Somali-American Muslim Women's Use of Mediated Technology in Identity Expression

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the three most important women in my life: My two daughters, Hannah Lee Hall and Alice Elizabeth Hall, who blow me away with their creativity, individuality, support and beauty; and in loving memory of my mother, Jewell Grace Kelley, for her unconditional love, support and spunk.

Abstract

This thesis argues that social media give agency to a population of immigrant women within an imagined community—and real community—as they negotiate being both American and Somali Muslims in diaspora. Based on a study of 19 women's personal Facebook sites—supplemented with interviews, a focus group and ethnographic methods—this project finds that women's self-presentations reveal attributes that rarely show up in dominant news media coverage. Since little is written about Somali women, documentation of their integration into Minnesota is important to understanding the immigrant process and how online social media play a distinctive role. This study explores how these refugees interpret, re-construct, and try-out their multi-faceted identities as Somali immigrants and American citizens.

The project contributes toward a better understanding of immigrant and minority communities and the role social media play in communication and development of ethnic, religious and cultural identities.

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Chapter One: Background

1.1 Introduction

> "We are becoming a greater, a more diverse country by the year and unless we start to focus on a range of different issues that are important to us—those (immigrant) communities as well as our overall population—we are undermining our economic growth and our innovation and our ability to compete with the rest of the world … diversity has been a strength for a very long period of time…. People have to face the fact that demographics are changing….There's a strong moral argument, but even if people don't believe in that, for the improvement of our country and the sustainability of our country and our economy, we have to make sure that we are integrating more and more of our population into American society," says Melody Barnes, domestic policy adviser for the U. S. White House at the Aspen Ideas Festival[1] in June 2011(Aspen Institute).

The fact that the U.S. population is growing more ethnically and racially diverse is backed up by the latest 2010 census figures: "In the four census regions, the proportion of the total population that was minority[2] (proportion minority) ranged from about one-fifth to just under one-half of the total population in 2010," with an increase in every region (Census Report, 2010, p. 17). The non-Hispanic White alone population grew by a

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[1] Aspen Institute and *Atlantic Magazine* sponsor the Aspen Ideas Festival, an annual summit that brings together "scientists, artists, politicians, historians, educators, activists, and other great thinkers" to discuss pressing issues.

[2] In the Census Report, "minority" is defined as something other than non-Hispanic White alone.

mere 1 percent, while minority populations increased by 34 percent in the South, 29 percent in the West, 21 percent in the Northeast, and 24 percent in the Midwest (p. 17). People of Hispanic or Lantino(a) origin are the fastest growing population in the United States with a 43 percent increase between 2000 and 2010. Long known as a nation of immigrants[3], a threshold will be crossed this year in the United States, when the majority of newborns are minority, according to Ronald Brownstein, political director of *Atlantic Media* (Aspen Institute, 2011).

As a multicultural society, some dismiss the well-known "melting pot" metaphor —where all become one indistinguishable dish—in favor of describing the United States as a "fruit salad" in which "each piece has its own individual taste, and contributes to the overall flavor of the dish" (Jian, 2010, p. no page). In one of pioneer sociologist, Robert E. Park's[4] volumes on immigration, he says "Americanization" is "the uniting of new with native-born Americans in fuller common understanding and appreciation to secure by means of individual and collective self-direction the highest welfare of all…. With all our rich heritages, Americanism will develop best through a mutual giving and taking of contributions for both newer and older Americans in the interest of the common weal," (Park, 1921, v). This paper maintains that society benefits as a whole from documenting immigrant populations and sharing their cultural heritages with inhabitants in the host country. Also important for successful integration, is informing new immigrants about existing U.S. customs. McGown (1999) reminds us that "consequences of

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[3]An immigrant is defined as a person who moves to a country where he or she intends to settle permanently.

[4]Park (1864-1944) was a founder of the Chicago School and specialized in the dynamics of urban life, race relations, and crowd behavior (Encyclopedia of World Biography).

misunderstanding for both immigrants and immigrant-receiving societies are significant" (p. 5). "In the absence of that understanding, there is a tendency to exaggerate the inflexibility of the barriers between cultures … a tendency to conclude that some distances are too far to bridge, that essential differences separate certain cultures and religions from others, and that assimilation — the rejection of the values of one culture and their replacement with the values of another — is the only workable path to cohabitation" (p. 4).

In keeping with this philosophy, my study responds to the scarcity of documented evidence about Somali immigrants, who are among one of the newest immigrant populations in the United States. From East Africa, Somali refugees[5] also are among the most recent Muslim immigrants. This study takes place in Minnesota, where the largest population of Somali immigrants resides.

In addition, this study responds to the desire expressed by my Somali-American informants to increase understanding in the public arena about their cultural and religious beliefs and practices, the contributions they make in the United States, and to the plight of their original homeland. Since cultural and religious beliefs play a part in defining gender roles and relationships with elders, this study takes particular interest in exploring the negotiation of those roles through mediated communicative construction of identity. While not quantitative in method, this study provides deep and nuanced information not available through a survey. Through ethnography, interviews, critical emergent coding of conversations on a social networking site and blogs, and a focus group, I document the

[5]The term, refugee, refers to "a person who is unable or unwilling to live in his or her native country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion" (Minneapolis Foundation, p. 2).

voices of a particular group of Somali-American women, ages 20 to 27, and explore their use of mediated technology to express identity.

My study aims to contribute toward a better understanding of cultural identities amongst immigrant and minority communities and the role social media plays in communication and identity development. This paper defines social media as social networking sites, blogs, tweeting and texting. “Digital literacy is now considered an integral tool in the arsenal against gender exclusion and poverty,” (Prado, 2010, p. 10). As well as looking at gender negotiations, I explore how my informants, as Somali women in the United States, integrate and weave together other aspects of their ethnic and religious identities. While significant literature exists about Muslims in the West, “the Somali experience has not been hitherto documented in a comprehensive way” (McGown, 1999, p. 5). I build on McGown’s comparative study in Canada and England that examines how domestic politics can either undermine integration of its immigrants and minorities or facilitate harmonious integration. McGown (1999) notes that circumstances “catapulted” many Somalis onto the mercy of the outside world, making their way “into the West: to Britain, Canada, the United States, and Australia, where the calamity and personal misfortune from which they ran has been compounded by the harsh realities of refugee life and its attendant cultural clash” (p. 5-6). One of the greatest challenges for Somalis is how to practice their Muslim faith in a secular society that is predominantly Judaeo-Christian. Most Somalis are Sunni Muslims. Islam is commonly embraced in Somalia, but practices vary by interpretation. In addition, “Muslims around the world interpret Islam in a variety of ways, many of which are at variance with the multitude of Middle Eastern or Asian interpretations, and these are in turn applied

differently to life in a non-Muslim environment" (p. 6). This is true of my informant population.

In this thesis, I examine how online social media play a distinctive role as Somali-American women immigrants explore their cultural, gender, religious and ethnic identities. Within the Introduction I present a brief background on Somalis in the United States and then present literature and discuss methods and theory useful in the study of identity, ethnic minorities living in the diaspora, new media, and religious and feminist ethnography. Through ethnographic techniques, interviews, a focus group, and Facebook sites, I allow the women to speak in their own voices through my study when I present my findings and analyses. Lastly, I suggest areas for additional study.

1.2 Somali Immigrants in the United States

Since the early 1990s, tens of thousands of Somalis fleeing civil war in their own country have settled in Minnesota. Official estimates put Minnesota's current Somali population at about 30,000, while community leaders believe it could be as high as 80,000 (Dunbar, 2010, p. 1), which represents about half of all Somali immigrants, according to U.S. census figures. Most Somalis in Minnesota live in the metropolitan area, particularly in Minneapolis. Some Somalis in the state came from Somalia's coastal, agricultural and/or nomadic regions, while others were urban residents (Minneapolis Foundation, 2008).

About one-third of Minnesota's Somali residents came directly from refugee camps. Others settled first in another state and then relocated to Minnesota, which is home to the largest population of Somali residents in the United States. Somali

immigration can be "traced back to the mid 1800s when Somalia was divided between France, England, and Italy, all of which maintained colonial control until the 1960s" (Macalester, 2008, p. 1). After gaining its independence in 1960, the modern nation of Somalia was entangled in Cold War politics for the next three decades. An immigration report published by the Minneapolis Foundation says that "civil war erupted while the Soviet Union was collapsing; atrocities and natural disasters—famine, flood, drought—forced more than a million Somalis to seek refuge in neighboring countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia. Somalia has not had a recognized government since 1991" (2008, p. 1). The Macalester report states: "One reason they have chosen Minnesota is for its strong social services including education and the relatively high employment opportunities" (2008, p. 3). "Many local churches have played a strong role in assisting the Somalis with their resettlement" (Macalester, 2008, p. 3). Faced with language barriers, unemployment, and harsh winters, Somali refugees have many obstacles as new immigrants in Minnesota. Dunbar writes, "Adapting can be even harder for them because so many are recovering from traumatic experiences such as losing their homes and loved ones to war, being separated from family members, or witnessing and experiencing violent acts" (Dunbar, 2010, p. 1). Somali immigrants have had a harder time getting access to education than English-speaking African and other populations because they must first learn English.

In addition, "underutilization of professional skills is a problem for many African immigrants" (Minneapolis Foundation, 2008, p. 11). Professional licenses that are obtained abroad often are not recognized in the United States, so immigrants who formerly were "doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, and lawyers are earning a living

through manual labor…" (Minneapolis Foundation, 2008, p. 11). At present, many Minnesotan-Somalis fill positions that don't require strong English skills, provide businesses and services to other Somali immigrants, and engage in other entrepreneurial efforts. The foundation documents that "Today more than 120 African-owned businesses can be found along Minneapolis' Lake Street-corridor" (2008, p. 11).

1.3 Somali-Americans as Muslims in the United States

In addition to dealing with racism in the United States—a country with a long history of oppression of racial minorities—Somali immigrants also recount dealing with prejudice and ignorance with regard to their religious beliefs. Muslims have suffered persecution throughout their history in the United States, which dates back to colonial times; however, since the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, anti-Muslim sentiment has come to the forefront of public attention. Many U.S. citizens equate Muslims with terrorists and Islamic extremists; however, Pew Research polls reveal that "Muslims in the United States reject Islamic extremism by larger margins than do Muslim minorities in Western European countries … absolute levels of support for Islamic extremism among Muslim Americans are quite low, especially when compared with Muslims around the world" (2007, p. 7-8). The Pew study also shows that "Muslim Americans are a highly diverse population, one largely comprised of immigrants. Nonetheless, they are decidedly American in their outlook, values, and attitudes. Overwhelmingly, they believe that hard work pays off in this society" (2007, p. 7).

Since the U.S. Census does not ask about religious affiliation in its national surveys, there are no generally accepted estimates of the size of the Muslim American

population (Pew, 2007, p. 3). The Pew study estimates approximately 1.5 million Muslim Americans, 18 years of age and older; the total Muslim American population is estimated at 2.35 million, based on data from the survey and available Census Bureau data on immigrants' nativity and nationality. Total U. S. population figures from the U.S Census Bureau are 301,237,703 (2009).

Roughly two-thirds (65 percent) of adult Muslims living in the United States were born elsewhere, and 39 percent have come to the United States since 1990, according to the Pew study (2007). "A relatively large proportion of Muslim immigrants are from Arab countries, but many also come from Pakistan and other South Asian countries (Pew, 2007, p. 8). Contrary to common misconceptions, only 20 percent of the world's Muslim population is Arabic-speaking (CAIR, p. 11). Muslims are not a monolithic group. Muslims in America are an extraordinary mosaic of ethnic, linguistic, ideological, social, economic, and religious groups (America.gov, p. 48).

African-American Muslims comprise from one-fifth to one-third of the total for all Muslim Americans (America.gov, 2008). Approximately 30 percent of the estimated 10 million Africans brought to North America as slaves, between 1619 and the 1800s, were Muslims. Other Muslims migrated from the Ottoman Empire, which includes today's Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Somalis, from East Africa, are among the most recent Muslim immigrants to the United States. Somali-Americans are isolated from other Muslims because most other Muslim immigrant groups came to the United States by choice, seeking educational and other economic opportunities (Dunbar, 2010), whereas Somalis come as refugees from their war-torn homeland in the Horn of Africa. Faced with language barriers, unemployment and harsh winters, Somali refugees have

many obstacles as new immigrants in Minnesota. Dunbar writes, “Adapting can be even harder for them because so many are recovering from traumatic experiences such as losing their homes and loved ones to war, being separated from family members, or witnessing and experiencing violent acts” (p. 1).

Somali-Americans are a small minority, some three to six percent, of the total Muslim-American population, but a significant percentage of the Minnesota Muslim population. An article by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis says, “The Muslim community in the Twin Cities includes individuals with roots in Africa, South Asia, Eastern Europe and the Middle East, plus members of the Nation of Islam and other groups” (Woessner, 2002, p.1). “The largest group of Twin Cities Muslims is made up of immigrants from the East African nation of Somalia. Because nearly all Somalis are Muslim, many estimates use the number of Somalis in the area as a basis for calculating the larger Muslim population” (Woessner, 2002, p. 1). In Minnesota, 99.9 percent of Somalis are Sunni Muslims (Macalester, 2008, p. 3).

“While Minnesotans may view Somali-immigrants as a monolithic group, Somali society is actually composed of multiple groups, affiliated by language, culture, geography or other commonalities” (Minneapolis Foundation, 2008, p. 11). For those Somali-Americans who choose to practice faith beliefs, their practices publically mark them as Muslims.

> “In Minnesota—especially at school and in the workplace—Somalis find they must negotiate for time and space to pray (at five, predetermined times a day, facing Mecca), for permission to wear the hijab (a head covering, a religious observance of modesty for Muslim women), and for

understanding as they fast from dawn to dusk during the month of Ramadan (a lunar month near the end of the calendar year). Islam also prohibits charging or paying-interest, which makes it difficult to purchase homes or otherwise participate in Western economic life" (Minneapolis Foundation, 2008, p. 11).

As these Somali immigrants explore their cultural, religious and ethnic identities as Muslims and as Americans, dominant and online social media play distinctive roles. Dominant media coverage of Somalis tends to focus on violence and other problems associated with Somalis with fewer stories about their positive contributions to American society. This thesis argues that social media give agency to a population of immigrant women within an imagined community—and real community—of friends, relatives and extended "friendships" throughout the world as they negotiate being both American and Somali. This thesis shows how social media provide a space for Somali-American women to promote national pride and identity, and preserve ethnic, cultural and religious values and maintain native language and literary arts.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Literature relevant to this study is reviewed briefly in this section.

2.1 Dominant Mass Media Coverage of Ethnic Groups

A principal characteristic of dominant mass media is that they help maintain social order (or the status quo) by covering news and producing content that helps support the dominant elite value systems. In doing this, mass media reflect a mainstream bias and marginalize perspectives outside dominant elite value systems. Mass communication and media scholar, David Demers defines mainstream bias this way:

> "The mainstream bias stems from the structural dependence that journalists have on government and on established power groups for the news. News beats are anchored in the powerful institutions in a society and these institutions help legitimate the role of news media in society, just as the media help legitimate the institutions and the elites who run them" (2005, p. 175).

Catherine Squires argues that most mainstream journalism "reinforces the racial status quo and dominant understandings of racial categories" (2007, p. 5). "Through the framing process, news media influence the public's sense of the salience of racial issues," she says. This, in turn, "influences public opinion and policy by delimiting the discussion of racial issues" (p. 5). As women from the African continent, participants in my study speak to their experiences and opinions about mainstream media framing of Somalis.

For the purpose of this thesis, I adopt the term “dominant,” which more accurately reflects any media that asserts power dominance because not all dominant media reflect a “mainstream” perspective.

Many scholars believe that the dominant mass media play a key role in defining, preserving, or weakening ethnic (and national) identities (Squires, 2009a; Riggins, 1992; Kelley, Brehe, Nangyal, Reed, 2010). Others concur that the dominant news media under-represent and misrepresent particular minority groups, issues, and sources because they perpetuate patterns of negative association, stress differences, conflicts, and criminal behavior in coverage of minorities (Rodríguez, 2009). One benchmark study assesses Latino-related coverage in three major U.S. news magazines in 2005. Latinos were the largest minority group in the United States in 2003 and in the latest 2010 U.S. Census; however, very little coverage is given in these major news magazines. Overall, out of 1,547 magazine stories published in *Time, Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report*, only 18 stories (1.2 percent) were predominantly about Latinos. The majority of stories predominantly about Latinos (12 out of 18) focused on immigration. Only five stories of the 1,547 total (0.3 percent) significantly included Latinos in non-Latino stories. Of the 1,547 stories published, 214, or 13.83 percent, mentioned (or referenced) at least one Latino (Gavrilos, 2006). Table 1 from the report shows the breakdown in articles between the three magazines.

Latino Focus	*Number of News Magazine Stories* TIME	NEWSWEEK	U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT
Predominantly about Latinos	7 (1.1%)	7 (1.4%)	4 (1.0%)
Significantly Inclusive of Latinos as a group	3 (0.5%)	2 (0.4%)	0 (0%)
References one or more individuals who are Latino	68 (10.4%)	111 (21.8%)	35 (9.2%)
None	578 (88.1%)	389 (76.4%)	343 (89.8%)
Total Stories	656 (100%)	509 (100%)	382 (100%)

Table 1. Latino/a focus stories (Gavrilos, 2006, p. 7)

In another study, Klein & Naccarato examine "how local television news has been shown to misrepresent minorities. Minorities are portrayed more frequently as criminals than are Whites, and minority misrepresentation has been shown to be out of proportion to crime statistics" (2003, p. 1611). They recap previous research, including Linton 1995, which shows "'African Americans' main complaint about news coverage is that it contains too much negativity about Blacks and excessive emphasis on crime" (p. 1613). "A national poll by CNN/USA Today/Gallup concluded that almost 40% of Hispanics were upset with news coverage of issues important to them and two thirds of African Americans reported being upset at least once per week by news coverage of Black issues," according to Sharp & Puente (p. 1613). Another "national poll of 1,200 children in 1998 conducted by Children Now found that in all of the racial groups surveyed (African American, Asian, Latino, and White), children reported that news media tend to portray African American and Latino people more negatively than White and Asian people, particularly when the news is about young people" (p.1613). "The most common explanations offered for minority misrepresentation are racism and economic gain" (p.1613).

More recently, Gettleman finds that many stories in mass media focus on

problems that a minority of Somali men are experiencing, such as news accounts about homicides in the United States, Somali pirates, and young men who join terrorist groups and return to Somalia to fight for their homeland, as seen in articles such as those found in *The New York Times* (2010).

Somalis, along with many immigrant groups, look outside traditional media to meet their need for news about their homeland, cultures or people. “Unable to generate the commercial appeal to attract major media conglomerates’ attention in the dominant mass media, some ethnic minority media found funding from churches, other nonprofit sponsors or the government—at least until the fiscal conservatism of the 1980s and 1990s” according to Riggins in 1992 (Kelley, et al., 2010, p. 11).

2.2 Marginalized Groups Create Traditional and New Media

Ethnic media fulfill needs not addressed by mainstream media in the United States. One scholar defines the “ethnic press” as a newspaper or periodical created for a specific audience based on nationality, religion, and language (Rhodes, 2010, p. 3). Historically, the ethnic press’ primary focus for voluntary immigrants to the United States was to create “an old world community in the new world through language maintenance, cultural emphasis, religion, and political discussions,” but the presses also helped immigrants assimilate into American culture (Rhodes, 2010, p. 3).

From *Immigrant Press and Its Control* published in 1922, much quoted author R. E. Park’s study of “Americanization”—the assimilation of immigrants—sees the role of the ethnic press as “an organ of speech” (p.13) … satisfying the immigrant’s “human desire for expression in his mother tongue,” (p. 11); however, Park questions whether the

“foreign-language press is a brake or an accelerator in this process of assimilation,” (p. 86). He cites the editor of the Lithuanian paper Draugas who asserts the paper segregates and isolates communities, preventing assimilation. On the other hand, some say the presses help immigrants orient themselves to America and “share in the intellectual, political, and social life” (Park, p. 86). Immigrants seek help from the Ethnic Press because they need familiarity with American events, customs and ideas in order to “get along” as residents and employees in the United States (Park, p. 87). Another scholar says one strategy to ensure ethnic minority survival is the development by minorities of “their own media conveying their own point of view in their own language” so that “cultural traditions are not reduced to the level of folklore and that languages evolve in a manner adaptive to the requirements of modern life….” Some ethnic media take on a dual role of helping the ethnic group maintain a connection to their culture in addition to helping a Diaspora audience assimilate to the mainstream values of the host country (Riggins p. 4).

Park elaborates that a key role of the foreign-language press in the process of “Americanization” is how they enable immigrants to “participate in the national life…. For it is participation rather than submission or conformity that makes Americans of foreign-born peoples,” (p. 89).

More recent scholars argue that America has progressed from a melting pot culture of assimilation to one of multiculturalism, represented by the metaphor of a salad or fruit salad in which people are mixed together but retain their cultural ethnicity. Subsequent work after Park casts doubt on the assimilation theory “and in fact has argued that ethnicity has grown stronger among both newer and older immigrant groups in the

United States," according to Viswanath and Arora, who cite numerous scholars—Blauner, 1982; Glazer and Moynihan, 1970; Hirschman, 1983—in their essay on ethnic media in the United States (2000). Other scholars concur:

"Fundamentally, the struggles of acculturation and assimilation are nothing new to the modern nation-state. … With the advent of convenient air travel and modern communication, complete assimilation is no longer the only resort for migrants and minorities. The maintenance of equilibrium between assimilation and the celebration of cultural uniqueness has become an unenviably colossal task for contemporary nation-states. The notions of nationality and citizenship, upon which they were founded, are being interrogated and must continue to be critically examined for the cause of equality and human freedom" (Iskandar & Rustom, 2006).

Viswanath and Arora argue that the increasing ethnic pluralism in the United States is undeniable and that further study of the ethnic press is needed. "Given the rising levels of immigration into the United States, increasing tensions and questions about immigration, and the growing importance of media, it is worthwhile to systematically examine and explore the role of the ethnic press in the United States," (2000).

The Native American and early African American presses were not interested in assimilation or acculturation, but were created to "establish a national voice for their people," (Rhodes, p. 4). According to Rhodes, there have been 5,539 African American newspapers since 1827 (p. 4). The Black press and radio serve black audiences with cultural information seldom found in dominant (aka mainstream) periodicals (Squires, 2009). For instance, *Insight*, is one of many successful papers that serve black readers, building on an African American tradition that started with pamphlets denouncing

slavery and continue with boycotts of Hollywood to fight for adequate representation in the mass media industries of the United States (Squires, 2009).

Black radio set a national agenda for racial equality starting in the 1940s (Savage, 1999) and has evolved into a successful industry. For example, "Radio One, Inc. is one of the nation's largest radio broadcasting companies and the largest radio broadcasting company that primarily targets African-American and urban listeners," according to its web site (Radio One, 2009). The company's 2009 third quarter net revenue was approximately $75.5 million and net income was approximately $14.2 million.

While African American media provides a voice for Black Americans, the Native American newspapers "were a source of information about sovereignty," (Rhodes, p. 4). Media targeted to Latinos is among the oldest ethnic news in America.

The bicentennial of Latino newspapers in the United States was celebrated in 2009. The first U.S. Latino newspaper, El Misisipí, was founded in New Orleans in 1808 in support of the movements for independence from Spain of the emerging Spanish American nations (Mendoza, 2009). "Throughout the 200 years, U.S. Latino newspapers played multiple roles….They have been a voice for the people and to the people, whether they were students, women, labor unions or community organizations," (Mendoza, 2009). In an article about an exhibit on the history of the U.S. Latino Press, Mendoza quotes Félix Gutiérrez, professor of journalism, communication and Mexican American Studies at the University of Southern California who says: "They're acquainting people to the U.S. who may not have been welcomed but have always wanted to be a part of American society" (Mendoza, 2009). While many ethnic minority media "are unstable and may prove to be short lived," according to Riggins (1992, p. 15), "Latino media in all forms,

including newspapers, are growing at a time when others are suffering declines" (Mendoza, 2009). They reflect the experiences, stories and "history of America as reported by U.S. Latinos," which differs from what English newspapers report (Mendoza, 2009). "The exhibit shows the role newspapers have played in advocating Latin American independence, adapting to U.S. conquest of the Southwest, acquainting newcomers with U.S. ways, serving as a voice for leaders, and using new technologies to reach larger audiences" (Mendoza, 2009). "Black and Latino online activity has more than doubled in less than 10 years" (Squires, 2009, p. 267). While many Latino and Black media outlets have been successful in setting a U.S. national agenda for racial equality, most ethnic minority media are "short lived" because their audiences are "too small, too poor, or too scattered to have much appeal for advertisers" (Riggins, p. 15). Ethnic media often have low circulations and are often poorly distributed (Riggins, 1992).

Today, ethnic media encompass multiple platforms, both traditional and new media. The Internet provides a more accessible and global medium; however, research in the 1990s revealed a "digital divide," between White users and people of color (Squires 2009). Castells states: "Core economic, social, political, and cultural activities throughout the planet are being structured by and around the Internet, and other computer networks. In fact, exclusion from these networks is one of the most damaging forms of exclusion in our economy and in our culture," (2001, p. 3). While Castells acknowledges the digital divide, he also presents the Internet as a network society, where virtual communities work through two common cultural features: horizontal, free communication and self-directed networking "in an era dominated by media conglomerates and censoring government bureaucracies," (p. 54-55). The Internet gives people the capacity "to find his

or her own destination on the Net, and, if not found, to create and post his or her own information…. It also lays the foundation for self-directed networking as a tool for organization, collective action, and the construction of meaning," (p. 55). For the women in my study, both the practice of free speech and construction of a web of meaning are important to explore in this research.

As this review of literature demonstrates, dominant media largely ignore minority groups; however, these populations often seek and locate media sources that fulfill their needs as citizens and as members of a marginalized community (Kelley, et al., 2009). This study helps document how one marginalized community of immigrant women produce their own media through social networking sites. In the next section, I review how diasporic groups create media networks and social media to produce news relevant to their communities and in the construction of identity.

2.3 Closing the Digital Media Gap

In the *Internet Galaxy*, Castells offers this definition: "The Internet is a communication medium that allows, for the first time, the communication of many to many, in chosen time, on a global scale," (2001, p. 2). In recent years, diaspora and "indigenous media" emerged from locally-based production centers to become part of globally-linked media networks with increased effectiveness and reach, according to Wilson & Stewart (Kelley et al., 2010). "Definitions of indigenous media are evolving," but for the purpose of this paper it is "defined as 'forms of media expression con-ceptualized, produced, and/or created by indigenous peoples across the globe'" (p. 15).

Previously, some members of these groups operated small media (weekly newspapers, magazines, radio and television programming) to meet the information and entertainment needs of their communities. Now digital technologies enable them to expand such communication activities to a global scale (Karim, 1998, p. 1, as cited in Kelley, et al., p. 15). “Indigenous, diaspora and ethnic media, occupy a significant place in ‘local cultures and communities but also in national and global media discourses, policies, industries, and funding structures,’ thus, calling for scholarly pursuits concerning how these developments affect dominant media, online media and issues of local and national identity among diaspora communities,” (Wilson & Stewart, 2008, p. 2, as cited in Kelley, et al. p. 15). Castells reminds us: “The elasticity of the Internet makes it particularly susceptible to intensifying the contradictory trends present in our world. Neither utopia nor dystopia, the Internet is the expression of ourselves—through a specific code of communication, which we must understand if we want to change our reality,” (2001, p. 6).

In her book, *Digital Diaspora*, Everett focuses on how the African Diaspora engages with cyberspace. She argues that colonization is not over and that it is a continuing process in globalization (Everett, 2010). While she does not dismiss, unequal technology distribution along with “the unbearable whiteness of cyberculture during its earliest discursive formations” as factors contributing to a “digital divide,” she advances the point that the “digital divide” is really “repressed racial difference in the information age” (p. 149).

Many scholars find that media serve as a tool of empowerment in regards to activism as well as re-instituting a sense of identity among ethnic groups (Castells, 2004;

Wilson & Stewart, 2008), both pertinent concepts to explore with the women in my study. A new African diasporic consciousness was evidenced in the 1960s through a rebirth of socio-politico-cultural rituals, ethnic hairstyles, speech, apparel and activism, which later migrated "through the evolving technospheres of cyberspace…" (Everett, 2010, p. 6). In the United States, blacks have struggled historically for access to the public sphere. "Despite black Americans' heroic efforts to demonstrate their patriotism by making the ultimate sacrifice in the Revolutionary War, the Great War, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, it was apparent that the nation was unwilling to recognize and fairly grant its black citizenry full citizenship protections and benefits" (Everett, p. 5). From traditional ethnic media to use of the Internet, African Americans effectively use media to convene and project a public voice. "Since 1994, there has been a proliferation of electronic bulletin boards, chat rooms, home pages, list serves, electronic directories, and black web rings…" (Everett, p. 7).

Well-meaning popular rhetoric discourse about the "digital divide" also perpetuates "intransigent racial stereotypes of certain groups in the West, especially that of black people as genetic intellectual inferiors" (Everett, p. 149). Everett's concern is that the media spotlight on the digitally-disadvantaged blinds us to the "other fact of signifycant black technomastery and new media activism despite tremendous odds" (p. 149).

Herman Gray also brings to light the inherent whiteness embedded in computer technology, and how "Afrogeeks," artists and composers make *cultural moves* "to challenge, disrupt, and unsettle dominant cultural representations and institutions" (Gray, 2005, p.3). Gray posits: "Identity in the hands of these artists forces a reckoning with the imbrications of race, gender, and social interests in digital technologies…." Their *cultural*

moves "…suggests that technologies are not neutral" (p.154). Gray further cites several social scientists like Beth Kolko, whom he quotes: "'cyberspace and race are both constructed cultural phenomena, not products of nature; they are made up of ongoing processes of definitions, performance, enactment, and identity relations" (p. 162). "Race matters far beyond the issue of access … precisely because all of us who spend time online are already shaped by the way in which race matters off line and we can't help but bring our own knowledge, experiences, and values with us when we log on" (p. 162).

One of Gray's central contentions is that Afrofuturists use "new information and digital technologies to change the terms—expand, really—of imagining and constructing twenty-first-century narratives of black Atlantic identities and representation" (p. 153). The artists he highlights in his book discursively push the conceptual boundaries beyond the historic confinements of place, period, and identities, to bring together "notions of blackness rooted in the connectivity and particularity of black soundings across geographies of time and space." As I look at Somali-American women's use of social media technologies, I will consider how these technologies, which were created in the United States, may have imbedded limitations both linguistically and technically to non-white users and how these women are constructing their own unique identities.

Beyond inherent technical limitations, gaps in accessibility are closing for people who have access to libraries, schools, and smart phones, which provide points of Internet access for a wider population of people in the United States (Lloyd, 2011). Prado reminds scholars in the Global North, who "increasingly enjoy reliable and affordable connectivity almost everywhere," that "most people in the developing world cannot count on reliable and affordable Internet access," (Prado, 2010, p. 11). She says that expanding

opportunities for digital inclusion of all people is “espoused by the United Nations Development Program” so “they may lead healthy, creative, and prosperous lives” (p. 10). Prado states that public Internet hubs at libraries, government agencies, telecenters, kiosks and Internet cafes, provide access to people in developing countries where individual access is not affordable or technologically accessible. In an exploratory study with women between the ages of 13 and 25 in the Dominican Republic, the scholar explains:

> “women are living through a transition, stepping beyond traditional roles and engaging in new activities that were once forbidden or frowned upon. These changes, often brought about by economic necessity, also result from increased access to information from global trends happening in the outside world,” (Prado, 2010, p. 9-10).

The participants in my study must adapt to a radically different environment—moving from an Islamic country in which almost everyone shares religious beliefs, albeit various interpretations, to a secular society in the United States. As newcomers, the Internet provides a haven among friends to re-convene and share identity re-formation as well as a place to learn about U.S. culture.

When looking at Internet use, especially outside the United States, social networking scholars, danah boyd and Nicole Ellison contend that although it is changing, scholars have a limited understanding of who is and who is not using social networking sites, why, and for what purposes. “Such questions will require large-scale quantitative and qualitative research. Richer, ethnographic research on populations more difficult to access (including non-users) would further aid scholars’ ability to understand the long-

term implications of these tools” (boyd & Ellison, 2007). A generally accepted conceptualization, these scholars define “social network sites” as:

> “…web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site” (boyd & Ellison, 2007).

This study draws on conversations posted on the social media site, Facebook, which has some five hundred million active users, according to *Tales from Facebook* (Miller, 2011, preface). “The average user has 130 friends and spends just under an hour a day on the site” (preface). Miller reports that every month there are three billion photos posted, and every day 60 million status updates. In the section, “The Anthropology of Facebook,” Miller offers 15 theses based on two months’ fieldwork and a year’s observation of people’s use in Trinidad, a Caribbean island near Venezuela. Inhabited by 1.3 million, Trinidad’s population is composed of “around 40 per cent descended from former African slaves, 40 per cent descended from former Asian indentured labourers, with the remainder having widespread origins, including China, Maderia and Lebanon” (p. xi). Miller’s anthropological starting point is that every individual is literally a social networking site without Facebook (p. 165). He contends Facebook did not invent social networking, but facilitates and expands it. Relevant to my study, is to recognize: “The normal distinction between public and private does not work for Facebook,” (p. 174).

Rather than what might be considered an unbounded anonymous mass, “The ‘public’ represented by Facebook is better understood as an aggregate of private spheres,” (p. 175). Miller’s ideas are certainly relevant to my ethnography of how my population uses Facebook to facilitate social networking within what I perceive as a combined public-private sphere.

2.4 Use of Social Networking Media for Community Building

Social network sites are a key means for making contact and building a “community” of people, which includes people who are known and those that one meets online. “Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace,” according to H. Rheingold in *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (1993, Introduction). Not restricted by geography, computer-mediated communication (CMC) “…unites individuals to share online identities through the aggregate networks of relationships and commitments that make any community possible” (Issa-Salwe, 2006, p. 55). As a group of people with a shared history and culture that distinguishes them in the United States, “Somalis using the CMC may create a virtual community, which also has another relationship: that of a specific group identity—one, in turn, backed by the real world (or offline relationships)” (Issa-Salwe, 2006, p. 56).

Very little research is available on the media habits of Somalis; however, in one study of more than 400 Somali websites analyzed in 2004, Issa-Salwe found two main reasons for a growing quantity of computer-mediated communication among Somali

people: “(1) the loss of national identity following the collapse of the state institutions, and (2) the characteristics of the Internet that make it more accessible are participatory and conducive to oral expressiveness” (Issa-Salwe, 2006, pp. 58-59). An explanation for the proliferation of Somali websites can be “viewed through the centuries-old Somali egalitarianism” found in Somali culture (Issa-Salwe, 2006, p. 63):

> “The current social crisis among the Somalis has created a situation that voids social norms, and many individuals are left in disarray, in mental and moral confusion. The proliferation of Somali websites presents an answer to this new situation in which sub-national groups are attempting to re-create themselves. In essence, the process of making web pages amounts to the construction of identities. Creating such pages offers an unrivalled opportunity for group-presentation (or self presentation) in relation to any dimension of social and personal identity to which one chooses to allude,” as quoted in Chandler 1997 by Issa-Salwe (2006, pp. 58-59).

Dorian B. Crosby suggests that more documentation is necessary to provide a comprehensive understanding of the struggles and triumphs of resettled African women in the United States (Crosby, 2006, p. 69). In her article she puts forward that “many female refugees are from patriarchal societies where men tend to dominate the political, economic, and social decision-making processes” (Crosby, 2006, p. 68). Resettled women must address language, education, religion, employment, dietary and other changes. They often need to provide economic support for the family, which is a new responsibility to many. Their adjustment to life in the United States also must be done in

the context of women's rights and equality, according to Crosby. "Being introduced to new employment and educational opportunities in the U.S., in particular, becomes problematic when attempting to maintain traditional gender and social roles" (Crosby, 2006, p. 68). Many of the Somali-American women in my study lived through the trauma of war, refugee camps, and resettlement to one or more places in the United States. This study aims to document their lives as expressed through conversations with each other online.

In agreement with Chandler and Crosby's assumptions and propositions, my thesis contributes to a growing body of knowledge about Somali women's use of technology and diverse identities as they connect and form online communities of support. As Somali-American Muslims face the daily challenges of living their faith in the diaspora, this paper shows how social media give agency to a population of women within an *imagined* community, and I suggest, *real* community of friends, relatives and extended "friendships" throughout the world.

2.5 Identity Development and Mediated Identities

In her 1995 book about the Internet, *Life on Screen*, Sherry Turkle describes how the Internet promotes the existence of multiple identities because it erodes "boundaries between the real and the virtual." Relevant to my study, Turkle contends that in cyberspace communities, "we invent ourselves as we go along." (p. 10). She contends we will see shifts in the way "we create and experience human identity." Karim suggests that "Global migration trends have produced transnational groups related by culture, ethnicity, language and religion" (Karim, 1998, p. 1), which also can be seen in my study.

Goffman's concept of relating people's behaviors or identities to a performance with a front area where the performance is presented and a backstage is helpful in looking at how people present their identities on Facebook and in other situations (Goffman, 1962, p.3). To fully document and "understand" my "actors' motives in interaction" there needs to be mutual trust established so that I understand the public and private performances of my subjects and why they might want to distinguish between the two" (Goffman, 1962, p.3). What does their public performance signify about their private beliefs? Do they present public and private selves as consistent performances? In Leage & Chalmers' study with Arab girls,[6] norms of modesty and gender appropriate behaviors kept some of the informants from participating on the "public" Facebook stage, while others found a creative way to negotiate identity through social networking, and another segment of participants saw Facebook as a way to achieve freedom of expression (Leage & Chalmers, 2010).

Anthropologist Gerald D. Berreman builds on Goffman in "Behind Many Masks." He says it is not the researcher's job to determine which of the performances—on stage or back stage—are the "true feelings" of the subject, but to employ techniques "that reveal not only the performance staged for the observer, but the nature of the efforts which go into producing it and the backstage situation it conceals" (Berreman, 1962, p.24). His work serves as a concise explication of methodological procedures for dealing with impression management, which he says is "a feature of all social interaction" (Berreman, 1962, p.24). He also cautions that the ethnographer must be aware that "the opinions and behaviors of one stratum are insufficient for understanding a whole society"

[6] In Middle-Eastern Arab countries the term "women" connotes females who have engaged in sexual intercourse. The unmarried females in this study prefer to be called "girls" (p. 29).

(Berreman, 1962, p.24). And, not only are there different stratums within a society, but there are different performances within the group a researcher has chosen to work. Internet ethnography scholar Daniel Miller also discusses how our ideas have changed about anonymity and its effect on online and offline selves. He elaborates on Goffman and Turkle in his Trinidad Facebook study that all versions of the self are to "some degree performative and based on certain frames of expectation," (2011, p. 177). When looking at identities portrayed by Somali-American women, the different roles they play in life will most likely be affected by many factors, not just whether or not they are online or offline.

Reaching further back in an effort to explicate identity, I offer concepts of philosopher and psychologist William James, who suggests a person can have many "potential or actual selves" (1890/1981, p. 297). James theorized that the consciousness of self involved a stream of thought including the "I," which knows and remembers all parts and past selves, and the various "me's." The experiences of the me's fluctuate and can be studied empirically as "*constituents* of the me in a larger sense,—such are the clothes, the material possessions, the friends, the honors and esteem which the person receives or may receive," according to James (p. 379). Comello suggests these various selves—material, social, spiritual—which in combination provide a sense of personal identity, have implications in the study of communication (Comello, 2009). I build on James' concept of identity as multifaceted where various selves are in conflict or rivalry, so that James, as is everyone, "confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my empirical selves and relinquishing the rest," (p. 295). Applying this idea to mediated communication is helpful in thinking about the way online communication facilitates

more or less freedom in identity expression depending on how "public" an individual deems the social network space to be, as demonstrated in the Arab girls study. As I study my participant's use of Facebook, I will consider the way in which individuals constantly make tradeoffs between various identities and look at the reasons why people suppress one identity over another.

In the area of mediated identities, Thiel-Stern argues that digital technologies not only allow subjects to negotiate between different identities, but at lightening speed. In their construction of identity via Instant Messaging conversations, Theil-Stern's subjects, "disclose different and often very contradictory bits of information" … as they "appear to 'try on' different tones with different persons," (2006, p. 196). Without face-to-face contact, even a very shy, reserved girl is "able to experiment and shift her identity without self-consciousness…." Theil-Stern contends, however, that online media use falls "in line with Butler's (1990) notion that gender is performed within the constraints of cultural discourses" (p. 197). Thiel-Stern reminds us to look beyond gender because "Identity should be considered through the lenses of gender, age, race, class, geographical location" and anything else that marks a person in a particular way. She advocates that identities are formed in relation to social reality and multiple discourses, in keeping with Foucault (2005, p. 184).

In addition, anthropology scholar, William Mazzarella suggests we look at the places and practices of mediation when asking questions about globalization. He contends that mediation is a constitutive process in social life. Paradoxically, "reflexive social entities (selves, societies, cultures) are fundamentally constituted (and not just reconstituted) through mediation. On the other hand, as Derrida and other scholars

suggest, this constitutive mediation also always produces a fiction of premediated existence" (2004, p. 357). As I approach the study of discourse among Somali-American women, I need to be "attentive to the specific social conditions or mediations out of which particular representations (including 'culture') emerge in our informants' lives and work," (p. 340).

In her book, *Mediated Identities*, Divya McMillin says that "identity is always incomplete and, in this sense, is always a hegemonic project," (2009, p. 6), acknowledging Butler. McMillin also considers how identity simultaneously is formed by and expresses relations of power," (p. 6). For Arab girls, ages 18 – 22, in Qatar on the Arabian Peninsula, the social network site (SNS) Facebook presents challenges to cultural expectations for those who desire to express identity (Leage & Chalmers, 2010). While perceptions of SNS continue to change rapidly, this study suggests that some of girls in this conservative Islamic country feel pressure to "comply with their culture and protect their reputation" by limiting their images, contact with males and other expressions on Facebook. SNS may enable a source of freedom in self-expression, but women are caught between their desires to articulate identity and maintain cultural norms.

Kearney's and Thiel-Stern's research attempts to answer the question of how and why young women employ social networking. Their studies show that participants use social networking for identity articulation and creative endeavors (Theil-Stern, 2009). Theil-Stern finds her participants "generate much of its content through a pastiche of their biographies … interests, blogs, list of friends, and posted media in many forms…. (p. 21). These scholars find their populations of young women use the Internet "to ex-

press themselves, explore their identities, and connect with others" (Kearney, 2006, p. 3).

Another scholar who focuses on girls and the negotiation of identities in online environments, Sharon R. Mazzarella, discusses how teens exhibit a growing presence online. Like the women who participated in the study for my thesis, the studies of young women in the book *Girl Wide Web 2.0* "paint a compelling picture of girls as active and engaged users of the technology—using it to negotiate their identities, flex their creative muscles, educate others, and just have fun," (2010, p. 5).

Using Stuart Hall's concept of identity as shifted and negotiated, this master's thesis explores and documents how one immigrant population of women define and re-define their identities as Somali-American Muslim women in the Diaspora. I adopt Paul Gilroy's genealogy of the concept of identity as "sameness," which can be distinguished from "subjectivity because it moves on from dealing with the formation and location of subjects and their historical individuality into thinking about collective or communal identities: nations, genders, classes, generational, 'racial' and ethnic groups" (Gilroy, 2006, p. 386). I also draw on the idea that "Religion continues to define and structure the personal and community identities of many new immigrants" as reported by Leonard et al. (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009, p. 308).

The idea that gender and identity are performed and negotiated online relates to this thesis' theoretical framework and larger ideas about community and identity that will be explored in chapter 3. These ideas, along with Stuart Hall's concept of identity as changing and constantly being negotiated, lay the theoretical framework for my thesis.

2.6 Defining Religion and Studying Religion

Robert Orsi articulates his definition of religious studies through an overview of its history. In his book, *Between Heaven and Earth*, he explains where the academy came from and where it should be going. Orsi maintains that the academic study of religion in the United States developed within a university culture struggling with the conflicting claims of Christian authority, which is widely accepted in the culture, and secular learning (Orsi, 2004, p.183). By following his explanation of what religion is not, Orsi provides criteria for what constitutes religion. He argues religious studies should not be what it has been—an attempt to distinguish between what is good and bad expression, in which we establish a "normative hierarchy of religious idioms" that ascend from "negative to positive, 'primitive' to high, local to universal, infantile to mature (among other value-laden dichotomies …)" and then find a methodological justification for them (Orsi, 2004, p.183). "These resilient impulses take on special significance in light of the well-known inability of the field to agree on what religion is: we may not know what religion is but at least we can say with certainty what bad religion is or what religion surely is not," he adds with a note of sarcasm (Orsi, 2004, p.183). So, Orsi's arguments do not agree with Freud, Tyler, Frazer and other theorists who bring forth a particular ideology for naming their brand of "good" religion. While he momentarily looks through the lens of previous theorists, such as Freud, in his analysis of his data from research in his book, *Thank You, St. Jude*, he does not end up there.

The study of religion within universities got relegated to the teaching of *ethics*, as defined in a broad, universal, nondogmatic, nonsectarian and nondenominational way, Orsi says (Orsi, 2004, p.183). Later developments, that remain today, encompass an

emphasis on moral learning. Among American educators was the rationale for building colleges to civilize the population and create a common culture of shared values and behaviors out of its diversity. "Civilized" meant acceptable religious beliefs, practice and emotion (Orsi, 2004, p.184). Progressive social scientists, as Orsi describes as "post-Christian Christian academics," had educational ideals defined by Enlightenment principles combined with either enlightened Christianity or religion of humanity, as described by historian George Marsden. Understanding this background is particularly important in self-reflexivity. He also describes the time when fundamentalist Christians waged a campaign outside of the university to bring back their idea of learning from church elders as true education in direct opposition to modernists within the university whose allegiance was the scientific method (Orsi, 2004, p.185). This time period is when the academic study of religion began in the United States. Orsi explains: "…the distinction between a 'Christianity' amenable to the aims of modern learning and 'sectarianism' hostile to them had by now been embedded in academic culture in its confrontation with fundamentalism" (Orsi, 2004, p.185).

In *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11,* Bruce Lincoln provides an explicit definition of religion that I would like to draw upon. As presented by religious studies scholar Jeanne Kilde in a University of Minnesota Religious Studies lecture, Lincoln asserts "a proper definition [of religion] must…be polythetic and flexible, allowing for wide variations and attending, at minimum," to four domains: Discourse, Practice, Community and Institution (Kilde, 2010). Lincoln contends that all four domains are necessary parts of anything that can properly be called a "religion" (Lincoln, 2006).

Orsi dispels the idea that any approach to religion that foregrounds ethical issues "obstructs our understanding of religious idioms because religion at its root has nothing to do with morality" (Orsi, 2004, p.291). Religion does not necessarily make the world a better place; conform to creeds and doctrines developed by theologians, church leaders or ethicists; or orient people toward social justice, even though we might like it as a paradigm for religion (Orsi, 2004, p.291). Orsi states that theories about religion have largely served to protect against truths, such as that the "same impulses that result in a special kind of compassion also lead to destruction, often among the same people at the same time" (Orsi, 2004, p.291).

In his book, Orsi states that it is the challenge of the discipline of religious studies "to enter into the otherness of religious practices in search of an understanding of their human ground" (Orsi, 2004, p.292). He says, scholars must find a way to honor "their own moral and political values while not masking the common humanity" that the researcher and religious adept share (Orsi, 2004, p.292). I intend to follow Orsi's lead when he says that the point of religious studies research should not be to "reassure ourselves and our readers that we are not them…" (Orsi, 2004, p.292). Orsi's method involves using an ethnographic approach, which is elaborated in the next section.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

Theories informing my approach to the topic of how Somali-American women connect and express identity through social media technology include Stuart Hall's concept of identity as shifted and negotiated, along with Benedict Anderson's idea of imagined community.

Anderson exerts that nations are "imagined political communities" … and says they are "imagined because members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1983, p. 15). For immigrant populations, reconstructing their "nation" may be possible through self-representation and connecting on the Internet through various social network media. These virtual, imagined communities may be formed by individuals who seek and connect with others who possess characteristics consistent with what they deem to be important. The perspective within this research concurs with Fox, who says, "Applying the idea of imagined community to virtual community allows for an understanding of the concept as more than just people interacting online" (Fox, 2004, p. 52). "… a virtual community is entirely predicated on an individual's extended consciousness, which helps to imagine his virtual community as real" (Fox, 2004, p. 52). "For individual members to truly belong, they arguably must be able to both imagine the community and in turn perceive themselves as a part of the community" (Fox, 2004, p. 52).

Appadurai theorizes that media and migration are interconnected, and create a "joint effect on the work of the imagination as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity," (1996, p. 3), which is very relevant to my study of Somali immigrants. In

his argument, Appadurai tracks ways in which electronic mediation transforms preexisting worlds of communication and conduct. With my Somali diaspora population, his notions seem to be readily apparent and applicable: Electronic media "compel the transformation of everyday discourse.…They are resources for experiments with self-making in all sorts of societies" and "…provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project," (1996, p. 3-4). When mass mediated messages are juxtaposed with mass migrations, "we have a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities….viewers and images are in simultaneous circulation. Neither images nor viewers fit into circuits or audiences that are easily bound within local, national, or regional spaces," (p. 4). We may see with my informants that "…the work of the imagination, viewed in this context, is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern," (Appadurai, 1996, p. 4).

Tomlinson asserts that "all cultural identities—be they national, regional, local—are, in one way, of the same order. They are all representations of belonging…" (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 81). Appadurai questions how small groups (especially families) deal with "new global realities as they seek to reproduce themselves and, in doing so, accidently reproduce cultural forms themselves" (Appadurai, 1990, p. 597). He contends that transgenerational and gendered relationships are strained as people negotiate their identities and challenge "existing repertories of knowledge and practice…" (Appadurai, 1990, p. 597). This paper articulates how a population of Somali-American women negotiates a balance between their desire to be both American and Somali, while attempting to respect their elders' cultural norms.

Paul Gilroy discusses how difficult it is to define identity: "…Few words in the conceptual vocabulary of contemporary cultural analysis have been more flagrantly contested and more thoroughly abused than "'identity'" (Gilroy, 2006, p. 382). In his genealogy of defining the concept of identity, Gilroy explicates that "the concept of identity points initially towards the question of the self" (Gilroy, 2006, p. 384) and that "…human agents are made and make themselves rather than being born in some already finished form." This concept is used in "feminist thought and critical analyses of racism … in exploring how 'subjects' bearing gender and racial characteristics are constituted in social processes…." The production of the "fictive creations" of "'woman' and 'Negro'" have been "understood in relation to the associated development of categories of humanity from which women and blacks have been routinely excluded" (Gilroy, 2006, p. 385). Gilroy walks through the concept of identity as "sameness," which can be distinguished from "subjectivity because it moves on from dealing with the formation and location of subjects and their historical individuality into thinking about collective or communal identities: nations, genders, classes, generational, 'racial' and ethnic groups" (Gilroy, 2006, p. 386). And lastly, he suggests that "analysis of communal and collective identity" leads into "the question of solidarity," which "asks us to comprehend identity as an effect mediated by historical and economic structures, instantiated in the signifying practices through which they operate and arising in contingent institutional settings that both regulate and express the coming together of individuals in patterned social processes" (Gilroy, 2006, p. 387). Gilroy suggests that "identity's capacity to synthesize and connect various enquiries into political cultures and cultural politics is something that makes it a valuable asset … worth struggling with and struggling over" (2006, p. 388).

Within this background, this paper situates itself with cultural critic Stuart Hall's ideas, as reiterated by Grossberg: "Hall works within both Marxist and semiotic discourses which attempt to understand the nature of contemporary social life and the central place of communication within it" (Grossberg, p. 152). Key insights in Hall's work are that identities need to be understood within a specific conjuncture, and that the theorization "of identity is a matter of considerable political significance, and is only likely to be advanced when both the necessity and the 'impossibility' of identities, and the suturing of the psychic and the discursive in their constitution, are fully and unambiguously acknowledged" (Hall, 1996, p. 16). Hall argues that identity is an irreducible concept that has at its center the question of agency and politics. He defines politics as both "the significance in modern forms of politics of location—but also the manifest difficulties and instabilities which have characteristically affected all contemporary forms of 'identity politics'" (Hall, 1997, p. 2). By agency, Hall does not want to "return to an unmediated and transparent notion of the subject or identity as the centered author of social practice" … but reconceptualizes identity. Hall stresses that the question of identity recurs in an "attempt to rearticulate the relationship between subjects and discursive practices" (Hall, 1996, p. 2). Or, "if one prefers to stress the process of subjectification to discursive practices, and the politics of exclusion which all such subjectification appears to entail, the question of identification" (Hall, 1996, p. 2). Hall contrasts the "common sense language" with the 'naturalism' definition of identification as "constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation … the discursive approach sees

identification as a construction, a process never completed—always ‘in process’” (Hall, 1996, p. 2). Specifically, this paper builds on Hall’s idea that identities are subject to “radical historization” … “above all in relation to the processes of globalization” … “and the processes of forced and ‘free migration’ which have become a global phenomenon of the so-called ‘post-colonial’ worlds” (Hall, 1996, p. 4). Identities are “constituted within, not outside representation” and “discourse”…. Identities “emerge within the play of specific modalities of power,” in the “marking of difference and exclusion…” (Hall, 1996, p. 4). Identities “arise from the narrativization of the self…” (Hall, 1996, p. 2). This paper explores the narratives of Somali-American women in the construction of their identities via the social networking site, Facebook, their blogs, and focus group feedback from participants.

In regards to globalization, I heed William Mazzerella’s offer of an alternative ethnographic and theoretical strategy based on a general theory of media and mediation. In the article “Culture, Globalization, Mediation,” he explores the contradiction that stems from globalization studies emerging from earlier media and cultural studies traditions. He posits the new field perpetuates substantialist and essentialist models of culture that are at odds with the critical thrust of globalization studies and “complicit with the agendas of public and commercial bureaucracies” (2004, p. 345). He states that ethnographers should consider: 1.) mediation, not just media, as a constitutive process in social life; 2.) cultural politics of globalization involve foregrounding “the mediated quality of our lives” and contradictorily “strenuously disavowing it;” 3.) tension is particularly apparent in the concept of culture that was “half-abandoned in anthropological theory,” but “celebrated everywhere else;” and 4.) setting new sights on

“nodes of mediation where value is often produced and contested” in the name of culture through a critical ethnography of the cultural politics of globalization (p. 345). It will be important to think about how the process of mediation works in the lives of my participants and how media is inherently embedded with existing control mechanisms, not just simply as neutral tools.

> Mazzarella suggests: “… a medium is a material framework, both enabling and constraining, for a given set of social practices. In this guise a medium is both dynamic and largely taken for granted. However, a medium is also a reflexive and reifying technology. It makes society imaginable and intelligible to itself in the form of external representations. Inseparable from the movement of social life and yet removed from it, a medium is thus at once obvious and strange, indispensable and uncanny, intimate and distant” (p. 346).

Mazzarella proposes the name “mediation” for the “processes by which a given social dispensation produces and reproduces itself in and through a particular set of media” (p. 346). “Because of the structural ambiguity of media, the work of mediation is always potentially volatile.” He suggests that

> “things were never quite as solid as they may have looked…On the one hand, an all-or-nothing confrontation between watertight cultural worlds and the poison of reflexivity. On the other, the recognition that meaning and value arise out of ongoing practices of mediation that are always at least half-conscious of the ‘close distance’—the blend of immersion and

self-consciousness—that any cultural identification involves" (Mazzarella, 2003, p. 346).

Since many of my participants' lives in Somalia are memories from childhood, I need to explore how mediation both enables and constrains their representations of self alongside my informants' ideas about how dominant media represent Somalis.

From religious studies scholar Orsi's writings, I want to keep in mind his notion of what our academic culture and our mainstream culture has deemed as acceptable expressions in a public life persona versus religious practice that should be kept private (Orsi, 2004, p.186). I wonder how my research subjects feel about the public outrage and fear expressed over public displays of religious beliefs through clothing, prayer and other practices that have gained attention in U.S. news reports. I also don't agree with some earlier religious theorists that look at religious practices as "wrong," "primitive" or evolutionarily inferior. My population of research subjects also has to deal with many in our society who have racial, ethnic, economic or gender prejudices. The deep-seated religious and political paranoia that reared itself in the wake of 9/11 is a prominent example of our widespread fear as a nation and "othering" of non-Christian based religious and ethnic minority groups. Orsi contends that "religion" has been demarcated to preserve it from "anything not in accordance with certain sanctioned notions of self and society" (Orsi, 2004, p.186). As I study my immigrant population of Muslim women, I am particularly interested in what Lincoln says about varieties within religions: "Every macro-entity that gets called a religion—Buddhism, Islam or Christianity, for example—has countless internal varieties and subdivisions, each of which undergoes its own historic process of development and change" (Kilde, 2010). I will attempt to keep this

idea in mind—of religion and practice as a process that can change over time—as I gather information and document my subjects' experiences.

Lastly, Castells' analyses of a series of "diverse expressions of a process of multidimensional, structural change" point toward *The Internet Galaxy and The Rise of the Network Society* are apropos to my study. "Core economic, social, political, and cultural activities throughout the planet are being structured by and around the Internet, and other computer networks," (Castells, 2001, p. 3) "Yet, in spite of the pervasiveness of the Internet, its logic, its language, and it constraints are not well understood beyond the realm of strictly technological matters," (p. 3). I use Castells' explanation of culture as "different from ideology, psychology, or individual representations. While culture is explicit, it is a collective construction that transcends individual preferences, while influencing the practices of people in culture…" (p. 37). He suggests that the "virtual communication culture adds a social dimension to technological sharing, by making the Internet a medium of selective social interaction and symbolic belonging," (p. 37). Castells puts forth that the Internet is a "technological medium for horizontal communication, and as a new form of free speech. It also lays the foundation for self-directed networking as a tool for organization, collective action, and the construction of meaning," (p. 55) which may be found with my participant community.

Chapter Four: Methodology

I conducted research for this thesis in Minneapolis, where the largest population of Somalis resides in the United States. My overall research question is: How do immigrant Somali women negotiate and balance their national, religious, and gender identities in the diaspora through social media? My thesis investigates and analyzes how these women experience and make meaning in U. S. culture and answers the question: How do Somali-American women express themselves outside the realm of traditional mass media? I address these questions by looking at a sample of self-representations through text posted by Somali-American women on the social networking site, Facebook and personal blogs. Through critical qualitative emergent coding, I identify and analyze a series of themes related to identity formation within the mediated spaces made available to me by Somali-American Muslim women living in Minneapolis. Qualitative research methods scholars Lindlof and Taylor say: "…categorization and coding are essential to making sense of qualitative data" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 214). Themes or codes are simply units of information that researchers identify by critically reading through the rich data they amass. I use a two-pronged approach to find categories and make sense of my data. I examine the data through several sessions of close reading, using inductive thinking "to stimulate the development of categories" (p. 215). I highlight passages of text into "high inference" or "ambiguous" categories, which "call for knowledge of cultural insider meanings or require the researcher to assimilate several pieces of evidence" (p. 215). Eventually, I find various passages—codes or units of data—that relate to each other and begin to form categories of "concepts, themes, constructs," (p. 216).

"Using pen, pencil, or highlighter, or computer mouse clicks, the analyst marks

what seems to make cultural or theoretical sense. What that 'sense' consists of may take more markings of text, more thought given to how and why they cohere as a group, and more attempts to craft a definition that 'would be self-explanatory to a newcomer,' as Turner put it," (p. 216). Lindlof and Taylor describe this kind of "open coding" as a "creative act" (p. 217). Secondly, I begin to look at my groups of passages (categories) within my theoretical frame and apply it to the data in "deductive or *etic* fashion" (p. 214). In this study, my theoretical framework categories are related to the participants' identity articulation: Racial, ethnic, religious, gender and sexual identities and how their identities shift and are negotiated. In doing this, Lindlof and Taylor caution: "A priori theory can sensitize one to what could be important, but it should never override or overshadow the meanings that the researcher discovers in the scenes being studied," (p. 215).

In the next step, I group similar items according to my theoretical framework and begin the long process of analyzing, interpreting and interjecting my thoughts within the text. In this study, my ultimate purpose is to document what a sample of Somali-American women, ages 20 – 27, express through social media technology and offer an analysis of their discourse through the lens of identity articulation.

In an attempt to gather background data on the media that prevalently covers Somalis, I learned that much of the relevant media are written in the native language of Somalis reading and writing it. Because of this, my background information study is limited only to media written in English. To gain familiarity with Somali activities in Minnesota and globally, I reviewed several months' worth of articles by searching for "Somali" news on blogs and in the *Twin Cities Daily Planet*, an online news blog that publishes original articles, blog entries and republishes entries from its 100-plus

community media partners, and listened to an archived radio series about Somalis produced by and available on the *Minnesota Public Radio* web site.

The women in my study spoke English or translated for me as they communicated with one another, which made up for the limitation of using English-only background media sources. My social media research builds on relationships I made through initial ethnographic background work within the Minnesota Somali communities. I initiated discussions with Somali-American students at the University of Minnesota and interviewed two Somali-American women who work at the African Development Center. I also interviewed a professor who is Somali-American and conducts research with women in Somalia. With a Somali translator, I observed a local Somali community radio program at KFAI radio station and attended various Islamic and Somali art exhibits, poetry readings and conferences in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Some of the Somali-American women I met in the Minneapolis community served as informants in my social media study and provided connections to other Somali women in Minnesota to whom they were linked as "Friends" on Facebook. I recruited participants with an email request and my informants relayed the topic of this study and my request to others to produce a snowball effect (Appendix A).

I received permission to review 19 women's personal Facebook sites that are also linked to public and personal responses from a worldwide network of "Friends." I reviewed one month of postings from each participant from April 1, 2010 – May 1, 2010. To avoid any possible influence my Facebook "Friendship" might have on the participants, I started my research the day I was given access to their sites and went backwards from that date. I reviewed existing postings, rather than new ones. Access to

the personal Facebook sites also provided me links to blogs, groups, videos, songs and other related media posted by participants and their "Friends." I also reviewed Somali Facebook conversations archived by the Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) at the University of Minnesota that were collected in 2009.

Particular care was taken to inform the participants of the researcher's intention and to offer them copies of the final research report. Some women chose to communicate with me directly through Facebook email messages and postings to my "wall" in addition to allowing access to their sites. Owing to the vulnerability of this immigrant population and my concern for the participants' privacy, none of their names are used in this study. In addition, my position as a graduate student and university instructor could be problematic. I also am older than most of my participants and Caucasian. I am aware that schemas of "white Americans may match up well with frames that are dominant in mainstream news media, thus reinforcing problematic racial beliefs," (Squires, 2009, p. 41). "Audiences interact with frames, bringing their own cognitive schema and life experiences with them to news media texts. However, for some white audiences, dominant racial frames may remain resonant due to a lack of real-life experiences with people of color in non-mediated settings, like schools and social clubs," as referenced by Squires from *The Black Image in the White Mind* (Squires, 2009, p. 41). While my research does not directly assess media coverage of Somalis to expose such dominant racial schemas, it will provide documentation of "real-life" experiences. In addition to being "people of color," my participants also are Muslim, a faith I do not share. As a researcher, I allow that all ethnographic encounters involve intersubjective study of difference in the participant observation encounter with informants. I relate to "the

inadequacy of the dichotomies between Subject and Object, Self and Other, the West and the Rest" as felt by contemporary feminist ethnographers (Benhar & Gordon, 1995, p. 7). My lack of experience with Muslims, may also serve as a positive attribute. My informants and participants may express their various interpretations of Islam with some degree of candidness because I am not a Somali or Muslim elder. I hope to engage with feminist ethnographer Ruth Behar's and feminist historian of anthropology Deborah Gordon's idea to construct other models as those in *Women writing culture*: "to write creatively" being "sensitive to the racial history, sexual politics, and moral predicaments of anthropology" (1995, p. XII). Rather than interpret and rephrase the participants' Facebook posts, my research data uses the women's own words, thus giving them power within my research. After I categorized data from the Facebook posts, I member-checked my themes with some of my Facebook participants in a focus group. Morgan provides focus group research techniques, which are helpful (Morgan, 1997). I used a somewhat unstructured approach, bordering on participant observation. I began by providing personal information about my background and interests. I asked questions and guided discussions by linking back to what I found in the Facebook posts. Inspired by feminist ethnographic practices, the focus group meeting allowed me to clarify and correct my assumptions and interpretations. The women explored and further elaborated on themes within the Facebook data, and provided deeper meaning, which informs my analysis. Also helpful to theme-checking, was the digital archive captured from more publicly-accessible "Fan Pages" and "Groups" initiated by Somali youth on Facebook that was created by the Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) at the University of Minnesota.

Lastly, this paper draws on religious studies scholar Robert Orsi's method of study, in which he attempts to be transparent in his positions, but non-judgmental in working with his participants. Orsi's method helps me place myself in an empathetic relationship within the religious group under study and employ what Orsi describes as a "disciplined suspension of the impulse to locate the other (with all her or his discrepant moralities, ways of knowing, and religious impulses) securely in relation to ones own cosmos" and be transformed by the experience of getting beyond any stereotypical constructs I have, to discover the women's feelings and intentions (Orsi, 2004, p. 198) through their own online representations, postings and feedback.

Chapter Five: Findings and Analysis

5.1 Facebook: A place for identity building

Here is how one of my participants explained how Facebook allows a private, yet public space to explore identity:

> "Facebook does create your own little world…. if you're any Somali woman, (Facebook) creates a little space for you where you can say whatever you want. At the end of the day it's your opinion … a lot of people understand in that sense because they are there too and … they know the ways of where we live in the West."

This comment comes from one in a group of Somali-American women who gathered around my dining room table to discuss how the Internet makes it easier for them to connect with one another and articulate a kind of mediated hybrid identity. As we sipped Somali tea and the children present ate chunks of banana, the 20- to 27-year old women

in my study explained how they use social networking sites, blogs and tweeting.

My thesis looks at identity articulation in Facebook conversations through the lens of how Somali-American women express their Somali versus American identities. Resulting data reveal attributes about Somali women that rarely show up in dominant news media coverage. In fact, there is little written in either popular or academic literature about Somali women in the United States, which makes my documentation of this group's integration into Minnesota important to understanding their immigrant process. My respondents' reveal through their posts and interviews, their creativity, strength, educational interests, love of family and friends, political activism, fashion sense, approach to gender roles and how they work to maintain Somali culture:

> We all come from the same country, but also we come from different families and that has a lot to do with who you are and how you carry yourself. That has a lot to do with your identity.
>
> Your family, I think, especially if you're a Somali girl, your family makes or breaks you in a way. Traditionally women are, like I said, there are those gender roles, but if you're not taught those, if you're taught to challenge those norms at home and you're taught to ask those questions and be confident in yourself, that builds your identity as a woman.
>
> … I think that with my 22 years of living … I feel like Somali women are the most resilient women in the world….Not because I'm a women I'm saying that, a Somali women, but I've seen that within the refugee camps here and all the other places that I've visited where I've seen Somali women, they tend to be the bread winners. Even they are

> single mothers, they don't take no for an answer. They're out there. They might have six, seven children, they might have a husband who is there, but is not working and helping out, or they might not have a husband at all, maybe he passed away, maybe he's not there, but they still go on and I feel like it depends what family you come from, but I feel like it is fair to say, generally Somali women are very resilient.

One of the themes that plays out in my data is the strength of Somali women and a high regard for mothers. Participants credit their mothers for protecting them during their migration through refugee camps and into the United States, for instructing them in reading the Qur'an, for teaching them about their Somali heritage, for working hard to make ends meet. Informants talk about wanting to project their identities as Somali women because they are proud to be Somali women and want to make their mothers proud of them. All of the women in my study are college-educated, so as the next statement mentions, education is empowering.

> If education comes into role, that in itself empowers you more. It builds that identity. You can speak three, four languages. You're balancing identities. You know the outside world, you know being home and being Somali women, being outside, you can relate to Americans. You just build on that identity and you try to balance everything. You try to balance, at the same time, I don't want to lose myself while making my mom happy, and at the same time making my friends happy and I try not to lose myself. I try to make sure that while balancing these identities I am

> happy with who I am at the end of the day. I think there are so many things that play into that. There are so many factors that contribute to one building their identity.

Hall discusses that identities are not stagnant, but are always sliding along a spectrum (1999). The above quote illustrates how Somali women negotiate their Somali and American identities — not simply a binary construction, "as that which seems fixed continues to be dialogically reappropriated," (Hall, p. 8).

To parse out the factors that contribute to the different faces of identity building, I use coding categories that relate to feminist and cultural studies approaches to studying identity, which look at selfhood, communal and mediated identities (Gilroy, 2006, p. 386-386). I present data from each of my coding categories—racial and ethnic, religious, gender and sexual identity articulation—in turn with my analysis in this section of my thesis, which includes data from my interviews, Facebook posts and my conversations with participants, a follow-up focus group, and Somali conversations on social media archived by IHRC.

Facebook participants make their viewpoints clear through their posted biographies, photos, organizational affiliations, interests, blogs, friends and media they create or sites to which they link, sharing their connection to homeland, political views, Somali-sponsored events, moral support, fashion, and personal news, images, videos, music, stories, poetry, and religious writings. I find that content of these first- through second-generation Somali immigrants on such mediated spaces demonstrates how they use social networking sites to express their shifting identities—which correlates with

previous identity research (Hall, 1997; IHRC, 2009; Thiel-Stern, 2007)—and convey their attachment to each other, their families, Allah, Minnesota, the United States, and Somalia. My Facebook participants, like the populations of young women studied by Thiel-Stern, Kearney and S. Mazzarella, use the Internet "to express themselves, explore their identities, and connect with others" (Kearney, 2006, p. 3).

Typical of the social media genre, in which contributors often type quickly and spontaneously, postings use cryptic abbreviations, slang, typos and misspelled words, which have not been altered in the posts I quote in this thesis, following Theil-Stern (2007) and other feminist ethnographers. In addition, some of the posts noted are written by non-native English speakers, which contributes to their incomplete English sentence structure.

Somali culture embraces a rich oral tradition. Here is a stanza from a poem written by one of my informants, Nixx, that expresses the longing for their tradition of storytelling:

> How many seasons passed since our people sang
> songs of freedom, how my spirit craves cool nights
> sitting underneath acacia trees listening to stories
> full of wisdom…

As nomadic families in Somalia moved their herds from one place to another to graze, they shouted to see if there were neighbors near their new home sites, explained Saxxx, a participant and interpreter in this study. Likewise, when follow-up focus groups met to provide feedback on my Facebook findings, participants spoke loudly to each other, interrupted and elaborated on each other's stories.

The Somali-American participants in this study also shout out to each other using social media. As Behar & Gordon (1995) suggest in their book title, *Women Writing Culture,* my informants document their lives as they use the medium to maintain and cultivate their Somali heritage through ethnic language, religion, clothing, conversation, and debate, while living as Americans. The online communication of this particular population of women, at this particular time in their history, provides a window into how technology gives them freedom to express themselves in a way that their cultural norms and religious beliefs inhibit in some arenas of face-to-face communication. In this protected private, yet online public sphere, players exhibit both "on stage" and "back stage" performances (Berreman, 1962, p. 24) in a very interesting interplay between American and Somali cultural identities. I find that "competing identities—racial, gender, sexual, national—are often context specific, mobilized depending on the circumstances" and that differing expressions of social identities interact with not only "distinct online environments" (Grasmuck, Martin & Zhao 2009, p. 158), but also in person-to-person realms.

5.2 Racial and Ethnic Identity Building

Somali language helps retain ethnic identity

Somali is an endangered language, according to my informants. Many Somali-Americans are interested in learning or retaining their language skills and use online communication to express themselves in their native language. Some participants grew up speaking Somali in the home and others cultivate the language through classes and practice. Many postings are in Somali or Arabic—the language used in the Qur'an, but

many also are posted in English or are translated in both languages. Many Somalis learn Arabic as a part of their religious training. It takes effort to maintain and develop the Somali language, while being raised and living in America. One participant describes her mission to develop the Somali language:

> Growing up in United States, not only I have kept my language where I can articulate the literature and its language use in a classical way (like that of Alizabethan or Shakesperean) and while I may do so, I also use English or both interchangeably….Going back to my subject on facebook, when I signed up on 2008, I have noticed many somali youngesters were not using Somali language, and of course I could not blame them-the langauge was only written for 5 after it was pronounced in 1972, and in 1977, we went to war with Eithopia. The Somali language is still yet to be improved whether in standard, modern, or less classicly form. Many will take advantage or place in such position, especially men to seek monetary gains to do this. I refuse to do that, and while they watch, not only I shall go on to revise the manual written for our classical language, I shall propose a non sexist dialect form and way to launch Somali language introducing new words, and things that do not exist to this day.
>
> I encourage youngesters to find the time to write down things that have not been written for the Somali folks, this is why we have so much to do, we are far from achieving the basics let alone the major developments in our lives. We can't expect others to do the work for us, it would mean as if we are asking them to come clean our homes-we must come to terms with the reality and train

our youngesters, and this was the reason I came on facebook.

Most of the participants in my study practice using Somali at least part of the time in their postings; however, the clash between being American and Somali is evidenced in an example of one of my Facebook participants who was frustrated trying to read a message posted in Somali or possibly Arabic.

> DAMN!!!!!! DAYUM!!!!! This took like three days to read for me to actually comprehend let alone understand it. WHY!! whatever happened to simply english my brotha from the same mother. Anywho, toots I honestly decided to check my 28 voicemail message yesterday and you were one of them. I will return for call shortly insha'allah[7]. Btw: next time write in english BLEASE!!! thanks! good day!

The above post points out how Internet use in nonymous settings “tend to be more ‘realistic and honest’” (Grasmuck, 2009, p. 158). Facebook also facilitates multiple identities, presented at different times or even simultaneously, as we see in this post in which a sister berates her brother for writing to her in Somali, but also expresses herself using a culturally-specific phrase. This relates to what W. Mazzarella writes about long-distance nationalism, which is a dynamic process

> “in the sense that there may be selective use of times, places and spaces to help construct ‘fictive unity’, national identities or ‘imagined communities’. The choice to ‘belong’ or imagine one’s ties and affiliation to a particular nation or nations reflects the salience of the argument that those in diaspora may be involved in disrupting the notion that the nation

[7]Insha’allah means: Allah Willingly in Arabic

> is a 'given' even as they themselves may utilize strategic and potentially homogenized notions of unity, ethnicity, religion and national identity," (2007, p. 407).

Expressing disunity "may be difficult to articulate, particularly for the first generation" (p. 407); however, the semi-private space of Facebook, provides a sense of freedom to be honest in selective situations.

While some of the participants on Facebook make it their mission to develop the Somali language and keep it alive, others find it easier to speak the language of their adopted homeland. Facebook postings support Hall's notion of identity as negotiated and not static. In this mediated space, conversations reveal the ongoing negotiation between being Somali and American.

Apparel reflects Somali ethnic identity

In the United States, Somali women make varied choices about dress. The women in my study take Americans' preoccupation with the hijab[8] head-on, as they acknowledge and struggle with Somali versus American cultural norms. Facebook participants and interviewees discuss how apparel reflects their identity as Somali women. "My identity as a Somali-American is not as difficult for me because, I don't wear the hijab due to a personal choice," writes one respondent. "So for me i blend in with everyone else, and some times i'm not even considered Somali." Another participant asserts Somali women's power in wearing the hijab. She explained why some Somali-American women choose to wear headscarves, capes and other cultural apparel. Her poem, called "Covered," was written in response to the frequent gaze and questions regarding the

[8] Hijab refers to head coverings and modest styles of dress, in general.

hijab. The poem echoes some of the factors that contribute to clothing choices among Somali-American women and demonstrates how identities in Hall's terms "arise from narrativization of the self" (Hall, 1997, p.2). The poem, written by my informant, Nixx, in October 2010, contests Western "normal" dress is not Somali "normal."

> She's covered it all…
> But in the gray concrete jungle, she does not blend
> You spot her from a mile, get nervous by her style
> She doesn't pretend
> You wish she did not stand out or blend in
> There is no pleasing you without baring the skin
> You want her to be normal
> to blend with them
> You think you are the judge of normal
> But she's got a normal all her own.

Religious beliefs influence women's dress, according to participants; however, family, cultural tradition, violence and fashion also play powerful roles, as seen in Nixx's poem:

> She's covered it all
> You wonder who this woman is
> And who does she think she is?
>
> …And this you should know
> Her garments are powerful!
> They connect her with her mother
> They're holy scripture

Participant photos posted on their Facebook sites demonstrate the women's varied

approaches to dress—from completely covering themselves from head to toe, to a combination of Western fashion worn with headscarves, to completely Western apparel. Not only does dress vary from individual to individual, but from situation to situation. In the United States, many Somali women wear traditional Somali dress with sheer, colorful fabrics, and uncovered heads for special occasions, such as Somali weddings, even when they adopt a more conservative dress at other times. "Fancy dressers" is how one participant describes Somali women.

Since Facebook users can protect who views their sites, my participants show photos from special events, in which they might wear a traditional sheer dress or a short couture dress, heels and uncovered heads. Normally, they would not wear such apparel in the public sphere, but allow these visions to appear online. Most of the women's pictures express a hybrid identity, suggesting the evolving and changing nature of identity as manifested in apparel. For example, I return to Nixx's poem:

> And honestly you don't care to know the depth beyond her exterior
> So you bully her with your gaze
> Til she shows you inches of her skin
> But she's not
> Not that kind of woman
> She's a woman warrior with her hijab as her cape
> And her powers remain a secret
> She's covered it all.

Traditional Somali dress evolved from the pastoral regions, where dress practices were practical and flexible. According to sociologist Cawo Mohammed Abdi's research, traditional dress was a practical part of nomadic life, which also moved into urban fashion:

> "Much of the country is semiarid savannah," and nomadic life … "involves extensive physical work.... Women play a significant role … constructing and dismantling huts, making grass mats used for bedding and for covering the huts, tending livestock, as sole care-ers for children, and in all other housework-related matters. Like that of women from rural areas around the globe, Somali women's traditional dress was light, reflecting this need for mobility and labor. It consisted of a long piece of cloth, similar to an Indian sari, knotted over one shoulder. The material covers the chest but leaves both arms and shoulders and part of the back bare. These are full-length dresses going down to the ankles. The guntiino (also called guntiimo or garays) was originally made of simple white or red cotton but was later adapted by urban women to include more expensive and elaborate multicolored variations" (Abdi, 2007, n.p.).

In Somalia, there were diverse uses of headscarves. Some school-age girls and women wore them and others did not, according to Abdi. Many Somali-American women choose to wear headscarves knotted in a traditional way. One traditional practice involved wearing a light scarf "over the hair with a knot at the nape, leaving the face, neck, and shoulders uncovered," Abdi writes (2007, n.p.).

One reason women wear hijab is a form of protection, which began after the civil war started in Somalia, alluded to in the poem "Covered." As a new right wing form of Islam surfaced, more conservative forms of dress were adopted in Somalia. Nixx writes:

Her garments are more than material
They tell the stories of her struggle
As she roamed the world chasing peace
Her garments covered her scars
And healed her battle wounds
It is the hijab that was her shield from fear
The hijab that was her security blanket as an infant
Sentimental and sacred
And a test and a protest!

And if you are really wondering who this woman is
She is a woman warrior
With her hijab as her cape!
She's covered it all.

Abdi investigates "the cultural significance of recent dramatic changes in women's modes of dress," namely, the adoption of veiling practices, which are "characteristic of conservative Islam but foreign to traditional Somali culture" (2007, n.p.). "The imported Islamic interpretation reconfigures preexisting cultural and religious practices, claiming that these communities have mispracticed and thus deviated from true Islam…" This reconfiguration or re-Islamization leads to the invention of a new Islamic tradition for Somalis in Somalia, according to Abdi. As in the poem, "Covered," which talks about Somali women who wear the hijab in the United States, Abdi finds various reasons that women in Somalia chose to accept "new modes of dress, ranging from a quest for security from rape and increased piety as a coping mechanism to recover from sexual violation to the adoption of conservative dress so they can move about freely in order to fulfill the survival needs and economic demands of their families" (2007, n.p.). Another portion of "Covered" reads:

> Linking her to the essence and strength of her creator
> She loves the texture
> And when she ties her scarves with her dresses
> She makes strong ropes, escapes wars
> Covered up she is superwoman
> Walking through violent raindrops, sandstorms
> And even bullets.

Focus group participants also discussed religious reasons for covering up:

> Thinking about it honestly, I have a cousin, she is very conservative. She covers completely. She wears the hijab. It's a very thick material and it covers from head to toe.
>
> #
>
> Very plain.
>
> #
>
> You won't see through it. You'll only see her face and her hands and that's it. We have this picture in our family album of her and she has this beautiful big afro. She has this really tight fitting dress that is up to her knees with some high heels. So every time I go over to her house she tells me I have to dress a little more modest, "I don't know why you are wearing that scarf, you need to start wearing hijabs." And I'm like, "Well interesting, but I have a picture of you in the family album, and you're not dressed like that. Why is that?" Before the war you could dress like that, but after, that goes back to people really wanting an answer and the more they learned about their religion and their research, they sat down and thought about it, they realized there is more that I should be doing as a Muslim person because really, culturally, you can forget about culture, the main thing we are here for is to be a good Muslim at that, respect to her neighbors, that respects herself, that takes

> care of her family. The more people learn about that the more they follow their own restricted rules, or they make them more into their own.

#

In their Facebook photos, my participants often show apparel choices that they would not wear on the street in a public arena. On the street, they want to project a "Somali" image, to re-constitute the nation that they cannot physically have. Ironically, their hybrid Somali-American clothing choices represent them as Somali in the United States, but as American when they visit Somalia. Facebook facilitates an in between place, where they experiment and tryout their different identities.

> I think it might have something to do with being in a country, because Somalia, when it was stable and everything was fine, like you said, the religion and culture was one. When the prayers were called, you could drop everything and go to pray. It was a Muslim nation. It was a Muslim country. There was that very small community that were Christians, but … an average Somali would not meet a Somali Christen. I feel like it might have something to do with the fact that you're in a different nation. A lot of the Somalis fled to countries that were non-Muslim, like Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, all these different nations that were not near Somalia and I feel that even if you come way out to the West, where Christianity or there all these vast different majority of religions and you meet people who are Atheist or Buddhist, that practice Judaism. You may be protecting yourself: "I'm Muslim women." Well if I'm a Muslim woman maybe I shouldn't dress like this and maybe I need to cover up. I don't know from my opinion, I think she (Cawa

> Abdi) might be right in that you are protecting your identity. You're protecting your religion, you're protecting who you are.
>
> #
>
> People started looking for ways, like "Why is this happening to us?" And when you ask that question you tend to go back and go for faith ways and religious ways and think "Why is this happening to us, I don't want something bad to happen to me and my family. How can I be a better person" and you go back.

Reasons for clothing choices among Somali-American women are varied and complex, according to participants. Many women choose to dress in a way they consider to be more "modest" than U.S fashion, but whatever their specific apparel, Somali women's visual articulation of their heritage is an important aspect of their cultural and ethnic identity expression. In an interview with Nixx, she shares this about her apparel choices:

> **Nixx:** I choose to dress the way I do because I feel like it's a reflection of me.… First off, I do want to be identified as a Somali woman. I want to be identified as a Muslim woman. I'm proud of both of those heritages.
>
> **Researcher:** Why do you want to and what does it mean?
>
> **Nixx:** Well to me it means, being Somali, it's pretty much who I am. I embrace both the troubles and the

> resilience of all Somali women. It's like a form of solidarity with all Somali women that I want to have with them. I love that recognition. And I look at them as one of the most strongest — I mean any women who have survived struggles in any part of the world are very strong. But the massiveness of what the Somalis have gone through, and if it wasn't for our mothers, I don't know how we would have made it through it. And speaking of mothers, I want my mom to be proud of me. I want her to see herself in me. I want her to recognize me as a Somali girl or her Somali daughter. I want her to identify with me.

Somali women also get pressured to fit into American culture. In an interview, one informant told me that dressing for her wedding became an issue with her mother. The informant wanted to wear traditional Somali dress and her mother wanted her to wear a white American wedding gown.

In summary, Facebook postings are an especially easy way to display their choices and get feedback and validation from friends. New media provides the space to widely distribute one's narrative responses to the struggle between Somali and American cultural perspectives. Participants' apparel choices viewed through Facebook demonstrate the hybrid identity of these immigrant women.

Politics and activism posts reflect dual national identity

Participants actively post about politics: World, U.S., Minnesota and Somali national issues regarding their views about politics in their United States home and

Somali nation. I use Ang's description of nation in which "migrant groups are collectively more inclined to see themselves not as minorities within nation-states, but as members of global diasporas which span national boundaries" (Ang, 2001, p. 76). Social media connections allow the conversation to continue across continents. Participant posts reveal that participants feel strongly about being American and taking part in the political process. They also maintain connection to their original homeland and actively participate in reconstituting Somalia and working for peace. My findings are consistent with Anderson's description of an *imagined community* (1991, p. 6), where nation-states may be geographically defined but nations are "cultural communes constructed in people's minds and collective memory by the sharing of history and political projects" (Castells, 2004, p. 54). My participants imagine themselves as part of a Somali national community, which is facilitated by online discussions. Facebook postings include world news about Somalis' involvement in political activities around the world, such as this *BBC* report posted by a participant, in which Somalis, in Mogadishu, Somalia, shouted their support for the UN-backed government and against al-Shabab, which controls much of southern Somalia. Many Somalis are Sufi Islam, rather than the strict Saudi Arabian-inspired Wahhabi interpretation of Islam that al-Shabab follows, according to the *BBC* article posted on an informant's site.

> *BBC News* - Somalis in rare march against al-Shabab militants
> news.bbc.co.uk
> The protesters, mostly women and children and wearing traditional white clothes, chanted slogans denouncing the al-Qaeda-inspired group….Some of the demonstrators carried posters with slogan such as "Down with al-Shabab" and carried "Support Peace and Government".
> "We have been forced out of our houses because of the violence instigated by al-Shabab. We are here to support the government and make our voices against them heard," said one of the marchers, Hawo Abdulle Aden.

> About half of Mogadishu's population have fled their homes.
>
> The country has been torn by conflict since 1991.

While some of the women in the study express their identity as Americans through their political debates, others express their love and concern for their families' homeland in Somalia. Many lamented problems of war, tribalism, human rights and Islamophobia through posting lyrics, poetry, news, videos and links to organizations, such as the next two examples:

> I love SOMALI SONGS!! THEY ARE sooooo beautiful. I am reading some Somali literature now and I HAVE FALLEN IN LOVE. BEING Somali is AMAZING..I LOVE IT. EVERYTHING ABOUT IT..NOT JUST SONGS.!!
>
> #
>
> I LOVE the SOMALI FLAG...INSHA ALLAH[9] I WISH WE SEE THE DAY THAT ITS PEOPLE TRULY ENJOY ITS WAVE N SIGHT

Women in my study express prayers for peace in Somalia. Online spaces provide a venue and writing as a mechanism to convey the pain associated with their war-torn homeland and the fear that atrocities will not end. Feelings of helplessness and yearning are countered with expressions of hope in their narratives. Often seen on Somali blogs are sentiments such as this one from someone in Mogadishu, Somalia:

[9] Insha Allah means: Allah Willingly in Arabic

> Often as Somalis, we are referred to as citizens who don't give peace a chance. Lets speak loud and clear and get a million Somalis that support peace. LOUD AND CLEAR!

Participants' social media sites serve as venues for expressing Somali ethnicity and keeping the Somali oral tradition alive through posting poetry, stories and day-to-day impressions. This finding is consistent with another study that looks at differences in self-presentation by distinct ethno-racial groups on nonymous sites – sites like Facebook where the person is identifiable. Grasmuck, Martin, and Zhao find through a Facebook study and interviews that ethno-racial identities are salient and highly elaborated, which coincides with my findings. African Americans, Latinos/as and Indian and ancestry students made intensive investments "in presenting highly social, culturally explicit and elaborated narratives of self reflect a certain resistance to the racial silencing of minorities by dominant color-blind ideologies of broader society" (2009, p.158). The segments below are from two very powerful poems, one from a Facebook profile that expresses my informant's identification with the Horn of Africa (Somalia) from afar in the United States, and her need to let others know about the horror of war and its effect on Somalia and on her. The second poem compares Somalia's brief independence with today. In both poems, the feelings of horror are resolved with hope for Somalia. Nixx is 23 and came to the United States at age 9. She first wrote the poem in November 2009, which is placed in its entirety in the Appendix.

> **Equalizer**
> Empires, kingdoms and world powers rise and fall; we still answer the call for peace and seek solutions with guns…
>
> Every day I fight to defend your honor, but stories of daughters discouraged by fathers with futile lives, their

souls deprived of all hope traps my mind in cells of horror,

Sons grow callous; another child of yours, another Somali
sibling of mine, undernourished life is lost,

Far away, days pass with pain and I struggle with fear for
the future, so I fast and pray for the Lords rescue,

… I don't camouflage my identity, roaming the world
carrying your name proudly from your soil to the deep
sea…

Dear Somalia, reminiscing of your beauty frees my soul
from fear and terror; Digging deep into the roots of my
family tree gives me reasons and strength to stay
resilient…

Another informant, Saxx, wrote a poem, which illustrates the Somalia of the 1960s and Somali's struggles today. As a Somali-American she urges Somalis to reconvene a Somali nation. According to Castells, "The Internet is a global communication network, but its use and its evolving reality are the product of human action under specific conditions of differential history," (2001, p. 6). Without a physical nation, the Internet facilitates communication from one to many for the purpose of nation building. This poem is an example of how the Internet culture and technology lay "the foundation for self-directed networking as a tool for organization, collective action, and the construction of meaning," (p. 55).

"1960"

1960, we got liberation
2009, we have no nation
I said, 1960, we earned our freedom
2009, we dying and bleeding
1960, Somalia was rising
2009, we are barely surviving
1960, we were the center for commerce
But 2009, we are the nucleus of a curse
1960, we escaped oppression and hate
2009, we are oppressing and hating our own state
1960, our nation was born
but 2009, our nation is torn.

isn't it sad that in 1960 we were one
and in 2009, we are none?
in 19SIXTY, we had a fruitful country
instead 2009, beneath the surface of a great civilization
laid dreams of material aspirations
that turned into anger and frustration between
people of one nation, one creed of Islamic denomination
we are dying of starvation and manipulation that can be
controlled but we are told the opposite, wrapped away and tossed in
a black hole.
in 2009, we are in that black hole of hunger, a cold-blooded
massacre with innocent civilians who have no answer to their situation
instead Raise their head to the sky and pray to the Almighty High to take
away this cancer. This cancer turned us into a devastation like a
hurricane that left a trail Of disaster that we can no longer inhale.

This poem is a good illustration of Anderson's description of an *imagined community* (1991, p. 6), where nation-states may be geographically defined but nations are "cultural communes constructed in people's minds and collective memory by the sharing of history

and political projects" (Castells, 2004, p. 54). Many of the women in my study were children when they moved to the United States from Somalia or a refugee camp. They did not experience the Somalia of their dreams. They are U. S. citizens, but in their narratives they encourage a collective memory of what their homeland once was and their hopes for a new nation – both geographically and in collective spirit.

> 1960 was the birth of our nation
> 2009 we want a nation
> And now its up to us to reseed a revolution
> Side by side, hand in hand to fight this self-destruction
> To become that great dynasty once more
> JUST LIKE BEFORE, IN 1960.

Participants also spoke out about the problem of violence in their communities that has followed them to their new homeland in Minnesota. They voice concerns about the way in which dominant media dwells on such stories. We know from previous works that "As institutions of ideological formation production, the news media are part of the process of racial formation and racial projects" (Squires, 2007, p. 3). "Dominate social institutions, including mainstream news media, upheld, reinforced, and disseminated oppressive characterizations, stereotyping African Americans as unfit for citizenship in order to justify White hegemony" (p. 3-4). Participants in my study find that online media gives them a space to engage in various conversations and postings about anti-violence sentiments and a way to make positive contributions to their communities, contesting frames perpetuated within dominate media. One participant posted this link to a Facebook group:

> Dear brothers and sisters,

> We are a group of young college and high school sisters, that're determined to give back to our community, and to bring change to the state of the Muslim youth in Minnesota. Our main objective isn't just to focus on problems, but to find solutions for the key pressing issues in our community. Through this program we not only aim to build on ourselves, but to hopefully touch those around us, and get involved. By the help of Allah we will inshallah succeed in our efforts, and bring about much needed CHANGE !!!

Other posts and links contained the women's visions for how they could help or to promote humanitarian organizations that could help the Somali people, including the following three posts:

> I want to build a clinic in Somalia one day that specializes in women's health and women issues (FGM[10] to be exact). I also want to build a school with its own state of the art library. Insh'ALLAH! I WILL.
>
> #
>
> Your donation goes to support the core mission of: AMERICAN RELIEF AGENCY FOR THE HORN OF AFRICA ARAHA, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit
>
> #
>
> Nairobi West, Nairobi Area, Kenya Project PLANNING Please welcome to the official facebook page of the Youth Union of Somalia (YUSOM).
>
> Are you a young Somali aged bewteen 14 to 36 years willing to bring positive change to yourself and others? if yes, Please do join us to make history again.

[10] FGM means: Female genital mutilation

In the absence of a viable nation, social media facilitates the formation of Anderson's notion of an "imagined community," as evidenced in this post (Anderson, 1983, p. 15). Posts such as this demonstrate how social media blogs, to which my participants link on their Facebook pages, connect them to an online community that reproduces an imagined community — with members they do not know and may never physically see—through which to experience a national identity.

> Welcome to project 2 Degree of Separation; Somalia Edition. I believe, within the Somali community online there is just at max of 2 degrees between yourself and other Somali individuals. What does this mean you may ask? Well lets see; Just looking at the Somali race it's self....we are related to one another in some sort of way. All of us; Which makes us first and foremost unique. For every 2 Somalis you meet, they know someone who knows you or better they know YOU! In this group, from the micro level, we learn about the 2nd degree of Separation in the Somali race. Secondly using Karinthy's 6 degrees of separation human web, we aim to bring to bring the Somali masses under one roof through this method viral contacting via knowns.

Most of the Somali women in my study never knew Somalia as one united "nation." Somalia was divided by colonial rule and devastated by political unrest, civil war and famine, from which their families fled out of the country to refugee camps. This and other posts show how the Internet and social networking provides a way to build a "nation" without boundaries, an *imagined* nation.

> Somehow, we are all related as humans at the macro level. In this group, we take a look at it from the micro level; focusing only solely at the Somali race online.
>
> You know the drill now, invite all of our Somali family online; those you consider to be Somali to this group. We will then start connecting the dots.

While participants actively pursue engaging in Somali nation-building and reconstituting an online Somali community, they also pursue local politics as Americans in Minnesota, reflecting their hybrid identity. A Facebook participant, Anxx, writes about Minnesota's governor at the time:

> The Republican Convention at Minneapolis Convention Center—Pawlenty asked Minnesotans, "Haven't you had enough?" and conservatives roared "Yeah!" What does that tell ya? I'd say, Minnesota is a democratic state, and we ain't converting to republican! And we support Obama allright! Go Minnesota!!!

Anxx receives a response from a football (soccer) enthusiast in the United Kingdom that echoes the presidential candidate Obama's campaign theme:

> Yes we can.

She also receives a response from a young woman in Johannesburg, South Africa:

> i support obama 2 and am nt in america.go obama go

Anxx responds to the woman in Johannesburg shows her ownership of her U.S. national identity:

> Go girl – ….If you come to U.S. we are inviting to you to Minnesota. I like that nationalism, hope we will have that for Somalia as well….

Anxx's response to a lengthy post from a man in Cairo who disagreed with her political views is not timid. She asserts her identity as a citizen embracing democratic ideals.

> …All of these are true, but guess what? You have got Bush like war mongers, money chasers, keeping the poor and blacks in place where they can never grow, outcasting and sending all the ugly messages about Islam, building more of Guantanamo Bay prisons, and God knows what goes on Abu Gharaib. It was socratic irony that Bush had the most votes by Muslims and we witnessed what he did (though I did not vote for him) but since they are all the same, at least for us, who are citizen and tax payers, we shall have voice, and say something about Obama's action, we can't just ignore him and we can't allow republicans rule either – it no win win situation unfortunately.

After a lengthy debate between Anxx, the man from Cairo and others, Anxx gets support from the woman in Johannesburg:

> go obama go,and yes we cn make change even in our country.anxxx i support u wit ol dat u say.we need pple who think lyke u.

The women in my study are bright and politically active — not common images portrayed in the dominant media. As other scholars report, my thesis finds that the Internet is a space where marginalized groups are empowered to express their ethnic,

cultural, and political identities. This is in keeping with Grasmuck, Martin and Zhao's findings that African American, Latino and Indian students convey group consciousness or ethnic pride through Facebook posts (2009).

Music choices also reflect Facebook participants' political views. Like most Facebook users, Somali women post lyrics and links to music and music videos they like and dislike; however, many music choices reflect a serious and political nature, such as posts about the Peruvian-born Hip Hop/Rapper raised in Harlem, Immortal Technique, whose explicit lyrics reflect his position as a revolutionary and activist for causes supporting third-world orphans and refugees. Their choices link them through association with such causes. My participant posts include:

> "you wanna spend twenty yeas as a government slave,
> two million people in prison keep the government paid,
> stuck in a six block eight cell alive in the grave" - Immortal Technique
>
> #
>
> like this.
>
> #
>
> heart immortal technique

In summary, these examples of political posts highlight how the women in this study weave together their identities as American women of Somali ethnicity who work toward peace in their original homeland while participating fully as citizens in the U.S. democratic process. Many of my informants have spent more time growing up in the United States than in Somalia, but proudly display their heritage and want to keep their Somali identities and culture alive. One participant described her woven identity this way

in a personal interview with me when I asked her about being Somali-American:

> **Nixx:** What makes me a Somali-American is that this (Minnesota) is where I call home. I just came back from Somalia not so long (ago) and I felt more American than Somalian after because I don't have a Somali passport. I've never seen what a Somali passport looks like. I don't have any identification that is Somalian that is on paper. I don't even have a birth certificate that is Somali because that's been burnt. So when you get to the nitty-gritty of it, and the logistics, technical, I'm like hey, I'm American.
>
> **Researcher:** So how does that make you feel?
>
> **Nixx:** How does that make me feel? How that makes me feel is honestly, I have two cultures and that's one thing that I'm proud of. But just to get through life and to kind of maneuver the world, it helps to have an American passport and it helps being an American. But then just to kind of understand yourself, it is good to go back to your heritage and know that piece as well, because that's equally as important.

This data illustrates Hall's idea that diaspora is not a binary, closed conception of difference that "depends on the construction of an 'Other' and a fixed opposition between inside and outside," (1999, p. 7). The "syncretized" configurations of cultural identity as exhibited by my Somali informants are consistent with Hall's explanation of identity as derived "from Derrida's notion of *difference,*" where meanings are "positional and relational, always on the slide along a spectrum without end or beginning. Difference, we know, is essential to meaning, and meaning is critical for culture," (p. 7). My findings

point to Hall's argument that "meaning cannot be finally fixed. There is always the inevitable 'slippage' of meaning in the open semiosis of a culture, as that which seems fixed continues to be dialogically reappropriated," (p. 7-8). The cultural identities exhibited by my informants on Facebook shows how these women negotiate and construct their cultural identities and "cannot be represented as a 'going back to where we were before,'" (p. 8).

Racial identity: "I'm not black"

Racial identity also is a fluid concept in identity formation. Many Somali-Americans express solidarity by separating themselves by their national identity of origin. McGown explains "Because they are black but do not identify themselves with sub-Saharan Africans or their Caribbean or North American descendants, and because they are Muslim, but not Arab or South Asian, they demand a confrontation with much of the accepted wisdom about the nature of racism and the position of Muslims, immigrants, and non-whites in relation to the larger society…" (1995, p. 5). One focus group member explained that she does not consider herself "black," she is "Somali."

While white students in the Grasmuck, et al. study "rarely signaled group identification or ethno-racial themes, reflecting 'strategies of racelessness' (Willie, 2003)," African American, Latino and Indian students identified themselves "with groups historically stigmatized by dominant society," (2009, p. 175).

The women in my study elaborated that the term "African American" is ambiguous: Does it mean "indigenous or anyone from the continent?" Many of my informants have lived in the United States for the majority or at least half of their lives.

Some succumb to social pressure in America and accept the designation of African American because they rationalize that it gives them more collective power on census forms rather than choosing the "other" category. This points to Hall's idea of identity being negotiated and flexible. Scholar Catherine Squires begins her book, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, with an apt quote from Stuart Hall: "Remember: identification, not identities. Once you've got an identification, you can decide which identities are working this week," (Squires, 2007, p. 1).

In general, the women in this study say their history as a nation is an important part of their identities and is separate from African Americans' whose ancestors were brought to America as slaves. The following sample posts on a discussion board entitled, "Why do Somolis (sic) think they are not black" demonstrate the controversy over racial and ethnic identity ranging from "not black," to a discussion of the history of the Horn of Africa, to race as a construct of society. Focus group discussions with Facebook participants, interviewees and online conversations captured by the Immigration History Research Center reveal controversies surrounding the racial designation of Somalis as black (IHRC, 2009).

> JUST READ THE TITLE OF THIS GROUP … WTF LAST I SEEN YOU LOOK BLACK TO ME
>
> #
>
> I agree … However I don't consider my self "BLACK" if anything I am African mainly because my skin color isn't "black" its brown and colors don't make you who you are..in my opion the term "black" refers to african

americans who went through slavery in America…..And Somalia is a country with people of all shades…..

#

color is not what defines us. The whole concept of Race is socially made up. So in fact, you are asking Somalis to acknowledge something Europeans invented, so they can demean and dehumanize African blacks from Sub-Sahara. Tamils and some Indians are 'black' by color, it doesn't make them Africans (unless they were born there). There are very light skinned Somalis, it doesn't make them White….get the drift?

Somalis are proud Africans and rarely claim to be not black or brown. We all come in various shades and heritage, we just don't want to be boxed by some bigoted outdated concept the 'White' man invented to justify slavery and segregation in North America.

#

We Somalian are very proud of our ancestry and Our History … The ancient people inhabiting the Horn of Africa (Somalia) about 50,000 years ago…. The earliest history of Somalia called Puntland, dates from its first trading contact with the ancient Egyptian culture … for the last 4,350 years. The ancient Egyptians believed Puntland to be the birth-place of their gods….We are people of independent will and dignity, it is indeed a matter of pride that these distinctive characteristics … are very zealously chrished, preserved and proudly displayed by all the Somali people even today … we are indeed unique and very beautiful people.

#

One of my informants told me about how the color of her skin as a Somali, set her and her family apart in the refugee camp before coming to North America. Faxx recalls:

> "I went to the worst place ever and they told us we were like celebrities based on how we appeared … it was just crazy heartbreaking. People don't have food, you have to get in line for water … and we went there and people were like 'where did these kids and families come from' because we weren't as dark as they were or as skinny as they were. We were wearing normal clothing, we were speaking English and Swahili and Somali and we were like 'whoa!' People literally came running to us when we had to go to the well and get water and, oh my god, my mom used to hide us in the house and were like 'don't get out' and she was so afraid of people talking about us that we would get sick or something."

Harking back to Hall's idea that identities are constituted within discourse (Hall, 1996), we see how "difference" is marked depending on the locality and through power relations. However, whether in the refugee camps or after moving to the United States, my informants don't choose "black" as an identifier.

These two related posts appear in the IHRC archive and describe how some Somalis negotiate either their "black" or "not black" representations:

> Nasraah XX: okay i don't consider my self black simply because i have a country…the only thing that us and african americans have in common is the fact that we have the same skin color…not only do we have the same skin color with african americans but we also share it with mexicans and asians…so does that mean were also asian and mexican?...i dont see them calling themselves "black" or "brown"..if african americans are comfortable being

called black….i am not…i am somali-american…. i have a culture and a sense of identity…i know where i come from and i won't deny it just to make african americans happy…i don't mean to be rude but african americans are nothin like somalis…..so those somali's who are okay with being labeled black am pretty sure in a few years u wont know where u come from and be a typical african american with no daqaan[11] and no din[12]…hopefully in the long run somalis will forever exist

#

UMAXX: hmmm….this is interesting! The debate regarding the concept of race can continue forever… people do feel the need to box everyone into a racial category…it's the pressures of a white dominant society…i can argue against racial categorization for an eternity but we are keeping things simple for the sake of a longer argument! As a Somali individual who actually is quite light skinned and deviates from the "typical" somali features that people seem to easily recognize…i do consider my self black! BUT first i consider myself SOMALI! That's what my people are, so when i look in the mirror i see a Somali woman, an African woman, and ultimately a Black woman. There is nothing wrong with the term black, i don't find it degrading and its unfair to say so…however its not something that we use…we say we are Somali and come from Somalia…if you ask "well are somali's black"? in modern day context of racial categorization then yes they sure as hell aren't white! However we come from a nation

[11] daqaan means: Culture in Somali. This word should be spelled "Dhaqan"
[12] din means: Religion in Arabic. This word should be spelled "diin"

and people who rather be called by what they really are
and that's SOMALI!!

Hope that Clarifies things further for everyone!

In summary, as evidenced by the data, the question of race is a much-debated subject amongst Somali-Americans. On one hand, we see the fiercely contested idea that "Somalis are black" and on the other, the negotiation to accept the designation because there is more power in numbers by joining the ranks of "African Americans" documented by census. Pointing to Hall's notion that identities "emerge within the play of specific modalities of power" and that they are always in process (1997, p. 2), these first- and second-generation immigrants express their national identity as an "evolution." In analyzing these conversations, it is helpful to employ Paul Gilroy's exposition of the concept of identity in which he brings together many different approaches. He says that today the term identity is "invoked more often in arguments that are primarily political than philosophical (20006, p. 382). Often combined with the term "cultural," identity has a "bridging" quality or "hinge concept that can help to maintain the connective tissue that articulates political and cultural concerns" (p. 383). In the Facebook postings, we see how the cultural concerns become political or vice verse. We also see racism in play. Gilroy explains: "Feminist thought and critical analyses of racism have made extensive use of the concept of identity in exploring how 'subjects' bearing gender and racial characteristics are constituted in social process that are amenable to historical explanation and political struggle" (p. 385). Somalis are recent immigrants. Even though my informants say they try to let go of their Somali tribal clan designation because clan

warfare, in part, destroyed their nation, their national ethnic heritage is vital to them as recent refugees. The experience of their original home is still present in their memories. As time passes, it will be important to study how these immigrants acculturate and whether or how they are able to retain or reconcile their Somali racial and ethnic identities in a more pluralistic United States than refugees faced in the past. In keeping with Hall's concepts, my study participants demonstrate that identity is not static. "We can build upon the contributions of cultural studies to dispose of the idea that identity is an absolute and to find the courage necessary to argue that identity formation – even body-coded ethnic and gender identity – is a chaotic process that can have no end" (Gilroy, 2006, p. 394). This introduces the next section on Gender Identity.

5.3 Gender and Sexual Identity

Motherhood: Love and strength

Love for mothers and love by mothers is a strong theme throughout postings. Motherhood is strongly valued by participants. New mothers express love for their children and women of all ages express appreciation for the strength, faith, and support of their mothers. Several postings illustrate how women express appreciation to their mothers and the importance of being mothers themselves, for example:

> I strongly believe that my mother is the strongest woman in the world. I wish to grow up and be exactly like her. She is my strength, my hopes, my dreams, my spirit, the backbone of my life, my courage, my resilience, my force, my energy, my weakness, , my future, she is my mother. I love her to death and she is one of my first and best friends.

The following post uses English with Arabic words to express this woman's adoration of her mother:

> I LOVE MY MOM....INSHA'ALLAH[13] ILAAHAY HANOO DAAYO..AAMIIN[14]. ALHAMDULILAH[15] BLESSED TO HAVE SUCH A STRONG WOMAN IN MY LIFE TO GUIDE US N LOVE US...MAASHA'ALLAH[16]

Others express love for their own children and reflect how motherhood influences their identity. The following post was from a new mother:

> I love my newest role in life..My Gift from ALLAH
> **MY CHILD**
> She looks into my eyes
> She smiles at my words
> She knows me by scent
> She loves me unconditionally
> She graps my finger n holds it tight
> She feels my LOVE for HER
> She hears my voice n looks up to c my face
> She sleeps on my chest n feels the protection
> SHE IS MY CHILD
> SHE IS MY PRECIOUS, MY PRICELESS GIFT FROM ALLAH
> SHE IS MY WORLD
> SHE IS MY 1ST BORN
> SHE IS ON MY MIND EVERY SECOND
> SHE IS MY NIMI-MY PRINCESS

---

[13] INSHA'ALLAH means: Allah willingly

[14] ALHAMDULILAH means: Thank Allah

[15] ILAAHAY HANOO DAAYO..AAMIIN means: Allah let her be. Amen. (This is a prayer asking Allah to bless someone with a long life.)

[16] MAASHA'ALLAH means: admiring or praising something/God has willed it

She makes me look at life in a ways I never had,
She makes me happy in a ways I never knew existed
She makes me strong in a ways I never thought I would be
She makes me be GRATEFUL TO MY ALMIGHTY ALLAH
SHE IS MY CHILD

Many families lost fathers through separation or war in Somalia, so many families are held together by women in the family. In a Minnesota Public Radio series, "Civil War Kids: Young Somalis in Minnesota," Laura Yuen reports on the young people who are succeeding. One story provides a common thread among Somali-immigrants' stories: The mother, who "…was a nurse in Somalia, moved her four children to Minnesota in the mid-'90s. Despite the challenges of being a single mom and refugee, she has sent three of her kids to college" (Yuen, 2010). After immigrating to the United States, this mother took English classes and found a job "resulting in a brutal schedule that required her to do her homework while riding the bus. She said she set goals for herself and clawed her way to self-sufficiency;" all the while she "carefully monitored" her children's daily lives, "and it paid off" (Yuen, 2010). Knowledge is valued in Somali culture and mothers passed on this value to many of the daughters who were in my study. The following sample posts are consistent with that value. Some of the participants in this study appear to be college students and others have careers and families of their own. There are posts about finishing exams, papers and graduation from those who are students and friends or relatives who express pride in their accomplishments.

i look forward to you and …'s graduation n dinner party as well insh'Allah. iam proud of you both mansh'Allah:)

#

I deliberately skip reading for my classes and get really mad when I don't know what the professor is talking about or what I am taking notes on. ☺

#

I wrote the heading of my paper, the easy part is done. NINE pages HERE I COME!!

#

All the participants in my study remember the roles their mothers or other female relatives played in teaching them, protecting them and guiding them through the turmoil in Somalia, in one or more refugee camps, immigrating to the United States and making a new life in Minnesota. My respondents pay tribute to their mothers for the women they have become and expand on their reasons in interviews and focus group discussions when I ask why they have such high regard their mothers:

> **Faxx:** It is cultural and religious because in our religion we are taught that — there is a literal kid song that I play in the car. I have the ABC, but I also have Arabic and English one for the car and — in the religion it says that after God and his prophet, who is the next person that you should respect that was as the prophet said? And he said, "Mother" three times before he said "Father." So he said after those two, you should respect your mom three times. The power

of three. Mother and he was asked again mother and he was asked again mother and the fourth time he said father and that — I'm getting goose bumps — and that has to do and every day, you guys can correct me, we are faced with this idea that your mother carried you nine months, she went to labor with you, she stayed up all night taking care of you. She picked you up when you fall, she was always there, she fed you, clothed you. That dad did that, but in a way the dad that was involved as our dad was, and there with us and everything, intellectually, and physically and emotionally, the mother takes so much away from him because you grew up in her womb before you see the world.

The strength of the whole biological mutual thing that you are embedded to have this unconditional feeling, love, and you are reminded all through your life, even now with me being a mom….

Haxx: Most of my life I didn't grow up with my biological mom. I grew up with my grandmother and my aunt and I didn't get that whole, "you came out of my womb," but I still get that connection where they were my moms. I call my aunt my mother. It was the fact that these women were putting aside everything to get in tune with my feelings and challenge me in ways. And I don't know why, but a man can't share in that, by all means.

Saxx: I don't know if it's the society really created this where they feel a father cannot provide this….We

created this realm (it's socially constructed) we constructed that he is just not capable of this, only she is. So we go on with our lives thinking she is the only one to get to.... I think in relation to Somali women, I'm not sure if I'm right, I think it has a lot to do with the fact that we went through some war. Sometimes men stayed back because they were on some believe that they were in their regime or they had something to do with it or because of the fact there were roadblocks and because some people might know you're in a tribe, it was just dangerous. A lot of women and children fled the country, more so than men. I feel that a lot of women went through all the struggle of getting the children to safe places to feeding them to making sure they were okay or when they were sick, or they were at least in a refugee camp. They were in a peaceful setting and then you go through that process of being in a refugee camp to hoping that you get your rations everyday to making sure that you get your sponsor to going to all these different places, as a women, because you want your children to know they are first, they come first, so then you come to America, a totally different world. You might not have that formal education, you don't know their language, there are so many barriers. I think a lot of the reason why we might see more women identify more with their mothers is because they went through this more so than the men and then it carried on so to speak because maybe in the first generation, her husband, they have this mutual understanding, but then there is those

> other women who marry men with the mentality of the old ways, “you do this and I do this.”
>
> I think that it really depends on, I feel we reconnect with women more because we know they’ve struggled, not just being a mother, but going through that process of coming here and going to school. And considering they are looked down upon, they are supposed to be weak they’re supposed to be submissive, they are supposed to be at home. The only thing they know is how to cook — culturally. But our religion teaches us understanding, that’s the other thing Debra.

In summary, when asked why mothers are held in such high regard, the women in this study cite religion, culture, biology and the strength exhibited by their mothers to protect them during the experiences of war, refugee camps, and immigration as reasons mothers are revered. My participants identify with, and as, strong females and speak out openly about gender roles on their social media sites. Facebook serves as a mediated public space to voice their reverence for their mothers and assert their own identities as strong Muslim women. Their writings paint a different picture about girls growing up in America than books in popular culture, such as “Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls” and its sequel, which tell horror stories about teen girls’ abusive relationships, eating disorders and self-mutilation. My participants are older than the ones Mary Pipher writes about, but the teenage women the participants describe in the re-telling of their identity formation are not the same as those exemplified in this popular book. My participants may or may not be representative Somali-American 20- to 27-year

olds; however, they do defy dominant media coverage of Somali women, as one of my participants suggests:

> I knew girls that were forced to wear the hijabs and they come to school and put that in their locker and just wear the scarf like me and Haxx wear.… When I look at the media and see how they are talking Muslim women and how they are oppressed and they are forced to do these things and I'm like, "No!" A person, a human being can only take so much at a time. If she's oppressed or forced to do this all the time, you gonna see her take it all off at once. The ones that are forced are the ones that are wearing absolutely nothing. Walking down the street, you don't even know who she is, or what her religion is. The ones that are told, "you know what, this is your religion, this is the way it teaches, this is who you are, and if you want to respect yourself enough and love yourself then you can wear it because this is your identity basically and this is really who you are, unless you want to say you are something else and take yourself out of that, then go for it. But if you're saying this is who I am, then who you are comes with this.

Strong bonds exist between the daughters in my study and their mothers and other female relatives and friends. This data suggests how important gender is in the construction of identity for these Somali women. They want to be like their mothers, make their mothers proud, and carry on cultural traditions with their own children. Facebook allows them a

space to voice their praise and honor females and the quintessential "Somali" woman, as interpreted by the individual.

Women's friendship and support for self and friends

Just as expressing praise and love for mothers is a strong theme, so is female friendship. Women's support and friendship was a common theme in posts on Somali women's Facebook entries. Posts include:

> My love, I miss you more. Wait until I get done with all these assignments, exams, papers, projects and we shall indulge in some mango mansoons and laughoutloud!!
>
> #
>
> the world became a better place with your arrival...I can't wait to sing you Happy Birthday---fine tuning my voice:)
>
> #
>
> What? you would say such a thing? You know I'll definitely be there insha'allaah... Was there high school, will be there for college... And yea when you planning to go to the motherland?
>
> #
>
> I am finally doing what that little voice inside me has been telling me to do all along. It feels good to listen to it!
>
> #
>
> Feeling powerful beyond measure with humility of course...but I'm also missing some of my friends that give me wings (you know who you are). That's really whats on my mind--how about you?
>
> #

> I think Allah has blessed me with some of the greatest friends a girl can have. They are all different in their own ways but I love them so much and my life would never be the same without them.

Unlike books and stories in popular culture about cyber-bullying among young women on social media, the Somali participants were much more likely to use their online community space to build up each other. The immigrant women's common heritage as refugees must provide an uncommon bond of understanding, empathy and attachment, not experienced by those who have not lived through such trauma. Their common religion and cultural practices, such as separating themselves from males and gathering as women, also provide a galvanizing force that provides common bonds of understanding. The women expressed strong ties to each other throughout their Facebook entries. I suggest their representations of "belonging" and expressions of power come from a collective communal identity perpetuated through real and online social processes (Anderson, 1983, p. 15; Tomlinson, 1991, p.81).

Facebook: A place to expound on love and dating

Many posts voice opinions about roles, responsibilities and even disagreements or arguments between men and women as they negotiate their identities and roles. A focus group participant, Haxx, explained how technology provides more freedom within the confines of the Somali culture:

> I feel like that whole cyber thing protects a lot of people, they want to say a lot of things, and it's like ok. They would never say it in front of my face; they

> could only say it on computer. It gives you a lot of freedom.

In this protected private, yet online public sphere, players exhibit both "on stage" and "back stage" performances (Berreman, 1962, p. 24) in a very interesting interplay between American and Somali cultural identities. I find that "competing identities—racial, gender, sexual, national—are often context specific, mobilized depending on the circumstances." Differing expressions of social identities interact in online and offline environments (Grasmuck, Martin & Zhao, 2009, p. 158). Focus Group participants explain why they have competing identities:

> Usually, I don't think within our culture, you never have mixed, you won't have women and men sitting down together having a conversation. And usually what I talk about, individually speaking, what I say on Facebook statuses, like I'll be really angry one day and I'll be having a conversation with a friend of mine, and we were discussing gender roles or gender issues, and I can say it in front of him, but if it was ten, twenty Somali men, would I say it if I was in a different situation? No I would not.

#

> You're taught at a very young age things that you're supposed to do and things you're not supposed to do. There are defined gender roles, if I'm speaking very frankly. Sometimes you're told what a girl does and what a girl doesn't do and sometimes you're not even told, you just know, it's like an unspoken thing.

The Somali women in my study see the mediated space as a somewhat private arena that is different from face-to-face communication. The mediation allows them a degree of freedom in expressing gender roles in ways that are sometimes bold and confrontational as the following posts exhibit.

> So I think Facebook does give you that arena where you can say whatever you want to say and you kind of feel comfortable with it because you know that you're friends. They're in Facebook because they are the same age of you and they have probably been through the same experiences so it's okay to say it because it's your opinion. And these are people that you've selected. And you're entitled to your opinion and they understand that. But would an older generation understand me speaking my mind and saying what I want to say? No. They'd probably say that young one, she needs to be quiet or this is not her place, so I think it creates that atmosphere so to speak.

In their posts, participants also voice their opinions about gender roles, such as in these examples:

> Between men and women there is no friendship possible. There is passion, enmity, love, but no friendship.

#

> A WOMAN CAME OUT OF A MAN'S RIB.
> NOT FROM HIS FEET TO BE WALKED ON

NOT FROM HIS HEAD TO BE SUPERIOR OVER
BUT FROM HIS SIDE TO BE EQUAL
UNDER THE ARM TO BE PROTECTED
AND NEXT TO THE HEART TO BE LOVED.

One Facebook entry did not retreat from speaking her mind about what behaviors she expects from Somali men (English is interspersed with Somali):

> Don't read this and take it as if I am an angry feminist. I have nothing but love and the upmost kalgacel[17] for my abooweyaal[18]. This is to help you* in realizing what is going on in my mind as your abaayo[19] and perhaps your "future xaas."[20] This is also to help me reflect in what I think of you and perhaps see the just cause in me thinking this way. This is not to say, in any shape or form, that all Somali guys are this way. I am just referring to the constant stories I see and hear about in my experience. And since these stories are becoming a little too tedious, I wanted to put my labo[21] cents in this kuleel[22] topic.
>
> *This "you" I speak of does not apply to all Somali men. It refers to some Somali abooweyaal, it definitely excludes my father's generation and certainly those who take care of and know what their responsibilities are.

---

[17]Kalagacel translation: Affection or love. (Should be spelled kalagaceel.)
[18] Abooweyaal translation: My brothers
[19]Abaayo translation: Sister
[20]Xaas translation: Wife
[21]Labo translation: Two
[22]Kuleel translation: Hot

> Dear Aboowe[23]–
> Let me guess, you want us to cook, clean, be the wife, be the mother and perhaps be the father, be the dutiful "woman" who is under your thumb and submissive to you in all your wants and needs when you are nothing but a mere sorry excuse for a real man, egotistic, not-there-to-take-care-of-his-responsibilities-type-of-man, womanizing, Casanova who flirts with every other girl. Well, let me tell you our expectations from you so that we can live happily ever after something that we really want. We just want you to be a devoted husband, a dedicated father and a man. A real man.

One complaint my informants have about mainstream dominant news media is the portrayal of Somali women — especially those who wear the hijab or more conservative clothes — as being subservient to men. The women in my study revealed strong opinions about the roles of husbands and wives. While their views about abstinence before marriage and courtship follow more conservative and traditional gender roles, their views about equality and roles in the home reflect a different perception than the way media portray them.

> Abooweyaal, we are extremely sad because you lack a lot of what you expect from us. So here is our question to you, what gives you the right to expect everything you cannot be for us from us? All we ask is that you be what you want us to be for you.

[23] Aboowe translation: Brother

> Nowadays, abooweyaal you take our hand-in-marriage just for taking it and not realizing what kind of responsibility you just signed up for. Aboowe, are you not aware of the loving, perfect-in-our-eyes, protective environment in which you are taking us from? If you cannot and YOU KNOW YOU CANNOT give us the same (and more) we are getting from our family, than don't EVEN BOTHER marrying us. Just do us a favor and wait till you know, we repeat YOU KNOW you are ready….

She also goes on to describe the conflicting identities women exhibit, which may contribute to problems between the genders:

> …Honestly speaking though abooweyaal, this is not all your fault. Because it is in part our fault too. We let you expect all that from us since we think you want an obedient, loving wife who supports you and does EVERYTHING for you. We are the ones who think we will keep you by thinking this way because we are so afraid of you leaving us with those shan ciyaal aad naga dhasheen[24]. And we've come to terms with this being completely ok. But IT IS NOT!! This is due to the fact that a lot of the times we forget that we are PARTNERS.

Within their Facebook posts and in conversation, my participants talk about how religious knowledge of their marriage rights and living in the diaspora as refugees have a profound affect on the way they divide household and childrearing duties. These women expect their husbands to share in the responsibility of child rearing because it's consistent

---

[24]shan ciyaal aad naga dhasheen means: The five children we bear for you.

with their religious beliefs and because they lack the extended family and domestic assistance their family's former status would have provided in Somalia. My informants' interpretation of what is or isn't acceptable as a Somali woman in marriage reflects having one foot in the United States while interpreting religious and cultural protocols.

> Hence, our responsibilities are meant to be 50/50 especially since we both brung those ciyaal into this world TOGETHER. We don't even try to look good and take care of ourselves for you anymore because even if we did look good, you wouldn't notice.
>
> Your biggest mistake lies in the fact that you fail to realize that we are amongst some of the rare women who value marriage nowadays. Those who would rather go to hell and back before we let you divorce us; we are this way for a reason and not only because we had your children. But because we love you and want your love back: The real love that a BEAUTIFUL, NUBIAN, talented, STRONG, African, Somali woman deserves. Not the one-sided, half-ass, good-for-nothing, second-to-none garbage you call love we are so use to. Now, is that too much to ask? Is it?

#

This open letter and other data show that social media provide a somewhat safe haven among friends to try out and negotiate their combined Somali-American identities in bold ways. While Somali Muslim culture discourages such forthright discourse with men in physically-shared spaces, Facebook allows a mediated distance, which seems acceptable to my informants. Stuart Hall reasons: "In the diaspora situation, identities become multiple," (1999, p. 2). Like the Caribbean migrants Hall discusses, my Somali

informants fuse together their various backgrounds and traditions with their current locality to form a shifting and negotiated identity as Somalis and Americans.

Some Facebook posts reflect a topic typical among many 18- to 27-year old women—relationships and romance. While social media sites often are spaces for women to express love and talk about dating prospects with friends, these topics were not a preoccupation of the participants in this study. Quotes and other posts express participants' philosophies about love, dating or romance as well as their religious identity related to sexuality and marriage. My study concurs with Mazumdar and Mazumdar and their quote from Carnes & Yang (2004, p. 3): "At the private level, religion has continued to influence gender roles, mate selection, and family lives, and is used by some to maintain or 're-negotiat[e] these relationships'" (2009, p. 308). Respondents discuss how learning more about Islam from their mothers, helps them negotiate gender roles in their marriages. They feel mainstream media portray Muslim women as being dominated by their husbands; however, the participants pose a different reality. They contend that knowing what the Qur'an teaches, gives them knowledge of their rights within the marriage relationship. Facebook gives them a place for expressing those beliefs to a wider audience and the complex issues of love and dating.

> "Who do you turn to when the only person in the world that can stop you from crying, is exactly the one making you cry?"

#

> "When they asked me what I loved the most about life, I smiled and said you"

#

I LOVE YOU like a fat kid loves cake, u know ma style,
I'll do anything to make u SMILE!!!

#

“No matter how clever or sophisticated a man may appear, he is merely clay waiting to be shaped by the hand of a superior woman. It is, however, best not to let him know this”

#

“Never make someone a Priotity when All you are to them is an option”

#

Love is what you give, not what you gain.

#

those who don’t know how to love... give love a bad name....
.... I read that once I believe that Bell Hooks wrote that.....

Friends also post about dates and prospects of dates, on which their friends comment, such as a portion of a wall post most likely texted to her Facebook:

Participant: Sitting with a boy I have a crush on. He bought me a drink. I hope it happens…

After numerous posts by friends, this post appears:

Friend: LMFAO[25]!!! This is by far the most entertaining status ever. I enjoyed reading all of Y'all comments.

Participant: For the record, I ain't got a crush nor do I drink, so let's get that straight. Looool[26]
I like to know what you all are thing will happen exactly? Hmmmmmmm.... I need answer people.

Participants looked to writers, philosophers and musicians for help to express ideas and feelings about relationships and romance, such as this post that mentions Hip Hop/Rap artist, whose titles include "Who Dat" and "Lights Please."

I am obessed to listening to J.Cole. This guy is ridiculously good, REAL MUSIC!!

"I'm so excited I can't get past to one, two, three..I'm so impatient, it's everything you do to me..A little fire mixed in good with desire..Makes my heart sing like a choir..I'm on a respirator whenever he leaves...."

More often than not, participants expressed their thoughts about life and love in their own words:

If you're honest, people may lie to you, be honest anyways. What you spent years building, someone could destroy overnight, build it anyways. If you find happiness, they may be jealous, be happy anyways. The good you do today people will forget tomorrow, do good anyways. You see in the final analysis, it's

[25] LMFAO means laughed my fat ass off.
[26] LOL means laugh our loud.

> between you and Allah not u and them. -Someone
> very Special
>
> #
>
> As we grow up, we learn that even the one person that wasn't supposed to ever let you down probably will. You will have your heart broken probably more than once and it's harder every time. You'll break hearts too, so remember how it felt when yours was broken. You'll fight with your best friend. You'll blame a new love for things an old one did. You'll cry because time is passing too fast, and you'll eventually lose someone you love. So take too many pictures, laugh too much, and love like you've never been hurt because every sixty seconds you spend upset is a minute of happiness you'll never get back. So use what you get and make the best out of it.

The online communication of this particular population—Somali-American women—at this particular time in their history, provides a window into how technology gives them freedom to express themselves in a way that their cultural norms and religious beliefs inhibit in some arenas of face-to-face communication. Posts exhibit a shifting and situational identity at work.

Hotness and beauty expressed through Facebook

American versus Somali values about sexuality sometimes clashed in participants' posts. Contradictions arose between "modesty," which participants espoused as a Muslim value and sexual attractiveness and beauty as American women. In one post a participant might praise Allah and be a proponent of sexual modesty, while in another entry express appreciation for her friends' sexy photos, such as in these examples.

OMG[27] OMG OMG OMG purple n u lookin hot!!
mashaallah!!!!

#

ftsufvsdhj: THIS IS THE REACTION TO THIS HOT ASS MOMMY THAT I KNOW!!! DAYUM!!! XAAAX-NESS TO THE FULL EFFECT!

When I challenged focus group participants about how they vacillate between wanting to be both sexy and modest, participants admitted it's sometimes difficult to be both American and Muslim. Girls and women are faced with the concept of fitting into various opinions about what constitutes proper attire in the Somali communities and in school and other American social venues. Focus group comments include:

> In high school, my parents were like "WHOA… You're American. You have nothing Somali about you." And I'm not, "No, I'm still Somali." And they're like, "Well you don't look like one." And I dealt with that. But I don't think that defines me though.
>
> #
>
> But you're sending different signals to people. You're confusing people. I was talking to one of my nieces, she's like seven. She wears the hijab to school and all the kids are giving her a hard time and her mom went to the school and she said, "I don't want people giving my daughter a hard time." The girl sitting next to her telling her, "Why are you wearing that? You don't have hair?" And she has the most gorgeous

[27]OMG means: Oh my God

hair, and she's like "I don't like it…." And they're like what, second, third grade?

And then I was talking to her and asking her about her classmates and whatever, and she's like, "Oh, I love that girl." And I'm like, "Why do you love her?" And she's like, "She … doesn't wear a hijab and she has the most beautiful hair." And that was shocking to me, I was like, "Who has better hair than you? You have this long beautiful hair." And she's like, "But I cover my hair and nobody sees my hair so people always complement … her." And I'm like, "Wow."

#

It's part of the challenge of diversity.

#

The participants interact, finishing each other's sentences:

I can't go to certain mosques like this.

(The participant is wearing a headscarf with a long-sleeved t-shirt and pants.)

That's respecting the place you are.

You can't just say, "Oh, I'm gonna walk with my chest up." You can go to a holy place, then you play that part and you respect it.

And you're supposed to cover up.

The following post exemplifies how participants attempt to balance sexuality with their religious beliefs in chastity before marriage.

She is so lovely
tall and sexy
she will make his heart melt
but never dare to take off his belt
her heart is oh so pure
can put all diseases into cure
she walks around with her head so high
but don't mistake that for insecure ties
she loves to laugh and giggle
enough to make anyone's soul jiggle
outgoing,sophisticated and inteligent
I tell you, this sistah is magnificent

The participants in this study readily discuss the conundrum of mixed messages and values:

I think it goes back to the American culture.

#

It's Americaness.

#

…You could appear to be very sexual and talk and act upon it, but in the end of the day you're still a virgin because everyone in high school still knows you're a virgin.

So back to the whole Facebook thing, you still have your modesty. You don't say that to a guy, you say it to other girls.

You still have this modesty. In a way you kinda tease and play with these ideas and push the envelopes.

> Although, it's not a threat by all means, it's just kinda to entertain the idea of join society for a little bit.

#

Incongruity between wearing modest and sexy attire is not just a conflict between American and Somali dress codes. It's more complex. Somali cultural norms have changed owing to war, adversary and religious practices, as discussed in the section on apparel. These Somali women long for being fashionable in the U. S. society within which they live — like their parents were in Somalia before the war and the advancement of a more conservative re-Islamification. Participants describe what it was like for their parents:

> Going back to our moms, I've seen pictures and like WHOA, and they were like, I used to be the talk of the town and I used to dress like this and I had the smallest waist and every women wanted to be like me.

#

> Dressing in modesty was always a thing.... where they would dress modestly in their homes or around their family and husbands and neighbors and things like that. But certain occasions, like weddings or engagements, (eating out) or something, when some occasion is going on, they would dress way liberal and get their hair done and their makeup and sometimes they would dress even very sexy....So people always kind of separated the two.

> But after the war, all these religious groups came about, the conservatives, and that was at some point, when I hear the stories, at some point it was nonexistent. It was the cause of it.

5.4 Identity Re-formation Through Religion

As reported by Leonard et al., “Religion continues to define and structure the personal and community identities of many new immigrants” (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009, p. 308) including the women my study. However, participants sometimes have trouble separating religious practices from culture, as they explain in these statements from our focus group discussion:

> The culture was never free to begin with from the religion. They were practicing Muslims….You would see more of the culture than the religion. People ask isn’t that the culture, and no that is not the culture, that is our religion. So they made them into the same. It’s more of a religion that was made liberal. If you go back, people thinks it’s our culture to pray five times a day and to cover up, like our mothers didn’t wear shorts and didn’t wear pants, because they always wear their skirts or long coverings, but that was their religion. It’s your religion to cover up and to be modest and not to look like a man, that’s what the religion taught us, and they made that into our culture.
>
> #
>
> I think that is how Somali people WERE. Even with their history they are very oral and poetic people. They keep a lot of their history orally. They are not

people who write down stuff. I feel like religion and culture are one within the Somali person.

#

There are no state and church. There are no separate. It's just one (in Somalia).

Praise and references to Allah is a particularly strong theme. Many daily posts reflect and express faith and beliefs and most subjects post to links to organizations or information about being a Muslim or inspirational messages. Organizations posted include:

CELEBRATE MERCY

A global celebration of the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) webcast live to your living room http://www.celebratemercy.com/

#

Countdown to ONE-MILLION Somalis for | PEACE
Category: Organizations - Political Organizations
Often as Somalis, we are referred to as citizens who don't give peace a chance. Lets speak loud and clear and get a million Somalis that support peace. LOUD AND CLEAR!
Privacy Type: Contact Info Mogadishu, Somalia -----
Open: All content is public.

Many posts deal with praise or recognition for Allah or the Islamic faith. Many Somalis did not read the Qur'an or hadiths[28] before moving to the United States. "Most Somalis are not Islamists, and their observance of Islam in Somalia varied widely, but

[28] Hadiths are reported sayings or pronouncements of the Prophet Muhammad

moving to a largely secular Judaeo-Christian-based liberal democracy derived them of their ability to take their identity for granted," (McGown, 1999, p. 69).

> I love to learn about Islam. It is such a fascinating way of life that many people are not aware of. Just reading about the Prophet (PBUH[29]) is exhilarating to me. I would like to finish the Quran one day and become one that lives by it.

My findings add to Grasmuck, Martin and Zhao's study, which suggests that "ethno-racial identities are salient and highly elaborated" on Facebook (2009, p. 158). That study shows differences in self-presentation of ''the cultural self'' in the displays by distinct ethno-racial groups. "African Americans and Latinos invest most intensively, Vietnamese and whites least intensively, and Indians fall somewhere in the middle of the continuum depending on the enumerated item," (p. 170). As seen earlier, my participants post lyrics and quotes that by association speak to their cultural identities, and my participants are especially invested in posting thoughts and quotes with religious and spiritual themes, as evidenced in the following posts.

> Allah is my LORD,
> ISLAM is my life,
> AL-Quran is my Guide,
> The Sunnah[30] is my practice,
> Jihad[31] is my spirit,
> Righteousness is my Character,
> Paradise is my GOAL.

[29]PBUH means: Peace be upon him
[30]Sunna means: To follow Prophet Muhammad's actions and sayings as a model for behavior
[31]Jihad means: The struggle to defend or promote Islam

> FAITH makes all things Possible, LOVE makes them easy.

#

> Some say I am friendly, some say I am evil, Some love my smile, others think I am funny and some think I am just flat out weird...but at the end of the day, it's all about what Allah and my parents think...peace!

Intensive involvement with religious identity production is consistent with Somalis' desire to re-build a nation. Even if they did not (or do not now) practice all the tenets of the Muslim faith, their identity as Muslims is important to them, as their territorial demarcations fade away. They not only identify themselves as Muslims, they negotiate what that means to them in their new homeland. Facebook provides a place for that identity re-formation and also a place where they can contest the dominant media's portrayal of Muslims as unilaterally violent radicals. (The following excerpts use English interspersed with Arabic.)

> Life is a test, Islam is the best. Salat[32] is a Must, Aakhira[33] is for rest. The world is only Dust. If QURAN is in ur chest, Nothin' need next. Obey ALLAH first, Success will be NEXT!!

> I ask ALLAH 2 increase your Imaan[34], Grant you Ihsaan[35], Bestow on you Sabr[36], Delight you in

[32]Salat means: Prayer
[33]Aakhira means: hereafter; life after death; afterlife
[34]Imaan means: Faith
[35]Ihsaan means: Mercy or compassion or striving to do your best

Dhikr[37], Bless you with Taqwa[38], Accept your Tauwba[39], & Honour you in Jannah[40].

#

Hold to forgiveness, command what is right; but turn away from the ignorant." [7:199]

#

Prophet Muhammad pbuh said: “Lose no time to do good deeds before you are caught up by one of seven calamities awaiting you: a starvation which may impair your wisdom; a prosperity which may mislead you; an ailment which may damage your health; an old age which may harm your senses; a sudden death; the Dajjal (Antichrist); or Doomsday, which is indeed the hardest and most bitter.”

This is a post to bring attention to and condemn the postings of a group called “Stop islamization of America.”

LEASE REPORT THIS GROUP THEY ARE CREATING UNSPEAKABLEPHOTOS OF OUR BELOVED PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SAW) AND THEY ARE
LEASE REPORT THIS GROUP THEY ARE CREATING UNSPEAKABLEPHOTOS OF OUR BELOVED PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SAW) AND THEY ARE TALKING DISGUSTINGLY ABOUT ISLAM! DO UR PART>>>>>REPORT TALKING DISGUSTINGLY ABOUT ISLAM! DO UR PART>>>>>REPORT

---

[36] Sabr menas: Patience

[37] Dhakir or Zikr means: Remembrance [of God], pronouncement, invocation; it is an Islamic devotional act

[38] Taqwa is an Arabic word, which is explained as a shield against wrongdoing and further expounded as to be “conscious of Allah” or to have “fear of Allah” or to be “cautiously aware of Allah.” Taqwa is an internal compass on the path that leads towards Allah. The broader meaning and character of Taqwa is to develop one’s behavior, so as to be cautiously aware in the worship of Allah and attain nearness to Him and in so doing, perfect oneself.

[39] Tauwba means: Repentance

[40] Jannah means: Heaven

#

My study concurs with McGown's: "…diaspora Somalis have developed a strong consciousness of identity through religion, in order to place themselves in a new society that is predominantly non-Muslim, and indeed to assert themselves as well," (1999, p. 228). Facebook is an integral place for weaving together their Somali-American religious identity.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Limitations

The participants in my study are 20 to 27 years old, compared to Kearney's and Thiel-Stern's research participants, who are younger teens; however, as in their research, my study participants use social networking for identity articulation and creative endeavors (Theil-Stern, 2009). Much like Theil-Stern finds, my participants "generate much of its content through a pastiche of their biographies … interests, blogs, list of friends, and posted media in many forms…. (p. 21). Social media provide a space where these immigrant women can communicate, reconvene their nation and forge common bonds in an alternative space to dominant media. Somali-American women produce their own media through social networking sites, blogs, YouTube, minority radio and Somali news sources. As articulated by these scholars about their study population, Somali-American women use the Internet "to express themselves, explore their identities, and connect with others" (Kearney, 2006, p. 3).

Just like many Facebook users, participants use posts in practical ways: to quickly inform friends about one's activities, to substitute for telephone calling or to let friends know someone wanted to talk or doesn't have access to a phone, as in:

> CALL ME ASAP..

However, this group of 18- to 27-year-old immigrants' use of social networking goes beyond a handy shortcut for everyday contact. The medium provides an important place for trying out ideas and to form and maintain a sense of cultural identity within this public, yet private space. A focus group participant explained earlier: "Facebook does create your own little world."

One of my Facebook participants offered a good summary of how the women use Facebook when she agreed to give access to me to her Facebook site for the study:

> **Facebook Respondent:** "my friend inboxed me … and told me that you were writting somthing on somali girls and how they use networks to communicate is that correct"
> **Researcher:** "yes and express identity"
> **Facebook Respondent:** "i don't see any diffrentce between how we use it and how other ppl use it it's pretty much the same"
> **Researcher:** I think so too—but do you think there are any specific issues that you share or support each other in regards to being Somali-Americans?
> **Facebook Respondent:** we support each other on keep our culture identity and we form facebook groups that' that's against tribalism to make us somalis more united also we create facebook groups to strengthen our islamic faith"

As the researcher in this study, I couldn't have stated it more precisely. The Somali women use social media to connect, like any other woman on Facebook. Social media provides people a more informal way to reach out and express what's on their mind, their activities and their interests. A focus group member elaborates:

> It also gives a freedom of expression because you're able to express yourself. Whether you're happy or sad or something is bothering you, you're just sending your feeling out there and then other people are supposed to like it or comment on it or do something with it. It's like "this is how I am today"

> instead of calling up people and people calling you, or sometimes it's just sending a signal to your family and friends and whoever is around to know what's going on because sometimes I don't have the time to call up these guys or know what they're doing or where they are, but because of Facebook and Twitter, we tweet all day and we already know what is going on....I know what you did last week because you tweeted about it....what's going on and where's someone work and how the kids are doing and things like that. So it's just a way to communicate with everybody else that you don't have chance to comment (because of our schedules).

However, when analyzed through the framework of identity, the Somali-American participants in this research reveal how identity is negotiated and evolving. They also demonstrate that social media is a key component in their ability to express their many-faceted identities. My research shows how women experience life as immigrants trying to negotiate and balance their identities through social media as Somalis, Americans, Muslims, and women away from their original homeland. My thesis investigates and analyzes how these women experience and make meaning in U. S. Western culture and provides some answers to the question: What would these Somali-American women say if their voices could be heard? Their self-representations throughout this study provide a glimpse into the identity negotiation and nation- building activities of a sample of Somali-American women in Minnesota. The data in this study suggest that social media provide a venue that is different from face-to-face communication and certainly different from traditional news media. The online space

provides Somali-Americans a platform to speak that balances the public-private sphere—even further, it becomes a liminal place that is "inbetween" (Orsi, 2004). This may be a temporal place as these immigrants negotiate between old cultural norms and new ones in keeping with Hall's ideas about identity being something that changes and shifts. These sites provide mediated, but direct access to ones' peers, friends and family along with a broader Somali community to say things that may be prohibited or just intimidating to say, fact-to-face or in an overtly public arena. One participant wrote:

> As Somali women, we are in an ambience time where we are either far left or right and you shall notice how we interact with one another, how we use the media to manipulate to persuade other fellow Somalis, and or even express our ways in which we weren't able to do so through face to face, mainly due to either shyness, keeping up with the cultural norms, and or just respecting the long tradition that women are expected to shun from expressive thoughts to voice their concern.

I build on Thiel-Sterns' (2007) research that argues that although young women use social media sites as a place to negotiate gender identity in public ways, they find the act of using technology to experiment with identity as empowering." While Thiel-Stern's MySpace users "play into the dominant patriarchal discourses of culture," my participants, who are older and immigrants, debate the dominant patriarchal discourses of both Western and Somali culture while living within it. They openly express their opinions as they negotiate identity, power, faith, education, politics, relationships, family and daily life as immigrants and daughters of immigrants in an online diaspora. "The

technology that makes virtual communities possible has the potential to bring enormous leverage to ordinary citizens at relatively little cost – intellectual leverage, social leverage, commercial leverage, and most important, political leverage. But the technology will not in itself fulfill that potential; this latent technical power must be used intelligently and deliberately by an informed population." (Rheingold, 1993). This thesis documents and articulates how an intelligent, engaged population of women is doing just that.

Throughout the research and writing of this thesis, I was puzzled by the question whether participants' interactions in their social media space constitute an imagined community as conceived by Benedict Anderson. I agree that my data supports the conception of a nation built through imagination rather than locale or government sanction, in that my participants engage in a Somali "nation," and communicate with people around the world that they will never know in person. I also agree with Anderson's idea about "print capitalism" and "the power of mass literacy and its attendant large-scale production of projects of ethnic affinity" that can be "remarkably free of the need for face-to-face communication…" (Appadurai, 1990, p. 585). My informants expressly admit that they engage in technically-mediated printed dialogues instead of face-to-face communication because it's convenient in reaching lots of friends simultaneously. They also say that Facebook provides a safer space to speak out about issues with friends and others who understand the online venue when they would not speak out in some face-to-face situations. The nagging answer that repeats itself to me is: "Yes" this thesis supports Anderson's concept of reconstituting an imagined community through social media; however, there is more. The social media environment allows these

women to have several layers of relationships and changing identities. In their social media spaces, they are not simply re-constituting an imagined community, but also are convening and building a personal community based on location, school, family, beliefs and attitudes.

Future research is needed to document and study the vibrant immigrant groups of Somali women in the United States and elsewhere. The questions asked in this thesis need to be answered by a larger population and over an extended length of time to fully understand the variations on what it is like to be a Somali-American Muslim woman living in the disapora: What choices do they make about their beliefs and practices, within a minority religious group in the United States? What social changes are they continuing to undergo? What representations do others make about them and how do they feel about those representations?

We also need further exploration about media use among a larger population of women both demographically and quantifiably. We need to supplement this research to see just how information communication technologies play an important role in building the "constructive landscape of collective aspirations" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 31 as cited in Kelley, et al., 2010) for the members of "nations without states" (Castells, 2004, p. 45).

Further research will make an important contribution toward an understanding of theories about identity articulation and re-articulation through mediated technology among immigrant women in the United States.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This master's thesis is the first part of a larger study with Somali-American Muslim woman that I will continue in my doctorate program in which mixed methods are employed. My thesis is based on research and analysis of a sample of Facebook entries and blogs created by Somali-American women and by ethnographic immersion in local Somali activities. My research demonstrates one particular location of Somali-American Muslim identity negotiation and articulation on the social networking site, Facebook. Participants provided access to their personal social media sites and further explored topics and themes with me through focus groups, interviews, and online conversations.

This thesis argues that social media give agency to a population of immigrant women within an imagined community—and real community—of friends, relatives and extended "friendships" throughout the world as they negotiate being both American and Somali. Facebook provides a global network to contest mainstream media's lack of coverage of the lives of Somali women. This thesis shows how social media provide a space for Somali-American women to portray their strength, creativity and presence in America. They use the Internet to promote national pride, preserve ethnic and cultural identity, maintain native language and literary arts, and interpret their religious practices as Somali Muslims living in the United States.

I do not want to over-generalize based on this study of a particular group of Somali-American women; however, this research and analysis begins to fill voids in the literature concerning immigrants' use of social media in the diaspora and identity construction. For this group of Muslim women, Facebook provides a veil that allows

participants to selectively represent and conceal their evolving identities as Somalis and Americans. Unlike books and stories in popular culture about cyber-bullying among young women on social media, the Somali participants were much more likely to use their online community space to build up each other. The immigrant women's common heritage as refugees must provide an uncommon bond of understanding, empathy and attachment, not experienced by those who have not lived through such trauma. Their common religion and cultural practices, such as separating themselves from males and gathering as women, also provide a galvanizing force that provides common bonds of understanding. The women expressed strong ties to each other throughout their Facebook entries. I suggest their representations of "belonging" and expressions of power come from a collective communal identity perpetuated through real and online social processes (Anderson, 1983, p. 15; Tomlinson, 1991, p.81).

The semi-private sphere of social media also provides a space where Somali women can assert their rights as Muslim women in ways they don't articulate in face-to-face mixed groups because of their respect for elders and cultural gender norms. If these conversations were compared with native-born women, I conjecture that the way my informants express and experiment with their multi-faceted and changing identities and values differentiates their use of social media. In this space, their discourse constructs, re-constructs, negotiates and re-negotiates identity articulation as they re-make their notions of what it means to be Muslim and what it means to be Somali. They create poetry and post quotes, open letters, songs and photos that capture their transitionary identities, values, hopes and dreams for their lives, their families, their imagined nation and the future of Somalia. They go about the serious work of nation and community

building, development and retention of native language, and promoting ethnic and cultural awareness and activism. This social media site is an empowering place where women take on the world and contest representations of Somalis in dominant discourse. It's a place where the art of Somali storytelling and egalitarianism survives and thrives.

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Appendix A

Debra Kelley Facebook Study Recruitment Email For:
"How Somali-American women express identity and connect using mediated technology" (#1012P93897)

The following is a recruitment email to be sent by mutual acquaintances to request participation in Facebook ethnographic study.

Debra Kelley is an acquaintance of mine. She is a graduate student at the University of Minnesota who is conducting a study of Facebook conversations among Somali-American women. Her research is interested in how Somali-American women use technology to express identity and their opinions about media.

If you are interested in participating in her study, please contact her via email or Facebook. She is happy to answer any questions you may have. Attached is a note from Debra and a Consent Form for participation in the study

Note from researcher:

I appreciate your time. I invite you to consider to participating in my Facebook study. Information gained will be used to document, through reports and publications, how Somali-American women express themselves through technology. The research I am conducting will be analyzed and used in my thesis as a Master's graduate student at the University of Minnesota.

If you have any questions or are interested in receiving a copy of my report when it is completed, please contact me at dkelley@umn.edu.

If you decide to participate, you are acknowledging that you agree to the following consent form. Thank you very much.

Debra Kelley, Graduate Student
University of Minnesota, School of Journalism & Mass Communication

CONSENT STATEMENT
FOR FACEBOOK STUDY
"How Somali-American women express identity and connect using mediated technology" (#1012P93897)

You are invited to participate in a study on how Somali-American women express themselves through mediated technology. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study. You must be a Somali-American woman to participate, as defined as: now living in the United States and having been born in Somalia or a descendant from parents who were born in Somalia.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to investigate and document how Somali-American women express their identity and use media.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to Friend me on Facebook. I will look at your conversations, find themes and analyze your conversations for approximately a one-month period prior to the current date.

I will analyze the information according to media use and how you express identity.
I will provide copies of my research findings to you and ask for your comments, if you are interested.
I will also provide an opportunity for you to comment on my findings at a meeting, which will be held in a conference room at the University of Minnesota.
I might contact you one time for clarification purposes, if needed when I analyze my data.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are minimal risks to you by allowing me to have access to your semi-private conversations on Facebook. To avoid inadvertent disclosure of your personal information or name, I will encrypt this information to prevent unauthorized access.

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. Reports will be published or publicly available, but names will be confidential.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Compensation:

No compensation will be provided for participation in this study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Debra Kelley. If you have questions later, you may contact Debra on her cell 612-309-5487 or by emailing: dkelley@umn.edu. You may also contact her course instructor, Prof. Dan Sullivan, at 612-625-0742 or by emailing: dans@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, contact Research Subjects' Advocate line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware Street S.E., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; telephone (612) 625-1650.

You may keep this form for your records.

Appendix B

CONSENT STATEMENT
FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICPANTS FROM A FACEBOOK STUDY
"How Somali-American women express identity and connect using mediated technology"
(#1012P93897)

You are invited to participate in a focus group of Somali-American women who have allowed me to study their Facebook conversations. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study. You must be a Somali-American woman, as defined as: now living in the United States and having been born in Somalia or a descendant from parents who were born in Somalia.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to investigate and document how Somali-American women express their identity and use media.

Procedures:

I will provide an opportunity for you to comment on my Facebook study findings at a group meeting, which will be held in a conference room at the University of Minnesota.

I will provide copies of my research findings from my Facebook study to you and your friends.

I will ask you questions concerning media use and identity, such as
Please discuss and elaborate on the various themes that I have found from studying your Facebook conversations:

- Mainstream media'a coverage of the Somali community
- Use of media or technology to connect with friends, family and others in the Somali community
- Facebook conversations concerning issues you face as a Somali woman living in American culture.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are minimal risks to you to participate in a group meeting because I cannot prevent others from disclosing information outside of our meeting. To avoid inadvertent disclosure of your personal information or name on my part, I will encrypt this information to prevent unauthorized access.

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

I will ask participants not to share confidential information; however, I cannot promise confidentiality because other members of the focus group might share information outside the group.

The records of this study will be kept private. Reports will be published or publicly available, but names will be kept confidential.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Compensation:

You will receive a $15 gift card as a token of appreciation for participating in the focus group meeting.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Debra Kelley. If you have questions later, you may contact Debra on her cell 612-309-5487 or by emailing: dkelley@umn.edu. You may also contact her course instructor, Prof. Dan Sullivan, at 612-625-0742 or by emailing: dans@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, contact Research Subjects' Advocate line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware Street S.E., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; telephone (612) 625-1650.

You may keep this form for your records.

Appendix C

Discussion Guide

"How Somali-American women express identity and connect using mediated technology" (#1012P93897)

These questions cover possible directions based on findings that may come from my ethnographic Facebook study.

Over-arching Research Questions:
How does cultural identity affect use of news media and social media?
How could news media better serve diasporic minority communities?

Read to participant:
Thank you for reading the consent form document about this study and agreeing to participate in a feedback session. I appreciate your participation in sharing your opinions about this information. Please read the consent form and explain back to me what the study is about and what procedures and risks are involved so that I may determine if you understand.

- Please discuss and elaborate on the various themes that I have found from studying your Facebook conversations:
- Mainstream media'a coverage of the Somali community
- Use of media or technology to connect with friends, family and others in the Somali community.
- Facebook conversations concerning issues you face as a Somali woman living in American culture.
- Comment on how people expressed beliefs, frustrations, desires, hopes through their Facebook pages through music, visual art, poetry, literature.
- Please discuss the identity topics that surfaced in these Facebook conversations.

Appendix D

CONSENT STATEMENT
Administration of Somali-American Women & Technology Interview

You are invited to participate in a background interview to help me prepare for research with Somali-American women and how they express identity through technology. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in an interview. I am interested in interviewing you because you teach courses related to my topic or work in a professional news media capacity or community development capacity related to my topic.

Background Information:

The purpose of my interview is to help me gain information in preparation for future studies that will investigate and document how Somali-American women express their identity and use media. The purpose of my background interview with you is to ask for any advice, articles, or information you may be able to provide related to my topic.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate, the interview should take about one hour. I might also re-contact you one time for clarification of information if I have questions while analyzing data. Some examples of questions I will ask you include:

1. Do you have any specific advice regarding my topic of study?

2. Do you have background information or articles pertaining to Somali-American women?

3. Do you have any opinions regarding mainstream media's representation of Somali-American women?

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are minimal risks expected for participating, mainly that I will be taking up your time. Please be aware that there is an inadvertent risk of disclosure of any sensitive information you might share with me; however, I intend to prevent disclosure by keeping my records confidential.

There are also no immediate or expected benefits for you for participating in providing background information to me.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. Reports will be published or publicly available, but names will be confidential.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Compensation:

You will receive a $15 gift card as a token of appreciation for taking the time to talk with me.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Debra Kelley. If you have questions later, you may contact Debra on her cell 612-309-5487 or by emailing: dkelley@umn.edu. You may also contact her course instructor, Prof. Dan Sullivan, at 612-625-0742 or by emailing: dans@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, contact Research Subjects' Advocate line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware Street S.E., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; telephone (612) 625-1650.

You may keep this copy of this form for your records.

Appendix E

Equalizer by Nixx

Empires, kingdoms and world powers rise and fall;
we still answer the call for peace and seek solutions
with guns,

Ignoring the warnings of the universe the hearts of
leaders grow cold and numb, addicted to power and
personal gain, they keep us in evermore growing
troubles!

Intruders come, murder they write, dividing and
breaking bonds of kinship they conquer it all,
offering fortune and friendship they easily take
control,

Implicating our lives with their lies the chain reaction
leads to our demise, warn the world and to whom it
might concern, the horn is ready to explode, shells
flying around with rapid street wars,

Red eyes with untamed anger piercing through my
fearful soul, the tainted heart infusing the
atmosphere with hatred, confusing family with
enemy,

Every day I fight to defend your honor, but stories of
daughters discouraged by fathers with futile lives,
their souls deprived of all hope traps my mind in cells
of horror,

Sons grow callous; another child of yours, another

Somali sibling of mine, undernourished life is lost,

Far away, days pass with pain and I struggle with fear
for the future, so I fast and pray for the Lords rescue,

How many meals must I miss to feel your hunger,
calling me loudly with your cries I can't stand to see
you suffer, I don't camouflage my identity, roaming
the world carrying your name proudly from your soil
to the deep sea,

How many seasons passed since our people sang
songs of freedom, how my spirit craves cool nights
sitting underneath acacia trees listening to stories
full of wisdom,

I heard about the euphoria that filled the air following
your independence as you gained liberty, but it didn't
take long when tyrants sparked the fire that melted
away your dignity,

Dear Somalia, reminiscing of your beauty frees my
soul from fear and terror; Digging deep into the roots
of my family tree gives me reasons and strength to
stay resilient…

Appendix F

1960 by Saxx

1960, we got liberation
2009, we have no nation
I said, 1960, we earned our freedom
2009, we dying and bleeding
1960, Somalia was rising
2009, we are barely surviving
1960, we were the center for commerce
But 2009, we are the nucleus of a curse
1960, we escaped oppression and hate
2009, we are oppressing and hating our own state
1960, our nation was born
but 2009, our nation is torn.

isn't it sad that in 1960 we were one
and in 2009, we are none?
in 19SIXTY, we had a fruitful country
instead 2009, beneath the surface of a great civilization
laid dreams of material aspirations
that turned into anger and frustration between
people of one nation, one creed of Islamic denomination
we are dying of starvation and manipulation that can be
controlled but we are told the opposite, wrapped away and tossed in
a black hole.

in 2009, we are in that black hole of hunger, a cold-blooded
massacre with innocent civilians who have no answer to their situation instead Raise their head to the sky and pray to the Almighty High to take away this cancer. This cancer turned us into a devastation like a hurricane that left a trail Of disaster that we can no longer inhale.

1960 was the birth of our nation
2009 we want a nation
And now its up to us to reseed a revolution
Side by side, hand in hand to fight this self-destruction
To become that great dynasty once more
JUST LIKE BEFORE, IN 1960.