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**Shared Religion: #Islamigration, Integration & International Relations – A Case Study of Somali Muslims in Mayfair**

## ■ ABOUT IGD

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3rd Floor Robert Sobukwe Building

263 Nana Sita Street

Pretoria South Africa

PO Box 14349

The Tramshed,

0126

Pretoria South Africa

+27123376082

info@igd.org.za

www.igd.org.za

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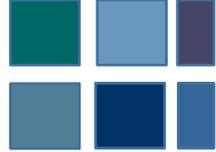
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## About the authors

**Sabeedah Mahomed** is a B.A Honours graduate in Islamic Studies of the University of South Africa's Department of Religious Studies and Arabic. Currently, she is an MSc candidate in Digital Humanities with the Department of Information Studies at University College London (ULC).

**Iqbal Jhazbhay** is a Full Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of South Africa's Department of Religious Studies and Arabic. He specialises on the politics and international relations of the Horn of Africa and serves on the ANC's NEC Sub-Committee of International Relations.



## 1. Introduction

In 1961, Somalia was declared an Islamic State. It is to date one of the only African countries with a majority Muslim population of 99.8%.<sup>1</sup> Since the onset of civil war in 1991, many have migrated to regions in the Horn of Africa: Somaliland, Djibouti, Ethiopia and the northeastern province of Kenya. The people of Somalia have spread across the world, including South Africa, taking their religious ethos with them.

With Mayfair being known as the heart of Somalis living in South Africa, even called 'Little Mogadishu', this presented for relevant research on a developing topic. Twenty-seven years since the war, it was of particular interest to examine the role of religion amongst the Somalis who have chosen to settle in South Africa.

The selected topic is centered on the role of a shared religion (Islam) between Somalis and their host community. The framework applied discusses how religion filters through on three interrelated levels; (Islam) migration, integration and international relations.

This research aims at answering three specific questions:

- 1) How religion influences migration choices;
- 2) How a shared religion between host and migrant influences integration; and
- 3) How a shared religion may influence international relations between individuals of two countries.

The sections that follow explain and contextualise this empirical, religious focused research, immigrants' religious beliefs and behaviours, and compares cross-cultural perspectives from individuals who follow the same religion. Section 2 discusses the concept of Islamigration and how Islam has influenced migration choices for the people of Somalia. Section 3 explores perceived social and religious factors positively or negatively influencing integration between Somali and Indian Muslims in Mayfair. Section 4 briefly describes the international views held by Somali migrants since moving to South Africa and if religion has played a role in their opinions. The paper concludes with section 5, which restates the research problem, findings and analyses, and suggestions. As an initial exploratory research paper, the literature review process does not have a dedicated section. Therefore, it is included throughout at the points which it informed the paper and aided in qualitative data analysis and interpretation

## 1.1. Research Methodology

Primary data and descriptive findings in each chapter were obtained through survey studies, semi-structured interviews in person and telephonically. Secondary material was obtained from books and internet based research. The beginning process of fieldwork consisted of approaching Somali community organisations. In order to gain access to the Mayfair community and recruit research participants, mutual friends or family who personally knew Somali Muslims living in Mayfair were contacted. The trust factor provided to play a key role in undertaking field research amongst Somalis.

Setting up interviews with Somali Muslims through a mutual acquaintance instead of randomly approaching people proved far more beneficial. The individuals interviewed had different ages, professions and relationship status. They were residing in Mayfair for different amounts of time, spoke English adequately and were open to speaking freely. Despite the interviews being designed to be completed in 20 minutes, all respondents chose to speak longer, sharing additional stories and honest, emotional experiences, with interviews being almost an hour long. In total, five male Somali Muslims from Mayfair were interviewed.

Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to protect their individual identities and comply with ethical regulations concerning the processing of sensitive data. Interviews were audio recorded, with consent, and transcribed.

## 2. # Islamigration

### 2.1. What is Islamigration?

Migration and Islam has been intertwined since the early days of Islamic history. Beginning with the first migration of the early Muslims to Abyssinia, the Prophet's migration from *Makkah* to *Madinah*, the Prophet's migration to the heavens where he received the five daily prayers (*Meraj*), to the annual *Hajj* which sees millions of Muslims travel to *Makkah* to undertake the pilgrimage; Islam and movement has a special relationship. Four of the five pillars of Islam (and all five compulsory prayers) require physical involvement. As much as Islam is a religion of submission (to the Will of God), it is also said to be religion of purposeful action.

Ali Mazrui<sup>2</sup> explained this precise quality of Islam as *movement* and *migration* which bears a unique relationship with Global Africa. He further explains how the dynamics of Islamigration can best be understood in terms of the *Hijrah*, deemed such a significant event that marked the start of the Islamic calendar. The Prophet (pbuh) travelled from *Makkah* to *Madinah* in secret to escape persecution. The *Hijrah*, and the first migration to Abyssinia, was a displacement of people from their land on the basis of their new



religion, in contrast to the Hajj, which is a reunification of millions of people on the basis of a shared religion.

According to the Pew Research Centre<sup>3</sup>, in 2015 there were 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide, 24.1% of the global population. More than a quarter of the total Muslim population reside in Africa and the African Diaspora, with African Muslim women having the highest fertility rates in the world. Therefore, it is viewed that the wellbeing, protection and relationships of Muslim African women and children, specifically during and after migration, may have a direct correlation to the growth of Islam

## **2.2. Migration Choices**

### **2.2.1. South Africa's place in the Migration World**

*“Somalis have true affection for South Africa. A real love despite the anxiety we sometimes feel. I believe we can benefit from each other. South Africans are skilled and educated. We Somalis are entrepreneurial. South Africa offers us opportunities to start businesses. This freedom is not available to us in Europe and the US.”<sup>4</sup>*

Many Somalis have come to South Africa since 1991; however there was no official Somali Embassy in South Africa until 2013. To date, South Africa does not have an official diplomatic Embassy in Somalia, the closest being in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia or Nairobi, Kenya. Africa is known to be the largest refugee producing continent in the world.<sup>5</sup> The main conflict prone regions are located in the Horn of Africa and Central Africa. According to the UNHCR in 2008, Somalia was amongst the top ten countries of refugee origin in the world, making it a major refugee producing country.

South Africa is believed to attract more asylum seekers than most countries. The general perception of the number of foreigners in South Africa varies considerably from the official statistics. Analyses of the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) suggests the number of foreigners in Johannesburg was 550 000 in 2006<sup>6</sup>. Yet official responses from local officials over-estimated this figure to 2.5 million (in a population estimated at 3.9 million). The most recent official source is the 2016 Community Survey (CS), when Statistics South Africa estimated the number of foreign born persons as 1.21 million, down from 1.5 million according to Census 2011.<sup>7</sup> From here, 26 116 were from Somalia according to Census 2011 which decreased to 10 954 in CS 2016.

### **2.2.2. Why Mayfair?**

Salat said, *“We are in...We call it here “Mogadishio”, the street of Mogadishio and the suburb of Mogadishio, but in fact it's Mayfair, in Johannesburg.”<sup>8</sup>*

Stats SA CS 2016 confirmed Gauteng as receiving the highest number of immigrants, of which most come to Johannesburg. Majority of Somali Muslims reside in Mayfair, and



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it is usually the first destination for most Somalis on arrival to South Africa. According to the United Nations (UN) report released in 2017 on immigrants globally, South Africa has been noted as the most hostile country in the world towards refugees and migrants.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, when xenophobic riots broke out in May 2008, Mayfair was peaceful and served as a place of refuge for many Somali migrants (from other areas in SA) who had lost everything. Many Somalis view Mayfair as the heart of their displaced community.

### **2.2.3. Islamigration of Somali Muslims**

*“Unlike other African Muslim migrants, such as the Senegalese or Malians who settled mainly in Hillbrow and Yeoville, Somalis prioritised socialisation with South African Indian Muslims, establishing a Muslim neighbourhood; they wanted to live in Muslim territories. Islam rather than race or Africanism, became their mode of identification.”<sup>10</sup>*

With reference to research question: The first part of each interview focused on how religion influenced migration choices

#### **Interview 1**

Yusuf\*<sup>11</sup>, who has been living in Mayfair for twelve years, said, *“The reason why we chose, or I chose Mayfair was because of the culture, the Islamic culture, there was mosques, there were people we can relate to, people who had the same religion where we can get halaal food, where we know as Muslims we help each other, people even if you don’t know them you can ask for help, or you can freely express your problem to them...The first thing we look for is a mosque, so that we can have a place to pray and then from there we can have a community or people we can relate to as Muslims.”*

Yusuf first resided in Paarl but left due to xenophobia. He then went to Worcester in the Western Cape but said he found a community whose weekends were characterized by drinking, drugs and gangsterism. He then moved to Mayfair in 2006 and has been there since. Yusuf’s viewpoint was echoed amongst all interviewees.

#### **Interview 2**

Mohamed, owner of a business, first lived in Ramaphosa Township when he arrived in South Africa. When asked to compare living in the township to Mayfair he said, *“It’s different, even when you’re working in those townships there is no mosques, you don’t pray congregation prayers, like Friday prayers, you cannot pray every Friday, you have to go every third Friday only to the mosque and the mosque is far from you- you know Ramaphosa (majority Black area), I think the next closest mosque is in Reiger Park (majority Coloured area), so it’s like 20-30 minute walk from where I was working that time. So it was difficult actually. And here (Mayfair – majority Indian area) there is mosques on every corner.”<sup>12</sup>*



### Interview 3

Moosa, owner of a shop, has been in South Africa for 23 years. He recalls, “*Actually, I was one of the first Somali people who came here in Mayfair.*”<sup>13</sup>

#### 1995 - 2018

- Arrived in Mayfair – shared accommodation with 7 men in one room
- Moved to Boksburg and stayed at the Angelo Church which provided free shelter
- Completed a 6 month carpentry course through the government
- Came back to Mayfair but could not find work
- Found employment at Wonder Flooring for R150 per week
- Saved money and started trading as a hawker in town. This did not work as his goods were constantly stolen
- Left Johannesburg and moved to Virginia in the Free State
- Headed to Belfield, Cape Town. Continued trading as a hawker. Business was good but slowly died down.
- Returned to Mayfair, opened his own business, married an Arab woman and started a family. He has never left since.

Moosa’s journey comes full circle as he returns to Mayfair after having moved through different towns and provinces. Despite trying to settle in other areas, he finds himself back at the place he started. Mayfair is thus, a location of religious, social and economic stability for many Somali Muslims.

### Interview 4

Imraan shared his unique migration story<sup>14</sup>. Unlike most migrants, Imraan’s entire journey is centred around and majorly influenced by the *Tabligh Jamaat*. Amongst his reasons for coming to South Africa, were the many positive stories he heard from friends who came to South Africa, such as ‘*having a medical doctor treat you who is also a hafiz*’ (an individual who memorized the entire Quran).

In 2004, Imraan arrived in South Africa for the first time and after receiving documentation as an asylum seeker, he along with his friend went to spend their first night in Mayfair. The next day, he contacted his friend from the *Jamaat* who was at the time serving as a guide for a group of Somali men from Western Cape and Eastern Cape on *Jamaat* in Gauteng. His friend picked him up that same day and took him to join the *Jamaat* group. They headed to Lenasia where they spent three days, then moved to the Muslim communities in Soweto, Vereeniging, old *Marcus* at Baitun Noor, back to Mayfair, and lastly to Kimberly. In the first two weeks of Imraan arriving in South Africa, he had spent time with Muslim communities in all these places.



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He says, *“I immediately felt at home when I arrived, I integrated, it was very easy for me because of the Jamaat, I honestly think I got everything on a silver platter”*.

Yusuf introduced the lead researcher to Imraan and jokingly said, *“This guy really integrated, he is 75% Indian and only 25% Somali”*. After interviewing Imraan for two hours, I understood why Mayfair played a very important role in Imraan’s life. He settled with his wife and three children in Mayfair. However, when he was offered a job outside Mayfair it had serious implications. At the same time, the 2008 xenophobic attacks broke out across South Africa. His wife refused to move. She did not want to leave the safety of Mayfair, the Somali community and madressas *and* close access to health services. He says ultimately contributed as one of the reasons for their divorce.

Imraan finds the Muslim community in his area welcoming since having moved there in 2008. However, there is a very low presence of Somali Muslims and finds his weekends to be extremely lonely. As a hypertensive patient, he journeys to Mayfair every weekend to be with his Somali friends and see his children. Mayfair is still an integral part of his life, and may be so for a very long time.

Religion attracts Somalis to South Africa, and Mayfair in particular. Many have voiced this as one of the main reasons they prefer South Africa to other countries worldwide. Yusuf explained the ease of practicing Islam in South Africa; *“The country itself, whether you are in a place like Mayfair or in another place, we didn’t see any problem with our faith. You can ask freely if the food is halaal and the people will tell you if it is or isn’t. You can pray wherever you want, I have been going to malls and getting places to worship, if I don’t find any I can even practice in parking lots and no one will bother me. I also used to play soccer and when it was time for prayer I used to take my mat on the grass and pray and no one of the other teams ask me what I was doing. It’s a free country Alhamdulillah...those Muslims who were here before us made it possible for us to practice our religion so Alhamdulillah...”*

### **3. Integration**

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) defines integration as, *“the process by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups. This definition of integration is deliberately left open, because the particular requirements for acceptance by a receiving society vary greatly from country to country. The openness of this definition also reflects the fact that the responsibility for integration rests not with one particular group, but rather with many actors—immigrants themselves, the host government, institutions, and communities...”*<sup>15</sup>

Initially integration was not a main area of this research, but it repeatedly appeared during the literature review and interviews conducted. There is a strong relationship between Somalis and Indians because of their shared religion. Before discussing the reasons for successful or unsuccessful integration, I propose the question of whether



or not this integration is a realistic goal. *Can Somali Muslims and Indian Muslims integrate?* If so, what are the perceived barriers to integration and what actions are needed to overcome these barriers?

This section explores social inclusion/exclusion and the role of a shared religion through variables such as ease of practicing religion, access to religious services, interacting an opinion of local Muslims and neighbours, positive or negative experiences, inter-marriages and effort to integrate.

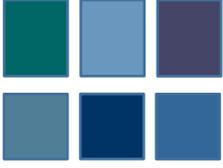
### **3.1. History: Indians and Somalis in Mayfair**

According to Jinnah, Mayfair and Fordsburg were hubs of trading amongst South African Indians, the majority of whom are Muslim.<sup>16</sup> She adds, the 2006 FMSP African Cities Survey found the majority of Somalis surveyed in Johannesburg, 89% live in Mayfair. Rawoot recorded the view of Abdirahman, a Somali refugee and Wits Master's student who came to South Africa in 2002 and noticed the fragmented nature of the local Muslim community.<sup>17</sup> Abdirahman describes the relationship between local Muslims and Somalis as, "*not hostile, but not highly friendly.*" He feels the South African Muslim community is separated according to ethnic lines. This view of a '*segregated mentality*' is based on his observation of the distance between Indians and Malays, with Indians being particularly less receptive to non-Indians.

There are 'old' and 'new' Somalis, those who moved to Mayfair in the early 1990s until 2005 and the latter who arrived in the past decade. Shaffer explains this as factoring in to integration, "*The issue of integration arose as a distinguishing difference between old and new Somalis. Old Somalis had no choice but to interact with other nationals because there were not many Somalis in Mayfair at the time, whereas new Somalis arrived in the heart of Johannesburg's Somali community and did not have to rely on other nationals to help them. The theory, then, is that new Somalis cannot understand why anyone would befriend individuals outside of their community. Integration appears to be a contradiction.*"<sup>18</sup>

Interaction between Somalis and Indians have been influenced as well, Shaffer continues, "*as early as the mid-1990s until about 2004 or 2005, life was very different before new Somalis arrived. Old Somalis sought opportunities in South Africa and were more independent than newer arrivals. They established the Mayfair community and saw its rapid development into a pocket of Somalia in South Africa. When old Somalis came to Mayfair, their numbers were few and they befriended members of the Indian Muslim community, who assisted them with their resettlement.*

*As more Somalis moved to the area, they effectively pushed Indian Muslims out of Mayfair and into neighbouring Fordsburg, and Indians took much of the support once provided through zakat, or almsgiving, with them. While Indians are still present in*



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*Mayfair, often as landlords to Somalis and other Muslim migrants, some are selling their properties and relocating”.*

‘Old’ Somalis felt a religious identification with the Indian Muslim community and received support from them. Many were assisted financially and worked for Indian business owners in Mayfair. With time, they left and opened their own businesses. Somalis do not like feeling ‘dependent’ on others, they prefer entrepreneurship and work hard for themselves, usually going the extra mile that most locals are not willing to. They went from employees, to business competitors with Indian Muslim

### **3.2. Integration: The Somali Perspective**

*“Somalis would not be here if there weren’t Indians. We came to Mayfair because of the Indian Muslims. There are so many areas; Fordsburg, Brixton, Newtown, Crosby...why we never go that side- we came here just because of the Indian Muslims- they are our Muslim brothers. They will help us.” – Mohamed*

*“We saw the only people helping us here (in South Africa) is the Indian Muslims, that’s why you see thousands and thousands Somalis coming here.”- Moosa*

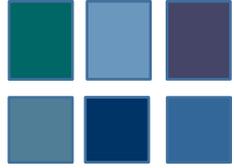
It was unanimously agreed amongst interviewees that Somali Muslims were easily able to practice their religion since arriving in South Africa, and have access to religious services such as mosques, madressas, burial services and social assistance. Yusuf is a good example for how Somali Muslims are able to integrate. His experiences reflect both the success and limitations of interaction with Indian Muslims thus far and indicate what needs to be done in the future.

Since moving to Mayfair, Yusuf has been an active member of society. He played soccer with the local teams, served on the Community Police Forum (CPF) consisting of majority Indian Muslims and has a network of politicians and councilors as friends (the previous and current councilors of Ward 58). His current occupation (the interview location) was a house belonging to an Indian Muslim who is now his friend. Mohamed rents the house from him, had it rezoned for business use and in turn sublets it to Somali business owners. He also volunteers at the annual *Sultan Bahu* fete.

#### **3.2.1. Somali Opinions & Experiences of Local Indian Muslims**

*“We appreciate the Indians and how they welcome us here. Because if they were not here, we won’t be able to be here ourselves...we don’t have a problem with them... those Indians they’re our brothers, our special brothers.”- Ibrahim*

Opinions greatly influence the progress of integration. Since no one opinion speaks for an entire community, these five responses present an overview of the major perceptions and experiences of Somali Muslims with Indian Muslims. Ibrahim, born in Mogadishu



has been in South Africa for the past ten years<sup>19</sup>. He holds the Indian Muslim community in Mayfair in high esteem expressing how he appreciates their presence and helpful nature. He has many Indian friends, both male and female. When talking with Ibrahim, he began by quoting the first line of the hadith below;

مِلَّ سَمَلًا وَخَأْ مِلَّ سَمَلًا

*“A Muslim is a brother of another Muslim...”<sup>20</sup>*

Mohamed, Ibrahim’s employer, has a positive opinion of Indian Muslims, especially in Mayfair, and feels they are very welcoming and help the Somali community greatly. His only reservation was the impression locals have of foreigners being untrustworthy.

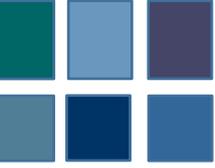
Yusuf shared his in-depth view of the local Muslims and describes them in two categories, *“Those who live with us are the best. They know us. We came from a different place, a different culture yet we understand each other. But those who don’t live with us, those in Crosby and those areas outside Mayfair, have a bad idea about us...that we are troublesome, we are hard to live with.”*

He stated when arguments arose during community meetings (with the CPF), the underlying prejudice nature was most apparent as it became Somalis (Africans) against Indians; *“...when we come together for community meetings we have differences (of opinion), we don’t like to be called ‘foreigners’ and that’s the time they mostly use it.”* He adds, *“They are 50/50. I am not saying the problem is with them, it is also with us.”*

Mohamed says tension between Somalis and local Indians are usually prevalent amongst the ‘upper class’ (wealthier) Indian Muslims. He recalls an article written in one of the local newspapers where the headline was *“Let’s take our Mayfair back”*. The writer stated how foreigners were ‘taking over Mayfair’ and making it dirty but Mohamed argues that most of Johannesburg is already deteriorating. However, he acknowledges the number of Somalis living in one street surpasses the normal capacity, but feels they try to do their fair share by opening businesses and paying their rates and taxes.

It appears, stereotypes are at play on both sides, Somalis think Indians are racist and Indians think Somalis are bad people. Yusuf observed the conservative nature of some local Muslims who prefer to not interact with non-Indians for fear it may breach their privacy. Younger people interact more than the older generation.

Indians comprised the majority of Mayfair’s population, both residential and commercial. When Somalis first started arriving in large numbers, one Indian family called the police as he saw many Somali people outside their homes and on the streets. He did not know what was going on and hence his uncertainty led him to call the police. With time, Indians understood the Somali culture to sit outside their homes and shops, walk the streets and interact with each other in public for most of the day.



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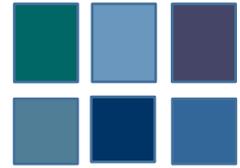
Imraan, who has been in South Africa for the past sixteen years, is the most integrated from the five participants. He believes it was the Somali Muslims who attracted migrants from other African countries. With the influx, crime increased and many local Indians decided to sell their homes and relocate. Somalis however, were not regarded as the perpetrators. One incident he states as an example was a conversation he overheard between two Indians in the Mayfair mosque whilst making *wudhu*. One wanted to relocate and the other did not, with the latter saying there was no need for him to move as he had his “*Somali brothers as neighbours and feels safe with them*”. He feels with time Indians have seen Somalis as unique in comparison to other migrants.

However, there were negative perceptions creeping in at the same time. There were clashes over *madhab* differences and locals viewed Somalis as unhygienic, especially when using the mosque facilities. Imraan confirms this and explain many Somali Muslims previously lived in the townships and were not conscious about cleanliness. This improved with time as they were made aware. Over the years Imraan has formed close relationships with a handful of Indian families. Whilst still in Mayfair and married, Imraan was unemployed for over a year.

He was struggling to maintain his family and relied heavily on the Indian community who assisted him with *Zakaat* and food. He speaks on behalf of the Somali community when he says they have learnt much from South African Muslims, “*They are people of impact, they are generous, which is rare. People here are willing to spend on anything related to Deen.*” After the divorce, Imraan moved to Belfore. Here again, he experienced the welcoming nature of local Indian Muslims. During the fasting month, a local couple invited him for iftaar every day for the full duration of *Ramadan*. At the *taraweeh* prayers the husband (now Imraan’s close friend) would bring food for him to eat for *sehri* the next day. Aside from business, community meetings and general interaction, neighbourly relations are an important starting point for integration amongst foreigners and locals. Good neighborly relations can form the basis for future interactions on both sides and create the foundational understanding required. One of the major barriers between local and migrant neighbours is that of language; Somalis mainly speak Arabic and Indians speak English. However, this can be overcome with basic interaction, greetings and small talk.

Yusuf has good relations with most of his neighbours but one family three doors away. He said, “*...that house is always closed, you just see them going in and out, even if someone passes away there we won’t know.*” He regularly attends funerals and the *Janaazah salah* of local Muslims in Mayfair and pays his respects to the bereaved families on behalf of the Somali community. He also attended the funeral of a Hindu business owner in Mayfair.

Moosa may well reflect the conservative understandings held by some Somalis. Once again, he bears testimony to the generous nature of the Indian Muslims in Mayfair.



In 1995 shortly after Moosa arrived, he was without work and desperately needed money. He approached the *Jamiatul-Ulema*, who sponsored his carpentry tools needed to start working. Prior to this, Moosa had nowhere to stay and slept for two months at the Angelo Church. Meals were not *halaal* but he and other Somali Muslims staying there were desperate. A group of Muslims from Benoni would travel to the church every Wednesday to give them hampers with *halaal* food, paraffin and essential items needed.

Despite being in South Africa for twenty-three years, receiving help and raising three daughters born in South Africa, he is still skeptical. Moosa sees social, economic and cultural barriers between Somalis and Indian Muslims. As Yusuf mentioned, Moosa also believes Indians prefer their privacy but Somalis like to frequent each other's homes. He says integration is difficult because they do not share businesses or intermarry and Somalis are not making a considerable effort to integrate.

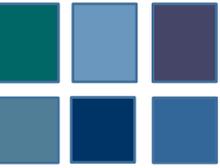
A major contributing factor to Moosa's views is his belief of local Indian Muslims viewing Somalis as inferior. He says, "*Indians look at us like we are Malawis, but we are not like Malawis. Somalis are clever, they open businesses, but Indians see us like Malawis*". He strongly believes Indians see themselves as superior to Somalis, "*Somalis need the Indians you see, but Indians don't need Somalis. They have everything*." When asked if he likes the local Indians he hesitates and says, "*Er yes, I appreciate alot, without them we couldn't be here*." But reiterated his desire to be more accepted and treated as an equal counterpart to Indians.

### **3.2.2. Negative Experiences**

The majority of respondents said they did not have major negative experiences, especially amongst the local Indian community in Mayfair. Those who previously resided in the townships had been victims of xenophobia and crime.

On at least four occasions since moving to Mayfair, Yusuf has observed intolerance towards Somalis at the mosques. A Somali praying close to the exit was shouted at by locals Indians whilst still praying. If the phone of a Somali Muslim rang, he would be reprimanded by the *musallees* instead of the *Imam* making a general announcement at the end of the prayer. He says Somalis are not used to this behaviour. Moosa has also witnessed *Imams* cursing foreigners during arguments but says from his experience this behaviour is mainly shown by the older generation.

Imraan confirms this view and attributes the fault to both Somalis and Indians. He says Somalis are aware of the religious etiquettes to be observed in the mosque but feels the Indians reproach is wrong as there is a manner in which to correct a fellow Muslim. After much time speaking with Imraan he expressed his most honest view, that many Indians and Somali Muslims are both racist. One such incident was amongst children in the mosque. He said, "*Children are innocent. What they hear at home they absorb and believe. I heard some children speaking in the mosque, the Indian child said, 'No, I*



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*am white and you are black, don't come near me*". He sees this as a reflection of conversations which take place at home. Another aspect mentioned was the derogatory term, *Karia*, used by Indians when referring to blacks – including black Muslims such as the Somalis.

Imraan personally experienced this indirect discrimination still prevalent in Mayfair. He enrolled his youngest child at a local nursery school. A short while later, his son came home traumatized saying he felt victimized by the teacher who favoured Indian children. He immediately took his child out. He mentioned this is not an isolated incident, Somali students attending the Muslim school in the area have also experienced discrimination, from fellow students and school staff. Imraan believes it occurs to a lesser degree at the local public schools where they have formed a clique of only Somalis, staying together to protect themselves from 'outsiders' once again.

After speaking of such events, Imraan, the most integrated participant who reflected a deep understanding of both Somali and Indian perspectives, thinks we are still a long way from successful integration between local Indian Muslims and migrants.

Moosa is a part of the community *WhatsApp* group, comprising of mainly Indian members, used for safety alerts and assistance. The afternoon his car was stolen, Moosa posted a message asking for help. He said he did not receive a single response, *'not even sorry, but when Indian members asked for help many would respond'*. After this incident, Moosa decided to no longer communicate in the group.

Yusuf was an active member of the CPF and would spend full nights on patrol. He too felt pushed aside by the Indians and not regarded as an equal because he was black. After a few confrontations, he left the CPF and now gives his time only to the Somali community groups.

As mentioned before, Yusuf was a soccer player and part of one of the Mayfair soccer leagues, a well-known, local Indian Muslim businessman. He observed multiple occasions when Somalis would be unfairly penalised and confrontations occurred. Yusuf and his teammates felt Somalis were mostly to blame whenever a foul occurred. If the referee was an Indian, Somali players felt they had to be extra cautious. On one occasion, two youngsters collided and began fighting. The matter was brought to the attention of the manager of the soccer league who decided the Somali players were to blame, despite the manager not even being present on the field at the time of the altercation. The Somali team stopped competing but says they remain good friends with some of the Indian players. Despite the varying circumstances in the above incidents there is a common factor of discrimination against Somali Muslims, especially during a confrontation.



### 3.2.3. Inter marriages

One of the most sensitive topics to confront a conservative Somali about is that of inter marriages, beginning within the Somali community itself. As recent as September 2018, a brutal murder took place in Mogadishu. Ahmed Muktar Salat, Mogadishu mechanic, was burnt to death by a lynch-mob over his nephew's marriage into a different clan.<sup>21</sup> Salat and his nephew belong to the *Shiidle* subclan, part of the larger *Jareerweyn* clan commonly known as the Somali Bantu. The marriage proposal was accepted by the father of the bride but the mother's relatives strongly disapproved. Whilst the couple was on honeymoon in Mogadishu, relatives of the bride's mother are said to have attacked Salat setting him alight at his garage workplace.

The murder caused an outcry amongst Somalis and Muslims worldwide as many disapproved of the inter-clan hate which has no religious basis. During the interviews the topic of marrying into a different race, culture and nationality had to be approached cautiously. The younger respondents were open-minded but admitted they might be reluctant to act on it. "*Somalis say Indians won't give their daughters to marry Somalis but Somalis themselves won't give their daughters to non-Somalis*"- Imraan. All five Somalis interviewed said marriages between Somalis and local Indian Muslims were uncommon. At most, they only knew one such couple if not any at all. Four of the five respondents approved of the idea, but stated their individual hesitations.

Mohamed states it may be challenging to be accepted on both sides of the family as well as having ideological differences.

Moosa, the eldest of the five respondents does not favour the idea. He said, "***Indians don't want to marry Somalis and Somalis don't want to marry 'blacks'***. *South African people are not the only racist ones, Somalis are also racist. They don't want to marry other black women from Mozambique, Ethiopia, Malawi, Ghana and those countries. If they see her hair is 'strong' and her features are different, flat nose, (like the Bantus) they won't marry her. Somalis think they are unique in their features the way God created them and only marry Somalis to keep these features, if they marry out then appearances will change.*"

Despite his acknowledgement of the racial bias in his opinion, it did not change his view. His daughters attend local South African schools and universities, and would like to marry into different races. Moosa told them he will not allow it. The only three race groups they marry into are; Somali, Indian or Arab. He emphasised if the individual is a local black he will refuse, even if the person is a Muslim. Looking at the lead researcher who was Indian, he added, "*You as well, your father won't want you marrying anyone who is not Indian.*"

His strong bias is clear and feels it is validated by others feeling the same way. A shared religion on this matter does not guarantee a removal of personal prejudice and racism.



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### 3.2.4. Fostering Integration

*“Somalis are revered by local Muslims because of their adherence to Islam and are seen as a welcome addition to the local community. However, much work needs to be done before Somalis are truly integrated as racism still exists among South African Muslims- as it does in other communities. The real challenge is that the Muslim community needs to go beyond the rhetoric and do a lot more for Somali integration. We still have to come to terms with our own humanity and lack thereof.”<sup>22</sup>*

– Cassiem Khan, Country Director of Islamic Relief

It was unanimous that integration still needs to be worked at, participants were asked for their opinions on how to better achieve this. Many drew on the role of the community over the government and the negative perception locals hold towards foreigners.

Mosques have played an integral role in integration thus far, but interaction was limited to prayer times. Outside the masjid, there was very little interaction taking place.

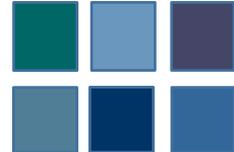
Yusuf drew on the role of the ulema in fostering integration. He feels real effort is only being made by younger people and activists. *“The Moulanas (religious leaders) could bring people together, have the khutbahs about us (Somalis) instead of other countries...let’s have our khutbahs about Mayfair and how we live together”...“let’s talk about neighbours and how the Prophet emphasised their rights.”*

Imraan does not think the Somali community is making a considerable effort to integrate in both the townships and Mayfair. He also draws on notions and stereotypes that each community has brought with them from their countries of origin (both Somali and Indian ideologies) which could create barriers. He too referred to the role of the *ulema (religious leaders)* to address such issues bringing about a greater awareness.

This begs the question, Somalis deeply desire to feel accepted as equals by the local Indians, but regard other Africans as inferior. This includes Malawians, Ethiopians, Zimbabweans, Nigerians as well as local black South Africans. However, successful integration and harmony in Mayfair and South Africa, requires integration across groups– not only a selected few - which may reinforce or create new barriers to integration.

## 4. International Views

International Relations is a branch of political science concerned with relations between nations and foreign policies. Diplomatic relations and bilateralism are essential for political, cultural and economic relations between nations. The nature of the relations between sovereign states may result in numerous advantages or disadvantages for its respective populations



The life of an immigrant can be greatly influenced in this regard. International opinions of Somalia and South Africa were included as a subtopic with focus for a future study. International views on a ground level are a necessary factor for understanding migration choices and behaviors.

#### 4.1. Somali Views of South Africa

*“South Africa is a very good place, actually it’s the best place on earth, and (for Muslims) better than Somalia because here there is tabligh and there aren’t many problems even though the Muslim population is only 2% they stay in harmony. They have no problem with the non- Muslims and no problem with the government, they can speak freely, even challenge the government without worrying about being arrested.”-*

Mohamed

South Africa is a popular migration choice for a number of reasons. Some major deterrents are crime and xenophobic attacks. From the five Somali Muslims interviewed as well as casual conversations with many other migrants, all expressed a liking towards South Africa. Four out of the five participants do not have plans to migrate back to Somalia or any other country. They consider South Africa their home and would only consider leaving should the state of the country deteriorate. Mohamed said he plans to leave South Africa and head to Kenya to join the rest of his family.

Yusuf, like many others, refers to Mayfair and South Africa as home. He pays tribute to the Muslims who first arrived in South Africa and laid a good foundation for future Muslims living here. Apart from the generous nature of South African Muslims, he too feels “it is the best place for Muslims to live in the world”. Friends of his who have migrated to Arab countries say they do not feel welcome and prefer South Africa. Now residing in Mayfair, Yusuf still maintains good relations with friends of his in Eastern Cape and Western Cape, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

Yusuf also met with former President Jacob Zuma during his first term of office after one of the xenophobic attacks in Gauteng. He feels the state of South Africa’s government can change for the better as presidents change with time with the aspiration of running for a political seat himself. As long as the government is not targeting Muslims he says, things are okay.

Ibrahim’s experience of South Africa over the past decade has caused him to believe the country is not as bad as is portrayed by the media. He admits xenophobia is prevalent but he expected worse. Corruption is a legitimate concern for any migrant seeking refuge in South Africa. On paper, South African policy is sophisticated with all necessary documents signed for the protection of refugees<sup>23</sup>. Unlike other countries, South Africa does not have a refugee camp. They are entitled to work, study, receive medical treatment and live where they want to. This freedom makes South Africa particular attractive for Somali refugees who seek to re-establish themselves and prefer being self-sufficient.



However, between law and practice of the state there is a yawning gulf. Foreigners, documented or not, are turned away at hospitals, public schools, and suffer direct and indirect discrimination in every sphere, including amongst communities whom they share the same religion with.

Across the country, migrants are among the softest targets for corrupt government officials. The unfortunate reality is that every state agency tasked with dealing with foreigners is riddled in corruption.<sup>24</sup>

#### **4.2. Reverse Case Scenario**

Each interview ended by asking their opinion on a reverse based scenario:

*If you are in Somalia and South African Indian Muslims arrived seeking refuge, how do you think you would feel about this and what action would you take towards them?*

All five respondents did not hesitate in saying they would be welcomed. Mohamed mentioned despite a few experiences of discrimination, he has not allowed it to negatively influence his opinion of South Africans, especially Muslims. Most mentioned they would treat South African Muslims as their own brothers and accept them. Moosa, a business owner, said there may be a possibility of business competition as is the case irrespective of nationality, location or religion. However, he feels it would be better than it is in South Africa without any fear of xenophobia. He believes this is because of their series of struggles and misfortunes, may be more empathetic to any Muslim migrant seeking a better life with them. Their religious consciousness guides their thinking and interactions, especially amongst Muslims.

#### **5. Conclusion**

*“The same religion, Islam that is what’s keeping us together. If the religion was not there we could not live peacefully together. The only thing restraining us and helping us live with each other is Islam. Because you know at the end of the day, even if this person is a racist or is a bad person, he is a Muslim. At the mosque, we can stand side by side. No one can say, ‘Oh you Somalis you stand one side, and Indians another’.” – Yusuf (Personal Interview)*

This occasional paper, which emanated from a dissertation briefly explored Islam as a shared religion amongst two diverse groups, Somalis and South African Indians, and its role in influencing migration choices, integration and international views. A common religion between migrants and hosts is only one variable for migrants to factor into their life decisions when leaving home. The extent of how important this factor is and how it continues to affect their lives once migrating was discussed with Somalis living in Mayfair.



The study proposed a baseline model for understanding this research, and the need for it by comparing the topic at hand to a parallel in Islamic history: The Hijrah. The Somalis view themselves as seeking refuge with the Muslims in Mayfair (South Africa). The relationship established between the *Ansaar and Muhajireen* was one of mutual co-existence and understanding. The latter were welcomed into *Madinah* and assisted in the early stages in every way. However, the *Muhajireen* did not abuse this hospitality and sought to use it only as a spring board to build them up. From the beginning, the *Ansaar and Muhajireen* were brothers to one another on the basis of a shared religion with all its joys, difficulties and contradictions.

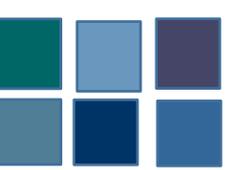
The journey of a Somali refugee is often characterized by struggles to establish themselves in different communities and lands. Throughout, their choices are governed by religion; freedom to practice Islam, access to mosques, prayer times, *halaal* food, *madressas* and Muslims for social interaction.

Mayfair was chosen by Somalis because of the Indian Muslim community and the benefits that came with it. Unlike other migrant groups, religion is a major factor for determining the migration choices of Somalis. Mosques were conveniently located, *halaal* food accessible and economic opportunities available, especially for an entrepreneur. Mayfair has generally been safe from xenophobic attacks and served as a place of refuge for many Somalis targeted in townships and other areas. Somalis living in Mayfair were no exception from being victims of crime. However, their strong solidarity to remain together for protection has created a safe community zone, only found on 8th avenue.

Shaffer's<sup>25</sup> in-depth dissertation in 2012 on the Somali Mayfair community concluded Somalis are living in a hostile country that is not their own and does not embrace foreigners. This coupled with a misunderstanding of cultural dissimilarities, and the perception that Somalis take jobs away from South Africans further complicates the relationship between South Africans and Somalis.

Initially, Somalis thought they may integrate with local, black South Africans in the townships because they share an identity of being African. Instead they were not welcomed and treated as being foreign. With Indians, in Mayfair, they were able to integrate better because of a shared religion. Integration has been achieved to a certain extent between Somalis and local Muslims in Mayfair. The Somali community appreciates the immense assistance received from the local Indian Muslims and acknowledges this primary factor enabled them to reside in Mayfair.

The research indicates that full integration is being hindered by a number of issues which require dialogue and understanding from both sides. There is a general perception of local Indians being distrusting of foreigners and regarding themselves as superior to migrants, regardless of race or religion. In turn, Somalis view Indians as racists who will never accept them as equal counterparts. Stereotypes and underlying



bias feature during confrontations fueling these beliefs. Many Somalis believe by being on the receiving end, they will remain dependent and thus inferior. As Moosa stated, “*Indians do not need Somalis, but Somalis need the Indians*”. As a Somali, honour is integral to their identity. They do not want to be seen as dependents, but rather independent or depended on.

Somalis, especially the women, are perceived as socially reserved preferring the company of their own community. The language barrier and lack of effort to integrate by migrants compound this issue.

Furthermore, the local religious, social and media platforms are not being used to its full potential to foster integration between local and migrant Muslims. Integration is needed outside the mosques, in schools, community events, businesses, and social interactions. 8th Avenue in Mayfair has already reached full capacity. The Somali community is increasing every year with many having children born and raised in South Africa in addition to new migrants still arriving. This new generation will be the first Somali-South African-Muslims and form part of the local Muslims of South Africa and nationwide labour force, which will make for further study useful on South Africa’s goal of social cohesion.

The Mayfair community, with effort and effective strategies for integration, can serve possibly as a model example for integration between migrants and locals in South Africa and other countries, notably in the context of emerging migrant Muslim communities. Thus far, relationships established between the Somali and Indian communities in South Africa have positively influenced views of each other’s countries respectively.

This paper was limited to a few male participants only. Suggestions for further research on this topic are to increase the number of participants, including females, and a comparative analysis interviewing Indians from Mayfair

In conclusion, a shared religion influences migration choices, integration and international relations. Human beings gravitate towards that which they are familiar. Muslims, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, social status or any other differentiating factor may unite on the basis of a shared religion. Islamic teachings focus on the spirit of oneness, *Tawhid* and ‘diversity in unity’.



## **Appendix A: Scope of Interviews**

### **Interview: Semi-structured Interviews and Face-to-face surveys**

Semi-structured interviews were used to inquire about participant's reasons for migration, religious activities since migrating, integration with locals and perceived social barriers, and international views. Permission was requested from each individual to audio record the interview before commencing. The following questions guided the interviews:

#### **Demographic Data**

1. Name
2. Gender
3. Religion of Practice
4. Place/Country of Birth
5. Current occupation

#### **Migration (Islamigration):**

1. How long have you been living in South Africa?
2. Why did you leave Somalia?
3. Why did you choose to come to South Africa?
4. Please describe your experience the first time you entered SA
5. As a Muslim, has it been easier for you moving to an area like Mayfair which is predominantly Muslim?
6. Do you intend on staying in Mayfair or moving? Why?
7. What is your experience as a Muslim migrant in JHB? What do you like/dislike?

#### **Perceived Social Barriers to Integration:**

1. Since coming to SA, has it been easy to openly practice Islam?
2. Do you have access to all religious services? (madressas/mosques/burial services etc)
3. Do you often interact with SA Muslims? What is your opinion about them?
4. Do you have any SA Muslim neighbours? If so, please describe your relationship with them
5. How has the local Indian Muslim community helped Somali Muslim migrants?



6. In your opinion, do Somalis make an effort to integrate & interact with SA Muslims?
7. Have you had any negative experiences with local Muslims or other migrants?
8. What is your opinion on Somali Muslims marrying local Muslims?
9. Are you able to approach local Islamic organisations if you require assistance?
10. How are Somalis in financial difficulty helped by the Muslim community?
11. What do you think will help Somali Muslims better integrate with local Muslims & South Africans in general?

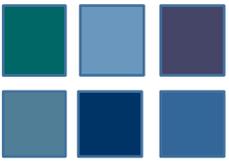
**International Views:**

1. What is your view of SA as a country for Muslims to live in?
2. What is your view of Somalia as a country for Muslims to live in?
3. Do you feel a sense of brotherhood with South African Muslims because of Islam?
4. If you were in Somalia and Muslims from South Africa arrived seeking refuge, how do you think you would feel about this and what action would you take towards them?
5. What is your opinion of the SA government?
6. Do you intend returning to Somalia in the future?



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