposes, 23% were as family reunification with someone already in Norway, and 17 % were granted residence because they had established a family (SSB 2009). However “the number of immigrants residing in Norway varies with the government's immigration policy, labor market needs and shifting global crises” (SSB 2009)

The steady growth of immigrants coming to Norway has made the country a multi-cultural country. Due to this, various government institutions and non-governmental organization (NGO) have conducted several integration projects. These projects were regulated by policies laid down by the Norwegian authorities.

The Norwegian integration policy is similar to its attitude towards the European Union (EU). Despite the fact that it has not joined the EU and remain outside the reach of most EU policies, many of its independent decisions, particularly, those regarding its relationship to European borders and migration policy management have a uniquely European character. The country's carefully regulated effort to allow only selected migrants to be admitted

together with its promise to ensuring social equality for those who arrive, closely fits the model to which many other European countries aspires for. The National Plan of Action to Combat Racism and Discrimination from 2002 to 2006 on integration stipulates that:

“The Norwegian government policy on integration is based on the principle that Norway is a multicultural society, and that cultural plurality enriches lives and benefits the community. Everyone living in Norway, regardless of their background, shall have genuinely equal opportunities, equal rights and equal obligations to participate in society and make use of their resources. This will benefit both individuals and the community as a whole”. (Cooper 2005)

As in other European countries, immigration to Norway has posed many political and social challenges. The structure of Norway as a nation and the development of the welfare state in the twentieth century placed great emphasis on cultural equality as the national cornerstone (Cooper, 2005)

Laws and Regulations in Norway about Integration

In addition to its wealth, Norway has many advantages as a destination country for immigrants and refugees. It has maintained a hearty labor market. Despite the recent recessions, it has demonstrated its commitment to humanitarian protection. For its high standard of living, the United Nation’s Human Development Program has named Norway the world's leading country with the highest standard of living for four years running — provides a separate enticement for the country to keep away from being lumped with greater Europe. But it is no accident that elements of the nation's migration policies have converge with those of Europe, especially in terms of border management and asylum Moreover the future of Norwegian immigration will continue to be tied to Norway's level of integration with EU immigration and asylum laws. Further integration could liberalize Norwegian-EU border policies or strengthen Norway's management of migrant settlement, (Cooper 2005)

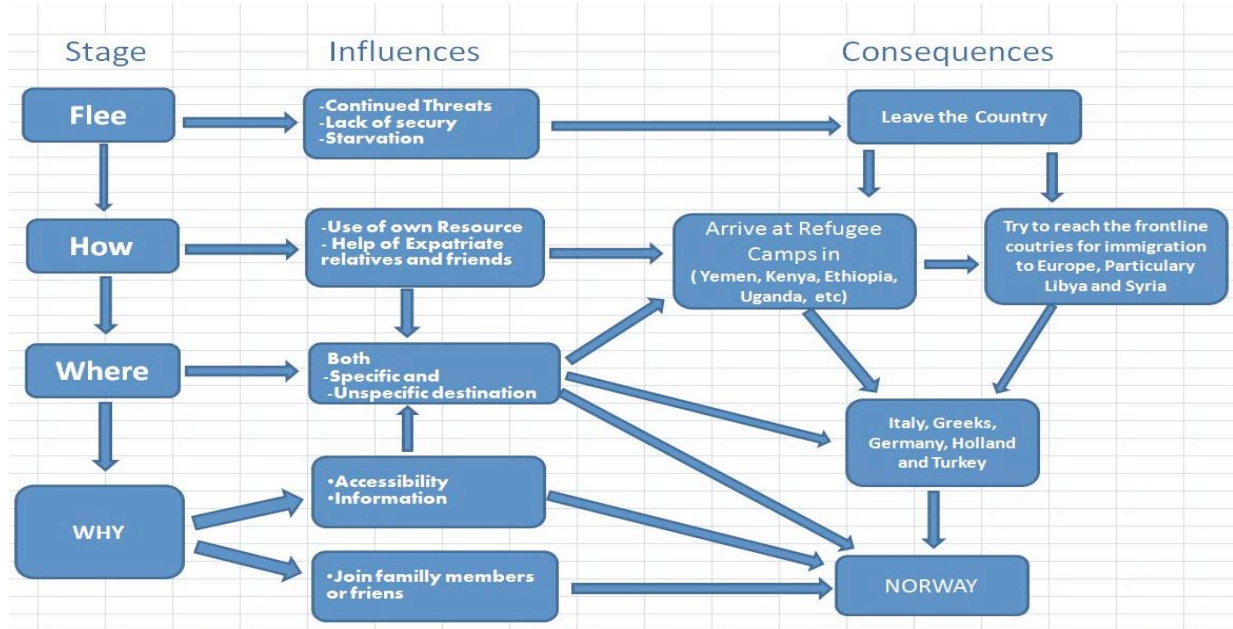
Somali Refugee immigrants and Their Integration in Norway

The road to immigration by the Somali refugees arriving in Norway is a complex process with a winding road that begins not only in Somalia, but also several African countries. The road to immigration subtly begins when a refugee set out from Somalia. Decisions on the choice of the final destination are defined by a complex array of factors involving stages, influences and consequences (Figure 1). Foremost, reasons of the fleeing decisions for the Somali refugees are the insecurity, economic hardship and threats to individual which are produced by the prolonged war that put so many people in the line of fire

To leave Somalia, means of transportation are pulled from different sources including: (a) family assets like land, house or personal belonging; (b) remittance from expatriates families; (c) and robbery.

In the process of reaching refugee-hosting country, like Norway, two main pathways, termed here as regulated and non-regulated, are followed. In the regulated pathway, the Somali refugee first moves to a country where there is a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) asylum camp. When they reach those countries they seek refuge. At the camp, the UNHCR arranges for the expatriation of the refugees to a designated country, mainly the United States of America (USA), Canada, Europe and Australia based on a quota system. In this respect, the refugees usually target UNHCR asylum camps located in Uganda, Tanzania, Egypt, Ethiopia and Kenya. In the case of the non-regulated movement, the refugees do not go to any of the asylum camps in Africa. Instead, they go to other countries where it is much easier for them to proceed to Western countries. In this process, countries such as Libya, Sudan and South Africa are used as transits in reaching western countries. Following their arrival in a Western country, they hand themselves in at an asylum centre, where they apply for a refugee status. Unlike those who come through the UNHCR system, refugees coming via the non-regulated systems are comprehensively scrutinized to assess the validity of their claim before they are given refugee status. The scrutiny can take several years to complete. As most Somali refugees arrive in Norway through the non-regulated means, it takes several years for them to be accepted as refugees and later be integrated into the society.

Figure 1: A simplified flow-chart of the process of movements of Somali Refugees coming to Norway



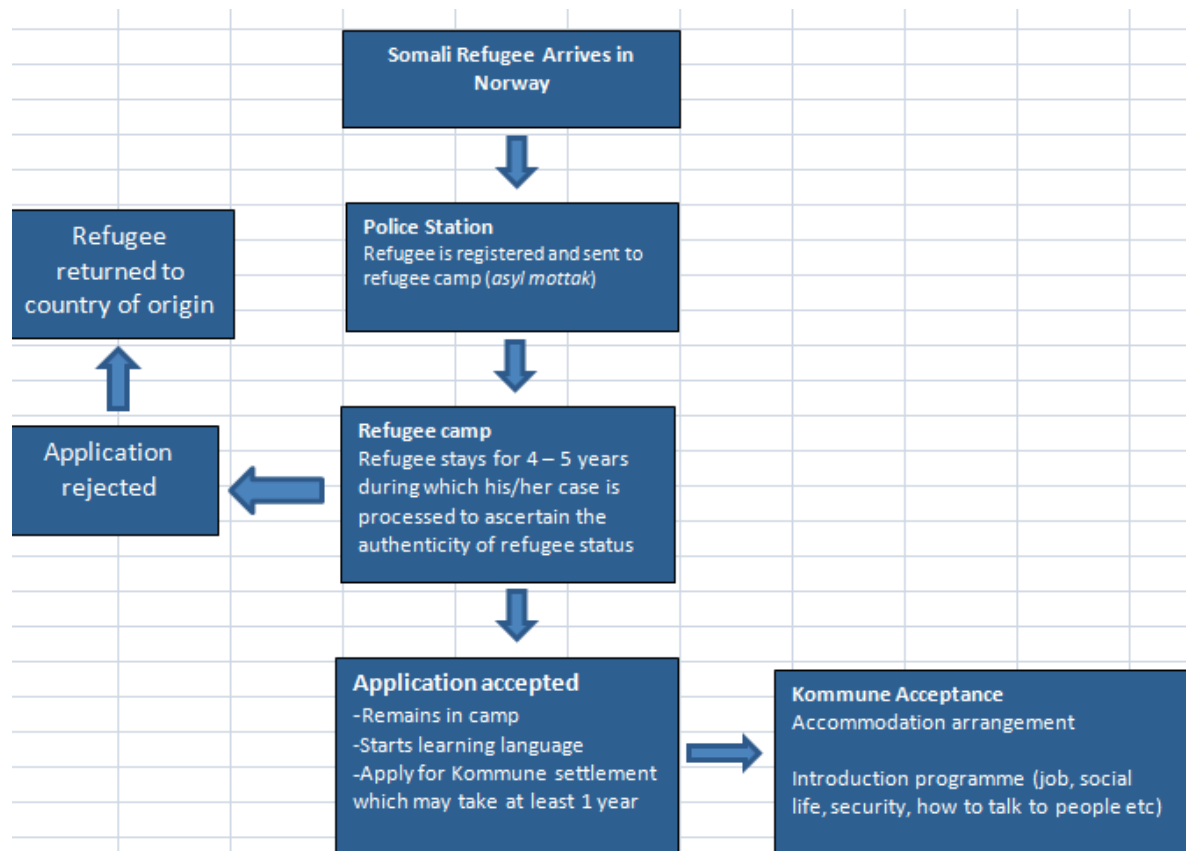
Source: Assal (2004)

The process of integration for a refugee in Norway starts with the accommodation of prospective refugees in asylum camps where they are processed to ascertain the authenticity of their claim as refugees. Following this, the successful applicants can then apply for settlement in one of the Norwegian municipalities. The settlement takes place either through the Directorate of Integration and Diversity's (IMDi) local office, finding a suitable municipality or through refugees themselves by contacting the potential municipalities in the region in cooperation with the staff at the refugee camps. It is also possible for the individuals who have work and can provide for themselves and their families, if they have one, to settle in whichever municipality they want without the involvement of the authorities assigned for the refugee settlements procedures. When a new refugee is settled in a municipality, the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi), in cooperation with the municipality, arranges integration program that qualifies the refugee to the Norwegian system of society life (IMDi 2009).

Although the integration of Norway's immigrant has been improving, there have been some negative impacts through the application process on Somali refugee coming to the country. According to a number of asylum seekers who were permitted to stay the country, have told me that both the application process, which for some refugee individuals takes several years, and the municipality systems have prevented them to easily integrate with Norwegian societies. However, according to the UDI (2009) while waiting the processing of their asylum application, refugee can apply to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) for temporary work permit that allows them to work in Norway. When they are granted a residence permit in Norway, the municipalities that settle the refugees are obliged to offer introduction programme that involves tuition in the Norwegian language and social studies.

From 1991 to 2000, the process of refugee integration into Norwegian society took 1- 2 years from accommodation at the asylum to the granting of residence permit in the Kommune. However, since 2000, the processes now take approximately 5–6 years with nearly 5 years of this period spent in the asylum camp (Figure 2). This long stay in the asylum while the case is being processed tends to dampen the hopes and aspirations of the refugees who feel that their case could be processed within a short period of time. Until 2009, these refugees spent the entire 5- 6 years in the camp without being introduced to Norwegian culture, language and life-style but were supposed to go out and mingle with their potential Norwegian hosts. This has always led to depression and frustrations for the refugees. Thus, for most of these refugees, the process of actual integration starts only after 6 years of arrival in Norway. This long lag of inactivity for the refugees exert significant stress on them as most of them would have been unable to support their families back home as they are only given what can make them survive without the opportunity to work. In contrast, the acceptance of refugees takes a few months in some Western Countries including the U.S.A, therefore, initiating the refugees to work and live within a short period of time upon arrival in the country.

Figure 2: Process of Integration for a potential Somali Refugee in Norway



The Challenges to Somali Integration process

Even though the tenets of social, cultural, political aspects and laws of the Norwegian integrations are well spelt out in various documents, the process of integration is encumbered by a plethora of factors. In this section, a review of factors militating against the integration of Somali refugees in Norway are presented and discussed.

As indicated above, the road to the arrival of Somali refugees in Norway is a winding and cumbersome process. In addition to this lies the even difficult task of the total integration of the refugees into Norwegian Society. There are several studies that have investigated this problem in Norway concluding that Somali refugees are the most difficult people to integrate into Norwegian society. The most defining reason for the seeming difficulty in integrating Somalis mainly lies in the sharp contrast between their socio-cultural background and that of Norwegians. Most Somali refugees arrive in Norway without any educational background, and normally from Nomadic communities in Somalia. The sharp

contrast between their rural nomadic life and that of a sprawling urban Norway usually overwhelms some of them. In effect they find it very difficult to relate very well with Norwegians because of the lack of formal education. Another often-overlooked factor is religion. Somalis are generally Muslims whilst Norway is primarily a Christian country. As Muslims, they would want to adhere to certain practices in relation to food habits.

For instance, Somalis may not want to eat from a Norwegian friend without first asking whether the food is 'halal' or not.

Another major overriding factor affecting integration of Somalis in Norway is discrimination both at the personal level and institutional level. At the personal level, most Somalis find it difficult to integrate because they are considered as the 'other' instead of being considered as a Norwegian even where the Somali holds Norwegian citizenship. It is often too common to find Norwegians refer to Somalis with Norwegian citizenship as 'Somalis' rather than using a subtle term of for instance; 'Somali-Norwegians' second generation Somalis is a major factor that militates against integration. This tag makes them feel unwanted leading to them being viewed as imposters on the Norwegian society. For this reason, Somalis usually would want to join other groups with similar background as theirs to mingle with instead of joining groups comprising indigenous Norwegians.

At the institutional level, refugees may have certain rights that need to be fulfilled by the Norwegian institutions. There is however a wide gap between what is stated in the statute books and what prevails in practice. For instance, Somali refugees have generally been incriminated as being over-dependent on the Social welfare fund both by the government agencies and the media. At the same time, there is a general perception that some of them prefer the social welfare support to work. Much as some of these assertions hold true they tend to put all Somalis including the hardworking ones under the same umbrella thus making genuine and hardworking Somalis feel betrayed by the Norwegian institutions as they too are often denied of their due. The trampling of the rights of Somali refugees, as with other refugee groups, is a major institutional problem and has been seen as a major issue of concern in the process of integration in Norway. Thus several non-governmental organizations have been established and supported by the Norwegian government to address this problem. Major non-governmental NGOs at the forefront of securing the rights are the Centre for Combating Ethnic Discrimination, Anti Racist Centre and the Institution against Public Discrimination.

The other obstacle to integration relate to culture, which is so cumbersome and difficult to address. Somalis are generally Muslims with some inherent norms, values beliefs and perceptions of life that set them wide apart from the largely predominant Christian Norwegian society.

Furthermore there are extreme right wing groups in Norway that systematically work against the integration of immigrants particularly those of African decent into the larger Norwegian society. They often use social nomenclatures such as ‘making Norway white’. Even though these groups are completely abhorred by the Norwegian government, their activities still persist in the society. It is a common place to find nightclubs that are exclusively for whites in Norway. And from time to time, violent provocations of these groups towards immigrants completely derail immigrants from the path to integration. Worse still, in the political arena, some parties have specifically targeted immigrants in the political campaigns often incriminating them to score political points. In the Parliamentary elections of 2009, the FrP explicitly made clear in its campaign that all asylum seekers from Africa will be sent back to camps in Africa located in countries such as Tanzania and Uganda that traditionally receive support from the Norwegian government to support their national budget. Interestingly, this action if implemented will view the party as an immigrant adverse party and further stall progress towards integration (Aftenposten, 2009). According to the FrP immigration spokesman, Per-Willy Amundsen:

“All applicants shall upon arrival in Norway, be flown to a recipient African country. Tanzania is suitable because it receives much of the direct support, right into the state budget, at the same time it is a relatively stable country...”(Aftenposten 2009)

Social Segregation of the immigrants

In recent years, plentiful of immigrants with different religion and cultural background have come to settle in Norway. According to Erikson (2005) around 70,000 Muslims are currently living in the country. Beside the cultural and religious differences among these immigrants, there are other important factors that play a significant role in the integration process. Among these factors are their language, traditions, cultural values, habits and customs. These factors do not only separate the immigrants from ethnic Norwegians but

also between the immigrants. Many of the immigrants have come from strongly male-dominated societies where men decide over women and their children even if they are grown.

Coming to Norway with those values and norms, which regulate their daily activities, some of the immigrants have eventually been isolated from the Norwegian society. Furthermore, as many of immigrants, whom I have interviewed, told me that the traditional and religious backgrounds they came with and Norwegian assimilation frame of mind have commenced a sharp conflict between the Norwegian liberalists and immigrant who will never abandon their traditional norms, such as those related to equality. As stated in Erikson (2005), “many would say that Norway is obsessed with equality, which must make it even more confusing for immigrants to experience that they do not get the equal treatment they have a right to”. This leads to the less integration of many immigrants, particularly those from Asian and African countries like Somalia.

The conflicts resulting from the different thoughts and perception of the Norwegians and the immigrant have shaped segregated blocks within the society. This segregation leads that many Immigrants would not achieve the rights they deserve. The degrees to which a refugee is integrated with the society he/she live with is inextricably associated with the rights he /she is accorded upon recognition of his needs and they ways in which they are socially treated.

“When immigrants are not treated as equals, it is difficult for them to feel at home in Norway. The other set of problems connected with culture is more difficult to tackle politically. There is no political party that proclaims that it is against equal treatment of immigrants and the rest of the population though the gap between theory to practice can be considerable.” (Erikson 2005)

Generally speaking segregation is one of the main obstacles that stop many of the immigrants to participate in the integration process of the country. Many of the immigrants who are concerned with their traditional values and norms, regard the Norwegian integration systems to be assimilation and not integration. Consequently, they prefer to be segregated instead of losing their traditional Identity.

The Integration Conundrum

Undeniably the literature is replete with information on the concerns of refugees and immigrants' integration in Norway and many researchers have focused on different facets of the issue including, for example, employment (Assal, 2004; Engbrigtsen & Farsted, 2004; Fangen, 2006). Even though several policies have been implemented in fostering the integration of several groups, Somalis still remain the least integrated group in Norway. Most studies feeding into the policy documents are often nested in the characterization of the Somali problem in the light of their material needs, as well as their socio-cultural backgrounds. Little (if any) rigorous investigation has been undertaken to deepen understanding on the perception of Somalis on integration and more so, what in their context can be done to achieve genuine integration for them in Norway. This study which aims at contributing to deepening and widening the understanding of the perceptions of Somalis on integration, its inhibiting factors and how best it can be addressed will contribute in no small measure to the efforts towards the development of effective integration policies in Norway.

Integration more than ever before, has become a major issue defining and shaping the contours of policies on social cohesion of most European countries. Increasingly, the composition of the social structure of most European countries is shifting from a homogeneously indigenous populace with similarities in socio-cultural idiosyncrasies to more heterogeneous socio-cultural landscapes encapsulating myriad and diverse cultures. A major factor propelling the wheels of this change is the influx of refugees fleeing devastating conflicts in Africa. The increasingly heterogeneous societies have often led to social and cultural clashes between the indigenes and the new entrants with serious consequences on social cohesions. There are often marked differences between refugees and their host European countries nested in religious beliefs and practices, language, women, economic and children rights, marriage and work ethics. Some of these divisive tendencies are usually naturally resolved as refugees adapt and transmogrify into likeable social figures acceptable by their host; while some of the differences particularly those of socio-cultural and religious leanings (which in turn shape a myriad of practices) remain intractable and an 'explosive' barrier against complete acceptance. Such conflicts segregates the society into pockets of social-cultural and economic classes that stand at loggerheads, with little information and communication channels created for the mutual benefit of the overall society. Also, within

the refugee groups lie deep segregations defined by a need for the preservation of their socio-cultural (often through marriages) and religious identity. This is passed on from one generation to the other and is sustained and preserved with minimum dilution.

As the refugee population transits from first to third generations and with these groups still tethered away from their host identity, the building of nations with a common identity and composition remain a major challenge for most European countries. A clear understanding of this teething problem has led most European countries with large refugee populations to formulate integration policies aimed at the cultural, economic, social and political integration of refugees. In this thesis, the efficacy and the relevance the integration policies of Norway is explored in the context of Somali refugees' perception of their road to integration in the Akershus region of the country. More importantly the work explores the major facets (indicators) of integration from the viewpoint of these refugees and seeks to elicit ways the entire process of integration could be improved.

Case of Somalis in Norway

Somalis are undeniably the most predominant and conspicuous African refugee group in Norway. Except the UK where Somali immigrants were already living prior to the war, only a few Somali's came to Norway and the other Western countries before 1987 (Lie 2004). However, the long protracted civil that has plagued the country since 1991, led to a large group of Somali refugees re-settling in Norway. Indeed by 2004 more than 16765 Somalis were living in Norway and today, there are 20,000, (Fangen 2008).

Somalis in Norway translating into 4 out of 1000 people living in Norway. It is anticipated that this ratio would increase in the next decades, as a result of high birth rates among Somali families. As Somalis are becoming integral parts of Norway, a major issue that has elicited a great deal of concern is their integration into the social, cultural, economic and political fabrics of Norwegian Society. Furthermore, Somalis are considered as the most difficult group to integrate into the Norwegian Society. In other words they are touted as 'unintegrable'- *a block that does not fit into the entire house*. The 'unintegrability' of Somalis is accounted for by plethora factors, a few of which are enunciated in previous studies.

According to Lie (2004) and Blom (1998), one cardinal reason for the unintegrability of Somalis is the feeling of disappointment and disillusionment. For most Somali refugees, beyond the expectations of peace also lies the desire for the refuge to become an active member of their host Norwegian society. While the Norwegian society meets the expectation of peace, the other desires according to Somalis are woefully met making them disillusioned and disappointment. This is especially so when it comes to economic integration. For instance, Somalis are considered to be the poorest of the refugee groups in Norway. They are also said to suffer the pangs of discrimination in respect of employment and accommodation. These claims have been enunciated in several studies (Lie 2004; Blom 1998). In a study of living standard among different immigrant groups in Norway, 36% of the Somalis reported that they had experienced racism (Djuve and Kavli 2000).

In fact, Somalis are the least employed, poorly accommodated, most dependent on social funds and poverty ridden refugee group in Norway. This situation is often blamed on a number of factors, the major one being the parallel socio-cultural idiosyncrasies of Somalis and Norwegians. In 2004, only 31.1% of Somali men were employed while just 19% of the women had some kind of employment. According to KIM (2009), the Somali in Norway came lower than the other diversity of socio-economical scale but in terms of numbers and dependents on social repayments as their principal income, they were in the lead. Others, albeit fewer were working small number who working in state offices (Ingbrigten 2004).

The situation for accommodation also paints a grave picture. In a study in 1998, it was found that Somalis had the worst living conditions in Norway and were discriminated against when trying to rent or buy an apartment (Blom 1998). The large size of Somali families was cited as the main reason for the discrimination. It was therefore not surprising that Lie (2004), found 66% of Somalis in Norway to be living in rented accommodation while only 24% were property owners. In the same study, Somalis compared to other refugee groups were found to have a mental problem that was further exacerbated by loneliness. And worse still, many Somalis hither to of high social class and educational backgrounds, were suddenly ensconced at the lowest stratum of the Norwegian social class, often engaged in jobs that condescended on both their status and ego. Lie (2004) succinctly captures this phenomenon as a class division where: “Upper class (Somalis have become) the lower class (members) of Norwegian society”.

Worse still, Somalis in Norway have been stigmatized and marginalized through media reporting, political bickering and insecure legal residential status. This has resulted in an antagonizing situation between Somali refugees on the one hand, and the Norwegian society on the other hand leading to difficulties in the integration of Somalis into mainstream Norwegian society. A major challenge, over the years, has therefore been how to integrate Somalis into mainstream Norwegian society to ensure their active participation in the national politics of the country. This is important to stem the tide of what Lie (2004) simply puts as:

“ A negative cycle where Somalis literally turn their backs on Norwegian society while Norwegian society turns its back on Somalis thus affecting the process of [genuine] integration of Somalis into Norwegian society”.

Of particular concern is that for most of the refugees, the road to social, political and economic integration is always long and rough. As indicated above, their situation is characterized by low employment rates and status, limited access to education, accommodation and other social amenities, and inadequate participation in political activities are part of the problem. While the literature is replete with the problems of Somalis integration, there seems to be very little (if any) major work on the perception of Somalis on integration. This study identifies the problems Somalis view as hindering integration, and further explores what they think should be done by the Norwegian society to fully integrate them into their society.

Chapter Four

Research Objectives

Based on the foregoing, the main aim of this study is to examine the perceived constraints confronting Somalis integration into Norwegian society and how this can be ameliorated. The specific objectives are to:

- i) Investigate the perceptions of Somali refugees on integration in Norway;
- ii) Examine the factors inhibiting full integration from the perspective of the Somali's communities in Norway; and
- iii) Elicit from Somali refugees how they can be fully integrated in Norway.

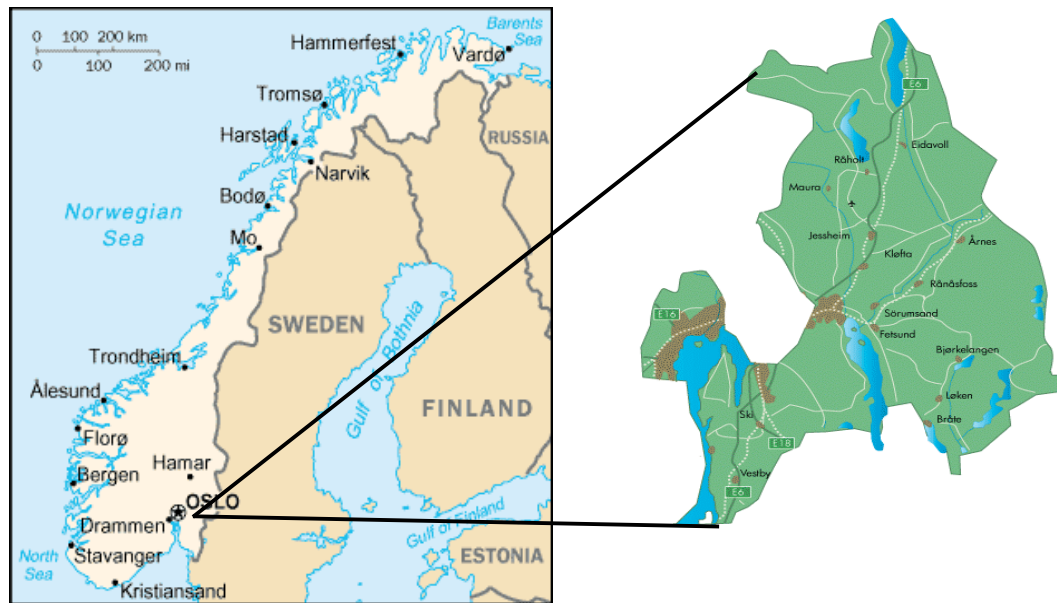
Research Method

Questionnaires were designed to collect both primary and secondary data. The questionnaires were tested and revised during in a pilot survey before the full study. Semi structured household questionnaires were used to elicit information from Somali immigrant households while structured questionnaires were used to collect data from various public institutions associated with refugee's issues in Norway. Participatory approaches involving focus group discussion with guide questions were used to elicit information from different Somali social groups and associations in Norway

Selection of the Study Area and Justification

This research was conducted in the *Akersshus fylke* (Figure 3); and some areas in Oslo. *Akersshus fylke* is the second most populous area in terms of Somali immigrant population in Norway. Although Somalis usually use clan affinity for the creation of communities, the case of *Akersshus fylke* is uniquely different. Here, communities are not based on clan affinity, which would make it more representative of Somali immigrants' situation. Moreover, the communities here are active and have biweekly gatherings, which ease of the possibility of meeting individuals and community leaders for interviews.

Figure 3: Map of Norway Showing the Study Area



Selection of Interviewees and Interviews

Interviewees were selected to reflect a wide range of socio-cultural and economic backgrounds of the Somali immigrants living the Akershus region. Thus the interviewees included students, religious leaders, the educated and uneducated, employed and unemployed as well as women. Also included in the interviews were well-organized men and women social groups of the Somali community. Through the same semi-structured interview and stratified sampling, information regarding integration (e.g. access to housing, employment, discrimination, racism etc) was collected from Somali households. The Somalis targeted included students, religious leaders in various mosques, welfare recipients, those in high offices in Norway the highly skilled professionals, the unemployed and underemployed as well as women leaders. Using semi-structured interviews information regarding integration processes was collected from several refugees' workers in charge of social welfare and integration in the Akershus Fylke. The focus group discussions were held in various mosques with men and women groups on the issue of integration. Secondary data on immigration and population size of Somalis to Norway were collected from the Norwegian Statistical Service (SSB). From the same institution, specific data on the employment status and situation of various minority groups including Somali's were

collected. Also data on the emigration of Somalis to other European countries over some years were collected.

Analysis and Presentation of Data

Data generated from the survey were analyzed and presented quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data from the survey were imported into Excel and presented in the form of charts, percentages and ratios. Qualitative data were analyzed and presented as narratives to further elucidate some aspects of the quantitative data.

Limitations of the Study Design

In relation with the growing concern of the Somali integration, I decided provide a reliable comprehension of integration problems regarding both of the Norwegian society and Somali immigrants. When I began this research that I have termed Rough road of Somali integration in Norway, I was exposed to the true extent of the problems that faces the whole Somali immigrants, particularly the problems of employment, housing, social services dependence. Certainly I was not conscious of the degree of the problem and I was surprised with what I found out.

Even though the research was conducted among my own people and their conditions of life and integration, their responses have frustrated me to say the least. In a situation such as this where, as a researcher, I had to remain neutral while collecting information, such neutrality becomes contradictory to the peoples conditions. This feeling may have biased the research in several areas.

Chapter five

How Somali Refugees Arrived in Norway

There was obviously no distinct way with which refugees chose Norway as a destination. Accounts on the choice of Norway as a final destination were both planned and unplanned. To some of the refugees, Norway was chosen as a safe haven for them by the UNHCR and to others it was by virtue of family connections in Norway. To others, final arrival in Norway was preceded by a tortuous adventure through different countries in Africa and Europe. These are accounts of some of the interviewees:

“Telling you how I arrived in Norway will take the whole day. First, it was extremely difficult to leave everything I had suffered for back in Somalia to seek a refuge in lands whose cultures and people are completely unknown to me. When I made up my mind to leave, I went to Ethiopia and then to Germany where I secured a job. From Germany, I decided to move to Norway because I heard there were so many Somali immigrants there where I could easily find a job. But, things were not easy when I finally arrived in Norway. It was not easy getting the job I had dreamt of and I also realized that you needed to find a Somali clan member to survive. As for the Norwegian host, they provided social security but were not so much concerned about what happened to me next’ (Mr. A).

Another interviewee had a similar story

“I was living in Mogadishu, married with two children. I earned my living in Somalia by importing spaghetti from Italy and exporting livestock to Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. I must say that I was one of the richest merchants in Mogadishu and supported so many people. When the central government was overthrown in 1991, there was chaos at every nook and cranny of Mogadishu. During the ensuing battle, my wife and first son were killed by the clan militants. My house and shops were all destroyed. In fact I lost all my money. By the help of a friend I travelled to Kismayo near Kenya with my daughter to live with some family members. In Kismayo I was able to raise some money to travel to the border of Kenya with my daughter. Upon arriving in Kenya I went to the UNHCR camp in Dadab with my daughter where we stayed for two years (Mr. B).

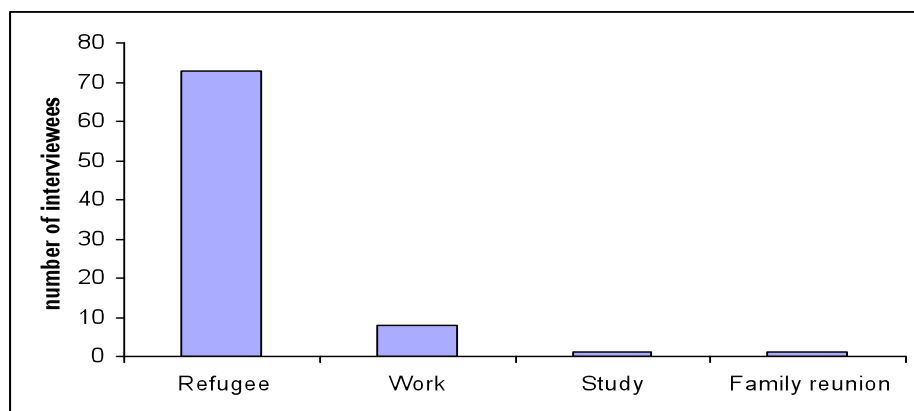
At the camp, conditions were so poor. My daughter and I suffered from malaria and diarrhea several times. Conditions became very unbearable and I had to depend on remittances from my relatives living in North America. One day, I met a man who indicated he could help me travel to Europe but said the travel would cost me 12 000 USD for my daughter and me. I contacted my relatives in North America and informed them about the issue. My relatives asked me to wait for three months to gather the money. Finally, they managed to send me 15000 USD from which I paid the man. The man took us from the camp and sent us to Nairobi where he lodged us in a hotel

for one week. During our one week stay, the man taught my daughter some basics of the Swedish language such as to answer questions like: “What is your name?”, “How old are you?” etc. He also taught us a lot of tricks on how to behave and act in front of immigration officials. At 9 pm one evening he came to us with passports and plane tickets and transported us to Nairobi International Airport where we boarded a plane for Frankfurt. In Frankfurt we stayed for two hours in the Airport. We then travelled from Frankfurt to Stockholm. In Stockholm we took a bus on a Sunday night for Oslo. In Oslo, the man showed us the Police Station and then left. I went to the Police Station with my daughter and told them we are refugees. The police sent us to the transit camp in Oslo after sometime the UDI transferred us to *Sondalsøre Mørøg Romsdal fylke*. We stayed for four years until we were cleared and offered asylum to stay in Norway” (Mr. H)

From these cases, several issues can be deduced. The first was how the refugees managed to reach their final destinations. The evidence can be deduced from the methods of travel in transit being exploited by charlatans who benefit from the misfortunes of people displaced from their countries. We also notice that facts about individual cases were couched in such ways that would help them to evade migration departments. In the case of the last narrative we also notice the important networks the Somalis have been able to use to facilitate their transits and finding money to pay for the charlatans that preyed on the refugees.

There are of course other ways that the Somalis have used to get to Norway. Whereas for the greater majority, the source is refugee status, others have come to Norway to work, while a few others had come to study and equally a minority came as a form of family reunion.

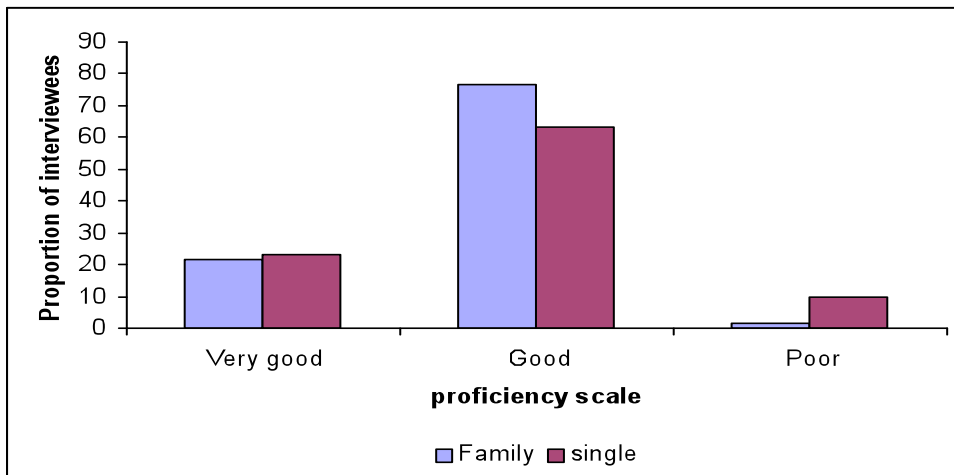
Figure 4: Reasons for moving to Norway



Language Proficiency

The subject of integration often borders on a number of factors. The most cardinal skill in the process of integration is for the refugee to be able to communicate with the indigenes of the host country. Language proficiency provides a conduit for employment, housing and social networking. From the survey, 90% of the interviewees could read and write Norsk, the official language of Norway. However, their proficiency differed markedly. As Figure 5 shows, a significant proportion of them were just 'good' on the proficiency scale. A few of the interviewees were poor at both written and spoken Norwegian. These were mostly the new arrivals compared to those with very good and good skill in the Norwegian language. An interesting observation was that those who could read and write very good Norwegian had better employment, housing and general social conditions than those who could not. This study confirms the role language plays in integration as also established in the study of Fangen (2008).

Figure 5: Norwegian language Proficiency of Interviewees

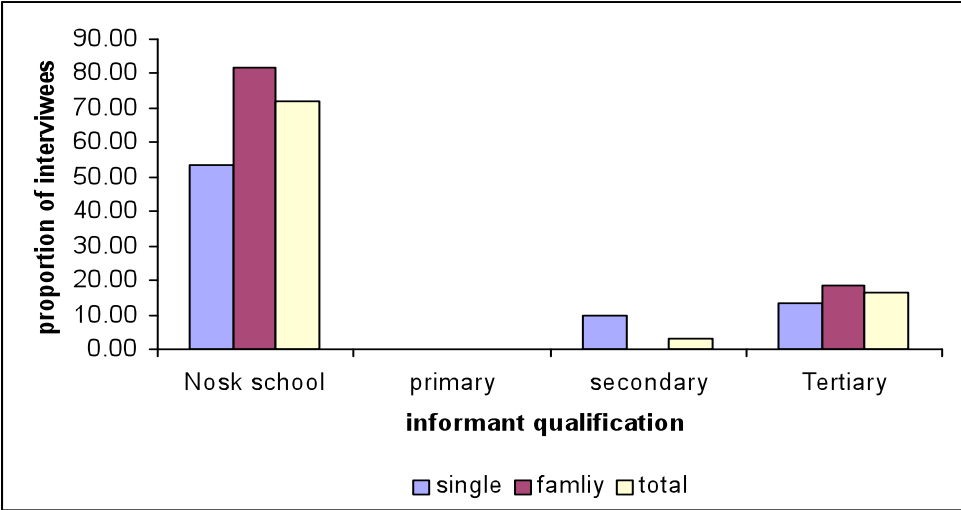


Educational level

According to data from SSB (2006), half of Somali immigrants in Norway have problems of unknown education levels for a number of reasons. First, many Somalis are new arrivals in Norway and secondly their educational status is foreign to the Norwegian System. Of the Somalis interviewed, most of them had acquired only language skill through the Norwegian

School. For this, 90% of the interviewees indicated the Norwegian school was the only education they have had. This is not surprising as it is a policy in Norway to ensure that all aspiring citizens are able to communicate in Norwegian to facilitate their integration. A few had attained tertiary educational status of Norway while some of the young Somali refugees interviewed were still in school mostly at the High School level.

Figure 6: Academic competence of interviewees



The fact that most of the interviewees had indicated that they had no educational qualification from Somalia was not surprising. Most Somalis fail to declare their previous educational qualifications, when seeking asylum. This is because they have the perception that a full declaration of their educational background will complicate and prolong the process of being granted asylum in Norway. In the words of one of the informant:

“Before the war in Somalia, I was a regional agricultural extension officer at the Ministry of Agriculture after obtaining a degree in Agricultural Science from the Somali National University. I worked for nearly ten years in this position and was in charge the coordination of the activities of different extension units in my region. I arrived in Norway in 2000. When I arrived in Norway and was taken to the camp, I was told by my friends not to declare my educational qualifications and work experience to the UDI interviewers. Their reason was that if I declare my qualifications to them, I would not be granted asylum in Norway. For fear of not being granted asylum, I did not declare my qualifications when I was interviewed. Instead, I told the interviewee that I was illiterate” (Mr. B).

This is what another said:

“I obtained a certificate in Nursing from one of the colleges in Somalia before the civil war and was working in the Digfer General Hospital in Mogadishu as a nursing superintendent.

When the war broke out, I fled to Ethiopia. I left Ethiopia to Norway in 2001. Before I came to Norway, my family residing in Norway told me not to bring any of my certificates along lest I will not be granted asylum. So I came to Norway without my Nursing certificates. Upon arrival and being granted asylum I had to learn the Norwegian language. During the Norwegian language classes, one of the tutors realised I was not an illiterate and enquired about my educational background so I told him the truth. He advised that I should go to *studie kompetense*. I attended the *studie kompetense* for one year and then later studied for 3 years for a diploma in Nursing” (Miss A)

The above clearly demonstrate that some Somalis in Norway deliberately give false accounts of their educational background and job experiences when they arrived in the country to seek asylum. It is therefore not surprising that in the Statistical records of Norway; most Somalis are shown as illiterate. These acts of dishonesty tend to prolong the whole process of integration, as the educated people are categorized as uneducated and are given similar education as the illiterates. Again, it tends to affect the refugees quest for employment as they arrive in the country with no certificates whatsoever with the fear that possession of certificates will dampen their chances of being granted asylum.

How Somalis perceive the concept of integration.

Most Somalis interviewed could not give any distinct definition of what they perceive to be integration. Therefore, the perception of the interviewees regarding integration varied significantly. About 15% of them perceived integration as their ability to carry out their social, economic and religious activities without any interference from the state. Another 10% were of the view that integration is about making them feel, behave and act like Norwegians. A majority of the Somali immigrants interviewed was however averse to the idea of integration as a complete disregard for one’s own background in pursuit for a new culture that has aspects alien to their social idiosyncrasies. They indicated that integration should not be about the substitution of cultures but rather serve as a platform for the bridging of different positive cultures. According one Somali man interviewed states:

‘Integration does not mean we should throw away our avowed cultural practices for another culture. I know some of our cultural practices are not good. In much the same way, other cultural practices here may not be good. The Norwegians have to understand this and not classify as the people living their country with bad cultural practices that have to be changed.’

On whether Somali refugees felt they were fully integrated, there were a lot of disparate views. Less than 5% of the interviewees felt they had fully integrated while the remaining

felt they still had a long way to go on the part of full integration. The latter group were of the view that there can never be a full integration as far as the Norwegians we still see them in a different light even if they become citizens of Norway. The same view was elicited through other studies on Somalis about integration. According to Lie (2004), most Somalis that had stayed in the country for nearly two decades still felt they were still yet to catch up with full integration. The reason being that their host Norwegians still considered as 'second class' citizens even though they held Norwegian passports. This concern is amply captured in the words of a Somali with Norwegian citizenship:

'To think that you can become a full Norwegian is to feel that you can metamorphose into a rock. Have you seen a vulture born out of the egg of a chicken? The vulture will always be told it is a vulture even if it roosts in a hen's pen. Things will remain the way they are for a long time to come'

There was however a convergence of views for all interviews in respect of offering social and economic security for Somali refugees in Norway as a conduit for integration. According to one Somali woman interviewed:

'If integration were to be about social security, then I feel almost all Somalis here are integrated. This is because the government has provided us complete security from attacks and gives us money when we are jobless'

They highlighted a number of issues they felt were *sin qua non*-for a harmonious relationship between Somali refugees and their Norwegian hosts. These issues revolve around employment, housing and education and are discussed in the ensuing sections.

Chapter Six

Employment of Somalis in Norway

According to a recent study, the Somali refugees are by far the poorest group in Norway (Lie 2004) and were among the least employed among other refugees domiciled in Norway. This can be due to a number of reasons. This study sought to elicit Somalis views on their employment status and also found out the reasons for unemployment. The study showed that the interviewees were engaged in menial jobs across the employment sector. In terms of the types of jobs, 27.08% of the interviewees were engaged in all manner of cleaning jobs. This is not a surprise, as less educated Norwegians are also engaged in similar jobs. The difference however for the Somali is that, those holding University and Post University degrees from Somali were still engaged in cleaning jobs since their certificates were not recognized. For this group of highly educated Somali cleaners, their status had been changed from one of high class to 'low' class as cleaners. One university Somali refugee degree holder interviewed indicated:

‘ I came here with a degree in Biochemistry and over ten years of experience as a chemist in Somalia thinking that I was going to get a good job after learning the Norwegian language. Here I am still mopping floors with people with secondary school education. I have been completely demeaned. But, what can I do since this is not my country’.

Another 16.67% of the interviewees were engaged in warehouse activities carrying goods and off loading trucks at distribution depots. About 8.33% of the educated Somali refugees were postmen distributing magazines, newspapers and letters. A few Somalis interviewed (4%) were engaged in specialized fields of employment including office and administrative works. These groups of people were viewed as the elite among Somali refugees. Their economic status was not exceedingly high compared to those engaged in menial jobs but their social status was what they felt they had preserved. One of the interviewees in this class told me that he had higher education from Somali and Norway as well. But unfortunately his qualifications did not pave away for further improvement. Explaining his situation and how his qualifications were not considered he stated.

‘When I came to Norway, I started to work as a cleaner and I have been doing that work for more than ten years even though I had very good certificates from Somalia and Norway. With time, I made Norwegian friends and they linked me up to an office job. I could not have secured a good job on my own’.

The above case brings up the issue of how Somalis manage to secure the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ jobs as they are badly in need of it to speed up their economic integration. As this study found, there are also many more Somalis who had a very high education from Somalia, who could not take their certificates and the document that show their education level because of the war. This category of Somali immigrants had expected potential jobs as soon as they had arrived in the country. They were even prepared for employment interviews. Unfortunately that did not happen as things followed the Norwegian legal systems. Thus, without certificates their verbal fluency and seemingly competence in some fields did not matter much as they could not document their qualification. The Table 1 below gives the breakdown of the types of jobs the Somalis were involved in.

Another problem that makes Somalis less integrated is long time they stayed in the refugee camps, whilst they are waiting for answer of their asylum application. Most of the refugees who had spent 5 years in the camps became disappointed when they realized that they cannot use their education without approval.

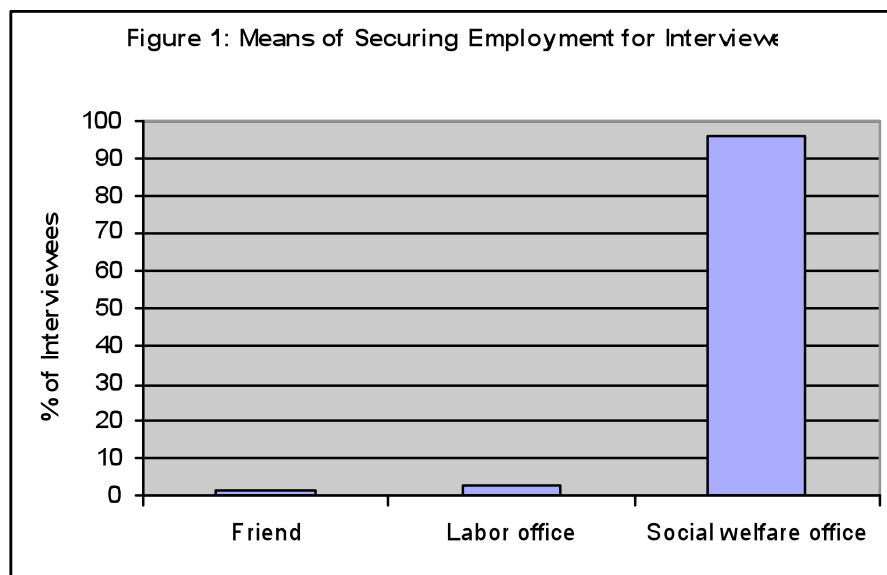
Table 1: Types of jobs secured by Somali immigrants in Norway

Type of jobs	Proportion of interviews (%)
Cleaning	27.03
Postman	8.33
Restaurant	4.17
Small shops	2.08
Driver	12.50
Warehouse	16.67
Kindergarten	2.03
Others	27.09
Total	100

How Jobs are secured by Somali Refugees

According to most of the Somali's interviewed one has to be socially connected to secure a good job in Norway. The Social Welfare Office however played a significant role in securing employment for the interviewed Somali refugees. Of the interviewees employed, 96% secured their employment through the Social Welfare office. Only 2.9% secured jobs through the labour office while another 1.4% had employment through friends. None of the interviewees managed to secure employment from direct application (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Means of securing jobs



Even though the Social Welfare Office provided a lot of assistance in terms of jobs, some of the interviewees indicated they had to go over a lot of hurdles to secure a job even with the Social Office. For example, although 90% of the interviewees indicated they had competence in the Norwegian language through the Norwegian School, they claimed the indigenous Norwegians still complained about the way they spoke the language. According to some of them, employers were of the view that they can't speak very good Norwegian even though they tried. According to an interviewer:

'I attended the Norsk school and passed all the exams. I felt I could communicate in Norwegian. I applied for a job and when the employer communicated with me, he asked

which dialect of Norwegian I was speaking. It is not possible for us to speak Norsk in a manner similar to those who were born and brought up here. We are too old'

Another major challenge in securing employment according to the interviewees is racial discrimination. Some of the interviewees indicated that it was easier for refugees of Asian and European origins to secure employment than those of African origin. This according to them may be due to the general bad perception Europeans have about Africans. They also indicated that one of the reasons for employers not preferring them is the general perception that Somalis are criminals and lazy. This situation can be largely attributed to the media. The media in Europe generally paint Africans in a very bleak light, which make Europeans take entrenched perceptions about the nature of Africans.

Housing

Access to decent housing is one of the fundamental ingredients to integration. In Norway, living standards are extremely high compared to most African countries including a war ravaged country like Somalia. For refugees that have toiled in the open for months before arriving in Norway, accommodation facilities in Norway will satisfy all the standards they expect. However, securing accommodation for one's family is not an easy task on accounts given by some of the interviewees. During a focus group discussion, most of the informants indicated that securing accommodation from indigenous Norwegian neighbourhoods was next to impossibility. Some also mentioned that indigenous Norwegians perceive them to be very dirty and cannot maintain accommodation facilities. Some of the following accounts were made about securing accommodation during the focus group discussion:

'An advertisement on housing was made in the papers and I wanted to rent an apartment. When I called the owner of the apartment, he said on phone I can have the apartment. When I went to inspect the apartment and the man realized I was a Somali, he quickly said he had already given it out to another person'

This is what another frustrated Somali had to say about housing:

‘A friend told me about an apartment somewhere and I called to enquire about it. The landlord asked me which country I was from. I told him Somalia and he said that he couldn’t live with Somalis’.

Clearly, there is a serious problem in the area of accommodation as an element of integration. Changing Norwegian attitudes towards immigrants in general and Somalis in particular with regards to accommodation would require significant amount of trust between the two groups. This may not be achievable in the short to medium term without conscious efforts being made by the two groups to achieve some level of trust. This is particularly so for the Somalis who have to prove to some extent that they are capable of meeting the accommodation requirements of the Norwegian host. This is the sticky point where compromise in terms of some socio-cultural idiosyncrasies and perceptions would have to be addressed. Somalis in general have large families For instance, from the focus group discussion it was asserted that Norwegians generally perceive Somalis as ‘*dirty*’, *poor*, *unemployed* and with *large families*. This general perception encumbers efforts at integrating Somalis in the provision of accommodation. For now, as this perception persists, the only medium for securing accommodation by Somalis is through close ties with Norwegian friends and also through the municipality (local authority) with the latter contributing largest proportion.

Political/Community Participation

Civic participation is one of the major tenets of integration. During the focus group discussion some of the Somalis indicated they do participate in indigenous Norwegian festivities. However, a majority indicated that they do participate actively in party politics at the municipal level. Another majority indicated that indigenous Norwegians do participate in some of the Somali festivities upon invitation. This was particularly during Islamic festivities following Ramadan. Thus far, participatory activities are only at small social gatherings. These social gatherings engender friendship between Somalis and Norwegians and could serve as a major conduit for building trust between the two groups. It has on the account of some of the focus group participants, provided opportunities for some groups of Somalis to secure employment. According to one participant of the focus group discussion:

‘I met Norwegian women during one of the social gatherings between the Somali community and some Norwegians. I had the chance to talk to her and informed her of my unemployment situation. She collected my contact number. I was there one day when she called me to inform me that there was a job I could apply to. I applied and used her as the reference and lo and behold had the job’ (Mrs. M).

One interviewee was of the view that, consistency in organizing social gatherings between groups of different backgrounds could provide a conduit for building trust. In his account:

‘Social gatherings with Norwegians always let them understand our culture to some extent. They tend to like us after such meetings. If such gatherings become pronounced in most areas, I think there will be a great deal of trust between us the Norwegians’ (Mr. P).

Although partial social cohesion have been expressed at the Kommune level through festive occasions, the ability of Somalis to actively participate in political/administrative decision making processes still remains a daunting task. This may not change in the medium to long-term. From the interviews, more than 98% of the respondents were oblivious to the political parties as well as the political processes in the country. According to one Somali woman:

‘I have lived in Norway for more than 18 years but have not voted before because I really don’t know which party to vote for. Infact, I have to confess that I don’t know much about the political parties and what they stand for’ (Mrs. H).

In the focus group discussion, it was revealed the apathy of Somalis towards political processes in Norway was due to the lack of interaction between political parties in Norway on the one hand and Somali groups and families on the other hand. According to the Chairman of one Somali group:

‘The political parties do not make any attempt whatsoever to lure Somali-Norwegians for their votes. They have never extended their

campaign programmes to this group even in the heat of political campaigns.’(Mr. AH)

The above accounts demonstrate the need for Somali-Norwegians to be actively involved in the political process. This is imperative in achieving one of the major tenets of integration- political integration.

Discrimination and Racism

The official political stance in Norway as with other Western countries completely rejects discrimination and racism in any form. Indeed, there is a National Plan of Action developed by the Norwegian government to combat racism and discrimination. This plan duly recognizes the daunting task of extricating discrimination and racism from the Norwegian society given the diverse social, cultural and religious makeup that immigration brings. The plans clearly indicate that:

‘A new population structure requires adjustments to the government policies so that the needs of all the various groups are addressed in the best possible way. There will always be new challenges to be confronted, including racism and discrimination’.

Truly so, the challenge of racism and discrimination was clearly manifest in the interviews conducted. Besides the issues of discrimination with respect to housing and employment mentioned above, the following accounts were given by some of the interviewees in respect of discrimination and racism:

‘One day I was at the national park in Oslo, when a Somali and another African man were involved in a severe brawl leading to the Somali becoming unconscious. The ambulance was called in to transport the unconscious Somali to the hospital. Upon reaching the scene, the ambulance staff refused to send the unconscious man to the hospital indicating that he had urinated. This is a clear case of discrimination and racism. I believe if it had been a Norwegian, faeces or urine would not have deterred them from transporting him/her to the hospital. I later heard the government took action and dismissed the ambulance staff. This was a very good development and could help in the fight against discrimination

and racism in Norway. However, I am sure that there more cases of discrimination and racism that goes unnoticed by concerned public authorities daily’.

Another interviewee had the following observation

‘I have been in Norway for 10 years and have four children all born and bred in Norway. My children have always complained about the way they are discriminated and ridiculed in school for being foreigners with a certain color and origin. These children breathe, speak, eat and drink like Norwegians yet they are referred to as ‘*fremme*’. It makes me sad because they are supposed to be treated like Norwegians’

Such views were also made by another observant

‘When I arrived in Norway as a refugee from Somalia, I attended a language course in Norwegian and completed the secondary school. Upon completion, I got a professional training and was employed by a warehousing company. After some years of work, I became the foreman for my section. I occupied this position for two years. However, one day, I was working when my manager came and told me I have to work under a new person who had been designated as the foreman. I asked why? And he said because you are a black man and this new man is a white man from Poland. I became so angry and resigned from the job.’

The finding made here is supported by a Finnish study. In that study, Somalis faced more negative attitudes than most other immigrant groups, and also experienced more racist crimes than any other immigrant groups (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004).

Chapter Seven

The Social Challenge

During the focus group discussion, it came out that most Somalis, particularly the youth addiction to *khat* was one of the main reasons for their inability to work and integrate into the Norwegian society. *Khat* is considered a narcotic drug in Norway, and is within the same category as other hard drugs like cocaine and cannabis (Gundersen, 2006). The *khat* in Norway is smuggled from England and the Netherlands. In 2007, custom officials in Norway seized 3400kg of *khat*, an increase over the 1900 kg seized in 2006 (VG, 2007) However, *khat* use is accepted in Somali culture and not controlled as it is openly sold at markets. Even among some of the Islamic sects, *khat* use during the fasting period in Ramadan is a common place. In Norway, Somali chatting with *khat* is common during social gatherings, mostly by adult men (Gundersen, 2006). The concern is that the drug can be addictive and lead to the inactivity of the users. Griffiths (2002) claim that *khat* chewing is more common among Somali men here than back home in Somalia. In most cases, they chew in the evening and sleep all day without engaging in meaningful economic activity, hence the reason why some of them remain mainly un-integrated into the Norwegian economic system. According to one of the leaders of the Somalis interviewed:

“*Khat* chewing has made a lot of the Somali youth very lazy. Infact it is the reason why some of them are out of the job. Some of the youth are already addicted and need to be rehabilitated otherwise it will be difficult for them to be economically integrated into the Norwegian society. I think this is a problem that the elder groups have to tackle head-on if we want to be fully be part of the Norwegian society” (Mr. R)

However, those who were in support of the chewing of *khat* were of the view that, the practice was to withstand the frustration of the Norwegian society. They felt isolated by the Norwegian system and could only find haven and peace in drugs. This assertion is consistent with the finding of Fangen (2006) where Somali’s interviewed for chewing *khat* asserted they it was in “... reaction to their sense of hopelessness, depression, frustration and anger”. Some even perceived the chewing *khat* as a cultural practice that should not be easily done away. For instance, an interviewee indicated:

“My grandfather chewed (*khat*), and my father also chewed (*khat*) before they all died. I chewed *khat* when I was in Somalia. I will not stop chewing it until I visit my grave. I cannot stop this eventhough I am Norway. Never!” (Mr. B)

A cultural and subtle practice as it may appear, the many young males who chew the *khat* have also metamorphosed into criminal gangs accompanied by intense street violence and destructions (Mohamed 1997). These actions tend to vindicate the ‘media’ assertion of immigrant criminality and further isolate Somalis from integrating into mainstream of the Norwegian society. Although many of Somali society who live in the western countries like Norway don’t believe that the main problem of Somalis integration is the *khat*, there are indications that the chewing of the *khat* has huge effects on their health and employment. According to Kalix & Braenden (1985) a long time consumption of the *khat* can lead to destruction of mental health, possibly contributing to mental deterioration and personality disorders. As stated in Glenice there are also many authors that have described depression associated with chewing *khat*. Despite those vast impacts that *khat* has on the somali society, there are many Somalis who controversially argue that chewing *khat* doesn’t affects their lives. The core base of their argument is that they chew the *khat* and at the same time are integrated with societies they live with.

Indeed, most of the *khat* chewers wake up very tired next morning after chewing the night before. Hence it is very difficult for them to participate in civic activities and get job. Furthermore, *khat* has a vast negative health effects on the chewers.

Pampered to be Un-integrated

An interesting finding from this study was the assertion that the lack of integration was due to the Norwegian social system of ‘pampering’ and dolling out free money to refugees who are out of work. From the focus group discussion there were contrasting views on this. While some of the participants have viewed the provision of free social services as an obstacle to their integration. They have stressed that the money given as a life support to those who don’t go to work and the less support given to the workers who had a very low paid salary job, makes many of the Somalis to quit their work Among the other major problems that the interviewees have reported are the ways they are received into the work

places. Some of their working site's managers do not let the workers to do their daily routine prays. However these managers allow the other employees to take breaks for smoking. In that reason many prefer to depend on the social support they get. Therefore the Norwegian social system on pampering out free social support to those who are not willing to take employment is another major problem to Somali integration process.

Cultural and Religious Inertia

Somali girls who attend schools and get to know girls and boys from the white majority encounter situations where they are faced with differing views on gendered assessments of behaviour (Salmela 2004). Most of the young Somali women I interviewed have adopted more modern clothing, which in several ways differs from the prescribed dress code for Somali girls. These young women wear trousers, and they do not wear *hijab*. As a result, they are constantly exposed to humiliating comments from elder Somalis. In a casual discussion group between five Somali women in their 20s this was intensely discussed.

'When you go to a Somali café, you know that they talk about you'. 'You hear so much about how you behave. But I want to be the way I am'. 'There are many who make a standard picture of what you should be like. If you go out once a week, they say that you are a bad girl. Now, I have gone without head-clothing for three years, and then I'm a bad girl?? I think they should see the positive sides of the person instead!' 'Also those our age think like that. If you use *hijab* you are seemingly higher up. You should *not* use trousers, and *not* clothes that show your body. I think many use a *hijab* even though they do not want these themselves'

This is a response from another.

'I have a daughter who is 16 years of age and is in the Secondary school now. When she was in the Kindergarten she used to wear the *hijab* but since she started primary school and till now her attitude towards the wearing of *hijab* has changed completely. Infact, she doesn't feel like wearing the *hijab* anymore to school. When I questioned her why she doesn't want to wear the *hijab* to school she indicated that her friends think two things about her when she is wearing the *hijab*. First they think that I have lice in my hair that is why I wear the *hijab*; and that she is isolated by her friends because they think that it is not a good way of dressing' (Mr. AB).

Then several of the other women gave various examples of *hijab* being imposed on young Somali women, against their own will. All of them, except the woman who chose to wear a *hijab* herself, agreed that most Somali young women wear it in order to satisfy the demands of others, or even because their own boyfriends demands for it. Some women choose to start wearing it a couple of years before they marry, because they then are regarded as more worthy as a wife, than if they didn't wear it. Again the scale of worthy woman on the top of the dignity scale and the unworthy, modern woman on the bottom is seen. Some resourceful elder Somali women underline that not all adult Somalis share this perspective. These are women who are engaged in Somali organizations in Norway in order to help other Somali women, and create social gatherings and so on for Somalis. Many of these women have daughters who do not wear *hijabs*. They do not impose that on them.

Another instance of rules imposed by their parents or the milieu, however, was the extent to which they could stay out with friends in the evenings or not. The young women in the discussion group felt frustrated and somewhat humiliated by parents who isolated them in order to prevent them from having a bad reputation or from experiencing things which might violate the strict moral rules. The parents think that, well, she just has to manage herself. But if they hear that their daughter has a boyfriend, then they keep her at home. It is always our mother who rules. Girls are not allowed out, whereas boys are.

Also many other Somalis conclude that many Somalis are much more religious here in Norway, than they were in Somalia. More women use *hijab* than what was usual in Somalia before the war. Some tell of husbands who use religion in order to keep their wives in place, so that they do not feel humiliated by a wife who suddenly goes out, meets other people and learns to know the new society. In a study of Somali women in Australia, the same pattern was found, that Islam had become more important because of their experiences with persecution and violence during war, and the hardships of replacement. War and exile lead to increased importance of religious faith, and Islam sustains them during times of emotional distress (McMichael 2002).

Chapter Eight

Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are made:

Introduction Programme

There should be an effective introduction programme for all Somali refugees seeking to be part of the Norwegian society. The introduction should begin at the asylum camps. Such an introduction programme should emphasise on improving the language skill of the would be asylum seekers. Furthermore, it is important that the introduction programme should have a component of skill development in order to make unskilled refugees employable and wean them off welfare funds. Also the introduction programme should have aspects of the Norwegian culture and should involve Somalis that are already fully integrated into the Norwegian society.

Length of Stay in Asylum Camps

An effective mechanism should be developed to ensure that the cases of potential asylum seekers are processed within the shortest possible time. The situation whereby genuine asylum seekers spend several years in the asylum camps tend to negatively affect the process of integration as they increasingly feel unwanted by the Norwegian society even before an attempt is made to integrate them.

Integration of Skilled Labour

The study found that highly skilled Somalis were engaged in employment that was completely different from their qualifications. It is recommended that Somalis that have had some level of professional training before coming to Norway are given additional training, if possible, to ensure that they make full use of their potentials and make them more relevant to the development of Norway.

Awareness Creation Campaigns

There should be more awareness creation campaigns among Somalis seeking to stay in Norway on the need for them to fully integrate into the Norwegian society.

Balanced Media Reportage

The media has a significant role to play in facilitating the integration of Somalis in Norway. Entrenched perceptions about Somalis among Norwegians can only be changed if the media gives balanced reporting on Somalis in Norway. The situations whereby only negative stories about Somalis living in Norway are emphasized tend to hamper the process of integration. For instance, there is usually a distorted preference for Asians and European immigrants compared to Somali immigrants due to entrenched perceptions about Africans in general and Somalis in particular created by negative media reportage.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the road to integration for Somalis is rough as also confirmed in several other studies on Somali refugees in Norway. The hurdles for full integration for Somalis are many and encapsulate those posed by the Norwegian society on the one hand and the inherent socio-cultural backgrounds of the Somalis on the other hand. Therefore, the integration of Somalis into Norwegian also requires a two-way process. In this process, Norwegian should provide the enabling environment for Somalis to feel accepted. On the other hand, would be Somali asylum seekers have to eschew all negative socio-cultural tendencies that make them un-integrable in the Norwegian society.

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