CHAPTER 9
Gendered Challenges Facing Somali Migrant Women within Transnational Contexts in South Africa

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Abstract
In this study, the author interrogates the gendered challenges that Somali migrant women experience in South Africa (Gauteng Province) within transnational contexts. Those challenges are interrogated through a feminist intersectionality lens and gendered geographies of power theories. The study is qualitative; therefore, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with 40 participants residing in Gauteng Province, South Africa. The participants were chosen through the snowball sampling technique. Somali women are not a homogeneous community but a heterogeneous entity defined by different social, political and economic backgrounds. In that respect, it is highlighted in this study that gendered challenges facing these women impact them varyingly along multiple factors that facilitate or hinder the negotiation of their space in the transnational context. The Somali migrant women in the spaces explored stand at the intersection of diverse planes of identification, namely gender (as women), nationality (as foreigners), faith (as Muslims) and race (tone and texture of hair and skin).

Keywords: transnational space, Somali women, intersectionality, gender, South Africa, Gauteng.

1 Introduction

Although a sizable population of African migrants is impelled by the quest for education, recreation, and employment opportunities, conflicts are a key factor that propels their migration. Women increasingly leave their home countries to settle in other countries unaccompanied by their husbands or male counterparts. This step induces their vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence outside the household setting (Farley 2019). Their mobility is complicated by the gendered nature of migratory routes beginning from the moment they set out to migrate during their journey and settlement in the host country.

Migratory routes are gendered spaces that impact migrants' lives differently. Because migrants are not homogeneous but heterogeneous entities, they are impacted differently. The objective of this chapter is to examine the gendered complexities that Somali refugee women encounter in the transnational space within the South African context. In this chapter, therefore, the author seeks to address the question, 'What gendered complexities do Somali refugee women encounter in the transnational space in the South African context?' Migratory spaces are territories that impact the lives of migrants by exposing them to multifaceted forms of vulnerabilities. The positive side is that these also proffer Somali women opportunities to redefine gender roles and power relations. They are crucial spaces to rebuild their lives economically and assist them in sending home remittances to their dependents.

Nonetheless, these same territories can potentially expose female migrants to multifaceted challenges due to legal status and the perception of migrants as 'the other.' The phenomenon of 'othering' migrants is tied to the underlying feeling that migrants are likely to take up job opportunities, compete for already scarce resources, and have the possibility of disturbing the norms and value systems of a nation. The resentment towards migrants in South Africa chips away solidarity and is normally irrational, making Somali women shy away from territories of higher economic opportunities like South African townships.

Somali women face gendered complexities and social factors that bolster or diminish their resilience. They are not homogeneous entities but people born into distinct social locations that either advantage or disadvantage their ability to navigate their existence in the transnational space. Migration is an expensive venture involving strategising and using substantial resources to facilitate migrant mobility. In light of gendered geographies of power theory, Somali women who originated from families and clans of the higher social and

economic class would adjust to the South African context better than those from the lower class. It is because higher-status people have more resources to support their transnational mobility. Similarly, migrants who find friends or familial network systems on their way to South Africa have an advantage over those that do not. These networks from families and friends often support them with resources, accommodation, direction, and emotional aid during the journey, thus boosting their resilience.

This study was conducted in the Gauteng Province. The location selection was justified by the fact that the majority of Somali women live in Gauteng. It is an economic hub of Africa, and therefore it is a city of attraction for most migrants within and outside Africa. The Somali migrants constitute a business-oriented community and would look to such vibrant economic spaces for their business interests. Gauteng is also the province that hosts the Department of Home Affairs and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The women are constantly attached to the Home Affairs and United High Commissioner for Refugees to renew their permits (from Home Affairs) and seek refugee protection (from UNHCR).

Male mobility experiences have eclipsed most literature on women's transnational migration. Thus, mobility has long been documented as a male phenomenon because migration scholarship is majorly economically oriented (Braun 2020; Zanabazar Kho & Jigjiddori 2021). In this regard, women migrants were depicted as having no significance in the host nation's social, political and economic progress.

This study is significant because it adds to the scanty literature about transnational experiences from a feminist perspective. The geographies of power and feminist intersectionality theories highlight Somali women's heterogeneity. This work is significant to actors that provide services to migrants as it sheds light on the diversity of needs for women migrants. Similarly, adopting the feminist frameworks would help the policymakers make migration policies that are gender sensitive.

2 Research Methodology

This chapter adopted a qualitative method because it required an in-depth understanding of gendered challenges in the migratory terrains. Qualitative research describes and offers a deeper grasp of a particular social phenomenon (Adedoyin 2020; Bus 2020; Tenny, Brannan, Brannan & Sharts-Hopko 2017).

The approach permits understanding people's experiences using in-depth data collection and interpretation processes (Adedoyin 2020; Buseto *et al.* 2020; LaMarre & Chamberlain 2022; Tenny *et al.* 2017). In the current chapter focusing on Somali women's gendered challenges, the qualitative method was deemed the best approach for a study of this nature which centres on elusive experiential data. The data was gathered using face-to-face interviews with the participants in the Gauteng Province. The justification for face-to-face interviews was that understanding people's experiences requires a method to optimise verbal and non-verbal communication (Saarijarvi & Bratt 2021; Self 2021). Since the subjects were new to the researcher, the snowball sampling technique was applied to reach the Somali women who were better informed about the subject matter. The 40 women interviewed were from diverse sectors such as trading, housekeeping, or employed in Somali shops. The researcher used the South African Somali Women Network (SASOWNET) to identify and reach suitable subjects for this study. Based in Johannesburg (the Gauteng Province), SASOWNET provides Somali women with an avenue for empowerment that would enable them to have a robust joint voice of action.

Regarding methodological challenges, there was a language barrier between the researcher and the Somali migrants who did not understand the Swahili language. The researcher had to use an interpreter conversant in Somali, English and Swahili. He also guided me to the homes and shops where I would locate Somali women. Additionally, interviewing the women was difficult because of the Islamic divide expected between men and women. During my interview, however, I had to use community leaders who introduced me to the community. The community leaders were very helpful in inducting me into the Somali community. Also, because most of those migrants were affected by violence orchestrated by the locals in the townships, there was suspicion towards an outsider. Therefore, I had to introduce myself as a student sent by the University of KwaZulu-Natal to study certain aspects of their lives. I also established a rapport with them and created a sense of belonging among them by introducing myself as a fellow migrant from East Africa.

3 Theoretical Frameworks

Feminist Intersectionality is a framework coined by Black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw, who argues that women's lives are built on multiple intersecting systems of oppression (Kelly *et al.* 2021; Woods, Benschop & Van den Brink

2021). The theory argues that women's inequalities are never an outcome of a single distinct factor but an outcome of interconnected power relations, experiences and social identity categories (Hvenegard-Lassen, Staunæs & Lund 2020; Shelton, Flynn & Grosland 2018). The theory penetrates and unearths issues about women, not from a single factor but intertwining social variables of oppression that affect women simultaneously (Chaulagain & Pathak 2021; Kassam, Marcellus, Clerk & O'Mahony 2022; Standke-Erdmann 2021). The theoretical intervention in the context of this chapter was significant in unpacking how gender complexities result from intersecting factors – gender, language, nationality, religion, education level, and class – that complicate Somali women's mobility within transnational space. The framework is germane to this chapter because it helps the researcher comprehend how Somali women's interaction with these interlocking multiple identification planes privilege or disadvantage them in interacting with power hierarchies as they navigate gendered challenges in the transnational space. The gendered challenges can only be understood clearly by being cognisant of those interwoven identities that privilege or disadvantage them in interacting with power hierarchies.

Gendered geographies of power examine how migrants negotiate gender powers within the transnational space. The theory comprises four aspects: 'imagination', 'power geometrics', geographic scales' and 'social locations' (Kofman 2020; Carruthers Thomas 2021). This study espoused power geometrics and social locations as the analytical lens to examine the data on the Somali-gendered complexities in the transnational space. The social location claims that humans are born into a certain social location which advantages or disadvantages them. The nationality, race, gender, religion, class, and educational background advantages or disadvantages women's lives in the transnational space. The argument emerging from this proposition is that we see ourselves or are perceived as representing various factors of differentiation – race, nationality, religion, education and class. Power geometrics argues that women have a sense of agency rather than being passive recipients of oppression. The relocation of migrant women to a foreign country improves their status back home. These women being the breadwinners and dependants, are perceived in high regard despite marginalised locations in their highly patriarchal backgrounds in Somalia. Thus, the new space in South Africa, finding employment, and contact with more open cultures offer them opportunities for the agency to negotiate gendered territories in the transnational space.

4 Literature Review

The migration concept denotes people's movement through geographical borders while aiming at establishing a temporary or permanent space elsewhere. More than ever, transnational migration has risen exponentially, provoked by push and pull factors that propel people's mobility. Historically, Braun (2020) observes that many women have migrated independently or with their families. However, literature on transnational migration depicts their obscurity in those migratory routes or features their presence in a limited way. Their movement happened even without the endorsement of the 'gatekeepers' within their families and male-dominated social set-ups. Most scholars traditionally focus on questions that are gender-neutral such as migration motivations, migrants' experiences in the host country, and remittances, while neglecting questions that are gender specific. The failure to incorporate gender into transnational migration literature makes it difficult to elucidate the motivations behind women's mobility, such as who informed their decision to migrate and why they remain predominant in certain occupations. Also, there were no gender theories underpinning women-centric migration studies. This androcentric worldview weighed heavily on the literature on transnational migration. Transnational migration and gender are gradually receiving scholarly attention (Braun 2020; Pande 2022; Yamamura & Lassalle 2022) as they try to comprehend how mi-grants interact with male power structures in the host country. While there is growing literature on gender and migration, there is still a lacuna in the literature about gender and transnational space, highlighting gendered challenges within the transnational space from an intersectionality perspective. Most literature (Jolof, Rocca, Mazaheri, Emegwa & Carlsson 2022; Nhengu 2022; Tan & Kuschminder 2022) highlight those complexities only within the host country and forgetting that their lives are a web of interconnected past and present and that those complexities are not homogeneous, despite those women belonging to one community. Thus, their experiences are multi-stranded, and this aspect cannot be ignored if we are to gain a better understanding of gendered challenges.

5 Contexts

5.1 The Context of South Africa

At the inception of clan-driven politics in Somalia, Somali women began to flee the country after Said Bare's fall in 1991. The aftermath of these wars was insecurity and resistance to an authoritative president characterised by

competition for power by different armed groups. These wars and clan-based tensions pushed many Somali women to migrate to the countries within and outside the Horn of Africa. Some women used Kenya as a route to South Africa and Western countries. After getting into South Africa, Somali women spread mainly to the Eastern Cape, the Western Cape and Gauteng, where they established ethnic enclaves. Their movement to the provinces mentioned above grew exponentially. They have also moved to other parts of the country to exercise their entrepreneurial acumen (Brown 2015; Kleist & Abdi 2022), especially in the unpredictably dangerous and racially segregated townships. The Somali movement was characterised by a transition period when South Africa came from Apartheid rule to becoming a democratic state. Despite this transition from an oppressive regime to a more democratic environment, the social, political and economic structures of Apartheid remained. These Apartheid legacies, which include ethnic bigotry and racism, affected South African blacks disproportionately (Pirtle 2022; Whitaker 2020). Apartheid, which means to 'set people apart' (Lanziotti, Bulut, Buonsenso & Gonzalez-Dambrauskas 2022), divided South African settlements along their skin colour. The South African blacks were thrown out of town centres and settled in townships leaving the whites to rule from those cities. In this setting, Somali and other migrants, like Ethiopians, took advantage of acting as intermediaries between the blacks in the townships and the cities, where they started retail shops to serve the blacks in townships. The Somali entry into business received heavy opposition from South African blacks, who saw them as threatening their job and business opportunities. Their business acumen and passion for entrepreneurship have helped the Somalis to lure a large population of customers compared to the locals. They lure the customers by lowering commodities costs as they can buy goods in bulk as a community and divide them among Somali Spaza shop owners. Their business shrewdness is also manifested in their way of packaging commodities into smaller items, which attracts most locals to buy from them because of their affordability (Abdi 2015). These strategies create tough competition between the Somali and the local shopkeepers, often triggering anti-foreigner bigotry (Xenophobia).

5.2 Gauteng in the Context of this Study

Gauteng is South Africa's most populous province, with a quarter of the population residing in the region (Blaauw & Pretorius 2022). Despite boasting

as the most populous province, it is the smallest in land size. The province is one of nine provinces with most migrant communities that either reside in or are transiting the province. In the same vein, in the context of transnational space, Gauteng plays a crucial role in the lives of migrants, even for the migrants that do not reside in the province. It is because migrants in different provinces connect with their acquaintances in the Gauteng Province or have memories of reporting to Gauteng to legalise their asylum and refugee permits. The province comprises three major municipalities, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Ekurhuleni, hosting over 13 million people. The huge population of nationals and migrants is mainly in Pretoria and Johannesburg. Many migrants from Africa and beyond inhabit the two cities. Gauteng leads the nine provinces in the crime figures in the context of gendered complexities in South Africa.

The high crime level is elicited by multifaceted factors, including unemployment, rapid urbanisation and firearms proliferation (Garidzirai 2021; Ndlela 2020). In advancing the argument, Garidzirai (2021) argues that the high crime rate in Gauteng could be attributed to unprecedented poverty and income inequalities. Those crimes, however, reflect a fraction of several crimes that happen in the province, as most crimes go unreported or underreported. Interpersonal crimes, such as rape, domestic and sexual violence, are underreported as women fear victimisation.

Additionally, the legacies of Apartheid, such as male chauvinism and sexism, sustain negative perceptions towards the aggrieved. The violence manifested in coordinated xenophobia and other forms of crime hurt migrant businesses immensely (Pirtle 2022; Whitaker 2020). Thus in the context of increased violence, Somali migrant women not only have to endure this violence, but these adversities are necessarily gendered.

6 Transnational Space

Transnational space is an area that has recently received huge attention from scholars as it has become ubiquitous in understanding how refugee lives are navigated and organised. The concept seemed ephemeral, but with the increasing levels of mobility, the concept has been crucial in understanding migrant lives in the 21st century. This concept was conceived from transnationalism, which denotes how immigrants forge and maintain social networks that connect their host country's communities with those of origin (Tedeschi, Vorobeva & Jauhiainen 2022; Xiang 2022). This space involves a

compound network of ties and realities that continually impact the lives of migrants upon entering their host country. That multi-stranded relationship connects not only the migrants with their societies back home but also with their memories of countries they might have visited. Thus, for the migrants to adapt to this space, their capability to meet and associate with other fellow migrants from their country of origin and country of abode is essential (Sandal-Onal, Bayad, Zick and Düzen 2022; Tedeschi *et al.* 2022; Xiang 2022). Thus, the idea that immigrants exist in a single territory that limits them to singular constitutional and cultural norms is no longer tenable. They exist in an 'in-between space' characterised by multiple connectedness with their host and home country and even beyond those locations. Globalisation and technological advancements have elicited stronger migrant connections between the country of abode and the home community. Citizenship has hugely been affected by this phenomenon which has also instigated complexity in migration regulation among the host nations. Immigrants will continually participate easily in their home countries' affairs while retaining their presence in their country of residence. Even the most socially economic and politically stable nations cannot manage to regulate migrant flows and their affairs because of the strong multi-stranded web of networks within the transnational space.

7 Transnational Space as a Gendered Territory

The transnational spaces are gendered territories traditionally considered male spaces, despite the huge, unprecedented increase of the female migrant movement, which has received little attention. It is the case because most scholars on transnational migration have focused on the economic dimension of migration, which has misrepresented the mobility process as a purely male domain. In that respect skimming through most of the literature, female obscurity depicts male-controlled territories. In some instances, women have also been stereotyped as accompanying their male counterparts as wives or sisters and, therefore, have no role in the economic development of the host nation.

8 Research Findings

8.1 Gendered Challenges in Transnational Space

Gender and the associated concepts cannot be overlooked in the migratory process because gender shapes migration patterns. Because gender interacts

with migration, ignoring the concept would hinder a researcher from understanding the gender dynamics that shape the lives of migrant women. The Somali women are exposed to gender-based violence on their journey to South Africa by the individuals who provide them with services at border points and for transportation and accommodation while soliciting sexual favours from them. Enticed by the pursuit of perceived opportunities in their destination and because of the fear of losing vital services on their way to South Africa, the migrant Somali women often acquiesce to sexual demands. In this case, Somali women are at the crossroads of overlapping forces of nationality – as foreigners, gender, race – skin tone and hair texture, and Islamic faith.

Despite sharing the commonality of origin and foreignness with other foreigners, especially from Eastern African nations, Somali women are cognisant of variations with other Cushitic communities (Eritreans, Ethiopians). Somali women do not open up easily to other immigrants they travel with. It is due to their religious and cultural differences and fear of people who do not belong to their community.

Somali women are affected by Afrophobia and other crimes along migratory routes. Those hostilities have greatly played out on women's bodies through beatings, emotional abuse and sexual assault. Their multiple jeopardies are also witnessed whenever their residences which function as a domicile of safety, are damaged through anti-foreigner vandalism. The emotional and physical violence women suffer is sustained by structured patriarchy within cultures. The patriarchal system is manifested in attitudes, ideas and actions revealed through gendered violence (Van der Heijden, Harries & Abrahams 2020). During those conflicts, sexual violence harms women as individuals and has a long-term effect on the entire community of aggrieved migrant women. Therefore, any violence affects the social, political and cultural structures built by the society during settlement. The violence, argues Van der Heijden *et al.* (2020), damages women's bodily integrity and obliterates existing community ties with the same history, values and identity. Rape is among the most disturbing experiences that inflict guilt and shame among migrant women. The act of rape is not about the perpetrator's sexual gratification but emotional and mental violence tied to power and domination by hegemonic gendered systems in which the victims lose power over their sexuality, body, and, importantly, their self-esteem (Maung 2021; Metz, Myers & Wallace 2021). Somali women have been victims of rape within the transnational space. These women keep silent after rape incidents because they risk social stigma if they disclose the rape.

Consequently, the stigma leads to their 'un-marriageability' and the possibility of them being divorced by their spouses. The silence culture of rape victims is sustained by the fear that the perpetrator could retaliate should the victim reveal his identity. Because of the shameful sentiments related to rape, the victim fears being ostracised by her family (Metz *et al.* 2021; Schmitt, Robjant, Elbert & Koebach 2021). Women get minimal assistance through the judicial system on sexual violence, yet the institution is constitutionally mandated to protect anyone regardless of nationality, gender or race. Law enforcement agencies are also reluctant to respond to the migrant's grievances. The lack of proper court representation intensifies their predicament because the South African judicial system is also chauvinistic. Those statutory institutions assigned to effect justice for the people have patriarchal undertones that buttress and sustain unequal power structures. Similarly, cultural and religious norms cannot be overlooked if an authentic search for the factors that underlie the sexual oppression of women within the transnational terrains during conflicts are to be pursued.

Somali women are subject to fear of working in traditionally perceived male spaces that are normally violent. Due to rampant gender-based violence manifested in Xenophobia-Afrophobia attacks and numerous crimes in South African townships, Somali women avoid those locations. Somali women in 'locations' do not run Spaza[1] shops or vend items independently as they would in urban centres and suburbs. The townships, also popularly known as 'locations', are principally male spaces because those spaces are operated by males who depict some resilience to withstand Afrophobia and other criminalities as opposed to women who are considered unable to withstand such violence. According to Abdi (2015), it is men that enter those black townships (rural), while Somali women enter racially mixed neighbourhoods (urban) in order to mix with Indian Muslims for their security. Therefore, Somali women depend on wages from their male counterparts working in those places or menial work within locations like Pretoria West and Mayfair – a suburb within Johannesburg that has the highest population of Somali migrants[2].

[1] Spaza - A South African slang among the Black population to mean the unregulated business designed for 'convenience' sake, and are meant to boost the household earnings for the owner (Yesufu 2022; Tuomala & Grant 2021). It's an informal business, with a wide range of items, particularly household commodities.

[2] It is also called Small Mogadishu, which is named after the Somalia capital.

The Somali women interviewed also pointed out discrimination in formal and informal employment. They could not be absorbed in the formal sector because they were non-citizens in a male-dominated state. This situation is aggravated by the patriarchal system in their communities that does not allow them to participate in some informal sector jobs. This study found that certain jobs are primarily male-orientated in their own communities. Due to the socio-cultural expectations in their community, Somali women shy away from taking such male-dominated jobs. The religious and cultural norms (Bjork-James 2019; de Vries *et al.* 2022) reinforce the gendered roles and expectations that impede Somali women from entering those male-dominated occupations. De Vries *et al.* (2022) point out that when a family is very religious, children are highly likely to be socialised into gender stereotypes and patriarchal gendered roles. After interviewing Aisha, I learnt that activities like driving taxis[3] are gendered and that any Somali woman attempting such a job would be considered going against their cultural norms. Aisha said:

> *Imagine myself driving a taxi. It doesn't happen anywhere, and is not something within our culture as Somali community and so it would look odd. Maybe one day the Somali women will take that challenge, although it will take quite some time.*

Another significant difficult experience encountered by Somali women is related to Islamophobia and Hijabophobia. How those women dress, which differs from the South African majority, provokes antagonistic sentiments among South Africans. Women have been discriminated against in various state departments (Home Affairs, the Police and Health departments). The discrimination is based on the Islamic garb, which labels them with an Islamic identity intersecting with several other social factors. A lack of intense orientation about the South African social, cultural, and religious contexts also facilitates the Somali women's predicament. The orientation would help the women to be well prepared for resistance against their religious background, indicated by Islamic attire. As obligatory attire, the 'Burqa' and 'Hijab' are worn whenever those women are in public domains to signify modesty and, importantly, as a covering to their bodies only meant for their husbands. Amina says:

[3] Taxi business is a common activity among males who transport Somalis from one community to another within the Johannesburg and Pretoria Central Business Districts and in townships.

> *South African culture is different from ours as Somalis. You know we dress differently from most of South Africans who are Christians. So when we put on Hijab to cover our bodies, but we become targets of xenophobia and other forms of violence. When you travel on a taxi, go to market like Marabastad*[4] *everyone is able to spot you from a distance. They ask us why we should cover ourselves with those clothes different from their women. Sometimes they can even rape you because of that cloth that shows that you are Muslim and a foreigner.*

Though Gauteng Province is home to several migrants, Somali women are impacted differently by the gendered challenges. A Somali woman dressed in Hijab can easily be spotted as non-South African, increasing their susceptibility to sexual abuse during migration. This phenomenon is also ubiquitous among Somali women within transnational routes. Although South African Muslims dress in Islamic attire like Hijab, Somali women can be spotted easily because of its conspicuous disparities, such as colourful Garbasaar[5] and Jilbab.[6] Through intersectionality theory, the author argues that Somali women's violence is based on intertwined social factors that affect them simultaneously. They suffer gendered challenges ranging from rape, sexual harassment, xenophobia, and discrimination because of the intersecting dimensions of identification, namely that of nationality (they are foreigners in South Africa (nationality), women (gender), Muslims in Christian territories (religion), and skin colour (different skin tone and hair texture). Those women receive negative sentiments, derogatory and demeaning based on their gender, nationality and religion that affect them concurrently. They receive emotional abuse from males and physical and sexual abuse within those routes. Sarah said:

> *We are harassed sexually on our journey to South Africa. They see us in Hijab and tell us that we are wearing a duvet, and ask as how we wear it in the heat. Why you don't throw it away, you are young, you are beautiful? Why don't you wear the trouser? Are you having a*

[4] Malabastad is a region within Pretoria West that has a significant population of Somali migrants and is the actual location of South African Home Affairs.

[5] Gabasaar is a Shawl worn by married Somali women. The wear is fashioned in different colours.

[6] Jilbab is muslim female costume that covers the whole woman's body as opposed to Hijab that covers the upper part of the body.

> *menstrual cramp which you are hiding in this Hijab? You are coming with something that we don't know.*

South Africa is principally a nation with a huge population of Christians. The Muslims are the minority in South Africa and are normally categorised as Indians. Therefore, Somalis dressed in Islamic attire, although black persons with soft-textured hair, are classified by most South African blacks as 'outsiders' in South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Through intersectionality theory, it is argued that various forms of stereotypes and gendered abuse that women migrants encounter in transnational contexts differ from what Somali male migrants face. Gender (women) interacts with other social factors to disadvantage Somali women more than their male counterparts. Through intersectionality, the author establishes that other Muslim women with light skin colour, such as Asians, are not perceived the same as Somalis, with fairly lighter tones (than most South Africans). Muslims of Asian origin are perceived in higher regard. The Somali Muslim's identity, skin tone, and Cushitic language manifest some 'foreignness' even to their fellow African migrants. Amina observed:

> *You know some tell us that we are from Pakistan because they have no experience of other Africans that have some different physical features. You know Somali the way they look like? You know the Ethiopian and Somali hair does not look exactly as African hair which is strong and darker than ours. Our structure and our hair make us look a bit different from other Africans in South Africa*.

Somali migrant women face a psychic load of gendered traumas of the past. Those women hold memories that affect their adaptability within the transnational space. They commence their journey to South Africa, already ruptured emotionally. They later encounter other experiences that traumatise them more in the transnational space. Due to the stigma and emotive nature of those experiences, Somali women find it hard to disclose them. When conducting interviews, I discovered that many women were divorcees, and separated from their husbands, while others died in the war. Thus, the absence of spouses resulted in the challenge of migrating alone and caring for their families in a foreign country. Besides, the scenario impacts the entire family's adaptability within South Africa. Fatuma, a middle-aged mother from Mayfair who lost her spouse in the war, said:

> *When our men are killed, it pains us so much, we get stressed. Our children are impacted a lot because they don't have the source of livelihood or no father figure. We don't want to remember or speak what happened because it troubles us so much.*

Somali women are victims of domestic violence in their household settings. They face this violence reinforced by the ethnic community, religion, clan system, and other hegemonic institutions (Farley 2019; Mkhize & Vilakazi 2021; Ripero-Muniz 2020). Faced with this kind of violence, these women face a dilemma as they must choose between pursuing Somali patriarchal structures[7] or reporting the incident to the South African police service (Mkhize and Vilakazi 2021), which, within the Gauteng province would only favour men (Ripero-Muniz 2020). As they face spousal violence, those women sometimes suffer silently because most of them depend on their husbands for the legalisation of their stay in the host country and their financial sustenance. In other words, gendered violence is used to assert dominance by the perpetrator over the victim. In this form of gendered crime, the aggressor justifies their actions and compels women to take responsibility for their actions. This phenomenon leads to 'internalising the guilt' and normalising the perpetrator's behaviour against her as justified. Being 'a good wife' or a 'potential good wife' – a common phenomenon – has also led Somali women to internalise the violent behaviour of their male spouses, thereby stopping them from seeking help from the justice system.

Most Somali women living in South Africa are uneducated and have no English language as a medium of communication which would enable them to seek employment with ease like any other foreigners[8] from Anglo-Saxon nations. The Somali women's condition is also aggravated by their status in the country, whereby many of them are undocumented migrants or have expired asylum permits. Since these undocumented migrants avoid public spaces to avoid arrests by South African police and military that conduct sporadic searches for illegal migrants, some opt to work in private spaces (Moyo &

[7] Somali community has systems for resolving conflicts among themselves which are male controlled and favour men in most cases.

[8] Zimbabweans, Nigerians and other agro-Saxons integrate better in South Africa and find it easier to seek employment in informal and formal sectors because they can express themselves well in English, which is one of the eleven South African official languages.

Zanker 2022). Normally, private spaces are potential grounds for gender violence and economic exploitation of women because of their invisibility.

Somali women face challenges in accessing maternal health. Due to the gendered expectation of performing the reproductive role as mothers, those women experience more suffering than men. Besides routine visits arising from the need for treatment, these women need pre-natal, anti-natal and post-natal care. In other words, they constantly need medical attention regardless of their financial or social status as non-citizens. The negative feelings towards Somali women due to their high fecundity level were among the salient problems that emerged recurrently from the interviews. Thus, their fecundity exhibited in their big family size resulted in them being perceived as a burden to the midwives and, importantly, to the country's economy. Subsequently, those women received insults and statements that carried Xenophobic-Afrophobic undertones. Maria[9], a lady who has experienced delivering a baby in a South African hospital, points out that having a large family is their tradition. This phenomenon is challenged in South Africa, where mothers are expected to control the size of their families. Maria said:

> *As a way of continuing our Somali ancestry it's our responsibility to give birth to the number of kids we want. And Somali women have the tendency to produce many kids as much as ten or even more. This tendency of giving birth to many children receives a lot of criticism from the health staff whom we meet in these maternity wards. When they see that the same women keep coming year after year to deliver a baby in the hospital, the nurses inject some medicine that stops them from producing more children. They also use the local language to insult us or even call us names that tell that they don't want us to come again in hospital to deliver the babies. At times the expectant mothers die in the process of long waiting because the locals are given more preference than us foreigners.*

Similarly, since household health care is gendered, Somali women are responsible for constantly attending hospitals to seek treatment for their children. In Gauteng, many Somali women have no husbands due to death or divorce, which separates them from their male companions. On the other hand, the husband's

[9] One of my interviewers residing in Pretoria West (located in Gauteng province). She hails from Mogadishu (Somali Capital).

absenteeism is not unusual in the province, as male spouses eschew their paternal roles as heads of the families. In addition to providing other necessities like shelter, clothing and food, women in such homes struggle to provide for their children and their health. In the light of feminist intersectionality, Somali women's suffering is due to interconnected social factors constraining their health access in the transnational space. Their gender (as women), marital status (single women), culture (one that confines them to reproductive roles), and nationality (foreigners) complicates their ability to access health.

The author argues that in light of the geographies of power theory, Somali women's manner of facing these health challenges is determined by their social locations, which are either advantageous or disadvantageous. These women do not suffer the same, but they are either disadvantaged or given the power to negotiate health structures according to social factors. A Somali woman from a wealthy family would navigate the gendered complexities in health easier than one from a low economic status family. It is because those from wealthy families or who are well-connected can afford better quality health services even from private facilities[10]. Similarly, women with an education background where English was taught can express themselves more confidently in English than those who can only speak Somali, Swahili, or an Arabic language not spoken in South Africa. In accessing health services, most of the Kenyan-born Somalis or those that have been in Daadab camps have the advantage of speaking the English language over those that come from Somalia. Thus, without the English language, argues Pandey *et al.* (2021), migrants cannot communicate at a reception or information desk, nor at subsequent offices where they would be required to give the right or specific information and documents or seek clarification and this could lead to misdiagnosis.

Somali women are disproportionately affected by challenges to accessing education than their male counterparts. It is because of the gender inequalities in education institutions in Somalia that these women come to South Africa without academic papers. In Somalia, for instance, Jama and Barre (2019) argue that many women are high school dropouts because they face discriminatory gender norms like teenage pregnancies, early marriages and girl child engagement in domestic chores. Traditional gender ideologies lead to women's domestication, ultimately denying them education opportunities and household incomes (Hyunanda, Ramírez, Martínez & Sánchez 2021; Sopamena

[10] In private facilities you don't get much antagonisms against foreigners, as the owners operate these hospitals as business enterprises.

2020). Besides, the clan systems, which have much power in running the affairs of the Somali community, prefer boy children moving up the academic ladder. Boys are perceived to bring more benefits to society than girls. Thus, in South Africa, the lack of proper documents and resources impedes access to education. Most Somali women cited access to university and other higher learning institutions as a huge challenge because of the need for a SAQA (South African Qualification Authority) certificate. Most of these women do not have qualifications that match the SAQA requirement. Also, most Somali women struggle as refugees to raise money for tuition. This challenge cannot be the same among Somali women because some said they received help from their kin. Other members struggled to access education for themselves or their children. Somali women cited family connections' role in supporting their education or their children's. The interpersonal networks make it easier for new migrants to access the required resources and opportunities in their destination countries (Bilecen & Lubbers 2021; Djundeva & Ellwardt 2020). Somali women cited South African Somali Women and the Action Support Centre as institutions facilitating women's access to education. Aisha says:

> *In South Africa, Somali women find hard to get education especially when they do not have varied documents. Universities need SAQA, which most of us cannot meet to its standards. The lack of money to educate our children are part of other challenges we have. But some people are just lucky because they have relatives and friends who support their education. There are also some few organisations that facilitate women acquisition of education.*

In the transnational space, Somali women are victims of religious and cultural-based oppression from their communities. Gender interlocks with religion and culture to buttress the social expectations of Muslim women of Somali origin (Gallo & Scrinzi 2021). The cultural and religious norms safeguard their chastity and sexual modesty, which ultimately gives the husband, family and community some honour. Thus, in our context, Somali women must represent their families while being monitored. The monitoring from the community curtails their social relations with anyone and confines them to behave in a manner that is in tandem with their religious and social expectations. Muslim feminists maintain the need to replace patriarchal exegesis with a technique that reads Quran with a more critical eye (Izadi 2020). The women must behave within the 'definition' of

Muslim women of Somali ethnic background. In one of my interviews, I remember a young Somali woman resisted when reaching out to shake hands with her. I understood they are restricted to only shaking hands with their close family members. This phenomenon is exemplified by Islam's purdah values, which restrict females from physically interacting with people outside their immediate family. In addition, the concept of 'Izzet' dictates that Somali women are expected to uphold honour and dignity for their families and the broader community.

Somali women are traditionally expected to play the gendered role of providing nourishment for their families. However, this role has been met with challenges related to the unavailability of food to suit their tastes and in line with their faith. This phenomenon was exacerbated by the Covid-19 lockdowns that restricted their movement (Mutambara, Crankshaw & Freedman 2022) and access to the importation of their foreign foods. Somali migrant women encounter food-related challenges. They find that South African diets vary from their ethnic dishes. The women interviewed preferred dishes prepared in their homes or eating meals from Somali-owned eateries whenever they needed a change. They preferred their restaurants because South African eateries did not have Somali food, which they considered 'strong'. In addition, the Islamic religion restricts its adherents from consuming certain foods and permits them to eat others (Halal[11]). This Islamic restriction posed challenges to Somali women because South Africa has many tinned foods that contain small quantities of pork. Nonetheless, retaining the ethnic dishes is a herculean task for most women due to the 'unaffordability' of ingredients imported from Somalia and other East African countries. Therefore, due to the high importation cost of ingredients for their food from East Africa, and stringent border restrictions, Somali food is expensive. Amina said:

> *We find it hard to adapt to the food in South Africa, because it's very different from what we eat. As Muslims, we have halal which you are allowed to take and there is food that you are not permitted to eat. Most of supermarkets are full of canned food which you have what has been prohibited by Islamic laws. It's a challenge to eat Somali food also because we lack ingredients, or they are expensive. They are expensive because of the difficulty in bringing them here*.

[11] Halal, also Halaal food is the one permitted by Islamic laws such as vegetables and beef. The Muslims are forbidden to eat pork or food that have pork.

9 Conclusion

The author has argued that transnational space is a gendered territory within which Somali women negotiate their new home in the host country while connecting with society in their home country. Within this space, these women face gendered complexities that affect them differently because they are a heterogeneous community of diverse social locations that are either advantageous or disadvantageous. The gendered complexities these women face include domestic violence, spousal abuse, traumas of the past arising from the loss of children or husbands, 'Hijabophobia', gendered 'Islamophobia', gendered xenophobia and crime that targets women, challenges to accessing health (maternal and family health) and education.

It is recommended that the South African government develop programs meant to provide migrants with a good orientation as a strategy of induction into the South African context. Such an orientation would help Somali women to integrate with the locals after understanding their social, cultural and religious contexts. Besides, it is suggested that religious communities, in the spirit of interfaith dialogue, must set up programmes to unite Christians and Muslims through humanitarian collaborations like poverty alleviation initiatives, Covid-19 prevention programs, and affirmative action.

In liaison with Civil Society Organisations, the South African government should set up platforms that would augment the participation of women migrants or at least facilitate their economic empowerment. They must tap into their abilities and skills and incorporate them into the mainstream economy. This facilitation would benefit those women and ultimately benefit the South African economy. Some women migrants have completed nursing courses, and a country like South Africa, overwhelmed by Covid-19, could have tapped such skills to arrest the spread of the pandemic among fellow migrants and locals.

More gender training programs must be incorporated into all migration sectors to ensure their understanding of sexual and gender-based violence and how to prevent it. Such training could comprise academics and researchers, religious and community leaders of both migrant and host communities, and most importantly, the migrants with lived experiences of those gendered challenges.

Reviewing migration policies that are not gender sensitive is proposed. Gender-neutral laws and policies assume that migrants are homogeneous entities that suffer the same inequalities. These laws are prerequisites for gender-based complexities in the migratory process.

A proposed study would focus on the gendered challenges experienced by male Somali migrants. It would be interesting to see how males are affected by the forces in the migratory process as they try to assert their masculinity traits within the transnational space. It would also be interesting to see the mechanisms the males would adopt to cope with those gendered challenges. Finally, a future study is proposed to focus on the gendered challenges of Somali women migrants from another context outside the Gauteng Province. Research can have different outcomes whenever social context and research subjects are altered. Cape Town, for instance, has a different social context where such a study could be done due to the considerably large population of Somali migrants living there.

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