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# The Life Experiences of Ethiopian Somali Refugees: From Refugee Camp to America.

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**The Life Experiences of Ethiopian Somali Refugees:  
From Refugee Camp to America.**

Ismail Gorse

University of St. Thomas

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Education  
Of the University of St. Thomas in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

March 29, 2011

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA

St. Paul, Minnesota

We certify that we have read this dissertation by Ismail Gorse and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

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Final Approval Date

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From Refugee Camp to America.**

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## **Preface**

I am Gorse: an Ethiopian born Somali; an engineer by training and profession; and a citizen of the United States.

I speak eight dialects of Ethiopian language, and was raised in that culture based on an oral tradition. My formal education through undergraduate school was in French. I came to this country before learning English, and continue to work daily on skills in this language.

I am told that while much effort has been made to formalize my writing for the purpose of this dissertation, influences from my Somali culture continue to surface. Among these, some may note repetition of thoughts and stories in the data chapters (4 & 5), as our oral tradition often does to commit things to collective memory. Some of these have been acknowledged in editing, but left as a reflection of my authorship and remnants of that voice.

Even as this work considers the identity construction of Ethiopian Somali men, including myself, the research and writing of this document has impacted the construction of my own.

## ABSTRACT

An increasing number of global migrants are refugees, who have fled religious, racial, ethnic or other political persecution. As these refugee populations have grown, governmental and nonprofit organizations have emerged to help the resettlement experience. The reality of the American experience for the newly resettled refugee does not always match the expectations of what the country has to offer, and these organizations do not always take into consideration the past history of the refugee.

This study explores the dialectical tensions/conflicts faced by Ethiopian Somali refugees in communicating with the organizations designed to make their resettlement successful. The methodology used includes phenomenology techniques which expose the assumptions, feelings, and subjectivities of the author and participants. At the same time, United States and United Nation policies are reviewed within the context of the experiences and stories of resettled refugees. In addition, this dissertation explores the construction of ethnic identity in the first generation of Ethiopian Somali refugee now living in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, with the aim of showing the intricacy of global events (civil wars in the homeland and war on terror in the host society) and local contexts (meaning-making occurring during the interviews). In-depth interviews conducted with ten men were treated as a series of stories in order to emphasize the importance of personal meaning-making. With awareness that “multiple identities” can denote various subjectivities, the thesis proposed research that theorizes about the constant shift of identities, the interplay between ascribed and performed ethnicity, as well as the role of societal and historical adjustment that influence the actors of these identities. The Ethiopian Somali refugees participated in semistructured interviews about their experiences with adaptation and integration in America. Four dialectical tensions/conflicts emerged from participants’ stories about their communication in their life experiences: (a) persecution and discrimination; (b) trauma in the journey of fleeing their homeland; (c) multiple identities in the refugee camps; and d) integration and adjustment in American society.



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I fled Ethiopia as a political refugee at the age of 15, leaving my family, home and beloved country. My journey ended in a Midwestern state. I became one of two hundred million people on the planet (Marie-Claire, 2008) who emigrated from their homelands in search of peace, justice and economic prosperity for their children and themselves. An increasing number of global migrants are refugees, having experienced religious, racial, ethnic, or political persecution prior to resettling in a new country (Marie, 2008). In the last two decades, thousands of immigrants have arrived in North America, facing different social, historical and cultural challenges, including the adjustments necessary to “make it in America.”

Many immigrants, forced to leave their homeland due to economic, political and/or social circumstances, feel a loss of place, culture and identity. Because circumstances beyond their control caused exodus from their homeland, many refugees experience the added trauma and burdens associated with being a political refugee *and* an immigrant.

Unfortunately, the reality of the American experience for some newly resettled refugees may not always match their expectations. Expecting to find prosperity and opportunity, refugees must adjust to the sometimes harsh reality of their new life - lacking resources, a social network or employment. They must learn to survive and adapt to a new culture, often including a new language and differences in family values and traditions. As immigrant refugees struggle to adapt, they may encounter some who remain ignorant of their history as refugees or fail to grasp the enormous challenges of adapting to a new and often “alien” culture.

I investigated the experience of Ethiopian Somali first generation males to learn how they made sense of their experience both as political refugees and immigrants adjusting to American life. Because ethnic and political wars existed in Ethiopia, political refugees are doubly

challenged: first as combatants who struggled in their home country and later as aliens “at war” with the cultures and traditions in their new country.

Adapting to a new environment requires refugees to go through an adjustment process, while maintaining their sense of self or identity. I wished to learn about the nature of their experience and how it impacted and potentially changed them. My experience as an immigrant and refugee motivated me to tell the stories of my countrymen, and, also to contribute to the scholarly research regarding the refugee experience. I focused this study on the experience of ethnic Somalis: caught in a civil war; fleeing their homeland; seeking asylum in a foreign country; living in refugee camps; and finally, resettling in North America.

The study focused on how first generation Ethiopian Somali male refugees now living in a Midwestern state made sense of their experiences as immigrants and refugees. In addition to a study of their journey, I also investigated how global and local events, such as the civil war in Ethiopia or fear of terrorism by Americans after the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, may also have contributed to the current challenges facing ethnic Somali refugees.

As refugee populations have grown, governmental and nonprofit organizations have emerged to help the resettlement experience. My study provides a record of the experience of ten ethnic Somali males, and the way they made sense of that experience as they attempted to adjust to life in America.

### **Statement of the Problem**

How do Ethiopian Somali males define their sense of self or core identity as a result of their experiences as both (1) political refugees fleeing ethnic and political wars and (2) immigrants living in an alien or foreign culture? What factors, including race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity, and/or politics influence the way they “construct” their identity and make

meaning of their life experience as Ethiopian Somali males living as citizens or guests in their host country?

### **Significance of the Research**

The purpose of my study was to examine the experience of acculturation and identity formation among Ethiopian Somali males. Specifically I wished to learn about the “lived” experience of Ethiopian Somali males who fled their homeland and adapted to an alien country and culture. I wanted to listen and record their refugee stories, learning about the challenges faced and the effects these challenges had on “core” identity as males and as political refugees. Ethiopian Somali refugees arrived in America with a personal history and refugee experience, and like all immigrants needed support and understanding to make a successful adaptation to American life. My study sought to strengthen the understanding of the challenges facing political refugees with the goal of telling their story of hardship, cultural change and adaptation, often hidden from view.

Identity for all people everywhere was not formed in a vacuum, but within a cultural realm with values, a history, and specific contradictions and complexities. These genuine differences among cultures allow us to learn from each other. My intention was to go beyond this impasse of differences and find in other cultures and vocabularies the key to unlocking a new set of possibilities for mutual understanding.

Chapter one provides background on how I came to choose this topic of study, including the importance of the topic and the need for the research on the refugee experience. Chapter Two reviews a body of literature related to the background of the life experiences of Ethiopian Somali refugees from Ethiopia, a journey to refugee camp in Djibouti and the adjustment in America.

Chapter Three provides the research framework and the methods of data gathering and analysis. Chapters Four and Five describe the qualitative data collected from interviews, personal experience, and analysis of the data. Finally, Chapter Six offers a summary of findings and analysis, and descriptions of the implications of this study for the life experiences of Ethiopian Somali refugees and recommendations for additional areas for research.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of my literature review was to locate scholarly studies of the refugee experience, focusing on the effects of political and ethnic wars on their lives as well as the cultural adaptation of Ethiopian Somali or political refugees in the United States. Because my research question involved the life experiences of Ethiopian Somali refugees in Ethiopia, the journey to refugee camps of Djibouti and resettlement in America, I searched for studies related to refugees' adjustment and adaptation to various challenges, including refugee experiences involving trauma, persecution, and adjustment.

I examined the influence and effects of acculturation on political refugees, describing both the psychological and social effects of adjustment on individual and social identity. I also investigated how political strife within one's home country adds complexity to the challenges of acculturation experienced by political refugees in their host country, showing how situational factors in acculturation influence refugees' adjustment to different situations. In addition, I also investigated the social and political history of Ethiopian Somali refugees as background to understanding the effects of these circumstances on their status as political refugees.

I organized the literature review thematically, beginning with the historical and traditional background of Ethiopian Somali people in the Horn of Africa. Second, I describe the sources of political conflict influencing the refugees' life and living conditions. Lastly, I delved into the social background of Ethiopian Somali refugee in the context of adjusting to a new environment, including; changes and challenges to personal, ethnic and social identities; the process of acculturation; and the impact of psychological challenges on the refugee and

immigrant experience. As a preface to this material, in the next section, I provide definition of terms adopted in this study.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the sake of this study, these terms shall be thus defined:

***Adaptation:*** the socio-cultural and psychological (attitude and behavior) changes that result from acculturation (Beiser et al.1988).

***Acculturation:*** Process through which immigrants are expected to learn the cultural patterns of the country of immigration, e.g., its language, cultural values, and practices. Some observers criticize the concept for assuming that the receiving society is culturally homogenous and that immigrants must relinquish their own ethnic group culture to integrate successfully (Berry, 1997).

***Alien:*** Any person not a citizen or national of the United States (Adler, 1975).

***Assimilation:*** Incorporating immigrants and refugees into the receiving society through an often multi-generational process of adaptation. The initial formulation of assimilation posited that both immigrants and host society adapt to each other, but the term has come to be associated with immigrants' relinquishing their linguistic and cultural characteristics in order to become part of the economic and social structure of mainstream society (Floyd, 2003).

***Citizen:*** Person who owes allegiance to a nation state and is entitled to its protection and to exercise rights of membership, such as voting. Under U.S. law, citizens include persons born in the United States or its territories, certain persons born abroad to a U.S. citizen, and non-citizens who become citizens through naturalization (Lewis, 2004).

***Culture/Social Identity:*** An individual's identity as a multi-faceted human being. Identity is composed of other facets of social/cultural background. (Aspects include such things as language

preference, sexual orientation, age, gender, religion, social class, generation, and so on (Eriksen, 1993).

**First generation:** Immigrants who are born outside of the receiving country - e.g., who are foreign-born. [Although, children born abroad but brought to the receiving society before adolescence are sometimes treated as "second generation" in sociological studies because the immigrants' language proficiency, educational levels, and other characteristics resemble those of the second generation (Floyd, 2003).]

**Foreign-born:** The U. S. Census Bureau considers anyone not born a U.S. citizen to be foreign-born. The foreign-born include immigrants who have become citizens (through naturalization) or who have any of the variety of immigration statuses (e.g., legal permanent resident, refugees/asylees, temporary legal residents, or undocumented).

**Globalization:** Increased global interdependence among peoples and countries, globalization is characterized by increased international trade, investment, and migration as well as greater technological and cultural interchange. The first era of globalization occurred in the nineteenth century with rapid increases in international flows of goods, capital, and labor. After retrenchment during World War I and the Great Depression, the second era of globalization is considered to have begun with the rise of trade and other elements of international exchange after World War II (Spiegelberg, 1960).

**Ethnicity:** A group within a larger society which considers itself to be different or is considered by the majority group to be different because of its distinctive ancestry, culture, and customs. Ethnicity in a group generally becomes pronounced as a result of migration (forced or voluntary), and a group may only achieve the status of an ethnic association as a result of migration (Eriksen, 1993).

**Ethnic Identity:** The extent to which one identifies with a particular ethnic group(s). Refers to one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings,

and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership. The ethnic group tends to be one in which the individual claims heritage. Ethnic identity is separate from one's personal identity as an individual, although the two may reciprocally influence each other. 4 major components of ethnic identity: (Phinney, 1996).

**Immigrant:** A person who leaves his or her country to settle permanently in another country. In U.S. immigration law, immigrant refers to all aliens in the United States who have not been admitted under one of the law's nonimmigrant categories. In this report, "immigrant" is the general term used to describe persons born abroad who have come to settle in the United States, regardless of their immigration status or whether they have become U.S. citizens Pipher (2002)

**Inclusion:** Process by which immigrants become participants in particular sub-sectors of society, such as education, labor market, or political representation. Emphasizes active and conscious efforts by both public agencies and employers as well as immigrants themselves; meant to contrast with exclusion or social exclusion (Creswell, 1998).

**Integration:** A dynamic, two-way process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant, and cohesive communities. Emphasis on the two-way process of change by both immigrants and members of receiving society contrasts with alternative use of term "integration" to signify one-way process of adaptation by immigrants to fit in with a dominant culture (US Department of State, 2008).

**Migrant:** In the broadest sense, a person who leaves his or her country of origin to seek residence in another country. Often used in the United States to refer to migrant farmworkers and their families, who follow the seasonal harvest of crops for employment in agriculture (Pipher, 2002).

**Newcomer:** An immigrant in the initial years after arrival; in this publication often used interchangeably with immigrant (Adler, 1975).



**Phenomenology:** A qualitative research design that reveals how a particular phenomenon is experienced by a group of people (Creswell, 2007).

**Psychological adaptation:** The process of feeling comfortable, competent, valued and safe in a new culture, thereby reducing anxiety and emotional stress levels.

**Receiving country:** A country in which immigrants settle. Alternate terms include "receiving community," "host society," or "host community" (Berry, 1997).

**Refugee:** A person admitted to the United States because s/he is unable or unwilling to return to the country of nationality due to persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, membership in a social group, political opinion, or national origin. Refugees apply for admission at a facility overseas and may apply for permanent resident status one year after being granted admission. In this report, the more general term "immigrant" is used to encompass refugees unless the term "refugee" is more appropriate to a particular context (Gow 2004).

**Segmented Assimilation:** Concept developed by sociologists Alejandro Portes, Rubén Rumbaut, and Min Zhou in the 1990s to explain the varying patterns of assimilation experienced by members of different ethnic groups. Focuses on the second generation, and posits that while many immigrants will find different paths to mainstream success, others will find their pathways blocked by segmented labor markets and racial discrimination and experience negative assimilation (Appleton, 1983).

**Separation:** A situation wherein immigrants/refugees tend to isolate themselves within home-culture enclaves, thereby limiting adaptation to the new culture (Berry, 1980).

## **Historical, Political and Social Background of Ethiopian Somali Refugees**

In colonial and post-colonial times, citizens living in nation states in the Horn of Africa struggled with challenges to their individual and social identity due to two factors: members of several ethnic groups were forcefully put together without their consent by the colonialists; and traditional tribal identities were ignored when the nation states were formed after conquest, causing ethnic conflicts within various nation states (Lewis, 2004). Ioan Lewis, noted British anthropologist and renowned author regarding Somali affairs, describes nation states in Horn of Africa as “cultural and (ethnic) patchworks” (p.1).

These cultural and ethnic patchworks contributed to cultural conflict within nation states during post-colonial times. Political strife and civil war resulted from this conflict. Citizens living in war-torn countries as well as political refugees living in host countries suffered from these conflicts, experiencing considerable psychological stress. Political refugees, immigrating to host countries, brought these conflicts with them to their communities and host countries.

America served as a place of asylum for the Ethiopian Somali people. To develop an understanding of the specific issues that refugees face when adjusting to American culture, a complete examination of the history that caused them to become refugees must be described. An overview of the history of Ethiopian Somalis and their place within the wider conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia is necessary to understand how they came to be a people who were recently subjected to persecution.

Katherine Englund (2008) studied Ethiopian refugees in the United States, examining how cultural traditions dictated by history play a role in a group’s ability to adapt to a new environment, such as the U.S., that comes with a distinctively different cultural history. She refuted the idea that people are inextricably shaped by the different circumstances surrounding

them and instead argued that the international community cannot deliver proper services to refugees if it does not understand how their backgrounds influenced them, including the way they make sense of these experiences. By understanding the different contextual layers that impact Ethiopian Somalis both at home and abroad, the international community can play a significant role in alleviating the plight of this small and widely ignored ethnic group (Englund, 2008, p. 2).

The current conditions of Somalis who inhabited the Horn of Africa may be very problematic and confusing to people who do not understand how history shaped this ethnic group. While Somali people initially shared the same language, ethnic group, culture, and religion, they now live in five different countries. Various cultural, political, social, ethnic, and historical spheres all played roles in shaping both the Ethiopian Somali group identity and the personal identities of individual Somali people.

As an ethnic group largely believed to side with Somalia during the longest African wars in 1964 and 1977, the Ethiopian Somali people continue to grapple with their national identity today. External confusion persists about whether Ethiopian Somali are either Somali or Ethiopian; it remains difficult to place them into definitive nation-state categories. In fact, the Ethiopian Somali have been deeply influenced by the humanitarian and political crises in which they unwillingly found themselves throughout their history.

I begin this literature review with the role of pre-colonialism in the Horn of Africa. I describe the subjugation under which the Ethiopian Somali found themselves throughout Somali's tempestuous journey to nationhood as well as their uncomfortable political position, straddling the line between two countries, the border dilemma of the Horn of Africa.

## **The Traditional Somali History**

Long before nation states, members of various ethnic tribes lived nomadically in the region known as the Horn of Africa. The US State Department (2008) has maintained that “the Somali-populated region of the Horn of Africa stretches from the Gulf of Tadjoura in modern-day Djibouti through Dire Dawa, Ethiopia, and down to the coastal regions of southern Kenya. Unlike many countries in Africa, the Somali nation extends beyond its national borders” (p.1).

In its informational web site, the US State Department (2008) has also reported that Somali people, who are classified as Cushitic populations in the Horn of Africa, have an ancient history, as early as the seventh century A.D. They mingled with Arab and Persian traders and settled along the coast. Integration over the centuries led to the emergence of a Somali culture bound by common traditions, a single language, and the Islamic faith (p.1).

Until the 20th century the Somali, apart from the inhabitants of the coastal sultanates (such as Seylac and Mogadishu,) were not organized under a strong central rule like Western style nation states (Markus, 2007). European travelers exploring the region where the Somali lived found no centralized authority or nation state formation. Instead, they found Somali, who lived nomadically in the Horn of Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as “quarrelsome and freedom loving” (Markus, 2007). Some now refer to them as “the Irish of Horn of Africa” (Greenfield, 1994), having suffered many of the same indignities of prejudice, mistreatment and displacement. The leadership style in traditional Somali was different from the colonial way of organizing society. The elders played a major role in ruling the Somali people for centuries, but their power was not acquired in the linear form of voting or electing them to office.

The power of elders or Sultans depended to a large extent on their individual qualities, such as rhetorical skills and wealth; but their fellow countrymen were always ready to oppose domination, as older sources on Somali society reveal (Markus, 2007, p. 2).

Jama Mohamed (2007) has explained that traditional Somali politics and organizational systems were governed by “two dialectically-related principles: ‘tol iyo xeer’ kinship and social contracts” (p.126). Kinship was founded on the segmentary lineage system, under which people traced their heritage to common male ancestors. Consequently, the foundation of the kinship system served as a type of social contract or ‘xeer’, establishing the roles, duties and rights of people based on their gender and relationship to male descendents (p.126). The social contract played a major role in the way Somalis constructed their identity based on Somali tradition, and it established the way leaders managed their business and made administrative decisions. While he quoted the well versed anthropologist I. M. Lewis, Jama wrote:

“Power and decision making in traditional Somali society followed well established rule and virtues. “[The] leaders were the elders, which technically meant all adult males, since all adult males were classed as elders (oday, pl.odayaal). All men had the right to speak at the council (shir); they deliberate matters of common concern” (Lewis, 1961, p.196). In fact, “at the dia-paying moot as in the clan moot, all men are councilors, and all men are politicians (Lewis, 1961, p.198). However, “although all men were equal inside and outside the moot, not all men had the same level of influence and power” (Lewis, 1961, p. 3). For example, traditional male chiefs were in charge of business and political groups because of their shared ancestry and traditions as clan members.” (p. xx)

Living with Somali pastoral for many years, Lewis (1958) observed that “the segmentary lineage system had no ‘stable hierarchy’ of political or administrative offices.” This system of

clan government was not compatible with western models of governance, and, therefore, Somali leaders had opposed the nation state imposed by the colonialists.

Having lived with Somalis, participated in and studied their lifestyle, Lewis (1961) asserted that the leadership style of the Somali traditional system. He wrote that although each clan had its own Sultan, Somalis had leaders as well as political and judicial institutions. The leaders had no power of coercion, even when some carried impressive titles such as *Sheikh*, *Ugaas*, *Garaad* or *Sultan*, they had no more power than an elder (p. 206).

Jama (1999) wrote:

“... radical differences between leadership and kingship. Leadership (*riyasa*) was based on the voluntary loyalty of people to certain men because they admired certain qualities about them; such leaders, however, had no power of coercion (*qahr*) to exact loyalty. They had the symbols of power, respect, followers, ability to wage war and conclude peace, etc, but no titles. Kingship, in contrast, is based on titles acquired through conquest (*taqalub*) and coercion (*qahr*).” (p.244)

Furthermore, Lewis (1961) argued that Somali society had leadership but no kingship.

“Their leadership system had a clear public system of rules based on kinship, virtue and contract. Though all men were politicians by right, men had differences in status determined by wealth, poetic gift, political ability, talent for oratory, knowledge, piety, wisdom, hospitality, courage, tactical acumen in war and personal strength.” (p.196)

Moreover, Jama wrote that these virtues, so to speak, gave a person prestige and status in the society; except for wealth, none of these could be inherited.

Lewis insisted that the society had institutions with a clear public system of rules. The most important institutions were the *shir* (Political Council) and *xeerbeegti* (Law Council). In the

*shir* political issues were settled, and in the *xeerbeegti* legal disputes were mediated. While the political council was the key political institution in the country, it did not need a specific building in which to hold its meetings. The council could be held wherever it was convenient for the participants. Although there may have been “a great deal of argument and wrangling, all those present [were] expected to behave courteously and breaches of good manners [might] be punished” (Jama, 2007).

### **Colonialism in the Horn of Africa**

For many years, Somali society lived within the traditional system described above. However, the advent of colonialism was disastrous for the Somali nation: the colonists divided the Somali nation into five countries; they did not recognize the Somali way of life, its political system, religion, social contract, nor the psychological makeup of the indigenous people.

Ever since the Ethiopian empire gained control over the Somali Region in the Horn of Africa in 1897, 1947, and 1954, Martin Doornbos (1997) argues, the region has been “one of the most problematic examples of colonial partition” (p. 4). Historically, relations between the Ethiopian highland and its Somali periphery have been characterized by successive phases of Somali resistance to their highland rulers. This resistance partly manifested itself in the “pro-national” Dervish rebellion of Mohammed ‘Abdulla Hassan and culminated in large-scale modern warfare in the 1977, dubbed as the Western Somali war, producing deeply entrenched distrust between the Somalis and the highland settlers and administrators, and forcing thousands of refugees into Somalia, Djibouti and Kenya (p.490).

Since the incorporation of the Somali Region into the Ethiopian Empire, politics in the Ethiopian Somali Region have been fashioned by the region’s double identity, first as a peripheral part of the Ethiopian nation-state, and, second as a division within the larger Somali

political economy consisting of the former Somali Democratic Republic, Djibouti, north-east Kenya, and the Ethiopian Somali Region. These newly established borders harmed the Somali pastorals who have always followed the rains and taken their herds to the grazing and wells areas. In other words, nomads do not recognize borders and, thus, the nation state of Western style governance is alien to them.

Sidney Waldron and Naima Hasci (1994) wrote:

Nearly a century ago Lord Curzon anticipated the plight of Somali pastoralists in the Somali Region of Ethiopia in his poignant statement about frontiers being “the razor's edge on which hang suspended the modern issues of war or peace, of death or life to nations”.

Hasci (1994) wrote that since at least 1968 Somalia has questioned the legitimacy of borders as determined by the colonial powers. In particular, the problem of border communities, in a wider African context has been central to Somalia's foreign policy towards its neighbors in the Horn of Africa. The Somali unification issue dominated the country's foreign policy (Lewis, 1994).

Sidney (1994) wrote that in 1987 Laitin and Samatar give an account of the dynamic socio-economic relations across the Ethiopian-Somali border as an integrated ecological zone, which links pastoral land with the water sources. A different aspect of border communities was analyzed by Hasci. Hasci (1994) wrote that in the southeast of Ethiopia, the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) mounted very successful attacks against the Ethiopian military, and occupied much of the Ogaden land in the battle of 1977; however, the Soviets supported Ethiopia and drove back Somalis to Somalia. The result was that thousands of refugees fled to Djibouti, Somalia and Kenya.



After living in the refugee camps of Djibouti, Somalia and Kenya, the luckiest refugees moved to the US and other Western countries with the help of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Many refugees who have journeyed to settle in U.S. did so without realizing the challenges they would face adjusting to the new environment. These political refugees fleeing persecution and in fear of their lives have brought their stories to the new world.

### **Political Refugees in America**

The Ethiopian Somali refers to people of Somali ethnic descent who live in Diaspora. The majority of Ethiopian Somali Diaspora members have been forced to leave their homeland due to political repression with few exceptions; a smaller number of people emigrated in search of better opportunities. Many Ethiopian Somali face the condition of exile or what Edward Said calls “being somebody away from the place that he was born and belonged to” (2001, p2). In the words of Gow (2004), Ethiopian Somali’s experience can be described as, “loss, anguish, divided loyalties and the longing for cohesion and community feature in the lives of displaced people. In the host country, experiences of discrimination, exclusion and invisibility negatively constitute Diaspora consciousness” (p. 304).

The wider Ethiopian Somali community and the specific cultural and identity differences that they bring with them to resettlement in the U.S provide a human face to the structural and situational conflicts that they have been exposed to in their homeland. These conditions have affected a community of people worldwide. In other words, political refugees, immigrating to US and other Western countries, bring these conflicts with them to their new communities and host countries. By gaining a more in-depth background of the Ethiopian Somali’s struggles, identity formation, and the adjustment difficulties faced in resettlement, social service agencies might be

able to develop more appropriate policies to enable them to better serve and accompany this unique group of people through their transition.

The many poor and tired immigrant groups arriving on North America's shores every day are changing the composite experience of North Americans (Pipher, 2002). For example, Ethiopian Somali are not only poor, but they are Black and Muslim. In addition, Pipher focuses on the resettlement of various immigrant/refugee groups in many American cities. To depict the seriousness of the effort of resettlement of refugees, she points out that Lincoln, Nebraska is sometimes described, despite a biased perspective, as the "middle of nowhere." It has a sense of being the middle of everywhere, immigrant groups from around the world have come to town, making it a real part of the proverbial global village (Pipher, 2002). The same could be said about the Twin Cities in Minnesota where Somali immigrants/refugees specifically have been pouring in during the last two decades.

### *Ethnicity*

Ethnicity has been defined as a category of membership; that is an ascribed or self-ascribed device that socially locates an individual with reference to the social ascriptions of other persons (Eriksen, 1993). Further Thomas Erikson (1993) notes that ethnicity is an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction. It can thus also be defined as a social identity characterized by metaphoric or fictive kinship. In other words, it is an idea created in the mind based upon an individual's previous relationships with other ethnic groups.

Ethiopian Somali, marked by ethnic, racial and religious diversity distinct from the majority cultures of "host" people, face challenges in assimilating -- melting in American society

is very difficult. First, they are racially different from European immigrants who look like “Americans.” Second, they do not practice the dominant religion, leading to behaviors outside the established norm (i.e.: Somali women wear headscarves that make them stand out in contrast to other American women). Third, many Somali do not speak English fluently, or at all, which makes it difficult to interact with the American people.

Fredrik Barth (1969) in his introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* specifically defines an ethnic group as “a population which has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order” (p. 2). The interaction between members of groups, Ethiopian Somali and Americans, and their social relationship has an ethnic element when the cultural differences are set in the context of conflict. In fact when Somali people first arrived in the United States, citizens had little knowledge of, or experience, with the Somali culture or individuals, which resulted in conflicts in the school, workplace and public parks.

### *National Identity*

National identity is one often co-existing and overlapping with other social identities, including territorial, racial, religious, and gender identities. Ordering and integrating their different collective “selves” becomes the psychological task of individuals (Ashmore & Jussim, 1997). The United States as an immigrant nation has always faced the problem of coping with ethnic diversity (Citrin, 2001). The motto “e pluribus Unum” (Literally - from many One) expresses the desire of a strong sense of common American identity without indicating the proper balance between the national “one” and the ethnic “many.” Ethiopian Somali have brought with them social identities contrasting with the general motto of Americanness. Being Black, following Islamic religion, and living at the bottom of the economic ladder, Ethiopian

Somali ethnic people have a hard time adjusting to America life compared to the European immigrants.

There are conflicting views regarding whether strong ethnic identity will benefit the national identity or force minority ethnic people into balkanization and separation. Ethnic pride is regarded as a source of individual self-esteem among cultural minorities that contributes to the achievement of their group goals (Raz, 1994). On the contrary, the emphasis on ethnic distinctiveness (in group favoritism) weakens common bonds and intensifies group conflict (out group hostility), raising the specter of cultural and political balkanization (Miller, 1979). When ethnic distinctiveness is emphasized, the common bond between people is weakened and group conflict intensified.

The content of American identity involves a set of ideas and sentiments that form the conceptual framework of nationhood. At the cultural level, this refers to a particular representation of the nation indicating the subjective criteria for membership in the national community (Citrin, 2001). The minority ethnic group such as Ethiopian Somali emigrating to US has brought double identities: one is the traditional cultural system wherever they come from and the second one is the new identity once they arrive in America. These dual identities create conflict and represent barriers to adjusting in the new environment. As one Somali elder describes this condition, “Our mind is at home, but our body is in America.”

### **Refugee’s Acculturation in America**

Stressing order, integration, and stability, Evelyn Margot (2002) argued that culture is coherent, integrated, self-producing, and shared with a group member. Typical traits could be defined by lists of features, for example, language, religion, and gender. Before leaving their homeland, Ethiopian Somali arriving in the US shared such traits as: language dialects;

predominantly Muslim religion; and a cultural focus on community rather than individualism.

Margot (2002) has stated that culture could be explained as practices and beliefs as well as continuity and change. This is completely the opposite view of culture being a static.

Immigrants/refugees can retain some of their culture, but adjustment to the host country must be made. In other words, the concept of assimilation is paramount to adapting to the culture in America. This has created conflict and tensions for new immigrants.

### *Identity and Acculturation*

Identity includes personal elements such as one's name, social elements such as one's family and cultural referents such as one's ethnicity (Pederson, 1994). Identity as oneness or one true self, which people with a shared history and ancestry have in common. Identity is constantly recreated as people make sense of themselves and the world around them. In a way, identity is how we see ourselves at any moment and at the same time, identity may also be the name we give to the different ways we "position" ourselves within the lived experiences of the past (Hall, 1994).

Identity serves as a "reference" point for expressing ourselves, taking into account our and present past experience in the world. In the Optimal Theory Applied to Identity Development (OTAID), identity development is seen as a continuous interaction between individuals and their socio-cultural environment, with people moving from a segmented way of viewing the world to a more holistic worldview (Meyers, 1991). The OTAID model proposes seven phases of identity development. Phase zero (absence of conscious awareness) is characteristic of infants who have no sense of self as separate. People, who are in phase one (individuation) are more likely to ascribe to group stereotypes and identify with mainstream culture. People begin to experience feelings of alienation from mainstream society often as a

result of discrimination in phases two (dissonance) and move to phase three (immersion). As people identify with their subculture group, feelings of pride and a sense of belonging can occur in immersion. In phase four (internalization) people positively integrate their subgroup identity into their self-concept. As result of this, people become more accepting of others.

People in phase five (integration) recognize and embrace differences among all people and exhibit unconditional positive regard for themselves and others. Finally, people in phase six (transformation) experience a transformation by experiencing spiritual-material unity and a conscious recognition of the interrelatedness of life. Therefore, to people in the transformation phase, definition of self is more holistic (Meyers, 1991). When people move to a new country, they are likely to be distant from the people who are embracing new identity and thus their sense of self can be confused and changed. They experience cultural shock, a crisis of personality or identity that is a result of contacting with an alien culture and being away from all the familiar bases of one's self (Adler, 1975).

Such cultural shock has been posited to occur in five stages (Pederson, 1994). The first stage is called "honeymoon stage". A person in this stage is excited about the new environment and new experiences, but he/she has not really "left home" in terms of his/her real identity. The second stage begins when the person cannot ignore cultural differences anymore, and the person in this stage experiences isolation, inadequacy, and loss of self-esteem. In the third stage the person becomes angry and rejects the new culture to protect his/her self esteem. During the fourth stage the person begins to recognize similarities and differences between his/her native culture and the new culture. The person in this stage is socially and linguistically capable of dealing with the new situation and is more self-assured. Finally, the fifth stage ideally leads

toward a bicultural identity that includes competence in both the old and new setting (Pederson, 1994). As immigrants/ refugees go through and resolve their problems and crisis, they develop new identities and attempt to embrace both old and new selves (Adler, 1975).

Akhtar (1999) addressed four interconnected tracks of identity change, which happen to immigrants in the process of acculturation. The first track involves immigrants' feelings toward both their country of origin and a new culture. The second is when immigrants experience identity confusion caused by the distance between both their home country and new country and their native self-representation and newly emerging self-representation. Immigrants in the third track go through a mourning phase as a result of separation from their own culture before they can have meaningful lives in the present moment in their new country. Finally, in the fourth track, immigrants become absorbed in a new culture, which leads "mine" and "yours" attitudes to become "ours" attitudes.

Bi-dimensional framework of ethnic identity proposed a person's cultural orientation and one's identification with the dominant culture as two dimensions of ethnic identity (Berry, 1997). Berry (1997) said bicultural Asian Americans are the most well-adjusted; however, they are marginalized and the most at risk. Refugees and immigrants experience identity confusion as a result of moving to a new culture. They suddenly lose majority status and become minorities and need to go through modification of their identity. Stress accompanying this process may lead to various psychological problems.

#### *Acculturation and Mental Health*

Psychological adaptations to acculturation are considered to be a matter of learning a new behavioral repertoire that is appropriate for the new cultural context. Learning new behavioral repertoires requires change and may be accompanied by some moderate "cultural conflict,"

which may cause the individual to experience “acculturative stress” if they cannot easily change their behavior (Berry, 1997). Adaptation refers to changes that take place in individuals or groups in response to environmental demands. These adaptations can either occur immediately or be extended over the longer term. Short-term changes during acculturation are not always positive. Sometimes they are negative and disruptive in character. In addition, people who go through the acculturation process may experience a sense of alienation, which is defined as a sense of not belonging and not feeling welcome. “Alienation consists of a sense of powerlessness, purposelessness, conflict, a sense of social isolation, meaninglessness, and self-entrapment” (Bhugra & Bhui, 2001, p.2). However, for most acculturating individuals, after a long-term period of time, some long-term positive adaptation to the new cultural context usually takes place (Beiser et al, 1988).

According to Hovey and King’s study (1996), “acculturative stress was positively correlated with depression and suicidal ideation among immigrant and second-generation Somali adolescents.” Moyerman and Forman (1992) did a meta-analysis of literature on the relationship between acculturation and adjustment. The results indicate that stress and anxiety may be acute at the very beginning of the acculturation process for higher socioeconomic status African-Americans. However, as acculturation progresses, they may be inclined to feel less stress and anxiety. In addition, development of an ethnic support system enhances immigrants’ ability to cope with acculturative stress.

### **Summary**

A lot of studies have been written about adjustment and identity formation required to tackle the issues faced by immigrants/refugees in America. I conducted my review of literature,



locating studies related to the following topics: history, culture, political refugee and acculturation of immigrants. In general these studies show four strategies available to immigrants adapting to life in a new culture: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Floyd, 2003). Of these, integration is theoretically linked with the most positive psychological outcomes, whereas, marginalization is linked with the poorest.

While some studies describe the general stages of adaptation immigrants needed to adjust to an alien culture, I found no studies that also examined this adjustment in relation to their status as political refugees. This dual identity compounds the challenges in adaptation and integration of immigrants with any host culture. My study addresses this gap in the literature by seeking to learn how Ethiopian Somali immigrants make their adjustment to American culture as both political refugees and immigrants with ethnic, racial and religious diversity. In the next chapter, I describe the phenomenological qualitative method adopted for my study and provide details regarding the participants, data collection and analysis as well as theories used for analysis.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

I used qualitative research, adopting a phenomenological study approach, to examine the “lived experiences” of Ethiopian Somali refugees during the flight from their homeland, journey to a safe place of refuge, and eventual adjustment to American life (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007). I chose qualitative research because it allowed first hand exploration about these experiences as both political refugees and also immigrants adapting to life in the United States. The hope and purpose in conducting this study was to investigate, document and explain the experience of a neglected segment of American society, namely my fellow Ethiopian Somali refugees. I wished to learn what it means to be a political refugee and an immigrant directly from the perspective of individuals, like me, who have experienced these traumatic life events. Being both political refugees and immigrants caused these Ethiopian Somalis to construct a double identity in their “lived experiences.” I wish to influence the way policy makers view the challenges and needs of individuals who identify themselves as both immigrants and political refugees - helping these leaders gain an awareness of how being a political refugee complicates the immigrant experience.

My idea for conducting this study came from experience as a political refugee and immigrant. My story and the story of fellow countrymen largely remain untold. If Ethiopian Somalis are viewed only as immigrants, not as immigrants *and* political refugees, the traumas they experienced during war, the effects of these traumas, and their concerns regarding the safety of their family and friends still living in their native country become invisible. To fully understand this experience in the context of identity construction, their stories and reflections

regarding this experience must be told from their perspective. This involved using qualitative approaches.

My participant sample, described more fully later in this chapter, included only male Ethiopian Somali refugees and immigrants because my experience as a member of this group allowed me to gain access to participants, and, I wished to focus on the male experience of war as political refugees and later immigrants. In Ethiopian Somali tradition, the males were to liberate the land, look after their families and face any threats from outside of their community. This was not to say that females did not look after their families, but I chose to interview the males tasked by tradition with protecting their tribes in the context of war. Because of these traditions, males of certain tribes were targeted during civil war and systematically killed to prevent their opposition to the government.

While women also suffered, I chose not to interview women because of my limited opportunities to access them. Further, my desire was to specifically understand the conflicts experienced by men as they attempted to carry out their roles following the Somali tribal tradition. Ethiopian Somali women seem to have settled in to staying and appear comparatively well adjusted to a new life in North America, as the males express thoughts about going back home and liberating their homeland. This makes the males caught up between two different worlds, North American life style and the life that they lived in Ethiopia.

Qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). My study provided an opportunity to learn about the experience of participants as political refugees and immigrants. This included a description of their experiences as well as

nterpretations of these events and the effects on their past and present stories. I conducted face-to-face interviews with them instead of testing some hypotheses through a quantitative measure.

Qualitative research begins with “assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems [which] inquired into the meaning individuals or groups ascribed to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2007, p.37). My worldview as a researcher includes a basic set of beliefs and assumptions that guided inquiries of the Ethiopian Somali refugees. In this case, the work started with assumptions regarding the nature of reality in their past lived experiences, which influenced: how I gained knowledge about what I knew about them (I interviewed the Ethiopian Somali refugees and collected my own experiences); the role of values (I acknowledged the traditional tribal system of Ethiopian Somali refugees before they arrived in America); the process of research ( I used qualitative methods to guide my investigation of their “thick description” of stories) (Creswell, 2007); and the language of research ( I interviewed the participants in their own native language and translated the interview into English to describe the meaning of their stories; to reflect the authenticity of their stories I added my words in brackets only when an explanation was needed).

I pursued a qualitative method of research because it was “Interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2). This allowed me to talk to people, listen to different points of views, and understand the meaning participants attributed to their experiences as they lived in their countries, fled their homeland, experienced the ordeal of refugee camps and immigrated to North America. After describing phenomenology research as my preferred qualitative research method, I will discuss the research sample, methods of data gathering and analysis, and ethical and confidentiality issues.

## Phenomenology Research

A phenomenological approach seemed to get as close as possible to the essence of the experience being studied while displaying the stories of those being researched in their own voices. In addition, I engaged in self-reflection and documentation of my own memories that required taking a position on intensely reflexive subjectivity in order to appropriately capture emotions and experiences (Grbich, 2007). Carol Grbich (2007) defined a phenomenology approach as follows:

“Phenomenology study was an approach to inquiry that attempted to describe the hidden meaning of individuals of their lived experiences and the essence of experiences together with how interviewees made sense of these. Essences were phenomenon that did not necessarily exist in time and space like facts (quantitative) did, but could be known through essential or imaginative intuition involving interaction between researcher and respondents (qualitative).” (p.84)

The phenomenology premise allows the opportunity to describe real direct experiences of Ethiopian Somali refugees as they lived in their homeland, fled their country, went through refugee life, and arrived in North America. I met with the participants, listened to their stories, and discussed the events that led to their uprooting and exposure to trauma and other persecution before arrival in North America. I also analyzed the experiences of these informants in order to understand the essence of the participants’ perceptions. Besides interviewing Ethiopian Somali refugees, I documented my own lived experiences as a refugee as part of my data collection. Marshall & Rossman (2006) called this approach to qualitative research inquiry “pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people” (p. 2).

Using a phenomenology approach, I analyzed, combined and reduced the data gathered from the shared experiences of informants (refugees/immigrants) to a central meaning or “essence” of their experience. In reflecting upon this dilemma in his apt description, Karin Klende (2008) wrote:

“No position should be preconceived in whatsoever must be undertaken... nothing is determined in advance before we meet the participants. The researcher remains present and focuses on his own consciousness by returning to whatever is there in...memory, perception, ideology, judgment, and feeling, whatever is actually there.” (p234)

In short, this study conveys how those refugees/immigrants constructed meaning of their reality as result of challenges to their identity at home and abroad. First, the study addresses how the Ethiopian Somali males were persecuted politically separated culturally and ethnically, forced to be political refugees in Horn of Africa. Second, I examine how post-September 11 demonization of immigrants, predated September 11 economic marginalization, past trauma of political persecution and language barrier, paradoxically, reinforced Ethiopian Somali male’s alienation in the host country, the United States of America.

My own story included in the research provides a more detailed account to provide deeper context about the experience of refugee life and the continuous struggle to form and maintain an identity during acculturation and global events. Because I live in this same world as a refugee and immigrant, my background offers access to participants and establishes trust and understanding of their experiences unavailable to most other researchers.

## **Participant Selection Strategies**

### *Sample Selection*

The sample of my study consisted of 10 Ethiopian Somali males. The inclusion criteria for this study were: (1) all participants had to be Ethiopian Somali males presently living in North America (2) they identified themselves as refugees/immigrants who had been forced to flee from Ethiopia due to fear of persecution, and (3) they had experienced living in refugee camps in the Horn of Africa before they immigrated to North America. A critical issue in participant identification was to make sure that members of the subject pool had experienced the same phenomenon of concern (Creswell, 1998). The inclusion of the above criteria ensured these males had experienced similar adjustments as political refugees at home and abroad, and had lived through similar social changes within the United States. By requiring that these experiences occurred during their adulthood, I obtained consistency in timing of “lived experiences” and its effect on dual identity. Based on population estimates from the 2004 census, there are approximately 300,000 Ethiopian refugees/immigrants in North America. I recruited participants from North American cities particularly those in the Midwest where the largest Somali refugees/immigrants now live. In the following table (using pseudonyms), the population of the study is described biographically as to: gender, age, time spent in refugee camp, year entering in U.S, martial status, employment and religion.

<b>Participant Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Description of the Participants (gender, age, time in refugee camp, year entering the US, martial status, employment and religion )</b>
“Guled Mustapha”	Biologically male, identifies Somali or Ethiopian Somali, 46 years old, is American citizen, he spent six years in the refugees camps and arrived in American in 1986, lives with his family, been in partnered relationship for ten years, four children, associate degree, currently a college student in the night, reports an income between \$15,000-\$24,999, work as clerk in the Office of Translation in Minneapolis, religion affiliation Muslim, fled from his country 1978.
“Awale Gedi”	Biologically male, identifies as Ethiopian Somali, 48 years old, he lived in the refugee camp for seven years and arrived in America in 1988, he is permanent resident, he lives with his wife and seven children, lives in small city, college certificate in technician, full-time electronic industry, reports an income between \$25,000-\$30,000, religion affiliation Muslim, fled from his country in 1977.
“Kennided Ali”	Biologically male, identifies as Ethiopian Somali, 44 years old, he lived in the refugees for eight years and arrived in America in 1986, he is an American citizen, he engaged, lives with partner, no children, lives in large city, bachelor’s degree, currently a full-time graduate student, reports an income between \$35,000-\$44,000, Roman Catholic (the only Christian person in the groups) and fled from his country 1978.
“Hersi Gawdan”	Biologically male, identifies as Ethiopian Somali, 55 years old, he lived in refugee camps for six years and arrived in America 1987; he is American citizen ; he lives with his wife, nine children, lives in big city, high school certificate , currently a full-time taxi driver, reports an income unknown, Muslim and fled from his country in 1978.



<p>“Guelle Hassen”</p>	<p>Biologically male, identifies Ethiopian Somali, 52 years old, he lived in the refugee camps for nine years and arrived in America in 1985, he is American citizen; he lives with wife and adult children, legally married for 30 years, lives in large city, graduate or professional degree, full-time financial accountant, reports an income of \$35,000-\$45,999, Muslim, and fled from his country in 1977.</p>
<p>“Awale Gedi”</p>	<p>Biologically male, identifies as Ethiopian Somali (preferred to be called Somali), 54 years old, he lived in refugee camps for seven years and arrived in America in 1986, he is an American citizen; he lives with his wife and five adult children, legally married for 25 years, lives in large city, graduate or professional degree, full-time teacher, reports an income of \$32,000-\$45,999, Muslim and from his country in 1977.</p>
<p>“Waberi Siad”</p>	<p>Biologically male, identifies as Ethiopian Somali, 45 years old, he lived in the refugee camps for eight years and arrived in America in 1987, he is American citizen; he lives with his wife and seven children, legally married for 20 years, lives in large city, Bachelor degree, full-time employed in the firm, Muslim and fled from his country in 1978.</p>
<p>“Samatar Ahmed”</p>	<p>Biologically male, identifies as Ethiopian Somali, 49 years old, he lived in the refugee camps for eight years and arrived in America in 1988 in America, he is permanent resident; he lives with his wife and mother and four children, legally married for 26 years, lives in large city, no education background, full-time employed in factory, Muslim, and fled from Ethiopia in 1977.</p>
<p>“Ahmed Mohamed”</p>	<p>Biologically male, identifies as Ethiopian Somali, 48 years old, he lived in the refugee camps for eight years and arrived in America in 1985; he is an American citizen, he lives with his wife and child, legally married for 21 years, eight children, lives in large city, BS degree in electronic, full-time employed in a company that makes battery, Muslim, fled from his country in 1977.</p>
<p>“Roble Farah”</p>	<p>Biologically male, identifies as Ethiopian Somali, 47 years old, he lived in the refugee</p>

	camps for eight years and arrived in America in 1987; he is an American citizen; he lives with wife and child, legally married for 24 years, six children, lives in small city, graduate in economics, full-time employed in the Anoka, Muslim, fled from his country 1977.
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Similar biographical information on me is also appropriate. I was born in Ethiopia in 1961. After living in Ethiopia until the age of fifteen years, I was forced to leave my country under the same circumstances as my participants. I was identified as Ethiopian Somali, and lived in the refugee camps for five years and arrived in America in 1988. Now, as an American citizen, I live with my wife of 24 years in large Midwestern city with our two sons. Since leaving Africa, I have earned BS degree in engineering, and Masters degree in computer science, and am employed in a medical device company.

*Sample Size*

My sample size is consistent with sample selection and analysis suggested by Englund (2008), who wrote that prior studies, observations, and empirical knowledge drive sample size selection; the adequate sample size was estimated 10 to 15. Englund (2008) reached saturation of data using a similar design with Eritrea refugees in Boston, after six intensive interviews. In this study of refugees of East Africa, Englund confirmed that the participants were very eager to tell the story of their lives at great length and detail. I found this to be true with the Ethiopian Somali refugees who were eager to meet with a person who listened to their stories. It might be considered part of psychological healing to tell their traumatic stories to one who would listen. In the traditional system of Horn of African people, oral healing was a kind of survival mode. That was why the Ethiopian Somali refugees spoke at length during the interviews.

While Englund learned a good deal from the neglected refugee populations researched, her nationality and gender limited her potential data gathering. As a Somali Ethiopian native person who did go through the same experience and understood the culture and history of the

participants, I was positioned to undertake a more in-depth data gathering. I knew the psychological make-up of the study group intimately and was able to create a culturally appropriate atmosphere during the interviews, such as creating an imaginary traditional gathering of male Somali Ethiopians and speaking their language in order to access rich data.

In addition, as a Somali Ethiopian, I had more tools to reveal authentic stories. In other words, I had unique insights to engage and reveal authentic stories of the participants. First, I am of the same gender and have a similar culture. Second, I went through some of the same experiences and therefore understood the psychological elements involved which helped me to dig more into their feelings and anxiety.

Subsequently, I estimated that no more than 10 males were needed for this study, knowing that sampling continued until saturation was reached, the data was complete and minority representation was adequate. Some scholars stated that the researcher will know that saturation has been reached when each additional interviewee added little to nothing to what had already been learned (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In addition, it was suggested that given multiple interviews combined with observations, a large amount of data may be collected without need for a larger sample if the participants talk at length about their experiences (Morse, 2000).

### *Recruitment*

The recruitment was done through personal friendships and other relationships that I had with Somali and Ethiopian community members in North America. During my sojourn in the refugee camp, I worked in the United Nations as a clerk to translate, interview, and document refugees' biographies and personalized stories. This gave me a lot of opportunity to know many Ethiopian Somalis males who eventually lived in North America. I met and recruited Ethiopian refugees who socialized in the coffee shop and Somali Mall in a Midwestern metropolitan community which has one of the largest ethnic Somali, Ethiopian and other African refugees/immigrants population.

Several social agencies providing services to the new arrivals of East African immigrants (such as schools, churches, mosques and other individual centers) helped me to contact and identify males who received services from these organizations and met the inclusion criteria. These agencies distributed a letter regarding the study to men that fit the criteria and might be interested in participating in the research. Whenever someone agreed to participate in the research, I responded with a letter of consent, and followed up with the time and place of the interview. In other words, prior to the meeting, a demographic information sheet was mailed to the participant to complete. This part of the process was very hard because the refugees/immigrants were still thinking in the mindset of homeland and were not punctual. Sometimes they agreed on the phone and then, did not show up or cancelled the interview at the last minute. Several times, I managed to reschedule the interview to accommodate the participant.

To honor the IRB agreement (Appendix B), I acknowledged, accommodated and respected their worries related to September 11 and the trauma that they faced before they arrived in North America. I explained the study in detail and gave all the instructions that existed in the IRB to those who showed up for the interview.

Prior to conducting the interview, I read all the questions to them to set expectations and minimize reasons to object in the middle of the interview. Most interviews took place in the participant's preferred place: a school; library; coffee shop; mosque; or church. Although multiple interviews were conducted, attrition was not a problem because the interviews were conducted over a short period of time. In interviewing the participants, I allowed each to lead the interview naturally evoke their authentic stories. This process required a lot of listening and patience on my part because some of them talked at length and diverged from the core question. This tendency may stem from the oral society in which the Ethiopian Somali people were raised, where community members would gather under a tree to talk for hours, to sort out problems, to settle disputes and to heal grievances. The reason many Somalis gather in front of the Coffee Shop is to imitate the old traditions of gathering under a tree.

During the interviews I had to accommodate and take into account my participants' traumatic experiences. I needed to be sensitive and stop the interviews if they preferred to do so. Sometimes, I had to repeat and rephrase questions as the interview required. As a researcher, I consciously refrained from meddling in their stories, allowing their genuine and sincere voices to come through the narration. Moreover, I had to call back some of the participants to complete the missing parts of their stories, a time consuming process.

### **Data Management Strategies**

#### *Modes of Data Collection*

An underlying premise of phenomenology is that people try to make meaning of their experience and the meaning made is contained in their stories (Kahn, 2000). Consequently, the aim of my interviews was to bring out stories about the participants' lives. Since this was a study of the changes associated with dual identity and subsequent adjustment, a current and a retrospective approach was taken. I recorded, transcribed and analyzed all of the interviews. Consistent with phenomenology, I completed three audio taped interviews with each participant following the recommendation that multiple interviews will help gain the trust of participants so that they engage in open discussion (Steeves, 2000).

After the first interview, I reviewed and analyzed the audio tape to clarify comments and identify relevant themes for the next interview. I scheduled the next interview within two to four weeks of the prior interview unless the participant needed more time. This gave me time to reflect upon the stories. If the participants became tired or reflected an emotional stress during the course of an interview, I stopped the interview and rescheduled it at their convenience. In addition, I re-interviewed several of them to gain the missing parts of their stories. Some of them left the setting in the middle of the interview and had to reschedule in order to complete the task. Some of the participants did not show up for the rescheduled time and place. This was partly due to the trauma that they went through when they lived in Ethiopia, fled from their country,

sojourned in the refugee camps and lived in North America. To accommodate participants exhibiting signs of distress, I did stop interviews when occasionally and always made sure to respect their feelings. Sometimes, I allowed the interviewees to talk about a topic that was not related to the study until they felt better. This kind of accommodation is considered a traditional healing in Somali oral society. This even involved hugging them to help create a sense of tribal solidarity that they were not alone in North America.

There were at least three interviews for each participant, taking 45 minutes to one hour per interview on average. I used the final interview to validate the data heard during previous interviews.

### *Interview Questions*

To answer the research questions, personal stories were sought regarding: individual relationships; personal agency; the timing of the events in their life; and the social-historical events grounded in the “lived experiences” of adjustment. For instance, the participants told me stories of refugees’ lives and adjustment that precipitated when asked about their life as a young adult. This was considered in relation to the social and historical knowledge of dual identity for persons with refugee background, which indicated that the majority of males with refugee experiences have lost everything prior to fleeing their homeland and often placed into lower bottom of economic, historical and political situations in the host country (Englund, 2008). Therefore, the type of adjustment, as well as the political refugee status with respect to dual identity, was explored further.

Interestingly, in a prior study investigating the meaning of identity for refugees with adjustment, trust was found to provide independence, and it balanced the dependence associated with “lived experiences” (Koch, 1995). This means that feelings of personal agency may create a space of independence to explore the meaning of identity in the context of their past lived experiences. Moreover, the foundations of knowledge that the method of phenomenology upheld

should be grounded in reality as it could be consciously analyzed and interpreted (Grbich, 2007). Persons with background as refugees adjusted to a new environment by developing skills for negotiating, accommodating and becoming more assertive after the initial conflict of trauma's event passes (Conyers, et al., 1998). Based on these points of knowledge, I asked about the nature of participant relationships with others during interviews.

The timing of the adjustment, the social and historical context of the "lived experiences," conflicts and adjustment concerns, their individual perceptions of agency and the relationships that surrounded their new environment all contributed to the meaning of participant identities. By using life course phenomenon to guide the interviews and analysis, I undertook the study with the assumption that the participants were able to state what was meaningful to them and rich descriptions of these events or objects would develop (Creswell, 2007). This permitted me to explore participant experiences in depth and avoid identifying superficial themes that did not situate the events in their life course. The interview guide presented in Appendix A offered some questions to ensure important topics would be explored.

### **Modes of Data Analysis**

#### *Data Collection and Organization*

The research began with full description of my own experience with phenomenon to be examined; then moved to engage in data collection through in-depth interviewing refugees. Grbich (2007) confirmed that interviewing with those who have first hand experiences, but in a non-structured method to follow the initial responses to open-ended questions led the researcher and the interviewee in the direction of the participants' experiences of interest (p.88). To seek clarification of the issues described by the participants, I had to interview Ethiopian Somali males in several stages. The beginning of the first interview focused on becoming familiar with their lives in general, and established rapport with the participants. In this interview, I introduced myself and paid attention to the feeling and overall thinking of the interviewee, whether he was

ready to be engaged in an in-depth interview or not. In short, I made sure he was mentally ready to engage and share his past experiences which was full of traumatic experiences and persecution.

The primary reason that I undertook several interviews was to clarify data provided in the first interview and to meet the methodological criteria of this research approach. It also created a more cordial atmosphere to have a long interview and dialogue with the participants. In the follow up interview, I collected the bulk of useful data and gained clarification.

The follow up interview also enabled the participants to further disclose their private thoughts and feelings. Ethiopian Somali refugees had to go through the process of easing and accommodating their past feelings from traumatic experiences. At this stage of the interview, the discussion focused on the topic. This was where many of the important themes emerged in the study. Allowing sufficient time for the immigrant/refugee participants became critical, because they had gone through hardships of persecution and experienced trauma which were time consuming to recount.

The final interview allowed the respondents to confirm and clarify a summary of the overall interviews. I took notes during the interviews and also observed and took field notes about the interactions and customs of Ethiopian Somali males in public meeting places.

After the interviews, I began transcribing the audiotapes as soon as possible. Next, I checked the data for accuracy by listening and comparing it to the transcribed notes. I analyzed the data using concepts associated with phenomenology. I stored each transcribed audiotape and notes in a locked filed cabinet until my study was completed. I plan to destroy all participant documents two years after the date of IRB approval or completion of my study (no later than May, 2011). Transcribed notes and demographic profiles were kept within a locked cabinet at all times except when they were being analyzed.



### *Data Analysis*

The method of phenomenology focuses on human meaning making through individual expression. This required documenting the participant's voice and transcription into written text. In this important process, understanding meaning beyond rational and logical analysis of written text was the primary objective. The participants were people of an oral society that required paying attention to the flow of conversation in a reiterated pattern. In other words, the interview was not in a straight forward linear Western style, but a spontaneous and sometimes chaotic pastoral style of Somali society. This required analysis to occur within the phenomenology circle. There is no specified starting point or simple elements that must be present in order for understanding to occur. According to Polkinghorne, a mental, integrative process bring in the whole, then the parts in a continual movement back and forth, and the understanding comes in an unspecified, tacit sense (Polkinghorne, 1983).

Data analysis continued in the "substituted field" of the coffee shop, Somali Mall and other sites where refugees gathered to create a semblance setting of lived experiences of Ethiopian Somali males. This added to my interpretation of the experiences of Somali males. Field notes were also incorporated into the analysis process.

After I transcribed the data and checked it for accuracy, I reread them many times. This immersion within the data with reading and rereading helped to create initial interpretations, which I entered into field notes for analysis. This continued before and after each interview. This indicated a cyclical interpretation of the meaning of the experience consistent with the phenomenology circle. I used thematic analysis to answer the specific aims of my study based upon the recommendations of Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves (2000). The text was read and reread to verify if it was representative of the experience. The transcripts were read line-by-line and coded

for specific phrases that indicated a salient aspect of the experience. The thematic analysis was based upon the following steps, but in a non-linear fashion:

1. Interview sections were grouped based upon adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood and later adulthood.
2. Line-by-line coding was used and phrases were labeled with code names. These were small pieces of information that relate their perceptions of human agency, relationships, timing of events and events in time and place.
3. Like code names from each area of the paradigm were placed side-by-side for further analysis and rules made as to how they relate before identifying a category.
4. Categories were placed together for further analysis to discover the complex interrelations of the content drawn out from each element of the paradigm and rules were made as to how they interrelate and then labeled themes.

After the basic analysis, a description of the major themes and their meaning will be presented as findings in my study.

### **Confidentiality**

The proposal was sent to the Department of Leadership, Policy and Administration (LPA) of the School of Education and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of St. Thomas. No informants were involved in the study prior to the completion of the LPA and IRB review. Approximately 10 males, who have lived as immigrants/refugees from 25 to 65 years of age, were included. All participants were cognitively able to consent to participate in this research. No participant was excluded based upon clan, region or religion.

No major risks were anticipated for participants in this study. Inconvenience was reduced by allowing the participants to arrange the time and place of the interviews. They also terminated the interviews at any time and subsequently, rescheduled or dropped themselves from the study without explanation. Each participant was informed at each interview session that they could refuse to answer any question, refuse to talk about any topic or end the interview. My dissertation chair reviewed data generation techniques, procedures, and data analysis, which included confirming or disconfirming emergent themes, and provided editing suggestions for the

final research report. All responses from interviews used verbatim in this dissertation have been attributed to a pseudonym to protect the identity of the participant.

### **Validity**

To insure credibility of my findings, and to minimize possible distortions that may result from my presence, I sustained engagement with the research participants to the point of data saturation, all the while using the phenomenology process of recursive examination of research data, as well as recording my interviews and observations in field notes. Lincoln and Guba (1985) utilized the term “prolonged engagement” (p. 301) to address this aspect of rigor. To address possible distortions that could arise from my involvement with the research participants, I utilized my advisor and a reflexive journal to record thoughts, decisions, questions and insights related to the research, while continuously attempting to be aware of the potential for bias.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: BECOMING A POLITICAL REFUGEE**

I explored the experience of Ethiopian Somali males negotiating multiple identities as a result of their experiences as: tribal members oppressed by colonial powers; victims traumatized by war; political refugees fleeing their native country; and immigrants living in a foreign country. Because ethnic and political wars existed in Ethiopia and threatened the core identities of tribal members engaged in conflict, Ethiopian political refugees experienced crisis in all aspects of their lives: first as tribal members, victims and combatants who struggled in ethnic and political wars in their home country, and later, as aliens “at war” with the cultures and traditions in their host country.

I designed this study to hear the stories of Ethiopian Somali refugees who experienced conflict, civil war, crisis and resettlement, and approached the work as a member of the refugee population community. The experience as a refugee opened my eyes to the problems associated with maintaining a sense of self during wartime and resettlement. I begin with a description of my refugee experience fleeing Ethiopia, using my story to introduce and provide important background information regarding the refugee experience. After sharing my story, I then describe and analyze the experience of other refugees who met the challenges associated with fleeing their country.

### **Experiences in Ethiopia**

I grew up in Dire Dawa, a city located in the southern part of Ethiopia. The city is considered the heart of Ethiopian industry due to a railway connecting Djibouti and the capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. The second most populated city besides the capital of Ethiopia, Dire Dawa is mainly inhabited by ethnic Somalis. I used to wonder why the city was ruled from Addis

Ababa, which is situated two hundred miles from Dire Dawa. I later discovered the central government in Addis Ababa did not have a single member of my Somali ethnic group in the administration. This lack of representation caused misunderstandings in communication, creating conflict between the nation and nationalities such as Somali and the dominating Amhara. The administrators of Dire Dawa, nominated by Addis (members of Amhara), lacked the ability to rule the subjected Somali people in terms of language, culture, religion and social values. In protest ethnic Somalis kept their own language and traditions by enrolling their children in private schools to oppose the central government, resisting their cultural and political dominance

In the Somali region, several public schools and two private ones were established. One of the private schools adopted French as the primary language of the school. Because my father was a conductor of the train and the administrators of the railway communicated in French, my parents decided to send my brother and me to the private school, Alliance Francaise so that we might get jobs in the railway. The wives of the railway administrators taught French at the school, and this close connection between the school and railway was not lost on my parents. Those who ran the train communicated in the French language and my parents were planning my future career.

French Catholics from Canada and France managed the two private schools in Dire Dawa. Ninety percent of the students were ethnically Somalis. We were taught all subjects in French as a means to oppose the regime in Addis. In addition, when the students finished their study, they often immigrated to Djibouti, a former French colony largely inhabited by ethnic Somali.

My mother did not speak Amharic and my father had hardly ever communicated in the official language of Ethiopia. My mother disliked it when we spoke in Amharic. When my father was at home, some of my friends from other ethnic groups visited our house and they were not

allowed to speak in Amharic, causing tension between my friends and my family. My family did not listen to Ethiopian radio, but instead listened to programs broadcasting in the Somali language and originating from Hargiesa, Djibouti or Mogadishu. Ironically Somalis did not have a radio station in Dire Dawa, let alone television programs in the Somali language.

My grandmother and parents told me many horrible stories related to the language, religion and social problems they faced due to their second-class status and lack of power in Dire Dawa. Frequent clashes with regard to language, religion and history existed in the city of my childhood. For example, my cousin moved from a rural area to the city and was arrested simply because he did not speak Amharic. The police did not understand Somali language and a miscommunication caused his arrest.

Police officers, army personnel and public services providers were mainly dominated by ethnic groups who moved from the north of Ethiopia to the city of Dire Dawa. We did not see any Somalis working in the public institutions. The services were provided in the language of Amharic, creating a lot of problems among the northern (settlers) and the indigenous Somali. During my teenage years, the city of Dire Dawa looked more like an isolated colony located in a foreign country. Daily transactions and interactions with public institutions and government agents were alien to Somalis who lived in the city. Service providers needed interpreters to communicate with Somalis.

The iron fist ruling style of the central government from the north was clearly omnipresent in the daily life of the tribal Somali people. For instance, many Somalis, frequently arrested for various reasons, did not know the verdict delivered in the court because the judge, lawyer and the police spoke in Amharic. Our relatives coming from the rural area were not considered Ethiopian; they were called “Sergo Gab,” meaning intruders. Many pastoral Somali

arriving from the rural areas were arrested every day. My parents had to bribe the police to obtain their release.

In general, Somalis suspected of supporting the Western Somali Liberation Front, a rebel group resisting the central government, were apprehended without trial and imprisoned or executed in broad daylight. Many relatives experienced persecution and loss of their freedom or life due to oppression and miscommunication. For example, I witnessed an arrest of a pastoral Somali person because he did not know how to communicate with the police. The police did not understand one word of Somali language, and were undoubtedly also ignorant of Somali culture and religious beliefs.

In 1972, my father was arrested by the government and jailed for one year. He was arrested and tried by the government because he was found carrying Somali shillings after he was searched on the train, doing his work as a conductor. The judge said that he collaborated with the rebels and passed Somali shillings to support the rebels. During this time, Somalis in Ethiopia were not allowed to have Somali shillings only Ethiopian birr. However, some Somalis smuggled Somali shillings and used them for transaction in the rural areas. My father helped other fellow Somalis to smuggle Somali shillings and sympathized with the rebels. Smuggling Somali shillings was viewed as act of opposing the regime of Addis Ababa. In addition, my father and his generation supported the rebel desire to liberate the Somali region from Ethiopian's occupation and smuggled money and weapons in order to be part of the struggle.

Things went from bad to worse when the Western Somali Liberation Fronts intensified the fighting in 1977. I was living in Dire Dawa and found myself trapped in the middle of civil war when I was fifteen years old. The pastoral Somalis who brought milk to sell in the city told us the rebels had liberated land from Ethiopian soldiers in the rural area. The rebel troops arrived

at the outskirts of Dire Dawa around 11: 00 a.m. in July 1977. Many residents stayed calm because the rebels had considerable support in the city. As the rebels entered the city, people assumed the Ethiopian military soldiers would flee.

I saw wounded government soldiers walking toward the north part of the city, using a road left open by rebel forces. The rebels appeared to have liberated the entire city from the control of Ethiopian troops. Government forces, wounded, thirsty and desperate from battle moved to this leeway for a few hours and the rebels followed them. However, this victory lasted only a few hours.

By 6.00 p.m. helicopters overhead bombed the city, while soldiers fought in hand-to-hand combat in the streets with rebel forces. Ethiopian government forces, supported by pilots from Russia, Cuba and Eastern Germany, bombed the city without taking into consideration whether the civilians had left the city or not. For the first time in my short life, I felt the Ethiopian soldiers were after the land not the well being of the people. They shelled the city indiscriminately, killing and massacring hundreds of civilians.

### **Daily Struggles, Ethnic Clashes and the Onset of Civil War**

Daily struggles with discrimination and oppression, ethnic clashes between ethnic Somalis and government authorities and the onset of civil war caused the participants in my study to leave or flee Ethiopia during a period of intense conflict in the 1970s. As in most conflicts, the process started with the struggle to survive in communities where ethnic Somali people experienced discrimination, oppression and persecution. All participants experienced a conflict with the dominant political power or central authority in Ethiopia for a variety of reasons. These included (1) the daily experience of ethnic discrimination, oppression and conflict of



Somalis as members of a minority group based on regional, ethnic and cultural differences and (2) the onset of civil war between rebel forces and the central government

*The Daily Struggle*

All participants described ethnic discrimination and conflict as important factors in their decision to leave or flee from Ethiopia. As ethnic Somalis, participants noted experiencing and witnessing frequent acts of discrimination from government officials due to their minority status in Ethiopia. Often Somalis were not even considered citizens in their own country. Whether language barriers or cultural and religious differences caused the conflict, the ethnic Somalis often felt like they were treated as unwelcome foreigners instead of citizens living in their own country.

Guled Mustapha said he never felt that he was Ethiopian because his family members did not belong to the same ethnic group as the ruling Amhara. The police and teachers harassed him, giving him a feeling of living in an alien nation. He emphasized that in his childhood, his mother told him that his relatives lived in Somaliland, Somalia and Djibouti across the border demarcated by the British and Italian colonialists. This is not surprising, as according to Lewis, when colonial powers divided land in the Horn of Africa without regard to the nomadic traditions of Somali people living on pastoral land, artificial nation states were established and conditions for ethnic conflict emerged (Lewis, 1961, p. 2).

Because Guled Mustapha's Somali relatives inhabited Somaliland, Djibouti and Somalia, when his relatives visited his home from Somalia, Djibouti and Somaliland, they were frequently rounded up and arrested by the security forces. His parents had to go to the court and gain their release with bribery.

Awale Gedi insisted that he felt different from the rest of Ethiopian people because of his ethnicity, language and religion. He recalled one day that his cousin, who did not speak Amharic, was arrested and put in jail without going through a trial. His parents were so upset and sad. He said, “My mother cried for days. I grew up in this kind of condition. In my opinion, Ethiopia was a jail.”

Awale Gedi and Kennided Ali described Ethiopia as being a “big jail.” They stressed that their exile did not begin when they crossed the border from Ethiopia to Djibouti on foot on a hot night in July 1977, but long before that night. Their exile had begun in their own land because they were not recognized as Ethiopian under the Derg Junta regime of Ethiopian military or the imperial feudal regime. They were not part of Ethiopian society and the authorities discriminated against them because of their ethnic Somali names, religion and identity. This caused them to live in constant fear.

Hersi Gawdan described his experiences of daily discrimination imposed by the central government, lamenting his experience in this way:

“I could tell you stories like the daily discrimination that we, Somali ethnic encountered.... I can narrate all day and night for a week, and at the end I still would not [have] told you all the stories inflicted on my people by soldiers coming from the north of Ethiopia. They did not understand what we were saying. We also did not have a clue what they were saying. This was the daily chaos [of living] in Ethiopia. “

Ethnic Somalis did not communicate effectively with the local administrators due to differences in language, values, and traditions. Guled Mustapha said the barriers created by language impacted his education, career plans and future. Many participants described difficult experiences in school. Cultural and language barriers caused resentment according to Kennided Ali. “I did not speak the same language, share the same religion and have [a] similar culture... To be called Ethiopian was not my favorite.... I did like to be called Somali.” Using an angry

tone, Kennided Ali said he insisted on not being called Ethiopian, saying, “I am telling you that I am not Ethiopian, I am not Ethiopian, and I am not Ethiopian.”

Kennided Ali and Guelle Hassen said they never thought that they were Ethiopian because Ethiopia was the government. Kennided Ali explained, “I did not want to go back to my country of origin because of fear of my safety. The situation that forced me to flee in the first place was not changed; until the regime is removed, I do not think to return home.”

Called intruders or “Sergo gab” in the eyes of Ethiopian authorities, Kennided felt he could not make a living and felt isolated all the time. Daily discrimination was rampant in the society. In addition, Kennided Ali said Ethiopian officials did not consider Somalis as Ethiopian citizens. Kennided Ali’s elder brother dropped out of school because he felt harassed, experiencing an unending oppressive nightmare.

### *Ethnic Clashes*

Ethnic Somali and government authority clashes emerged as one of the major factors causing Somalis to voluntarily leave or flee the country. Seven participants described poor treatment by the authorities and conflict due to their ethnicity. Roble Farah explained the harsh treatment of his region as compared to the other regions in Ethiopia. He felt like he was living in an occupied land:

“I felt that the central regime miserably ruled my region. It was a place of fighting, and the government focused on the military infrastructure. We had a few schools, an old road that was built by the Italians in 1935, and dilapidated housing where many people were living in crowded conditions. The hygiene was so bad that I could see sewage running in front of my house. It was an occupied land.”

Awale Gedi described being discriminated against because of his ethnicity and marginalized by the central government. He stated that in Ethiopia, nobody asked him if he had economic problems, but their first question was if he was Somali or Ethiopian, if he was Muslim or

Christian. To belong to a Somali ethnic group seemed to be more dangerous than having AIDS in Ethiopia.

Similarly, Samatar Ahmed explained that he felt the Ethiopian central authority was like a “killing machine” with regard to destroying his culture. The central regime destroyed the customs and traditions that kept people working together for survival. People in his culture helped each other in time of famine and drought, but, he recounted, the Ethiopian regime killed that sense of community. The Ethiopian government punished all Ethiopian Somali, blaming them for supporting the Somali rebels.

Awale Gedi talked about how others in the international community saw Ethiopia as a country that had never been colonized, but he insisted that Ethiopia was a colony of many nations and nationalities of African descent. Kennedid Ali described how ethnic Somalis were oppressed within their own country. “The irony was that Ethiopia oppressed and marginalized internally many ethnic groups by one ethnic [group] that came from the North.” Samatar Ahmed stated that he did not speak the same language, practice the same religion or share the same culture. He was considered as a foreigner within Ethiopia. He observed many ethnic Somalis marginalized by the central authority. These conditions caused two of the ten participants in this study to leave Ethiopia.

### *Voluntary Leaving*

Two of ten participants, Waberi Siad and Guelle Hasen left Ethiopia before the civil war started in 1977. Waberi Siad described how his parents had prepared his escape for many months and in the end, he left his homeland to move to Djibouti where some of his relatives lived. He explained, “I never felt that Ethiopia was my country and decided to join my ethnic group who lived across the border.” Waberi Siad stated that his father paid a bribe to help him sneak

through the border. He stayed for a few years in Djibouti. Then, when civil war broke out in the Somali Region, Waberi Siad said thousands of his compatriots fled to Djibouti, including his family.

Guelle Hassen discussed that he never felt that he was Ethiopian and recalled an incident that forced his elder brother to leave the country. His brother enrolled in public school and successfully completed high school; however, his application to attend university was rejected due to this name. The principal told him to change his name so that it reflected Ethiopian culture, history and an Amhara ethnicity. Instead, he emigrated from Ethiopia to the Middle East, disgusted with the regime.

#### *Onset of Civil War*

The experience of living in a war zone, where fighting between rebel forces fighting for their freedom as citizens and government troops occurred, caused many ethnic Somalis to flee their homeland. Participants described how they were caught up in the middle of heavy civil war and suffered in many ways. Their stories described the death of family members and the terror they experienced from government threats due to their involvement in supporting the rebels, and also the experience of running for their lives from a city under attack.

Guled Mustapha, Samatar Ahmed, and Kennedid Ali said that they were suspected of supporting rebel forces called the Western Somali Liberation Front. The rebels planned to liberate Somali Ethiopians from the oppression of the Ethiopian government. Guled Mustapha decided to leave the country when the fighting in the countryside moved into the city. The Ethiopian government forces started shelling inside the city regardless of the civilians. This caused him to flee the country. Kennedid Ali said he fled from his city due to his fear of persecution by the Ethiopian soldiers who fought the rebels. Roble Farah and Waberi Siad fled

from their homeland and separated from their loved ones due to their fear of being persecuted by the Ethiopian soldiers.

After the government defeated the rebels and dislodged them from the city, the troops went house-to-house and killed many suspected ethnic Somali people. Roble Farah said he saw many people who were killed by the Ethiopian troops as they sought to arrest the rebels. Roble Farah explained that the troops did not have a way to differentiate the rebels from the people. They were intertwined. In the same vein, Waberi Siad talked about how the soldiers massacred many ethnic Somalis as they recaptured the land from the rebels. He stated that the majority of the people who lived in the city sympathized directly or indirectly with the rebels. He stressed that the southern part of the city of Dire Dawa populated by the rebel supporters was the area in which most of the genocide took place. Waberi Siad described how he “saw many dead bodies lying on the street and the soldiers had given the order that they did not have to be buried.”

#### *Death of Family Members*

Samatar Ahmed discussed the death of two family members when the Ethiopian soldiers and rebels were fighting in his city. “Ethiopian soldiers executed my father and my elder brother in front of our house. I saw them lying in the sun for a day and the authorities did not allow us to take care of them.” Samatar Ahmed made his decision to flee after this horrible event.

Hersi Gawdan was sleeping when the fighting between rebels of the Western Somali Liberation Front and the Ethiopian soldiers broke out. The bombardment of the city was so loud that he woke up and could not hear or see anything except the crying and wailing of people running for their lives. Artillery fire from Ethiopian soldiers destroyed his house. He and his family ran away to save their lives.

Awale Gedi explained that as he fled the country, he ran into many bodies of people killed due to the skirmishes between the rebels and government troops. The weak, sick and children civilians were the most affected people. Awale Gedi explained that he saw five of his relatives killed during the days of battle. He ran for his life when he fled his homeland. Ethiopian soldiers massacred many civilians after they defeated the rebels. Hundreds of dead bodies were laid out on the streets. Similarly, Ahmed Mohamed was forced to leave his country due to the killing that was inflicted on his family. Ahmed Mohamed said, “The soldiers came and started shooting left and right; they killed my father in front of me.” Then the soldiers tortured and beat him in the same place that they killed his father. On that same day the soldiers took their home, all of their property and money, leaving him and his family homeless and destitute.

Guelle Hassen explained how he was caught up in the fighting between the Western Somali Liberation Front rebels and the government. When the Ethiopian soldiers shelled the city, he decided they did not care about the people; they just wanted to liberate the land from the rebels. To get control they massacred hundreds and hundreds of people.

Roble Farah explained that he lost several of his family members and opted to leave, summing up his ordeal in this way:

“My family woke up with the sound of shooting between Ethiopian soldiers and rebels fighting in the city. People were screaming and dogs were barking; everything lit up in the sky. It looked like fires of 4<sup>th</sup> of July when people celebrate the Independence Day in America. Many houses were burning at the same time, the ground shook and I felt as if I was caught in the middle of earthquake. I saw many dead bodies lying on the ground. As I was running to save my life, I jumped out of the fires and dead corpses. It was one of the most horrible days in my life. I still have flashbacks of those days.”

Kennedid Ali discussed his escape:

“One night, my brother and I who were sleeping in one room and we woke up because of thundering noise heard by the forest. After a few hours, we realized it was the fighting of rebels and Ethiopian troops as they entered the city. As the heavy fighting between the rebels and the Ethiopia soldiers became fierce due to exchanging of artillery regardless of

the civilian, we fled the city. I observed people running every direction without knowing where they were headed. Chaos was the order of the day.”

Mukthal Waberi described his horror of escaping in this manner:

“It was around nine ...in the night; my father was listening to the BBC Somali to know what was happening in Somali Region. BBC Somali Service was the only reliable source of information when the war broke up. Suddenly, the light went off and heavy bombardment ...replaced [the] peaceful atmosphere. All night, the heavy bombardment between the rebel and the Ethiopian troops was going on.”

Mukthal Waberi continued to describe his experience that morning; as the sun started to rise, he said his family prepared to flee the city.

“We saw people scattered everywhere. The houses went up in flames. We left my friend and cousins; however, we could not pass the soldiers who stood in the front of our neighborhood. Having decided to flee for our life, we were obliged to run for safety to the countryside. We could not talk about the ordeal that we went through to manage to save my life. We never thought that we would have survived the amount of loss of lives and properties. My family and I wondered why all the Ethiopian troops inflicted this kind of misery on us. This was clear indication that the Ethiopian soldiers did not care about us, but the land.”

The majority of participants talked about how they were harshly treated in Ethiopia and discriminated due to their ethnicity, religion and region. On top of this maltreatment, they were forced to flee the country because of the battle ensuing between Ethiopian forces and the rebels. In the end, these had caused mass exodus to neighboring countries. The biggest problems that the interviewees felt during these times were that they were at once persecuted for and losing connection to, their culture, history and religion.

### **My Journey to Refugee Camp**

I left my homeland after I sneaked to the suburb of the city during a moment of peace as the bombing of the city had stopped. I went through all kinds of challenging difficulties before I arrived in the refugee camp.



When the bombs went off, people fled for their lives. I was caught in the crossfire and fled into the countryside, leaving behind my family and home. I left with nothing but the clothes on my back, lacking money, food, or provisions of any kind. On the outskirts of the city, I jubilantly found six boyhood friends. We had played soccer and attended school together and quickly formed a group of seven. Fleeing in terror, we wandered for nine days in the countryside, trying to escape the war and avoid the dead bodies found in the fields outside the city.

For those nine days all we saw were dead bodies. We were lost and lived on food provided by generous people who lived in the countryside. On the ninth day, we saw the lights of the city at night and realized that despite our days of wandering, we had returned back to where we had started, the outskirts of Dire Dawa. Fortunately, that night we met some rebel fighters who transported us out of the conflict zone. We rode a lorry into our first refugee camp, stayed the night, and learned our fate for the next three months.

After recovering meager provisions, we were told what to do to escape the war zone. Even though we wanted to join the rebels, their commander did not want us to stay with them and fight for our land because he thought that we were too young to be recruited as rebel fighters. One of the rebel commanders told us that anyone who could walk should begin immediately to try to make it to Djibouti. The journey to Djibouti took three months to complete. We soon adjusted to the terrain, stopping at night to avoid wild animals, receiving help from strangers and villagers, sometimes walking alone and sometimes encountering refugee groups also fleeing. I saw many dead bodies, and also some refugees who could not walk and had been left along the road. This was a crucial time to question the values that I grew up with and how they had been shattered. I felt that I opted to save myself rather than help others. While I was running for my life, I felt guilty. For example, one of the men stopped walking with us. Although we waited for

several days for him to recover, eventually we had to continue our journey without him. Amazingly, he later made it to the refugee camp with the help of other villagers.

Weary from three months of walking and with no possession of identification, we crossed the border into Somalia and traveled to a refugee camp, and joined approximately half a million other people in need of relief and assistance. I and my friends stayed together for three more months, sharing tents and daily rations of food. Relief workers and officials interviewed refugees, administered tests and eventually made assignments based on the results. I was among the ones who were selected to go to Djibouti Ville and to continue my education. Our selection had to do with our past background in the French school system. No longer a young man growing up with my family in Ethiopia, I had now taken on a new identity as a political refugee. In the next section I describe the experience of the refugees who participated in my study and what they faced as they were fleeing their homeland.

### **Survival in Journey**

The theme of survival emerged in the majority of the participants' stories. They described their experiences during their journey and what they did to survive. The ethnic Somalis described how they managed to overcome the ordeal, how they endured the difficulties as they crossed the border, how the traditional value of community fragmented, and how saving themselves dominated their way of thinking when they were searching for a safe place. Three subthemes were found: survival; crossing the border; and loss of communal concern to individual survival.

#### *Survival*

Participants explained the difficulties they experienced when they were in the process of searching for a safe place. The sub-theme of survival emerged as the most important factor during their journey whether: escaping from the bombardment of the planes; facing hunger and

thirst; seeing dead bodies; or being confronted with the sick and children by the side of the road. Each participant attempted to explain everything they experienced in the interview, while trying to overcome many emotions and memories from the harsh reality they once faced. The ethnic Somali who participated in the study ultimately stated the survival lessons that they learned had a tremendous effect in their current lives. Waberi Siad discussed his story to survive from the plane's bombardment in this way:

“After we met with the rebels and got what we needed to survive, I planned to escape from the battle field. I was told that the plane was aimed at bombing our area. The rebel commander ordered us to move further from the place. Things were very tense in the areas that we were staying. We were given the choice to run or stay. The informants of rebels were telling us all kind of stories; we had seen Ethiopian soldiers heading to our area; Russian and Cuba soldiers were the ones who led the Ethiopian troops; they would be arriving any time to the rebel side [to capture] the land from the rebels.”

Similarly, Ahmed Mohamed explained his sad story when he saw the plane fire on his fellow men and women. “It was the worse experience in the journey. The plane fired down close to the earth ... massacring many people.” He stressed, “I saw people running everywhere to save their skin and watched as a movie from a few miles. Observed the bombardment causing black smoke in the sky, I was very sad and emotional.” He emphasized that the Ethiopian soldiers were not caring for his people except to capture the land.

Samatar Ahmed discussed his hiding from the plane and he said, “We walked in the night so that the plane could not see us. In the day time, we used to hide in the bush. But sometimes, the plane fired in the middle of broad daylight.” He recounted emotionally, “One day, I saw a plane hitting not far from where I was hiding and many persons were killed; however, we were so helpless to do anything. I heard shooting all around us. That was the worse day in my life.”

Hersi Gawdan described the horror of seeing corpses every where he went. He met many fellow country men and women crying for help and nobody was doing anything. Everybody was running for his/her life. Mukthal Waberi similarly described:

“I did not have words to describe what I had faced in the journey of fleeing from Ethiopia. I did not wish any human being to go through what I had experienced. Dead body, crying human being, some eaten by wild animals; these were the routine things that I encountered every day that I was walking to save my life.”

Guled Mustapha and Kennedid Ali described being hungry and thirsty and the horror of seeing all the dead bodies along the road as they tried to get a safe place. Guled Mustapha was separated from his relatives, friends, and villagers. Having fled to survive, he did not eat for several days except wild fruits and dirty water that the camels, cows and sheep were drinking. He explained that he walked for many days, and was too weak to try to move his body, and his legs barely allowed him to stand up. However, he said that he forced himself to move to find a safe place. His mind could not think of anything besides that he was going to die any second. In the same way, Kennedid Ali fled his home in Ethiopia and walked to the border with his friends. He talked about what he had experienced along the road while he saw bodies lying everywhere. He discussed that it took him several days to walk before he did not see any corpse. Emotionally and sadly, he described, “Some of them were eaten by hyena and wild animals; I saw heads missing, legs cut off and hands amputated. I ran into of all kind[s] of horror of human catastrophe. It was total genocide that the world did not know.”

### *Crossing the border*

The second subtheme of the journey was crossing the border. While many participants experienced the first subtheme, survival after they fled from their country; interviewees also spoke about the danger and confusion that were created as result of crossing the border. Crossing

the border was experienced by all of the participants. Guled Mustapha, Mukthal Waberi and Samatar Ahmed viewed the border as an artificial border that was created to separate groups of ethnic people who had a lot of things in common: language, culture and religion. Hersi Gawdan and Ahmed Mohamed described that they put their life in danger when they crossed the border. The Djiboutian guard fired on them if they did not go through the main entrance. They expressed concerns about the security condition that they encountered when crossing. Waberi Siad explained that he was confused to see some friends with whom he had gone to school in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia guarding the border. He lamented that he did not know whether it was because he ethnically belonged to the ethnic Somali living in Djibouti or in Ethiopia that he was being persecuted. Awale Gedi described the colonial history of border creation in this way:

‘The artificial border demarcated by the colonialists in 1895, 1948 and 1954 when they divided inhabited Somaliland as cake to suit their geopolitical interests did not make sense to me. The concept of border did not make sense to my fellow Somalis who were following rains and searching for grazing and well of waters. The colonialists did not respect the lives of my poor Somalis who were divided in five different countries; I was so amazed that a fellow Somali living in Djibouti was considered as Djiboutian whereas I shared the same ethnicity, religion, language and other cultural norms.’

Kennedid Ali related that he fled his home twenty years ago due to the ongoing conflict of rebels and Ethiopian troops, but he wanted to go directly to Djibouti where his relatives were already living. However, he said that it had been hard to prove that he was from Ethiopia when he arrived at the border. Guelle Hassen explained that he tried to cross the border overnight into Djibouti and he stated, “It was so difficult because the border was so long, I could not imagine surviving in the journey, it was so dry that I could not think that I would live.”

Walking for a long time to cross the border, Guled Mustapha fled alone from Ethiopia to Djibouti not knowing in which country he ended up. It took him seven months of untenable situation to arrive at the cross borders of Djibouti, and Somaliland. Upon his arrival at the border,

he met a man who was part of security and he was interrogated. He stated the confusion surfaced when he attempted to prove that he was a Somali from Ethiopia, not Somaliland or Somalia. Sadly, he recounted his ordeal, “This was the first [time] in my life that I experienced (the) artificial border that my parents and relatives used to tell me. Having put in harsh scrutiny, I passed the test to prove that I was from Ethiopia. After I was granted the title of refugee, I and others refugees were taken to a refugee camp.”

Samatar Ahmed described his journey in this manner, “It was very dangerous when I was fleeing my country as well as when I crossed the border because I knew that I should hide from Ethiopian soldiers as well as from the Djiboutian soldiers who were guarding the border.” He explained, “The soldiers would possibly have shot at me while crossing the border if they saw me because we were doing so illegal to cross the border to Djibouti; I did hide from the soldiers so that I could arrive at the refugee camps.”

### *Community to Individual*

The third subtheme to emerge with the majority of the participants as they were fleeing and searching for a safe place was the fragmentation of their traditional communal way of life because of their need to survive. The participants described their feeling of guilt because they did not help the elderly, the sick, and the wounded as they were running for their lives. Eight of them said that they neglected the values that they acquired in their childhood. They described how the communal way of thinking based upon helping and caring for each other was gone and everybody was running to survive. They all opted to save their skin. Hersi Gawdan shared his story that he was feeling guilty and disgusted with himself because he did not provide assistance to the sick, elderly and women. He summed up in this way:

“I had seen many weak elders, children and women but nobody cared about them. Having experienced the sense of (being) disconnected from my forefather community support, I

felt guilty and sad. I started to cry not to help my fellow Somalis. I was so disgusted to reject the values in which I grew up, sense of belonging, community oriented, and helping each other. For centuries, I lived in the sense of communal and belonging. These were all gone from the windows. I felt that I was useless to the point of not being the right person who looked after my fellow Somalis.”

Guled Mustapha and Kennedid Ali described their experiences of seeing people dying along the road and not doing anything except running for their survival; the guilty feeling of neglecting their communal duties was reflected in the tone of their stories. Guled Mustapha saw long, long lines of miles of human beings walking to flee from the city. He described that mothers carried babies at their backs while the few belongings they had on their heads. He reflected on his experience that war had ruined many things and people were killed; animals were not spared in this calamity of human destruction. He lamented tearfully, “It was a hell on earth. I was hopeless to help my fellow country men. This was the guiltiest time in my life by neglecting what I was exposed [to] when I was growing up in my traditional extended family.” In the same line of thought, Kennedid Ali stated as he walked through the bush, he ran into many weak elders, emaciated children and sick ones who were left on the road. He discussed how he could not believe that some people were very sick and nobody dared to help them. He explained, “Everybody was struggling to survive.” He shared his comments and concerns about his story of contrasting value of individuality versus community in this way. “For example, an elderly man with watery and red eyes was crying for help. I did not do anything because I was running away from (a) horrible situation and everybody was doing the same thing. The helping and cohesive community spirit was gone. I felt that I was selfish.”

Four participants talked about how they had not buried their fellow countrymen who were dead and left along the road. Samatar Ahmed stated, “In [my] traditional indigenous way of

life, I had the responsibility to bury the dead and looked after the sick and weak, but I did not do (that).” In the same vein, Mukthal Waberi recounted his saddest story in this way:

“One of my friends was sick after he walked for a few days. I could not continue to walk with him because he was so weak and very sick. His condition worsened until he died on the road. His body was left across the road where I did not have time to bury him. It was one of the saddest events that I would never forget in my life time. I never thought that I neglected my indigenous values. We used to bury and help each other in the time of misery, famine and drought.”

### **Life in Djibouti**

I stayed in Djibouti, a country located in the Horn of Africa for five years. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) selected a dozen students who had gone to French schools when they were living in Ethiopia to move to the capital of Djibouti called Djibouti Ville. I often visited a dump that served as a marketplace in the middle of Djibouti where the French military personnel station in the city disposed of all kinds of material. One day, I met a French man who was throwing out a book and other material. I asked him if I could have the book. We engaged in a dialogue and at the end, he gave me the book. Luckily, he was in charge of Lycee of Djibouti; he told me to come to school and took a test. I did the test and scored well in math. When I reported the news to the United Nation High Commissioner of refugees, I was given the chance to be one of 12 students who began nine grades in the lycee of Djibouti. They also provided us a shelter. For the first time, I was separated from my refugee friends with whom I had fled from our homeland. In Djibouti, I started a new life and was a student for whom UNHCR provided not only schooling, but food, shelter and security, in



contrast to the friends I left behind in the refugee camp were very bad in terms of food, shelter and security.

I was considered stateless in Djibouti; although, I ran into many Ethnic Somali whom I had known in Ethiopia. Even though I felt that I was living in a country inhabited by a people with whom I shared ethnicity, language, religion and social norms, I was treated like a refugee. However because of my role with UNHCR, unlike refugees living in the camps, I was allowed to participate in several committees that looked after the cause of the refugees whether they were living in the refugee camps or in Djibouti Ville. For example, I recalled that we had a meeting with the Djibouti authority, UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations to discuss how to improve the food, shelter and security in the camps. We stressed that many refugees were deported to Ethiopia, many of our sisters were raped and some refugees died due to lack of proper medical treatment. There were a lot of promises made to help the refugees, but we did not observe anything being done. Through the meetings with different organizations and UNHCR officials, I became known to the administrators, and after finishing high school in 1981, was offered a job as an interpreter with the UNHCR. Since I spoke several languages of Ethiopia, I had the opportunity to help the refugee population when immigration officers arrived in Djibouti, and I helped with their daily routines whether it was a medical case, security issue, food concerns or other matters.

### **Living in Refugee Camps and Resettlement**

When reflecting on their lives in refugee camps, ethnic Somalis described the threatening conditions they experienced as well as how they managed to immigrate to the United States. Participants discussed the fear they initially experienced living in uncertain and unsafe conditions whether it related to their personal safety and fear of being forced to return to Ethiopia,

or to obtaining food, or finding shelter. Somali refugees also eventually hoped to immigrate to the United States and many waited a long time to achieve this dream.

### *Security and Deportation*

Six out of the ten participants said security was very bad in the camps and they were constantly in fear of being deported to Ethiopia. The participants Hersi Gawdan, Awale Gedi and Kennedid Ali talked about how Ethiopian soldiers sneaked into the refugee camps and rounded up those who may have opposed them and deported them back to Ethiopia.

Kennedid Ali said the Ethiopian soldiers collaborated with the Djiboutian security and rounded up many refugees and deported them back to Ethiopia. The security condition was very bad and Kennedid Ali claimed the United Nations High Commission did not help them solve the problem. He lived constantly in fear of being deported to Ethiopia. The nutrition was also bad and the shelter too.

Mukthar Waberi discussed the experience in the refugee camps in this manner:

“The biggest fear was that many fellow refugees were arrested and sent back to Ethiopia. Sometimes, the Ethiopian soldiers crossed the borders and selected the ones that they thought would be fighting against them and took them back to Ethiopia. They raped women. One night, I was hearing the wailing and crying of refugee women. I could hear the noises and people talking in Amharic, which was not our native language. Cramming and hiding in my hut, I did have a sleepless night. In the morning, I was told that Ethiopian soldiers entered in our camps. They beat elders, rounded up some men and raped women. It was a horrible place for Ethiopian Somalis to live.”

During interviews five of the subjects explained that they were arrested and interrogated because they were thought to have fostered rebellion in the refugee camps.

Waberi Siad summed up his fear in this manner:

“I was among the survivors who arrived at the refugee camps. I was given a tent and food in the camp of Ali Sabieh. The rumors constantly circulated that the Ethiopian soldiers crossed the border and took all men whom they suspected to fight against them. It was very scary time to live in the camps. Having caught in the middle of dilemma of two devils, I could not go back to Ethiopia or stay at the same time. I chose to live in the

camps and face what the life brought to me as my fellow country men and women did. In the first few days, I was so terrified; however, I adjusted to the condition of the refugee camps and started to search for food, shelter and resettlement.”

Guled Mustapha described that he was apprehended by Djibouti police because he was suspected of organizing the refugees. He stated that he was taken to the headquarters police station and beaten so badly he lost consciousness. Similarly, Ahmed Mohamed explained, “I was arrested as result of allegedly [opposing] the way that the Djibouti government was treating the refugees and the condition of the refugee camps because of lack of proper sanitation, food, water and shelter.”

### *Fear of Ethiopian Soldiers*

Six of the subjects said they had fear when they lived in the refugee camps. They described the Ethiopian troops crossing the border and deporting whomever they thought opposed them by supporting the rebels. The participants Hersi Gawdan, Awale Gedi, and Kennedid Ali in the study talked about how the Ethiopian soldiers sneaked in the refugee camps and rounded up those who posed a threat to their government. For example, Hersi Gawdan described his fear in the interview process to the immigration officer in this way “Djibouti is not a safe place, no education, no employment.” He stated that the Djibouti people did not have enough food, shelter and jobs for themselves. He explained to the immigration officer, “Forgot about us, the refugees. They were very hostile that we lived in their country.” He added, “The biggest problem was the security; many refugees rounded up and sent back to Ethiopia when we did not know their whereabouts.” Hersi Gawdan said that seven days after that interview, the immigration officer finally put a list of approved names on the wall of a small office of UNHCR. Hersi Gawdan described happily, “I was selected to immigrate to America. That was the happiest day in my life.”

For Awale Gedi the refugee camps were a fearful place to live due to the Ethiopian soldiers managing to enter in the camps and to arrest several ethnic Somalis. Several times, he hid in the bush near the refugee camps to avoid being captured by Ethiopian soldiers. Awale Gedi said also that to settle to America was the lesser of two evils. He explained that he was fearful to go to a land that he did not know the language, not having relatives and not sharing the same social norms, but he added, “ To stay in the refugee camps was worse because he was afraid to be deported to Ethiopia.”

Kennedid Ali described his experiences in the camp in this way, “I arrived at the camp refugee called Ali Sebihe where thousands of people crowded together. Everybody was building huts to make shelter. When many Ethiopian Somalis were driven out of their land, kids, elders, mothers and fathers cramped in several camps and built huts out of branches of trees and others materials.” Kennedid Ali said the Ethiopian soldiers collaborated with the Djiboutian security and rounded up many refugees and deported them back to Ethiopia. “The security condition was very bad and problematic and United Nations High commissioner did not help us to solve the problem. I lived constantly in fear to be deported to Ethiopia. The nutrition was also bad and the shelter, too.”

Five of the ten participants felt security was the biggest issue in the refugee camps. Samatar Ahmed, Guelle Hassen and Guled Mustapha said security was more important than concerns about food and shelter. Samatar Ahmed, Guelle Hassen and Guled Mustapha all explained that they complained to the visiting official from the Western donors and UNHCR about the lack of security, but that they did nothing about it. For example, when Samatar Ahmed crossed the border by hiding from Djiboutian soldiers and entered the refugee camp where thousands and thousands of people that he had known in Ethiopia resided, he looked for place to

sleep and sought food. However, he found that the security of the camp was not safe. He was in fear of being deported to Ethiopia. He said, “A friend of mine told me that the Ethiopian soldiers frequently snatched refugees particularly men and deported them back to Ethiopia. The Djibouti government did not care about us.”

Similarly, Guelle Hassen said that he was treated very badly by the Djiboutian security. Guelle Hassen recounted that the police guarding the refugee camps took him and other suspected refugees for interrogation and held them without food for the first two days. He stated that it was difficult to communicate with the police as they did not have any rules to follow. They kicked and beat them with policemen’s batons. In addition, he explained that he saw some detainees that were subsequently moved to the city jail; where they were held in terrible conditions. For over a month the guards subjected them to psychological torture. He described that at the end, he was released because the police did not find any problems.

Guelle Hassen explained his leaving the refugee camp in this way:

“When I returned to the refugee camps, I was told by police that I was organizing a movement within the refugee camps which was not true. Luckily, I told the story to the immigration officer who was from US and processed my file very fast to immigrate to U.S. I was so delighted to leave the bad experience behind and moved to US.”

### *Pursuing Refugee Status*

Seven of the ten participants in the study discussed facing an identity crisis when, first, they tried to prove to United Nation High Commissioner for Refugee that they were from Ethiopia, and, second, that even though they shared culture, language and ethnicity with the people of Djibouti, they did not want to be integrated into their society. Guled Mustapha, Ahmed Mohamed and Guelle Hassen described that they had a hard time proving that they were originally from Ethiopia. Guled Mustapha explained, “I was interviewed by the Djibouti authority to prove that I was a refugee from Ethiopia. I told them that I lived in Dire Dawa;

however, the authority rejected [granting] me refugee status. I took many years to get the refugee card [and only] after I paid bribery to a man who processed the refugee status in Djibouti.”

Ahmed Mohamed said that he did not want to be integrated in the local communities for many reasons. First, the Djiboutian local people were very poor and did not like them to take their jobs. Second, the Djibouti authority was trying to maintain peace with Ethiopia and allowed the Ethiopian troops to cross their border and take anybody they wanted. Third, he wanted to go abroad to help his family who lived in Ethiopia. He left behind his mother who was raising his brothers and sisters; although, he did not know their whereabouts at the time that he was living in the refugee camps.

Similarly, Guelle Hassen discussed how he was living miserably in Djibouti when his refugee status was rejected by the Djibouti authority. He described how he did not know what the future would be like in Djibouti. He stated that no one seemed to care, and the situation was so bad that he was frustrated to the point of hopelessness. He said that he did not want to integrate with the locals because he did not trust them. Emotionally, he discussed that he would rather be in Ethiopia if the political situation had changed or to resettle to another country. He lamented that the locals abused and treated him as a second class citizen. He talked miserably about the fact that the security officer beat and raped his sister and that some of his fellow refugees worked all day for nothing.

### *Resettlement and Hope*

Nine of the ten subjects in the study talked about the conflicting feeling of fear and hope in the refugee camps. Hope emerged as an important subtheme as a means of coping with the challenges of the daily life in the camps. The majority of the participants described how the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees arranged the interviews for them. The refugees

described the feeling of immigrating to America. Seven of the interviewees explained that they feared immigrating to U.S because they did not know where they were heading as well as they were constantly afraid they would not leave Djibouti. Eight of the subjects stressed that they were the luckiest ones to be selected and interviewed to go to America.

During my interviews with Ahmed Mohamed, Guelle Hassen and Hersi, they discussed how they were selected to be interviewed by the UNHCR officials, and that they were very happy to be approved to immigrate to America. Ahmed Mohamed described how after adjusting to the daily routine of the refugee camp's life, he managed to register his name in the office of UNHCR to participate in the process of resettlement to another country. He explained, "One day, I went to the UNHCR office nearby and I was told to be prepared for an interview. I did my interview and recounted to the immigration officer my story. Luckily, I was selected to immigrate to U.S." In the same line of thought, Guelle Hassen discussed his hope to be selected and interviewed in this way:

"After seven years in the refugee camp, the UNHCR told me that I was selected to be interviewed. I did a long interview with an American officer. He asked many questions pertaining to why I did flee from Ethiopia, what I experienced in the journey to reach Djibouti and lastly why I wanted to go to America. A few days had passed and then, the American officer approved my case that I immigrated to U.S. All my paper was checked out by the immigration officer after I arrived at the Djibouti Ville which was the capital of Republic of Djibouti. I planned to take a plane to move to America. Emotionally, I had a difficult moment to believe that I was selected to move to America. Having worried that something would go wrong in the last minute, I did not believe the departure until the plane took off. Then, I was so happy to move to safe place; although, I did not have a clue [about] the life in America."

Similarly, Hersi Gawdan said that he was interviewed and approved for immigration to U.S., and then took some medical exams to finalize the process. Having mixed feeling of happiness and sadness, he described that on Sunday afternoon, he took a plane from Djibouti airport to America. Emotionally, he discussed that he looked at Djibouti for the last time while

the plane was slowly moving to take off. He talked about how he was still in disbelief and full of fear; however, as the plane started to take off he added that he had mixed feelings. He described that on the one hand, he was happy to immigrate to America; on the other hand, he was worried for the people that he left behind and feared going to a land that was unknown to him. Hersi Gawdan summed up:

“Lastly, the plane went into the air where I could not see Djibouti. Tears were rolling on my face, I did not know whether it was because of happiness or sadness or I was heading to unknown world. “

Six of the subjects that participated in the study discussed their experiences during the long interviews they had with American officers. They described that they were questioned on the root cause of their fleeing from Ethiopia and why they did not want to stay in the refugee camps but instead wanted to immigrate to America.

Guled Mustapha and Kennedid Ali highlighted the questions that they were asked by the immigration officer about their fleeing from Ethiopia. Guled Mustapha explained that he was among the lucky ones who were selected by the UNHCR to be interviewed. Excitedly and nervously, he talked about how the interview had been processed. He discussed that in the afternoon, it was his turn and the immigrant officer called his name and asked him the reason that he decided to flee his home land. He described his experiences during the interview in this way:

“I talked for along time to explain the reason I fled from Ethiopia. The interpreter interrupted me and said, “Enough for now. “You would continue next time.” The difficult question was when I was asked why I wanted to go to America; I said, “I want to immigrate for safety and better life.” The Officer was half believed and half disbelieved on my statements. At the end, the immigration officer told me that I was approved to immigrate to America.”



Kennedid Ali explained that the Immigration and Naturalization American agency interviewed hundreds of refugees every day. When it came time for his interview, the immigration officer asked him through an interpreter, “Why did you flee from his country?” He described his ordeal of fleeing his country, his journey and his time in the refugee camp to meet the provision of UNHCR so that he would be granted refugee status. He spoke about his story of fleeing from his country for fear of persecution due to his ethnicity, the political violence and other factors. He stressed that after he completed the interview, he was granted the passing status. Then, he was assigned an I.D. number and required to take a medical examination. After he completed the health examination, he took the plane and arrived at the Minneapolis airport in Minnesota. A church group helped him to settle in Minneapolis when he first landed in America in June 1990.

During my interviews with the refugees, they described how they processed the resettlement to go to America and the overall treatment in Djibouti. Roble Farah, Mukthal Waberi, Awale Gedi and Waberi Siad discussed their fear and hope when they were interviewed before they flew to America. Roble Farah explained his ordeal in this way:

“I did not want to return to my country of origin because I feared to be killed and persecuted and did not either want to live in the refugee camps that lacked safety. It was a dilemma until an immigration officer interviewed and granted me to resettle to U.S.”

Awale Gedi stressed that he was among the luckiest ones who was selected to go to America; he stated emotionally and sadly that he left many of his fellow Somalis without knowing where he was headed and what was waiting for him. Nevertheless, he explained that he was perplexed and puzzled, that he had mixed feelings about leaving now that he had been granted permission. Similarly, Mukthal Waberi described how the UNHCR refugee coordinator informed him that the Western countries such as America, Australia and Canada were finally

going to interview him for resettlement. He stated that he was as happy as if he was going to heaven. An American officer interviewed him for several hours. Mukthal Waberi said, “It was very hot day and I travelled to the nearest station; I arrived at the office of UNHCR. I was fed bread and water for 24 hours. The officer granted me the approval to go to America. I stayed all night thinking where I was going and where I ended up. It was sleepless night.”

Waberi Siad expressed his feeling of happiness when he was informed that he was selected by officials to emigrate to America. He described how he lived in refugee camps for eight years and that he had been rejected by many immigration officers from Canada and Australia. He said, “I was completely in limbo before the American officer interviewed me and granted the approval status.” He described his feeling, “I never thought that I would be selected, but I was so delighted to be among the hundred who immigrated to America. It was heaven on earth.”

### **Life in America**

Ethnic Somalis certainly identified numerous problems and challenges faced before they immigrated into North America; however, the challenge of trying to integrate into American society was also an important recurring theme in participants’ stories.

In this chapter, I present ten ethnic Somali refugees’ stories regarding their experiences immigrating to North America and their adjustment experiences once they reached America. As noted earlier in this dissertation, I undertook this study as a member of the refugee population community. My personal experience as a refugee attempting to sustain my sense of self as I adjusted to life in America provided perspective to the challenges described in my participants’ stories. I first describe my refugee experience of adjusting, assimilating, separating and integrating into this new world, using my story to introduce and provide important background

information regarding the refugee experience in general. After sharing my story, I then discuss and analyze the experience of other refugees who met the challenges associated with adjusting to American culture whether it was by assimilation, integration marginalization, or separation.

### *Early Experiences*

As previously noted, I spent five years in Djibouti as a refugee - going to school and participating in the community while I worked part time in the United Nation High Commission for Refugees. Gradually, I put my life back together through hard work and education. Graduating after four years from the Lycee of Djibouti, I was hired to work as a full time clerk\interpreter in the UNHCR. One Canadian immigration officer, for whom I interpreted, gave me the opportunity to participate in the interview process and suggested I fill out an application for a scholarship to study in Canada. I received a scholarship to Ottawa University in Canada, left Djibouti Ville, and moved to Canada to study engineering. During that time, I attended college and worked to support myself and send money to my family whom I left in Ethiopia. I left my mother, brothers and sisters in the refugee camps. As in our tradition, I was expected to do everything possible to support them. This led me to find a fulltime job while attending the university.

After graduating from college, I moved to America and started to learn English. While in Canada, I spoke French and did not have much of a problem because I had spoken French most of my life, but in America I faced not only employment issues and other challenges of a new society, but particularly the language barrier. When I arrived in America, I felt that I had to start life from scratch. The problem of language was the most challenging and this had closed many opportunities. For example, I could not find a job in my field due to the language barrier and was obliged to work full time as a custodian and went back to school to learn English. Other

challenges included difficulty communicating with medical practitioners when someone was ill. Language was also difficult in daily transaction, for instance, things as simple as buying food. I needed to overcome all of these challenges in order to adjust to a new environment.

In Minneapolis, I was among the first East African refugees trying to establish a new life. Educated but without experience, I struggled to find an engineering position. To gain experience, I volunteered to work for free in an engineering company while I worked as a custodian at night. I did this for eight months until they offered me a full time position. In addition to improving my English language, I went back to Anoka-Ramsey College on weekends to take English language courses. I also became heavily involved in community work. I started to organize the Somali community along the line of advocacy and helping other refugees to settle. Although not all of the efforts functioned as hoped, I did accomplish many things in our community. I set up radio station in Somali language on KFAI, and worked with lawyers to help other refugees to process reunion of their families who were still living in refugee's camps.

Challenged to preserve my culture as well as to assimilate into the American culture, I experienced tensions both within my immigrant community and in the multiethnic culture of the larger community. These cultural tensions and the conflict that developed from them caused many Ethnic Somalis, including me, to retreat within our cultural community. While we wanted to be accepted and become a part of America, we also wanted to retain our Somali identities. Unfortunately, at times, it was impossible to do both. In fact, I knew that some Americans argued that "Immigrants must claim American identities by ignoring or abandoning their past cultural and political multiple identities, effectively requiring choosing one identity over another." (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007) In fact, the participants in my study found that assimilation at times required a loss of culture, language, traditions, which made them feel that they were losing their

true “identity”. For example, some of the participants insisted that they could not find a place to worship and practice their religion. Some of the interviewees even said they did not have a place to communicate regularly in their own language. This resulted in the regular gathering of many refugees in front of Star Coffee shop – in essence, creating a setting that reminded them the old tradition to assemble under a tree and exchanged ideas.

### **Arriving and Adjusting in North America**

The ten ethnic Somali participants in this study described the challenges and difficulties that they faced adjusting to a new environment. Several of the participants discussed how they felt like aliens “at war” with the cultures and traditions in America. The major theme that emerged from my interviews - arriving and adjusting in America – has eight sub themes: (a) settlement; (b) language barriers; (c) employment; (d) culture; (e) race; (f) religion; (g) advocating, and (h) parenting.

While all the participants in the study expressed their appreciation of the freedom they enjoyed in America and the opportunities for improving their lot, they also described the difficulties they had experienced in deciding to come to America and in adjusting to a new environment. In the next section, I discuss the subtheme of settlement as the refugees arrived in North America.

#### *Settlement*

Two participants migrated with their families when they were in their twenties, so obviously in those cases they were not the decision-makers in the migration process, but the eight other key subjects said they chose America because it allowed them to live in a better environment; they would not have to live constantly in fear as they had in the refugee camps. They said that peace, security and a better life were for them the most important factors in their

decision to resettle in America. As Roble Farah said, “I chose America because life was better; I thought that it would be easier for me to live in America.” Another important point mentioned was that it was easier and faster to immigrate to North America in terms of the immigration administrative process compared to Canada and other Western countries. As Guelle Hassen from the rural part of Ethiopia mentioned, “I chose America because it was easier since it was a peaceful and better place; it took me less time to be processed [immigration procedures].” Another participant, Samatar Ahmed, described a similar situation. “For me it was easier to have permanent residency in America; I learned English; I had [the] skill[s] of [a] mechanic, and I was working in Ethiopia before the war had broken out.”

In general, the adjustment experience of the participants in North America was not what they had expected. The majority of the subjects did not know what to expect. Awale Gedi was charmed by the city and its people through post cards that the refugees who went before him had sent him, and he liked the idea that it was easy to live in America. Samatar Ahmed said, “I was somewhat motivated by my friends who were filing the immigration forms. They gave me the information that they got from other refugees who went to America. I told myself, if somebody was trying, why not me? So I took a chance.” Another man, Mukthal Waberi, explained that he loved America because it was one of the richest countries on earth, and he thought that it would be easy to connect with the community of his origin once he arrived. However, he also mentioned that people from his community were not represented enough in the American labor market, for example in the government and in the police force. Guled Mustapha told his story in this way:

“Our friends in the community were telling us that America was a nice country but economically and for work, it was better to go back to school and acquire skills because our past skills did not match to find better salaries and better jobs.”

Waberi Siad and Ahmed Mohamed said that the Americans were always in a hurry and did not have the time to listen to their stories. For example, Waberi Siad said that during his time in New York he met with a number of Americans and tried to explain his stories, but he felt that he did not capture their attention. He said, “I had the feeling people in America were very busy and did not have time to listen [to my] story. The majority of the people [worked] hard and did not have time to spare to pay attention to refugee problems. I felt paralyze[d] not to get a person who wanted to listen to my stories.” He felt that he “was losing the extended family intermingling and interacting with people [that I had] when I lived in Africa.”

In addition, they explained that they started to dress differently and ate food that they found unfamiliar. Ahmed Mohamed said that when he arrived in US, he was disappointed with his condition of life. He explained:

“The expectation that I had about American life was so fertile in general. Nevertheless, the food was different, I had to wear jackets and live in apartments; when I was in the refugee camps, and I did not have a fridge where I could store food items that would perish. Therefore, I ate organic food. The first three years, it was very difficult to adjust in America.”

Most participants had disappointing experiences in North America. Much of this disappointment stemmed from the inability to fulfill their basic expectations of living in America, especially in regard to learning a new language, finding a job, adjusting to a different culture, retaining their religious practices and other social factors.

### *Language barriers*

Several participants in my study said that they had not anticipated the problems of language, culture and other social issues they would face in America. Roble Farah said it was a childhood dream to go to America. “It was my childhood dream of peace, and security; it was not a strategic choice but a dream really. My friend who immigrated to North America told me

that it was a good place to live peacefully; I was telling myself that one day I would go to North America, but I did not know [how difficult the] ...language barrier [would be].”

None of the participants in this study had studied the English language before they immigrated to America. The problems of language in the context of communicating with Americans, finding a good job, and explaining their symptoms to doctors were important key factors that emerged in the research as they narrated their experiences about adjusting to America.

The following three participants exemplified extreme diversity in their personal stories with respect to the language barrier challenge. Hersi Gawdan described how difficult it was to tell his story about the killing of his family member in Ethiopia to a church member he met. He was frustrated that he could not find the English words to describe the horrible execution of his relative. Guled Mustapha described many difficulties in adjusting to America, but he pointed out that not knowing the English language was the most challenging barrier to his integration into the American culture. Kennedid Ali discussed the communication difficulties he encountered after he was left in a hotel by the people who welcomed him to America; he said that he could not order food let alone have a conversation with the Americans. All three participants stressed that the English language was very important for adjusting to America. Participants summed up their stories in this way:

“One day, I told my story to one of the church members who helped me to find an apartment. The story that I was telling did not register with her. The horror of the story was unimaginable and untenable in her opinion. She asked me again another day about my relatives and other close family members, “How did you know that they were executed?” The problem [in conveying] my message was the difficulties at the time of not communicating properly. My English was very poor and this pushed me more to study English.” Hersi Gawdan

“I and other Ethiopian refugees in general were not able to plan our migration in advance; consequently, we arrived in a host country unprepared for what we may encounter there. In addition, we [had to] cope with the trauma associated with sudden separation from, or loss of loved family along with the challenges of integration into the country of



resettlement. The dimensions of race, religion and the forms of oppression in our home as well as social barriers in the host country compound[ed] our situation that did not allow us to adjust in America. However, the most important obstacle was communication and English [language] barrier.” Guled Mustapha

“Church people took me to the hotel and left me with other refugees for the night after they had arranged where to eat, sleep and take bath[s]. The obstacle of language barriers surfaced when I attempted to speak with host country people. I did not know much about Americans’ lives; however, I was in better life than eating wild fruits for a long time on my way to Djibouti as well as when I lived in the refugee camps. I decided to learn English.” Kennedid Ali

Mukthall Waberi, Samatar Ahmed and Awale Gedi discussed their experiences of the language barrier as a hindrance to finding a job; they explained that they were not hired for jobs for which they were qualified because they couldn’t speak English. For example, Mukthall Waberi said, “I have good skill[s] to work as [a] mechanic, but I did not have the ability to communicate in English and I was not hired.” Similarly, describing the language problem that led to his rejection to get a good job, Awale Gedi said, “Well, a lot of things could be challenging in the new environment, but to communicate with the host people was the main factor that precipitated the rejection [for] the job that I applied for ...” Samatar Ahmed disclosed an incident in which he was not hired because he did not speak or write well in English. He said, “I was given a form to fill out for the job; however, I had difficulties [completing] it correctly.” He lamented, “Had I known [the] English language, I [would have been] hired [for] a [better job]; I was a good mechanic in my homeland.”

Guella Hassen and Waberi Siad described their experiences when they visited and interacted with doctors whether they were in hospitals or clinics. The participants discussed the language barriers as major difficulties in communicating with the doctor and explaining their symptoms when they, themselves, dealt with the doctor or when they took their children to the hospitals. Guella Haassen described his shortcoming as he was dealing with the doctor and felt

that the interpreter was not translating his thoughts. I asked him, “How did you know that he was not translating correctly.” He responded, “I could tell from the follow up questions and the gestures of the doctor.” In the same vein, Waberi Siad expressed sadly, “I was amazed to see a person who was not qualified in [the] medical field to interpret to a doctor, and he did not also work in the hospital.”

In fact, not being able to speak English was reported as the most challenging barrier by all the participants except one. Ahmed Mohamed was the only participant who became proficient in English, which helped him to overcome many hurdles. He summed up this way:

“To learn language skills was an opportunity to adjust quickly in this country. When I was struggling in English, I had lot of barrier[s] in terms of employment, education, culture and other social factors. For instance, learning English helped me to obtain my citizenship papers. I became a United States citizen in 2004. Becoming [a] citizen made me ... feel much more accepted, more at home in America. I learned English by watching television, mingling with the host people and studying in college. I did believe that English was the best tool to adjust [to] this country. I did not have [a] problem ... explain[ing] my symptoms to [a] doctor.”

My findings with regard to the language barriers and the impact those barriers had on Somalis were similar to barriers experienced by Kunana refugees who tried to adjust to American life (Englund, 2008). According to Englund (2008), learning English was necessary to becoming academically, socially and culturally successful in America. Knowing or learning the language of the country to which an individual has immigrated has been found to be highly correlated to acculturation into that society (Keefe & Padilla, 1987). In my research, the participants revealed the problems of language in the context of communicating with the English speaking Americans, explaining their symptoms to doctors, and finding a good job.

### *Employment Issues*

The experience of looking for employment was particularly disheartening and a bitter situation for the refugees interviewed. All key informants reported that they were actively looking for jobs as they resettled in America in order to be good productive citizens and to help their immediate families still living in the refugee camps and in Ethiopia. All reported they were very motivated and put a lot of effort into trying to find their place in the North America labor market. Nine of the participants indicated how very important it was to find employment to sustain their lives in North America as well as to support their extended family back in the refugee camps and in Ethiopia. They claimed that finding work would help them fulfill the responsibilities of their traditional Somali values of self - help and caring for others. For example, Kennedid Ali indicated the typical common story of several refugees:

“I was looking hard to find work and I did at the end, but it was very difficult in the beginning. After a few months, I started to work in [a] parking lot. It did not require a lot of communication. I was poorly communicating in English, but I had managed to do my daily work. In the night, I was studying English and worked in the morning for a few years. Then, I went to college.”

The participant experiences searching for employment demonstrated that speaking the English language and finding a job were intertwined. They all concluded that not being able to communicate in English had been the biggest problem in finding decent employment. The majority of the participants felt that their past work experiences were not taken into consideration when they looked for a job. Eight participants reported that they were able to work in America after a few months; however, none of them found a position that matched their credentials and/or the work experience gained in their homeland. Hersi Gawdan reported the importance of hard work in overcoming employment issues:

“Another problem that I worried a lot [about] was to find a job and help my immediate family members who were still living in the refugee camps and in Ethiopia. I started to ask the church people to help me to locate a job. Everybody noticed that I was looking very hard to find a job to work and support my family. My first job was with the church

that welcomed me to America. I was given a job of cleaning the church, custodian. I worked late in the evening and on weekends. In the morning, I used to go to school and learn English. I wired my first check to my family member who was living in the refugee camps. I was so happy to help them. This was one way of expressing my extend[ed] family responsibilities.”

While Samatar Ahmed and Kennedid Ali revealed their difficult experiences trying to find jobs in America, they did not feel they faced any racial discrimination when seeking a job. They explained their frustrations in adjusting to in the new environment were the results of various other hurdles they encountered that prevented them from finding a better job and living decently in America. For example, Kennedid Ali explained that he had a hard time finding a better job in America because he did not speak English, and did not have good skills. The first six years of his life in America was not a good experience; however, as he started to adjust to the reality of his situation, he accepted that he was in a new country and had to fit into the American way of life. He began to go to school and worked as well.

Even though these Somali refugees tried to make adjustments, my findings revealed that in was impossible to avoid incidents of being unprepared to assimilate as they faced workplace and other public situations.

### *Cultural Issues*

All the participants indicated that their ethnicity and culture took on a different meaning for them after living for many years in North America. However, my research underscored the importance of affective responses felt by ethnic Somali refugees as they first engaged in cross-cultural experiences. These emotional dimensions represented manifestations of what has been commonly considered “culture shock” as described in Chapter 2 as powerful and unbalancing reactions, both emotional and physical, often associated with experiencing a culture other than

one's own. Individuals often acknowledge having faced sense of being confused in a new country. To integrate in a new society, scholars and practitioners contended that powerful emotion has a negative impact on the adjustment and acculturation (John, et al, 2006).

The majority of the participants reported that their names, dress style and behaviors, to a name a few factors, caused cultural misunderstanding. All of them reported that they did not understand why the Americans were very fast in their daily life and did not pay attention or listen to them. In other words, the majority of the participants said that they caught in a new environment particularly the cultural difference and life style that were based upon fast economic style comparing to the old traditional system where everybody knows other affair life. They insisted that their communal behaviors were fragmented. For example, the scarf of Somali women stood out in the middle of Minneapolis among other East refugees.

The results of this study indicated that ethnic Somali refugees struggled to adjust to America and to simply survive, and they did not have enough experience to differentiate the culture of America and the one that they left in Africa. They all reported that the Americans did not know the Somali cultural background. Waberi Said summed up his experience with a type of culture shock in this way:

“I did not interact with [Americans] and had a lot of misconception on many things. The same could be said about the [Americans]. For example, after I had a lot of American friends, I was so surprised the kind of outlook that I had about their lives... They did not know the difference between the refugee and immigrant. They did not know about Somali culture. For example, they did not know how to pronounce our names, what we ate in Africa, how we dressed in Africa and how we interacted in Africa.”

John (2006) stated that: “The process of intercultural adaptation reflects two dimensions of the experience: (a) learning about the new culture and, (b) learning about one's self within the context of the new culture.”(John, et al, 2006). My research focused primarily on how ethnic Somali refugees' experiences in a new culture evoked and fostered adjustment about who they

were and how they came to re-think their sense of self. This seems to indicate the study was consistent with others that have approached intercultural experience as a process of “adapting and adjusting”, but specifically relating to “transformative learning.” These point views noted the importance that how the participants have to change other previous beliefs, values and behaviors so that they can adjust in a new environment to survive (John, et al, 2006). Further, this perspective applied emphasis to participant consideration and change of prior beliefs, values, and behaviors in order to align appropriately with the country and culture in which one was living, allowing the individual to “effectively accommodate the demands of living in a host culture” (Taylor, 1994, p.154).

One of the participants revealed that he, himself, was a person who had culture, language and other social heritage before he arrived in America. He reported that in the beginning, it was not easy to adjust, but when he found the refugee gatherings such as coffee shops and restaurants, life became easier; he got his own place to socialize with people speaking his language and having the same culture. Kennedid Ali indicated that

“The notion of religion and other social factors had been ... barriers, but I, for one, had [cultural] and [historical] norms that contrasted with the host country people whether they were black or white. To [adjust] in the host country, I felt that I had to [forget] my past culture and history and [be] lumped with the black American.”

Several of the ethnic Somali refugees echoed Dubois’ (1990) concept of double consciousness to describe their bicultural existence in and out of work place and other areas of interacting with America, the dominant culture. They described the culture shock they experienced at work, school and other social areas, as they struggled to make sense of the American culture, their own sense of alienation and marginalization as ethnic Somali refugees, and the disheartening realities of the American culture that encouraged the subordination of ethnic cultures. According to Mukthar Waberi, the lack of socializing areas created a context of

alienation which seemed a barrier to an open society. He reported that as newcomers, signs of his culture, class, and other distinguishing origins made him different than most Americans, and consequently, he felt self-conscious – like an outsider. Thus, he was pressured to assimilate to the culture of North America. His success within the work force and other environments meant losing much of his native power and grace – a cost to his identity.

### *Contrasting Racial Issue*

All participants indicated that even though they encountered some racism and discrimination, these were not identified as major problems. They saw the need to adjust and adapt to daily life in American as greater difficulties than racism. They indicated that the complex identity formation and adjustment could be a source of frustration and confusion, and yet it also offered opportunities for growth compared to their previous life in the refugee camps. They were in fact adamant that racism was not a problem in North America. Guled Mustapha explained:

“Of course there were people who did not like people; however, we did not begin to generalize for the whole country of United States of America... I thought that in America they were far from being racist.”

Not surprisingly, the ethnic Somali refugees indicated that identity and tribe were more important for them than race; they described identity in two ways: the first focused on the ways others defined them and the second were the identities they constructed along the way to manage their bicultural life structures. They all reflected on who they were as tribes in the Horn of Africa, and how they were viewed as refugees with race stigma in America. They lamented that some Americans had certain expectations of them as foreigners that were often framed from the stereotypical images of their race, ethnicity, and nationality. Samatar Ahmed, for example, noted, “There was a certain image that people were looking for when you say you are from Africa. You

must act ‘African,’ whatever that means.” The majority of the participants in this study reported the confusion that they experienced because they felt they were associated with black Americans. They revealed that the black American was not different from the white American in their point of view. They insisted that they preferred to be labeled by their tribal name instead of race.

Mukthal Waberi summarized his story in this way:

“The notion of race did not have any influence or shape the society [in which] I grew up. On the contrary, the clan affiliation or tribe was the main thing that helped me to identify my culture, history, and social norms.”

He explained, “The black[s] killed each other in Africa, but no black American wanted to criticize or condemn the acts. On the other hand, they geared up to talk about the issue of South Africa. We did not have to be judged by our [the color of our skin], but what we can bring to the society.” Several participants reported that they marked “other” for race when they were filling out applications for a job.

### *Religious Issues*

Findings of this study also provided a unique view of the religious marginalization that occurred as a result of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on America. During the interviews, all participants talked about how religion became an issue only after September 11. They indicated that before 9/11 Americans knew their religion and they did not wonder or question if they were part of a terrorist group; however, they said that after 9/11 they experienced again the fear they had in the refugee camp and when they were fleeing their homeland. One of the participants indicated, “Their religion was not an issue before September 11 and they were only minor problems. However, after September 11, 2001, everything changed.” This was consistent with the studies that had been done on the Arab Americans with whom the ethnic Somali share a similar religion. For example, Abraham (1989) emphasized the choice that Arab Americans had



in regard to acculturative strategies and he illustrated how the level of discrimination experienced by each individual depends on the level of adherence and identification with Arab culture.

For example, one of the participants in the previous study described a process of “ethnic denial” whereby some Arab Americans consciously deny or de-emphasize their Arabic and Islamic heritage— even to the extent of falsely claiming to be of European descent— in an effort to prevent discrimination and ease entrance into mainstream culture. In the same vein, ethnic Somali experienced religious discrimination. Abraham (1989) stated that a second process of “ethnic integration” in which Arab Americans choose to highlight similarities between American and Arab cultures in an effort to integrate the two. They also demand political and social recognition from mainstream institutions. This strategy is utilized mostly by middle-class Arab Americans, in particular American-born second and third generation Lebanese and Syrians. A third acculturative strategy that Arab Americans, in particular recent immigrants from poor or working-class families, consciously choose to follow is called “ethnic isolation.” These groups tend to establish isolated ethnic communities within the United States in which cultural traditions are emphasized and adoption of mainstream culture is discouraged.

In recent years, the acculturative strategy of “complete” separation had become a viable alternative for Arab Americans. Ethnic Somali refugees reported that a contemporary phenomenon forced them to live in isolated ethnic communities, speak Somali at home and at work, and continuously watch satellite T.V. and spent many hours in the Pal Talk. In this research, all the subjects suggested that after 9/11, none of them sent a remittance to their relatives who lived in refugee camps or in Ethiopia, because they feared they would be deported,

and also face harsh treatment by the Americans. Similarly Samatar Ahmed summed up his harsh treatment in this way:

“The US government closed the majority of money wiring; although, no- one associated with agents was accused of terrorist financing. The [closure] was done as result of September 11... Some of these agents such [as the] Baraakat grocer agents in the US were charged with failing to disclose their money deposit of transmission systems to the state authorities. The situation got worse to the [refugee population] and I did not wire any money for almost year to my family. It was very bad time. On top of this ordeal, I lost my factory job.”

The majority of the participants reported that they were mistreated following September 11, in ways that made it difficult to support their relatives whom they left behind. They insisted that these experiences helped shatter their old tradition of communal life style where they helped each other as a matter of course.

#### *Advocating*

The majority of the participants in this research indicated the subtheme of working as advocates for those whom they left behind in their homeland were very important. Several participants suggested that they wanted to mitigate the severe condition of refugee camps. Seven of the subjects reported that they organized as a committee to advocate through humane organizations the refugee condition and to improve the life in general of the ethnic Somali living in Ethiopia. They also suggested that they collected money to build schools and clinics in their villages; Hersi Gawdan discussed his desire to advocate in this story:

“I did want to [advocate] for our people whom I left behind. In addition, I had the responsibilities that the [world] should know...what were the reasons that forced me to flee my homeland. Many innocent people had perished and nobody knew their history.”

The interviewees insisted that they were working hard to act as advocates to those impacted by social changes in the U.S. as result of 9/11, as well as continuing to assist those left in the refugee camps and in Ethiopia.

In summary, the participants felt that they were in some ways victims of social changes in the wake of 9/11. Most indicated that no longer being able to easily send money to their relatives that they left in the refugees camps was a great hardship. All had used wire remittances through the “hawala” (a banking system that did not go through the formal banks) which were closed after the terrorist attack on US. In addition, Cultural issues related to dress, language and other behaviors were also consistently reported by the participants. Finally, the interviewees noted that they felt that forced to take a new identity based upon on race comparing to the old tribal one. The interviewees prefer to be labeled as tribal identity rather than by race.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: TODAY AND TOMORROW**

### **Introduction**

In the 80s, at least 30 thousand Ethiopian Somali refugees had immigrated and resettled in the United States as a result of conflict in their homeland. The Ethiopian Somalis arriving have been helped to settle here as refuge from military conflict and other guerrilla warfare; however, the adjustment and reconstructing a life in a new environment did not guarantee gaining a normal life without stress, anxiety and other major's hurdles. Of course, during resettlement in this host country, they faced: alienation; discrimination; language barriers; and other problems that any immigrants/refugees encountered. However, the Ethiopian Somali were unique in the sense that they also faced an extra burden due to their ethnicity, religion and economic status. In other words, they were black, Muslim, and at the bottom of the economic ladder. Plus, they were the most visible mass influx of African people to United States in the memory of most citizens. The Ethiopian Somali people did not have any community, ritual place and other societal infrastructure as they arrived in the host country.

However, like any other immigrant /refugees, they struggled to regain some hope and measure of what they had lost before they arrived in North America: economic prosperity, freedom and hope not to be burden on society. Ethiopia Somalis were by nature very proud people and they found it emotionally hard to be dependent on the welfare system and be at the mercy of government to be sheltered, fed and dressed. On top of these problems, they were experiencing the fragmentation of communal way of life and ended up in a lifestyle that did not resemble the form and shape of their traditional tribal way.

To reconstruct a new life style in the host country, Ethiopian Somali had to work very hard and long hours, taking any kind of jobs to survive and feed their families here, in addition to

those left behind in Ethiopia and refugees camps. To ingrate in the mainstream of American society, they had to learn a new language, English: to find a new job; to get a decent place to live; and to wire remittance to those who were living in the refugee's camps. Further complicating their lives was a loss which was not material – absence of a sense of the traditional cohesive and communal mindset within which the Somali had lived for centuries. The story of the Ethiopian Somali refugees in the United States of America was more a story of freedom, hope, and success over fear and setbacks. The refugees felt that their children would be able to enjoy the greatest benefit of coming to America as opposed to them.

### **Somali Community**

As the Ethiopian Somali arrived in North America, they found the life style was very different for those by whom they were welcomed. The majority of Ethiopian Somali reported that everything seemed strange: the food; gathering places; the eating style; the housing; and the clothing. It seemed to them as if Ethiopian Somali community had to restart life again and find rebirth of community - in every aspect of life they would need to reinvent their past traditional way of life.

The ten participants described that they were forced to reconstruct how: to eat; to focus their daily endeavors individually; and to manage every aspect of life as an individual struggle. All the refugees claimed that the community lifestyle that they have had known in their homeland was gone out of the window. As the French proverb goes, “Chacun pour soi et Dieu pour tous” - Everybody in his/her own and God for all. When interviewing the ten Ethiopian Somali, I noticed that they had lost completely their past lifestyle. Each complained sadly that he often did not know how to handle the new environment or overcome all the hurdles that life had revisited on them. They described that they used to share food and other material in their

homeland - the participants said that they had never eaten alone before they arrived in United States.

In the traditional setting, the participants said that they knew what the neighboring person ate, what kind of the problems they had, and whether they lost loved ones. However, in North America, they found out that life was completely different and everybody was effectively still running for his own life. Nobody was helping another one. The Ethiopian Somali men interviewed were caught by surprise as they encountered people standing and begging in the street in United States. Five of the interviewees reported that they did not believe people were begging for food in the richest country on earth. They reported that the numbers of homeless were alarming and left them with disbelief.

The participants have had a far different lifestyle here in North America compared to in Ethiopia, during the journey to, and in the refugee camps. The majority of the interviewees have not had opportunities for education because survival mode was their focus in Horn of Africa. Originally, the majority of the participants came from extreme poverty, with few choices for personal growth. They found it hard to imagine the opportunities of education that United States provided and the richness of new environment, but reported they did not have the right tools to navigate and take advantage of these opportunities.

Here are some observations of refugees regarding work and the potential of attending school for the first time. Guled narrated his story of Somali communal support, and making money for his family. He said, "It took many hours to cultivate a land with oxen driven plough, but I had to work from sun set to sun rise and I couldn't take breaks at home!" By contrast, when living in the refugee camps, I personally saw many young men passing time throwing flip-flops to knock over stacked cans, wandering the camp or playing soccer or volleyball. When I

asked Samatar what he did in the camp he smiled and said, “I had a dream for all day and night!” He said, “I went to school in America as well as I worked in the night.”

I observed several refugees during the interviews who felt as though they were now in big jail. They could not differentiate the lifestyle of traditional collaboration and the new lifestyle that they have to work hard to survive in their own. Some of them said and acted as though America was the land of opportunity, but the supportiveness of community and cohesion were absent here in their view points.

I noted that the participants had a hard time comprehending that everybody had to be in his own house and eat by himself. The contradiction of community mindset versus individual was a major problem to overcome for the refugees. Abdi told me that “I had never eaten alone; we were always together with other family and I found very difficult to have dinner by myself or with my family. The sense of community binding was shattered and felt that they were forced to separate them individually.”

I noticed sometimes that the refugees behaved strangely due to the lack of understanding the independence of economic and social life. Ahmed said, “I used to go to home and to bed when I only sleep. But here I am most of the time at home in the winter time when I am not working and attending to school. The life has been hard to face it.” So even the weather impacts the sense of community and becomes a hurdle to its establishment.

### **The Communal Tree**

The ten refugees interviewed expressed the wish to create an imaginary setting of traditional system where all able bodied people gathered to discuss and settle daily transactions. The coffee shop has been employed in this way, becoming the metaphorical “communal tree.” Metaphors are a representation of an idea, and the participants created meaning by using rich

representation of their lived experiences in United of States. They used symbol representation of a Starbuck's coffee shop as a bridge back into the communal way of life. In a nutshell, they connected much meaning in daily life to the communal tree - to feel as if they exchanged in dialogue and to be perceived in the community how they wanted to be perceived.

As they arrived in North America, they were caught in the middle of environment lacking the big communal tree to which all were drawn regularly: to have heated debates; to settle issues and conflicts; and to support each other when facing bad weather and harsh socio-economic conditions - as in the host country. Lacking a place of gathering forced them to create an imaginary place. Specifically, they started to gather in coffee shops, such as one Starbuck's in Minneapolis or in communal areas at the Somali Mall as more refugees arrived in Twin Cities.

In the beginning, the metropolitan police did not like that Somali gathered in groups of fifty or more in front of the coffee shop. As the officers learned that these people did not violate laws or harm other residents, they have allowed the Somalis to sit in front of the coffee shop in the summer time. Today, one can observe many Somalis gathering in front of the coffee shop to discuss the daily routine particularly on the weekend. These locations have retrieved the sense of the communal tree where the daily transaction had done for centuries.

One of the participants, Abdi, told me that he was very happy to have the setting of the coffee shop; he felt more secure when able to gather with his own fellow Somali men. Another participants, Samatar, said , "At last, we had relieved from the anxiety of being lost in the middle of nowhere in North America; in the beginning, I thought that I was in a big jail, although , I was not arrested. I felt bad that I was isolated and forced to be at home all the time." He added "in the winter time it was very bad and sometimes I was locked at home and did not do anything except



daydreaming. I did not speak English language and did not have a job as I got in United of States of America.”

Moreover, the ten participants told me that they informed all other Somalis who lived in other states to move to Minnesota because they had a lot of places of gathering as they set up Somali Mall and coffee shop. Kenneded said that over the ten years that he has lived in the state of Minnesota, he observed the state has attracted many refugees from other states and it became the largest gathering of Somalis in North America. He added that they all love to visit and hang around the Somali Mall and felt that these places allowed the past living experiences to be reconstructed to a degree in North America.

I have observed many Somali elderly who gathered in the Somali Mall and coffee shop as I interviewed the participants. In the Somali Mall, you could see - any time of the day - many Somali gathered and exchanging goods which reminded them the informal open market back home in Africa. During the weekend, I saw many people who negotiated the prices in the Somali Mall, unlike the American setting fixed prices in stores. The reconstruction of traditional ways of living was a must to these immigrant/refugees: whether it was to buy goods; to have a tea and coffee and dialogue with fellow Somalis; or to have camel meat in the traditional gathering of tribe when the rains fall, the cattle abound, and the grass is tall.

Another important vista to reconstruct the traditional old setting was the gathering of Somali in the wedding time and graduation of students. Every weekend, one can observe Somalis gathering to attend wedding in a rented place on University Avenue in St. Paul. I attended several weddings and one felt that he/she was in a good old day's tribal ceremony. In summary, it showed that the majority of the refugees have been forced to construct their own community and places to have a binding and cohesive traditional way of life.

## Successes in the United States

In addition to exploring the reasons that the participants moved to North America, I was also interested in having people describe and tell about their success putting their experiences in historical, cultural and ethnic origin contexts. One of the participants, Ahmed noted that he could not compare American lifestyle with that he had known in Africa. He had seen that many of his fellow Somalis had grown up in poverty, and said, “I have known a generous abundance in my adult life before I was caught in war, refugee camps and journey to America, but I was very perplexed [by] the opportunity of education, business and other material abundance in North America.”

The majority of Ethiopia Somali refugees faced trying and failing many times, particularly in the first three years in the host country which were marked by confusion, poverty, cultural shock and regret. Nevertheless, the hard work values inherited from being originally from the third world eventually paid off, and the majority of the ten refugees became successful.

I observed that the Ethiopian Somali refugees were not so different from other immigrant/refugees who have taken advantage from United of States being a land of opportunity. Most worked all kinds of odd jobs for many hours so that they fulfilled the dream of one day fully integrating and belonging to American society. The ten participants all agreed that they talked with a positive outlook into the future. Guled reported that his children will take advantage and will have golden opportunities to be successful. In other words, the refugees felt that their children would be able to enjoy the greatest benefit of coming to America as opposed to themselves.

### **Fear within the Community**

The Ethiopian Somalis talked at length about the fear that they experienced in United States of America as result of September 11 and how their life was more peaceful before the incident. Several participants said that they could not comprehend why they were targeted and the government did not want to go after the real evildoers. The ten participants felt that they were relatively secure before the horrible act of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Some of the refugees expressed that they felt relatively welcome, even though they exercise a religion other than Christian, but they lived peacefully and eked out a decent living. Guled said, “After the terrorist attack by the extremist Muslim group, my life and [that of] fellow Muslims in the United States of America have dramatically changed.”

Another refugee, Awale, lamented that he felt that he and his wife were full of fear to go to the shop and buy groceries; he said that his wife who was wearing a scarf did not want to leave the house in the days after the attack of September 11. Guled said, “It reminded me of when I was living under the iron fist of military regime in Ethiopia, when fleeing from the airplane of Cuba and when living in the refugee camps.”

The majority of the refugees interviewed were working hard to show the difference between Ethiopian Somali Muslims and those who came from the Middle East. All said that they condemned the people who committed the atrocity in the host country and they hated war. The last thing that they wanted to face in life was war again. Roble said, “We are Muslims, but we are different. We dislike war. We love the American values and ideals, but we have hard time to prove. We did not have lawyer and other educated people to explain clearly our position on the attack of September 11.”

The ten participants were doing their best to explain crucially that they had a lot in common with the values of Americans and did their best effort to show affinities with them and opposition of the views of those extremist Muslims from the Middle East. They all said that Somali practiced a moderate Muslim and never heard of terrorism before September 11. However, things have changed for the worse as some Somali kids who grew up in Twin Cities went back to Somalia to fight along side of Ala Shabaab, a terrorist organization.

Awale, who was one the most respected people in Ethiopia, was disgusted with the terrorism attack and he said, “In Horn of Africa, we were all Muslim, but we hated each other because of ethnicity. Here in United States of America as result of September 11, people do not like us due to our religion; although, I and my family Somalis did not do anything to them beside being Muslim. Again people hate for who we are and we never do anything bad to them or their families. It is very sad thing that I fled to escape of being killed to be Somali ethnic and now you have feared to be arrested or jailed to be Muslim.”

### **Not Knowing If Your Neighbor Eats**

As I interviewed the ten participants, I noticed that they felt dislocated from their country, but they all lamented that they missed the communal way of eating together and knowing details of the life of your neighbor. Guled said, “Everything is private in this country, but at home [Ethiopia] I know the life of my neighbor and even he eats or not; it was very strange to be confined to your family.” The ten participants contended that they have distinct inclination to live together, share their food and face any kind of threat collectively; however, here in the United of States, they have pursued the individual living style in their daily lives.

They all spoke about a preference to be living collectively and helping each other in the bad or good times. Roble said, “God has created us individually, but we have to live together

and society will have a meaning of life if we support each other. Otherwise, we think that we can make alone, which is not true.” The majority of the refugees insisted that the traditional Somali approaches were very good and helpful to support each other. One refugee, Hersi reported that he did not like to be private in all his life, but his children are acting in that way. He insisted that they preferred not to be interfered with in their lives and could do anything for themselves. He added that when he wondered where did they have this idea, he decided that probably the TV was the teacher that instilled this individualistic value.

### **Walls**

The ten refugees reported that they all have a normal life in their point view. They all knew everyone in the village in their homeland, but they had lost these communal ways of life as they arrived in United States. Awale said, “If I looked at the house near my apartment, I did not know the people and it was very strange in the beginning. I used to it and did not bother me. However, I wanted to dialogue or to eat a food together.” While all ten Somali refugees interviewed preferred to live with their families, they did not like to be separated from their neighbor.

During the interviews, I met some participants at their home. They were still living with many people in one bedroom, and I was so surprised to see in that condition. I observed that some of them preferred to live in group due to the financial condition, but others opted for binding and cohabiting to create the semblance of village way of life. Roble said:

“The first few months of my arrival in United States, I thought that I was living in big jail and did leave my home for a few months except when I was getting food and having the visit to the Lutheran Social Services. I did not speak English and did not have a job either. On top of this nightmarish lifestyle, I did not go anywhere .The same thing did happen

in September 11. This time my family and I preferred to stay home. We were in fear to be deported or retaliated due to the terrorist attack.”

### **Advocacy**

The ten participants that I interviewed were not interested in politics, but they expressed interest in helping those whom they left in Ethiopia and refugees camps. They were brought up in an undemocratic regime and went through difficult times, yet were willingly to devote time so that the western worlds would help their cause. For example, I observed in the coffee shop that Somalis debated politics all the time; however, they were ironically puzzled at the prospect of participating in politics.

Waberi said, “I was victimized by politics. Nevertheless, I did want to take part in any politics.” In contrast, Samatar did describe his work in advocacy. He expressed being very involved in advocating for his fellow Somalis living in the refugee camps and in Ethiopia. He spoke about the politics when he grew up were very bad, and one group dominated the rest of society. He did think that American politics was different and here people at least have the right to vote in free and fair election.

Most interviewed expressed that they wanted to be a citizen and participated in the political domain in United of States. Five were already citizens, three were planning to apply, and two were not sure what they will do in the near future. In contrast, three of the ten interviewed were deeply involved in advocacy and campaigning to pass a bill, HR2003, in the congress so that the current Ethiopian regime would be scrutinized and questioned in order to continue getting aid from United States.

Almost all the refugees interviewed expressed that they wanted to help their fellow Somalis who were still living in Ethiopia and refugees camps, but they did not opt to be involved in politics in Ethiopia or wanted to go home. Another important point was that all relinquished refugee status for American citizen so that they got travel documents and exercised their basic right to put pressure the Ethiopia government. These were contradictions that I noticed from the participants. It seemed that they developed a new identity to be a citizen and participate in politics whether they shaped the condition of refugees left behind or the ones living in Ethiopia.

Two of the interviewees could not wait to be eligible to apply for citizenship while five acquired the citizenship. As in all countries, only citizens are able to vote. Refugees are eligible to apply for citizenship after living in the United States for five years. The majority of the refugees wanted to support their fellow Somalis who were still oppressed in Ethiopia, and left in the refugees. Hersi said, “I am more than willingly to right my previous mistake that I abandoned many refugees as I fled from his country. I should work hard to advocate for my fellow Somalis”

### **Second Generations**

The refugees interviewed were very hopeful that their children will have a better life compared to their own past experiences. The majority of them were delighted to see their kids have a good opportunity and chances to be raised peacefully, to go to a better school and to realize their dreams. Two of the participants were not very satisfied with their kids acting differently and did not respecting their parents the way that the participants had behaved and respected their own parents when growing up in Africa.

Awale said was he was as pleased as his child went to the best school in the world. He said, “I did grow up in absolute poverty and did not have many schools and University, but I was

so surprised that the number of education facilities in United States of America and how American did not take advantages.”

For many of the interviewees, however, these opportunities were reserved for their children. Eight refugees, who were parents, noted that their primary motivation was for their children; their sole purpose after bringing their families to the United States was to guarantee the safety of their families and then ensure the children received a good education and a chance at the American dream.

### **Future hopes**

Most of the refugees remain optimistic and look forward to a bright future full of opportunities. Eight of the ten interviewees were well off compared to when they arrived in the United States. While I interviewed and observed their worlds, I was quite impressed how the participants lives have changed for good and each had taken advantage of American dream - although some of them were still suffering anxiety and loss of loved ones. Gulded said, “I was better off and viewed the future life with full of hope and opportunity. I was thinking that my children will not go through what I have had before I immigrated to America.”

On the one hand, they lost some traditional ways of thinking and pursuing life in general and felt that they were caught between guiltiness not to help their fellow Somalis materially, but they were very happy that their children were likely to be better off.

The identity changes of the participants were obvious as I interviewed them. Overall, the resettlement for the refugees in the United States was a positive integration, although, they had many problems in the beginning. Of course, the biggest observation - whether in their houses, religious places or “communal trees” such as coffee shop and Somali Mall - participants seemed



very happy and to be managing life to move on to its next stages. They also wanted to revisit their past and insisted that they preferred to live and manage identities collectively. Diasporic identities are defined by the recognition of necessary heterogeneity and diversity. They are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew along itineraries of migrating, but also re-creating the endless desire to return to ‘lost origins’ (Hall, 1994).

Another factor that I observed was that they individually sought to improve their individual lives in contrast of the identity of collectiveness and communal mindset that they had as they arrived in the United States. Moreover, nearly all of the participants talked about their children being completely integrated and behaving as American kids. All ten Ethiopian refugees expressed the intention to remain in the United States permanently, but wanted to visit Ethiopia if peace ever prevailed over time. Their perception that the United States is a land of immigrants was comforting and reinforced their belief that the United States ultimately would provide countless opportunities.

### **Introspection**

As an individual, I am both a representative participant and outlier in this research. While my experiences are similar in many ways to those interviewed, my education makes me different. The following is presented as journal entries with limited editing to provide perspective on the thought process and some additional context about me as an Ethiopian Somali and as the analyst of the data in this research:

“I have had good and bad experiences, from when I lived in Ethiopia, on the journey to the refugee camps and in North America. I experienced a lot of problems, particularly since I decided to separate from my family. To maintain faith in life, I utilized my grandmother’s sage words: “Life is full of pain, yet you must be optimistic and face it with courage.” I faced multiple ordeals and used many times her wisdom. The worst of those were as I left my mother behind and experienced my father being killed in the civil war. One must know that one cannot know what life will bring tomorrow, but still take each as a new day that ushers the old day away.

“In the beginning, I was afraid in life, but I had developed a thick skin as I experienced problems that went from bad to worse. During my staying in Ethiopia, life was good; however, it shattered as I experienced war, killing and massacres in 1977. I thought that those lived experiences were the worst; however, I had faced literally hell on earth as I fled from my home land to save my skin and lived in the refugee camps.

“To construct a new identity began when I questioned the artificial borders and my Somali ethnicity in Djibouti. As I fled from my homeland and arrived in Djibouti, I was forced to experience a new identity based upon the colonial legacy. For instance, I was asked to prove whether I was a Somali from Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somaliland or Somalia.

“On top of this identity confusion, I was interviewed to attest my Ethiopian origin by a man who lived in Ethiopia but belonged to the Somali clan of Djibouti. Ironically, the President of Djibouti was born in the city that I fled from Ethiopia. Sometimes you wondered whether life is fair to humanity. I was constantly in search of new identity - be it ethnicity, religion or region, until I got to the United States of America, but the searching of identity was still in construction constantly.

“Moreover, I have long struggled to help my fellow Somalis - as I fled my country, stayed in refugee camps, and lived in North America. However, in order to help somebody in the United States (especially these days) to get a job and become settled in the community effectively, a whole lot of resources need to come to the table besides jobs. People need: housing; adequate resources to take care of themselves; and child care for their kids. I did my best to be involved in a lot of projects and help my community. For instance, I taught refugees workplace English language, and a computer course on how to communicate in an interview and in writing on an application (something totally foreign to them). I have also taught them that they have to impress an employer in the interview - when the language itself in the interview was the largest barrier.

“In the beginning, I had to work hard to compete against American candidates to find a job. While working at night as a custodian, I did engineering work for free in a company to gain some experience. To support my Somali community, I had opened a radio station to communicate messages to the community and teach my fellow Somalis how to get the right resources and help for their families. For example, I interviewed lawyers, doctors and political figures so that they could help my community adjust in United States. There was a tremendous amount of teaching and supportive services that needed to be delivered. For instance, I had to interview a doctor who helped the refugees learn how to cope with anxiety, fear and trauma. Many refugees who were open to discussing their past experiences called the radio station or privately sought help as a result. In the same line of thought, I and my colleague ran a driver’s education business and provided resources to the refugees.

“As far as my family is concerned, I raised two boys who struggled with dual identities: on the one hand, they had to live with parents who practiced African values; on the other hand, they have to compete with American kids because they are American.

“My wife and I were working hard to put our kids in the best schools we could in the Twin Cities and instill values and norms of determination, dedication and hard work to succeed in life. They gained those values and norms, and showed us that they excelled in school and worked hard in any job that they have done. For example, my older son, who is studying in medical school, worked very hard to be a good student and completed his undergraduate school and went to graduate school before turning twenty-one.

“Beyond all these endeavors, I want to talk about the notion of leadership (that I acquired while studying with cohort 18) that shaped me and allowed me to look back at life and formulate an analysis of the decisions I have made. Leadership without inner strength and vision is not achievable; in other words, I had to take back the past so that I can deal with present and prepare for the future. Jean Jacques Rousseau said, “Life has two kinds of beliefs; the one that we do not question as God and the other belief that we would experience and conceptualize as we live daily. The latter one is based upon stories and witnessing.” I had a lot of stories to tell... to pass on what I had lived in lived experiences, and as humans we are always telling stories in any aspect of life. That is why I loved to use phenomenology to frame my fellow Somali experiences and my own. I do believe that leadership requires the story of daily life actions to help us strive for tolerance and understanding in humanity.” (Gorse Ismail)

## **CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS**

In this chapter, I first summarize and analyze the major findings at each stage of the journey, and, then offer recommendations regarding how this research may help the social service agencies dealing with refugees, and also the community organizations serving refugees/immigrants in general. Lastly, I provide suggestions for additional research.

### **Summary**

This study may contribute to a greater understanding of the difficulties Somali refugees face as they resettle and try to adjust to life in the United States after fleeing from Ethiopia. Given the exploratory purposes of the study, the research included in-depth review of the relationship between personal/cultural values and cultural competence - the theories of ethnicity, identity and others were used so that the study provides values framework for conceptualizing cultural competence.

The choice to include a values-based theoretical framework was based on the fact this personal epistemology fit with my view of how cultural adjustment and identity may be impacted by the challenges of being a political refugee. Four dialectical tensions/conflicts emerged from participants' stories about their communication in their life experiences: (a) persecution and discrimination; (b) trauma in the journey of fleeing their homeland; (c) multiple identities in the refugee camps; and d) integration and adjustment in American society. When a phenomenological lens was applied to explore the experiences of the Ethiopian Somali refugees in this study, I saw more clearly they were influenced by ethnic clashes, experiences of

persecution, trauma during war, resettlement challenges in refugee camps as well as adjustments to America.

The refugee stories describe their journey and the impact of these experiences on individual lives. Their stories of struggle and survival share common elements with my story as a refugee and immigrant. My familiarity with struggle and survival - learning English as a second language, adjusting to a new environment and searching for employment - allowed me to gain the trust of the participants and to use an insider's perspective to interpret their experiences.

Participants identified three primary difficulties experienced in their journeys from Ethiopia to America. First, ethnic Somalis living in Ethiopia experienced ethnic discrimination and oppression as a result of political conflict occurring between differing tribes during a post-colonial era. A second problem related to the psychological and physical trauma experienced by Somalis as a result of physical threats and loss of family during the civil war period (including their experience in refugee camps). Lastly, Somalis experienced difficulties associated with assimilation in America as a result of: their cultural diversity and traditions; and post 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States; and negative reactions from government officials and general members of the public.

While living in Ethiopia, ethnic Somalis experienced discrimination, including a denial of their human rights and access to economic and employment opportunities. They lacked political power and protections and also were not recognized as legitimate members and citizens of their country. On the basis of these findings, the participants reflected multiple identities when they lived in Ethiopia. The findings of this research are similar to previous studies on identity formation that stated that in colonial and post-colonial times, citizens living in nation states in the Horn of Africa struggled with challenges to their individual and social identity due to two factors:

members of several ethnic groups were forcefully put together without their consent by the colonialists; and traditional tribal identities were ignored when the nation states were formed after conquest, causing ethnic conflicts within various nation states (Lewis, 2004). These circumstances caused ethnic Somalis to leave or flee Ethiopia during a period of intense conflict in the 1970s. Participants discussed their clashes with government authorities, the loss of family members, and threats to their personal safety and sense of well being. Participants traced the cause of this conflict to the legacy of colonialism and disregard for tribal membership and cultures.

The majority of the participants discussed their fear and struggle to survive while fleeing Ethiopia during civil war. After crossing the border to Djibouti, Somalis felt a loss of identity, a separation from their homeland and families, and also experienced continued threats to their safety while living in refugee camps. The loss of community and a survival mentality caused them additional pain.

The findings reflect that accepting a new identity in the refugee camps (although, the native people of the host country shared the same ethnicity, religion, and language with them) was problematic. As the participants discussed, the crossing of the border presented social problems that produced additional confusion of identity; seven of the participants expressed confusion as to whether they were in a new country or still living in Ethiopia. The findings corroborated claims in the literature that Somali pastoralists in the Somali Region of Ethiopia in his poignant statement about frontiers being “the razor's edge on which hang suspended the modern issues of war or peace, of death or life to nations” (Asiwaju, 1993). This complements nicely previous research that suggests ethnicity is an aspect of social relationships as well as “a social identity characterized by metaphoric or fictive kinship.” In other words, it is an idea

created in the mind based upon an individual's previous relationships with other ethnic groups (Erikson, 1993).

Reflecting on their experiences in refugee camps, ethnic Somalis described the threatening conditions that they experienced, as well as how they managed to immigrate into the United States. All the participants in the study discussed their decision making process in terms of fear: the fear they initially experienced living in uncertain and unsafe conditions; and the fear of being forced to return to Ethiopia. As they struggled to obtain food and secure shelter while living in harsh conditions, remaining in a refugee camp did not seem like a good option.

The participants discussed their alternatives: they could go back to Ethiopia and fear persecution; or stay in the refugee camps, suffer from malnutrition and the fear of being forcefully rounded up for return to Ethiopia. Somali refugees also eventually hoped to immigrate into the United States; many waited a long time to achieve this dream. This finding of the research supports that identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', but what we become, how we have been represented and how that impacts representation of ourselves (Hall, 1966).

Finally, the phenomenology lens was used for this research. As Madison (2005) defined, "phenomenology is that the receiver determines meaning, and therefore it is human perception, not external influences or objects of the material world." The participants here interpreted their daily lives whether living in Ethiopia under an oppressive regime, in the refugee camps, or in North America. Each narrated their lived experiences for analysis.

Phenomenology is essentially the study of lived experience or the life world (Van Manen, 1997). Its emphasis is on the world as lived by a person, not the world or reality as something

separate from the person (Valle et al., 1989). This inquiry asked the Ethiopian Somali males “What was this experience like in Ethiopia, Refugee camps and North America?” as I attempted to unfold meanings within the described lived everyday existence. This has been identified as trying to understand or comprehend meanings of human experience as it is lived (Polkinghorne, 1983).

In this study, I asked participants to return and reexamine their “taken for granted” experiences to uncover new and/or forgotten meanings. I gave voice to the experience of Ethiopian Somali males, helping them tell their stories as experiences of a forgotten people. My goal involved understanding how Ethiopian Somalis interpreted their experience as refugees and immigrants, using phenomenology to learn what their experiences mean to them (Taylor, 1980).

After Somalis arrived in the United States, they experienced challenges in adjusting to a new environment. Participants encountered language barriers, employment issues, cultural differences and conflicts related to race, religion, and ethnicity and also differences in social norms and values. These findings were consistent with Englund’s (2008) description of problems associated with adjustment. Despite difficulties experienced in adjusting to the United States, participants also described the freedom they enjoyed in here, appreciating opportunities to improve their lives. However, the majority of Somalis suffered due to their religious beliefs after the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. Many Somalis felt fear again because many people lumped immigrants, foreigners, and terrorists together in one group.

Many Somalis retreated within their communities to feel safe and avoid attacks based on their cultural and ethnic diversity. The participants discussed how they constructed an imaginary setting such as coffee shops and Somali Malls. These experiences, combined with the difficulties they encountered after fleeing their homeland, imposed hardships and postponed their adjustment to living in the United States.



The findings of this study showed that the participant stories provide a way to understand the experience of a generation of immigrants who arrived here as both political refugees and immigrants seeking a better life in to United States. Always in process, identities undergo constant transformations and are increasingly fragmented, fractured, and “multiply constructed across different, often antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions” (Hall, 1966). Another finding that the ten participants narrated and supported was fragmentation and shifting of identity. However, identities constantly strive for a closure, a belief in internal coherence, and a sense of eternity, which can be achieved through retelling the stories of the past and imagining a “homeland” (Frith, 1996).

Many studies of refugee populations have emphasized the “typical” immigrant experience of coming to the United States in search of better standards of living and improved socioeconomic opportunities. However, the experiences of refugees traumatized while escaping political persecution or struggling to reunite with family members during a period of civil war require a different understanding of the “immigrant” experience.

Because Somali refugees faced many hurdles, their vision of a better future may have led them to underestimate the intense stresses they would face in their new environment. Although each refugee’s experience was unique, there was a common set of challenges that newcomers typically confronted. These challenges associated with their journey from Ethiopia to the United States impacted their physical, behavioral, and psychological well being and also challenged their core identity. These findings supported the literature that suggests immigrants experience identity confusion caused by the distance between both their home country and new country and their native self-representation and newly emerging self-representation (Akhalar, 1999).

When people immigrate to a new country, they experience loss because of the separation from the people who were part of their identity, and they feel confused and changed. This cultural shock results in a crisis of personality or identity due to immersion in an alien culture and the experience of being away from familiar points of grounding for one's self (Adler, 1975). These concerns, added to the refugee experience, made adjustment to the United States more complex and difficult.

As I embarked on the analysis and data collecting of the ten refugees, the key themes that guided this research regarding life before and after arrival in the United States were studied in the light of lived experiences of the daily life. For example, the refugees described their lived experiences in a state of fear as a result of 9/11, and detailed the difficulties encountered in adjustment and assimilation creating a new life - whether in learning English, finding a job, or adjusting to any walk of life.

Assimilation occurs on two levels: behavioral or cultural assimilation, and structural assimilation (Appleton, 1983). Behavioral or cultural assimilation occurs when immigrant or ethnic minority groups take on the values and life styles of the dominant group. In general, ethnic Somalis resisted giving up their traditional language, culture and values; consequently, the process of assimilation and adaptation created tension and cultural conflict within ethnic Somali communities. For example, participants noted that the practice of Somali women wearing scarves created tension in area schools and work places. The men interviewed also indicated that they wanted to take breaks frequently to pray and this was not acceptable to the managers of the factories. In addition, they reported that Americans were not used to ethnic Somali type of refugees. The refugees claimed that they were black, Muslim and economically poor in a new environment. This need to reject traditional customs in order to assimilate often caused some refugees to choose separation and withdrawal from the larger community, rather than

assimilation into the dominant culture. This separation seemed to limit the feelings of participants about whether they were being recognized as full citizens in their new home.

The second level, structural assimilation, refers to the acceptance of ethnic minority groups into the social groups, institutions, and organizations of the dominant group (Appleton, 1983). For assimilation to occur, both levels must be present. However, ethnic Somalis did not feel their customs or traditions changed the “dominant culture.” This lack of recognition by the community reduced their participation in society at the educational, economic or political level. Because Somali men interviewed saw some resistance to assimilation and need to retain culture among their fellow immigrants, the adaptation appeared to take place “in three phases: contact, conflict and adaptation” (Padilla, 1980, p.24).

Redfield (1936) described, “Acculturation as a process occurring due to first hand contact between autonomous groups, leading to changes in the original cultures of either or both of the cultures.” In essence, acculturation describes the way culture changes due to exchanges between and among diverse people, often requiring less powerful groups to make more adaptations to the dominant culture. Cultural changes experienced by refugees proved difficult because many native born Americans thought refugees should fully integrate or assimilate into the mainstream culture. This included assuming the values, language and traditions of Western culture and ignoring their traditional culture. Appleton (1983) explained the challenge to refugees and new immigrants:

“To assimilate, an individual or group not only assumed the cultural traits of a host society, but also was allowed to participate fully in social, economic, and political arenas. More specifically, assimilation was considered a theory of conformity of immigrant or ethnic minority groups to the dominant group” (p.41)

In the initial phase, “contact occurred when two or more autonomous cultural groups Interact[ed]” (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987, p. 207). The major contact in America occurred when Ethnic Somalis from non-European backgrounds entered school and work. Conflict followed when Somalis felt unwelcome and challenged to assimilate and adjust to American culture. This would require them to learn a new language and ignore the norms of their traditional tribal system. Many participants objected to the “American” way of living and life style because it required them to do live differently, and independently. For example, many refugees had a hard time finding a place to pray or to exercise their cultural expressions.

Having experienced contact and conflict, many ethnic Somalis struggled to adapt, doing so with various degrees of success. Adaptation may take three forms: adjustment, reaction and withdrawal (Berry, 1980). In adjustment, the cultural behaviors of the minority group become similar to those of the dominant group in order to reduce conflict. These changes could include language, values, customs, and self-identification with the dominant group. However, many participants felt alienated and reacted by finding a comfortable means of surviving within their own communities. They found coffee shops and traditional malls in which to gather and socialize with their fellow Somalis. They created their own communities and bonded for social networking. Political refugees also accessed “Pal talk” on the Internet, establishing contact in a virtual world to discuss politics and current events, bonding with fellow countrymen who live around the world. They were, in a very real sense, distancing themselves from America’s dominant culture.

### **Recommendations**

My recommendations involve four primary areas of focus: (1) the Somalis’ political status as refugees and their need for protection; (2) cultural adjustment; (3) adjustment to social

norms; and (4) mental health problems. Regarding the political status of refugees, I recommend greater sensitivity from the Ethiopian authorities to the difficulties encountered by ethnic Somalis due to the discrimination experienced as a result of their ethnicity, language and culture in Ethiopia. This also includes their treatment in neighboring countries such as Somalia, Djibouti and Somaliland. Because the unfair treatment and resulting civil war occurred as a result of colonialism, the remedy should involve recognition by the international community of this harm and a change in treatment of ethnic Somalis. For example, prior to the occupation by colonial powers, the Somalis were a nomadic ethnic group; however, they lost this status and their homeland due to the artificial creation of nation-states.

Ethiopia and the countries in Horn of Africa adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Guidelines of United Nations (citation) and Inter-agency Guiding Principles (citation) which declares that the rights of individuals in their homeland should be respected. Somalis should experience safe and fair treatment within their territories as part of a national policy of protection of those living in the region, including those in refugee camps located in the region.

The Ethiopian government should formulate clear and detailed policy guidelines to treat ethnic Somalis humanely, including giving them access to food, shelter and other proper basic rights established by the United Nations and international community's agencies. The Human Rights Commission and the United Nations should monitor the treatment of ethnic Somalis. Various organizations supporting Somali refugees should work collaboratively to pool resources and gain assistance for refugees' still experiencing discrimination based on their ethnicity or political status. Social, political and legal remedies for the harm caused by their experience during civil war and refugee status should be provided.

The international community should assist Ethiopian Somali refugees outside of the Horn of Africa with the necessary support to meet the needs and demands of the refugee population, especially the ones left behind in refugee camps and in Ethiopia. The problems resulting from the September 11, 2001 attack regarding the financial support of refugees still living in refugee camps by their immediate families living in the United States should be corrected. This would allow the support to immediate family members living in refugee camps to continue. All of the recommendations made to this point would ultimately assist the reconstruction of identity of Somali people, wherever they live, as these changes would allow some return to the foundational communal identity of their upbringing in many ways.

To support immigrants in making cultural adjustments, I recommend a general educational effort for citizens, as well as Somalis in Somali Centers, within the United States. The emphasis or focus of this effort should be to help all involved understand the double impact of being an immigrant and a political refugee. The uniqueness of their experiences and misunderstandings regarding ideas about race and religion has created communication difficulties and cultural conflicts within the United States. For example, Ethiopian Somali refugees classify themselves not by race but by their tribal membership, and they do not accept Americans' emphasis on racial identity.

As to Americans' misunderstanding of the Somali's ideas of religion, the participants suffered due to their religious beliefs only after September 11. Ethiopian Somali should be encouraged to practice their faith without risking the label "terrorist." Somalis may benefit from participating in support groups to address their unique needs, including the discussion of past history and experiences. Being a refugee and fleeing persecution due to ethnic, religious and

cultural diversity causes changes in their economic, political, historical and social perspectives and values.

Immigrants to the United States faced problems of adjusting to life in the United States in terms of security, sheltering and other basic necessities. Assistance to refugees living in the United States may be varied depending on the different cultural and historical backgrounds and the unique conditions of their resettlement process. The Somali ethnic group from Ethiopia, who fled their country for refugee camps in Djibouti, provided a particularly challenging case as they most often have limited English-language skills, no employment experience outside of farming and herding, and a complex political history. These refugees should be given the proper language training, job skills and help with cultural adjustment. Language barriers impeded their adjustment to living in the America. Many adult refugees felt frustrated and helpless due to their inability to communicate. Refugees should access language training as a first priority to help their adjustment and gain employment.

Many new refugees also experienced tension between the cultural norms from their home country and popular cultural norms in the United States. They found their traditional values and behaviors were often undermined or not sanctioned in the America. Some conflict between parental values and the experience of their children existed. For example, refugee's children tended to internalize a new set of cultural norms, language, and value system more quickly than their parents. These differing rates of acculturation frequently became a source of conflict in immigrant families. As Velez and Ungemack (1995) explained, exposure to new norms weakens the social controls of the society of origin. The child's quicker adjustment often leads to feelings of alienation between parent and child. Often exacerbating familial conflicts is the need for an immigrant child to begin serving as a translator for his/her parents. This result is a reversal in

dependence that can threaten parental authority (Baptiste, 1993). Agencies and service providers should recognize these concerns and exercise sensitivity when dealing with parents and children of refugees.

To address mental health problems of refugees and immigrants, I recommend psychological counseling be provided by professional psychologist because refugees were often subjected to severe treatments of abuse, killing and discrimination in their homeland. Sometimes, cultural taboos prevented them from sharing this experience and seeking a Western style of treatment. Often Somali spiritual and community leaders could help by combining their support with the psychological support offered by medical providers.

Compared to the anxiety experienced by immigrants, the stresses confronting refugees were often even more intense. Unlike voluntary immigrants, refugees were often forced to come to the United States to flee political persecution due to their ethnicity, nationality, religion, or political opinions. As a result of persecution in their homeland, Ethiopian Somali refugees were often severely traumatized. Many suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of the violence and torture previously experienced. Somali refugees tended to have weaker social networks than other immigrants, fewer financial resources, less formal schooling, and more psychiatric illness. Westermeyer (1997) wrote that conditions that have been associated with refugee children are depression, somatic complaints, sleep disturbances, social withdrawal, violence, and antisocial behavior.

Refugees also experienced more instances of family separation than other immigrants (Westermeyer, 1997). Many refugees were placed with American families rather than with members of their own ethnic group. (one of the participants has married to lady who was living with American family. In general, it has effect on the lives of these refugees to have exposed to



American values. (it is only one participant that married to a lady put in American family) If family members accompanied them, they were often absent or unavailable to support them. Ethiopian Somali refugees should be given a proper cultural counseling that eases the loss of family and the fragmentation of family values experienced due to this separation. The majority of the Ethiopian Somali refugees lamented the neglect of their immediate families due to their circumstances and wished others had a proper understanding of traditional culture and norms.

I recommend the international community, and indeed the American community, place a larger focus on the situation of Ethiopian Somali refugees, including their fair treatment and recognition of their human rights. Their experience of being “lost in the system” should end, and greater efforts to support them, whether living in refugee camps or somewhere else, should be made.

### **Conclusion**

A more complete understanding of the total ethnic Somali experience – their escape from discrimination, war, and refugee camps to their lives in the United States - may allow others to recognize how being an immigrant and a political refugee doubly challenges the Somali’s sense of identity. The nature of this experience seems widely unknown to the general public resulting in conflict due to cultural misunderstanding and differences in traditions. More understanding and support for refugees should be provided here and abroad.

We live in a global age of protracted refugee crises and more aid will be needed. While millions of people seek outside aid to provide them with the basic necessities of food and shelter, they also wish to have access to educational and language development, psychosocial health,

physical protection, and support through times of great trauma, loss, and cultural adjustment. All of these services and components must be present to facilitate the most effective cultural adjustment possible, and to give Ethiopian Somali refugees the tools and resources to construct their own future, regardless of where they live.

For future research, I recommend examining the refugees' cultural history through a study of their traditional way of life and their traditional system of healing. My findings illustrated that knowledge of the refugees' background might allow community organizations – social services, government agencies, etc. – to help resolve the trauma that refugees experience as they integrate into a new environment in America. In addition, based on the findings of this study, I would recommend that future research be done to help Somali refugees gain an understanding about the needs of adjustment and integration. I also suggest that future research include: (a) studies focusing on diverse samples, (b) more studies derived from the themes from this study (e.g. identity, acculturation and integration) (c) studies focusing on power in traditional systems, and (d) studies exploring refugee inclusion in the therapy blended with the traditional system.

Finally, we who have gained a good education and achieved skilled employment in the United States should involve ourselves more in helping our fellow Ethiopian Somali refugees/immigrants adjust to life in America. Since we have experienced the American life style in both the academic world and employment area, we could help to alleviate some of the fear and ignorance that often play major roles in hindering progress. It is my hope that having overcome that fear and ignorance I can be particularly helpful in the field of education, counseling and acculturation of new refugees/immigrants as they adjust to life America.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### *Interview Questions*

1. Are you aware that I am recording this interview? If so, please say, “Yes, I know that this interview is being recorded.”
2. Tell me how long have you lived in the refugee camp before you move to North America. What was it like to live in this refugee camp?
3. Why did you flee from your country? Did you persecute due to your ethnic group in Ethiopia?
4. How did you feel with the imposition of nation-state of Western style versus traditional system when you were leaving in Ethiopia?
5. Did you tell me in which ethnic group you classify yourself before you fled from your country? You were considered as Somali or Ethiopian?
6. Did you face problem to prove that you were Ethiopian due to your arrival in a country (Djibouti) inhabited by Somali ethnic group?
7. What was the reason that you were forced to flee from your country?
8. What is the most different about life in the U.S. compared to back home
9. When did you arrive in the United States?
10. Besides English, what was the hardest adjustment to make to the U.S.? What was the easiest?
11. How much English did you speak when you arrived? How much do you speak now?
12. What do you miss most about home?
13. What do you like best about the U.S.? What do you like least?
14. What has been helpful to you in adjusting to the U.S.?
15. Is there anything you wish the services providers could do for you that they are not already doing?
16. Are you currently employed? What do you do?



17. How old are you?
18. Where is your family? Who is in the U.S., and who is in Africa?
19. Do you think you will ever visit back home in the future?
20. What about the U.S. makes you feel most at home?
21. What is your ethnicity? What is your race? What is your religion?
22. How do you agree with the religious beliefs, race and ethnicity of the community in which you lived?
23. How did you disagree with the religious beliefs, race and ethnicity of the community in which you lived?
24. How did people in the United States react when they learned that you are racially, ethnically and religiously different from them?
25. Tell me about your friendship in the United States. Did you have a lot of friends?
26. Did your American friends respect your tradition, culture and history?
27. What was easy your services providers with respected of your religion, race and ethnicity?
28. Did people ever ask you question about your religion, ethnicity or racial? If so, what did they ask?
29. Do you feel your religion, ethnicity and race made a difference to the host family with whom you work with, rent place from or interact to an aspect of life?
30. How do you life change as result of September 11?
31. Did you attend a Christian church, or a Muslim mosque in the United States? If so, did you think about your own religion, race, or ethnicity while you are living in this host country? What did you think about?
32. How do you rate your adjustment of religion, race or ethnicity in a work place, school or any other public place?
33. What did you think of the services providers, police forces or immigration officer's comments?
34. Did anyone ever try to get you to talk about your ethnic identity with respect of your past refugee life? If so, what was that like? What happened?

35. While you were in Ethiopia did you marginalize because of your ethnicity, race or religion? Did you persecute because of your race, religion, and ethnicity?
36. Did your past political refugee's life affect your adjustment in America?
37. Did staying in the United States change how you think about your religion, race and ethnicity? If so, how did your thinking change?
38. If you were to offer people from your United States town some advice, what would you tell them?
39. If you were given a chance to immigrate to the United States again as an immigrants/refugees, what would you do different? What would you do the same?

**Appendix B: IRB Consent Form**

**UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

**APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL TO CONDUCT  
RESEARCH**

**REQUESTED REVIEW CATEGORY: [ X ] EXPEDITED [ ]  
FULL BOARD**

IRB USE ONLY
IRB #: ____ _____
DATE RECEIVED: _____
DATE APPROVED: _____

1. **Project Title:** \_\_\_\_ Stages of Acculturation and Identity among Ethiopian Somali Males living in North

America. \_\_\_\_\_

**Application Type:** [ ] Initial Review [ X ] Resubmission/Revision

If Resubmission/Revision, list original IRB # here: B09-042-2X

\_\_\_\_\_

2. **If Expedited, Indicate Research Category** (*see line-item instructions*): \_\_\_\_

7 \_\_\_\_\_ is it expedited, if yes answer

3. **Will This Research last more than one year?** [ ] Yes [ X ] No

**Project Period** (*from data collection to project completion*): June 2009 through June 2010

4. **Name of Principal Investigator:** Ismail Gorse \_\_\_\_\_

University Department/School: Leadership, Policy & Administration

Primary Mailing Address: 1581 Rice Creek Road North East, Fridley, MN 55432

Telephone: 763-502-9990

E-mail: imgorse@stthomas.edu

5. **Name of Research Advisor (if applicable):** **Dr. Sarah Noonan**

University Department/School: Leadership, Policy and Administration

Primary Mailing Address: 1000 LaSalle Ave., Minneapolis. MN 55403

Telephone: 651-962-4897

Email: sjnoonan@stthomas.edu \_\_\_\_\_

6. **Please list any Co-Investigators:** \_\_\_\_\_ None

\_\_\_\_\_

University Department/School: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

7. **Mark the appropriate category:**

Faculty or Staff Research (1)  Undergraduate Student

Research (3)

Graduate Student Research (2)  Classroom Protocol (4)

Student/Faculty Collaboration (5)

Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

8. **Is this research subject to any other type of review?**  Yes  No

**If YES, specify:**

Dissertation or Thesis committee  Grant agency

Project site

Other IRB (*Specify Location/Source of Committee*):

\_\_\_\_\_

Other:

\_\_\_\_\_

9. **Lay Summary**

Please complete each section in clear, easy to read language that can be understood by a person unfamiliar with your research and your field. Done correctly, sections of this summary can be used in your consent form by changing the voice to first and second person and deleting information your participants do not need.

a. **Purpose of the research:** Provide a concise statement of 2-3 sentences.

The purpose of this research is to examine the experience of acculturation and identity formation among Ethiopian Somali males. Specifically I wish to learn about their “lived” experience of Ethiopian Somali males who fled their homeland and adapted to an alien country and culture.

- b. **Background:** Provide 1 or 2 brief paragraphs to explain the importance of the research and how it fits with previous research.

My study aims to strengthen the understanding of the challenges facing political refugees who must adapt to an alien culture while maintaining their core identity. Because studies often ignore the experience of political refugees prior to their emigration to their host country, significant elements in their stories of cultural change and adaptation are missing.

Because Ethiopian Somali refugees bring their past experiences into the host country, they need to be understood so that they can learn to adjust to be a good and productive citizens while retaining their core identity. Host countries benefit when people become familiar with the experiences of refugees and provide sound services that allow refugees to become contributing citizens. Identity for all people everywhere is not formed in a vacuum but within a cultural realm that comes with values, a history, and specific contradictions and complexities. It is this genuine difference that allows us to learn from each other. My intention is to go beyond this impasse and find in other cultures and vocabularies the key to unlocking a new set of possibilities for mutual understanding.

- c. **Research Methods and Questions:** Specify your research questions, hypotheses, and present specific methods you will use to address these hypotheses.

The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning of adjustment for Ethiopian Somali males in relation to their status as political refugees. Two different forms of dual identification with political refugees (Horn of Africa) and adjustment (America) have been forged among Ethiopian Somali males' residents during the period of transition to

acculturation in North America. The central guiding question of this study is “What is the meaning of the lived experiences” of Ethiopian Somali males as they make their adjustment to the host culture of the United States as both political refugees and immigrants with ethnic, racial and religious diversity?”

A qualitative research design is the most appropriate approach for answering the question because qualitative designs have been encouraged in areas of study where the voice of the group has been unexplored (Cohen, 2000; Smith, 1979); such is the case for immigrants/refugees of East African descent in America. The specific qualitative traditions and methodologies that will guide data collection, analysis and report writing include phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology and postmodernism (Cohen, 2000). I chose these qualitative theories and methods to help me to learn how Ethiopian Somali males describe their experiences related to identify formation using historical, political and cultural perspectives as members of a marginalized ethnic group.

I plan to conduct the interview of Ethiopian Somali males in three stages. The first stage includes introductions and provides an overview of the process, reviews the conditions and confidentiality agreement, and proceeds after a consent is given. I will establish an acquaintance with the interviewee. I wish to help the participants begin to analyze and share their experiences with me. After the first interview, I plan to do the next interview. The second reason for conducting more than one interview is to meet methodological rigor criteria for prolonged engagement. A second interview allows the participant to confirm or clarify information given in the first interview and may also ensure heightened trust between the participant and the researcher, thus enabling further disclosure of private thoughts and feelings. In case, I do not connect with the participant, I will not do the interview and thank the interviewee for

his/her time and move to next participant until I find a person who agrees with my proposal of interview. Then, I will conduct the interview. The second stage interview of Ethiopian Somali males is where the bulk of useful data may be derived.

Questions and probes should be directed to the “lived experiences” and “adjustment” of the informants. At this stage of interview, I will keep the discussion focused on the topic. This is where I anticipate the important themes may emerge. Although, participants might ramble or discuss irrelevant issues increasing the cost and time for transcription of audiotapes, I will give sufficient time to the immigrants/refugees population because they have gone through hardship of persecution and experienced trauma. The final portion of the interview should be a summary of the participant's responses and allow for confirmation or additional information to be given. I will take notes during the interview and also observe and take field notes about the interactions and customs of Ethiopian Somali males in public meeting places. Following the interviews and observations, I will begin with transcribing the audio taped interviews. The interviews will be transcribed as soon as possible after the interview. Next, the data will be checked for accuracy by listening and comparing it to the transcribed notes. The data will be analyzed using concepts associated with phenomenology.

(see Appendix A).

- d. **Target Population:** Describe your target population (*e.g. seniors, children ages 9-12*). Provide reasons for targeting any special populations (*see question 10d*) or for excluding women or minorities (*as appropriate*).

The sample will consist of 10 to 15 Ethiopian Somali males who lived can be identified as first generation immigrants and political refugees before they have arrived in North America. The inclusion criteria for this study are: (1) all participants will be Ethiopian Somali males living in North America (2) focus strictly on the male because they are having hard time to adjust to

North America life style unlike the female and they used to live in patriarchal system where women have been oppressed at home (3) identified as refugees/immigrant forced to flee from Ethiopia due to a well founded of fear of persecution, and (4) had experience living in refugee camps in Horn of Africa before they immigrated to North America. The age will be between 25 to 65 years old.

- e. **Expectations of Participants:** State precisely what you will have participants do. Attach any surveys, tests, instruments, interview questions, etc. that you will use with participants. Also state the location of data collection and the expected time commitment of participants.

I will ask participants to engage in a series of interviews after I obtain their voluntary participation using an informed consent form and discussion of the documents. I will begin the interview by going over the confidentiality concerns and reviewing the content of the informed consent form (see attached documents). After reading and reviewing the confidentiality assurances and the nature of their voluntary participation, I will ask the participant to describe in his own words the terms of their participation (see section 14 for details regarding informed consent). Next I will describe the general nature of the questions in each interview and their right to “edit” or offer comments regarding my summary of the interview.

- f. **Analysis of Existing Data:** If you are analyzing existing data, records, or specimens, explain the source and type, as well as your means of access to them. Use the exact name of each section and write underneath it. You have different names. Use the form and paste your text right underneath the category.

No data is collected yet.



10. **Anticipated Subject Population**

These are your best estimates based on the population you wish to study.

a. **Number of Males:** \_\_\_15\_\_\_      **Females:** \_0\_\_\_\_\_      **Total Human Subjects:**  
\_\_\_15\_\_\_\_\_

b. **Age Range:**    Youngest Subject \_\_\_25\_\_\_\_\_      Oldest Subject \_65\_\_\_\_\_

c. **Location of Subjects** (*check all that apply*):

University of St. Thomas       Long Term Care Facility

        campus       Prison/Halfway house

Elementary/Secondary school

Hospital

Clinic

Other Special Institution (*Specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

**None** of the above (*Describe location of subjects*): \_\_\_Interviews will be conducted preferably in the subjects' home environment or in a neutral location such as coffee shop or public library.

**NOTE:** If subjects are recruited or research is conducted through an agency or institution other than UST, submit written documentation of approval and/or cooperation. This document should use the agency or institution's letterhead and contain enough information to demonstrate the agency or institution's understanding of their role in your research.

d. **Special Populations**

**NOTE:** These groups require special consideration by federal regulatory agencies and by the IRB. In the Lay Summary (*question 9d*) you should have provided a rationale for focusing on special populations. **If women and minorities are to be excluded from the study, a clear rationale for their exclusion should also be provided in the Lay Summary** (*question 9d*).

**Minors** (under age 18) - volunteers       **HIV/AIDS** patients

**Minors** -- patients       **Economically** disadvantaged

**UST Employees**       **Educationally** disadvantaged

**Students**       **Hospital patients** or outpatients

**Pregnant women**       **Prisoners**

- Elderly/aged persons  Cognitively impaired persons  
 Minority group(s) and non-English speakers (*please specify in question 9s*)  
 Other refugees Special Characteristics and Special Populations (*specify and provide rationale in question 9d*)

## 11. Recruitment of Participants

- a. **Describe how subjects will be identified or recruited.** Attach copies of recruitment materials to be used (*e.g. advertisements, bulletin board notices, letters, emails, phone scripts, etc.*).

How will you locate the subjects to send a letter?

The recruitment will be done through personal friendships and other relationships that I have had with Somali and Ethiopian community members in North America. During my sojourn in the refugee camp, I worked in the United Nations as a clerk to translate, interview, and document refugee's biography and personal stories. Therefore, I met many Ethiopian refugees who settled in North America. I will ask them to distribute a letter from me regarding my study and to me if they are interested in participating. I will then respond to their class and inform them of the study and the consent process. I will call them and explain the study in detail. If the males are willing to be interviewed and meet the inclusion criteria, a meeting time will be scheduled at their convenience at a mutually acceptable place.

Prior to the meeting a demographic information sheet will be mailed to the participant for them to complete prior to the first interview. It is expected that most interviews will take place in the participant's preferable place; other accessible sites could include a school, library, coffee shop, mosque or church. Although multiple interviews will be conducted, attrition should not be a problem because the interviews will be conducted over a short period of time.

- b. **Specify who will make initial contact with subjects, and how that contact will be made.**

Subjects will be identified using personal friends, members of my church and my contacts with other in services agencies. As a refugee of Horn of Africa, I am in regular contact with other refugees. I encountered some of these refugees at the refugee's camps. I worked in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as an interpreter clerk when I lived in Horn of Africa.

- c. **Will subjects be chosen from existing records?**  Yes  No

**If subjects are chosen from records, indicate who gave approval to use the records.**

- d. **Will the subjects receive incentives before and/or rewards after the study?**

Yes  No

If Yes, describe these incentives and/or rewards. Include this information in your consent form.

- e. **What is the nature of the relationship between the researcher and any cooperating agency or organization?**

None

- f. **What is the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the potential participant?**

None

## 12. Confidentiality of Data

Please completely answer each question in clear, easy to read language. As with the lay summary,

the information in this section should be used in your consent form. It is extremely important that

all information obtained from your participants be kept as confidential as possible.

- a. **In what format(s) will the data be created?** (*e.g. written notes, surveys, audiotapes, video tapes/DVD's, photographs, etc.*)

---

**NOTE:** IF you are making any electronic records (*e.g. audio or video recordings, photographs*), stop now and complete an expedited/full board application for this proposal.

To maintain confidentiality, subjects will be identified by pseudonym only. As result of 9/11, refugees may fear that they might be targeted by government agencies. I will take the utmost care to safeguard their safety and security. Also, the participants' identities will be protected by changing minor details in their stories as appropriate such as city, family names, tribe affiliation and other remarkable characteristic of the collected stories (in addition to giving them pseudonyms). The refugee population that I am planning to interview is very sensitive to interviews. Consequently, as researcher I will make sure to respect their confidentiality of the data collected and the way that the interview is undertaken.

The lists of materials that I am creating are audio tapes, transcripts, and consent forms.

**Answer the following questions for each form of data you create.**

- b. **Where will the data and records be kept?** Specify the setting where the data will be kept (*e.g. home, work, school, etc.*), and how the data will be made secure (*e.g. kept in a locked file in a locked room, secured computer. etc.*).

\_ I will tape record the interview after receiving permission and store the tapes in a locked file drawer in my home office. A professional transcriptions will transcribe the tapes after

having signed a confidentiality statement and both tapes and transcripts will be returned to me.

- c. **How long will the data and records be kept?** Specify the exact date when the data and records will be destroyed. If the data and records are to be kept *indefinitely*, specify how they will be deidentified (see appendix for details).

Other than during transcription, I will be only one to access the audiotapes , consent forms and any items related to the transcripts which will be destroyed after completion of the research project by \_\_\_\_\_ July 2010

- d. **Will information from the data be transcribed?**  Yes  No

If Yes, please explain who will transcribe any information from this media and where it will be

kept. If the researcher is not the person transcribing the media, attach a statement of confidentiality from the transcriber.

Professional transcriptions will transcribe the tapes after having signed a confidentiality statement and both tapes and transcripts will be returned to me.

- e. **Will the data be recorded in any permanent record, such as a medical chart or student file?**

Yes  No      If Yes, please **STOP** and complete an "Expedited/Full Board" IRB application.

### 13. **Risks and Benefits**

- a. **Does the research involve any of these possible risks or harms to subjects?** Check all that apply:

- Use of private records (medical or educational)  
 Possible invasion of privacy of subject or family

- Manipulation of psychological or social variables such as sensory deprivation, social isolation, psychological stresses
- Any probing for personal or sensitive information in surveys or interviews
- Use of deception as part of experimental method
- Social or economic risk
- Other risks (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**b. Describe the precautions used to minimize risks and use of Deception.**

The nature of this research involves the sharing of sensitive and personal information. Subjects who volunteer for this study will be informed as to the nature of the questions prior to the interviews. Subjects will be selected based on their willingness to disclose personal feelings and insights. At the conclusion of each interview a debriefing will take place with each interviewee. Transcribed interviews will be available to each participant for review with the option to edit.

In addition, if a participant becomes distressed, I will offer him to terminate or reschedule the interview depending on the agreement of the interviewee and provide the following list of counseling/support resources:

- Minnesota Center of Torture.
- University of Minnesota Counsel Department that provide culturally sensitive resource.
- Somali Elderly of Center of Brian Coyle in Minneapolis.

**d. Benefits to participation:** List any anticipated direct benefits for subjects that participate in this research project. This does not include statements like "add to the existing knowledge" or "assisting your school/agency/company, etc." If there are no benefits, state "None". List this information here and in the consent form.

There are no direct benefits to the subjects(participants).

#### 14. **Informed Consent**

Attached is the Informed Consent Form, Appendix B.

Simply giving a consent form to a subject does not constitute informed consent. Consent itself is a *process* of communication.

- a. **Prepare and attach a Consent Form for IRB review.** A consent form template may be found at [www.stthomas.edu/irb](http://www.stthomas.edu/irb). Information from these sections will be needed to complete this form.
- b. **Describe what will be said to the subjects to explain the research.** Do not say “see consent form”. Write the explanation in lay language.

I am conducting a study about refugees who fled from their homeland due to persecution. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a refugee who fled your country to save your life and you might be interested in sharing your experience. The purpose of this study is to better understand what it is like to adjust in your new country and learn about the challenges you have faced. What happens to you when you were left your home and arrived in US, how is your life affected? How did you adjust to US? You do not need to answer all questions to be in the study. You are also volunteering to this study and will not involve any risk in your security and life in general, but I am collecting your “lived experiences” that you have gone through in refugee camp. It will be bringing up painful memories and feelings and I will also collect the data after you have arrived in this country, North America.

- c. **What questions will be asked to assess the subject's understanding of his/her participation in your research?** Questions should be open-ended – not “yes/no” questions; they should address procedures, risks (if any), confidentiality, and voluntariness. See the instruction form on the IRB website for examples.

What are you being asked to do? What questions do you have? What more do you need to know to feel you are entering into this study informed about the nature of the research? What can you do if you choose to withdraw? Do you understand that you can stop the interview at any time or refuse to answer any question? How will I ensure that your identity so that no one will be able to learn your name or place where you live?

- d. **At what point in the research process will consent be obtained?** Be specific.

Participants shouldn't sign the consent form until after I have explained the study orally and given them a chance to ask questions. So consent should be obtained at the beginning of the first interview but before I begin audio recording. All participants will be cognitively able to consent to participate in this research. No participant will be excluded based upon clan, region or religion. No major risks are anticipated for participants in this study. Inconvenience will be reduced by allowing the participants to arrange the time and place of the interviews. They may also terminate the interviews at any time and subsequently, reschedule or drop from the study without explanation. Each participant will be informed at each interview session that they can refuse to answer any question, talk about any topic or end the interview.

- e. **Will the investigator(s) personally secure informed consent for all subjects?** [ X]

Yes [ ] No



If No, identify below the individuals who will obtain consent (*include job title/credentials*):

15. **Determination of Full Board Review** (*check all that apply*)

Checking either of the categories below qualifies this study for full board review under federal

regulations.

Research involving more than minimal risk to the subject (*see instructions for definition of minimal risk*)

Research involving children or vulnerable populations (*see instructions for definitions*)

16. **Special Concerns for Research in School Settings**

If you are conducting research on school children during class time, please answer the following

questions.

a. **Describe in detail the activity planned for children not participating in your research.**

None

b. **Who will supervise non-participants?** Include this information in the consent form.

None

17. **Assurances**

**NOTE:** Inked signatures are required on the original application, to be submitted with the appropriate number of copies (**4** copies for an expedited review, **12** copies for a full board review).

This research, once approved, is subject to continuing review and approval by the IRB. The principal investigator will maintain records of this research according to IRB guidelines. If these conditions are not met, approval of this research could be suspended.

**The signatures below certify that:**

The signatory agrees that he or she is aware of the policies on research involving human subjects of the University of St. Thomas and will safeguard the rights, dignity, and privacy of all human subjects.

The information provided in this application form is correct.

- The principal investigator will seek and obtain prior written approval from the IRB for any substantive modification in the proposal, including but not limited to changes in cooperating investigators/agencies as well as changes in procedures.
- Unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events in the course of this study which may affect the risks and benefits to participation will be reported in writing to the IRB and to the subjects.
- The research will not be initiated and subjects cannot be recruited until final written approval is granted.

Signature of Principal Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Ismail Gorse \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_ June 19, 2009 \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Research Advisor \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Student Research:*** As Research Advisor to the student investigator, I assume responsibility for insuring that the student complies with University and Federal regulations regarding the use of human subjects in research.

Signature of Department Chair, or Designee \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Faculty/Staff Research:*** As Department Chair, or Designee, I acknowledge that this research is in keeping with the standards set by our department and assure that the principal investigator has met all departmental requirements for review and approval of this research.

**Prospective Telephone Interview Questions**

***Appendix A: Interview Questions***

40. Are you aware that I am recording this interview? If so, please say, "Yes, I know that this interview is being recorded."
41. Tell me how long have you lived in the refugee camp before you move to US. What was it like to live in this refugee camp?
42. What was the reason that you were forced to flee from your country?

43. When did you arrive in the United States?
44. What is the most different about life in the U.S. compared to back home?
45. Besides English, what was the hardest adjustment to make to the U.S.? What was the easiest?
46. How much English did you speak when you arrived? How much do you speak now?
47. What do you miss most about home?
48. What do you like best about the U.S.? What do you like least?
49. What has been helpful to you in adjusting to the U.S.?
50. Is there anything you wish the services providers could do for you that they are not already doing?
51. Are you currently employed? What do you do?
52. How old are you?
53. Where is your family? Who is in the U.S., and who is in Africa?
54. Do you think you will ever visit back home in the future?
55. What about the U.S. makes you feel most at home?
56. What is your ethnicity? What is your race? What is your religion?
57. How do you agree with the religious beliefs, race and ethnicity of the community in which you lived?
58. How did you disagree with the religious beliefs, race and ethnicity of the community in which you lived?
59. How did people in the United States react when they learned that you are racially, ethnically and religiously different from them?

60. Tell me about your friendship in the United States. Did you have a lot of friends?
61. Did your American friends respect your tradition, culture and history?
62. What was easy your services providers with respected of your religion, race and ethnicity?
63. Did people ever ask you question about your religion, ethnicity or racial? If so, what did they ask?
64. Do you feel your religion, ethnicity and race made a difference to the host family with whom you work with, rent place from or interact to an aspect of life?
65. How do you life change as result of September 11?
66. Did you attend a Christian church, or a Muslim mosque in the United States? If so, did you think about your own religion, race, or ethnicity while you are living in this host country? What did you think about?
67. How do you rate your adjustment of religion, race or ethnicity in a work place, school or any other public place?
68. What did you think of the services providers, police forces or immigration officer's comments?
69. Did anyone ever try to get you to talk about your ethnic identity with respect of your past refugee life? If so, what was that like? What happened?
70. While you were in Ethiopia did you marginalize because of your ethnicity, race or religion? Did you persecute because of your race, religion, and ethnicity?
71. Did your past political refugee's life affect your adjustment in America?
72. Did staying in the United States change how you think about your religion, race and ethnicity? If so, how did your thinking change?
73. If you were to offer people from your United States town some advice, what would you tell them?

74. If you were given a chance to immigrate to the United States again as an immigrants/refugees, what would you do different? What would you do the same?

**CONSENT FORM**  
**UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**

**Stages of Acculturation and Identity Formation among Ethiopian Somali Males Living in North America.**

**B09-042-2X**

I am conducting a study about stages of acculturation and identity formation among Ethiopian Somali males in North America. I am asking you to participate in this research. You are an Ethiopian Somali male over age 18 living in the United States. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Ismail M. Gorse, a doctoral student at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis, MN, U.S.A. This study will result in a doctoral dissertation.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to gather data regarding the experiences of Ethiopian Somali first generation males living in North America face the challenge of maintaining an identity that incorporates their native culture, history, social and political values and traditions (including the effects of political and ethnic conflict) as well as forming a new identity as a result of their adjustment to a new culture and circumstances

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to answer a questionnaire that indicates which U.S. states you lived in, the size of the community, and your ethnicity. You will receive a list of interview questions beforehand as email attachment or through a regular mail. You may then be selected for a tape-recorded telephone interview or to meet and have a face to face interview. If

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you are selected for a tape-recorded interview, you will be contacted via email, mail or telephone to arrange the date, and time of that interview. Those who are interviewed will be asked to consent for the interview and describing the “lived experiences” of your refugee background. (I did not understand whether I have to remove the whole paragraph or the sentences that describe the questionnaires; please clarify this question)

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

If you are selected for an interview, you will be asked questions about your past and present experiences of adjustment and political persecution of “lived experiences” at home and in the United States. It may bring up painful memories and feelings that you had in your past experiences of your original country as well as the refugee camps. There are not other risks associated with participation in this study. We also need you to state that there are no direct benefits associated with participation.

### **Compensation:**

No payment is involved in this study.

### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include your name or any other information that would allow other to identify you. Your research records will be kept in a locked closet in my home. I am the only person who will have access to the records. I will destroy the audiotapes, consent forms, and any other items related to the transcripts after completion of the research project by June 2010.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. As a participant, you can skip any questions you are not comfortable answering. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will not be included in the study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with any organization, institution or the University of St. Thomas.

Contacts and questions: Please add phone contact information for yourself and the IRB. Please omit the request that the participant mail the signed form to you.

### **Contacts and Questions**

My name is Ismail Gorse. You may ask any questions that you may now. If you have questions or concerns, you may contact me at [imgorse@stthomas.edu](mailto:imgorse@stthomas.edu) and call me at 763-502-9990. If you would like to speak to the professor overseeing this research, you may contact Dr. Sarah Noonan at [sjnoonan@stthomas.edu](mailto:sjnoonan@stthomas.edu). The IRB phone number is (651-962-5341).

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study and to be audio recorded. I am at least 18 years old.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Print Name of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT  
 UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**

**Stages of Acculturation and Identity among Ethiopian Somali Males living in North  
 America.  
 B09-042-2X**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ [name of transcriber], agree to transcribe data for this study.  
 I agree that I will:

1. keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than     Ismail Gorse    , the primary investigator of this study;
2. keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession. This includes:
  - using closed headphones when transcribing audiotaped interviews;
  - keeping all transcript documents and digitized interviews in computer password-protected files;
  - closing any transcription programs and documents when temporarily away from the computer;
  - keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet; and
  - permanently deleting any e-mail communication containing the data;
3. give all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the primary investigator when I have completed the research tasks;
4. erase or destroy all research information in any form or format that is not returnable to the primary investigator (e.g., information stored on my computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.

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Signature of transcriber

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Date

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Signature of researcher

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Date