CHAPTER 7
Reconstruction of Gender Roles and Relations among Somali Women within the Transnational Context of South Africa

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Abstract

Reconstruction of gender roles and gender relations is inevitable for most refugees in transnational terrains as they navigate a new socio-cultural context. In Somalia, women operate from a highly patriarchal system that legitimises dependence on men, but in the host country, they are making remarkable inroads in redefining gender roles and relations. In this chapter, the authors interrogate how Somali women reconstruct gender roles and relations within the transnational terrains in the context of South Africa using feminist intersectionality. It is informed by a qualitative study that drew data from in-depth interviews of 40 Somali refugees in Gauteng, whose purpose was to interrogate the gendered complexities of Somali women in the South African context. The study establishes that redefining gender roles and power relations was elicited by pressing livelihood demands and the South African context, which gives Somali women the ability to access rights more easily than in Somalia. The Somali women reconstruct gender roles and relations in their Diaspora households as they strive to build themselves in South Africa. When these women have an income and access to resources in these transnational terrains, they control the household budget and decision-making. The women venture into the male domains to maximise family returns to support their families in the Diaspora and, importantly, send remittances home. This work contributes to the literature in the field of migration by specifically

focusing on Somali women refugees and how they negotiate gender roles in the transnational space to be economically independent, which in turn positions them to have decision-making power in their homes. Finally, it contributes to the literature on the intersectionality theory within gender and transnationalism.

Keywords: gender roles, gender relations, transnational space, transnational migration, Somali women, South Africa.

1 Introduction

The transnational migration[1] has reconfigured, redefined, and reinforced the gender roles[2] and gender relations[3] among Somali women living in South Africa due to the pressing socio-economic demands. This chapter explores the following gender roles and power re-negotiation that continuously shape the identity of Somali women within the transnational space[4]. Somalia is a highly patriarchal system that legitimises the socio-economic dependence on men, though women are making remarkable inroads in redefining gender relations. The chapter describes the shifting gender roles and how women negotiate gender power structures when they come to South Africa. In South Africa, they navigate various complexities like financial challenges that demand them to redefine their gendered roles to meet household needs while remitting money home. How these women navigate through the transnational space in the context of South Africa is divulged in this chapter.

Due to the pressing economic demands among migrants, a shift in gender roles is expected. Although Somali women originated from highly androcentric backgrounds, transnational space proffers them the possibility to redefine and negotiate their gender relations in a transnational space. This shifting of gender roles and power relations has been born out of the livelihood demands that induce them to venture into the male domains to maximise the

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[1] Migrants' movement processes across national borders.

[2] Gender role is an outcome of social and cultural interactions that dictate the expected behaviour appropriate to one's gender.

[3] Gender relation denotes hierarchical relations of power that disadvantage women.

[4] Transnational space is a dense web of ties among migrants across and beyond their host nation and country of origin.

economic returns and cater for their families. South Africa allows them to negotiate those power hierarchies within the Somali institutions much easier than in Somalia or Kenya.

Transnational migrants forge and retain multi-stranded ties that link them with their families and friends at home and in the recipient nation while negotiating the liminal space. Transnationalism cannot be overlooked in a study like this because it is a phenomenon reproduced by migrants as they rebuild their identities within those 'new spaces' (Maleku *et al.* 2022; Muthuki 2013; Tedeschi, Vorobeva & Jauhiainen 2022). Transnationalism describes this ever-evolving differing, fluid nature of the web of connections that migrants interact with between their country of origin and the receiving country. It is never a static process but an ever-evolving process that continuously enables migrants to forge their identities within the host country (Tedeschi *et al.* 2022).

Due to social, political, and economic opportunities in South Africa, the country remains a huge attraction destination for migrants. Migration into South Africa has also been occasioned by the democratic landscape governed by a very progressive Constitution. Migrants, marred by debilitating poverty, unemployment, low wages, and intermittent wars, flee their countries and migrate to South Africa for peace and economic stability.

Propelled by their fluid mobility with nomadic lifestyles, Somalis moved to other countries, notably South Africa, for better opportunities. Their movement is instigated by political instability occasioned by the Al-Shabab menace and ethnic tensions in Somalia. The Somali people also migrated to flee famine and drought in the dry parts of North Eastern Kenya (Ibrahim, Rizwan, Afzal & Malik 2022). Thus, led by a dense social network, they are attracted by the perception that South Africa has a boisterous economy that would give them opportunities to rebuild their lives in the democratic landscape of South Africa.

A qualitative study was conducted among 40 Somali women from Gauteng. Few community members identified women that could provide more relevant responses to the interview questions.

In-depth interviews were conducted to understand better how those women reconstructed their role in South Africa. The study aimed to answer the question, 'How do Somali women negotiate gender relations in the transnational context?' The justification for the choice of Gauteng Province was that it is the point of entry for most migrants. It is also the province where

Pretoria is located. Pretoria is significant to the migrants coming to South Africa as it is their reference point for getting asylum or renewal of their permits. The Department of Home Affairs that issues asylum permits is based in Pretoria. Besides, Johannesburg is an economic hub of Africa, which pulls a considerable population of migrants into the province. Mayfair and Pretoria West (both suburbs in Gauteng) were selected as the study sites because most Somali women reside in the two suburbs.

The key theory adopted in this chapter is feminist intersectionality, an analytical tool based on the concept that interlocking oppression systems affect women's lives (Atewologun 2018; Hanklvsky & Cormier 2019). Somali women's lives cannot be understood clearly without the theory because intersecting factors – class, race, nationality, education, age, gender, race, religion, and refugee status – affect them directly. These factors have to be concurrently understood because they are interconnected and interdependent on one another.

The chapter contributes to the literature in the field of migration by focusing on Somali women refugees and how they negotiate their gender roles in the transnational space to be economically independent. The negotiation aspects, in turn, positions them to have decision-making power in their homes. The chapter also contributes to the body of knowledge under consideration by analysing and understanding the migrant's lived experiences. Also, the study contributes to the literature on the intersectionality theory within Gender and transnationalism.

2   Methodology

This chapter adopts a qualitative method. The qualitative method is a naturalistic inquiry that is invaluable for interpreting and describing social phenomena (Ancker, Benda, Reddy, Unertl & Veinot 2021). This work, whose purpose is to interrogate how Somali women reconstruct gender roles within transnational contexts, is naturalistic and, therefore, a qualitative approach that suits the study. The work was done within the interpretivism paradigm. Interpretivism engenders considering various interpretations of a given social context to attain deep knowledge (Junjie & Yinxin 2021). Forty research subjects were interviewed in-depth using semi-structured questions. Although the study could have exceeded 40, the researcher considered it a saturation point where no new information arose from the field.

Some Somali population (students) interviewed were also sourced from

the University of Pretoria, the University of South Africa (UNISA), and Johannesburg. The women interviewed were in Johannesburg and Pretoria West in Gauteng Province and within the South African Somali Women Network (SASOWNET). Pretoria and Johannesburg have the largest population of Somali women in South Africa. Johannesburg is the largest economic hub in South Africa, making it an ideal destination for Somali who do business. Pretoria is the town where Home Affairs is located. The Somali women are therefore located a few kilometres from Home Affairs. In order to gather in-depth knowledge of women's experiences in reconstructing gender roles, this study adopted semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview is a flexible approach that allows the study to obtain in-depth data and evidence from the subjects while considering the study focus (Mashuri, Sarib, Alhabsyi & Syam 2022). Thematic analysis was applied in this study. The salient themes from the interview were used to describe issues pertaining redefinition of gender roles and power relations among Somali women.

3   The Theoretical Framework of the Study
3.1   *Feminist Intersectionality*
This chapter adopts Feminist intersectionality. The theory was coined by Kimberly Crenshaw[5], who argued that women's lives are constructed by interlocking systems; social, political, and cultural systems of oppression. The proponents of the theory see how the marginalisation of women is sustained by the intersection of various axis of social identities (Al-Faham & Ernst 2019). The theory penetrates and reveals issues relating to women, not from single elements but intertwining social factors of oppression that simultaneously affect women's lives (Chaulagain & Pathal 2021; Kassam, Marcellus, Clark & O'Mahony 2022; Standke-Erdmann 2021). Therefore, women's inequality results from interwoven experiences, power relations and social factors, not a singular social factor (Atewologun 2018; Hanklvsky & Cormier 2019). The intersectionality concept came about following the inability of single factors of structural inequality to recognise the web of interconnection between various systems of oppression (Martin & Chang 2022). The theory enables the authors of this work to understand how intersecting factors of oppression affect how they negotiate gender roles and power relations in transnational contexts.

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[5] Kimberley Crenshaw, an American Black Feminist, coined the theory of Feminist intersectionality.

3.2 Gendered Geographies of Power

In this chapter, the authors examine how transnational migrants negotiate gender powers. Four blocks constitute the theory: 'power geometrics, geographic scales, imagination, and social locations' (Kofman 2020; Thomas 2021). This work adopts the social locations element to understand how gender is reconstructed within transnational terrains. The concept of social locations implies that migrants are born into a particular social location that disadvantages or advantages them. The lives of migrant women are either disadvantaged or advantaged by factors such as their education level, gender, class, race, religion or nationality.

4 Literature Review

4.1 Negotiation of Gender Relations among Migrants

There is extant literature about negotiating gender relations among the migrants in the host countries (Bleeker, Escribano, Gonzales, Liberati & Mawby 2021; Wandscheneider, Batram-Zantvoort, Razum & Miami 2020). During the migration process, women experience traditionally gendered roles and expectations differently because migration is an activity that redefines gender roles (Wandscheneider *et al.* 2020). Besides, for those that face gender-based discrimination, like women and the LGBT community, it could be a way to their self-actualisation (Bleeker *et al.* 2021). Although displacement adversely impacts migrant women, such as facing horror and trauma, Daniely and Lederman (2019) argue that it gives them a platform to deconstruct gendered roles and change power. Ripero-Muniz (2020), who investigates the negotiation of culture and religion among Somali women in Nairobi and Johannesburg, claims that while transnational migration plays a vital role in the reconstruction of gender roles, Islam is equally important in defining gender roles and relations, as gender interlocks with religion and culture. Fresnoza-Flot (2021), who interrogates literature on mobility focusing on definitions of gender in transnational contexts, argues that most literature is heavily heteronormative. Weber (2015) examines how children migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa construct, transmit and negotiate their gender identity in France. The study found that the children are active participants in constructing their gender identity by negotiating the gendered layout which their parents constructed for them. Similarly, Duda-Mikulin (2015), who looked at the effect of migration on Polish women in the United Kingdom, argues that

migration can empower migrants. Duda-Mikulin (2015) further argues that transnational terrains expose migrants to different gendered expectations and regimes. It helps them to compare and contrast how gender roles have changed between their home and host countries. Thus, those migrants can interrogate the current gender roles and power relations in the host countries. Pinnawala's (2013) work focuses on Sri Lankan female returnees that have worked as domestic workers in the Middle East. The study found that migration signi-ficantly impacted household tasks, family relationships, and power relations. Besides, women remain home to create a comfortable environment for their husbands, who return home weighed down by work-related stress. The work of Okeke-ihejirika, Punjani and Salami (2022) focuses on extended family relations among African women migrants. They argue that the gender role shift within the family can upset gender relations among migrant women. Muthuki (2013) examines how the African international students at KwaZulu-Natal negotiate familial relationships transnationally and how those students gain autonomy or become empowered in the process of forging familial meanings within the transnational terrains.

The above-mentioned scholarly works demonstrate that the negotia-tion of gender roles and relations among migrants in the host countries has been studied. Nonetheless, those works (Bleeker *et al.* 2021; Duda-Mikulin 2015; Muthuki 2013; Okeke-ihejirika *et al.* 2022; Shaffer, 2013; Wand-scheneider *et al.* 2020; Weber 2015) have not taken cognisance of the inter-sectionality of gender and other social locations – nationality, religion, lang-uage, education – that affect women's lives in transnational terrain. These so-cial locations either enhance or encumber women's negotiation in the host nation. There seems to be a paucity of literature considering social locations in examining how gender roles are negotiated in the transnational space. This chapter advances that the lives of migrant women cannot be comprehended deeply without interacting with the social locations of gender, race, religion, nationality, education, and language that either enhance or encumber their navigation of the transnational space.

4.2   Gender Relations in the Somalia Context

In order to understand the manner wherein Somali women negotiate their gender identity in Gauteng, a quest into the gender relation discourse in the context of Somalia is pertinent. Understanding their social backgrounds is

crucial to establishing how their activities are impacted by religious, cultural, and statutory structures that reinforce their subordination or enhance their emancipation in Gauteng Province.

Gender relations in Somalia have historically been shaped by the religious and cultural institutions that define the status of women. This socio-cultural setting in Somalia has seen the exclusion of women from public participation, despite the push by civil society organisations (CSOs). Male-structured institutions with less political will have marginalised Somali women to recognise their leadership and decision-making roles (Abdi 2021; Ali & Ali 2013; Ochiltree & Toma 2021). The responsibilities of power and respect in the community, like elders, religious leaders and decision-making roles, are retained within men's domain (Ochiltree & Toma 2021). This condition is reinforced by men being socialised in an overtly patriarchal society. The gender inequality, shaped by the deeply rooted patriarchy, was exacerbated by the two decades of military rule that saw boys and girls socialised in an androcentric environment. Similarly, the collapse of Siad Barre's[6] regime precipitated gender segregation of Somali women in educational institutions and places of work. The absence of national policies that are gender empowering has resulted in slow progress in the power structures, which has impacted negatively on gender relations.

The Social Locations concept underscores that people are born into power hierarchies that either offer them an advantage or disadvantage in navigating the patriarchal institutions within the transnational territories (Forsberg Stenbacka 2022; Moolman 2013; Woods, Benschop & Van De Brink 2021). For instance, Somali women coming into South Africa from Kenya have a Swahili and English language background and a more open culture than those from Somalia. That social location of origin enables them to interact with other nationalities from Africa. Most Somalis in Kenya have interacted with other cultures among Kenyan communities in the North-Eastern regions, namely, the Oromo, Samburu, Gabra and Rendille.

In Somalia, the community operates from a very male-controlled belief system that legitimises the social-economic independence of men. In the pre-colonial era, women were expected to be the housekeepers and caretakers of the livestock (Guyo 2017; Ochiltree and Toma 2021), a gender role that was very significant for the household's survival. Political engagement was a no-

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[6] Siad Barre was a military general who later became the third Somali president and ruled from 1969 to 1991.

go zone for Somali women, and so were the roles outside the household. Men were regarded as the breadwinners in line with religious and socio-cultural expectations (Abdi 2021; Guyo 2017; Ochiltree & Toma 2021). The colonial masters would later reinforce this dependence of women on men, thus, placing women in a state of subordination to the community and the Somali state (Abdi 2021; Ochiltree & Toma 2021). The women were socio-politically and economically marginalised, so much that they depended on men in varied ways.

Somalia is a highly patriarchal state with few policies safeguarding women's rights against gender-based violence and discrimination against women at border control checkpoints (Abdi 2021; Carter, Rogers & Turner 2021). The patriarchal system buttresses overlapping complexities based on gender, culture, and religion. Due to their gender, women are discriminated against regarding access to inheritance and land rights. Somali women are also subject to limited access to education facilities due to the country's inequalities (Abdi 2021; Al-Sharman & Mustasaari 2020).

Somalis, predominantly Muslims, hold to the teachings of Prophet Mohamed, as contained in the Holy Qur'an, the Islamic doctrines taught by their Imams, and cultural norms and belief systems, which are significant in ordering the lives of the Somali community. Nevertheless, the place of women has progressively improved due to the emerging economic demands that push women to challenge norms that restrain them in traditional gendered roles. Somali women have notably engaged actively in public circles in Somalia and Kenya, albeit with complexities due to patriarchal institutions. Somalia's new constitution, adopted in 2012 in Mogadishu,[7] advocated for women's political rights while annihilating the clan system of governance that hampered women's public participation.

Although Somalia is a United Nations Member State, it has not ratified the Convention for Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This failure presents Somali women, who face various forms of discrimination, with a challenge as they could have used CEDAW as the international law to safeguard their rights. The Federal government of Somalia has a constitution that guarantees the participation of women in the public arena, albeit conservative institutions that exist to relegate women. The Hadith or Koran does not exclude Somali women from public participation. The exclusion is elicited by the belief that women can fall prey to temptations and conflict because of their moral vulnerability, which hampers their struggle toward public

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[7] Mogadishu is the capital city of Somalia.

participation.

Although there are ongoing efforts to improve women's lives in keeping with the constitution and the women's call for their emancipation through various agencies, roles and expectations are still gendered. Their belief systems and traditions continuously weaken the full participation of women within male domains. Most Somali women are unaware of their rights in Islam, leading to fear of pursuing specific roles involving public participation. When those women have access to education, property, and political participation and know those rights, they can negotiate gender powers that define their roles. A school of thought among Muslim scholars advances the view that Islam is positive about the equality of men and women in society (Henning 2016; Saujan, Mazahir & Ibrahim 2022; Sirri 2020). The school argues that, to comprehend the dimension of justice, equality, and being considerate to the other person, the reader of the Qur'an has to apply contextual reading. The Islamic faith allows women to access rights to inherit, possess property, get an education, and any other treatment that a man would have, based on the equality of persons (Abdi 2021; Henning 2016; Saujan, Mazahir & Ibrahim 2022).

In Somalia, women have been victims of rape, gendercide, and other forms of violence as a strategy to intimidate them. Rape humiliates, ethnically cleanses, and silences opponents during the war. The work of Sri (2022) regarding the Ukraine war points out that rape is the cheapest weapon used by opponents to instil fear and degrade women. The community suffers because men are de-masculinised while women's bodies are besmirched. Similarly, rape is considered a property crime in the Somali community because women are part of men's possessions. The stories narrated by the women demonstrated that Al-Shabaab would use rape, forced marriages, and graphics of kidnapped women to intimidate them and consequently demonstrate their power over an anti-Al-Shabaab society. The Al-Shabaab uses culture and religion as a tool to justify their acts of violence. In this regard, women pointed out that rape and sexually related intimidation kept women indoors, as women are traditionally perceived to belong within the household confines. Thus, according to Fatima,[8] when those insurgents realised that some community members were supplying the African Mission to Somalia (AMISON) and the Somali government with intelligence information, they intimidated them through

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[8] Fatima was one of the forty participants interviewed. Other participants featuring in this work were Aisha, Amina, Zara, Kuresha, and Amira.

sexual violence or even killed them. Somali women would narrate horrendous stories about rape, kidnapping, and torture. The Al-Shabaab would show them graphics of women who had been kidnapped, raped, forced into marriage and used as suicide bombers to instill fear. This tactic was aimed at discouraging them from reporting the group to the government. As a result, Somali women left the country and sought refuge in South Africa.

4.3 Gender Dynamics in the Context of South Africa

In order to understand the context in which Somali women negotiate gender relations and power structures in the transnational space, a focus on gender relations and expectations of women in the recipient nation cannot be ignored. However, the context of South Africa is not homogeneous, and the same can be expected of the experiences of South African women whom the apartheid regime positioned at the bottom of the social and economic ladder. The reality of South Africa is uniquely different from that of other African countries because the colour-based cleavage defines a women's position. Black women experienced disenfranchisement out of their 'blackness' that is varied because they are not a homogeneous entity. In South Africa, black women differ regarding their social, political, and economic status (wealthy/ poor, educated/ uneducated, affiliated/ non-affiliated to the ruling party, rural/ urban). The Islamic faith does not prohibit women from having incomes as long as they do not engage in proscribed business and dress outside the Islamic dress code (Khalif & Cabdirisaaq 2019; Saujan, Mazahir & Ibrahim 2022). Although Islam has been used to reinforce an androcentric[9] environment, some Muslim scholars increasingly engage Islam in comprehending women's rights within Islamic jurisprudence. Due to those intersecting forms of domination, black women were prohibited from voting, possessing bank accounts, or owning land. In order to obliterate such imbalances based on the interweaving forms of domination, South African black women-initiated activism was geared towards realising change (Lewis & Baderon 2021; Stuhlolhofer 2022). As these women envisaged citizenship devoid of disenfranchisement along gender, race, and class, they organised themselves into political liberation move-

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[9] I.e., women have to cover their whole body because it could be a source of temptation to men - yet Islam does not order men to cover their bodies as it does to Muslim women. Women's traveling during migration is also discouraged in some communities by invoking the sacred teachings within Islam.

ments that fought against the dehumanising 'Pass Laws of 1956'. This law required every black person to carry the Pass, designed to segregate the black population. This day is so significant to the South African nation that it is celebrated every year on the 9th of August.

Due to the patriarchal landscape in the South African context, gender roles were predominantly reinforced (Strebel, Crawford, Shefer & Cloete 2020). Those gendered roles determined their responsibilities in public and private domains. Due to this phenomenon, women were relegated to roles that circumscribed them from participation in decision-making and public domains of economic and political nature.

Nonetheless, the post-apartheid era has been characterised by women participating in the social, political, and economic spheres, albeit with several challenges. South African women have made incredible headway in their struggle for inclusion into the public domain. For instance, the phenomenon of gender mainstreaming has been enhanced by vibrant women's movements that have called for the inclusion of women into public institutions (Rai 2018). The Constitutional and gender equality[10] clause was brought into the limelight after several years of struggle by South African women's organisations. Thanks to these organisations, the force of South African women has been felt in their fight against gender-based violence, the political inclusion of women, and decision-making processes. Although South African women have brought about remarkable progress in addressing the forces of apartheid, they still grapple with those forces in their efforts to jettison social imbalances (Zulu 2021). The forces of institutionalised racism challenge women's activism and their access to the government's opportunities.

5   Negotiation of Gender Roles in the Transnational Space

Gender is neither a natural nor immutable phenomenon but a never-ending looping expectation and societal norms that change with time. Thus, gender roles and power relations cannot be static or natural but constantly change over time. In South Africa, Somali women are redefining the gender roles that were initially traditional because of the need to meet livelihood demands. Somali

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[10] Gender equality denotes that men and women should be treated the same, irrespective of their gender. It is different from gender equity which maintains that men and women ought to be treated according to their individual needs i.e., reproductive needs to women.

women manage their homes without their male counterparts' assistance and engage in economic activities that enable them to earn their livelihoods (Ripero-Muniz 2020; Shafer 2013). Nevertheless, the change of gender roles is still intricate as customary norms coupled with Islam confine women to traditional roles.

Through Feminist intersectionality, the authors of this study argue that Somali women's multiple jeopardies within the transnational terrain are not only a result of gendered structures but a multifaceted axis of oppression that interact with each other. Due to these factors, Somali women are at the receiving end of overt and covert Xenophobia-Afrophobia[11]. Xenophobia-Afrophobia is a significant element that leads to a redefinition of gender roles whereby Somali women shift from housekeeping and reproduction to assuming the responsibilities their husbands were engaging in before their death or incapacitation due to overt Xenophobia. This shift from a traditionally gendered role to a breadwinner role is a herculean task for most Somali women who stay home to care for their children.

Due to her gender, a Somali woman also suffers from discrimination and Xenophobia as a non-South African. She is cut off from opportunities due to her education level and the language barrier. These axes of domination intersect while placing Somali women at the crossroads of oppression. This axis of oppression complicates their participation in social and economic activities outside the traditional roles. Generally, due to a lack of education, most Somali women are unaware and unable to access rights enshrined in the South African constitution and international treaties protecting migrants. During the interview, one participant indicated that Somali women, when assaulted, cannot report it to the police because of the fear of victimisation.

This study, however, established that the transnational space is an important site for Somali women's gender role rearrangement due to the daily demands that leave them with no other option than to forge that space for their benefit. Education has been a key player in facilitating this shift in gender roles. There is an increase in enrolments of Somali women in South African tertiary

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[11] Xenophobia denotes the fear of foreign nationals, while Afrophobia refers to the fear of Black foreigners from other African nations. The chapter adopts the term Xenophobia-Afrophobia because antiforeigner bigotry is targeted towards foreign nationals from other African or Xenophobia is relevant when speaking about Somalis because they are perceived as not pure Africans due to their complexion, hair texture that resembles that of Indians.

institutions, as demonstrated by Aisha.[12] Somali women realise that education is a prerequisite for a decent life, so much so that the traditionally held idea of a woman being a housewife is slowly fading. Aisha says:

> *There is a considerable number of Somali students enrolling in the universities, especially around Gauteng Province. Initially, they used to be housewives but they came to a country where education is their main target in order for them to succeed. Now at least they are learning something. So when you look at the statistics of the Somalis enrolling in the universities, there are so many young ladies doing so. So, that tells you that women who were initially considered mere housewives are somehow privileged today.*

Education enlightens women about their fundamental rights, thus influencing their responses to traditional gender expectations enshrined in their cultural and religious norms. Besides, education offers them a higher status that enables them to challenge gender expectations defined and reinforced by patriarchal institutions. Although Somali parents have laid traditions that they hand down to their children, young Somali women negotiate and recreate their identity dynamically. Notwithstanding societal expectations to conform to the norms of their progenitors who highly buttress gendered roles, they can resist them in the transnational terrain. The reconstruction of their gender identity is prompted by interactions with other people and education, redesigning their thinking. Under the Social Locations concept, in this chapter, the authors contend that Somali women who originated from Kenya or had been to Kenya as refugees have an advantage over those from Somalia regarding access to Higher Education and interaction with the locals. The Somali women from Kenya can speak English, enabling them to navigate South African institutions better than their counterparts from Somalia.

International migration can remodel power relations and gendered expectations (Papatzani & Knappers 2020). In Somali women's context, transnational terrains offer them a viable space for transgressing gender roles and societal expectations. Nevertheless, in terms of women performing roles outside their gender expectations, men play a significant role in determining what they can and cannot do outside their gender expectations (Papatzani & Knappers 2020; Abdi 2021). For instance, Ali demonstrated that women are

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[12] Aisha is one of the research participants from Johannesburg.

free to work outside their homes as long as their men permit them; otherwise, it would be very insolent if they did it without their permission. In contrast, Amina pointed out that looking after the family and cooking is the principal responsibility of Somali women. Nonetheless, her response alludes that they can also perform other activities if the husband permits them. She says:

> *My primary work as a woman is to look after the children. I have to remain at home. Nevertheless, Somali women from our community are working outside their homesteads, the same as South Africans. Whether to work or not is not written anywhere. It depends on your husband.*

However, due to huge responsibilities that demand them to send much remittance home, Somali women negotiate traditional gender roles that confine them to housekeeping and childrearing. Thus, to deal with this pressure, they improve their income by venturing into informal businesses, some of which jeopardise their lives. Somali women have interpersonal links with other migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community of origin (Oliff 2022). Thus, just as potential migrants expect kin or acquaintances who have already migrated to assist them, the households of origin also expect migrants to give financial support. These remittances are countercyclical as women send money to help their kin deal with economic shocks such as Covid-19, famine, and illnesses (Takenaka, Gaspar, Villafuerte & Narayanan 2020).

These women remit part of their earnings, and because of the familial expectation at home, households select the members to migrate. Although Somali women in Gauteng engage in informal businesses that are lowly paid, it does not deter them from sending remittances. However, they ensure they send a little money home whenever they can to support their families. A Somali, Zara, says she left her children with her older sister and mother and sends a little money home to cater for her children's clothing, food, and school fees. She says:

> *I lost my first husband in Somalia in war. Life was not easy for me, and so I had to come to South Africa. I left behind my children with my elder sister and mother. Although my daily wages are small, I save and send some money to my family to support my children because I have a big responsibility for them.*

The Social Location concept accentuates that people are born into positions

that confer certain advantages and disadvantages (Enriquez & Millan 2021). The Somali women are within power hierarchies created through the clan, religion, and cultural androcentric norms. The South African context allows them to negotiate these power hierarchies within Somali institutions more easily than in Somalia or Kenya. For instance, in Somali customary laws, it is difficult for a woman to divorce a husband without his consent (Al-Sharman & Mustasaari 2020; Jenifer 2015). While in Somalia, it is hard for women to get a court order to provide child support. In South Africa, women are favoured for the children's welfare (Jenifer 2015). Amira says:

> *Somali we are a very patriarchal society by nature. We are living in South Africa, where the institutions protect the rights of women. When they come to me to seek help, I direct them to the right institutions where they seek for their rights. In South Africa, due to such 'fluid' territory, women are visible in social, political, and economic activities where they make decisions of their own and contribute to building those communities.*

A study conducted by Abdi (2014), who looked at the experiences of Somali men and women in Minnesota (USA), recounts how men, after establishing that women are getting incomes and support from the government, felt threatened for fear of power loss. Such a threat would affect the relationship between the husband and wife from a patriarchal background (Abdi 2021; Papatzani & Knappers 2020). In Pretoria West, Kureshi, a Kenyan Somali, argues that some men do not like their wives to get a job because they feel that they are taking the place of men who are 'supposed to be the family providers'. Their power as head of the household is compromised, a phenomenon which she finds unfavourable for a Somali man. According to her, men are jealous of their women working and would like it when they stay home.

Nevertheless, due to the family's financial needs that the husband struggles to meet, women negotiate these gender confinements to maximise the family income by acquiring a job. Women feel that their men are failing in their obligation to look after their families; thus, negotiating gender relations becomes inevitable. Kureshi observes that:

> *When a woman is working, the man feels jealous. He does not want you to work. He says it is our tradition for a woman to stay at home. So the*

> *man forces you not to work. He wants you to stay home, yet what he*
> *gives you does not sustain the family. So you suffer because you have to*
> *obey your husband. Sometimes it happens to many ladies here, who*
> *have to go out of their homes and irrespective of regulations that*
> *confine them because the money he gives cannot sustain them.*

However, the employment of Somali women outside their households proffers them economic independence. It gives them the power of decision-making in their homes. Financial independence prompts the shift of gender roles from traditional to non-traditional ones. Although Somali women become the financial managers in the home and gain power in decision-making, this kind of empowerment can be considered contestable. It is because the negotiation of power relations and shift of gender roles is occasioned by the need to fulfil various household responsibilities in both the host and home countries. Congruent to this view, most literature has indicated that women take over the male responsibilities when their male partners are absent. Therefore, it is not proper to say that they are empowered. Thus, women feel uncomfortable whenever their husbands are absent. They feel overburdened by household responsibilities when they play the paternal and maternal roles.

During my interviews, Somali women told me that Somali culture and Islam define women as being expected to cook for their husbands, keep the house tidy, and stay home while their husbands work. By contrast, men are expected to provide for the family. Nonetheless, the women said they decided to leave their homestead because their men had failed to provide for the family. This study established that most Somali women in South Africa would have preferred to remain at home if their male spouses provided for their families. Although international migration does not necessarily lead to the emancipation of women within the transnational space, there are some notable gains in crossing those borders. Through those transnational territories, women can access the resources and more rights that enable them to redefine the existing gender hierarchies that impede decision-making within the community. Women gain more control over decision-making, the household budget, and flexibility when they have wages and access to resources. This trend has not been perceived well by some Somali men. These negotiated gender power relations resulting from access to resources and rights in South Africa have been detrimental to the wife-husband relationship. Aisha says they have acquired too much freedom competing with the male presence as the head of

the household:

> *In my own opinion, women have seen several changes here. She has a voice now. She can talk because she has freedom. She is doing her own business. Some of these women bring up their families on their own. Somali families today are breaking away because of this new issue, whereby women want to 'walk on their own self,' while saying that they cannot stay at home 24 hours.*

The gender, cultural and religious intersections are fundamental elements determining women's place and roles in private and public domains. In the effort to shift their gendered roles, this chapter argues that Somali women in Gauteng stand in a space where they grapple with the intersectionality of culture, religion, and gender. The religious and cultural norms among Somali women aim to safeguard the family's dignity. They are excluded from men during some cultural and religious occasions. However, this exclusion gradually diminishes as women get educated or interact with other cultures that change such restrictive practices. During an interview with Mohamed, a Somali in Pretoria West, in his restaurant, I learnt that women do not eat together with men. Men were eating downstairs while women were eating separately at the upstairs apartment. After some inquiry, Mohamed said that separate eating in public was part of the cultural norms within the Somali community.

Under the Social Locations[13] concept, which accentuates that migrants are born into environments that proffer them advantages and disadvantages, this study indicates that their cultural and national background disadvantages Somali women. As foreigners with a 'Cushitic'[14] background, they are considered non-Africans because of physical features such as the texture of their hair and skin tone. Besides, being Muslims in a predominantly Christian nation (South Africa) complicates their negotiation in the transnational space. The patriarchal setting reinforced by religious and cultural institutions has also

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[13] Social location is one of the four constituents of gendered geographies of power.

[14] Most of the Cushitic have a lighter skin, smooth hair different from Black Africans who are the majority in South Africa. Due to the aforementioned features the South African Blacks perceive them differently from other migrants.

hampered Somali women's full expression of their identity in public. This view was expressed by Pretty, who pointed out that women actively participate in debates during the meetings, but whenever there are men, they shy away from talking. Pretty pointed out that their androcentric cultural background makes Somali women believe they should not talk when a man is talking.

Conversely, women gradually emerge from those norms that restrain their negotiation in the host country. The Action Support Centre located in Johannesburg encourages women to come out of their socio-cultural confinements that fetter the actualisation of their potential. The organisation creates a platform allowing them to share their experiences on gender-based violence while discussing strategies to reduce that violence. In these forums, men are also engaged in such discussions. The women are challenged not to see men as the 'problem', thereby sustaining gendered power systems. In order to avoid the scenario where women's shared experiences could exacerbate violence against their male counterparts, the organisers try to create a friendly environment that feels like it is not reporting one another but rather, a platform to find a panacea to gender-based violence in the community without victimising anyone.

6   Conclusion

As migrants face pressing economic demands in transnational contexts, a shift in gender roles becomes inevitable. This study demonstrates that despite originating from highly androcentric and patriarchal backgrounds in Somalia and Kenya, Somali women have the ability to redefine and negotiate their gender relations in the transnational space. These shifts in gender roles and power dynamics arise from the livelihood pressures that drive them to enter traditionally male domains to maximise economic returns and support their families. The South African context provides them with a greater opportunity to negotiate power hierarchies within Somali institutions compared to Somalia or Kenya.

This study suggests that policymakers need to ask a key question about what could be done to create gender sensitisation on the power relations in the transnational space. Addressing that question would be the prerequisite to transforming cultural values that still define what a migrant woman can and cannot do.

The authors of this chapter recommend that SASOWNET, in liaison with other CSOs, should develop and push for strategies that would facilitate

the realisation of gender-sensitive rights[15]. Effective emancipation of migrant women could only happen if the organisations described above adopted theories like feminist intersectionality to craft those policies.

The transnational space proffers Somali women a platform to reconstruct their gender roles and power relations through financial independence because they gain more control over household budgets, decision-making, and planning. Though Somali women run small businesses outside the household territory, the South African government must collaborate with migrant communities to facilitate business-friendly environments free from Xenophobia-Afrophobia, gendercide, and rape.

Although Somali women originate from Somalia and Kenya's highly traditional and androcentric backgrounds that legitimise their disenfranchisement, the authors suggest training that focuses on de-gendering family religious and cultural institutions. This process would involve joint examination by male and female participants of the religious and cultural beliefs that sustain patriarchy. In such a forum, both genders could be given various roles within the training environment.

Besides, civil society organisations must create platforms or give more support to the already existing women networks like SASOWNET to break barriers that dissuade women from public participation. The economic responsibilities that women carry for their families engender the shift of gendered roles in the transnational space. In this regard, initiatives that would enhance access to financial growth and security should be put in place by the state.

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15 SASOWNET means South African Somali Women Network. The network is a platform meant to give Somali women a collective voice. Most of my research participants belong to this organisation. The rationale for use of SASOWNET is because, the organisation is a constituent of Somali women themselves, and for any initiative to advance their concerns, it must go through this institution.

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