



**Arab Muslim Immigrant Women in Iceland outside the capital
area**

Immigration experiences and future expectations

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**Félagsvísindadeild
Hug- og félagsvísindasvið
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Abstract

The present study explored the perceptions and the experiences of Arab Muslim immigrant women who immigrated from Arabic countries to live in Iceland outside the capital area. The focus of this study was on the main challenges and obstacles faced by Arab Muslim immigrant women and how these affected their adaptation into Icelandic society. This study investigated how these women identified themselves and how the new environment and the social and cultural values contributed to their integration process in Iceland outside the capital area. The method applied consisted of semi structured in-depth interviews. Nine interviews were carried out with nine Arab Muslim immigrant women aged between 18 and 70 who live in Iceland outside the capital area. Grounded theory approach was used to analyse the data. The findings indicated that these women's religion played a component role in the experience of immigration and the adaptation process. The findings also suggested that the women's experiences were effected by other factors such as the cultural differences and the support of the local community which impact the development and maintenance of the women's identity. Children's schooling and education had also had an effect on the women's life in Iceland. The analysis suggested that there is a lack of knowledge about the women's culture and religion which causes misunderstanding or confusion about their Islamic outfit and some of their acts and behaviors.

I dedicate this master's thesis project to my father Abdulrahman Nouh and my mother Maha Alhamwi for their unconditional love and the encouragement to pursue my life dreams. Also to my husband Ibrahim Alkhatib and my children Jana, Farouq and Abdulrahman for their endless love, patience and loving support to achieve my academic goals and interests.

Preface

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1. Introduction

Aims and Objectives

In the last several decades, the population of immigrants increased greatly around the world including Iceland. In other words, as a result of major political and social changes worldwide, a big number of immigrants have had to move to another country through choice or necessity. As a result of wars, conflicts and the unstable political situation in the Arab world, the number of Arab immigrants and refugees has increased rapidly in the last few decades. Economics and the low economic standards in most Arab countries is another reason why Arabs to immigrate to a new country (The World Bank, 2017). Arab immigrants may come from different countries but most of them share a Muslim religion.

Iceland is home to immigrants from different cultural backgrounds such as Arabs, Asians, Africans and other ethnic groups. These ethnic groups are diverse in terms of their religious beliefs, cultural backgrounds, traditions, norms and cultural values such as family values and gender roles values (Kiss, 2005). In Iceland the majority of immigrants live in Reykjavík and its surroundings (Statistic Iceland, 2020). Small cities in Iceland are still more homogeneous and less multicultural which make ethnic groups such as Muslims more visible and easy to be recognized. For example, in Akureyri which is the largest urban area in the North of Iceland, the

arrival of the first Syrian refugee women in 2016 has changed the face of immigration in Akureyri; perhaps the most visible symbol of this change is having women wearing headscarves (Hijab).

At this time no research has been done on this topic in Iceland, so as an Arab Muslim immigrant woman in Iceland myself, I decided to conduct this research on Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland because there is a strong need for more understanding of them. Arab Muslim immigrant women in this research are defined as women who have immigrated to Iceland and live outside the capital area, who are Muslim and who grew up in Arab countries. The women in this study are a mixed group. Some are refugee women and some are immigrant women who came to Iceland for family reunion or to study. The aim of this research is to map the experiences of the Arab Muslim immigrant women: their difficulties and obstacles, which are the most positive things, and their experiences of attitudes. The focus of this study is on the main social and cultural challenges that faced by Arab Muslim immigrant women in the new Icelandic country and its effect on their adaptation. In addition, how these women identified themselves and how the new environment and the social and cultural values contributed to their integration process in Iceland outside the capital area.

Arab Muslim immigrant women and girls are likely to experience difficulties and challenges within their immigration experiences to western societies (Ólafsdóttir, 2017). “As people from different cultural groups take on the exciting challenge of working together, cultural values sometimes conflict. We can misunderstand each other, and react in ways that can hinder what are otherwise

promising partnerships. Oftentimes, we aren't aware that culture is acting upon us. Sometimes, we are not even aware that we have cultural values or assumptions that are different from others” (Kiss, 2005: 215). Arab Muslims have different religious and cultural backgrounds from the Icelandic western host society which influence their immigration experiences and their integration into this society. Different individuals have various migratory experiences and they use different strategies to adapt to a very different culture, while most of them wish to maintain the traditions, cultural values and norms that they value most from their homeland (Berry, 2005, Kiss, 2005, Kim, 2017). Various other factors such as the language, social life and the new society’s acceptance of minority groups with their different religion and culture have its effect on immigrants’ lives and their adaptation in the host society (Duderija, 2007, Erel, 2009).

The intention of this research is to gain insights into the Arab Muslim immigrant women’s post-immigration experiences, the social and cultural challenges Arab Muslim immigrant women face in Iceland, to explore how Arab Muslim women perceive themselves and their arrival in Iceland, and how they deal with conflicting norms and values between home and host societies. Understanding the women’s difficulties and cultural challenges will help to reveal the factors contributing to the successful integration and adaptation of Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland, Moreover, better understanding of the factors leading to satisfaction for Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland will provide useful and important information for the hosting communities wishing to give Arab Muslim immigrant women a voice and help them to integrate.

The present research will endeavour to understand the experiences of female Arab Muslim immigrants in Iceland, and will provide the Icelandic community with a better insight into their culture and traditions to help the women to integrate more easily so that they can contribute more to Icelandic society.

Structure of thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter throws light on the basic information underlying the study work. It introduces and describes the objectives and the main purpose of the study. It gives a brief introduction and overview of the whole thesis. The second chapter presents general background, cultural background, literature review and theoretical framework which is the base of this study. The third chapter introduces the methodology, the data collection and analyses procedures and methods during fieldwork and ethical issues related to the study. The fourth chapter is the findings of the study. The fifth chapter discusses the findings and their interpretation in the light of literature and theories and the final chapter presents the conclusion which highlights the most important points during this study.

2. Background, cultural background, theoretical framework and literature review

This chapter is written as a guideline to the study. The chapter is divided into three sections, which are:

- (1) 'Background' which gives statistical information about immigrants, refugees and Arabs in Iceland.
- (2) 'Cultural background' is an attempt to understand the cultural background of the studied group in order to comprehend the data collected. The chapter is divided into three sub-sections. The first sub-section presents general information about the Arab world and recent changes in Arab societies. The second sub-section explains the status of women in the Arab world and how the interpretation of Islam influences women's status in the Arab world. The third sub-section explains about the Islamic outfit and its effect on Arab Muslim women lives.
- (3) 'Theoretical framework and literature review' the section is divided into three sub-sections. The first sub-section is the theory on immigration and literature on acculturation and adaptation. It explores why people immigrate to a new society. It also shows Berry's acculturation strategies and how immigrants respond to adaptation stress which might appear in immigrants' life through time. The second sub-section which is Hofstede's cultural dimensions is used to find the cultural differences between the Arab world and Iceland and I choose Syria as the best example in order to understand the group

studied. The third sub-section which is Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland: social and cultural challenged explores the growing number of Muslims in Iceland. It explains the cultural conflict between the Icelandic culture and Arab Muslim immigrant women's own culture. It also presents the social and cultural challenges which appear in Arab Muslim immigrant lives in Iceland. These challenges are related to their identity, their Islamic dress, language, weather, food and their children's schooling.

2.1 Background

Immigrants in Iceland:

Globally, the number of immigrants has grown in recent years, thus it rose from 173 million in 2000 up to 220 million in 2010, and 272 million in 2019 (International Migration Report, 2019). According to the migration report for 2019 the percentage of worldwide immigrants who were women was 48 per cent in 2019. In Europe more than half (51.4 per cent) of international immigrants were women in 2019 (International Migration Report, 2019). Iceland has been affected in recent years by this increase in migration.

The number of immigrants in Iceland increased by over 50% from 2012 to 2019. Figure 1. shows the changes of the percentage of immigrants in the Icelandic population which was less than 2% in 1996 and just below 9% in 2010 while it reached 12.6% in 2018 (Statistic Iceland, 2019-a). In 2019 the percentage of immigrants of the Icelandic population was 14.1% (Statistic Iceland, 2020). The largest group of immigrants in Iceland in 2019 was immigrants from Poland (38.1%) then came immigrants from Lithuania (5.7%) and immigrants from the Philippines (3.9%). The majority of immigrants (more than 63%) live in the capital region (Statistic Iceland, 2020).

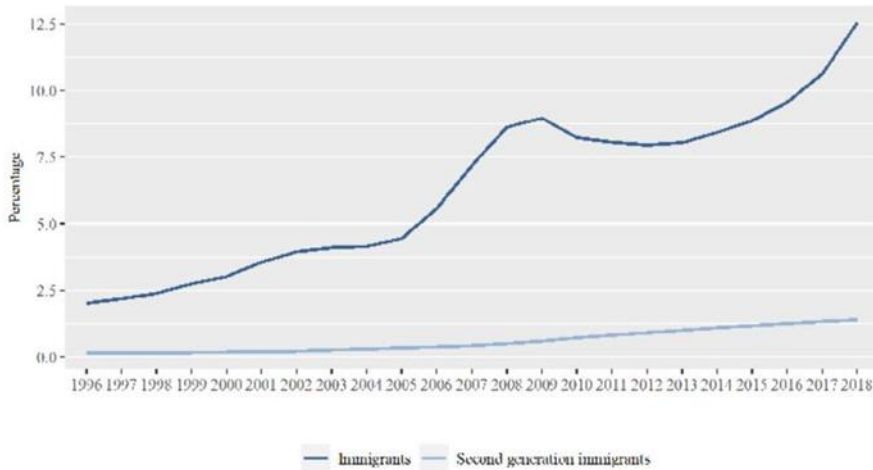


Figure 1. Percentage of immigrants of the Icelandic population 1996-2018 (Statistic Iceland, 2018)

An immigrant is defined as a person who comes to a foreign country to live there (UNHCR, 2018). According to Statistic Iceland an immigrant is a person born abroad with two foreign born parents and four foreign born grandparents (Statistic Iceland, 2019-c). People immigrate to a different country for various reasons (Gomez, 2015, Kim, 2017). Often people immigrate searching for higher income and a better lifestyle and work opportunities. Moreover, some people immigrate looking for higher education for themselves or for their children to increase their success in life (Gomez, 2015, Kim, 2017). Others immigrate to learn about cultures, traditions and languages and some immigrate for political reasons to escape wars and conflicts and are looking for a safe place for themselves and for their families (UNHCR, 2018).

Recently, Europe has also experienced a record flow of asylum seekers and refugees escaping conflicts and violence in Syria and other Muslim countries (Pew Research Center, 2017). According to Eurostat

(2018) the highest number of asylum seeking applicants registered during the fourth quarter of 2018 in Europe was recorded for Syrians (Eurostat, 2018). In Iceland the number of applicants for international protection has also changed from 977 in 2016 up to 1096 in 2017 and down to 800 in 2018 (The directorate of immigration, 2018).

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) refugees are defined as a group of people who are forced to flee their own country because they are at risk of persecution because of conflicts, war and violence. Refugees usually cannot return or are unable to go back home because of that risk (UNHCR, n.d.-a). Moreover, refugees are sometimes categorized as immigrants although they are forced to immigrate while immigrants make a decision to leave their homeland looking for better opportunities and life. However, refugees are protected in international law (UNHCR, 2018). In Iceland in 2007 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs agreed to resettle an annual quota of 25 to 30 refugees. However, as a result of the increased numbers of refugees and displaced people around the world, the Icelandic government announced in 2015 that they would increase the number of resettled refugees annually.

The first group of Syrian refugees resettled by the Icelandic government arrived on the 19th of January 2016 and the second group on the 6th of April the same year, in total 48 persons. The treatment of refugees could be different from other immigrants because they have a special resettlement program which helps and supports them to adjust to the new country. According to the UNHCR Resettlement Handbook (2016 :4) in Iceland “the resettlement program is for one year where

comprehensive support from the local authorities is provided including social services, special support for children at the elementary and kindergarten level and children with special needs are offered necessary services. There is a close cooperation between the social services, the school system and the local health care centers”.

2.1 Cultural background

The Arab World

The Arab World (or as it is called in Arabic Al-watan Al-arabi) is composed of 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa which are: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen (League of Arab States, 2019, Arab Human Development Report, 2010). According to World Bank data, the population of the Arab world is growing very fast. It reached 414.5 million in 2017 of which 60 percent were under 25 years of age (The World Bank, 2017). The official language in Arab countries is Arabic. However, some countries have another official language in addition to Arabic including Somali in Somalia, French in Djibouti, Comorian in Comoros and Kurdish in Iraq (Ethnologue, 2019). In addition, the Arab world is home to other ethnic groups such as Kurds in Syria and Iraq (Taucher, Vogl and Webinger, 2015) and Berber in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt (Michell, 2011). Moreover, small numbers of Turkmen, Assyrians/Syriacs, Armenians and others also live in the Arab world. Some of these ethnic groups might not consider

themselves as a part of the Arab world for example Kurds who were struggling to be an independent state years ago.

The majority of people in the Arab world are Muslims but there are also Christians and Jews (Pew Research Center, 2010). Arab society has developed and changed over the last three decades and is influenced by economic, social and political factors (Haj-Yahia, 2002, Pfeifer, Posusney, 2003, Arab Human Development Report, 2010). As a whole, the Arab countries achieved modest GDP growth, although these have not emulated the fast growth of populations (The World Bank, 2013). Moreover, since 1970, countries from the Arab world recorded the world's fastest progress in human development like Algeria, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia (Arab Human Development Report, 2013). Additionally, development in each Arab country was unique and was affected by its economy (Pfeifer, Posusney, 2003). High income countries such as Gulf states developed faster than middle income countries like Syria and low income countries such as Sudan (The World Bank, 2013).

Economic development in Arab countries has increased employment opportunities in large cities, and Arab societies have experienced a large movement from rural to urban areas where people look for a more modern lifestyle, education as a way to take part in the modern society, improved services and employment far removed from traditional farming jobs (Arab Human Development Report, 2010). People have also migrated to the richer Arab countries or to Europe for the same reasons (Arab Human Development Report, 2010). The increase of population in large cities has presented challenges to governments who needed to create new opportunities and provide

services for people. This has possibly affected economic growth (Arab Human Development Report, 2010).

Moreover, Arab societies are influenced by global technological development, the internet and social media which has increased communication with Western societies (Pfeifer, Posusney, 2003, Sakr, 2011). In addition, it has caused big social changes related to values and norms of “equality, freedom, patriarchy, mutual respect, individualism and other values” which has influenced “the social practices and structures related to family, gender roles and women’s work and functions” (Sabban, Mohamad, 2014: 21). Even though the majority of people in the Arab world are Muslim and there are many values and traditions common to Arab countries they are not a single culture. The different interpretation of Islam in each country has influenced social practices and structures related to family and women. The next section will explain the status of women in Arab Muslim societies and in order to understand the social and cultural challenges that face the Arab Muslim immigrant women who live in Iceland outside the capital area and which is the focus of this study.

The status of women in Arab Muslim countries

The social and economic changes in Arab Muslim countries as explained above have influenced the status of women in Arab Muslim societies (Salem, 2010, Momani, 2016). In fact, throughout the last three decades the number of Arab Muslim women who are more active in politics, education and the labor market has increased (United Nations Development Program, 2019). However, women in Arab Muslim societies are still less active than women in other regions

(United Nations Development Program, 2019). In many Arab Muslim countries, education for girls in particular is seen to be necessary and as a way to follow global development (Ottaway, 2004, Salem, 2010, Momani, 2016). The proportion of female enrolment in tertiary education in 2016 was very high in many Arab Muslim countries and sometimes higher than males (Arab development portal, 2018).

Girls primary and secondary enrolment rate have more than doubled especially in rich Arabic countries like the Gulf states, particularly after the oil boom. These countries launched programs of development in all field, especially in the education field (Arab development portal, 2018). In addition, Arab Muslim women see education as a key to taking part in society outside the home and to be more independent (Valentine M, 2004, Sidani, 2005, Momani, 2016). However, Arab Muslim women participation in the labor market is still low compared to other regions (Momani, 2016, Pew Research Center, 2016, Arab development portal, 2018). This might be because women in Arab Muslim countries like many women around the world face difficulty balancing work and family life (World Bank, 2013 Momani, 2016).

According to the Middle East and Northern Africa -development report: *Opening Doors Gender Equality and Development in the Middle East and North Africa* the limitations on social, economic and political practices of Arab Muslim women are related to the social and cultural customs and norms which are inherent in the Arab world. In addition, the interpretation of gender roles laid out in Islam which is varied between Arab Muslim countries influence the state of Arab Muslim women in the Arab world (World Bank, 2013, Pew Research Center, 2018).

In Arab Muslim countries most women are raised in an environment of gender inequality that limits their participation in decision making in almost all public and private aspects of life (Doumato, Posusney, 2003, Valentine, 2004, Predelli, 2004, Driss, 2014). In addition, Arab Muslim societies are mostly considered to be a patriarchal culture. The traditional patriarchal system in most Arab Muslim societies imposes itself at all levels. Under this system which is built upon a hierarchy of roles and authorities, men prioritize and have power over women. The hierarchy of roles and authorities in patriarchal societies is also reflected in the power of the old over the young, the rich over the poor, and the majority over minorities (Mooij, Hofstede, 2010).

In Arab Muslim societies, under this patriarchal system, Arab Muslim women and girls are often expected to obey their male relatives (for example their husband, father and brothers) to be good wives, daughters and mothers and also to protect the family honor which is very important in these societies (Doumato, Posusney, 2003). In other words, in most Arab Muslim societies, traditionally, men have the authority over women's lives and decisions. Arab Muslim men in most Arab Muslim societies control and restrict women's decisions regarding for example education, work force participation and sometimes the choice of a husband (Doumato, Posusney, 2003). These prejudiced practices against the women in Arab Muslim societies do not come from their religion itself (as most non-Muslim believe), but are part of local cultural traditions (Nawal El Saadawi, 2015).

In Islam, women are as important as men. They have equal rights, roles and responsibilities although their rights, roles and responsibilities are not identical (Ashour, 2005, Würth, 2008, Bajelan,

2017). Men and women have varying but important roles in the Muslim society (Predelli, 2004, Driss, 2014). In fact, these roles do not mean that men are better than women or the opposite. Some Islamic scholars justified the different roles and responsibilities for men and women with arguments that the different responsibilities of men and women in Muslim societies is because they are naturally different (Ashour, 2005, Würth, 2008, Bajelan, 2017). These Islamic scholars claimed that men and women are different in terms of innate composition.

Each gender has diverse needs, emotions and mental and physical abilities which enable each one of them to perform their roles in life (Würth, 2008, Bajelan, 2017). However, their inherent differences are complementary (Ashour, 2005, Bajelan, 2017). The interpretation of the idea of complementarity in the majority of Arab Muslim societies probably led to the traditional idea that men are responsible for household expenses and protecting the family whilst women's responsibilities are within their homes, doing housework and raising children (Doumato, Posusney, 2003, Predelli, 2004, Driss, 2014). However, nowhere in Quran (the central religious text of Islam) or Sunnah (the prophet Mohammad's traditions, sayings and teachings) is it mentioned that the women's responsibilities are inside the home. In some Arab Muslim societies especially in rural areas women are denied an education, work and the ability to make decisions without their male relative's approval while Islam insists on empowering women in education and gives them the rights to make their life decisions and to be independent (Nawal El Saadawi, 2015).

The traditional roles of Arab Muslim women inside their homes might be similar in most Arab Muslim countries but their social practices are influenced by the local traditions and norms which differ between Arab Muslim countries (Doumato, Posusney, 2003, World Bank, 2013). The social status of women in Syria is the best example in order to understand the group studied in this research. In Syria, as in many Arab Muslim countries the social and cultural norms play a very big role in affecting women's lives and their social practices (Cultural orientation resource center, 2014).

Traditionally, women and girls in Syria enjoy less freedom than men and boys because they are considered as a source of honor and they should be protected in order to protect the family's reputation (Cultural orientation resource center, 2014, Habib, 2018). In Arab Muslim societies family is the center of honor, loyalty and reputation. The head of the Arabic family are always males. In general, the main roles of most women in Syria are inside their houses doing domestic work and caring for children. Girls are expected to help their mothers inside the house (Cultural orientation resource center, 2014). However, women's roles are influenced by the economic and education level of their families and women's roles in Syria vary between rural and urban areas (Habib, 2018).

In fact, high class and urban educated families usually support girls' and boys' education and employment equally (Olimat, 2013, Cultural orientation resource center, 2014). Women in these groups work outside the home and "can be found in a wide range of professions, including medicine (at all levels), office work, government service, education, laboratory work, computer science, and social work"

(Cultural orientation resource center, 2014:6). Usually these women employ a woman to do the domestic work and to look after their children when they are not home. While in middle class and rural families, women are less educated and only a few of them work outside the home in order to be financially independent and to support the family (Olimat, 2013). However, their roles inside the home don't change and very few men help women doing the housework or raising the children. Women have to balance work and family life which can be difficult if she has young children. This can restrict women's participation in the labor market (Cultural orientation resource center, 2014). Moreover, girls in semi urban and rural areas in Syria marry younger than in urban areas where most educated girls get married after finishing study at university. In rural areas women and girls may also work for the family in unpaid agricultural employment (Cultural orientation resource center, 2014).

The roles of women in Syria have changed since the Syrian conflict began in 2011 (UNHCR, n.d.-b). The traditional roles of working within the home are still the same but many women had to work outside the home because they lost their men who were responsible for the household expenses. Some girls left the education system because they had to work in order to help their families (UNHCR, n.d.-b). In addition, many families moved to safer places within or outside Syria. Locations outside Syria include neighboring countries like Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey but also Europe and other western societies (UNHCR, n.d.-b). One important aspect of women's behavior inside and outside the home is that of appropriate clothing.

Arab Muslim women's Islamic dress code

Arab Muslim women's outfit in the Arab world varies between countries. Arab Muslim women's outfit is related to the local traditions and to the interpretation of Islam (Sadatmoosavi, Shokouhi, 2011).

However, the majority of Arab Muslim women wear hijab. The word hijab has several meanings like cover, screen and curtain and it means in English the veil or headscarf. Hijab is defined in Merriam-Webster dictionary as "the traditional covering for the hair and neck that is worn by Muslim women". In fact, there are different interpretations of Islam regarding the Islamic outfit for Muslim women. Some Muslim sheikhs and scholars explained that hijab for Muslim women must cover the whole body including the face while others said that hijab must cover the whole body except face, hands and feet (Memon, 1992, Aziz, 2010, Sadatmoosavi, Shokouhi, 2011).

In general, The Islamic dress should not be too thin, too tight or too colorful. Muslim women Islamic outfit should not be attractive to the opposite sex (Memon, 1992). Muslim girls are expected to wear hijab when they reach puberty (Aziz, 2010). Why do Muslim women wear hijab? In fact, according to Islamic teaching, Muslim women should wear headscarves (hijab) to obey God, and to be identified as Muslim respectable women with a good moral character and full of dignity (Memon, 1992, Aziz, 2010, Sadatmoosavi, Shokouhi, 2011, Akhter, Munir, 2017). "This is more appropriate so that they may be known [as Muslim women] and thus not be harassed [or molested]." (Quran 33:59).

However, not all Muslim women know the real purpose behind wearing the headscarf. Many Muslim women wear headscarves

because of culture and traditions and the social environment that they live in while other Muslim women wear hijab because they believe that women who wear it are more respected in Muslim societies (Ouazzif, 2007, Sadatmoosavi, Shokouhi, 2011). In fact, there are different views regarding Muslim women's Islamic outfit (Aziz, 2010). One suggests that Muslim women protect themselves and their privacy by wearing the Islamic outfit while another one suggests that Muslim women are required to seem invisible and passive (Aziz, 2010, Akhter, Munir, 2017).

In Arab Muslim countries the majority of women wear hijab without covering the face. However, the style of the Islamic outfit could be different between Arab Muslim countries (Istizada, n.d). For example, in Saudi Arabia Muslim and non-Muslim women have to wear Abaya which is "a loose unadorned black robe that covers the feet" when they are in public places. In addition, many Muslim women cover their faces (Aziz, 2010). While in Yemen and in Bedouin society in Kuwait women have to cover their hair and bodies because it is highly socially expected (Istizada, n.d).

In many other urban areas like Syria, Egypt and Lebanon women have the choice to wear what they want. In Syria which is a very diverse conservative society, older women, especially in semi urban and rural areas, prefer to keep their traditional costume while young girls follow the modern style of western clothing (Istizada, n.d). The diversity in the Syrian society is reflected by the varying styles of hijab between women. Muslim women may wear jeans or a long skirt with a long sleeved tunic and a hijab. Many different styles and colors of hijab are available. Others may wear Abaya and very few cover the

face. In addition, the diversity of the Syrian society is shown by the number of Muslim women in Syria who choose not to wear a headscarf.

2.2 Theoretical framework and literature review

Immigration, acculturation, adaptation

Immigration is “the international movement of people into a destination country of which they are not natives or where they do not possess citizenship in order to settle or reside there, especially as permanent residents or naturalized citizens, or to take up employment as a migrant worker or temporarily as a foreign worker” (Oxford dictionaries, n.d., Merriam-Webster, n.d). The experience of immigration to a new country varies between individuals and it changes immigrants’ lives in different ways (Erel, 2010).

Each immigrant has his/her unique immigration story. In addition, every immigrant goes through an immigration process in which each of them creates a special internal process to face the external changes in their lives (Erel, 2010). Immigration experiences start when people take their decision to move to a destination country in order to settle there (Erel, 2010). Some immigrants have high expectations and hopes in the new country. Others have mixed feelings between excitement to the new life and the anxiety about the unclear future. The immigration process involves adaptation to the new environment and relationships in the new society (Lin & Hung, 2007). Adaptation to the new environment is different between immigrants and related to their age, gender, ethnicity, cultural and religious background, education, the purpose behind immigration and their willingness to immigrate (Berry, 2005, Erel, 2010, Kim, 2017).

The transnational theory is one approach that tries to explain migration and it suggests that “individuals migrate to where they have social connections, cultural similarities or chances for better economic opportunities” (Gomez, 2015: 15). Many immigrants prefer to immigrate to a society which is similar culturally to their society because they may feel higher self-respect in a society that is not so different from his or her own society (Van Oudenhoven, et al. 1996, Gomez, 2015).

Migration to a different social and cultural environment can be challenging for immigrants and can affect their feeling of belonging (Erel, 2010, Kim, 2017). The different social and cultural environment is often more challenging for people who immigrate involuntarily for example refugees who often have experienced many difficult things in their home countries like war, violent or persecution before they immigrate. In many cases, the challenges resulting from migration is related to traditions and habits, cultural differences, language, and climate (Erel, 2010, Kim, 2017).

In general, when people immigrate to a new country, they bring with them their social and cultural capital which means their language, skills, education, behavior, habits, traditions and experiences (Erel, 2010). Thus, when immigrants try to adjust to the different social and cultural environment the process of acculturation may occur (Berry, 2005). Acculturation is defined as “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry, 2005: 698).

Moreover, the acculturation process is related to two basic issues which challenge individuals and groups (Berry, 1997, Berry, 2005). The first issue is the extent of maintaining one's heritage, culture and identity. The second issue is the extent of contact with and participation in the larger society and with other ethno cultural groups (Berry, 1997, Berry, 2005). According to Berry (2005) acculturation has four strategies (figure 2.) which cope with these two issues and they explain the different ways of adaptation to the new culture and environment. These strategies are: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization (Berry, 2005).

The first strategy which is assimilation occurs when immigrants reject their own cultural identity and accept the host society's culture with its values and beliefs (Berry, 1997, Berry, 2005). For example, in the case of Arab Muslim women who immigrate to Iceland assimilation may occur by rejecting their culture's values which limit and control their decisions and give men the authority over their lives while at the same time, they accept Icelandic cultural values which give women control over their lives and decisions. The second strategy which is integration occurs when immigrants prefer to keep their own cultural identity but, at the same time, accept the host society's culture (Berry, 1997, Berry, 2005, Bereza, 2010). For example, in the case of Arab Muslim women who immigrate to Iceland integration may occur by keeping their culture's values but accepting Icelandic cultural values by being more independent while, at the same time discussing their opinions with male relatives and respecting their views. The third strategy which is separation occurs when immigrants choose to keep strictly to their culture's values while rejecting and avoiding

interaction with the host society's cultural values and beliefs (Berry, 1997, Berry, 2005).

This separation strategy may make immigrants feel lonely and they may also feel a loss of identity value (Bereza, 2010). For example, the separation strategy may occur in the case of Arab Muslim women immigrants in Iceland when they accept obedience to male relatives without any influence on their decisions. The separation strategy appears also when Arab Muslim women in Iceland want to work, study or integrate into the social life and activities but they choose not to do that because their male relatives did not accept it. Arab Muslim women in this strategy adhere to their culture and traditions which give men the authority over the women decisions as explained above. The last strategy which is marginalization occurs when immigrants reject their own and the host society's culture (Berry, 1997, Berry, 2005). For example, in the case of Arab Muslim women immigrants in Iceland marginalization occurs when they reject their original culture which limits their freedom while at the same time they reject the Icelandic culture which gives women control over their live.

ISSUE 1:

MAINTENANCE OF HERITAGE CULTURE AND IDENTITY

ISSUE 2:

RELATIONSHIPS

SOUGHT

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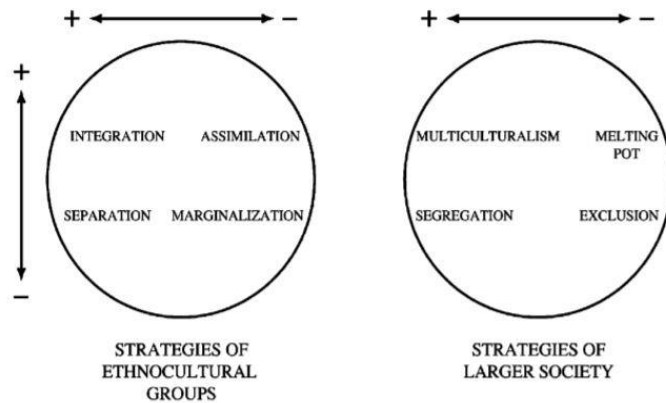


Figure 2. “Four acculturation strategies based upon two issues, in ethno cultural groups, and the larger society” by Berry (2005:705)

During the acculturation process many problems might appear in immigrants’ life like stress, anxiety, depression and loneliness (Berry, 1997, Berry, 2005, Kim, 2017). The acculturation process might take a long or short time depending on the degree that immigrants maintain their original culture as well as the level of willingness of migration (Berry, 2005). The group studied are either refugees or women who immigrated to Iceland in order to follow their husbands who have been living in Iceland for more than ten years. In both cases Arab Muslim women in this research had little choice about immigration. In the case of the war, violence, conflicts or persecution, refugees mostly accept moving to any safe country looking for a better future and education especially for their children.

Involuntary immigrants are more likely to feel stress which affects their adaptation into the new environment (Kim, 2001, Kim, 2017). However, in many cases this stress leads to a better adaptation in the

long term (Kim, 2001). Kim (2017) emphasizes that the adaption process is not linear but that it rather moves in cycles that he labels as the “draw-back-to-leap” style (Figure 3). When people decide to immigrate to a new society they possibly have high expectations (Kawar, 2004) but when it comes to the reality they may experience many stressful situations related to their culture, values, family, work and study. Immigrants may respond to these stressful situations with withdrawal which often make immigrants activate their adaptation and progress. This strategy can help immigrants to adjust better. In addition, with increased communication in the host society which might have many cultural differences more challenges and stressful experiences might appear in immigrant life but if the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic is activated the movements will lead to a greater adaptation and growth (Kim, 2017).

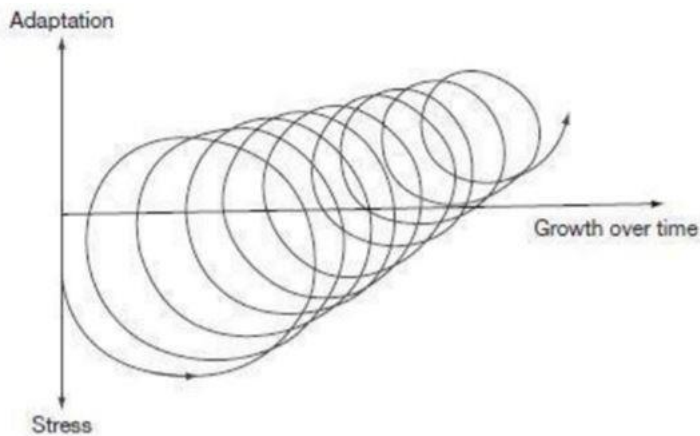


Figure 3. The process of cross-cultural adaptation: the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic (Kim, 2001: 59). Taken from Cross-

Cultural Adaptation: Critical/Cultural Studies, Communication and Culture, International/Global Communication. by Kim, 2017.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions: cultural differences between Syria and Iceland

Acculturation stress in an immigrant's life is due to various factors. One of the main stressful factors is the differences between the immigrants' culture and the host society's culture (Berry, 2005, Kim, 2017). These differences in most cases lead to cultural conflict in the immigrants' life (Berry, 2005, Kim, 2017). When Arab Muslim women move to a Western society many of them face a culture clash between their own culture and the host society's culture because each culture is unique and has its values, norms and traditions. Increasing the understanding of different cultures could lead immigrants to a better adaptation process and decrease acculturation stress. In addition, it gives a better insight into the host society and improves understanding of individual behavior.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions' theory was invented by Geert Hofstede who was an organizational psychologist (Van Vliet, 2009). His cultural dimensions' theory is one of the theories which are used to understand cultures (Mulder, 2009). Hofstede's cultural dimensions are based on cross-cultural communication. The theory explains how a society's culture affects the values of its individuals. It also describes the relations between these values and the society members behavior, "using a structure derived from factor analysis" (Mulder, 2009). The main goal of Hofstede's cultural dimensions' model is to provide information about the differences between cultures so "that they can be

bridged” (Van Vliet, 2009). In order to measure cultural differences between countries Hofstede pointed out six dimensions (Hofstede, 2011). These dimensions are:

1. Power distance, which is the level that members accept and expect of human unequal power distribution;
2. Individualism versus collectivism, which is connected to the integration of members into a certain community;
3. Masculinity versus femininity, related to the division of values and the traditional roles between women and men;
4. Uncertainty avoidance, which is the level of anxiety that appears in a society when its individuals are faced with unknown circumstances;
5. Long Term versus short term orientation, which is the degree of how societies are linked to the past while working in the present and preparing for the future;
6. Indulgence versus restraint, which is defined as “the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses” (Hofstede, 2011).

Figure 4. compares Iceland and Syria⁽¹⁾ which is the best example to understand the studied group. In this study it is good to use the power distance index, individualism/collectivism and masculinity/femininity dimensions. I choose these three dimensions because they help to understand the cultural differences between the group studied and Iceland in order to understand the challenges and changes in Arab

¹ <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/iceland,morocco.syria/>

Muslim immigrants' life in Iceland which help to answer the research questions.

Figure 4. shows that Syria is a large power distance country which means that women accept hierarchical orders and they know that their male relatives have the power over their lives which reflects the inherent inequalities in the society (Hofstede, 2011). In Iceland, which is considered a small power distance country according to the same figure, women and men are equal and they work together as a team. Figure 4. shows also that Syria is a collectivist society. In collectivist societies women have an active social life, they feel they belong and have responsibilities to their nuclear and extended families, whereas Iceland is an individualist society. In individualist societies women look after themselves and their direct family and that might make their social life limited (Hofstede, 2011). Figure 4. also shows Syria as a masculine society. In masculine societies women don't take decisions, they accept their male relatives' decisions without negotiation. While in Iceland which is considered a feminine society women and men solve conflicts through discussion, collaboration and negotiation (Hofstede, 2011).

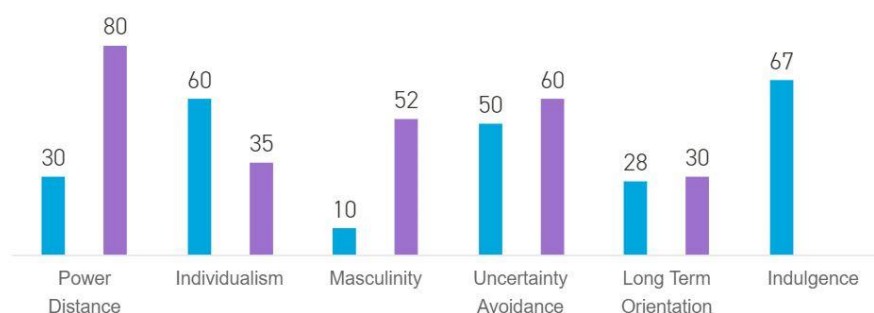


Figure 4. Comparison of Iceland (blue) and Syria (purple). Taken from Hofstede Insights website, Hofstede's National Culture Dimensions (Hofstede Insights, n.d.)

Hofstede's cultural dimensions' model is used to understand the differences between cultures as it highlights the social and cultural challenges that immigrants might face in their new society (Mooij, Hofstede, 2010).

Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland: social and cultural challenges

Recently, the number of Muslim immigrants has increased rapidly around the world. The conflicts and violence in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and other Muslim countries play an important role in determining the number of Muslims in Europe (Pew Research Center, 2017). Muslim population growth in Europe has increased proportionately from 19.5 million (3.8%) in 2010 up to 25.8 million (4.9%) in 2016 (Pew Research Center, 2017). The percentage of all Muslim immigrants (regular immigrants and refugees) between 2010 and 2016 was 53% per cent (Pew Research Center, 2017). Recently, most Muslim immigrants came from different countries like Afghanistan and the Arab Muslim world e.g. Syria, Morocco, Iraq and Sudan (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Iceland has also experienced a growing number of Muslims in recent years. In 1998 the number of Muslims in Iceland was 78 and in 2010 the number of Muslims in Iceland was 591 while in 2018 the number of Muslims reached 1051 (Statistic Iceland, 2019). This number showed only the Muslims who were formally registered in the

Islamic associations but the real number of Muslims in Iceland might be more than 2000 (Seddeeq Muhammad, 2017). The Arabic population in Iceland has also increased. Iceland was home for 342 Arabs in 2010, up to 430 in 2015 and 833 in 2018 (Statistic Iceland, 2019). The majority of Arabs in Iceland in 2018 were from Syria 217 and Morocco 215. The number of Arab immigrant women is 279 while men are 554. The majority of Arabs in Iceland are Muslims and most of them live in the capital area (Statistic Iceland, 2019-b). Two Islamic associations are registered in Iceland and both are located in the capital (Seddeeq Muhammad, 2017).

Compared to other Scandinavian countries the Muslim community in Iceland is small (Seddeeq Muhammad, 2017, S V Kulik et al, 2019). The number of Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland is not known exactly and the studies about Arab Muslim immigrant women and their adaptation are still few because it is a new phenomenon in Iceland.

In recent years Iceland has been considered to be a multicultural society because of the increase of the number of immigrants from different cultural backgrounds (Stefánsdóttir, 2018). According to Statistic Iceland more immigrants live in the capital area than in rural areas like the North, East and West of Iceland (Statistic Iceland, 2019-b) and that makes the capital area in Iceland more multicultural than rural areas (Stefánsdóttir, 2018). Migration to a rural area could be as challenging for Arab Muslim Immigrants as for other ethnic immigrants in Iceland. Generally, an ethnic group shares a core of cultural and traditional roots and values which make some of their

social needs different due to cultural differences between their home country and the host society (Erel, 2009).

In multicultural areas different ethnic immigrants' groups allow members to communicate by for example having regular meetings, having their own cultural practices and places to meet and practice their religion while it could be more difficult to do that in rural areas because of the small number of these immigrants (Stefánsdóttir, 2018). In additions, in big cities when people come from different cultures they tend to represent their own culture by having their own businesses (Erel, 2010). For example, opening restaurants and markets where they can sell and buy their own foods, spices and ingredients. Having ethnic businesses helps immigrants who come from the same cultural background to keep connected to their original culture in the new society. They can meet people from the same background and speak their own language.

In addition, many ethnic immigrants try to keep the connection to their original culture inside the home by following their cultural traditions. For example, cooking their cultural food, speaking their mother language and teaching it to their children, following their religious commitments and beliefs (Erel, 2009). Many studies have shown that even though the social needs of each immigrant are not always the same as their whole ethnical group, most immigrants wish to maintain this core of roots and values (Saroglou, Mathijssen, 2007, Erel, 2009, Aziz, 2010, Erel, 2010, Meyer, 2013, Gomez, 2015, Trililani, 2015, Kim, 2017).

When ethnic immigrants move to a totally different environment many of them face cultural clashes between their own culture and the

new culture because each culture is unique and has its own norms, beliefs and values which affect its individuals' lives (Meyer, 2013, Saroglou, Mathijssen, 2007, Kim, 2017). In Western societies, Arab Muslim women's adaptation to the new society is different between individuals and they have different options to deal with the clash between the two cultures. Arab Muslim women use acculturation strategies to adapt to the conflicts (Berry, 2005, Meyer, 2013, Saroglou, Mathijssen, 2007).

One of the options is to adapt to the new life and culture and integrate into the new society and its values by selecting cultural values and traditions from both cultures. Another is to adhere to one culture with its values and traditions and refuse the other culture's values (Saroglou, Mathijssen, 2007). Integration and assimilation could be one of the best strategies to adapt to the new society (Saroglou, Mathijssen, 2007). In the host society, many Arab Muslim immigrant women want to adapt to the new life. Adaptation to the new life is by being more active in many areas like education or the labor market. They may also wish to be more like others through taking a more active part in the social activities and life of the host society (Barkdull & all, 2011).

Adaptation and using acculturation strategies lead to social and cultural changes in Arab Muslim immigrants lives. These changes appear in their behavior, values and sometimes in their beliefs (Saroglou, Mathijssen, 2007). One of the changes in these women's lives could be in Arab Muslim women's gender roles values (Predelli, 2004, Saroglou, Mathijssen, 2007). When Arab Muslim immigrant women move to Europe women and men are more equal and they

work together inside and outside the home (Jafnréttisstofa, The Center for Gender Equality Iceland, 2017) whereas in the Arab world women are mostly inside the home and their decisions are mostly controlled by men. In time the new different social environment in the new western society can influence the values of gender roles which have strong traditional roots in most Arab Muslim societies.

This influence appears when Arab Muslim women try to find ways to look for or get jobs, start to study and get help from their male relatives within home. For example, in Norway which is culturally similar to the Icelandic culture, Predelli (2004), in her research *Interpreting gender in Islam; A case study of immigrant Muslim women in Oslo, Norway*, described that immigrant Muslim women in Oslo use the flexibility and complexity of Islam to define gender roles and to support their own view and practices like having jobs or to get help in their homes.

Arab Muslim immigrant women can take the decision to work outside the home after discussion with male relatives- both parties respecting the different opinion of the other. Some Arab Muslim women try to get help from their male relative inside the home to conform to the host society. However, when Arab Muslim women are new to the western host societies the majority of them (especially those who grew up in the more closed traditional Arabic societies) usually have no problem continuing their traditional roles inside the home. These women may consider their cultural responsibilities of maintaining the home and looking after their children as a way to maintain one of the important family cultural values which they do

their best to keep especially when they are new in very different society (Erel, 2009).

The effect of the new society's values during the adaptation process on Arab Muslim women and families is different between individuals, depending upon different factors e.g. religiosity, the effect of their own culture and traditions, education and class. However, it is common that the influence of the new society's values appears more in the second generation who grow up and live in the host society (Erel, 2009). People who live in an environment with a strong emphasis on tradition can find it more difficult to changes their roles and values. Immigrants with a more open mind find it easier to accept these changes (Erel, 2009). In addition, the adaptation process for Arab Muslim women in the new society is affected by how flexible they are, how much they want and have to change and also how the host society treats them (Barkdull et al, 2011).

Erel (2010) in his study on immigrant women from Turkey who lived in Germany and Britain: *Migrating cultural capital; Bourdieu in migration studies* discovered that if immigrants are flexible and able to change their cultural capital that makes their integrating process easier. He found that it is difficult for these women to adapt totally to the new culture but women find ways to integrate into the new society.

During the adaptation process many social and cultural challenges appear in Arab Muslim immigrant women's lives. Immigration challenges can be related to religion, language, gender roles, their children's future and their lives in the host society (Erel, 2009, Aziz, 2010, Gomez, 2015, Ashraf, 2018).

One of the biggest challenges that face Arab Muslim immigrant women in western societies, as other Muslim immigrants, is keeping their identity as Arab Muslim women (Saroglou, Mathijssen, 2007). The word identity is used to describe the characteristics that are used to distinguish something, a person or a group from another (Eriksen, 2002). A personal identity describes an individual with his name, age, nationality and the personal footprint of oneself and one's special characteristics (Eriksen, 2002). While collective identity is formed by a group of people who share the same kind of characteristics, system, norms and the sense of belonging to a community which creates cultural identity (Eriksen, 2002). Being a minority group surrounded by a different culture with its values, tradition and beliefs leads immigrants to reassess themselves and their identity (Duderija, 2007).

Development of a new identity is based on their primary religious cultural identity. Immigrants belong to minority religious groups and may become more religious after leaving their countries. For many Muslim immigrants in western societies religion is considered to be the important component of their identity because it helps them to feel in control and gives a sense of belonging while living in western different culture (Duderija, 2007). Guðmundsdóttir (2012) in her study *Petta er ekki bara hlýðni; Sjálfsimyndarskopun múslimakvenna (This is not just obedience; creation of self-identity of Muslim Women)* found that Muslim women in Iceland base their identity-formation around three dominating themes; obedience or submissiveness, compromise and their own reasoning. She added that similar threads could be found between new trends in the practices of Islam worldwide and amongst her interlocutors although built on differing grounds.

Muslim immigrants come from different backgrounds but many of them have in common that Islam is the meaning of life (Seddeeq Muhammad, 2017). Islam can give many Muslims the framework to solve life's problems and to control their behaviors (Hjálmtýsson, 2011, Seddeeq Muhammad, 2017, Ólafsdóttir, 2017). When Arab Muslim women find themselves in a new and a different culture like the western culture, many of them adhere more to their religion and traditions for fear of losing their identity (Hjálmtýsson, 2011, Ólafsdóttir, 2017). They integrate into the society by being active as explained but many of them at the same time try to keep their religious, cultural and social identity (Hjálmtýsson, 2011, Ólafsdóttir, 2017). Muslim women's identity is reflected in their beliefs, religious practice, lifestyle and Islamic outfit (Ólafsdóttir, 2017).

In western societies Muslim women (who wear the Islamic outfit) are recognized easily because of their visible customs, traditions and their Islamic outfit (Ólafsdóttir, 2017). This visibility adds another challenge in addition to the adaptation challenges (Ólafsdóttir, 2017). Arab Muslim immigrant women are possibly the group of "other" regarding their appearance. People in western societies have their own possibly erroneous ideas about Islam and the reason behind Muslim women wearing the Islamic dress which is thought to be by force (Ólafsdóttir, 2017). This idea is based mainly on prejudice and is increased by acts committed by some Islamists groups around the world (Kulik et al, 2019). Kjartansdóttir (2016) in her essay *Sjálfsmynd múslimskra kvenna Feðraveldi, fordómar og femínismi (Muslim women's self-image Piety, prejudice and feminism)* wrote that Muslim women's identity is influenced by the increase of islamophobia in

western society. She also explained that Muslim women who wear the Islamic outfit are stereotyped in western societies as the “others” which may lead to conflicts in their lives.

People in Western societies do not have enough information about Arab Muslim societies. They sometimes misunderstand Muslim behavior, traditions and culture which influence Muslim immigrants’ lives (Maadad, 2007, Barkdull &all, 2011). Ólafsdóttir (2017) in her essay *Mitt val: Sjónarhorn múslimskra kvenna á aðlögun og notkun blæju í nýjum menningarheimum (My choice: Muslim women’s perception of adaptation and use of veil in new cultures)* found that the Islamic headscarf is a choice for many Muslim women. She also mentioned that there is a lack of information about Muslims and Islam in Iceland which may lead to misunderstandings about Muslim behavior and that affects their adaptation process in the new society. The feeling of being misunderstood leads to more conflict between Arab Muslim immigrant women and the host society and psychological problems are more likely (Maadad, 2007). On the other hand, some Muslim immigrant women choose not to wear the hijab and sometimes face additional challenges from their own community who may see this as a rejection of their religious identity. Also, their relaxed dress code in some cases is taken as a sign of excessive freedom in other matters and may result in isolation (Ouazzif, 2007).

Studies have shown that the migration process, especially for ethnic groups, leads to isolation and the feeling of loneliness (Bereza, 2010, Ísberg, 2010). It is common that immigrant women feel isolated and culturally homeless when they move to a different social and cultural environment where they have less social life and support (Bereza,

2010, Rísberg, 2010). Arab Muslim immigrant women feel lonely in the new society because they miss the social life and support that they usually have in their own society. In Arab Muslim societies it is common that nuclear families live in the same neighborhood, especially in rural areas (Haj-Yahia, 2002). The relationship between neighbors is also strong so Arab Muslim women have a very active social life and they communicate with each other almost every day to be sure that everything is going well (Haj-Yahia, 2002). The absence of the social atmosphere in the new country makes immigrant women try to build a new social life by participating in social activity but the lack of language skills limits that (Bereza, 2010, Rós Ísberg, 2010, Renner, 2010).

Language is important for communication with others, and for adaptation into the new society (Bereza, 2010, Renner, 2010). On the other hand, as for other ethnic immigrants in Iceland, language is considered as one of the biggest obstacles that Arab Muslim immigrant women face in Iceland (Bereza, 2010, Renner, 2010). Learning a new language is a challenge for all immigrants and it is the key to become a part of the society (Bereza, 2010, Renner, 2010). Icelanders speak Icelandic which is a North Germanic language with long words and sometimes complicated grammar and pronunciation (Bereza, 2010, Renner, 2010). The lack of the heritage language experiences may present a problem for immigrants to learn the Icelandic language (Bereza, 2010, Renner, 2010). In addition, fluency in English, especially among young people in Iceland, makes it even more difficult for immigrants to learn Icelandic (Renner, 2010).

Many Icelanders initiate conversations in English when talking to immigrants thus denying the immigrants an opportunity to practice their Icelandic (Renner, 2010). Immigrants may feel stressed and depressed if they experience a situation in which they cannot communicate with others, for example if they want to go to clinics, hospitals, children's schools and other places. Additionally, lacking language skills will affect opportunities to get a good job (Bereza, 2010, Renner, 2010). It is common that immigrants accept any kind of job when they are newcomers in order to have more social contact with Icelanders as soon as possible. Others want to learn the language first to improve their lives and find a higher income job which in most cases takes more time than expected and that possibly leads to disappointment and anxiety in their lives.

Children's education is another challenge for Arab Muslim immigrants. The lack of language skills makes immigrant parents unable to follow their children's progress at school or to communicate with schools to discuss their concerns with teachers (Ragnarsdóttir and Hama, 2018). As a result, immigrant parents may feel that they are incapable of helping their children to do their schoolwork which makes them feel helpless. Immigrant parents who do not have enough information about the educational system in their new country may misunderstand or even not understand it at all (Gomez, 2015, Ragnarsdóttir and Hama, 2018). For example, the education system in Iceland is based on the cooperation between the parent and the school and it has (in addition to the academic learning in mathematics, sciences and languages) many subjects like art, music, handicraft,

carpentry and other subjects (Ministry of Education, Science and culture, 2011).

Especially in compulsory schools, children have very little homework or even don't have it at all. Icelandic schools encourage children to enjoy their childhood and it considers playing as an educational method. In addition, children should be encouraged to express their opinions and schools should provide a positive communication and school atmosphere for all children (Ministry of Education, Science and culture, 2011). After school time children, especially the younger ones, enjoy their free time playing or doing different activities like practicing sports or doing different kind of arts. While in the Arab world there is a lack of partnership between schools and children's families (Faour, 2012).

Traditionally, the family plays a secondary role in children's education while the common understanding is that teachers play the main important roles and they drive the children's schooling (Faour, 2012). The school environment in many of the Arab countries is negative and many students do not feel safe. Teaching methods are based on schoolbooks and the teachers' task is to pass on knowledge. The focus in most Arabic schools is on academic subjects such as mathematics, sciences and learning the Arabic official language. The material is written in textbooks and students are required to memorize it in order to pass their exams (Faour, 2012).

Children spend a lot of time studying inside and outside of school hours, which makes them tired and sometimes they have no time to play. The differences between the two educational systems might make Arab Muslim immigrant women feel worried when they see their

children playing and not studying as they used to do in their homeland. The children's perception of their parents' worry may in itself affect the children's achievement (Gomez, 2015). Supportive families give confidence to their children and clearer goals which help their children to achieve more (Erel, 2009, Gomez, 2015).

3. Methodology

This chapter presents the research methodology and the methods followed to collect the data in the present research. It also describes in details the research Interviewees. In addition, it discusses the data analysis procedures and shows some ethical issues that I kept in mind throughout the present study.

3.1 Data collecting method

This research focuses on the social and cultural changes and challenges faced by Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland. The intention is to gain insights into the Arab Muslim immigrant women's post-immigration experiences and to map the experiences of the Arab Muslim immigrant women who live in Iceland outside the capital area: their main social and cultural challenges which are related to life changes, religion and cultural identity, differences between Iceland and the Arabic world, adaptation, future expectations and how they experience the attitudes of the local residents. By doing this research I want to understand how Arab Muslim immigrant women adapt and adjust to the Icelandic social and cultural environment, which changes and obstacles they face during their integration process, how they deal with these changes and obstacles and adapt into the Icelandic society, what is important for Arab Muslim immigrant women and so on. The main research questions are:

How do Arab Muslim immigrant women adapt to the Icelandic social and cultural environment?

What are the social and cultural changes faced by Arab Muslim immigrant women living in Iceland outside the capital area?

How do Arab Muslim immigrant women maintain their culture and traditions? What are their expectations for themselves and for their children in the future?

In order to answer these questions, a qualitative research method was used. Qualitative research is preferable and chosen as an approach because it allows for a thorough understanding of the meaning the participants in this research assign to the topic in question (Creswell 2007, p.36-40). In addition, the intention in qualitative research method is to explain people's words and behaviors in specific social situations rather than calculate the number of people who use particular words and behaviors in specific social situations (Creswell, 2014).

Qualitative research aims to give deep understanding into people's feeling, behaviors, perspectives and experiences. In other words, as Creswell (2009) states, qualitative research is a sensitive method because it is used as a "means (of) exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). In addition, qualitative research method is a powerful method to study everyday life experiences for different informants with different social and cultural backgrounds in different societies (Creswell, 2014). While doing qualitative research and during the time of gathering the data, the researcher uses what he sees, hears and notices which helps him to develop new concepts and to analyze the data later and justify the research questions (Patton, 2002). I have chosen to use qualitative

research method for my research because of all these advantages and the importance of a qualitative research method as explained above.

The method applied consisted of semi structured in-depth interviews with nine Arab Muslim immigrant women who have lived in Iceland outside the capital areas for one to four years. By using semi structured interviews, the researcher is able to use set of core questions in all interviews but the structure is not set in stone and it is also possible to add questions or explore some topics in more detail or follow a new thread that the interviewee introduces. In interviews, I avoided yes/no questions and questions which have a fixed answer. In order to get detailed information my participants were asked structured and open- ended questions which give me a chance to ask more if I need more explanations related to the study aim.

The data was analyzed and interpreted by using the grounding theory approach tools. Grounded theory method is very suitable as it uses a very systematic and structured strategy to analyze the data which helps to go deeper into the interviews materials and understand the meaning (Priest et al, 2002). The grounded theory process is based on three coding steps: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. These three steps help to break the original data down and clarify and arrange the concepts (Priest et all, 2002; Lawrence & Tar, 2013). I can use grounded theory method by reading my interviews line -by-line and highlight the codes (open coding). Then I put the similar codes together, after that connect the concepts and the codes to find the main concepts (axial coding), and finally select the codes and concepts which is related to my aim (selective coding). A second code can be done if needed.

3.2 Context and research Interviewees

As an Arabic Muslim immigrant woman in Iceland myself, I am interested in the lives of Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland. Therefore, I decided to conduct a study to explore their experiences and their socio-cultural environment. As mentioned semi structured in-depth interviews were used to gather the data. In total nine interviews were carried out with nine Arab Muslim immigrant women of three different nationalities currently living in Iceland outside the capital area. The age of the women ranged from 18 to 70 years old and they had all lived in Arabic countries more than 15 years before moving to Iceland.

My participants grew up in different environments. Three of them lived in developed cities while the others lived in rural areas where it was not common for girls to go to school. Three of my participants do not read and write and four had only finished elementary school, and two are studying in secondary school.

Apart from one of them, every Arab Muslim immigrant woman I spoke with wore headscarves. Issues of confidentiality were raised at the beginning of the interview and the participants were briefed about the research.

The Arab community outside the capital area is small and I am part of it so I know my participants personally. In a general meeting of the Arab community, which I attend every month, I told my participants about the study and the interviews, and they were all willing to take part in this research. After that I phoned each of them to arrange a time to do the interview. At the beginning of each interview I explained the

aim of the study and asked for permission to record the interview. The duration of each interview varied from 40 minutes to one hour. After finishing the interviews, I asked for permission to call or come back if I wanted to ask more questions or if I needed more information. The location and the time of the interviews were chosen by the interviewees. All the interviews went smoothly, and I asked each woman to tell me about herself and the environment that she grew up in first. I carried out the interviews in Arabic and recorded them. I listened to each interview, transcribed it in Arabic and then translated the recording into English by hand first, then I retyped it to understand each word and sentence and get the correct meaning. I made notes during and after the interviews and listened to the tapes a second time whilst scrutinizing the transcripts. I tried not to distort the meaning of the responses while I was translating. Nine transcriptions were scrutinized and analyzed to bring out categories that related to participants' experiences and attitudes. The themes were identified from application of theory and also research questions and issues which arose during the interviews.

3.3 Data analysis procedures

Grounded theory is a systematic approach, and helps the researchers to analyze the data deeply therefore I used it to analyze my data (Flick, 2006). The data analysis was throughout three steps. The first step started during and after each interview by writing notes and comments. The interviews were transcribed with the comments which make easier to read through the material and use the grounded theory approach

analyze (Flick, 2006). The grounded theory analyze was very suitable to understand the narratives of the participants. The second step was coding the data. The coding includes three steps were applied to find the core categories: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. In the grounded theory approach you can use more than one coding at the same time.

First, I read the interviews carefully and analyzed them line-by-line. I found many codes and I chose the codes which reflect the main concepts that are connected. This is called open coding. By doing this step many codes and concepts appeared and those codes and concepts were the basic units of analysis within my data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Before going deeply into the codes similar concepts and codes must be given similar labels so I can find the primary categories for the analysis (Crang & Cook, 1995). Fourteen categories were found and labeled according to the aim of my research. these categories were: lifestyle changes, social life, following their country's traditions that my participants brought with them, culture shock, adaptation, language barrier, cultural and social differences, religion, dress code, gender roles, reactions of the host society, expectation vs reality, children's happiness, children's future prospects and educational approach in Iceland.

Secondly, I connected the concepts and the codes that I had in the first step to find the central concept, this step is called axial coding. Axial coding helps to find the connection between the codes, the concepts and the categories so the main concept is clear. "the use of the grounded theory approach allows the connection of codes and categories in the data to be established and theoretical propositions to

be developed” (Priest et al, 2002: 46). The categories were combined and reduced to six sub-categories. These sub-categories were: lifestyle changes and traditions, differences and adaptation, isolation and social life, gender roles, religion identity and children’s school.

The third step was to select the codes and concepts which were related to my research aim and this stage of coding was the final step of coding in the grounded- theory approach and it is called selective coding. The selective coding identifies categories that build the framework (Priest et al, 2002). This third step identified five categories which I labeled: life in Iceland, adaptation and lifestyle changes, social and cultural values, cultural and religious identity and children’s schooling and future expectations. The third step of the analysis was to use the comparative method of the grounded theory approach by comparing the narratives of the women’s immigration experience in relation to the different themes.

3.4 Ethical issues related to the study

In social research the researcher should keep in mind some ethical issues. Informed consent is one of main ethical issues. Researchers must give accurate information about the study and they should keep in mind that participants are free to make their decisions about it (James & Busher, 2007). All participants were willing to take part in my study voluntarily and gave informed consent. As I explained above, at the beginning of each interview I explained to my participants the purpose of my study and the benefits that would come from it (Akaranga & Makau, 2016), for example that others would have a better

understanding of the main difficulties and challenges upon arriving in Iceland.

Participants have the right to refuse the making of recordings and so interviews were recorded after having obtained permission (Akaranga & Makau, 2016). I told my participants that only my supervisors have would read the interviews but no one would hear the recorded and they all accepted that. All the recordings were kept in a secret place where no one else could reach them and after I have finished my research they will all be destroyed.

In my interviews, I was willing to hear my participants' experiences. I tried to pay attention to their difficulties and challenges which they faced during their adaptation process. I avoided asking embarrassing questions and I told them that they could refuse to answer if they were not happy with any question and stop the interview if they felt uncomfortable (Akaranga & Makau, 2016).

Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were raised at the beginning of all interviews. I emphasized that all the information that they gave will not be shared. I was also clear that their names and their identity are protected and will not be mentioned. By telling them this I wanted to let them feel free to tell me even the information that they might not share if their identity was not protected (Elliot & al., 2016).

The city where the women live is a small town and people know each other. In this city Arab Muslim immigrant women are a small group and it is easy to identify them should proper steps not be taken. To increase confidentiality, I removed all personal information like real names, nationalities and ages, the name of the city where the women live and I also removed some of their life history information

which might make them recognizable (Hickey, 2018). In the findings chapter I used pseudo names for confidential reasons.

4. Findings

This chapter presents the study results. I often use direct quotations to deliver Arab Muslim immigrant women's feelings and experiences. The main findings about Arab Muslim immigrant women's experiences in Iceland outside the capital area are discussed in five main themes.

The first theme which is life in Iceland explores the purpose behind immigration and it also explains the challenges faced by Arab Muslim women. These challenges were of two different kinds. The first kind was environmental challenges (weather, darkness and day length) which were apparent soon after the women arrived in Iceland. The second kind which was social and cultural challenges appeared after they had spent some time in Iceland and was apparent after closer interaction with the Icelandic society.

The second theme which is adaptation and lifestyle changes explores the strategies that Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland used to adapt to the Icelandic society and how they dealt with the conflict between their culture of origin and the Icelandic culture.

The third theme is social and cultural values which is divided into two sub-sections: childrearing and gender roles values. It explains Arab Muslim immigrant women's perception of their own social and cultural values and the Icelandic social and cultural values regarding childrearing methods and gender roles. It also shows the influence of the Icelandic social and cultural values in the participants' lives.

The fourth theme is Arab Muslim immigrant women's religious and cultural identity. It explores how participants maintained their own

religious and cultural identity while building a new social identity to integrate into the Icelandic society. It also shows the importance of local support in Arab Muslim immigrant women's lives.

The fifth and last theme is children's schooling and future expectations. It describes Arab Muslim immigrant women's different views about the Icelandic educational approach. It also shows the participants' future expectations for their children which they built from their children experience in the Icelandic schools.

These themes, which are all interconnected, highlight factors that affect Arab Muslim immigrant women's lives in a new country. In the findings chapter all the women were given pseudo names for confidential reasons. These names are: Aya, Fatima, Hanan, Hiba, Lubna, Maryam, Marah, Qamar and Zena.

4.1 Life in Iceland

It was obvious from the interviews that most of the Arab Muslim immigrant women in this research implied that they immigrated to Iceland involuntarily. The women have different stories behind the decision to immigrate to Iceland. Marah and Fatima immigrated to Iceland because their husbands were already living in Iceland. They both confessed that they had no choice of being in another country because their husbands had been living in Iceland for more than ten years and both of them were looking for a woman to live with them in Iceland. In the case of the refugee women's group in the study, the decision to move was mostly for safety and for a better future for themselves and their children. They had all left their native countries

because of conflicts there. Their opportunity to come to Iceland was arranged through the UNHCR resettlement program which doesn't give refugees the opportunity to choose the country of resettlement and that leaves refugees without much agency in the decision (UNHCR, 2018). Unlike the other women, Aya was the only woman who chose to immigrate to Iceland. She was an exchange student. Her plan was to come back to study and live in Iceland after the exchange year finished. Her purpose behind immigrating to Iceland was because she "*knew nothing about this country*". She wanted to discover a new culture and traditions and compare it to her culture in order to increase her knowledge about different cultures.

Life in Iceland was difficult for the majority of the group studied when they were newly arrived in Iceland. The first impression Arab Muslim immigrant women perceived of Iceland when they arrived was shock. They were shocked because of the different environment, culture and their unrealistic expectations.

It is common that when people decided to move to a different country many of them try to find information about the host country. This information could be through relatives or friends who live in the host country or through the internet. According to the information received people have different expectations about the new society some of which might be wrong. In this study, the unrealistic expectations about Icelandic culture and values created an expectation of culture shock in one of the Arab Muslim immigrant women's lives. Maryam built up her ideas about the Icelandic culture through the Western media and movies. When Maryam came to Iceland, she was surprised that "*people in Iceland are respected and they (Icelanders)*

wear conservative clothing". Her thoughts that "*in Europe*" she "*would see naked people*" and "*people kiss or hug each other in the street*" but was "*totally wrong*".

Similarly, the interviews revealed that the majority of the participants had very little knowledge about Iceland before they immigrated which might explain why some of them took a longer time to understand the new culture and environment with its new values and differences. All the women agreed that when they tried to look for information about Iceland the cold weather was the first thing they read about. The first image they had was of a very cold country with snow. Hiba was laughing when she told me that she thought she was going to live in a "*freezer*". Even though the other women voiced the same idea about the cold weather in Iceland the weather was still the first shock for all of them when they were newly arrived in Iceland.

All the women were shocked by how much snow they saw when they arrived. The women who participated in this research had lived in countries where there is a moderate climate with four seasons. Winter is not very cold and there is not too much snow, whilst Iceland is a very cold country. The weather is unpredictable and Iceland has a long winter with a lot of snow. Summer is very short compared to what the Arab Muslim immigrant women are used to:

Hiba said: When I arrived, I was shocked, a lot of snow everywhere then very long days in summer. One of the women was "*surprised about how much it snows in Iceland*". On the other hand, she was also "*surprised about how the houses are prepared for all this snow and cold weather*".

Also having darkness during the winter and light during the summer was another shock for most of the participants. Some of the women found the darkness quite depressing while others found the long daylight more difficult. Marah explained:

My husband told me about Iceland before I came. He said that it is the country of snow and fire. It has volcanos and a lot of snow. He also mentioned the long days in summer and the darkness I winter. Everything he had told me was true but I was shocked about the darkness, it was more than I had expected.

Lubna explained her situation like this:

We looked for information about Iceland on the internet because we didn't know anyone living there, but the biggest difference was the weather. There was too much snow when we arrived. It is colder than we had expected, and also the darkness and the daylight were different to what we were used to. I found it difficult in summer to see only the light, I like the darkness more.

In addition to the environmental challenges Arab Muslim immigrant women in this study faced social and cultural challenges. One of the main social and cultural challenges for these women was the cultural differences between Iceland and the Arab world. The findings showed that all women except one of them experienced culture shock when they first came to Iceland because of the cultural differences between the two countries. For example, some of the participants found it difficult that some of the Icelandic cultural values and traditions are forbidden in Arabic culture e.g. drinking alcohol, eating pork meat and having a sexual relationship without being married. Like Zena said:

I am always afraid about my daughter, I don't want her to have any sexual relationship outside marriage, it is shameful and forbidden in our culture. I am not afraid about my boys simply because they are boys and that makes them different.

Lubna described her experience like this:

Men and women here like to hug and kiss and shake hands, which is unacceptable in my culture, also I was shocked when I went to the swimming pool for the first time. Women there take a shower near each other and without any clothes on. They don't even try to cover themselves.

Other participants said that in the Icelandic culture there are many behaviors which are unacceptable in their cultural values and traditions. Qamar was culturally shocked because she grew up in a traditional Arabic society where girls and boys should live in their parents' house until they got married while in Iceland children could easily take a decision to leave their parents' house and live with their partner even if they were not married.

Aya also grew up in a traditional Arabic society but her family was "*open minded*" and gave her a lot of freedom. She could have friends of both genders even though that was not common in her society. Aya was a very open-minded girl, however she also experienced a culture shock when she met transgender people for the first time in Iceland. She admitted that she was avoiding contact with them as much as possible. Aya was confused about the way to interact with them because it was something she had never experienced before moving to Iceland. Hanan was the only woman who didn't experience any culture

shock. She said: *“there are many differences between my culture and Icelandic culture but it doesn’t surprise me”*.

The findings also showed that more interaction and communication with Icelandic society created more cultural conflict. However, the longer these women lived in Iceland the better they became used to the Icelandic culture even if they weren’t convinced of the validity of its values and traditions.

Language was also one of the main obstacles in Arab Muslim immigrant women’s lives in Iceland. Seven out of nine interviews reflected that the Icelandic language was a big encumbrance for the participants. Two other women didn’t consider language as a barrier in their integration process. The oldest woman in this group thought that she was: *“very old to have a job or to study”*. She used to: *“sign language”* in order to communicate with other people *“like deaf people”* as she described it. The other woman didn’t mention the language as a barrier in integration which could be because of her proficiency in English.

The other women stated that the Icelandic language was one of the biggest obstacles in their adaptation process because Icelandic is very difficult and complicated. In addition, all the women agreed that learning the Icelandic language was important to integrate because it would build bridges between them and the Icelandic society.

The findings showed that learning the language was even more challenging for illiterate women. Zena was quite *“happy”* learning Icelandic but being unable to read and write made it more *“difficult”* and she thought that she might take a *“longer time”* to be able to speak

it, while Fatima stated that Icelandic was “*very difficult*” and she was “*not sure*” if she would “*learn it*”.

On the other hand, the complexity of Icelandic was not the only reason for the women to feel uncomfortable learning it. Maryam was unhappy learning Icelandic because she thought that “*Icelandic is difficult*” and “*can be used only in Iceland*”. She preferred to learn English because Icelandic “*is not an international language*” which she “*can use everywhere like English*”.

Due to the lack of language skills my participants experienced difficulty in communicating with others particularly professionals or institutions. It was very hard to express their needs without a translator. Being not able to communicate and express their feelings and needs was a problem for some of the women. It led them to feel anxiety when they first came to Iceland as Hiba said:

Language is the most difficult challenge for me. It is hard and new, and because I don't speak any other language like English I always need a translator when I go to doctors or to the bank or to my children's school. Now I can understand a little bit but I think it will take time to learn it and speak it fluently.

Even the women who had been living in Iceland for a longer time still considered the language as one of the biggest challenges in Iceland. Marah expressed her disappointment at being not able to communicate without a translator by saying “*Language was and still is the biggest challenge for me. It is very difficult and because I don't speak English I always need someone to translate for me (sigh)*”.

Like Marah and Hiba, Lubna was frustrated about how complicated she found Icelandic. She added that people didn't understand her

because of her “*different accent*”. Even though she had started to understand Icelandic they (Lubna and her husband) always needed a translator to help them to understand fully invoices and official documents, she explained:

The Icelandic language is very difficult and complicated and it is a big challenge for me especially when I go to doctors or the hospital. I can understand when people speak to me sometimes but because I have a different accent they don’t understand me most of the time. In addition, all invoices are in Icelandic. We always need a translator to know which ones have to be paid and which are optional.

In a similar way Qamar was aware of the difficulty of the Icelandic language but she was also aware of the importance of the language in order to build her future, continue studying or find good job. Qamar missed communication with her classmates and other people because she didn’t “*speak Icelandic or English*”. She was lonely and isolated.

The rest of the group studied felt lonely and isolated too. The lack of language proficiency which creates communication difficulties isolated the women to some extent from the local community. One important cause was the absence of family and close friends and neighbors. In addition, the smallness of the Arab community where the women lived had caused differences in their social lives. According to the women’s descriptions, all the participants came from a cultural background where they had strong family relationships. The extended family lived almost in the same area and they visited each other frequently. They also had a very active social life within their neighborhoods with related and unrelated individuals. After relocation to Iceland all the women had in common that they missed the social

life which they used to have in their countries. Hiba explained her situation like this:

I have a nice home here and my life is better but I am bored and I feel lonely here, I am sitting home almost the whole day. I used to go out and see my friends and meet my family almost every day.

And Zena described her experience like this,

My life has changed since I left my country, I have a nice home here and my life is better but I am bored and I feel lonely here. I am sitting home almost the whole day. I used to go out and see my friends and meet my family.

It is common among immigrants who come from very different ethnic groups that they try to keep the connections to their culture of origin in order to decrease the feeling of homesickness. In the study case, the women keep the connections to their culture of origin by following their traditions like speaking Arabic, watching the Arabic channels and following the lifestyle they used to have in their home country within their homes. Fatima said: *“Inside my home as you see I still follow my homeland traditions. I cook Arabic food, I speak Arabic and pray (.....) Even the television channels are Arabic channels.”* And Hanan described her experience as follow: *“Yes, I do follow my country’s traditions (.....) I cook Arabic food, watch and listen to Arabic programs on YouTube (.....).”*

Cooking Arabic food was one of the ways that the women used to keep the connection to their own culture. However, in this study food was one of the cultural differences which influenced the adaptation process for some Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland outside the capital area. The findings indicated that five out of nine women

considered food as a challenge when they first came to Iceland. For example, finding Halal meat was a problem for some of the women. Hiba avoided cooking or eating meat or chicken when she was newly arrived in Iceland. A man who came from the same background and had been living in Iceland for a long time helped her and her husband to find Halal meat in the shops but that was after a few months.

In addition, the women agreed that fruit and vegetables are different in availability, size and taste. Arabs use special spices in their foods and they also use ingredients like mallow, orange blossom water, okra and pomegranate molasses. These ingredients and others are not available in the small cities where the women live so the women have to order it from the capital area. Zena said this: *“Food is also a challenge for me, many ingredients are not available so we have to order them from Reykjavík.”* And Maryam was on a similar note: *“It wasn’t hard to adapt, but food caused me a lot of trouble until I heard about the Turkish market in Reykjavík. It has Arabic spices and ingredients which we couldn’t find in (the name of the city).”*

Being in a small city in a rural area was problematical for some of the women who were used to living in big cities. Fatima was disappointed at being in a *“very rural area”*. She missed the development in big cities where *“there are high buildings, trains and restaurants for poor and rich people”*. Fatima added that Iceland is *“a place where you come just for visiting but not to live there”*. The simplicity of the city and the people surprised her. She felt that the rural city is not suitable for children because it does not have too many places for children to spend their day with their parents such as *“big adventure parks”*.

The findings indicated that moving to Iceland was a big challenge for all the Arab Muslim immigrant women. The new culture, environment and the differences between Iceland and their country of origin have forced changes in the lives of the Arab Muslim immigrant women in order to adapt to the Icelandic society.

4.2 Adaptation and lifestyle changes

Adaptation to the new country was different between participants. As explained above, the majority of participants immigrated to Iceland involuntarily. Involuntary immigrants might take a longer time to adapt to the new society. Arab Muslim immigrant women who participated in this research used various strategies to adapt to the new life. For example, adaptation to the cold weather, darkness and day length was different between Arab Muslim immigrant women in the current study. Qamar didn't consider the weather as a big challenge because everything is prepared for this cold weather. On the other hand, Hiba adapted to the cold weather by wearing warm clothes and enjoying the fresh air and nature. In addition, the findings showed that the longer the women had been in Iceland the more they became used to and adapted to the weather. Fatima who had been living in Iceland for the shortest time was still struggling to adapt to the cold and snowy weather. She always thought about her children, how they would go to school or play outside with all the snow.

Nevertheless, the interviews reflected that the environmental challenges have less affect than the social and cultural challenges on

the adaptation process of the Arab Muslim immigrant women in the current study.

Two important factors in my participants' immigration experience were their ability and flexibility when adjusting to the new society. For example, Hanan the oldest woman in the group studied didn't find it hard to adapt to the Icelandic society. Hanan was flexible and open to the Icelandic culture. She was grateful, "*happy and satisfied*" at being in Iceland. Even though she experienced many social and cultural barriers during her adaptation process being accepted and welcomed in the Icelandic society was enough for her to feel "*stable and secure*".

The biggest obstacle for Hanan was being far from her family. Hanan could deal with that by communicating with her family almost every day using the social medias. She admitted that no one could be like her family but having Icelandic friends who were the same age as herself helped and supported her a lot to adapt to the current situation. In addition, Hanan had a good interaction with the Arab community in her town which also help her in her adaptation process. As a small group, Arab Muslim immigrant women in the town try their best to have regular contact to maintain their Arab culture and support and help each other.

The opposite to Hanan was Marah. Adaptation for Marah was very hard and slow because of her headscarves. When Marah first came to Iceland, she "*preferred to stay at home and never go out*" because of her Islamic outfit. She was depressed and withdrawn for a long time. Marah was isolated until she was able to take a personal decision to "*integrate more into the society by learning Icelandic*". When she started to learn the language she felt more confident and she decided to

find a job to communicate more with people. Marah was very stressed in her first days at work. She wasn't sure how she would communicate with other staff at her workplace. In addition, Marah was afraid that people might not accept her headscarf. In contrast to her expectations, Marah found that everyone in her workplace was willing to help her, none of them bothered her because of her headscarf. She was happy at work and she was continuing to learn the language.

Similar to Marah was Qamar. Qamar found it hard to adapt because of her headscarf. However, she was sure that wherever she was, people needed time to accept her headscarf. She noted that learning the language was the key to adapting to the Icelandic society. Qamar was one of the refugee women who started to learn the language soon after she arrived. The refugee women took part in an organized and special program which included learning the language and some aspects of Icelandic culture. For example, one of the sections in this program was about the Icelandic celebrations and the traditional food. Another section discussed the values of gender roles in Iceland and women's rights. Getting to know the Icelandic society helped the women and was an important part of their adaptation process.

Arab Muslim immigrant women in this research described very different cultural and religious backgrounds which affected their adaptation processes. The women who came from very conservative families found it harder to adapt than the women who came from more open families. For example, Aya adapted to life in Iceland by drawing some red lines like not having a sexual relationship without being married. Aya had no problem shaking hands with men or even hugging (when the hugs don't have a sexual meaning).

Hiba's experience was very different. Hiba felt "guilty" when she had to shake hands with men and she was too shy to tell them that in her society people don't shake hands with the opposite sex. In her society the opposite sex greets each other by leaving a space between each other and putting the right hand over the heart. In the same way, Lubna claimed that she was unhappy that men and women sat together when they visited each other. In her area men and women met separately and that was more comfortable for her and for her husband. Lubna also admitted that living in Iceland forced her to make a negative change in her Islamic outfit. She "used to wear very long dresses and coats" in her country but she "couldn't find something similar in Iceland". She was unhappy with this change and hoped "to travel to an Arabic country and buy clothes like she "used to wear".

Similar to Lubna, the interviews reflected that all participants experienced positive and negative transfers in their lives after they immigrated to Iceland. Some of the changes in the participants' lives helped their adaptation processes. For example, working for Maryam, Lubna and Marah was a big transfer in their lives and they used it to meet people and learn about the Icelandic culture and also to learn the language which was considered as the key to understanding the social environment.

The findings indicated that the most obvious changes in the women lives were in their lifestyle and personality. One of the women thought that she had a "more organized life". She had started to think like Icelanders who (in her opinion) "have organized time for everything; for work, food, family, study, and for holidays. They work during the winter and travel in the summer". Another woman said that she is

more “*responsible*” than she used to be in her country. She has learned how to “*respect and deal with people*”.

One of the important changes in some of the women’s lives was being able to look after themselves. The findings showed that seven out of nine women used to spend most of their time in their home country caring about the family and its needs. After moving to Iceland these women were able to do more for themselves and “*not only for the family*” (Maryam) like learning the language and having a job (or even just being able to look for a job). This was a big transfer in the women lives. The findings revealed that the women were more satisfied and confident and were trying to be independent even though most of them agreed that their roles within the home would not change as will be explained later.

Maryam who had already found a job expressed her feeling of being “*appreciated and confident*” by saying: “*I have a job and I feel that I am doing something for myself not only for my family, I am also learning Icelandic. I feel more confident and appreciated.*”

In a similar way Lubna’s lifestyle has changed. She “*used to stay at home most of the time*” caring for the children and doing housework. Going out alone was not possible for her and “*her husband always had to be with her if she wanted to go out*”. After she moved to Iceland she was very happy that her life is “*totally different*”. Lubna said that in Iceland she is a “*stronger woman*”. She “*is looking for a job, goes shopping sometimes alone, takes her children alone for a walk*”. Lubna also added that “*the women who work or study are more appreciated and responsible*”. Lubna’s husband supports and “*encourages*” her “*to study and work which was impossible*” in her

“country” because of the traditions which made women feel “guilty” if they decided to get job.

The support of a husband has played an important role in acceptance and adaptation to the life changes. Marah’s husband “helped and supported” her “a lot” to adapt to her different Islamic dress. He also helped her to understand the different lifestyle and gender role values in Iceland. Marah explained how her life is different in Iceland by saying: “*My lifestyle has been changed a lot. There were many things I couldn’t do in my country but here I can, like driving and learning another language. Now I am studying sewing. It is just different here.*”

An exception from the experiences of Lubna and Marah was Fatima. Fatima’s lifestyle changed negatively after she moved to Iceland because of her husband (who has been living in Iceland for more than ten years). In the country where she used to live, she “knew exactly what women’s rights mean”, she was a very independent woman. She used to work, she was financially independent and “free to do whatever she wanted”. When she came to Iceland she was “isolated” because her husband tried to limit her freedom and control her life financially “... controlled our finances without asking me. I didn’t even know how to check my bank account because only he knew the password”. He also didn’t want her to integrate into Icelandic society or even into the Arabic community.

Fatima tried to change her life with her husband many times but that was impossible because of his very traditional way of thinking. Fatima decided to separate and start new life which was very hard for her as she said:

When I tried to insist on more independence with him we couldn't live together so we decided to separate. It is very hard for me to live here alone but he didn't give me permission to go with our daughter to live in (the name of her country).

As a result of her situation with her husband, the adaptation for Fatima was different. While she was with her husband and because she was almost always home, she kept a very strong connection to her home country. For example, cooking traditional Arabic food and wearing traditional custom sometimes. Fatima's connections to her country of origin might have been used as a tool to adapt to a different culture. However, after Fatima was separated she started to learn the language to understand more about the new society and to get an opportunity to find a job and improve her life in the new country.

4.3 Social and cultural values

Childrearing

Arab Muslim immigrant women in this study came from three different countries in the Arab world and each country has its unique values. However, the women had shared core values and norms. Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland in this study still maintain their main social and cultural values. Nevertheless, the women were concerned about the way they would introduce their children to and teach them about their homeland social and cultural values whilst growing up in the Icelandic culture. One of the traditional cultural values is the method of childrearing. The findings revealed that Arab

Muslim immigrant women in this study talked about the difficulties of raising Arab Muslim children in Iceland.

One of the main problematic aspects of raising children for Hiba was her children's obedience. She described how in her society parents traditionally monitor and have control over their children's decisions and activities. She added that children in her country are taught to respect, obey and accept their parents' decisions because parents know where their children best interests lie. Hiba said that her children's behavior had changed since they came to Iceland and they were too easily influenced by the Icelandic culture where children are not dependent on their family and are more free to make decisions and control their own lives. Hiba was worried and confused about the changes in her children's behavior after moving to Iceland. She was not totally aware of what her boys do when they were outside the home with their friends which made her feel stressed:

Children in Iceland are independent, they can say and do what they want and this affects my children. They used to be obedient and do what I asked them to do but now it is different, they look to their friends and try to do the same, they are disobedient. Maybe before we came to Iceland they were younger and I could control them, I am not sure.

Similarly, Zena felt a difference in the way the children were raised in Iceland. She explained that in her country children are expected to follow their parents' wishes while in Iceland children are more open and responsible. Zena hoped that her children would maintain her culture and traditions and that they would appreciate the family as she does and said:

My children will choose what they want to do in their future but I would like them to know about my culture and traditions and try to follow the good things like respecting their parents, and appreciating their family.

Maryam expressed the opinion that she would raise her children as her parents raised her. She thought that “*children should be raised to be respectful toward the family and elders*”. She wished that her children would learn and maintain her family’s traditions and values, but she was worried that they might not do that while they are growing in a very different culture like the Icelandic culture.

The cultural differences between the cultural values of the women’s country of origin and Iceland cultural values was a source of fear for the majority of the women. They thought that their children might become involved in activities which might be against their values and traditions. The different Icelandic values of religion, women’s freedom, gender roles and sexual relationship was a big concern for most participants. Lubna found it “*very strange*” how Icelanders raise their children. She was confused that in Iceland “*girls are the same as boys and they can do everything (.....) girls play football and boys dance, also they sleep in their friends’ houses*”. Lubna was pleased that she doesn’t have a daughter because she thought that “*it is big challenge having a girl in a different society*”. However, like the other women she was worried that her boys might grow up differently in Iceland. Lubna said: “*I am a little bit worried about my children if they grow up here. I have to work very hard to teach them my traditions and everything related to my culture.*”

This group of women grew up in Arabic countries where it was common that girls were treated differently to boys and have a different degree of freedom and responsibility (this might not have been in their family but they were aware of it in other families). According to Fatima's descriptions the gender differences in her country was due to religious and cultural interpretation which she thought was wrong. She said: *"Arab culture is very different; you cannot compare it with any other culture. In Arabic countries they use the religion to control everything but are they really interpreting the religion correctly?"*

The Icelandic values when it comes to raising children are different from the Arabic values but that doesn't mean that it is different in a negative way. Some of the Icelandic values in raising children are positive and some of the women hoped to teach them to their children. For example, Qamar had learnt from the Icelandic society to respect the private lives of others and that is something *"Icelanders insist on teaching to their children"*. She added that *"in Iceland people do what they think is best for them and for their families without thinking about others"*. She also noted that *"in Iceland people respect you as human first and then look at your career or job"*. Qamar confessed that in her country *"people have to think about others before they do or say anything"*. In addition, some people in her culture don't respect other's privacy, *"they might judge you according to your education, work or even your appearance"*.

Aya agreed with Qamar. Aya also experienced a positive impression of different values of freedom and independence in Iceland. In Iceland Aya recognized how children are open and they learn to be more independent from their parents. Teenagers are more responsible

and they are free to make decisions which could be considered as disrespectful in her culture. Aya thought that *“having responsibility while you are young is very important and it is better for future development”*. Aya explained that in the Arab countries children are more dependent on their parents and follow their instructors. Teenagers are restricted and their parents control their choices and decisions even sometimes their study and future life decisions.

The women in this study were influenced by the different Icelandic cultural values even though some of them tried not to show it during the interviews. Maryam who hoped that her children would grow up like her experienced a change in the values concerning gender roles. This was obvious when she tried to give her boys tasks which were considered as female tasks in her countries like cooking or baking. Maryam explained: *“In my country I used to do everything (...) but here it is different, we all work together. I ask my children to help me bake and cook but they don’t help in cleaning. My daughter and I do it.”*

Gender roles values

The findings about the differences in gender roles have already been mentioned. In this section they will be examined in more detail. The women had all introduced changes of gender role. Arab Muslim immigrant women experienced a different set of gender role values from those that they were used to before they immigrated to Iceland. Like Fatima said: *“The way of thinking is different. Men here (in Iceland) respect women and help them while in Arab countries they try*

to control them as much as they can.” Aya also explained: “In my country they still control women and don’t give them all their rights (...) we have to learn from people here how to get our rights as a woman.”

The rejection of the idea that men have the right and the power to control women’s lives and decisions was obvious in some responses. These women connected this idea with their country’s traditions and not religion. Most Arab Muslim women in this study didn’t reject all their cultural values. These women tried to incorporate the positive things from the Icelandic culture like gender roles values into their lives.

The findings also demonstrate that at least one woman had difficulty talking about issues of gender role to people outside of the family. Like Luban described:

if my husband does anything bad to me I will not complain or go to the police, and I will not ask for a divorce because this will affect my children and my family and my life, I am happy like this and I can deal with my problems inside my home.

According to the women in this study, traditionally women have fewer rights in their countries for example in education, work and choice of a husband. All the women explained that in their countries girls have limited freedom and parents restrict girls’ social life because *“girls are special and have different roles”*. Five out of nine women in this study didn’t go to school or stopped studying because of the traditions which consider girls as a source of honor which has to be protected by their families, like Hiba who said: *“I studied only to 6th grade because it is thought that it is better for girls to stay at home and marry early. Only*

boys can continue studying and go to university.” Aya was in a similar situation and she said:

I came from a traditional Arabic society (...) we have no differences between girls and boys especially in my father’s family, but in my mother’s family it is different so girls are not allowed to go out alone or come home late because my mother grew up in a rural area where people know each other and always think about what others will say about them.

The women pointed out that in Arab societies men and women have different responsibilities. The women’s first priority is inside the homes, doing housework and raising children while men are obliged to take care of the household expenses. Hanan referred to the traditional way of thinking that *“it is shameful for men to help with any housework”*. In Iceland the men in her life share all the responsibilities within and outside the home as she described: *“Men’s and women’s roles are also different. In Iceland men clean and cook and wash the dishes. In addition, women are often financially independent.”*

In a similar fashion Zena explained the different responsibilities of men and women in her country by saying:

A man’s responsibilities are to go and have a job and make money while a woman’s responsibilities are inside her home, doing housework and caring for the children. Even if a woman has a job it doesn’t give her the right to ask for help in cleaning or cooking but if a man helps her that means that he is a very good man.

The findings also noted that the women who are married to an Arab man who has lived for a long time in Europe have different experiences from the women who are married to men who had always lived in Arabic countries.

Marah was happy that all the responsibilities inside her home are shared between her and her husband because *“he has been living in Europe for a long time, he knows about women rights, explains it and gives it to me”*. He supported her integration by for example helping with her Icelandic language homework *“I started to go to (.....) and my husband helped me at home”*.

On the other hand, Fatima’s husband who has also lived in Europe for a long time was different. When she first came to Iceland her husband was very helpful but after a while he *“began behaving like a typical Arab man, giving orders, controlling”* her life and limiting her freedom *“My husband didn’t want me to go out or learn the language”*. As a result of her husband’s restrictions her integration while she lived with him had been more difficult.

The different gender roles in Iceland have positively influenced these women. The majority of Arab Muslim immigrant women in this study have tried to build their own identity while accepting their traditional responsibilities. This new identity was seen in the common desire of most of these women to learn the language and to get jobs outside the home, even though the majority of the women in this research believed that their responsibilities would not change even if they got a job and shared the household expenses as Lubna said: *“the different gender roles in Iceland affect my life in a positive way (...) even if I had a job he (her husband) would not help me with cleaning or cooking. Arab men are not used to doing it and they would not.”*

4.4 Cultural and religious identity

Religion plays an instrumental role in the lives of all my interviewees. Their religious identity is reflected in their commitment to religion: praying, fasting, reading and following the holy Quran and the Islamic dress or hijab. Religion is also the foundation of their cultural identity and a way to maintain their traditions and lifestyle. This was clearly demonstrated in their responses to the question about what specific cultural traditions they brought with them to Iceland. Lubna said: *“My commitment to my religion, praying, fasting and reading the holy Quran.”* And Hiba agreed: *“The most important things which are always with me and I bring here are my commitment to my religion, my prayers, reading the holy Quran, not shaking hands with men, and my Islamic outfit.”* As well as Marah: *“I have brought with me my religion and my Islamic headscarf and I will not abandon them.”*

The findings showed that religious identity was reflected in their religious practice. As Muslim women religious practices before immigration mostly occurred inside the home. However, the lack of Islamic religious atmosphere outside the home might make them feel that they do not belong. The absence of the religious atmosphere was a big concern for the women who were afraid of losing their identity. Zena found it strange not to hear the voice of the Adhan (the call to pray which is heard loudly five times a day in all Muslim countries). The absence of a mosque in the city where she lived removed a sense of religious involvement. She was very emotional when she said: *“They don’t have a mosque in (the name of the city), I miss our religious atmosphere.”*

In addition, being recognized as a Muslim woman was important after immigrating to Iceland. The Islamic outfit or headscarf which makes Muslim women visible is a very important part of my interviewees' religious and cultural identity as Hiba: *"My Islamic outfit is my identity and I am happy to wear it."* And Lubna explained: *"I am proud of my headscarf. It is only for me and I don't like to be criticized because of it, but luckily here in Iceland people accept me as I am."*

All Arab Muslim immigrant women in this study (except the women who didn't wear headscarf) explained that Icelanders are very curious to know more about the Islamic outfit. This might be because it is a new phenomenon in the small society where the women lived. Most immigrants are from Eastern Europe and they are not identifiable but when Arab Muslim women came to Iceland their appearance was different and women wearing headscarves stood out. When I asked about their feelings when they wear the Islamic outfit, some of the responses were:

Zena: When I am wearing my Islamic outfit I feel people are very curious about it, they want to understand why we wear it.

Maryam: I was afraid about how people in Iceland would treat me with my Islamic outfit. They are curious to know more about it so they ask many questions and sometimes I feel they don't believe that we have hair (laugh).

Hana: I was one of the first Muslim women in (the name of the city), and that was new for Icelanders, some of them are curious and want to know why I wear it. They look at me sometimes in a strange way, but you know in my country also when people see a woman without a

headscarf they look at her in a different way because it is not common there.

Nevertheless, all of the women agreed that this curiosity of Icelanders about the headscarf makes them feel strange. All my participants faced either questions about their headscarves or strange and uncomfortable looks, although these questions about Hijab didn't bother some of my interviewees like Hanan, who said:

My Hijab is part of me and people here respect it. Sometimes they ask me why I wear it or they want to see my hair. These kind of questions don't bother me and my answer is that this is my religion and God asks me to do it.

And Lubna explained as well:

In Iceland people accepted me as I am, they have asked me many times about the reason for wearing the headscarf, and when was the first time I wore it, but they just ask I think to be aware and maybe because it is something new in (the name of the city).

On the other hand, the younger women were more sensitive to these kinds of questions or looks. They explained how young people have very wrong ideas about the Hijab. Most Icelanders (as the women explained) do respect and appreciate them as Muslim women, although a few of them do not, especially young people. For example, Qamar was not sure if people respect her Islamic outfit. She was very upset when she explained that one girl thought that she wore a headscarf because she didn't have hair:

I am not sure if people respect my Islamic outfit. They tried to tell me that I would be more beautiful without it. Sometimes they ask strange questions like once a girl asked me if I have hair..... can you imagine!!

On the other hand, the woman who chose not to wear the headscarf was challenged by her own community. Aya was a bit excluded and she explained that her relaxed dress code is taken as a sign of excessive freedom in other matters especially by Arab men. She blamed the Arabic traditions which make her be judged according to her appearance by saying:

I don't wear a special costume like a headscarf or long tunic and that causes me to have troubles, not with Icelanders but with other Arabic people who live here especially men. I feel that I don't belong to the Arabic community in any way. They judge me by my looks and my clothes and forget other things. This is the Arabic way of thinking unfortunately.

One of the important questions in this research is whether Arab Muslim immigrant women consider their Islamic dress as a barrier to accessing the facilities in Iceland. Seven out of eight Arab Muslim immigrant women (who wear a headscarf) in my research do not consider their Islamic outfits as barriers for accessing public utilities in Iceland. They felt glad that they were respected as they are. In addition, they are all planning to have jobs (some already have a job) as Fatima said:

My religion is very important no matter where I am. I wear the headscarf and inside my home I sometimes wear the traditional dress (...) I don't consider my headscarf or dress as barriers for accessing the facilities in Iceland. People respect me as I am and do not judge my dress at all.

And Hanan explained: *"I don't consider my costume as a barrier to accessing the facilities in Iceland, not for me and not for any woman who wears a headscarf."* And Lubna agreed:

I don't consider my Islamic dress as a barrier to accessing the facilities in Iceland. People here are very open minded. I consider myself as a lucky woman to be in Iceland. I am planning (...) and have a job and my headscarf will not stop me.

One woman does though consider her Islamic outfit as a barrier.

Qamar felt that there would be people anywhere who did not understand her Islamic outfit and would need time to accept it. She said:

I consider my Islamic outfit as a barrier to accessing services, and not just in Iceland, because people need time to accept and understand me, it might take time until they become used to my Islamic outfit.

Qamar was worried about not being respected as a person which might explain her answer. She didn't want people to deal with her differently because of her nationality or religion. She said: *"I respect people as they are and it is very important to me. I don't look to where they come from or to their color or religion, I deal with them as just people."*

Most Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland outside the capital area who participated in the present study tried their best to keep their cultural identity. As explained above their cultural identity is reflected in following their traditions like cooking Arabic food, speaking Arabic, watching the Arabic channels and following the same lifestyle as they used to do in their home country within their homes as Hanan: *"Yes, I do follow my country's traditions. I wear my headscarf as I used to, cook Arabic food, follow my religion and read the holy Quran. I also fast in Ramadan and celebrate our Eid (after Ramadan and before Al Hajj)." And Marah also said: "I still maintain an Islamic way of*

dressings and thinking. I cook Arabic food, I pray and fast and read the Holy Quran.”

Findings revealed that all women have a common hope to maintain their culture and tradition for their children. My interviewees were aware of the importance of maintaining their religious and cultural identities and this was obvious when they insisted on teaching their religion, culture and traditions to their children as explained above. Arab Muslim immigrant women's traditions, norms and values are influenced by Islam which is considered as a way of life for most of these women. The women preserved a strong sense of their own religious and cultural identity, but they also build a new social identity by having jobs and learning the language which helps them to integrate more into the Icelandic society.

One of the important factors which help Arab Muslim immigrant women in this study to maintain their religious and cultural identities was the supportive local community (especially for the refugee women). Before moving to Iceland some of the women felt stressed because they had so little information about the people in Iceland. These women were worried about the way they would be treated in Iceland because of their different culture and special outfit. After they moved to Iceland some of the women were surprised about how welcome they were which made their adaptation process easier as Hiba explained:

Yes, I feel welcome, all Icelanders I have met have shown me respect and they are happy to have us here. They have helped us a lot since we arrived. In the same way I also respect them and always try to show my best behavior.

Hanan was on a similar note: *“Absolutely, when you see everyone is smiling at you and show they care about you and try to help you as much as they can, you will definitely feel that you are welcome.”*

The women were glad that they could practice their religion and follow their culture’s values without feeling unwelcome. These women agreed that they appreciated how the church in the city where the women lived offered them a place to meet and to practice their religion. The Arab community were also offered a place in the Icelandic schools to teach their children their own language which was a big concern for the women especially the ones who had young children.

4.5 Children’s schooling and future expectations

The children’s future and education were some of the biggest concerns for the women who participated in this study. Seven out of nine women said that one of main reasons for moving to Iceland was their children’s future and schooling. Maryam explained her reasons: *“then we had this opportunity to come to Iceland and we accepted only because of our children’s future.”* And Hiba said: *“I felt that they (her children) were losing their future (...) we were waiting for any opportunity to leave (...) I knew that we would have a better life anywhere else.”*

Regarding the Icelandic educational approach, Arab Muslim immigrant women were divided into two groups: one was quite negative while the other one was more positive. Three different issues

in the Icelandic educational approach made them feel either dissatisfied or satisfied.

The first issue causing dissatisfaction in some women was that the Icelandic system places more value on arts, handwork and physical activities whereas the educational system in their countries is more heavily based on study books to pass exams. Every student sit in a disk and listen to the teacher explaining the lessons then they have to memories and learn by heart everything at home to do the exams to pass to the next level. Failing is sham for the family. Art, physical activity and handwork is not as important as the Arabic official language, mathematics, science and languages and some of it are not thought at all.

Some of the women were not happy that their children were spending a lot of time doing subjects like cooking, sewing, carpentry and many other activities in the time they were supposed to be learning mathematics, languages and other academic subjects. On the other hand, others were happy and satisfied. This group of women thought that it might be better for children especially the young ones to learn more by playing and less by studying as Lubna:

they (teachers) focus more on playing, they don't focus on math or science or languages. Maybe it is a good way to teach but we used to have a different way. Children here are very happy at school and they release their energy at school which is good. School time for them is a time of enjoyment (...) it is not bad to let children play more I think.

Aya felt that in the Arab countries it was very useless having a lot of books to study just to be examined. She thought that each subject has

to have a “*practical application*” in order to maintain it in the memory and not forget it immediately after finishing the exam.

Another issue which was raised during the interviews was homework and exams. For the dissatisfied group of women, the absence of homework and exams was problematic. For example, Hiba did think that the educational system in Iceland is not very good because her children have a lot of free time after school. In her country “*students have to study at home*”. “*They have homework and exams*” which are used to evaluate students’ progress. Competition between students plays a large role in their achievement. She stressed that the absence of exams and lack of possibility of failure in the school system reduced the motivation of her children to study. Similarly, Hanan said:

Schools in Iceland focus only on playing. No homework and no exams. I would like to see the children practicing at home, reading or writing, or doing something related to school. I am not sure if they understand what they learn at school, teachers have to follow them more.

In contrast was Fatima who was happy that her children have time to play and live their childhood with less homework and exam pressure.

Fatima said:

In all European countries the educational approach is more developed than in (the name of her country). In (the name of her country) the focus is on books and children have a lot of homework and they don’t even find time to play.

Similarly, was Qamar who “*liked the educational approach in Iceland very much*” because it put “*no pressure on students*”. Qamar added that:

Teachers in Iceland explain the subjects in an easy way and they use a developed and new technology, like

watching videos or going out to learn. In my country they focus only on books, no activities at all.

The third issue which made a negative view about the Icelandic educational approach was poor communication with the school staff which made it more difficult for some of the women to follow their children's progress. Maryam was worried about her children's schooling. Maryam found it hard to follow her children's progress in the Icelandic school system. Her husband tried to communicate with the school in order to have more homework but the school was unwilling to address this issue which made them anxious about their children's future.

Even though the women have different opinions about the Icelandic school system, all Arab Muslim immigrant women in this research agreed that their children are happy at school. They have friends and they enjoy their activities at school as Zena said: *“My children are happy at school and I think when they are in the school everyone cares about them and wants to help them.”*

In addition, none of the women reported any kind of racism in the schools. The women were glad of the relationship between their children and the school teachers. They all agreed that children's teachers are very helpful, they deal with them in the same way as other students and sometimes better as Hiba said: *“My children are happy at school and they have many Icelandic friends. As far as I can see there are no differences in the way the teachers deal with my children.”* and Fatima said as well: *“My son doesn't complain about differences in dealing with him, he says that teachers help him and care about him.”*

Nevertheless, the women were worried and confused about their children's future. They have a common desire that their children should continue studying and reach a higher education level. On the other hand, they didn't think that Iceland is a good place for them to do that. That might be because they don't trust the educational system in Iceland or because of the Icelandic language which they thought could be one of the biggest challenges for their children if they continue at school as Hiba explained: "*For me I think they will have a good future in Iceland but I don't know about them, maybe they are thinking about studying abroad. I hope that they will study at university, it is one of my dreams.*" and Lubna:

I don't know. I hope my children will continue their education, I don't think they will stay in Iceland, there aren't many choices here, I have been told that most Icelanders send their children to study abroad. I don't want to have high hopes for them here, maybe we will not be here so it is still very early to think about their future.

Similarly, Zena didn't think that her children would go on to higher education in Iceland. However, she was sure that they could have a "*good job*" if they didn't continue studying.

5. Discussion

The main purpose of this study is to explore Arab Muslim immigrant women's immigration experience in Iceland outside the capital area. What are the social and cultural adaptation challenges and obstacles among Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland who were living in rural areas? In addition, the study explores the different adaptation strategies that Arab Muslim immigrant women used in the new culture and society. It also discovers Arab Muslim immigrant women's future visions for themselves and for their children. The previous chapter was divided into five themes which described and compared the different narratives of Arab Muslim immigrant women in this study. The findings indicated that Arab Muslim immigrant who live in Iceland outside the capital area came from a very different culture which has a various values and believes from the Icelandic culture such as gender roles values and childrearing values. The contact with the different culture created a cultural conflict which led to social and cultural challenges. The challenges created an internal conflict due to imbalance of their own cultural values with the Icelandic values and also to maintaining their religious and cultural identity while participating in the new society.

The main findings from this group of women showed that these women have a strong religious foundation. Each Arab Muslim immigrant woman had her own experience of adaptation in the new Icelandic culture. The women's different experiences were related to how long they have lived in the Icelandic society, and to what extent the women wanted to accept and participate in the new culture whilst

keeping their traditional cultural values and norms for themselves and teaching it to the next generation.

The findings also showed that the Icelandic language was one of the biggest barriers and affected most of the women adaptation process. In addition, the women's children's schooling and its effect on their future was a big concern for most of the participants. In this chapter I combine my findings with the theory and the findings of others. this chapter is divided into three main themes which are: firstly; cultural values, immigration and adaptation, secondly; identity and thirdly; children's schooling and future vision.

5.1 Cultural values, immigration and adaptation

Immigrating to a new country is a challenge for every immigrant and it is more challenging for ethnic immigrants who come from totally different culture and societies (Kim, 2001). Arab Muslim immigrant women in the current study faced many challenges related to the different environment, religion and cultural identity, gender roles, the Icelandic language and the children's schooling. The women in this study found it hard to adapt totally in the Icelandic society because of these challenges. However, each Arab Muslim women in this study found her own ways to integrate into the new society by learning the language, finding jobs and others.

The immigration process starts when people make the decision to immigrate. When people decide to immigrant they look for information about countries to select the best depending on the reason behind the decision to immigrate (Erel, 2010, Trillian, 2015). The first

challenges the Arab Muslim women faced related to the different environment and climate. Environmental challenges are the first shock for many immigrants who are used to living in moderate weather and move to a cold country like Iceland (Erel, 2010, Trillian, 2015).

Arab Muslim immigrant women in this study only had information about the new environment (the weather, darkness and day length) and the geographical location of the new country. Eight out of nine Arab Muslim immigrant women in this study tried to adapt and adjust themselves to the new environment and the cold weather. The woman who was still struggling to adjust to the cold weather had been in Iceland for the shortest time. The longer Arab Muslim immigrant women had been living in Iceland the more they had become used to the cold weather. However, the whole group studied found it hardest and were still struggling to become used to the day length changes. The darkness had a negative effect on most Arab Muslim immigrant women in this study. The effect of the darkness and the short day length applies to Icelanders and other immigrants too. Many of them feel sad and down during the darkest days of winter.

In most cases immigrants tend to move to a similar environment (Erel, 2010, Gomez, 2015, Kim, 2017). Immigration is a very personal experience and it is related to many different factors such as the purpose behind immigration and to what extent the new social and cultural environment is close or different to the immigrants' social and cultural background (Erel, 2010, Gomez, 2015, Kim, 2017). In the study case Arab Muslim women had various reasons behind moving to Iceland. The refugee women seemed to be willing to make sacrifices for their children's future. They couldn't choose which country to be

settled in but at the same time their lives in Lebanon were miserable so they had to move to Iceland. As shown in figure. 4 Arab Muslim women in this study came from collectivist societies. In collectivist societies individuals have strong relationships with their families and they may sacrifice their happiness for the benefit of other members of their group (Hofstede, 2011).

Involuntary immigrants are more likely to put less effort into adapting themselves to the host society and they take a longer time to adjust to the new environment and they may face adaptation stress which can lead to depression or anxiety (Erel, 2010, Kim, 2017). However, in this study most women put a lot of effort into adjusting to Icelandic society even though they faced adaptation stress due to the social and cultural differences.

Even though the different environment and weather was the first shock for all the women in this study, the cultural shock has had more effect on the women's lives and adaptation process in the long term. The cultural differences between the Arab Muslim women's culture and the Icelandic culture created a conflict in their lives. The experience of immigration as explained is different between individuals but in most cases immigrants experience common feelings at some point (Kim, 2001, Berry, 2005, Kim 2017). Most of them are excited when they take the decision to immigrate. The first impression after they immigrate is possibly a mixture of happiness and confusion when they discover the new life in the new country. The more contact with the society the more conflicts appear (Kim, 2001, Berry, 2005, Kim, 2017).

In this study the women had no knowledge about Icelandic society before they arrived. When the women started to have more contact with the Icelandic society they felt the differences in traditions, habits and norms. These women experienced changes in their behaviors and sometimes in their values in order to have a balance between their culture of origin and the Icelandic culture (Kim, 2017, Meyer, 2013, Saroglou, Mathijssen, 2007). In the study, the findings showed that the women adopted two acculturation strategies separation and integration (which is closely related to assimilation). When it comes to Islam the Arab Muslim immigrant women chose to maintain their religion and to refuse the religion of the new culture. Immigrants groups differ in the way they merge their religious and ethnic identity in the new society, however religion continues to be an important identity sign when they are new immigrants (Yang, Rose Ebaugh, 2001).

Islam for Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland who participated in this research is the foundation of their lives. It plays a prominent role in these women's lives and it influences every aspect of their daily activities. The women adapted themselves in the new society by keeping their commitment to their religion and celebrating their religious heritage festivals. For some of them religion is considered as a culture and tradition which they grew up with and which they feel a need to maintain and keep their commitment to and teach to the next generation.

One of the most important aspects that Arab Muslims immigrant women insist on when they are raising their children (both genders) is being a good Muslim which is part of the family values that they brought with them (Predelli, 2004, Driss, 2014). Immigrants who

belong to minority religious groups experience strengthening of religion practices and commitment during their adaptation process in the host country (Duderija, 2007). For the women in this study Islam gives a meaning for life and it helps them to solve and control their problems and behaviors. In Iceland religion is a personal choice for individuals and it has a less important role in their daily lives (Már Kristinsson, 2018). The different religious beliefs of the women's country of origin and the Icelandic culture created an insider clash. The children may choose the new culture and its beliefs and refuse their home country's religion. At least six out of the nine women feel the decision behind immigration was their responsibility. This responsibility puts pressure on the women to prevent their children from melting into Icelandic society and its beliefs. Hjálmtýsson (2011) and Ólafsdóttir (2017) explained that when Muslim women move to a different western culture they adhere more to their religion and traditional home culture for fear of losing it. Muslim immigrants do their best to pass on their religious identity to their children. Religion is considered to be an important key to cultural reproduction for immigrants when they try to pass their heritage on to their children (Duderija, 2007). The women coped with their membership of a minority religious group by putting an extra effort into ensuring that their children kept their home country's religion, traditions and beliefs.

Arab Muslim women also adapted themselves to Icelandic society by adapting some western ways of thinking like the way of raising the children and gender role values. The women were unhappy about the unequal gender roles in their countries (as will be explained below) but at the same time they were maintaining it by for example being more

relaxed about raising their boys than the girls. In most Arabic Muslim societies boys and girls have different degrees of freedom and responsibilities (Cultural orientation resource center, 2014, Habib, 2018). The women's response might be explained by the women having lived in large power distance countries. In large power distance countries people have a strong connection and loyalty to their cultural values and traditions (Mooij, Hofstede, 2010).

The daily problems of family life, social relationships, work and school is a big concern during adaptation to the new culture (Kim, 2017). All the women from the group studied came from collectivist societies. In collectivist societies individuals have an active family and social life, they feel they belong and have responsibilities to their nuclear and extended families (Haj-Yahia, 2002, Hofstede, 2011). On the other hand, Iceland is considered as an individualist society where people might have a limited social life because most social interactions are with their nuclear family (Hofstede, 2011). This made it more difficult for two women to have close social relationships. The women expressed their disappointment in not having an active social life and relatives or close friends nearby.

The refugee women had a special social support which decreased the feeling of homesickness especially when they were newly arrived. It is very important for immigrants to feel accepted and welcomed in the host society since that helps them to build their social life and to integrate more into the society (Bereza, 2010). The feeling of being unwelcomed and discriminated against on the basis of their race make immigrant women feel isolated and disappointed (Trillian, 2015). The women were all welcomed and appreciated in the Icelandic society,

however, they didn't have a strong friendship or couldn't take part in social activities. The women adapted themselves to the new situations by perceiving it as a cultural difference between the two countries. They also added that the lack of language skills is one of the reasons which limited their social life and practices. The supportive welcoming society made the Arab Muslim women's immigration experience more positive (Kim, 2017). Social networks in the new society have an important role in supporting immigrants and they may reduce the loneliness and the trauma of family separation. These social support networks assist immigrants during their adaptation process to the new life in the new country (Kim, 2017).

Kim (2017) found that immigrants tend to have a special social connection with their ethnic group and similarly all the women in this research have a good contact with their Arabic society. Ethnic groups tend to keep their original identity as a part of their ethnic community. In the host country they meet to share language, music, food and other ethnic atmosphere which they had in their culture and which may help to decrease the acculturation stress and the loneliness of the family separation (Kim, 2017). The relationships with the other women from the same ethnic group helped the women mentally and emotionally when they needed help. Although strong relationships between the same ethnic group members help ethnic immigrants in their early adaptation, on the other hand it may limit their integration and active involvement in the host society which would lead to more isolation after a while (Kim, 2001). The women in this study were not feeling isolated and they put more effort to integration into Icelandic society.

The second strategy the Arab Muslim immigrant women adapted in this study was integration. The women integrated into the Icelandic society by adjusting some of its values and behaviors. Adjustment into the new society is a behavior or value changing which ethnic immigrants use to find the harmony and the balance between their original culture and the host society (Kim, 2001, Berry, 2005). The majority of these women showed that they respected and accepted the new culture with a positive attitude and showed an interest in adopting new values in Icelandic society like gender role values (which might appear more in the second generation).

Icelandic society is a feminine and short power distance type where women are able to control their lives and decisions (Hofstede, 2011) and that had a positive effect on the Arab Muslim women in this study. The women thought that some of the gender role values are more positive in Icelandic culture and at the same time don't affect their Islamic roots (Habib, 2018). The women used the flexibility of Islam to get more rights inside and outside their homes from their male relatives. These findings agree with the findings of Perdelli (2004) who found that Arab Muslim immigrant women in Norway use the flexibility of Islam to have employment outside the home and to get help from their male relatives.

The unequal treatment of the two genders is inherited and common in large power distance countries like those the women came from (Hofstede, 2011). Most of the Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland were empowered by the different gender roles values found in Icelandic society. This is revealed by the fact that most of the women had tried to find a job (some already had a job) or were learning the

language to become more integrated into the Icelandic society even though they had faced many challenges and obstacles related to the different cultural values between the two societies.

Language is considered to be the main method for the adaptation of immigrants. Learning the host language is an effective way for immigrants to get to know the new culture with its beliefs, norms and values and to manage the daily activity in effective way and to deal with obstacles in the new society (Kim, 2001). By having a job or being able to speak the new language Arab Muslim immigrant women felt more appreciated and confident. Increasing the ability to interact with the locals using the host society language is one of the highest achievements for immigrants (Kim, 2001). Even though the women had a little knowledge of Icelandic they tried to use it at every opportunity to interact with Icelanders using their Icelandic language. All the women (except the oldest women) were aware of the importance of learning the language. Most of them were enrolled in Icelandic courses and some had private teachers to help them at home. Learning the language is important for immigrants not only to build a bridge with the host society, in addition it is a sign of integration in the host society (Kim, 2001).

5.2 Identity

The participants introduced themselves as Arab Muslims. They shared a heightened sense of their heritage cultural background. However, as a consequence of the immigration experience, the Arab Muslim immigrant women faced a change in the construction of their identity. These women

immigrated from their countries where they were the majority (religion and culture) to Iceland where they were the minority group. This transplantation between the two different societies produced new hybrid identities often with religion as their foundation. Religion plays a significant role in the construction of the new identity for many immigrants especially when they are a minority religious group (Duderija, 2007).

The women's new hybrid identity was a mix between their ethnic identity and the new values and behaviors that they adopted in the new culture. In their combined identity the Arab Muslim women selected the Icelandic cultural values which suited their way of thinking as Arab Muslim women. However, these women were caught between the two cultures in some values. None of the women felt fully integrated into Icelandic culture. The Arab Muslim immigrant women chose to balance the two cultures and adapted themselves to the new environment while preserving their own cultural identity and background (Berry, 1997, Kim, 2010).

They had different degrees of acceptance of the new Icelandic cultural values depending on their personal flexibility and the extent to which they wanted to keep or change their own cultural values. Some women had difficulty incorporating their own Arabic cultural values into Icelandic western cultural values. For example, shaking hands with the opposite gender was a problem for at least three women in this study whereas others didn't mention it at all.

In western societies some people have less knowledge about Islam and the Arabic culture which, in some cases, leads to misunderstanding some of Muslim women's behaviors or words and that leads to misconceptions

(Maadad, 2007, Kjartansdóttir, 2016). Not shaking hands might be wrongly understood since according to Icelandic culture not shaking hands with both genders could be considered as being impolite.

An effective way that Muslim immigrants use to maintain a high sense of their cultural and religious identity is by practicing their traditional and cultural values (Ólafsdóttir, 2017). In this study, Arab Muslim immigrant women maintained their ethnic identity through practicing their traditional, cultural and religious customs and habits like following the lifestyle of their homeland, keeping a strong connection to their ethnic group in the Icelandic society and maintaining their religious practices e.g. their appearance, following their religious commitments and holding celebrations. All the women in the current study have a strong sense of their ethnic cultural background although they admitted that even though they still hold their cultural customs and norms they have become more open to some of the Icelandic cultural values and practices.

The process of developing the new mixed identity is challenging for immigrants because of the importance of maintaining their own religious identity (Berry, 1997, Berry, 2005, Saroglou, Mathijssen, 2007, Bereza, 2010, Kim, 2011, Kjartansdóttir, 2016, Ashraf, 2018). The participants insisted on being identified as Muslim women outside the home by wearing their Islamic outfit. The women's Islamic headscarf confirmed their Muslim identity. Muslim immigrant women's appearance is a highly salient aspect of their religious identity (Guðmundsdóttir, 2012, Kjartansdóttir, 2016, Ólafsdóttir, 2017).

Arab Muslim women who wear headscarves were in agreement that their Islamic headscarf was one of the biggest challenges they faced in Iceland outside the capital area. None of the women mentioned any kind

of racism regarding their appearance. However, the women were challenged by the curiosity of people who wanted to know more about the Islamic headscarf. Identity construction is related to how the host society perceive immigrants and not only the way they introduce themselves (Eriksen, 2002, Ólafsdóttir, 2017). The women hoped that the Icelandic society would not judge them according to their appearance but would appreciate them for their personal qualities and behaviors. The lack of information about the Arab Muslim immigrant women's religion and culture made them adhere more to their cultural and religious identity which became more important after moving to Iceland.

5.3 Children's schooling and future vision

Even though the Arab Muslim immigrant women accepted some Icelandic values with a positive attitude they still did not consider Iceland as their home country. The majority of them considered Iceland as their second home. There were differences in acceptance of the Icelandic culture but the women had a common desire to maintain their traditional culture through their children. Iceland for these women is the place where they live for safety, financial and children's schooling reasons.

None of the women mentioned moving to their countries or to other countries because they were comfortable about future plans based on being more active in Icelandic society. Some of these women wanted to be active in Icelandic society by having a job. Others realized that language is the key to being active in the society. The third group believed that education would make them avoid being classified as

uneducated women and bring better opportunities in the labor market and in the social life.

One purpose behind immigration to a new society is the parents' intention to improve their children's' educational and future employment prospects in the new society (Gomez, 2015). This kind of immigration is challenging for the parents and their children (Ragnarsdóttir and Hama, 2018). The challenges related to the different school system and teaching methods (Ragnarsdóttir and Hama, 2018). The women in this study reported a variety of experiences in Iceland where the educational approach and teaching methods is totally different from their countries.

The differences between the two educational systems can be explained through Hofstede's cultural dimensions. According to figure.4 which compares Iceland and Syria (which is used to represent the societies where the study participants came from), Iceland is a feminine society and low distance whereas Syria is a masculine society and large distance. In feminine and low distance societies the focus is on student creativity, independence and self-achievement. Teachers use new developed techniques and methods in communication and teaching and assessment of student progress. Failure is accepted and there is little or no emphasis on homework or strict examinations especially in younger classes (Aðalbjarnardóttir, 2005, Hofstede, 2011).

On the other hand, in masculine and large distance societies academic achievement is very important for students and parents and it is used to evaluate student success. In these societies it is believed that competition between students motivates them to achieve more and

failure is unacceptable. The relationships between teachers and student is based on respect and fear and strict orders (Aðalbjarnardóttir, 2005, Hofstede, 2011). Being in a feminine society is challenging for people who come from a masculine society because people in masculine societies are affected strongly by their cultural roots and values and it is hard for them to accept a new way of thinking especially when it comes to their children's education and future (Aðalbjarnardóttir, 2005). These differences between the two systems made some of the women misunderstand the different learning methods.

Some of the women couldn't understand the importance of subjects like art, handwork and physical activity and they consider the academic level of the Icelandic schools to be low. This finding is along the same lines as the findings of Ragnarsdóttir and Hama (2018) in their study of refugee children in Icelandic schools. Ragnarsdóttir and Hama (2018) found that the refugee parents criticize the standards of the Icelandic schools which they consider to be low or different because of the different emphases of education.

Icelandic schools contact parents by emails which are all sent in Icelandic (Aðalbjarnardóttir, 2005). The lack of language proficiency limited the women's involvement in their children's schools which created a communications gap. This gap is caused by communication difficulties between the two parties (Aðalbjarnardóttir, 2005) which made them misunderstand the school system or not understand it at all. Most Arab Muslim immigrant women in this study felt disappointed and they showed some distrust of the educational approach in Iceland.

Immigrants might be under pressure to find a solution if their children's education doesn't live up to expectations in the new country

(Gomez, 2015). Even though Arab Muslim immigrant women had different views about the educational system in Iceland they didn't see their children's long term future being in Iceland. The women's attitudes towards the educational system in Iceland may appear in the second generation. These women agreed that their children would go to another countries looking for better education opportunities when they get older. The women had no doubt that their children would followed their desire to go to another country looking for better educational opportunities when they get older. These women grew up in a large distance power society where families have strong bonds and children are expected to accept and obey their family orders and wishes (Haj-Yahia, 2002, Hofstede, 2011).

5.4 Limitation of the study

There were a number of limitations to this research. The first limitation was the small number of participants which might not represent Arab Muslim women's population outside the capital area. When this research was conducting Arab Muslim population outside the capital area was still small and I wasn't able to reach more participants. Conducting more interviews in other towns in rural areas in Iceland might change the findings of this study. The second limitation was the language barriers. My access to many Icelandic researches was limited because of the lack of Icelandic skills. In additions, the number of studies and literatures around Arab and Muslims are very few in Iceland which is also considered as limitation for this study. I used a studies and papers which was done around Muslim immigrants in

European countries which are close to the Icelandic society and culture.

Being an Arab Muslim immigrant women myself could be considered as a challenge but not limitation in this study. The participants were very honest, open and not afraid of sharing any sensitive information. Sharing the same experiences, culture and beliefs with the women participated in this study was challenging when finding the results. However, I was able to understand exactly their feeling and reflected in this study.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to explore Arab Muslim immigrant women's living experiences in Iceland outside the capital area and how they adapted themselves into the Icelandic society with its different culture and values. The findings revealed that Arab Muslim immigrant women are generally doing well in Iceland; however, they need more time to integrate fully into Icelandic society. In this study I found that there are a variety of cultural and social barriers which make Arab Muslim immigrant women's integration process slower and harder in some areas. The different environment, cultural and social differences, the variety of cultural values like gender role and childrearing values, language, dressing code and children's schooling and future are the main challenging factors faced by Arab Muslim immigrant women and cause some struggling to adjust to the Icelandic society.

The Arab Muslim immigrant women in this study perceive themselves according to their ethnic identity. On the other hand, these women admitted to some adaption to new western values and ways of thinking. The women found themselves caught between the two different cultures struggling with different values and norms which led them to create a mixed identity to help them define accurately who they are and where they fit in. In the new identity the women were not able to separate their religion from their ethnicity.

Religion plays a significant role in the women's life in Iceland. The women's life in the new country was organized around following and respecting Islamic teaching. This influenced the type of clothes worn, their ability to have communication with the opposite gender, to find a

job and to control their family life inside and outside their home. On the other hand, the women were able to control and choose the values and behaviors which were not dictated by their Islamic roots and beliefs. In addition, the findings showed that the longer Arab Muslim immigrant women had lived in Iceland the more they had become open to the Icelandic values.

One of the important factors affecting and making the women's immigration experience more positive is the supportive society. The locals' positive attitudes towards the women, especially the refugee women, encourage them to integrate more into Icelandic society and to learn its language or find a job. On the other hand, the lack of language skills limited the women's social activities and interaction with the locals which caused a feeling of not belonging to Icelandic society. The findings suggest that learning the Icelandic language would lead Arab immigrant Muslim women to a better life and ease adaptation in the new society.

In the case of the refugee women, the findings suggest that one-year support for them is not enough and they need more support to find a basis for their new lives in Iceland. The first year for them was spent learning about Icelandic culture and they took special courses to learn the language. In this first year the women were glad to feel secure and safe and to see their children's future moving forward again after it was stopped because of the war in their countries. However, at the point at which the women started to have more routine in their lives the social support almost stopped because the first year had finished. As a result, these women had more time to dwell on past experiences and became very emotional remembering circumstances which made them

flee their countries. In addition, they started to feel the absence of their family and close friends which made them increase the amount of time spent on communication within their ethnic community which may lead in the long term to a more complicated integration process. This study recommends that the refugee women's progress is monitored for a longer period. For example, continuing home visits for at least another year would help and support them socially and mentally.

In this study, the different construction of the education approach of schools make Arab Muslim immigrant women anxious and worried about their children's schooling and future. One of the important suggestion in this study is that the schools should provide immigrants from different culture backgrounds with more information about the different education approach in Iceland. In addition, in order to decrease the communication gap between immigrants' parents and the schools, the schools should increase the involvement for immigrants' parents in their children's schooling and education.

The findings also suggest that there is a need for educating society in general about this minority group and increase the knowledge about their religion which would encourage multiculturalism and the acceptance of diversity in Icelandic society especially among young people. This could be for example provision of information about Arabic culture by the Icelandic authorities and public discussions. The most useful information could be determined through further research related to Arab Muslim immigrant women in Iceland and give the public a better understanding of Islam and Arabic culture.

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