

A Narrative Inquiry of Sudanese Muslim Women's  
Perceptions of Their Integration into the Finnish Society in  
Jyvaskyla City

Ahkam Assaf

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Department of  
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## **ABSTRACT**

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This study examines five Muslim, Sudanese women's experiences of integration in Jyväskylä city, Finland. It is an attempt to understand the study participants' lived experiences of integration from a micro perspective. The focus of this study is to shed light on the obstacles and aids of integration, and unfold the meanings attached by the study participants to their experiences of integration in Finland. In order to meet the study objectives and answer the research questions, a qualitative design is utilized, and narrative inquiry is used to collect data. Data analysis reveals that the major dilemma for all the study participants is child-rearing in a culture of values and mores conflicting with the Islamic, Sudanese values. Another dilemma is lack of Finnish language skills, which did obscure the study participants' ability to express their needs and voice their concerns in the early stages of their life in Finland. Moreover, high living standards and lack of good work opportunities are considered as a burden by the study participants. On the other hand, the findings highlight aids of integration. For example, the participants are found out to be resilient as they have formed strategies to help them integrate. For example, the Muslim, Sudanese women have used strategies to tackle racism and intolerance incidents, which are, surprisingly, few. Solidarity was shown by Finnish people in the place where racism and intolerance took place. Moreover, the Muslim, Sudanese women did not isolate themselves from the Finnish society but made networks with Finnish people in spite of the Finns' social shyness. Finally, the public officials' conduct is deemed to facilitate the participants' integration.

*Keywords: social integration, Muslims, Sudanese women, Finnish culture, child-rearing, racism*

## **DEDICATION**

To Hannele Vestola and Waleed Saleh; no words can describe my deep gratitude to both of you.

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## Glossary

- Awra: parts of the body that should be covered. A woman's awra is different from a man's awra. A woman's awra is her breast and genitals while a man's awra is his genitals.
- Shariya: laws and rules derived from the Quranic texts.
- Halal: religiously permitted according to Muslims
- Haram: religiously prohibited according to Muslims
- Ayb: socially inappropriate according to the Arabs
- Hijab: a head cover; an Islamic symbol of modesty. According to Islamic interpretations of Islam, Hijab is a head cover which is put on by women to be modest
- Subhana Allah: Praise be to God

# 1 Introduction

Compared to other European countries, Finland is considered as an ethnically homogeneous country, and it was always an emigration country as many Finns emigrated abroad. Emigration wave continued increasingly until the early 1980s when Finland started to witness more immigration than emigration. Immigration rate was higher than emigration in the 1980s, and it doubled in the 1990s. By the end of 2000, immigrant population was 1.6% of the total population. Immigrants mainly came from Russia, Estonia, Sweden, Somalia, former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Germany, United Kingdom, USA and Vietnam. (Heikkilä & Peltonen, 2002)

In 2017, the number of immigrants increased to reach 384123, 26467 of which are Arabs. (Official Statistics of Finland accessed 27.3.2019) This study mainly focuses on the Muslim Arab immigrants, particularly the Muslim, Sudanese immigrant women.

Immigration is a new and recent phenomenon in Finland, and integration policies have been developed only recently. These integration policies mainly concentrate on labor market inclusion of immigrants with little attention paid to societal and cultural integration. (Koskela, 2014)

The Finns hold negative views on Islam and Muslim immigrants. An international study from the Finnish Social Science Data Archive, carried out by researchers from the Church Research Institute, points out that most of the study informants have negative attitudes towards Islam. (Yle, 2012) According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, Teivainen (2018) reports that more than half of Finnish respondents declare that Islam does not fit into Finland because of its conflicting values with the Finnish cultural values.

In the light of the above-mentioned circumstances, the recent integration policies and the Finns' negative attitudes towards Islam and Muslim immigrants, it is essential to investigate the integration experiences of Muslim immigrants. This study intends to describe the integration experiences of Muslim, Sudanese women since they are visibly different in their appearance and race, and it is an attempt to provide insights into the subjective level at which integration occurs.



Bukay (2003, p. 12) states different cultures have profound differences in their “lifestyle”, “social structure”, “life perceptions”, “beliefs” and “values”. These differences can “constitute gaps” that cause people perceive other cultures in a wrong way. A prominent example of how differences can be a basis for distorted perception of others is Western culture and Arab-Islamic culture. (Bukay, 2003)

Henceforth, exploring Muslim, Sudanese women’s experiences of integration into the Finnish society highlights the obstacles, barriers, assets and aids of integration. This study is an attempt to present integration from a micro perspective since subjective viewpoints contribute to better understanding of immigrants' unique, lived experiences. "There are a multitude of studies which present integration from a macro perspective. We should also ground our findings into the micro perspective from where the real solutions arise." (Hamberger, 2009, p.20) Below is a summary of how the study is organized.

*The introduction chapter* presents the circumstances surrounding Muslim, Arab immigrants in Finland. It presents the content of the subsequent chapters in brief. It also includes my self-narrative and how it is related to the topic of the study, purpose of the study, background information about immigration, immigration policies in Finland and the Finns’ attitudes towards immigration. Finally, the introduction chapter presents an overview of the Arab culture.

*Chapter two* presents a theoretical framework of the study. It introduces definitions of social integration by several scholars.

*Chapter three* presents literature review of the integration experiences of Muslim immigrants in the host societies. This chapter highlights several topics and issues, which have influenced the integration of Muslims in the host countries where they live. These issues influencing social integration of Muslim immigrants are: Language of the host country, wellbeing and mental health, support, conflicting cultures and religiosity.

*Chapter four* presents the research design. It presents the methodology, data collection process, demographic information of the participants and data analysis approach and the key themes of the study.

*Chapter five* presents the analysis of the data in relation to the research

questions. Regarding the first question about the obstacles of integration, three major themes are pointed out; these are child rearing, lacking Finnish language skills and not finding good work opportunities. In respect to the second question on the aids of integration, three themes are found out: Muslim, Sudanese women's strategies to tackle racism, networking and social service staff and public employees. This chapter ends with a summary of the findings.

*Chapter six* is the final chapter. It presents examination of the findings, significance of the study, limitations of the study, opportunities for further research and reflections.

## **1.1 My Story: A Self-Narrative**

It is important to share my own life experiences and immigration experience as they are the main motive behind writing this research paper. I am a 30-year-old woman. I was born and grew up in a Muslim, conservative family in Palestine. My father was a businessman; he ran a company with his brother. He was popular in the town where we lived as he was a member in the municipality of the town for two rounds. My family was not religious, but it was very traditional. My father was stern and very strict in the way he brought me and my siblings up. The most important thing for him was protecting the honor of the family and keeping a good image of the family before people in that town. Although my father hated that masculine, traditional community as he would say, he chose to live there and be part of it. My mother was 17 years younger than my father. She got married when she was 16 years old. My mother was a very strong woman, but my father always influenced her way of thinking, even her political views. Nevertheless, she wanted me and my other three sisters to be independent and strong, and encouraged us to be good at school to gain our independence in the future. Neither my mother, nor my siblings and I were able to discuss life matters with my father. Discussion and freedom of talk were suppressed; my father always had the last word in every matter related to our family life and our personal life. My father was very protective. As teenagers we were not allowed to keep windows wide open though the weather was very hot during summer; he

explained our male neighbors would see us through the windows. Singing, dressing shorts or tight clothes at home, laughing aloud, hanging out with friends, engaging in a conversation with male cousins, choosing a marriage partner, and choosing a major to study at school were not permitted by my father.

Living a very restricted life with my protective father has influenced my personality, world views, goals in life, but it was not the sole impact on me. Indeed, the patriarchal society I grew up in has influenced me as well. The society I grew up in was masculine; men could hang out late at night; men could travel by themselves; men's sexual misconduct was justified; men were able to complete their education abroad; men dressed the way they wanted; men stared at women in the street; men got married again after the death of their wives; However, women were better stay home; women only travelled with a male companion; women's sexual misconduct destroyed the family's honor and thus women were killed to purify the reputation of the family; women were expected by their families to be home early; women were obliged to show modesty and chastity by the way they dressed and behaved; women's second marriage after the death of a husband was severely criticized by their community; women were encouraged to take care of their children and stay home rather than working outside home; and the list goes on.

Furthermore, as a student and later a teacher, I was aware of the shortcomings the educational system had. For example, classrooms were crowded; way of teaching was teacher-centered; children with special needs were neglected; the five top students were the only ones who received teachers' attention; verbal abuse and corporal punishment were still used; and the list goes on.

As a result of the life I had, I believed that I should do something to enlighten and empower people who experience injustice in their lives to stand for themselves and work towards changing their realities and I decided to work hard to help solving the problems my country and society has. In 2016, I was admitted in the university of Jyväskylä in Finland. I left Palestine to complete my education and find a way to meet my life goals.

My life in Finland was not easy in the early stages because of the following reasons. I came to Finland with preconceptions about racism, rejection of

Muslims' presence in Finland and Finns' introverted social nature, which caused me feelings of unease and fear. Because of those preconceptions, I was always afraid when people stared at me in Finland. With my head cover on, I believed the Finns found me dangerous or stupid. I was occupied by fear of being hurt as I looked Muslim. I always felt that someone could stab me or shoot me. I used to live in the first floor and always imagined that someone could break into my room and put my studio apartment on fire while I was asleep. That fear developed into severe depression, which left me bedridden, suffering from a painful disease in the immune system, Vasculitis. That fear was ignited because of preconceptions I made up from reading articles on social media and on the news.

The experiences I went through made me curious to explore the experiences of other Muslim women in Finland. I was driven by my desire to help these women by unfolding and documenting their experiences hoping that this study can contribute in sorting out any problems they encountered. Thus, I chose Muslim, Sudanese women as study participants because they looked different in their color and appearance. I started my research with the following expectations in mind: Muslim, Sudanese women experienced the same fear I had; they faced racism regularly; and they felt isolated and rejected.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to (1) unfold the meanings Muslim, Sudanese women attach to their experiences of integration; (2) explore the obstacles that hinder their integration; and (3) explore the positive aspects in their experiences of integration.

## **1.3 Background**

This section introduces an overview of the migration wave in Finland, the Finns' attitudes towards immigration and Muslim immigrants, and the integration policies in Finland. This section is important as it depicts the context Muslim immigrants are

in.

### **1.3.1 Immigration to Finland**

Compared to other European countries, Finland is considered as an ethnically homogeneous country, and it was always an emigration country as many Finns emigrated abroad, mainly to Sweden. Emigration wave continued increasingly until the early 1980s when Finland witnessed more immigration than emigration. Immigration rate was higher than emigration in the 1980s, and it doubled in the 1990s. By the end of 2000, immigrant population was 1.6% of the total population. Immigrants mainly came from Russia, Estonia, Sweden, Somalia, former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Germany, United Kingdom, USA and Vietnam. (Heikkilä & Peltonen 2002)

Likewise, Jaakkola (2005) explains that Finland was a country of emigration as more than half million Finns travelled abroad looking for better jobs, and better life standards. Emigration continued until the beginning of 1980s when Finland started to receive more immigrants mainly Finnish returnee migrants. In addition, 23, 500 refugees from Yugoslavia and Somalia were granted residence permits in 1990s.

### **1.3.2 Finns' Attitudes towards Immigration**

Jaakkola (2005) suggests it is important to explore the Finns' attitudes towards immigration almost every five years starting from 1987 when the first survey on the Finns' attitudes was conducted. The Finns' attitudes towards immigrants were influenced by the economic situation. For instance, the Finns' attitudes towards immigration in the time of the economic recession when unemployment rate was 19% in the early 1990s were different from those attitudes in the years after when the economy revived, and unemployment rate declined. Negative attitudes decreased from 61% to 38%, while positive attitudes of those who wanted more foreign immigrants and labor went up to be 30%. Moreover, immigrants' occupation and reason to immigrate to Finland had an influence on the Finns' attitudes towards immigration. For example, attitudes were more positive towards immigrants like language teachers, entrepreneurs and students, while attitudes are negative towards job seekers, for example. Even though negatives attitudes towards immigration decreased in 2003 compared to 1993, the recession year, those attitudes were

influenced by the nationalities of immigrants. Immigrants who were culturally and visibly close to the Finnish culture were more accepted than immigrants who were visibly different from the Finns in their appearances and cultures. Besides, the attitudes of the Finns who had relations and contacts with immigrants were more positive than those of the Finns who had no contacts with immigrants. (Jaakkola, 2005)

Similarly, Söderling (1992) studies the Finns' attitudes towards immigrants and explores how these attitudes are related to the Finns' societal and financial status such as income and level of education. Söderling (1992) finds out that the Finns who have low income and level of education tend to have negative attitudes towards immigrants, and they are the only racist group. However, those who are successful in the society have more positive attitudes towards immigrants. Söderling (1992) suggests that negative attitudes towards immigration can be reduced if the welfare system justly allocate the resources among citizens.

On the other hand, The Finns hold negative views on Islam and Muslim immigrants. An international study from the Finnish Social Science Data Archive, carried out by researchers from the Church Research Institute, points out that most of the study informants have negative attitudes towards Islam. (Yle, 2012) According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, more than half of Finnish respondents declare that Islam does not fit into Finland because of its conflicting values with the Finnish cultural values. (Teivainen, 2018) Moreover, an attitude survey conducted online by Yle claims that 43% of the respondents rejects the idea of having a mosque or a Muslim praying room near their houses and they see that having an Alcoholic rehabilitation center is better. (Yle, 2015) Furthermore, Finnish Media depicts Islam as problematic; for example, topics that are discussed on media are usually Hijab, genital circumcision and Islamic terrorism. (Martikainen, 2013)

### **1.3.3 Integration Policy in Finland**

Koskela (2014) reports immigration is a new and recent phenomenon in Finland. Somalis were the first, big wave of immigrants who arrived in Finland in the early 1990's. Refugees from Vietnam and Chile came to Finland in the late 1970's in small numbers. Because Finland is still in its first steps regarding immigration, integration

policies have been developed only recently. These integration policies mainly concentrate on labor market inclusion of immigrants with little attention paid to societal and cultural integration. The responsibility of integrating immigrant by engaging them in the labor market is the responsibility of the Ministry of Employment and Economy. Only immigrants who are not employed receive integration training which includes providing language courses and professional training. It is believed that societal and cultural integration take place once employment and acquisition of Finnish language are secured. (Koskela, 2014)

Moreover, in the public and political discourse, societal and cultural integration are missing, whereas the issue of immigration is highly debated. Public and political discourse is all about whether to restrict immigration, what origins of immigrants to allow into Finland and how immigration is good or bad for Finland. For example, the target group of immigrants being discussed is Somalis who are apparently different in their culture, religion and appearance, and they are perceived as a threat to the Finnish culture. When talking about Somalis, little is said about how to well integrate them into the Finnish society. (Koskela, 2014)

The integration services provided by municipalities and employment and economic administration services in Finland include the following: First, immigrants are acquainted with the places where they can get support and counselling regarding their life in Finland and are provided with information about Finland. Second, Finnish or Swedish language courses, vocational training, and social, cultural and life-management skills are offered to adult immigrants. Moreover, immigrants' previous educational degrees and vocational skills are taken into consideration and are identified. Third, immigrants are entitled to get public employment and be involved in business services and entrepreneurship. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, n.d.)

## **1.4 An Overview of the Arab Culture**

This section describes major aspects of the Arab culture. It includes a brief description of the Arab family structure, sex life, role of religion and major cultural values of Arabs

as described by the Hungarian ethnographer Patai (1973) in his book, *The Arab Mind*.

#### **1.4.1 The Arab Family**

The Arab family is patriarchal, hierarchical, where the father or the elderly are on top and dominate. It is acquainted that a father in an Arab country is authoritarian disciplinarian and stern, while a mother is more tender and compassionate. Children in an Arab family respect, fear and subordinate to the father, and feel more attached to the mother even after marriage. This refers to the fact that a father treats children in an authoritarian, severe way, while a mother is gentle in the way she deals with the kids. Besides, a severe father with his children tend to be severe to his wife too. Thus, a wife of a severe husband does not usually express disapproval of her husband's disciplinary and child-rearing practices. Furthermore, child-rearing practices in the Arab family vary according to the gender of the child. The way a son is reared is different from the way a daughter is reared. In the Arab consciousness, sons and daughters are two distinct entities. Distinction between sons and daughters starts in the wedding day when everyone in the wedding party congratulates the bride and groom by wishing them many sons. When the wife is pregnant, she prays she delivers a son. The family welcomes a baby boy with joy, while they receive a baby girl with annoyance. In the old days, a baby girl would be buried alive by her father until Mohammed, the prophet, came and urged people to stop doing that. Nevertheless, this unease and negative feelings of having female children are still there in conservative regions in the Arab world. (Patai, 1973)

#### **1.4.2 Sex life**

Sex repression is widespread in the Arab countries. Children are taught that extramarital sex is shameful and sinful and are brought up to believe that any sexual misconduct brings a huge scandal to the family. As children grow up, they are confronted by societal regulations and arrangements that constantly remind them that extramarital sex is sinful. The society imposes restrictions on its individuals in order to make them avoid having extramarital sex. For example, the two genders are segregated in all possible ways. Besides, there is a concept of sexual honor that every



Arab family does its best to preserve. This honor is connected to women's sexual conduct. Women, basically daughters and sisters, must behave according to specific behavioral standards. Any sexual misconduct brings dishonor and disgrace to the father, brothers and the whole family. The reason why the whole family is influenced by a daughter's or sister's sexual misconduct is the strong family bonds and the fact that the Arab culture is a kinship culture. Accordingly, families do their best to protect their honor to the extent that a father or a brother do kill a daughter or sister who sexually misconducts to purify and clean the honor of the family. (Patai, 1973)

### **1.4.3 Religion**

Since the start of the industrial revolution in the West, Christianity has lost its normative function and it has lost the role it has played in all life aspects. Religion has become part of people's private life. However, religion in the Arab world still influences all life aspects and it has preserved its normative function. Patai (1973) comments in this regard, "all the people in the Arab world were religious in the double sense of unquestioningly believing what tradition commanded them to believe and obeying the ritual rules with which religion circumscribed their lives. Religion was – and for the traditional majority in all Arab countries has remained – the central normative force in life." (Patai, 1973, p.144) Besides, Islam and other religions in the Arab world still have a spiritual and inner sustaining power. The religions in the Arab world and Middle East still have the power to make their followers by following them believe that they possess the Truth, follow the straight path and have the key to heaven. (Patai, 1973)

### **1.4.4. Arab values**

Arabs are acquainted of values like hospitality, generosity, and honor. Arabs are expected by their community to be hospitable, especially in occasions like marriage, burial, completion of a house-building and Ramadan, the holy month of fasting. According to Arabs, hospitality is strongly linked to one's honor. If someone is hospitable to her/his guests, this gives him/her a good reputation in his community or tribe. Conversely, if someone is not hospitable, this brings shame to him/her in

her/his community. Generosity is not distinct from hospitality; both are related. One who is hospitable is generous. None works without the other. However, generosity is not only shown at one's home or when a guest visits like hospitality. A generous Arab shows his generosity wherever he/she goes. For example, if a generous man meets a friend in the street, he insists to invite him to his house or a cafe. Honor is another value Arabs strive to sustain. The concept of honor is multifaceted in the Arab culture. There is that honor which is related to the actions one takes to maintain group cohesion and survival. For example, one should show loyalty to his tribe or community by taking part in defending it against enemies. Moreover, honor is related to one's public image. Thus, an Arab should be generous and hospitable to show a good image of herself/himself and preserve her/his honor accordingly. If one's honor is injured, one must act to retrieve it. In this respect, it is important to point out that the word honor has two equivalent words in Arabic. The first one is *sharaf*, which is linked to preserving group cohesion and one's public image. The second one is *Ird*, which means a woman's sexual honor. For instance, if a woman is involved in an extramarital sexual relationship, this brings a constant dishonor to the whole family, which can kill that woman to restore the honor of the family. (Patai, 1973)

## 2 Theoretical Framework

Shedding light on the meaning of social integration is essential to interpret the Muslim, Sudanese women's experiences of integration. Thus, this chapter presents a wise detail of integration theories. To better understand what social integration is, definitions provided by several scholars are discussed below. Social integration is distinguished from social assimilation. To avoid confusion of the two concepts, scholars (Durkheim, 1893, Park & Burgess 1921, Beresnevieute, 2003, Ferguson, 2008, Hamberger, 2009) offer potential explanations and definitions of social integration and differentiate between it and the concept of social assimilation.

Emile Durkheim is among the first to talk about social integration in his book, *Division of Labor*. Durkheim (1893) states that solidarity does exist among people in communities, but the concept of solidarity is not the same in the pre-industrial and post-industrial eras. In preindustrial communities, people are held together by factors such as similar values, beliefs and sentiments, which are labelled as "collective conscience". (Durkheim, 1893, p.109-110) Solidarity, in this context, is the strongest when collective sentiments, attitudes, values and beliefs are more common and stronger than the individual and personal ones. This kind of solidarity is called "Mechanical Solidarity" by Durkheim (1893, p.129-130). However, in the postindustrial era, people living in one society no longer share the same beliefs and sentiments, and everyone in the community is distinguished from the others by being specialized in doing a specific job within that society. In fact, a different type of solidarity is produced by the division of labor, when individuals have started to be specialized in different careers and jobs. Just like organs of the body, people function in postindustrial societies. That is, each organ has a function it does while depending on the other organs to keep the body functioning. Likewise, people in postindustrial era have their individual personalities and functions, yet these specialized functions work together towards one unified end, which is to keep the society strong and organized. Thus, this kind of solidarity of individuals with distinguished personalities and functions is called "organic solidarity". In such a society, community is united and organized by the dependability of the various life specializations on each other.

(Durkheim, 1893, pp.130-131) In a nutshell, Social integration resembles Durkheim's organic solidarity, where people are not necessarily similar, but they work together towards one end. However, social assimilation resembles mechanical solidarity when immigrants give up their previous culture, melt in the host culture and adopt the values and principles of the majority.

Ferguson (2008) and formerly Park and Burgess (1920) state in social integration immigrants are not forced to embrace the values, principles and beliefs of the host culture. Instead, they are free to keep their own culture and live in harmony with the others who have different backgrounds and cultures. Park and Burgess (1920) distinguish between two social processes related to immigration, accommodation and assimilation. Accommodation has to do with the process of organizing social relations of people with divergent backgrounds and attitudes to maintain stability and reduce potential or actual conflicts. However, assimilation has to do with having immigrants infused in the dominant culture of the host country, where everyone shares similar attitudes, perspectives, feelings and beliefs. Modifications that happen to the community in the process of accommodation are sudden and rapid, while these modifications that take place within assimilation are gradual and moderate. Besides, accommodation is a conscious process as the groups involved are completely aware of it, yet groups which are involved in assimilation are unconscious of the process since they are incorporated into the dominant culture of the host country over time. Besides, Park and Burgess (1920) highlight that assimilation is not the same as amalgamation, which is achieved by intermarriage and interbreeding that lead to having the various races infused into each other. However, assimilation is about having cultures infused into each other. What facilitates assimilation is primary social contacts, which lead to interaction among individuals. Primary contacts mean intimate and intense contacts among individuals. Nevertheless, amalgamation is another way to promote assimilation as it is a good reason to have primary social contacts.

Likewise, Alba and Nee (1997) define assimilation as the process when cultural and social boundaries among citizens of different ethnicities in a community vanish and dissolve in favor of the majority culture, to which all conform.

Beresnevieute (2003) defines social integration, clarifies facts to be taken into consideration to achieve social integration and explains the importance of achieving social integration. Beresnevieute (2003) states that social integration refers to the principles shared by all members of the community and the relations and interactions among these members. In social integration, individuals with diverse backgrounds work together to avoid disturbing the social system and promote the way it functions. The process of social integration could encompass both harmonious relations and conflicting ones, yet any level of social integration is essential for any social system to function well. Henceforth, social participation is a result of successful social integration of the diverse ethnic groups living in one social sphere. This participation is represented by taking part in the political, economic and cultural life of society, being represented in the different administrative and governmental institutions and being involved in other different activities. Social participation is considered a dimension of social integration. When individuals are proactive within the host society, they could have an influence on the mainstream social life as they form social relations with the others. Thus, they can better understand the others, and be understood by them.

Ferguson (2008) clarifies social integration as a comprehensive process which leads to having a harmonious society socially, economically and politically by introducing new set of values and principles emphasizing equality of opportunities, equity and dignity for all society members regardless of their color, ethnicity, religion, and number. This process is opposed to assimilation which forces minorities of a society to conform to the mainstream norms of most of that society, where all have the same identities and lifestyle.

Ferguson (2008, p.11) adds for social integration process to achieve its goals, three interconnected processes must be taken in account. First of all, recognition of all society members from various social, ethnic or religious backgrounds is crucial so as to promote respect, dignity and cooperation. Second, representation of minority groups as well as majority groups politically and in decision making is essential so as to ensure minority groups' voice is heard and their needs are met. Third, equal and just redistribution of socio-economic resources among individuals and groups

protects the society from getting fragmented, which would lead to resentful feelings among society members. In fact, a prominent element of social integration is social justice where all social, political and economic opportunities and resources are equally accessed by all society individuals and groups regardless of their ethnicity, social class, color or religion. Another basic element in social integration is social capital which refers to the social relations built by all society members, and the norms, rules and conceptions which influence social relation building. The set of norms influencing relationship building can have negative or positive impact such as creating relations of fear or relations of trust. Henceforth, shedding light on social capital is of utmost importance during the process of social integration. Furthermore, values of solidarity where citizens realize the importance of standing by and helping other citizens who are in distress and hardships are integral part of social integration since solidarity is inter-linked with resource distribution.

UNHCR does not differ a lot in the way it defines integration of refugees. UNHCR (2013) reports the way governments and policy makers view social integration of refugees is different from the way refugees and stakeholders view it. For example, governments and policy makers gauge the extent to which refugees are integrated according to three major criteria: language acquisition, employment and housing. However, refugees relate their integration in the host country to "understanding rights and responsibilities", "the passage of time" and "feelings of being at home", which are considered "subjective" dimensions of integration. (UNHCR, 2013, p.118)

Nevertheless, UNHCR (2013) points out that employment, education, social inclusion and active citizenship are viewed to be key factors for integration to take place according to the Zaragoza Declaration (2010).

Having refugee immigrants involved in the labor market is evidence of successful employment integration. However, there are factors influencing refugees' employment such as job availability, recognition of refugees' previous education and professional experience, and vocational language skills of the host country. Thus, lack of appropriate employment is a challenge to refugees' integration. (UNHCR, 2013)

Another factor influencing refugee immigrants' integration is accessing

education and language learning courses. For instance, acquiring the host country's language enables refugees to "feel part of the wider society", makes them have "a sense of belonging", "enables friendships", and "facilitates day-to-day living." (UNHCR, 2013, p. 124)

Furthermore, social inclusion is essential in the process of integrating in the host country. However, social inclusion is influenced by factors like "language ability", "uncertainty of cultural norms", "fear of rejection or experiences of racism", "psychological limitations connected to concerns about finances, employment, housing and family separation". Availability of the formerly mentioned factors can lead to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, which adversely influences refugees' ability to connect with the host community. (UNHCR, 2013, p. 125)

Active citizenship of refugees would promote and facilitate their integration in the host country. Active citizenship refers to participating in the political and civic life of the host country such as "media engagement, participation in associations, volunteering and access to citizenship." It is the host country's responsibility to facilitate refugees' active participation in the political and civic arenas by promoting "intercultural dialogue" and "community engagement like sports clubs and recreational activities." (UNHCR, 2013. pp.125-126)

Housing is another factor influencing the integration of refugees. Finding a proper house is usually hindered by reasons like "landlords' reluctance to rent to refugees", "the urgency with which refugees must find housing after recognition of status", and "refugees' lack of employment". Besides, the geographic location of refugees' houses can have a positive or negative impact on their integration; for example, finding proper housing in big cities is harder but employment availability is better while getting a suitable house in smaller cities is easier but finding appropriate employment can be harder. (UNHCR, 2013, p.126)

### **3 Literature Review of Social Integration Experiences of Muslim Immigrants**

When talking about social integration in this study, the focus is on obstacles and aids of the Muslim, Sudanese women's integration. Chapter 3 presents different studies that have been conducted on the integration of Muslims and highlights the challenges and aids of integration as perceived by Muslims in different Western countries. The following life aspects influencing social integration are interrelated, which means that they overlap with one another and result from each other. For example, providing enough support to immigrants in the post-migration period can lead to good mental health and wellbeing, which, in turn, facilitates the integration of immigrants. Below is a description of potential obstacles and aids of integration related to the psychological and mental health of immigrants, support, acquisition of the host country's language, cultural differences and religiosity.

#### **3.1 Psychological and mental health of immigrants**

Gracia and Herrero (2014) state that there are three determinants of social integration: Personal, interpersonal and situational. First, personal determinants refer to the psychological and mental status of refugees. For example, refugees who suffer from psychological distress or depression are reluctant to initiate or maintain relationships with others in the community. Second, interpersonal determinants of social integration refer to the support refugees get from close, intimate networks when need arises. Support networks positively impacts the integration of refugees. Gracia and Herrero (2014, p.11) state, "A strong feeling of support within the network of close ties is an important predictor of feelings of attachment, and involvement in the informal life of the community." Third, situational determinants affect refugees' support resources; thus, it influences their integration in the host country. Situational determinants refer stressful life events refugees encounter like "conflicts and problems in areas such as work/school, home, love and marriage, family, health,



community, finances..." (Gracia & Herrero, 2014, p.7) In fact, such problems inhibit refugees' integration over time.

In Shakespear-Finch and Wickham's study (2010) which is conducted to find out the hindering and helping factors towards adaptation for Sudanese refugees, aged between 19-40 years old, in Australia, It is pointed out that one of the hindrances to positive adaptation refer to homesickness and being apart from families. Likewise, Mhaidat (2016) confirms that psychological factors are of impact on adaptation. For example, the Syrian refugee girls, who are the study sample of Mhaidat (2016), suffer from adaptation problems because of their feelings of low self-esteem, depression, hostility, anger and unsafety.

### **3.2 Support in the integration process**

Goda-Savolainen (2017) finds out pre-migration, traumatic experiences and integration stressors such as finding employment and having poor Finnish language skills adversely influence refugees' mental health and wellbeing. Nonetheless, the social support refugees receive all along their resettlement period in Finland has helped in improving their mental health and reducing stress.

Segal and Mayadas (2005) suggest that service institutions working with the newcomers to the USA should not only focus on the immigrants' and refugees' life in the USA. They should study closely the immigrants' and refugees' home lifestyle and culture, reasons behind immigration, the experience they have had in their way to the USA, resources refugees and immigrants bring with them to survive and live in an unfamiliar environment and the political and social readiness of the host country to receive immigrants and refugees. This helps service practitioners know what kind of help they can provide for refugees and immigrants to help them adjust and adapt to the new culture.

In this respect, Owens-Manley and Coughlan (2002) state that the trauma refugees pass through has serious effects on their ability to adjust to the new culture. Most of the study participants, Bosnian refugees, seem to have mental health problems. Most of them stated that they feel anxious, nervous, tense, low in energy,

lonely, guilty and trapped. Owens-Manley and Coughlan (2002) add that service providers play a pivotal role in the initial stage of resettlement since providing a good service, particularly good mental health service, positively impacts refugees' adjustment on the long term. Owens-Manley and Coughlan (2002) explain that the US Refugee policy does not provide enough guidelines regarding screening and treating stress-related symptoms for refugees when they first come to the USA, which constitutes a major obstacle in the way towards successful adjustment.

Bello (2015) states the way to achieve socio-cultural change and integration of Muslim immigrant families is through the empowerment of Muslim immigrant women by economically integrating them and involving them in small, medium and large businesses. Economic integration of Muslim immigrant women contributes to reducing prejudice and stereotypes held of them by the Western host societies where they live. For example, Western societies see that Muslim women are oppressed, and oppressive actions of Muslim women do not change as they move to Western countries. On the other hand, Muslim people see that Westerner women are not valued and are indifferent of their children and families. To battle the previously mentioned stereotypes and help change them, Muslim women immigrants should be given opportunities to be hired and empowered families by the socio-political systems in the host countries to be change agents within their host countries.

UNHCR (2013) finds out social engagement is important to achieve social integration of immigrants and avoid social exclusion in Austria. Taking part in social and cultural activities in the host society and building up networks, especially with Austrians are indicators of social engagement. Building social connections and networks and participation in social and cultural events are dependent on personal motivation of immigrants and available time. It is found out that social engagement of immigrants is impeded by lack of German language and cultural knowledge of the Austrian society, which results in mental health problems that are considered as another constraining factor to integration of immigrants in the host society. (UNHCR, 2013)

### 3.3 Language of the Host Country

Regarding the factors that influence social integration, Seker and Sirkeci (2015) conclude that language barrier is an evident challenge to adaptation of refugee students to the Turkish culture. Language barrier influences their school life such as their ability to express themselves and communicate with their peers at school, which is considered a major obstacle in the way towards integration. Moreover, lack of Turkish language skills affects refugee children's academic achievement at school.

Correspondingly, Shakespear-Finch and Wickham (2010) state that the participant Sudanese refugees, in the study they conducted, consider inability to speak English language well as a hindrance to adaptation in Australia. Some of them say that they hear negative comments from Australians about their spoken language. The refugees add that they cannot express themselves well, and it is hard for them to communicate with others easily, which causes them feelings of helplessness and exclusion.

Gregory (2014) does research to study the adaptation strategies Muslim women use, and the effect of gender, race and religion on their life experiences in Western society. Gregory (2014) states that informants of his study were eleven women from Africa, Asia and Middle East. They expressed that English language proficiency was a barrier to creating social networks; thus, they would work harder to master English to be able to make American friends.

UNHCR (2013) affirms language influences the integration of immigrants in the host country; lack of language is a constraining factor; acquisition of language is an enabling factor of integration. Lacking German language skills isolate immigrants, hinders social networking with nationals, negatively influences employment, turns immigrants to be dependent on others to express their needs, and disturbs their everyday activities.

Marsh (2012) finds out that there is no length of time for adaptation to take place, and identifies some exclusionary factors based on the stories of refugee women in Vancouver, Canada. These exclusionary factors stand as obstacles in the way of cross-cultural adaptation, and the first exclusionary obstacle is language. The

interviewed women repeatedly state that their inability to speak English language well puts them in isolation because they cannot communicate with people from the host community and sometimes cannot express their basic needs and feelings. For instance, these women report that they have difficulties communicating some health problems, socializing with neighbors or even finding a secure employment, which leads them to be depressed and anxious. Marsh (2012) describes inability to speak the language of the host country as a mental burden.

Doyle (2011) states that the factors which impact Muslim teenagers in Ireland refer mainly to time spent in the country and language fluency. However, factors like racism and islamophobia were not major influences on the integration of Muslim teenagers, which is different from other European countries where racism and islamophobia are of central influence on the integration process. In this regard, Doyle (2011) points out that newly settled Muslim teenagers find language as a huge barrier to their integration, while their counterparts who have been living in the Cork, Ireland, for a long time and speak the language fluently do not see language as a barrier to their integration. On the other hand, Doyle (2011) finds out that racism and islamophobia are not central themes in what the informants state to be negatively influencing their integration. Doyle (2011) refers this to two reasons. First, these Muslim teenagers have lived in Cork for a long time and have already had their social life well established. Second, the youth social worker is a good help for Muslim teenagers to integrate as he has considerable experience working with them. Doyle (2011) adds though Muslim teenagers have shared some bad experiences they have passed through; they state that they feel accepted and integrated.

Similarly, Hamberger (2009) emphasizes for integration to take place, some critical issues should be taken into consideration. First, language acquisition helps in achieving cultural and social integration, yet acquiring the language of the host country is not an easy process because of several factors such as immigrants' level of education, the distance between the country of origin and the host country and immigrants' age. Second, making use of immigrants' skills, professional experiences and knowledge is an important step towards achieving integration. Immigrants' human capital is an asset for the host country. (Hamberger, 2009)

### **3.4 Cultural differences between immigrants and people of the host country**

Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2010) add that racism stands in the refugees' way towards being part of the Australian community. For instance, some refugees tell accounts of racial verbal abuse, physical violence and denial of access to services, which leads to feelings of fear and social isolation. Furthermore, some of these refugees find it hard to adapt to the Australian laws that are western in nature such as laws related to the way to discipline children. For example, Sudanese refugees show their concern for losing control over their kids as there are strict regulations by the Australian government in respect to kids' raising and discipline.

However, Owens-Manley and Coughlan (2002) find out that in regard to the social adjustment, most of the interviewed Bosnian refugees stated that they felt welcomed by the host community in New York and did not face any kind of discrimination. Only the elderly refugees expressed that adjustment was hard because of the lack of familiarity, attachment and comfort.

Alhawsaw (2016) declares that several barriers inhibit Arab refugees from adapting to the Canadian culture. Canadian labor laws and financial constraints are found to be hindering the integration of Arab refugees. Regarding the Canadian labor laws, Arab refugees feel their previous education and expertise are not valued in the host country, and accordingly they need to work harder on their expertise more to meet the Canadian criteria. In addition, financial insecurity prevented Arab refugees from being engaged fully in the Canadian society. This can be a major reason that stops them from socializing and participating in the community events. For example, compared to the fund Arab refugees receive from the Canadian community, most of the Arab refugees were used to a good financial condition in their home countries. Yet in Canada they are obliged to adjust their lives according to the fund they receive from Canadian government, which is less than the income they used to get in their homelands.

Alhawsaw (2016) adds that another difficulty to adaptation is the fear of

raising children in a western culture where values and norms contradict and totally differ from the values of the Arab culture; they are concerned that their children acquire these values and lose their Arab identity. Moreover, not having the opportunities to express, show and talk about their own culture to Canadians make them feel marginalized. Moreover, their children grow up to be bicultural, which leads to conflicts between parents and children, and it could lead to serious troubles within family.

Thet (2016) states that immigrants' strong self-identity is perceived as an enabling factor of integration in the host society; self-identity refers to immigrants' awareness of their cultural values, beliefs and life goals. Strong self-identity provides immigrants with resilience to adapt to the new life in the host community while maintaining self-coherence. Immigrants' self-identity is either stable, deep and permanent or it is flexible and adaptable which can be modified in an ongoing basis depending on the surrounding conditions. In both cases, immigrants' self-identity represented by their values, beliefs, ambitions, worldviews, self-image, religion, cultural background and origin has a positive impact on the integration process. On the one hand, it can facilitate integration by helping immigrants maintain self-coherence in a totally different society, while on the other hand accommodate to the new life of the host society. Furthermore, a clear self-identity can encourage immigrants to take part in the host society and not to seclude themselves from being present in the different life aspects of the host country. Other factors that influence integration are lack of trust between members of the host society and immigrants, attitudes of the host society, lack of social relationships between immigrants and members of the host country, racism, immigrants' feeling of insecurity and voicelessness. Such factors make integration harder to achieve and lead to immigrants' seclusion and marginalization. Henceforth, there should more serious work towards having identity construction and counselling as it plays a vital role in the success of immigrants' integration.

### 3.5 Religiosity

Ahmed (2017) studies the nature of Islamic education in Canada with a focus on how Islamic school teaches Islamic values in a secular society and prepare students to tackle any pressures resulted from the differences between religious norms and national norms. Ahmed (2017) states that Islamic education has not succeeded in preparing students to keep their Islamic values whereas adapt to the Canadian secular society at the same time. Islamic education has failed to develop students' multicultural competence. For instance, Islamic schools do its best to preserve students' identities as Muslims, but discourages students from being involved in secular, non-Islamic activities and celebrations, for example. Nevertheless, Islamic education is not solely to blame for this problem. Media with all news and negative views it broadcasts about Islam and Islamic terrorism is another factor contributing to making these problems and challenges worse. Henceforth, Islamic education institutions and Canadian media must prepare students to perceive the Canadian principles and convictions as valuable and significant as their own religious-related principles and values. Besides, there must be more interaction opportunities between Islamic and Canadian public schools which can help in reducing stereotypes and misunderstandings one can have about the other at an early age. Consequently, Muslims and non-Muslims can live more harmoniously in the Canadian community. (Ahmed, 2017, p.45-46)

Khosrojerdi (2015) studies the intersection of race, gender, ethnicity, and religion and its influence on the way Muslim female students construct their identity and their experiences of higher education in Canada. Khosrojerdi (2015) finds out that Muslim female students experience marginalization in the post September 11th era. One of the salient findings of Khosrojerdi (2015) is the impact of Hijab on female students' educational experiences; some of them faced overt discrimination from their peers and professors. Khosrojerdi (2015) states that Muslim female students, whether the ones who wear Hijab or do not wear Hijab, share very similar experiences; however, female students who wear hijab explain how they encounter challenges and extra pressure because of their Hijab.(Khosrojerdi, 2015, p.181) These Muslim female

students state that they did not face direct racism, yet they felt they were treated differently and sensed racial prejudice. Furthermore, Muslim female students who wear Hijab highlighted the fact that they suffered from invisibility and exclusion in their interactions with white non-Muslim students. Creating friendship and maintaining them was hard for them. Nevertheless, these Muslim women state that discrimination against them and racial prejudice do not lead them to be passive in the Canadian society and university life. On the contrary, they state that they are proactive and determined to change their realities. (Khosrojerdi, 2015, p.182-184)

In this regard, Gregory (2014) state that the Muslim female informants of his study explain that they have synthesized between their traditional identities as females and new identities as residents in the U.S. For example, some of them engage in activities that are not allowed in their home countries such as driving a car or motorcycle, smoking and dating non-Muslims. Moreover, Muslim women in the American context, which is occupied by preconceptions of Muslims as terrorist, primitive and having hatred sentiments to the West, used some strategies to help changing the negative image of their Muslim community. They have become active members of Muslim student clubs on campus to educate non-Muslim peers about Islam and its principles.

In Mir's book (2014) about undergraduate Muslim women's identity and social life at university campus, Mir (2014, p.174) states that being Muslim was a big challenge for Muslim women in their way towards integration in the social life at campus. The campus life resembles the Muslim reality in the bigger US community. Muslim women interviewed for this study state that they feel they are excluded from the social life of the university campus. Some of them hide their identities as Muslims to avoid looking different among their colleagues, while others were louder and are in persistent resistance against any kind of racism they encounter because of their appearance as Muslims.

Alamri (2013) conducts a research paper on the influence of Islamic background on students' participation in school physical activities. In fact, taking part in school activities, like participation in school sporting activities, indicates that students are engaged and integrated in the school culture. Yet not doing so means that



there are challenges to their engagement and integration. Alamri (2013) finds out that the Islamic teachings which determines dress code for women and puts limits on interaction with the opposite sex, and the inflexible school policies and rules of school sporting activities influence Muslim female students' engagement in school sports. For example, Australian schools do not have special halls where female students can practice sport with no males being around. For Muslim female students, this can hinder their participation in school sports activities since it contradicts with Islamic principles where women and men are not allowed to interact with no limits; i.e. men and women in Islam are not allowed to touch, date, have intimate relationships, and sexual intercourse as long as they are not married.

In Salleh-Hoddin's and Pedersen's study (2012) which explored Muslims' experiences of discrimination in Australia in the current political climate, and the effect of these experiences on their feelings of integration, Salleh-Hoddin and Pedersen (2012) find out that Muslims face discrimination in different life aspects in Australia such as in housing, dealing with "police", "shops", "restaurants", and other "public places". (p.17) Nevertheless, informants of the study point out two important issues with the Muslim community. For example, Muslim respondents state that some Muslim people act in a way which ignites prejudice against them. Besides, the Muslim informants state that there is discrimination within the Muslim community itself. Muslim immigrants face discrimination, yet the degree of discrimination towards Muslim immigrants differs according to their ethnicity and gender. For example, Middle Eastern Muslims encounter more discrimination than other Muslims. Moreover, visible Muslims like women in Hijab report that they face discrimination more than invisible Muslims. Moreover, visible Muslims and those who had positive contact with their ingroup are reported to be less integrated than those who were less visible Muslims and had less contacts within the ingroup. Furthermore, Muslims point out that there are some behaviors Muslims do in the Australian community, which increases prejudice against them. For example, some Muslim communities tend to isolate themselves from the Australian society, and just get involved in their own cultural activities. This leads the Australian society to feel that their own values are not accepted by Muslims and accordingly it increases prejudice and discrimination

against Muslims. Moreover, one third of the informants state they encounter discrimination and prejudice within their intergroup as they are judged by other Muslims, which implies a specific set of behavior to comply with. This code of behavior can hinder integration in the host community since these Muslims tend to act just like other Muslims in the intergroup to avoid being judged and stereotyped.

Alvi (2008) states that girls who wear hijab report that they feel alienated and othered by their peers, which, accordingly, influences their active participation in school social activities. These feelings of segregation and alienation come from Muslim female students' own perception of how others see them. In Alvi's study (2008), Muslim female students state that wearing Hijab necessitates that they behave in a particular way and take part in activities that get along with Islamic teachings and principles. Consequently, Muslim female students who wear hijab refrain from participating in school activities like dance activities, or casino hang outs. According to them, not abiding by this code of conduct misrepresents Islam, which is something they reject. Moreover, Muslim female students state that they feel more confident and inspired to speak up and express themselves when other Muslim girls wearing hijab are around. Stereotypes and judgments from their peers were discouraging factors that stopped Muslim female students wearing hijab from taking part in school social activities. Teachers sometimes were racist and not considerable to girls' dress code, which negatively influenced their participation in sport activities and other social activities. Some of the girls wearing Hijab were confident enough to overlook the racist remarks their peers would make and join the different social activities, while other were discouraged to partake these social activities.

Zine (2001) explains how Muslim youth avoid assimilation and maintain their religious and cultural identities in the Western societies where they live. Muslim youth live in Western societies which have social values that contradict with their own values. According to Islamic teachings, Muslims must commit to a straight path drawn by Quran. Thus, being assimilated in the social life of secular, Western societies, which involves a lifestyle where pre-marriage sexual relations, alcohol drinking, less modest dress code and other Western habits, is of negative impact on their religious identities. Public schools are a secular setting where peer pressure, racism and

Islamophobia threaten the actualization of an Islamic identity by the Muslim youth. Nevertheless, Muslim students report that they resist conformity to the mainstream Western culture and reject assimilation by keeping connections with other Muslim youth within and outside school community, which supported and inspired the Muslim young students in keeping their Islamic lifestyle.

Begum and Seppänen (2017) explore the experiences of Muslim women care professionals at care service institution in Finland. Begum and Seppänen (2017) find out that Muslim women professionals who strictly follow their Islamic teachings find challenges and difficulties at their workplaces. Examples of these challenges are related to the five prayers Muslims have to offer daily. Some of the interviewed Muslim women professionals expressed frustration as they are not given short breaks to offer their prayers. Besides, practical nurses have some gender preferences of clients. They prefer to work with same-sex care receivers. They refuse to work with male care receivers since they are required to bathe them, wash them in sauna and dress them. According to the interviewed practical nurses, taking care of male care receivers could bring shame on them in their cultural communities. What makes this issue harder to deal with is the fact that in Finnish work culture a nurse has no option to choose clients based on their gender. Another issue Muslim female professionals encounter at their workplaces is food. Some of the informants prefer not to talk about food and Halal food in front of their co-workers to avoid negative attitudes from their colleagues. Instead they bring their own food from home. Besides, Muslim women professionals talk about the difficulty of getting days off from work in times of Muslim festivals that usually happen twice a year. According to these informants, spending time with their families during these holy days is vital, and having some flexible schedules in times like Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting and celebration events is important. Another challenge encountered by these Muslim women professionals is finding time and place to offer prayers. Some of them are not given extra time to do prayers, while others do not find a proper place where they can offer these prayers as they share offices with male colleagues. However, some of the informants find no difficulty in this regard as they have already discussed these matters with their colleagues who are considerate and supportive. Begum and

Seppänen (2017) conclude co-workers' positive attitudes, tolerance and cultural understanding lead to a healthy work atmosphere, which consequently leads to motivation and wellbeing of Muslim women professionals. In addition, developing cultural competence among health professionals can sort out workplace problems related to cultural differences and misunderstandings.

### **3.6 Summary**

The former chapter is a miniature literature review of the topic in hand. It can be inferred from the studies and research papers written in the field of Muslim immigrants' integration, that there is much in common. Many scholars (Gregory, 2014, Hamberger, 2009, Goda-Savolainen, 2017, Doyle, 2011, Marsh, 2012, Segal and Mayadas, 2005, Owens-Manley and Coughlan, 2002, Alvi, 2008) shed light on the challenges and aids of Muslim immigrants' experiences of integration. The challenges and aids of social integration are related to psychological and mental health of immigrants, language of the host country, support, and cultural differences and religiosity, which are interrelated and lead to one another.

## **4 Research Design**

This qualitative investigation used a narrative inquiry research method to gain deeper understanding of how five Muslim Sudanese refugee women perceived their integration in Finland. This chapter describes the objectives, sampling strategy and participant selection, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, derived themes, and validity and reliability.

### **4.1 Research questions**

This study is about Muslim, Sudanese women's experiences of integration into the Finnish society. The aim of the study is examining how Muslim, Sudanese women perceive their lives in Finland and to what extent they feel integrated. To meet this aim, this study answers the following questions:

1. What obstacles do Muslim, Sudanese women perceive as hindering their integration into the Finnish society?
2. What aids do Muslim, Sudanese women perceive as facilitating their integration into the Finnish society?

### **4.2 Research Participants**

In this research, Muslim, Sudanese women were the focus of the study. Seven women were invited for an interview. Only five out of seven were interviewed. The selected research participants shared similar socioeconomic backgrounds. The initial selection was from personal contacts in the city where I live. Through personal contacts, a snowball method was utilized. Only married Sudanese, Muslim women who have

been living in Finland for more than three years were contacted. See Table 1 for a summary of the demographic profiles of the five Muslim, Sudanese women participating in this study. Each participant was given a pseudonym to provide confidentiality of her identity.

**Table (1) Demographic profiles of the study participants**

Characteristics	Ayda	Najah	Zarifa	Hayat	Aysha
Age	42	38	39	39	30
Years in Finland	4	14	4	4	12
Number of daughters	2	1	4	2	1
Number of sons	2	3	0	1	1
Marital Status	married	married	married	married	married
Level of Education	Diploma-Nursing assistant	Eighth grade	Third grade	Eleventh grade	University, bachelor's degree
Current Work	Housewife	Housewife	Housewife	Housewife	Housewife
Previous work	Nurse assistant in Egypt	Personal assistant in an old people care center in Finland  Kitchen assistant in Finland	Housewife	teacher at school in Sudan	pharmacist in Finland

### 4.3 Data Collection Procedures

This study utilized a narrative inquiry research method. Narrative inquiry is

conducted by “eliciting and documenting” stories. Narratives can be a resource for “future research”, “theory building” and “implications for practice”. (Murray, 2009, p.46)

Interviews were used to collect participants' narratives. Five Muslim, Sudanese women were interviewed. The research participants were initially contacted via phone and informed about the purpose and focus of the study, anonymization and archiving of research data. The informed consent gained from the research participants included information about the purpose of the study, and a statement of anonymity of the participant's name and confidentiality regarding the given information provided by each one of them. The steps I followed to conduct my interviews follow the four phases provided by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000).

Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) provide four phases to elicit narration. The first phase is called 'initiation'. In this phase, the researcher poses a general question about the topic of the research and explains the process of the interview; the researcher clearly explains that she/he will not interrupt and will only listen to what the interviewee says and take notes. The second phase is the 'main narration'. In the second phase, the interviewee tells her/his story with no interruptions from the interviewer's side; the interviewer listens attentively and uses facial expressions to encourage the interviewee to continue telling her/his story. The third phase is the 'questioning phase'; the interviewer forms questions about the points and topics highlighted by the interviewee during the narration phase. In the last phase, the interviewer concludes the interview and can ask questions related to the research questions and objectives, and not mentioned by the interviewee in the previous phases. Besides, in the fourth phase, the interviewer can write notes about the interview and debrief it. (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000) Below I elaborate the steps I followed in conducting my interviews.

In the first interview session I asked an open-ended question which inquired about the experiences of integration Muslim, Sudanese women have had since they came to Finland; the question I posed did not restrict the participants to talk about a single experience they went through. Instead it inquired them to talk freely about their lives in Finland. The following is the main question asked in the first session of the

interview:

*“Can you, please, tell me about your experience of integration and your life in Finland. How did you start your life? how your experience of integration has changed since you came to Finland up until now? I will not interrupt you. I will just take some notes to use them after you finish telling me the experiences which have been important for you.”*

While the interviewees talked, I kept silent taking notes on some points mentioned by them and needed more elaboration and clarification. I was attentive to everything said by the interviewees and used facial expressions to show I was following what the interviewees said.

The second session of the interview started 10-20 minutes after the interviewee finished her story. I took time to write questions about the points noted earlier in the first session. In those questions I asked for more narration about the topics raised by the interviewee. I used the same words and phrases which were said by the interviewee in wording my questions. When I finished the questions, I prepared, and got answers from the interviewees, I ended the interviews and thanked the interviewees for their participation.

After the preliminary analysis of the data, I found some topics that needed more clarification. I contacted the interviewees via phone to inquire about those topics, which rose during data analysis. I did not contact all interviewees; only interviewees whose narratives contained unclear statements and topics.

#### **4.4 Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis is the process of dividing qualitative data into codes, identifying patterns or themes out of these codes and using the identified patterns to answer research questions or interpret the phenomenon in question. (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) To look for codes in the narratives, Express Scribe Transcription software was used. Three themes were derived and used to answer the research questions. Below is a description of the ways data was analyzed.

- **Coding and Process of Data Analysis**

I followed the 6 phases suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). In the first phase, data



was transcribed and translated into English. Each sentence stated by the informants was replayed several times to provide an adequate translation. In the next phase, translated data was read and reread to get familiar with the data. During the reading phase, initial impressions and notes about the narratives were written down. In the third phase, similar thoughts and statements across the narratives were highlighted. Only data related to the research questions was coded. Some of the codes were developed and modified by me while other codes were inspired from the previous literature written on the research topic. Semantic rather than latent codes were identified. That is, I was mainly concerned with what was said by the informants rather than interpreting what was meant by the informants' narratives and responses to the interview questions. In the fourth stage of data analysis, the identified codes were divided into sets where similar codes were grouped together. In the fifth stage, the themes were defined and given clear names and I made sure the themes were comprehensive. Finally, in the sixth stage, the derived themes were used to answer the research questions and produce a report on that. (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Three major themes were derived (See table 2); (1) concerns (child-rearing, Finnish language, and financial status); (2) strategies to integrate (tackling racism, social contact initiation); (3) assets (public officials' conduct)

**Table (2): Derived Themes**

Themes	Subthemes
Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child-rearing</li> <li>• Finnish Language</li> <li>• Financial Status</li> </ul>
Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tackling Racism</li> <li>• Social contact initiation</li> </ul>
Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Officials' conduct</li> </ul>

- **Concerns**

Concerns refer to the obstacles that hinder Muslim, Sudanese women's integration in Finland. These factors are faced by all the study participants with varying degrees. Child-rearing is a major obstacle that causes the study participants unsettled mental health; thus, it hinders their integration. Finnish language is also depicted as a hindering factor of the informants' integration. The financial status is also believed to be a major difficulty for integration by some of the study participants.

- **Strategies**

Strategies refer to the aids that play a promotive role in the integration of the study participants. Muslim, Sudanese women talk about ways they use to help them have more peaceful life in the host country and adapt to life in Finland. First, all the study participants tackle racism by neglecting it, remaining silent or defying it. Second, the study participants do not wait for the Finns to start a conversation with them. Instead, they take the initiative to talk to people of the host country and create networks with the host people despite the fact that the Finns are socially introverted.

- **Assets**

Assets refer to the public officials' and social service staff's conduct, which is praised by all the study participants with a single complaint about a teacher's discriminative conduct. For the Muslim, Sudanese women, public officials refer to bosses at work, teachers at school, doctors and other officials the study participants have dealt with. In respect to social service staff, the study participants state that they are always supported by the social service office.

## **4.5 Validity and Reliability**

Conventionally, it was believed the data that can be validated is the one generated from statistical analysis. However, social science reformists and narrative researchers believe that social science knowledge claims can be validated by the readers by judging how cogent and sound the evidence-based argument of the narrative knowledge claims is. That is, all the interpretations and findings presented by the narrative researcher must be supported by evidence from the narratives. Besides,

richness of the descriptions and analysis of the narratives is another indicator of the validity of narrative knowledge claims. The deep and rich interpretations of the data can be achieved by contextualization of the narratives and clarification of what aspects of the narratives overlap or contradict. For example, revealing the effect of the social and cultural setting, circumstances and background on the informants' lived experiences helps in understanding the meanings attached to the told stories. (Polkinghorne, 2007) Reliability of qualitative research paper means that a research can be repeated by another person and results in the same findings. For research to be reliable, it needs to be valid in the first place. (Grossoehme, 2014) Henceforth, I offer a wise detail of the data collection, analysis and interpretation, and a description of the study participants' social settings and cultural backgrounds. Quotes from the narratives are collated and used to support the found themes. (Grossoehme, 2014) Accordingly, I provide the study participants' stories and demographic information to contextualize and thus understand the driven data. Then I answer the research questions by adding all related quotes from the narratives.

## 5 Results

Findings of this study are presented in two sections. The first section describes the five women's backgrounds. The women's demographic backgrounds are summarized in chapter 4, table 2. Five women aged between 30-42 participated in this study. All of them come from Sudan, were brought with their families by the UN and lived in other countries other than Sudan before taken to Finland. The first section is important as it describes the context of the subsequent results. The second section presents three themes: concerns, strategies of integration and assets, which are used to answer the research questions. The answers of the questions are supported by detailed quotations that clarify them. A short summary that sums up the findings is provided at the end of the chapter.

### 5.1 Stories of the Muslim, Sudanese Women

- **Ayda**

I met Ayda in a café. She seemed confused all the time during the interview. Ayda is an educated woman; she studied nursing assistant in Egypt where she met her husband and got married there. She delivered all her children in Egypt. She was granted asylum by Finland and moved through the UN there. Ayda and her family wanted to go to Canada, but they got a refusal of asylum from Canada. Nevertheless, Ayda had high expectations about life in Finland, but she was shocked when she arrived. The Finnish cultural values which conflict with the Muslim, Sudanese values made Ayda feel trapped in this country struggling to preserve her cultural and religious values and bring up her children.

"In the beginning, I did not have this fear. I had great hopes and expectations. You know we came to Finland from a very hard life. But when we came, we found life was a lot different from ours. A person is shocked by life. But there is no escape. This is it; we are here, and we must coexist in this situation and this society we are in. We must coexist in it. This is what happened. We try not

abandon our things and traditions..."

While Ayda was describing her life experiences in Finland, she had a flashback of her life in Egypt. She said that she felt more integrated in Egypt because of likeness factors such as people dressing in the same way and following the same religion.

"In Egypt, we didn't feel alienated because it is an Arab, Muslim country. It is close to Sudan in its culture."

After four years living in Finland, Ayda still feels stressed and has not developed feelings of belongingness. According to her, Finnish silence makes her question whether she is accepted by the receiving population, confuses her and makes her careful dealing with her Finnish neighbors and colleagues. Moreover, throughout Ayda's narrative, it is evident that the major thought troubling her is raising her kids according to the Islamic, Sudanese culture in Finland.

"Regarding my psychological status, I believe the way the Finns perceive me won't change. It will be as it is. I am a stranger here. This is not my country though I am residing here. I do not think I will be completely comfortable, and I don't feel completely integrated. I always feel they do not accept me. I do not feel this is my homeland. I cannot get rid of this feeling. I keep wondering would they accept me. Nothing happened to make me feel like that. It is just a feeling. I overthink about my life here since I came. I overthink because I have children. I overthink. Maybe this is why I feel like that. I do not know how they see me. Do they accept us amongst them, or we are forced on them? You can never know. This is the problem, in fact."

- **Najah**

I met Najah in a café. We ordered tea and sat in a quiet place. She was calm telling me about her experience in Finland. She talked like an expert about the Finnish culture and how to integrate in the Finnish society. Najah lived in Lebanon and Syria before she was given asylum by Finland. Najah has lived in Finland for 14 years. Before moving to Jyvaskyla, she stayed in a different town for two years. She thinks Jyvaskyla is a better place to live in because it has more facilities. She has worked in two places: A restaurant and an old people care center. She has one daughter and two sons. She does not have any serious problems in Finland. Her first friendship with Finnish people started through her husband. One of her husband's Finnish classmates befriended him and invited him and his family to his house. Now the Finnish family and Sudanese family are good friends as Najah described. Najah believes the Finns

are kind, and any racist misconduct from the Finns' side is usually caused by teenagers or old people with Alzheimer.

Najah does not hesitate to express her opinion openly when something annoys her; according to her, when a racist misconduct happens, one should defend himself/herself. Otherwise, such racism incidents will be frequent and happen again. She feels Finland is her home and she states that she is open to change. Her religious views are mild as she explains. For example, when I asked her about whether she accepts if her daughter stops wearing Hijab, she replied, "I don't mind if my daughter tells me she does not want to wear Hijab. It is OK. I don't mind it. Many Muslims don't put on Hijab. That is ok." Nonetheless, Najah expresses her concern for her daughter hanging out with Finnish friends and she is happy that her daughter is not sociable and likes to stay home. Besides, she is not pro the idea of having her son marry a Finnish girl and she makes it clear to him that she will arrange his marriage in case he fails in his marriage with a Finn.

Najah feels homesick. When her kids grow up, she decides to pay more visits to Sudan. In Sudan, she wants to start projects which could provide support and help to the old, the poor or orphans; Najah says, "God's willing in the future I would like to go back to Sudan. I want to found an association to take care of old people or an organization to take care of the poor and orphans."

- **Zarifa**

Zarifa is a very simple woman. She is cheerful and have sense of humor. She welcomed me at her house. When I arrived in the building where she lived, she came down to receive me by the entrance. On the main gate, a Finnish, old lady with a white pad covering her nose was walking by; Zarifa stopped her asking in Finnish about the injury she had in her nose and expressing concern. The woman answered, smiled and went away. We had the interview in the living room. Before I started the interview, Zarifa was excited to show me some Sudanese stuff such as home-made perfumes and incense.

Zarifa has four daughters. Her husband is religiously committed. He does not attend parties held in Jyvaskyla for religious reasons, but he encourages Zarifa to

attend all the Sudanese parties, and stays home to look after the children. For Zarifa and her husband, family time is valuable; every Sunday, the parents and daughters spend time together talking and exchanging ideas.

Zarifa was genitally mutilated, which adversely affected her child while being delivered; Zarifa's newly born child eats through a pipe connected to her stomach. When it was time to deliver her baby, Zarifa did not tell the doctors that she had genital mutilation which makes it impossible for her to deliver the baby normally; as a result, the baby got suffocated. Zarifa already mutilated two of her daughters when they were in Sudan. But as they are in Finland, she said that she will not genitally mutilate her other daughters because Finland's law does not allow this to happen.

In Zarifa's narrative, the phrase "Alhamdu lillah", which means praise be to God and often said by Arabs to express satisfaction and contentment, is repeatedly said, almost at the end of every experience she shared, whether bad or good.

Zarifa has never faced any racism in Finland. On the contrary, Zarifa says, "Whoever we met, we saw smiles and tenderness. This is why we are happy in this country. Alhamdu lillah. Alhamdulillah." Besides, Zarifa has good relationship with her neighbors. She told me that when the neighbors saw her husband in the hallway, they would ask him about her. When talking about Finnish people, positive words like "tender", "kind-hearted", "tenderly", "kind hearts", and "patient" are repeatedly used.

- **Hayat**

Hayat welcomed me at her house in Jyvaskyla city. The interview took place in the evening. Hayat lives with her husband, two daughters and one son. Once I stepped in the apartment, I noticed that Hayat and her eldest daughter put on their Islamic dress and covered their hair with a Hijab although they were at home. Her daughter greeted me and went to the kitchen to make cookies. I seized the opportunity to pose some questions on the daughter about her life in Finland. The girl said that she did not like her life in Finland and she preferred to go back to Egypt where she could find other people who look like her. After I was offered food and something to drink, Hayat

suggested that we could have the interview in her bedroom to have more privacy. In her bedroom, she took off her Hijab to be more comfortable and started talking about her life in Finland.

Hayat is 39-year-old woman; she came to Finland with her family through the UN. She used to work in Sudan and had a good life in Sudan up until the civil war started. They were forced to go to Cairo, Egypt. In Egypt, her husband worked as a translator and got a high salary. Her children used to go to private schools in Cairo. When they applied for asylum through the UN, they were granted asylum in Finland. The family wanted to go to the US. That was because her husband worked as an Arabic-English translator and aspired to work in his field in the United States. However, when the family moved to Finland, they were shocked; English was not an official language and the husband could no longer work as a translator. That disappointed him and he wanted to go back to Cairo. But he was not allowed to do so. The good life they used to have turned to be a hard one in Finland because of their financial status. Hayat says, "Here they give you money parsimoniously. The money we get are not enough. The kids' requirements are a lot." The low living standards of the family led them to borrow money from friends; they borrowed 18,000 euros. Hayat comments, "Debts are heavy on us." Hayat expressed her willingness to do any kind of work, even if it is a cleaning job, but she said that working as cleaner would bring her disgrace within the Sudanese community in Jyvaskyla. This indicates that there are restrictions imposed by the ethnic community on what job to take. Hayat comments, "Cleaning work is OK, but the Sudanese here are nosy, very nosy."

However, money is not the sole problem Hayat encountered in Finland. Hayat suffers from depression and she cannot sleep at night; Hayat says, "I am sick. I go to doctors. They say I have nothing. But I feel I am sick. This made me mentally sick." Hayat whispers to me, "I went to a psychologist. I didn't tell anyone; no one." Just after telling me about her health status, Hayat starts talking about her nephew who lost his family in a car accident in Sudan and who is being taken care of by her old mother. Hayat feels helpless because she cannot help her mother to take care of the two-year-old child. Hayat says, "Life in Sudan is hard. Here there is no money you can send to her. There is no work to get money to send and help. This makes my mental health



the worst. I wish I had work to provide for my mom." Her eyes were full of tears, her voice was shaking, and she burst, "Honestly I am not comfortable. I am not comfortable here in Finland. I am not comfortable; I swear. I am sick. They do not want to treat me." Hayat ended the interview by saying, "I just want work."

- **Aysha**

I met Aysha in a cafe. The first thing I noticed was that she was not wearing Hijab, but she put on a turban-like cap. Aysha is 30 years old. She came to Finland in 2006 as a part of family reunification; she was 17 by that time. Her father was in Finland, first. Then Aysha, her mother and two younger brothers were brought to Finland through the UN. Aysha is married to a Sudanese man and has two children, a girl and a boy. She went back to Sudan and got married there. Then she brought her husband to Finland on a visa based on family ties. Her older brothers were not brought to Finland because they were more than 18 years old by the time the family was granted residence permits in Finland. Aysha commented on that, "When I got the visa, I was 17. When I arrived in Finland, I was 18. When my visa was issued, I was a minor. It was luck that brought me here."

The first shocking thing to the 17-year-old Aysha when she came to Finland was the cold and dark in winter and the 24-hour daylight in summer. Aysha explained how Finland's day and night messed up their prayer times. For example, they would miss all day prayers as sunset was at 14.00; by that time they would be at school or outside home; thus, they could not offer the five prayer, which Muslims are required to offer according to their doctrine. Aysha seems to be struggling to integrate even though she has lived for more than twelve years in Finland. Her narrative is full of negative comments about living in Finland with only two positive highlights about the security level in Finland and the fact that there is no hierarchy. For example, Aysha points out that food is a dilemma; finding Halal food is not easy. Besides, being in a hospital or a meeting where food is offered necessitates that she asks for vegetarian food instead of explaining that she eats Halal chicken and meat and does not eat pork. Moreover, Aysha furiously talks about the difficulty of raising kids in Finland, where the government can interfere in the way one raises her/his children. Aysha believes

that corporal punishment for children is not acceptable, but she believes that Sudanese men can get angry and furious and shout before their children sometimes, which does not mean that they hate their children as she explains. According, to aysha, police does not have the right to take the children from the family for such reasons. The idea of having children taken from parents by police seems to scare Aysha a lot, especially that she has very young children. This topic is repeatedly mentioned by her throughout her narrative. Another cultural dilemma pointed out by Aysha is the fact that children leave home when they are 18 years old, and the fact that parents are sent to old people care centers when they get old. Aysha deems Finnish youth as selfish for not taking care of their parents when they get old. She believes that children grow up selfish and indifferent because of the way their parents treat them when they are children; Finnish parents can be alcoholic and beat their wives and not care about how their children feel.

## **5.2 Answering research questions**

### **5.2.1 What obstacles do Muslim, Sudanese women perceive as hindering their integration into the Finnish society?**

Three major obstacles of integration are found out. First, childrearing in the Finnish culture is an obstacle to the integration of Sudanese, Muslim women because it is hard to raise their children according to the Sudanese culture. Second, Finnish language skills are considered an obstacle to integration of Sudanese women in their initial stages in Finland. Lacking Finnish language skills hinders the Sudanese women's ability to express themselves and needs easily. Third, lack of good employment and high living standards in Finland are deemed as barriers to integration. In fact, these obstacles have caused the study participants unsettled mental and psychological health, which adversely impacts their integration.

#### **Child-rearing**

The study participants express their concerns for upbringing their children in the

Finnish culture. The extent to which they are worried varies. Some participants are overwhelmed by the fact that their children could be westernized by acquiring Finnish cultural values. Other participants are worried but confident about the way they bring up their children. The following section elaborates the reasons behind the Muslim Sudanese women's concerns for their children and the ways the study participants use to protect their children from acquiring values conflicting with the Islamic, Sudanese values.

### **The impact of child's age on Child-rearing**

The study participants believe that younger children are harder to bring up in the Finnish culture which is different from the Muslim Sudanese culture. It requires a great effort to instill the Sudanese cultural values in a child who is born in Finland or has come to Finland at a young age without having acquired the values, mores and principles of the Sudanese culture. However, a grown-up child who have already acquired his parents' values and culture could reject all the Finnish mores that contradict with the Sudanese mores. The narratives show that assimilation of young children into the Finnish society is easier than assimilation of the grown-up children who have acquired the Sudanese values.

Aysha says, "Integration is a suffering. It's hard. You grew up in a different country. Since childhood your religion is automatically acquired. You became a Muslim just as you found your family, tribe and everyone around you Muslim. Whenever we heard the call for prayers, we went to pray. The traditions and culture and customs you see your elder family members doing are inherited. But here you are different. You are an individual. Even these things you inherit, you acquire from your family, your parents... When you teach them to your kids, they will be different. Now I, myself, teach my kids the Sudanese traditions and culture, but they have already learned and acquired Finnish traditions and culture. They are in the kindergarten. Their concepts are different from our concepts. We suffer how our kids can balance between the Sudanese culture and Finnish culture. What is allowed...? And what is right to do and what is not right to do? For the Finns, there are things one can normally do. It is personal freedom. It is freedom for the individual. For us, no, such things are "Ayb" and "Haram" and prohibited. The Haram part is a problem."

In the above-quoted extract, Aysha highlights the contradictions between the Finnish culture and the Muslim, Sudanese culture. Muslim, Sudanese culture labels some behavioral conducts as "Ayb", socially and culturally inappropriate, or "Haram", religiously prohibited. However, such behaviors are considered as part of an

individual's freedom according to the Finnish culture. Such contradictory values of the two cultures make the task of bringing up the young generations harder and obscures the integration of the parents and children likewise.

Aysha adds, "When I came from Sudan, I was 18 years old. My mom and dad were not afraid I would go astray. I already acquired the Sudanese culture. And I was raised in an Islamic way. It was normal I would not go with the flow. However, they had concerns for my younger sibling, not the one who was at high school because he was aware and mature, but the youngest who was on the third grade when we arrived in Finland. Always they asked him where and with who he is, who his friends are... He has started to be annoyed. He always asked, "why, my dad, you always ask me where I am going to, or coming from? With who I am hanging out? Why you embarrass me? Why when I am with my friends you say come home and it is enough to be outside home?" At 8.00 p.m. he must be home, he was not allowed to come home at 10.00 p.m. When he grew up, he understood why we were concerned for him."

The preceding quote by Aysha reveals the difference in childrearing practices based on age. An 18-year-old child who was born in Sudan and acquired the parents' culture can hardly change and be part of the host country's culture. However, a young child who has not acquired any of his parents' cultural mores can easily immerse in the host country's culture. Accordingly, parents pay more attention to children at young age and work harder to protect them from assimilating in the host country's culture.

### **Male Child-rearing vs. Female Child-rearing**

Sudanese women state that they are more worried about their male children than their female children. Reasons behind this distinction between boy's rearing and girls' rearing are set by the study participants as follows. First, their male children are given more freedom in the social contacts they make, and in the social activities they are involved in. Because parents cannot stop their male children and restrict their social life, and thus they are not fully aware of what their male children do outside home, they tend to be more worried about their male children in regard to immersing in the Finnish culture and acquiring values that conflict with the Islamic, Sudanese values. On the other hand, the narratives show that these Sudanese mothers have more

control over their daughters in several ways. For example, daughters are expected to have Sudanese friends. In case a Sudanese, female child has a friendship with a Finn, this friendship is better be within school context. Moreover, the Sudanese women's daughters do not hang out wherever they way. They can go shopping with the company of the mother, grandmother or with other Sudanese female children, usually children of well-acquainted family or a friend family.

"I am afraid my kids would be involved in things not ours. Let me give you an example about my son. I am afraid he could have a girlfriend. He can have girls as friends. But I am afraid he would have sexual relations with girls. However, the daughters... I know my daughters. They do not hang out a lot. They do not go out a lot. Only they go to school and then return home. I know all their steps. Even any place they go to, I am with them. If they need anything, I accompany them. I don't feel anxious about my daughters. However, I am more concerned for my son because he is always with his friends." (Ayda)

"My daughter does not have many friends. She only has school friends. She has a Finnish friend at school. In the neighborhood she has few Sudanese friends. She does not have many contacts. She only goes to school and from school to home. She does not pay visits. My daughter was born in Lebanon. She grew up in Finland. It is her personality. She doesn't like to be among others. She only has school friends. My daughter is very quiet. I pray day and night she is like that. She is not willing to have friendships. She even does not invite any Finnish friends to her birthday party. She only has them at school. And this is the best." (Najah)

"I am not concerned about my daughters because my daughters are home. But I am concerned for my son. I make prayers to God to protect them... May God protect them. May God protect them. I always pray for them. Even when I am in bed; if I wake up for a while, I pray for them." (Hayat)

The above-mentioned quotes entail that daughters are easier to raise since they are easily controlled. However, sons are hard to control; thus, they can easily get involved in activities, which Finnish youngsters and young boys of different nationalities are involved in and contradict with the Islamic, Sudanese culture.

### **Sex Education at an Early Age**

School education according to the Sudanese women in this study can interfere in child-rearing. At school children take sex education courses. For the study participants' part, school talks openly about sex and teaches it at an early age, which is considered not appropriate according to the Sudanese culture. While talking about this issue of sex education, Ayda lowers her voice whenever she says the word sex

and she tries to avoid saying it, too.

Ayda says, "School talks about stuff. School explains to them that when they are at particular age, they would have some feelings and some things happen to them. My children had not reached teenage, yet they showed them the period pads and explained to them about menstrual period. Somethings they explain are educative and good. But topics related to sex... I was shocked when my daughter told me about what they learned at school. I never talked to them about these topics. I wanted to talk about them, but I was waiting the right time. They told my daughters that everyone is entitled to have a boyfriend and sex. I told my daughter that having sexual relations is "Ayb", and according to religion it is Haram. I tried to tell them it is "Ayb" and we do not do these things. My daughters told me, "Mom, we are Muslims and we do not do that." I told them they are not Muslims and for them these things are normal. Even in Christianity this is not OK. According to religions, these things are not allowed. Religions do not allow this. But they do it. It is normal for them."

In the former quote, Ayda describes being involved in a sexual relationship with the words "Ayb", socially inappropriate, and "Haram", religiously prohibited. Ayda highlights the contradictions between Islam, which prohibits extramarital sex, and the Finnish culture, where sex is normal. Extramarital sex, which is considered a normal act in Finland, is one of the factors that makes the study participants feel that integration is hard because such values threaten parents' ability to raise their children according to the Muslim, Sudanese culture, where extramarital sex is taboo.

Similarly, Aysha believes that sex education is taught at an early age too and she describes some teachers' conduct at kindergarten as not correct; Aysha explains that such conduct could lead kids to have sexual thoughts when they grow up; and emphasizes the role of parents to educate their children about these issues or they will turn to be like Finnish children.

"Kids are taught many things before it is the right time for that. We at a specific age, we start to have sexual education. But here starting from kindergarten, a boy and girl go to the toilet together. It is not OK to leave a girl and a boy together in a toilet. A 6-year-old is no longer small. A 6-year-old can realize he/she is different. A teacher at kindergarten tells the kids to go to the toilet together and tell them that she will follow to help them clean. This child at this age never forgets what he/she sees. Right? We, for our part, kids at age 6 are taught there is the "Awra" and it should be covered. But they don't cover anything. But these instincts are awakened at a young age. Yes kids have no sexual desires. But at age 12 and 13, at teenage, there are things in the child's brain that sexually arouse him/her; the pictures and memories a child restores at teenage may sexually arise him/her. Here comes the role of the parents. We as Muslim parents, have a big role to do or our kids will be like Finnish kids." (Aysha)

### **State Interference in Child-rearing**

In Finland, there is a policy of removing a child from parents' custody if the parents or guardians of a child do not take care of or abuse him/her. Taking into care and foster care are procedures arranged by the municipal social welfare board when a child's development or behavior is negatively influenced by domestic circumstances or by the child's own behavior. In such a case, a child is taken into care involuntarily as a protective measure. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2013)

Removing children from parents' custody by the state or social services is another factor that can beset the integration process. This point of fear of child removal is mentioned repeated only in one of the narratives. Aysha who has two young children expresses frustration and fear regarding child removal policy and execution. According to her, parents are better caregivers to their children than the supervisors in the care centers where children are put. According to the young mother, only when a mother or a father are mentally sick, children can be removed from parents' custody.

Aysha says in an angry tone, "No one can be more tender than the mom except if the mom is mentally sick. I wonder don't Finnish parents get furious in their houses because of their kids sometimes? Why...? Because I am a foreigner, any negative reaction to what my kids do, they come and take the kids from me? Are they more tender than me? Are the supervisors in the centers more tender than the mother?"

Aysha proceeds by saying that children can be mistreated in the childcare centers and keeping a child with her/his mother would save him/her from going through such experiences.

"On the news, they said that in one of these centers, the supervisors punish kids by locking them in rooms. They make them sleep on the floor, in the cold. Is there a mom who does this to her child? There isn't. Is there a mom who does not give her child food? This happens only if she is mentally sick. In such a case, they can take the kids. But if the mom is mentally OK, and what happens is only a reaction or an argument between her and the husband... They shout at each other or he beats her... We are humans, not angels. I wonder are the Finns angels and we are devils? They are not more tender to our kids than us." Aysha adds, "I know some stories that when kids are taken by the police and put in these centers, they change how these kids think and they change their religion. They tell them they are free, and that they can go with their friends whenever they want. They tell them why your parents prevent you and control you. Here a clash of cultures happens. The law says this is how kids should be raised and it interferes in the way you bring up the kids. This is a big problem. Here conflict takes place." (Aysha)

Moreover, according to Aysha's narrative, the state does not only remove children from parents' custody, but the state also interferes in the way parents raise their children. Aysha in the quote below explains how hard it is to raise children according their parents' cultural norms and traditions as the police can interfere when parents impose their own thinking on their children.

"There is a big difference. For example, when my kid is 18 and has a girlfriend and I tell him this is haram according to our religion and Islam and traditions, police can interfere. The law says you cannot decide for your child. You cannot stop him. He is free. If he wants to have a sexual relationship with a woman, he is free. If he wants to drink alcohol, he is free. If he wants to live on his own and he does not want to stay with you, he is free. Where, in our country, an 18-year-old boy leaves his family's house and lives alone while he is not married, or has a relationship with a girl from a different region and stays with her with no marriage? We don't have such a thing." (Aysha)

### **Ways of Raising Children**

Sudanese, Muslim women talk about the way they approach their children and instill in them the Islamic, Sudanese values. All the study participants agree on the importance of befriending their children, teaching them how they must behave since childhood, being an example to them and surrounding them with other children who come from the same cultural and religious background.

Najah says, "I have no concerns about my kids. I need to show them what is wrong and what is right. Since they were kids, I taught them about the right and wrong. I taught my kids we don't have a boyfriend or a girlfriend. We can only get married through Halal marriage. In regard to Finnish guys, they are open. You know. It is possible to have a relationship when you are 17 years old. The same thing applies to girls. I told my son that if one day he gets married to a Finn, I don't mind that if it is his desire. His marriage may turn to be a failure. Then his next marriage will be arranged by me. My son is 19 years old now. Thank God. He told me, "don't worry, mom. I won't marry a Finn."

Aysha believes that parents' responsibility to stand for their kids and teach them what is wrong or right is essential, "We as Muslim parents, have a big role to do or our kids will be like Finnish kids. We don't want them to be like them. They will be failures. They will fail. I if I don't play a big role in raising my kids' awareness regarding what is Halal and Haram and what is prohibited and not prohibited; and if I don't befriend my kids since childhood, they will acquire things from their friends when they grow



up. And this is wrong.”

Ayda has the same ideas regarding the way to raise her children. Though she has not succeeded in being a close friend to her daughters, she asks her daughters to be close to each other. Besides, she prefers her children have friends from the same background as she explains in the quote below.

“My daughters and I do not talk a lot about their personal and private lives. They are shy. They do not tell me everything. I feel there is a barrier between us. I do not know why. I try to ask my eldest daughter to be close to her younger sister and advise her. I know all their friends. Once, my eldest daughter had a Finnish friend. She never hung out with her. They only saw each other at school, or they talked on phone. But now they do not talk to each other because they are no longer in the same class. Most of her friends now are immigrants, especially Somalis and Sudanese. I feel afraid if my daughters have Finnish friends. You know why? because their values are different from ours. My other daughter has no friends. She only has her cousins as friends, her uncle's daughters.” (Ayda)

The idea of the Sudanese children having Finnish friends is not appreciated and welcomed by any of the study participants. Sudanese, Muslim women refer this to the cultural differences between the Finns and Sudanese, and the fear of having the children involved in activities that are against the Sudanese values. According to the study participants' narratives, creating social contacts with members of the host community by their children is not preferred. If such social contacts occur, they are restricted within school environment.

- **Finnish Language**

The study participants compare between their lives before knowing any Finnish language and after they have learned the language. Communicating with people in the community was very hard, and expressing their needs was almost impossible if there was no translator. Being not able to express themselves in Finnish and communicate caused them distress when they first came to Finland.

“Five months after arrival, I gave birth to my daughter. In the hospital when I stayed there, language was a problem. I depended on the bell. I would ring it whenever I needed something. The doctor would come and did not understand what I wanted. However, in the morning when the translator came, it was easier. The first year was very difficult. What people said about me, I never got it.” (Zarifa)

“Life here is very very good and open. The most important thing, you need is to learn the language and integrate with the Finns.” Najah adds, “in 2015, I gave birth to my son. It was a hard experience. I did not know Finnish. I stayed in the hospital for 5 days. It was very hard. The

hospital was 23 kilometers away from my home. In the beginning my husband was with me. But he could not stay any more. He had to go home to take care of the kids. I stayed for five days. They do not let you need anything. I swear by God the Finns are very kind-hearted. I kept crying. Life was so hard. They would take my child. I was wondering why they took my child from my side. They were taking the child to protect him from falling off when I was asleep. Five days were hard. I did not know the language. And the food... The food was strange. I did not eat well. This incident was the hardest for me. Other stuff I faced in Finland was positive. However, when I gave birth to my other child, it was easier. By that time, I knew Finnish. It was a better experience." (Najah)

Similarly, Ayda shares a stressful experience she passed through because of lacking Finnish language. When Ayda needed to see a gynecologist, a translator had to be there to facilitate her communication with the doctor. That day the available translator was a man even though Ayda asked for a female translator. Thus, Ayda refused to have him in the room while being checked. The following quote by Ayda highlights that lacking Finnish language results in anxiety and tension situations, and a feeling of helplessness.

"I refused to have the checkup while the translator is with me in the checkup room...Then we talked to the doctor. The doctor suggested we put a curtain. I refused. I was going to take off my pants. How could I accept having the translator with me? The doctor then said that we could manage if I understood some English. Then I had the checkup. In that time if I did not know English, would I be forced to have the translator with me? I prefer to cancel the appointment rather than having a male translator to translate for me...We are Muslims. There are limits." (Ayda)

- **Life Expenses and Work Opportunities**

Life expenses and lack of good work opportunities are two interrelated issues influencing the integration of Muslim, Sudanese women as frequently stated. According to the narratives, there are not enough job opportunities. Only Blue-collar jobs are available, which discourages them from being employed. Moreover, the 30-year-old Aysha states that the advantages of being unemployed can be higher compared to the advantages one gets when employed. which tempts immigrants to stay home and not look for work. An employed person is in charge of paying all her/his bills, water, electricity, house rent, medical bills, and children's day care center; the salary one gets can be only 1600 Euros after taxation, which is considered little money for a person who has a family. However, if a person is unemployed, Kela,

the social insurance institution, provides financial help to him/her based on her/his circumstances. Nevertheless, in another narrative, the financial support provided by Kela is considered little and not enough. The following quotes clarify how life expenses and lack of job opportunities cause Muslim, Sudanese women negative sentiments about their lives in Finland. In the first quote below Aysha complains about the scarcity of good work opportunities in Finland and considers the pay one gets not enough for a family of four members, for example.

“You apply for work. There is no work. All work opportunities are closed. They ask for high degrees and experiences. All that is open are cleaning jobs and marginal work, exhausting, tiring work. All beautiful job opportunities are closed and taken up. They want high degrees and people who have work experience. OK... How can I work and receive a good salary that would be satisfying for me and my kids and in the same time is a comfortable work? I can work. But 1500 euros is not enough. Why when I go work for 1500, they cut all the financial supports? For instance, the financial support of the housing rent, if it was 900, and I work for 1500, I would pay 900. What is left is 600. I pay for the daycare center. If I am employed, I must pay for the children's daycare center. If one of my family members is sick, God forbid, I pay. If I was unemployed, all of these are paid for me by Kela. Isn't it better to stay unemployed? It is better I stay unemployed.” (Aysha)

Likewise, Hayaat compares between her life standards before and after living in Finland. The financial status of Hayat's family was very good, but their financial matters in Finland are not settled, which has caused them disappointment.

“I used to work in Sudan. It was simple work. Thank God. But I was happy and comfortable. There were no problems. Everything was easy. When war started in Darfur, my husband had some problems. After my wedding day, we travelled to Cairo. From Egypt we applied for asylum. Then we were brought here. In Egypt, my husband had a very good work. He was a translator. Our financial status was very good. We had very good life. When we were given asylum by Finland, we did not want that. We wanted to go to the US. But the US refused to give us asylum. English is a foreign language in Finland. My husband wanted the US to find work where he can use English. My husband was a head of a translation association in Egypt. He gained a lot of money. In our first year here, my husband got depression. He wanted to go back to Cairo. But it is not possible because he is an asylum seeker. It is not possible to return they told him.” She adds, “Back home, we were used to good life. Our life was beautiful. I came here. I was shocked. I did not know there was no work. The language is hard too. Imagine.” (Hayat)

Similarly, Ayda and her husband are educated and have good professional experience. Ayda's husband, for example, used to be an accountant, and Ayda was a nursing assistant. But it has not been easy for them to find work in Finland. Ayda also refers not finding work to the fact that they did not officially accredit their certificates.

"My husband was an accountant. But here it is hard to find work. We did not try to work on our certificates to make them officially accredited." (Ayda)

Although Najah does not complain about work as she has worked in an old people care center and a restaurant, she highlights the fact that graduates find it hard to find employment in Finland. Thus, her daughter plans to complete her studies in an English-speaking country to have better opportunities of employment.

"My daughter is interested to complete her studies in Britain and Canada. In the future, it is better for her to study abroad. Here there are not good opportunities. I don't know... There's a difficulty. There are immigrants who have university education and come here. But they get frustrated. It is better that my daughter studies at school in English. When she finishes school, she can go to Canada or Britain. Britain is better because it is closer to Finland."

### **5.2.2 What aids do Muslim, Sudanese women perceive as facilitating their integration into the Finnish society?**

The aids of Muslim, Sudanese women's integration are divided into two sections: (1) The strategies used to tackle racism and create networks with people of the host country; and (2) the public officials' conduct which is considered as an asset promoting the study participants' integration. Surprisingly, few racism incidents are encountered by the study participants. Such incidents are either defied or neglected. Besides, although the Finns are socially introverted, the Muslim, Sudanese women find ways to build networks with Finnish people and feel more integrated accordingly. Moreover, the public officials' conduct and their way of dealing with them are praised by all the study participants and have played a vital role in their integration process.

- **Tackling Racism and Intolerance**

The study participants believe that the Finns are kind. In spite of the fact that the Finns can be friendly and kind as narrated by all the study participants, racism incidents do occur. The study participants choose to remain silent and not argue when they are attacked verbally by a Finn. However, when it is possible to respond and argue, the study participants speak aloud and clarify their attitudes towards questions posed to them or offensive statements said in their faces. The following quotes are good examples of women's strategies to deal with racism, intolerance and offensive behaviors.

Aysha says, "ISIS destroyed everything. It distorted the image of Islam. I used to wear hijab at school and work since I came. I never changed wearing hijab to wearing a cap up until ISIS rose. The Finns...When they see you wearing Hijab, they feel afraid. It can influence you at your workplace. Once I worked in a pharmacy and I was standing behind the bar where the cashier is. One of the customers came and told me, "I don't like this thing you are wearing; this, I don't like it." I didn't respond to him because I was at the workplace. I could not argue with him. I served him. Then the customer after him told me to tell him it was none of his business. I smiled. And I didn't say anything back. To wear Hijab makes me face racism and harassment by some people, not all of them."

Aysha also believes that harassment is usually caused by young people of 18-40 years old, who think that immigrants come from poor, undeveloped and war zone countries to Finland to take the Finns' jobs and money.

"You don't find young people who like to know about your culture... All the young ask, "Why do you come to Finland? Your countries have nothing? Why do you study here? Your countries have no education. Why do you come here? You don't have salaries in your home countries? You don't have safety in your country? Do you have wars in your country?" Young people see that all foreigners who come to their country come for economic reasons because the economic situation is bad back home; no food; no money. You face racism from young people older than 18 years old, the 20, 30 40-year olds. When they are drunk, they say, "You came and took our taxes. You are unemployed and take our own money and you don't like to work." This is how they see foreigners."

Najah passed through similar experiences of racism and intolerance. One of them was with an old woman, but Najah did not remain silent; she responded to what was said to her. Najah did not feel offended by what the woman said to her because that woman was not mentally OK as she explains in the extract below.

"Sometimes they ask me why your color is like that. How long have not you washed? Of course, these are said by people who have Alzheimer's disease and have problems with their minds. Young boys in the street sometimes call me "Mamu". It is a brief word for "maahanmuuttaja", a

Finnish word which means immigrant. When you explain to them, they understand. Some of them, maybe, have never seen a person with a black complexion. Once an old woman asked me, "Why don't you take a shower?" I told her I am not dirty. I am clean. This is how my complexion is. This is how God created me. She asked, "Seriously?" I told her God creates everything. You have this color and I have this color. I told her if there is sun, it does not influence me. But you as a white woman it is hard for you to stand in the sun. The woman was surprised by my talk. She asked if I got upset. I said that I did not get upset. She apologized. She said she did not know that. I told her people come with different colors."

"Once some young boys were calling me "Mamu" I told them, "so what? Are not "Mamu" humans?" I asked one of them, "where does your dad come from?" He said, "From Turkey." And his mom was Finnish. I told him, "You are like me. You follow your dad not your mom." These are teenagers. They have wrong ideas and no education."(Najah)

Najah's bravery to defend herself in a calm way can also be shown through the following story when her daughter was bullied by one of her classmates. Najah again did not remain silent about what happened. She went to school and talked to the teacher explaining that such incidents should not be neglected, or they will never stop, not to mention the mental and psychological effects of such harassment.

"Since childhood, whenever someone said something negative to me, I said positive things back to them. When some is negative, it urges me to defend myself and explain to these people. I never withdrew. I would cry in the past. If a person is drunk, you can't explain to him. It is useless. He would not understand. I don't like anyone to hurt my kids not in anyway. Once a small boy at school called my daughter "an almond". I went to school and talked to the teacher. The teacher said that was a trivial thing. I said, "It is trivial to you. But I don't want this to happen again to my daughter." I told her, "You are a teacher. Teach them there is no difference between the white and black." I was not silent about it. If one does not talk about these things, more cases will happen. It would cause psychological complex to the child."

Likewise, Ayda confronted racism by taking action. When it was a Muslim holiday, her teacher refused to give her a day off at school and threatened her that she would mark her name if she was absent that day. Ayda did not listen to what the teacher said and did not go to school. Instead she spent that day with her children celebrating together. That incident seemed that it hurt Ayda as the quote below shows.

"This year, we asked our teacher at school to give us one-day holiday because we had our Eid. She refused. We have kids. We need to make them have a feel of their religious rituals and make them know these are our own traditions. In this day, we do several things and we go to mosque to offer prayers. Not being allowed to have a holiday makes me wonder how this country is a country of freedom. I wonder why in Christmas we have a vacation which could be for two weeks, while we are not allowed to have one-day holiday. I think this is not fair. But I do not know if this is generalized and it happens to other people. There were some people who were given a day off, whereas others were not allowed to have a day off. Children schools gave them a day off in the Eid. Imagine my kids are home in that day, while I go to school. This hurt me a lot. I told my

teacher I would not come to school in that day. She said I will put a red mark by your name if you do not show up. I did not listen to her and I stayed with my kids and hung out with them.”

In another incident, Ayda takes action by moving from her house to another house to get more peace and safety. Some neighbors’ constant complaints about noise coming from Ayda’s flat made Ayda ask the social service office to help her move to a different neighborhood to avoid troubles.

“In the very beginning we lived in a different town; not in Jyvaskyla. There we did not face any problems. People were nice. They gave us a good image of Finland. A year later we moved to Jyvaskyla, and lived in a neighborhood, where there were people who did not accept us amongst them. They would always complain we made noise in our house though we did not make noise. The time they complained we made noise, my kids were at school. They would claim at that time there were music and loud voices. We proved for the social worker we did not make noise and she told us that people did not want us among them. They do so because they want you to leave. I did not feel safe to live in a place where people reject me being among them. I started to have fears that someone could hurt my kids. So, I asked the social worker to help us get a new place. People in charge found us a new place. People in charge are good. In the new place, the neighbors are good. We felt integrated. We did not feel any strange thing with them. My small kid goes downstairs and plays with the kids.”

However, in another incident, Ayda chooses to be silent and leave the place where she is insulted by an old woman in a lift. Even when talking about the offense she encountered in the lift, she highlights that her life in Finland have been peaceful and safe.

“Since I lived in here, nothing has happened to me. I go back home late. I walk in the street alone. Nothing bad has happened to me. I have never faced a person who looked at me in a bad way or said bad things to me. But once I was in a lift. There was an old lady. She was saying bad words and insults. I did not understand everything she was saying. She was that kind of racist people. She was saying the word "Mamu" to me. She said that word repeatedly. I did not respond to her. She was an old woman. I stopped the lift and left her there. It was the only incident that happened to me like that.”

Racist incidents happened with all the study participants. Some of them were verbal insults, while others were physical. Hayat shared two stories where she faced direct racism and intolerance. In the two incidents she did not do any action. Even while she was talking about them, she was quiet and seemed unaffected. When I asked her if she felt sad, she shrugged her shoulders and said she did not care.

“When it comes to security, this country is secure. I only encountered two cases. I was in the bank. A man came and pushed me. I called my friend and my husband. My husband said I had to report

it to police. A woman in the bank told me that he is mentally ill. And she told me to tell the police about what happened. But I didn't do that. They would start questioning and questioning, and that would be useless. My school could also be influenced as I might need to be absent for some days. If I miss any lessons, I won't understand lessons by myself. I only understand from my teacher."

She adds, "Another bad situation happened at Kela office. A woman insulted me; she was saying bad words to me. I did not understand what she said. The employee asked the security guard to take her out. I did not feel bad because of that. I didn't care."

In short, all of the following expressions, "I didn't care", "I didn't feel bad", "I stopped the lift and left her there", and "I didn't respond to him" show that silence, neglecting what happens, and not arguing with a racist are one way used by the study participants to avoid trouble and get more peace in their lives. On the other hand, taking an action and defying racism is another way used by the women whenever it is needed. More interestingly, the stories the women shared about the racism incidents they encountered reveal that people in the site where racism took place did not remain silent; there were always Finnish people who showed solidarity and encouraged the women to respond or neglect.

### **Building Social Network**

To have friends from the host country is not easy in Finland according to the study participants' narratives. Finnish co-workers, classmates or neighbors could meet you in a public place or neighborhood and never greet you. Sometimes you could greet a Finn, who may not greet back or just nod her/his head to greet you back. Edelsward (1991) states that Finnish people are shy, especially when the Finns are needed to speak loudly in public or talk to strangers, for example. Moreover, Finnish people do not express their emotions openly and they prefer to keep their personal thoughts and beliefs to themselves or share them with their closest friends. Thus, the Finns are viewed as cold and unfriendly by outsiders. According to Finnish people, starting a conversation with a stranger and asking personal questions are deemed intrusive. This can be referred to two basic reasons. First of all, Finnish people are sensitive, vulnerable and unforgiving. This is why the Finns keep a safe distance between themselves and the others to avoid being hurt which is something a Finn cannot



forgive easily and takes time to heal. Second, the Finns highly appreciate the fact that they are independent. They like to rely on themselves in doing everything. Opening up and expressing their emotions and needs contradict with their sense of independence. This is why the Finns do not easily talk about their personal life with anyone. Such talks take place between the Finns and their close friends or family members. (Edelsward, 1991)

Nevertheless, the participants of this study believe that Finnish people can be friendly, helpful and willing to learn more about one's culture. The following quotes describe how Muslim, Sudanese women try to make and maintain social contacts with the Finns. Besides, they reveal the study participants' viewpoints of the Finns and the effect of these points of view on the mental health of the study participants.

Najah says "Before Jyvaskyla, I was living in a different town for two years. That place was a very small village. Jyvaskyla is %100 better. But people of that village were very kind-hearted, more kind-hearted than people of Jyvaskyla. They were used to having foreigners. Many foreigners resided there for a while and then re-settled in another place. There were not enough Finnish courses in that village. That was why we moved to Jyvaskyla. But people of that town were more kind-hearted. When I came here, I wondered why people don't greet others. But you should start greeting people. You may see a person you know in the bus stop and say hi to him or her, but he might not respond. Keep greeting them every time you see them. Then they start to greet you."

The preceding quote indicates that living in a place where people are used to multiculturalism can create a more harmonious atmosphere among people of the host country and immigrants. Besides, it indicates that the Finns are socially introvert and it takes time and courage to build friendship with them. This can be referred to the Finns' most salient characteristic, which is shyness as explained by Edelsward (1991). However, understanding the Finnish culture and persona and sharing cultural values and norms with the Finns can help immigrants to integrate as indicated in the following quote.

"The Finns have a different culture than the Arabs' and Africans'. They are shy. They do not start a conversation immediately. The Finns are very kind-hearted. The only problem is shyness. Of course, they have traditions and norms. I have Finnish friends. I told them about my culture. I told them how we treat our guests, parents and the elderly. In my culture, anyone who visits me must be offered food. The first time my Finnish friends visited me, I prepared everything, food, drinks and sweets. When we, my family and I, visited them, my Finnish friends did the same. I noticed that my Finnish friends started to act the way I act regarding hospitality."

However, being bold to start a conversation with a Finn is not Ayda's way of communication with the Finns. Ayda is more reluctant to start a conversation with a Finn or build a network as pointed out in the following quote.

"We don't have Finnish friends. We did not try to have friends. And no one has approached us to make friendship with us. We are careful and they are careful in the way they deal with us. But I talk to my neighbors. When I meet them downstairs we greet each other and talk about the weather and ask how they are. I say simple things like that, but there is not more communication... Honestly I do not think we integrated. It is true there are nice Finnish people, but because they do not speak a lot, you may feel there are people who do not accept you. This is why we are always careful in dealing with them even, with neighbors. A person needs to be careful."

Ayda's preceding quote elaborate on the fact that the Finns hardly initiate a conversation with a stranger as it is considered intrusive by them. (Edelsward, 1991) However, Ayda uses the word "careful" to describe her communication with the Finns and the way the Finns communicate with her.

Nevertheless, Ayda who is careful when dealing with the Finns takes the initiative and invites her child's Finnish classmates to his birthday party at her house. Surprisingly, ten Finnish parents bring their children to the party as revealed in the quote below.

Ayda adds, "I never expected the Finnish parents would bring their children to my son's party. They came. Ten families brought their children. That thing made me feel good. The parents did not know us, and we did not know them. Only my son knew the children because they were in his class. That made me less afraid and worried. I felt some people would accept us."

Similarly, Aysha explains how the Finns are hard to talk to, which is opposite to the Sudanese socialization culture, where people like to socialize as it makes them feel psychologically comfortable and emotionally relieved. In addition, regardless of how long one stays in Finland, this does not change the fact that it is not easy to have Finnish friends and contacts as indicated by the following quote.

"Regardless of how many years you may spend with the Finns, they act as if they don't know you when they meet you in the city center. We, the Sudanese, like to socialize. Anyone you meet, you need to get to know him or her. You ask him or her questions. We, the Sudanese, can be nosy. We ask about everything. We like to socialize and chat. We feel comfortable talking. We feel emotionally relieved. But the Finns are silent. One of them does not start a conversation with you. Never. We may stay for two hours or three hours while a Finn is focusing on her own things. If there is nothing to do, a Finn keeps looking at his mobile phone playing games and not talking to you. You may ask him or her, he/she would answer the question briefly. But to start a talk with

you, it does not happen the way it happens among us, the Sudanese. There is a difference between the two cultures.”

Hayat believes that the Finns are kind with some exceptions which exist in all societies. The general view about the Finns according to the quote below is that the Finns are kind and they do not intrude into the other’s private life. Besides, Hayat shares her own experience with a Finnish friend who supports her.

“Finnish people only mind their own business. They are nice people. They are good. There is not any community that has no exceptions. But the Finns are kind. I have a Finish friend. She is a teacher. She visits me at my house. Once she brought me two big bags of food. My husband takes us to a cafe, and we have coffee together. If I need a ride by car, my friend and her husband help me. she is a busy woman. She has kids. Her children like me a lot.”

Regarding building networks in Finland and the Finnish persona, Zarifa believes that Finnish people are better to live with than Egyptians. Zarifa compares between life in Finland and Egypt, and she points out the difference between the Finns and Egyptians. For example, The Finns are kind, believe in human rights, and live by values like honesty, trustworthiness and faithfulness, values that are emphasized in Islam as indicated by Zarifa. However, Egyptians treat people based on how much money they have. A rich person is treated respectfully, while a poor person is treated badly. The quotes below reveal Zarifa’s viewpoint of the Finns and life in Finland compared to the Egyptians and life in Egypt.

“The Finns are tender. They have human rights. Finland is a very beautiful country. Its people are very tender and kind-hearted. They are very tender, very tender. They have human rights. They treat you flexibly and tenderly, so that you do not feel alienated. They are very nice. They do not know cheating. They do not know lying. They are very good people. The Finns do things that are very similar to the things Muslims do. There are negative and positive things. But Thank God.” (Zarifa)

“I lived with the Egyptians in Egypt. They are very hard to deal with. What they care about is money. They value money more than human beings. Even the way they treat you depends on how much money you have. If you have money and you give them, you are their brother or sister. If you do not have anything, they start to say, “You came to our country and crowd it” We heard hurting words.” (Zarifa)

- **Assets**

## **Public Officials and Governmental Staff Members**

The study participants not only told accounts of their experiences with Finnish citizens, but they also shared their experiences with public officials, their teachers at school, social service staff and bosses at work. Most of their experience with public officials were positive and facilitated their integration. Public officials were considerate and cooperative as described by the study participants. For some participants, that could be referred to the laws in Finland. As a matter of fact, in Finland all people have the right to life, personal, liberty integrity and security (Fin. Const. §. 7), and they have the right to embrace and practice whatever religion they want (Fin. Const. §. 11). That is why public officials do not discriminate against immigrants as claimed by Aysha in the following quote.

“It is a country where law is imposed on everyone. We are all the same in front of the law even if you were a minister's son. This is something good. This is the most beautiful, justice and equality. Laws do not distinguish between a man and a woman, a native or a foreigner. There is equality. Yes, there are people who are racist. But they must follow the law and not show this racism. At work place your co-worker might not like you because you're a foreigner, black, african, not fluent in Finnish, or a Muslim. Yet 'she is obliged to deal with you within the work context according to the laws. In the law, you have to respect my culture and religion and I have to respect your culture and beliefs.” (Aysha)

Similarly, Ayda believes abiding by the Finnish law makes the public officials treat immigrants well as she states in the following quote.

“There is a difference between the officials and these who are responsible for us and average Finnish people. Their way of thinking towards refugees is better than average Finnish people. Officials are the ones who have put policies to bring refugees, and social workers who work for the government try to abide by the laws and reflect a good image of their work.” (Ayda)

Moreover, the following quotes by Ayda address three contexts where public officials, especially social service workers, play a vital role in the integration process of immigrants. Social service workers, as indicated in the first quote below, listen to the refugees' problems and sort them out. Besides, they organize activities and events to help refugees promote their cultures and embrace their beliefs in Finland as pointed out by Ayda in the second quote below. In addition, Finnish schools offer immigrants' children courses in their mother tongue and religion, which is viewed as a good step towards integration as addressed in the third quote.

“I did not feel safe to live in a place where people reject me among them. I started to have fears that someone could hurt my kids. So, I asked the social worker to help us get a new place. People in charge found us a new place. People in charge are good.” (Ayda)

“They always tell us to keep our traditional dresses and show them to the others. Once the Social workers took us to Lappi and they asked us to bring our traditional dresses and anything related to our culture. Besides, they made us a cultural day to celebrate our traditions. They always encourage us to preserve our language and culture.” (Ayda)

“They allow them to take religion classes. I thought we would do effort to teach our kids at home about their religion. This is a good aspect. They try to make us integrate. They try to make us live our lives normally.” (Ayda)

Najah shares an experience when her boss at work politely asks her to change the way she dresses her hijab. Najah does not find any problem in her boss’ request and she replaces her large head cover with a smaller one.

“Once my boss gave me advice. I used to wear hijab. She said we really like you. But I want to say something to you but don't be offended or feel annoyed. I was wearing a big hijab. She said can you wear a smaller hijab in a different way or wear a hat. I said OK. You know Islam is what is in the heart, not just Hijab. And in Sudan all people wear hijab, Christians and Muslims. In Finland I have never faced anything because of Hijab.”

Hayat comments on how kind their teachers at school are. Zarifa also describes how her child’s school has helped her child get used to using public transportation. The child’s teacher would accompany her for a month back and forth until the child was able to use the bus by herself.

“My Finnish teacher is very good. She is nice. (She laughs) I have another teacher. She is good too. They are not racist.” (Hayat)

“The Finns are patient. The school helped my daughter to get used to it. For a month a teacher was accompanying her. The month after, my daughter started to go by herself. She learned how to commute by herself.” (Zarifa)

### **5.3 Summary of the Findings**

The findings revealed the study participants' experiences of integration in Jyvaskyla city have had ups and downs because of several constraining and facilitating factors. The Muslim, Sudanese women’s narratives point out their major concerns regarding integration in the Finnish society; how these concerns hinder their integration; what

strategies they use to integrate; and the promotive role Finnish public officials play in the integration of the study participants.

The findings indicate that all the study participants are basically concerned about child-rearing in a culture that conflicts with their Muslim, Sudanese culture. The Muslim, Sudanese women in this study believe that they are obliged to do more effort to have their children maintain the Islamic, Sudanese culture and protect them from immersing in the Finnish culture, where nudity, extramarital sexual relationships and individual independence are common. Moreover, the participants of the study believe that lacking Finnish language skills is a dilemma that obstructs them from expressing their needs and feelings and communicating with Finnish people, which is considered very essential to feel integrated. Besides, the financial status and finding a job opportunity that matches the applicant's skills and education are an integral part of the complete integration process. The study participants state that manual work is easy to get in Finland, while white-collar jobs are hard to be admitted in. Lack of suitable job opportunities is not the only problem, but also not getting a full-time work with a good pay is a reason why the study participants prefer to stay unemployed.

The study participants are positive, resilient and try their best to coexist and integrate in several ways. Racism incidents do not put them down. Instead, they face them strongly and defend themselves before racist people. Neglecting racism is another strategy followed by the study participants, who consider these incidents too trivial and small to spend time thinking about them. The Muslim, Sudanese women in this study believe that the Finns are kind-hearted, a word which is repeatedly mentioned in the narratives. All the study participants take into consideration that they should take the initiative and start a conversation with a Finn, and always greet these whom they know in the Finnish society to melt the shyness barrier that stops the Finns from communicating with strangers. Finally, public officials play a big role to help immigrants integrate. In all the narratives, public officials are described that they abide by the law and treat the study participants kindly and respectfully. Social service staff is always there to listen to immigrants' problems and help them sort them out. They also encourage and urge the study participants to embrace their culture and be proud of it by arranging cultural activities and events.

## 6 DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Examining the Results

The aim of the study is to better understand Muslim, Sudanese women's experiences of integration in Finland and shed light on the constraining and facilitating factors influencing their integration. This aim is met by examining the study participants' narratives. It is evident from the data analysis that integration of Muslim, Sudanese women have not completely taken place. According to the integration theories (Durkheim, 1893, Beresnevieute, 2003 & Ferguson, 2008, UNHCR, 2013), for integration to succeed, immigrants must be socially, economically and politically involved in the host society while preserving their beliefs and cultural values. However, the study participants' narratives unfold that they struggle to integrate socially and economically. Social integration of immigrants is hindered by reasons like child-rearing in a culture of values conflicting the Islamic culture, and the Finns' introvert nature as stated in the narratives. Similarly, the study participants' economic integration is troubled by lack of good work opportunities and high living standards.

Surprisingly, despite the fact that Finnish people have negative attitudes towards Muslim immigrants (Yle, 2012, Yle, 2015, Teivainen, 2018, Martikainen, 2013), the narratives reveal that few racism and discrimination incidents are encountered by the study participants, who show resilience by either neglecting what happens or facing and defying it. Moreover, solidarity with the Muslim, Sudanese women who experienced racism and intolerance was present and showed by local people who were around when such incidents took place. Ferguson (2008) reports that solidarity among locals and immigrants is a critical dimension of social integration.

The findings of the study indicate that there are three major dilemmas faced by Muslim, Sudanese women in the integration process. According to the study participants, integration in the Finnish society can be hard because of the difficulty of child-rearing in a culture full of values opposite to the Muslim, Sudanese culture, lacking Finnish language skills and financial reasons.

The frequently repeated dilemma to integration is child-rearing in a culture that is substantially different from the Muslim, Sudanese culture. The study participants voice their worries and concerns for their children to acquire Finnish cultural mores such as extramarital sex, individual independence and dress code. This goes in line with Alhawsaw (2016) who states that Middle Eastern parents find it hard to integrate because they are afraid that their children would acquire the Western values and lose their identity. Even when children grow up being bicultural, conflicts start between parents and their children. Childrearing in a Western culture as a dilemma to integration confirms what Shakespear-Finch and Wickham (2010) outline in their study about the integration of Sudanese refugees in the Australian society. Sudanese refugees consider adapting to the Australian laws regarding disciplining children a hindrance to integration since they fear losing control over their children.

The second dilemma to integration as stated by the study participants is lack of Finnish language skills, especially when they first came to Finland. Lack of Finnish language skills prevented the study participants from expressing their needs and feelings. Previous studies (Seker and Sirkeci, 2015, Gregory, 2014, Shakespear-Finch and Wickham (2010), Doyle, 2011) have documented that language of the host country is of paramount importance to help immigrants integrate, but lack of the host country's language skills could lead to feelings of exclusion and helplessness.

The third dilemma to integration is financial. It has to do with scarcity of employment opportunities and expensive living standards. White collar job opportunities are seldom and require high level of Finnish language and considerable years of experience. Moreover, high living costs burden the study participants and put them under stress. The former results correspond with the findings of prior research (Alhawsaw 2016) which demonstrated looking for secure employment stands as a barrier to the integration of immigrants; and refugees' previous job experiences and education are not taken into consideration by institutions in the host societies. .

The above-mentioned dilemmas yield feelings of resentment, distress, fear and exclusion, which adversely affects the social integration of Muslim, Sudanese women. The negative feelings the study participants express are a sign that integration has not



completely taken place. Correspondingly, Mhaidat (2016) states feelings of low self-esteem, depression, hostility, anger and unsafety obscure refugees from achieving successful adaptation in the host country. Chen et al. (2019) states there is a strong link between social integration of refugees and their mental health. Social integration stressors like adapting to the new life of the host country and learning a new language adversely influence refugees' mental health. Moreover, Ferguson (2008) and Beresnevieute (2003) state that resentful feelings among people in a society can be avoided by equal distribution of socio-economic resources and social participation of immigrants in all life aspects, which is missing as stated by the current study participants.

Even though the study participants encounter difficulties to integrate in the Finnish society, several facilitating factors of integration are derived from their narratives. The Muslim, Sudanese women have used strategies to help them integrate: First, being resilient in the face of racism and discrimination incidents is one factor that helps Muslim, Sudanese women integrate. Second, building social network with Finnish people although the Finns are socially introvert contribute to having Muslim, Sudanese women feel more accepted and included within the Finnish society. Third, support of social service staff and public officials who abide by the laws and do not discriminate against refugees play a vital role in helping the study participants integrate. Finding strategies to adapt in the host country goes in line with Gregory (2014) who finds out that the Muslim girls of his study choose to be proactive at university campus to defy the negative stereotypes about Muslims and help change misconceptions about Islam.

Muslim, Sudanese women confront racism by arguing with racist people or by neglecting them. Racism incidents do not have negative impact on the study participants, which corresponds with Doyle (2011) and Owens-Manley and Coughlan (2002) who state racism incidents are not of paramount effect on the study participants' experiences of integration. However, the former result contradicts with the findings of Shakespear-Finch and Wickham (2010) who demonstrated that racism is a major constraining factor of integration in Australia as described by their study participants.

Building Network with Finnish people is another enabling factor of integration. Despite the fact the Finns are socially introvert, Muslim Sudanese women insist on initiating a conversation with their neighbors, colleagues or coworkers. This result goes in line with the findings demonstrated by Ferguson (2008). Building social relations by all members of the society, immigrants and natives, is essential for the integration of immigrants, which is called social capital by Ferguson (2008).

The support the study participants receive from the social service staff and public officials they deal with has yielded feelings of inclusion and security, which substantiates the findings by Wens-Manley and Coughlan (2002), and Segal and Mayadas (2005) who highlight the pivotal role social service office plays in the initial stage of resettlement since providing a good service, particularly good mental health service, positively impacts refugees' adjustment on the long term.

## **6.2 Significance of the Study**

This study is an attempt to present integration from a micro perspective since subjective viewpoints contribute to better understanding of immigrants' unique, lived experiences. "There are a multitude of studies which present integration from a macro perspective. We should also ground our findings into the micro perspective from where the real solutions arise." (Hamberger, 2009, p.20) This study is significant as it makes Muslim, Sudanese women's voices heard and gives these women the opportunity to express their concerns and talk about their experiences, and it sheds light on important issues such as the challenges of raising Muslim, Sudanese children in Finland

Moreover, this study can contribute to improving the services of the social office and other service providers in Finland, especially the services related to the wellbeing and mental health of refugees and immigrants. Besides, it can contribute to modifying the integration policies and the way the Finnish government views social integration of immigrants.

### **6.3 Limitations of the Study**

- Time was a major limitation of the study. The topic of the study could have been studied more deeply if there was more time given to elaborate it.
- The narratives were told in the study participants' mother tongue, Arabic. I translated them and tried my best to keep the meaning unchanged.
- The study sample consists of 5 participants, which is considered quite small. Two factors influenced the size of the sample; first, there was not enough time to interview more informants; second, it was planned to interview seven informants, but two of them did not have the time to meet the interviewer and share their experiences of integration.

### **6.4 Challenges for Further Research**

A narrative approach is utilized to answer the research questions regarding the constraining and facilitating factors influencing Muslim, Sudanese women's experiences of integration in Finland. An ethnography would be of paramount importance to have better understanding of how and why Muslim, Sudanese women feel about their integration in Finland.

Moreover, studying Muslim, Sudanese children's perspectives on their integration in Finland and the influence of their parents' rearing practices on their experiences of integration is essential as it contributes to having better understanding of the overall experience of integration of Muslim immigrants.

In addition, studying the experience of other Muslim immigrants with different backgrounds such as different genders, marital status, nationalities or age contributes to better understanding of the social integration of Muslims.

Finally, more studies from a micro perspective about the integration experiences of Muslim immigrants would complement the findings of the present study. It is also important to study other Arab immigrants' perspectives on their integration experiences.

## 6.5 Reflections

I conducted this study driven by my experience in Finland, which was very hard in the beginning. Moreover, this study was meant to help women voice their fear; I wanted this study to document their lived stories, so that they can be made use of by other immigrant women who pass through similar experiences. I also wanted these women's voices to be heard by policy makers to help improve social integration of immigrants in Finland.

The results of this study were surprising for me. I expected that Muslim, Sudanese women lived in constant fear and suffered from discrimination because of their race and appearance as Muslims. However, the findings reveal that Muslim, Sudanese women's color and appearance are not a major obstacle in these women's experiences of integration, but child-rearing, which is repeatedly mentioned across the narratives, is deemed to be a major dilemma of integration. Besides, Muslim, Sudanese women's concerns for their children are overwhelming. For example, Hayat says that when she gets up during night, she prays God protects her children from acquiring Finnish values that contradict with Muslim, Sudanese values. This makes me question the role of mental health support in Finland. I recommend there should be more mental health support offered to refugees upon their arrival in the host country and in the initial stages of the resettlement period.

Data analysis indicates that every narrative is unique; the narratives share similar experiences of integration, but they are distinctive. For example, Najah, who is 39 years old and has lived in Finland for 14 years, and Aysha, who is 30 years old and has lived in Finland for 12 years, have two opposite experiences of integration; Najah feels Finland is home and she does not face any serious problems in her life in Finland, while Aysha waits the time her children turn 14 years old to leave the country

and live in a country of a similar culture to the Sudanese culture. Moreover, Zarifa, who is 39 years old and left school when she was in the third grade, does not share any negative experience in Finland and only talks about positive aspects of life in Finland. Even when I asked her about raising her children in Finland, she said that she was not afraid of anything. In fact, personal attitudes seem to have great influence on the integration of Muslim, Sudanese women.

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