Immigration from the MENA Region to Norway
A Qualitative Study of MENA Immigrants in Norway through the Lens of Identity Theories

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to gain a better understanding of the challenges related to identity and identity transformation for MENA immigrants living in Norway. Using a theory on social identity and one on mental narratives (Somers 1994; McAdams 2001) this paper will look at how personal context, social interactions and institutional frameworks interact and construct the identity of individual immigrant actors (La Barbera, MariaCaterina 2015). This dissertation assumes that comprehending the interplay of these forces is key for gaining a better picture of the processes we call integration and assimilation. The chosen research questions are therefore: 1) What challenges related to identity do immigrants from the MENA region face when moving to Norway? And 2) how can social policies aid with these challenges?

The theoretical framework of this study assumes that the identity of a social actor is composed by various sub-identities that are categorized by the context in which it is desirable and appropriate to enact them; therefore identity is understood as a social identity. The notion of identity can be briefly summarized as a collection of differentiating self-representations. A core part of this study will look at this in relation to people growing up in-between two cultures; the emerging phenomenon is referred to as transnational identity. Stuart Hall introduced this concept when writing about what he called “new ethnicities”. Today it is a widespread theory used to describe people who carry “self-representations” from more than one culture at once. Because identities are shaped by socialization, it is assumed that transnational identities exist; meaning that immigrants from a distant culture who maintain a different set of traditions, language and cultural practice at home, different from the ones in their country of residence, can develop a stable identity composed by at least two very distinct sets of cultural traits.

From this framework I then gather four hypotheses (at the end of literature review), which will be investigated through the use of seven qualitative interviews of MENA immigrants living in Norway. All the interviews were semi-structured so it would be possible to “flow” with the respondent. I would encourage long narratives and ask everything that was relevant to the thesis when it came up. Only respondents from the MENA region were chosen. The participants in this study are from the countries: Somalia, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Five out of seven are first generation immigrants who came to Norway between the ages 4-13 and the other two are second generation who were born in Norway.
The MENA region is considered a cultural unit because it is assumed that immigrants who come from the same region possess identities that are similar to one another. This is illustrated by the literature, which tells us that structures and institutions affect identity construction in individuals. Therefore it is natural to select immigrants who are all from the same region. In our case this is the MENA (Middle-East and North-Africa) region, which is bound together by similar Islamic institutions and similar socio-economic contexts. “The identity of being Muslim is firmly embedded within the wider socio-political context of Middle Eastern Islamic countries. The essence of being Muslim has over centuries been formalized in Islamic jurisdiction (Rosland, Ingerid 2012 page 1)”. These forces shape and bind MENA identities together regardless of the fact that the countries in the region maintain a level of heterogeneity.

As previously mentioned, the literature review enabled the formulation of four hypotheses. These are all related to the research question and have been explored by the investigation. The first hypothesis is that *intergenerational acculturation is a natural and inevitable process of immigration*. The second is that *identity transformation is heavily limited in adults*. The third is that *MENA immigrants who grow up in Norway will become emotionally attached to both Norwegian and culture of ethnicity*. The fourth is that *enclaves are a natural consequence of immigration and may provide immigrants who are highly embedded in their own culture better emotional wellbeing*. Inquiries were also made about other challenges related to identity as they came up during the interviews. Further explanations of these hypotheses will be made in the literature review section.

The reason for choosing this specific topic is because I grew up in Norway in a town called Drammen. To put it from a historical perspective, this town has undergone rapid demographic changes since the 1960s. Today the town consists of 30% immigrants or immigrant born people. The largest cohorts of immigrants are either from other countries in Europe or from the MENA region. This new emerging multicultural society was always fascinating to me and I grew up with many friends and classmates who were immigrants or immigrant born. My worry, however, is that as I got older I perceived that there seemed to be a lack of intercultural dialogue and understanding between some ethnic Norwegians and immigrants. There also seemed be growing socioeconomic inequalities between minorities and ethnic Norwegians. A concern about the lack of social cohesion is ultimately what made me interested in the topic and why I sought to explore it deeper. I first started trying to write about the topic from a macro perspective where I tried to gather residential patterns, welfare usage and crime
statistics. However I quickly realized that this data would only give descriptive and not prescriptive answers to the questions I was looking for. After some more research I then decided that looking at the phenomenon of immigration through the ‘micro’ lens of identity theory was a very interesting approach. It provides the opportunity to understand what role cultural symbols, religion, and traditions play on the process of identity formation and transformation without embedding the analysis on any one particular culture.

A few commonly used concepts will be used, therefore definitions are provided. First is the difference between *assimilation* and *integration*. Assimilation is the notion of immigrants adopting to, and taking on the culture of the native majority, whereas integration is simply the notion of immigrants living side by side with the majority culture without necessarily changing their own cultural practices. These words can often be confused since they can both be used as political strategies/goals and be natural processes at the same time. Another concept to introduce is *acculturation*. Acculturation is the process of changes in individuals and society because of the mixing of cultures. Acculturation is contextual and can happen in more than just one direction. Although it is related to the previous concepts, acculturation can only be conceived as a process, and not as a political strategy or a goal.
2. Literature review

Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to combine a body of information about identity, identity transformation, limitations of identity transformation and transnational identities in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of MENA immigration to Norway. The last section of the literature review will then address analyses on the formation of immigrant enclaves by combining the literature of identity with theories like Putnam’s study on ethnic diversity in neighborhoods and individual trust of immigrants and natives.

2.1 Definition and Dimensions of Identity

This dissertation uses the following definition of identity: “Identity is intended and best described as a relational and contextual process that refers to how individuals and groups consider, construct, and position themselves in relation to others according to social categories such as gender, sexuality, culture, race, nation, age, class and occupation. Identity encompasses the multiple roles endorsed by individuals in social life that are externalized through the use of markers, such as language, dress, and occupation of space” (La Barbera, MariaCaterina 2015 Page 9).

Identity is a complex phenomenon that has many dimensions. To gain a better understanding of what shapes and creates the identity in every individual it is useful to use Bourdieu’s notion of habitus as a starting point. His theory tells us that identity is formed at two separate levels and that these two levels interact with each other. At the first level the actors’ identities are constructed through his or her subjective experiences and interactions with the world around them. However, those subjective experiences and interactions are at the same time shaped and/or influenced by macro forces like social structures and institutions. Even tough these two forces are independent of each other they still interact and form a complex interplay(La Barbera, MariaCaterina 2015). I will refer to the former as the personal level and the latter as the structural level.

Social actors form their identities through this process of forces interacting on two separate levels and by doing so they end up creating various self-representations. These are then used
to present themselves to others and to the society around them. The degree to which individuals create their self-representation based on the personal level or on the structural level varies (Berry 1997; Roccas and Brewer 2002; Schwartz et al. 2008; Ramelli et al. 2013). However, since no individual comes out of blank space and since every individual has unique personal experiences it is logical to deduct that every individuals identity will be a product of the interaction between these two forces.

Other studies also demonstrate that identity is in reality not a complete whole, but rather a fractioned whole consisting of multiple parts, each of which depends on social situations for its development and expression. At the same time there tends to be a ‘master identity’ that influences an individual’s multiple ‘sub-identities’. Quote “The literature revealed that self tends to have more than one identity. However, we should not overlook the fact that most of the time it has one master identity that shapes or at least influences other identities that that particular individual occupies” (Cinoğlu, Hüseyin and Arıkan, Yusuf. 2014. page 8 2014). An extreme example is someone religious believing that homosexuality is a sin and therefore disowning their son. Here the actor put more importance on the identity “religious” than the identity “father”.

This conceptual framework on identity is derived from emphasizing and accepting both social identity theory, which emphasizes group membership as the driving force for identity formation, and narrative theory, which emphasize the importance of personal experience. Both theories for the structural and personal level are explained individually in the next section.

2.2 Theories on Identity for Navigating the Investigation

This section will introduce Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982) and Narrative Theory (Somers 1994; McAdams 2001) to achieve a better conceptual framework for analysis.

Social identity theory is based on understanding identity through mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, and social categorizations. The theory is based on three steps. Firstly, the founders of the theory tell us that humans categorize themselves and others into social categories in order to understand social reality. Categories like Muslim, Indian, middle-class etc. all have stereotypes attached to them that make it easier for people to interpret their social surroundings. People can categorize themselves and others into several social categorizations simultaneously. Secondly, social identity theory tells us that humans become emotionally
attached to the social categories they have assigned to themselves. This means that the actors will become personally invested in their category and take on the norms they associate with their own assigned categorizations, i.e. if you categorize yourself as a student you will start acting the way you subjectively perceive a student to act. The actors will then become emotionally attached through identifying themselves within social categories. This makes it so his or her emotional wellbeing and self-esteem will be bound to his or her group membership in their social categories. It is important to emphasize that actors can both self-assign a categorization, and be born into the categorizations. Thirdly and lastly, social identity theory tells us that after actors have categorized themselves and identified themselves with a social category/group they will compare their groups with other groups. Since the actors emotions and self-esteem is involved it becomes important for them that their group needs compare favorably to other groups. If this does not happen the actor will feel a decline in his or her personal self-esteem and emotional wellbeing. This paper understand how the structural level influences the process of identity construction through this theory.

Another theory, called theory of narrative identity, states that actors form their identity by their individual subjective experiences of life as they go (Somers 1994; McAdams 2001). This ever-evolving narration makes the actor able to create purpose and unity in life because they will adjust their identity to what is happening around them. Although this theory is criticized for being too individualistic and for not recognizing the power that institutions have over individuals it is still a good conceptual tool for imagining how identity is constructed at the personal level. This theory highlights the fluidity of identity.

This paper assumes that social identity theory can guide and explain identity construction and transformation at the structural level, while narrative theory explains it on the personal level.

2.3 Limitation of Identity Transformation

Migrants often gain the ability of an “outside-in” perspective of both the host country and their home country. This may be a great advantage as it can help the immigrants construct an identity based on elements from more than just one culture. However, it is not always the case, as studies show that identity formation among immigrants varies. Quote: “A number of studies have shown that the patterns of identification among migrants vary greatly, ranging from identification with one’s country of origin, religion or mother tongue to receiving country,
neither or both (La Barbera, MariaCaterina 2015. Page 3)”. This means that identity formation among immigrants is contextual. An important question I want to raise here is: Is it possible to determine what each context predicts in the direction of identity formation?

Migrants are especially exposed to having to transform parts of their identity, and some immigrants may even see the process of migrating as an event that requires complete reconstruction of their identities. The introduction of new social conditions, social structures, and institutions may be overwhelming and hard for many to overcome. However, migrants are often more willing to go through a compromise of their own identity because in most cases it is done in the pursuit of a better life. Quote “The research collected in this volume shows that migrants explicitly perceive identity as fluid and multiple”(La Barbera, MariaCaterina 2015). This is a positive indicator for a multicultural society as it is requires that people adjust to each other. However, as we will see, parts of identity have their limitations for transformation. I will argue that recognizing these limitations is key for understanding integration and creating successful policies.

We all have multiple identities, which we rely on for different contexts. My understanding is that our identities or “self representations” that are connected to, or embedded in culture or religion are more rigid and harder to change than the self-representations which are not connected to ancient social structures. My assumption is that adults especially become emotionally invested in their “self representations” during childhood and adolescence, because this is the time they are constructing their identities. On the one hand this notion illustrates the limitations of adult immigrants when it comes to acculturation or participating in Norwegian social life, but on the other hand it illustrates the possibilities for intergenerational acculturation. If actors become emotionally invested in “social categories” when growing up, then acculturation seems inevitable. The different types of “social categories” or in other words, the pool of “social categorizations” to choose from so as to identify with will be bigger for immigrants because they will be exposed to the social categories of both Norwegian culture and the culture of origin country.

Just as the adult who already grew up and became emotionally invested in the social categories that existed in his or her surrounding, the kids will do the same. It is true that acculturation may not happen in extreme cases if the immigrant is only being exposed to his or her own culture, but it is very hard to not let in any influence. Just the fact that the child is born in Norway gives him a different history and profile than his parents. In summary, since
individuals’ “self-representations” are molded by the environment, acculturation is inevitable and natural.

Quote “Cultural identities, unlike moral ones, are not formed by free will; that is to say, cultural identities are not of a willing and voluntary construction. None of us choose to be born into a given culture or race, just as none of us choose our parents or mother tongue. Yet, the acceptance of our cultural identity and the recognition of its importance in the constitution of the self and of one’s self-respect is a necessary and voluntary step, just as in the case of constructing one’s moral identity. In other words, we do not dictate the contents of our cultural identities, but only manage the importance that they have in our lives and therefore the strength of their claim for public recognition.” (Viola, 2015 p. 30). This point illustrates the fact that cultural identities are rooted in ancient structures that we are born into and they provide us with a background, a history and a sense of belonging. From this perspective we can understand that the content, i.e. the empirical manifestations of culture through the identity of an individual cannot simply be changed by will, although it can in fact be shaped by will. Individuals derive a sense of who they are from conscious and unconscious choices to enact one set of cultural practices, or a combination. Looking at cultural identity from the perspective of social identity theory, we can assume that the individual’s self-esteem and emotional wellbeing are involved in their self-prescribed social categorizations. This tells us that integration policy designed with the goal of achieving rapid assimilation is likely to never be successful.

SIT tells us that identity is based on mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion and therefore we can deduct that when a minority feels like they cannot identify themselves with any part of the host country’s society, they will feel excluded. Therefore it is important that the host country make sure that the minority’s cultural identities are represented in society. This is what Charles Taylor has referred to as “the politics of recognition”. Another and more recent concept of achieving proper representation of minorities is through the exercise of “mainstreaming integration”. This means to shift thinking from treating integration as a specific problem to instead treating it as a generic problem meant to involve more of society. This shift also requires the shift from a state-centric to a more polycentric governance solution (Scholten Peter, Collett Elizabeth and Petrovic Milica. 2017). The concept of “mainstreaming” seeks to include society at large in the integration process and encourage discussion among cultural identities. Mainstreaming was used as an effective strategy to encourage discussion on gender equality in earlier years (Scholten Peter, Collett Elizabeth and Petrovic Milica. 2017).
2.4 Transnational Identities

As already mentioned; Young first or second-generation immigrants who are either born or raised in a foreign country will be born in the middle of two cultures and with a larger pool of “social categorizations” to choose from. However, the direction of identity construction in young immigrants is contextual. There might be forces pulling them in either direction, which might cause dissonance. The literature on this phenomenon is varied; some claim that individuals with transnational identities experience dissonance (Bhugra, Dinesh and Becker Matthew A. 2005), while others claim it can be positive or even advantageous for the actors because they will have an “outside in” perspective on both their family culture and host country culture (Meintel, Deirdre. 2000). The question is: it is normal for immigrants to identify with social categories from only one culture, or is it normal for them to identify with a mix of social categorizations from both cultures? If the actor identifies with both, or with elements from both cultures simultaneously, they have will have become emotionally invested in both cultures and a transnational identity would have emerged.

One study on immigrants in Canada argued that “the young people interviewed express fluid ethnic identities that have changed over time and that are characterized by multiple forms of ethnic belonging. They present their ethnic identity as a source of enrichment rather than of conflict or feelings of inferiority. The oral accounts of youth of immigrant origin in Montreal give much evidence of transnationality, that is, ties with the cultural group of origin whether in the country of origin or elsewhere; and of transtnicity, solidarities with other ethnic groups in Montreal that are seen as culturally or structurally similar. Though these two orientations would seem to be somewhat contradictory, they are, we argue, in fact compatible. Both offer numerous advantages to immigrant groups and their members, particularly in the present-day context (Meintel, Deirdre 2000 p. 1).

The above study indicates positive findings for transnational identities. However, since none of the interviewees in this specific study came from the MENA region we cannot be sure that the results are relatable. I will investigate the presence of, direction and issues related to transnational identities in my investigation. I hypothesize here that the more contradicting the cultures are, the harder it is to be in the middle. Norway is usually considered one of the most atheistic and liberal societies in the world, while the MENA region is often considered to host some of the most religious and conservative countries in the world.
2.5 Cultural Relativism versus Objective Morals

Strategies for better including minorities, such as mainstreaming of integration, encourage discussion and negotiation between different cultural identities. However, this discussion can be problematic. What is it that is being discussed and who has to change? In fact, it is a widespread opinion among theorists that negotiation or argumentation does not actually work for changing the practices and forms of life of collective identities (Viola, 2015).

Quote “Argumentation between cultures implies that there are universal or common criteria of justice that can be used as the basis for judgments about practices and forms of life; it implies, in other words, that there exists a common grammar of good and justice. However, it is this very assumption that is challenged by ethical pluralism and multiculturalism. Because the premises of argumentation would imply that certain cultures or certain elements of a culture may be somehow wrong or perverse, argumentation therefore seems intrinsically incompatible with a cultural relativism that protects the specificity of collective identities” (Viola, 2015). This argument touches on a fundamental difficulty that intercultural dialogue experiences. How do we encourage intercultural debate about certain practices when there is no agreed upon set of objective morals or values to guide the discussion in the first place? From this view it seems like the debate should move away from arguing over finding common practices and forms of life to instead finding common values, but how do we do this?

The solution to this theoretical problem is to recognize that no culture is currently in possession of objective morals. If the majority culture believes that they are, then the intercultural dialogue will be one-sided, the same applies vice versa (Viola, 2015). What is needed is for both majority and minority cultures in a multicultural society to approach the dialogue with the recognition that neither party is in possession of objective morals. Only then can the different cultures start negotiating which practices are moral and which are not. In this way the dialogue is no longer about who is right but instead about finding common ground from a more equal starting point.

The goal is to search for “objective morals” as a team. It does not matter if objective morals are a real concept, it only matters that it is being perused as a goal together. This, however, requires the willingness of both minority and majority culture to engage in discussion and give each other room for expression. The role of transnational identities in this conversation is obviously a key factor. I have mentioned the possibility of mainstreaming integration above but in this context it is easy to see the value of mainstreaming and glorifying transnational
identities in particular. These identities are often pulled towards one side or the other but not towards the middle. This is a notion that will be explored further on.

An important note is that we are not talking about the negotiation of cultural identity here, instead only the negotiation of common morals. Since actors are so attached to their identity this is a much more feasible starting point as it does not imply that there is anything wrong with anyone’s culture or identity. Viola also mentions how “the precise aspiration of multicultural societies is to produce a social order that is comprehensive of the different identities that live within it, rather than producing a form of cosmopolitanism. Each multicultural society has its own particular physiognomy that depends upon the unique circumstances in which it originated—both the history of original political community and the subsequent manner by which cultural minorities were integrated”. In other words, this process will be different in each multicultural society because of variations in specific conditions. If a particular multicultural society slowly becomes accepting of certain common values, it does not mean that these values will be the same as in another multicultural society, which may have different conditions or different cultures living in it.

2.6 Housing Segregation of Minorities

The phenomenon of “residential segregation or “ immigrant enclaves” has become more relevant in Europe over the last decades. All over Europe it is possible to find these enclaves where immigrants live segregated from the rest of the host society. It is fair to call this phenomenon a type of segregation. However, I will argue that it is a natural consequence of immigration and that it is not as negative as first impressions tell us. First of all, it is found that immigrants who arrive to Norway, either as refugees or trough family reunification programs, move to locations with higher density of immigrants (SSB Stambøl, Lasse Sigbjørn 2013) For economical immigrants on the other hand, the trend is the total opposite. They would rather move away from locations that have a high density of immigrants to find better work opportunities (SSB Stambøl, Lasse Sigbjørn 2013).

Refugees are usually the majority of those who sponsor immigrants that come through family reunification programs. This is a reason for why they show similar trends and both move towards areas already high in immigrant population. It is hypothesized that these immigrants are embedded to a higher degree in the structural level of their home countries and are
therefore not prepared to face the new social structures and institutions of Norwegian society. Therefore they group together and create “enclaves”. Some believe these enclaves are due to “white flight” (William H. Frey. 1979). This is the concept where the native population gradually moves away from the areas that immigrants move into. However, according to a Swedish study on immigrant residential patterns, the exact opposite is happening. Quote “The results show that 'Swedish avoidance', i.e. low in-migration rates among Swedes, rather than 'Swedish flight', i.e. high out-migration rates, has been the main driving-force behind the production and reproduction of immigrant concentration areas” (Bråmå, Åsa 2006 p. 1).

Another way of understanding the causes behind residential segregation is with the help of Putnam’s research on ethnic diversity in neighborhoods and individual trust of immigrants and natives. The results were shocking and Putnam waited years before he published his results. Bram Lancee and Jaap Dronkers, in order to ensure significance, replicated the research later. Quote: “With data from the Netherlands (N=5,757), using multi-level regression, we confirm Putnam’s claim and find that both for immigrants and native residents 1) neighborhoods’ ethnic diversity reduces individual trust in neighborhoods; 2) those with neighbors of a different ethnicity have less trust in neighborhoods and neighbors 3) a substantial part of the effect of neighborhoods’ ethnic diversity on individual trust can be explained by the higher propensity of having neighbors of a different ethnicity. We conclude that ethnic diversity can have a negative effect on individual trust. However, we do not find these negative effects of neighborhoods’ or neighbors ethnic diversity on inter-ethnic trust” (Lancee & Dronkers, 2008).

I hypothesize that the results are due to the fact that familiarity of social structures and institutions in your neighbors creates a sense of community and reaffirmation in your own beliefs. SIT tells us that more recognition of ones identity in social life is connected to better self-esteem. In an enclave this might be what is happening as different ethnicities group together. Especially for those who are strongly embedded in the social structures and institutions of their home country may feel more at ease in an area that is highly populated with other immigrants from their home country or close to their home country. Even tough the enclaves often create visible inequalities with adjacent neighborhoods, which then create relative poverty which then translate into larger social problems (Wilkinson et al., 2011), the enclave may still be the better option for many migrants who want to stay close to their familiar cultural practices.
The enclave might for example be a much better place to live than where the immigrants came from, even if there are higher crime rates than in surrounding areas. From this perspective I describe enclaves as more of an organic and natural process of immigration that should be an expected consequence of immigration to a country with foreign social structures. SIT and Putnam’s research gives explanations for why it might be an attractive option.

The kids brought up in enclaves may then go on to experience more influence from both cultures than their parent ever did, and therefore decide to move out when they grow up. The above literature tells us that integration policy should not be based on assimilation since we should respect the limitations of identity transformations. Bussing for segregated communities has often received mixed opinion but has been know to also increase equality between minority and majority culture (Billings et al., 2013). Based on the above literature I deduct that 1) structural level shapes identity and 2) identity transformation is limited and assimilation should not be forced, e.g. bussing should be available but not mandatory.

Reflections and Hypotheses

The literature above has this far provided a theoretical framework for the investigation by exploring the mechanisms of identity in the context of transformation, transnationality and immigrant enclaves. From the literature above I have extrapolated the four following hypothesis:

1) **Acculturation is an inevitable consequence of intergenerational change** because the majority of Second-generation immigrants will grow up with surroundings that expose them to the possibility of experiencing and therefore identifying with social categorizations that stem from more than just one culture. However, degree of acculturation in individuals will be contextual, depending on their experiences on a structural and personal level.

2) **Already adopted social categorizations in adult individuals are hard to transform** because according to SIT social categorizations are something humans become emotionally invested in as they grow up. From this perspective it is easy to understand the limitations of acculturation in first generation adult immigrants.

3) **Being brought up, as a MENA immigrant in Norway will make the actor emotionally invested in Norwegian and “home” country cultures**
4) Enclaves are a natural consequence of immigration and may provide immigrants who are highly embedded in their own culture better emotional wellbeing.
3. Methodology

The research took the form of semi-structured qualitative interviews. The reason for choosing this research method was because I found qualitative interviews to be the best method for gaining a proper insight into the respondents’ actual beliefs and a deeper understanding of their experiences. For this reason it was also natural that the interviews were semi-structured. This made the interviews flow in the most casual and relaxed way possible. I chose to go where the interviewees wanted to go and I made up questions related to their individual experiences as I went. This made every interview different but relevant at the same time, as I made sure that the interview always stayed relevant to the research question and my hypothesis. Other than the qualitative interviews, there is of course the literature review which has guided the investigation and the conclusion of this thesis.

For the purpose of this thesis, I considered qualitative methods to be superior over quantitative methods because the topic is complex, personal and may also be sensitive for some. Having an in-depth face-to-face “conversation” with the interviewees helped create a relaxed atmosphere in which they could feel comfortable. In this way I could reassure their anonymity, explain my motives and the purpose of the research. I believe this approach was necessary for honest and detailed responses. It was necessary for me to understand the individual experiences by coming up with extra-personalized questions as the interview was unfolding. This would have been impossible through a standardized impersonal survey or fully structured interviews.

The interviewees whom I selected are all from the MENA region or, in the case of second generation, have family from the MENA region. The logic behind selecting interviewees from a specific region and not randomly, was that even though regions are heterogeneous, they are still usually bound together by sharing similar social structures and institutions. Since social structures and institutions have an effect on individuals’ identity construction I find that it makes sense to select respondents from the same region when studying the identity of immigrants. Migrants from different regions may arrive with different worldviews and therefore may encounter different challenges. Immigrants from the MENA region are also one of the biggest immigrant groups in Norway. The respondents selected come from various MENA countries, i.e. Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iran and Pakistan. Out of the seven selected interviewees, five arrived to Norway as kids between the ages of 4-14 years old, while the other two were born in Norway creating some diversity of first and second-
generation immigrants. I also made sure to prioritize gender balance and selected three women and four men as respondents.

The bibliography used in this paper comes from scientific literature written mostly in English but some in Norwegian. The literature was mainly sought for trying to understand identity construction and transformation in order to understand processes like integration and assimilation. The majority of the literature therefore focuses on actors’ social interactions with others and with society, from a micro perspective. The biggest contribution to my literature review comes from a journal called “Identity and Migration in Europe: A Multidisciplinary Perspective” which was written by several experts and policy makers whose fields are related to identity and migration. Other contributions came from scientific papers and studies found online. The Norwegian database for statistics (SSB) also helped tremendously in finding relevant statistics needed.

3.1 Ethics

It is the responsibility of every serious researcher in the social sciences to conduct their research in an ethical manner. This is not only important for the validity of the results but sometimes also for the psychological and physical wellbeing of the participants. There are many guides written in order to achieve this; I used the official code of ethics written by the International Sociological Association as my official guide (ISA, 2001). Following a code of ethics does not only provide the researcher with an excellent moral compass, but it also serves as a guide to behaving professionally.

Since my thesis includes qualitative interviews that might include sensitive questions, I made sure that the principle of confidentiality was followed. In other words, only the people directly involved in the research will know the participants’ credentials. If this is still not enough to make some feel comfortable, it was also made possible for the participant to be fully anonymous.

Information forms were issued explaining in full detail what my research is about. I gave out my thesis outline to the participants so that they could make an informed decision on weather or not to participate. Another important rule in the code of ethics is making sure to adhere to the principle of voluntary participation. I therefore made sure to request a signed consent form and to ask every participant for their consent for recording the interviews.
My biggest challenge during the research was staying aware of my own history and intersecting identities. It is highly possible for a researcher to misinterpret an interviewee because of his or her own biases. Therefore it is important to be aware of this as much as possible. I tried my hardest to make this happen through reflective techniques.
4. Findings

**Background information of Interviewees:**

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<td>Female (22) with Turkish family background. She Arrived to Norway at 5 years old and I will refer to her as <strong>Lamia</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Male (22) with Afghani family background. He arrived to Norway when he was 5 and I will refer to him as <strong>Emanuel</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Male (23) with Turkish family background. He was born in Norway and I will refer to him as <strong>Artemius</strong></td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Female (22) with Pakistani family background. She Arrived to Norway at 4 years old and I will refer to her as <strong>Milena</strong></td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Female (39) with Somali family background. She Arrived to Norway at 13 years old and I will refer to her as <strong>Jantine</strong></td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Male (21) with Iraqi family background. He arrived to Norway when he was 9 and I will refer to him as <strong>Gianni</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Male (24) with Iranian family background. He was born in Norway and I will refer to him as <strong>Peter</strong></td>
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**Integration or Assimilation?** The findings revealed that all respondents perceived integration as a gradual and intergenerational process. There was no one that believed assimilation or “becoming more Norwegian” was necessary for successful integration. When asked to describe a successfully integrated person, none of them answered that taking on Norwegian culture or behaving “Norwegian” was necessary. Their answer was rather that an integrated person should be able to communicate in Norwegian, participate in the labor market and follow Norwegian laws. There was an undertone in the respondents answers which made it clear that integration should be a looked at as a gradual process. “I don’t like that it is expected that immigrants assimilate. For me a person that works, knows some Norwegian and functions in society is enough”(Milena).

What I noticed was that all the respondents usually came to this conclusion due to their experience with their parents. The respondents all reported their parents having more trouble than them with the language, and find that they identify less with Norwegian culture. “He (Artemius’s dad) is much more Turkish than I am. I have been fed much more Norwegian culture than him. After he finishes work he behaves ”Turkish” by hanging in the café with his other Turkish friends”. From this perspective it is easy to see how the respondents do not see any sense in approaching assimilation as a political strategy. Their parents all have jobs and they all function in the Norwegian society even if they do not act “Norwegian”.
All respondents that had first generation immigrant parents also reported feeling culturally distinct from them. This indicates that acculturation is an intergenerational process. Every new generation in a foreign country will adjust to his or her surroundings making it possible to visualize the integration process as a chain. This again illustrates the limitations of identity transformation for individuals but not for collective groups. It seems that integration is a collective effort in which the children of first generation immigrants transform their identity according to their environment. The first generation immigrants generally seem to have more limited options for becoming part of Norwegian social life. They have already built their identity in their home country while growing up and they come to Norway in order to work and protect their family, not to hang out with Norwegians. “They often come without knowing the language and all they think about is work because that is what is important for them to survive (Milena)”.

It is the immigrants’ children and youth in general who will be most affected by Norwegian social structures and institutions because they are forced to interact with other Norwegians through school. As long as heavy forms of social control do not hold the second generation back, it is inevitable that they develop identities that are affected by both their interactions with Norwegians and their interactions with people from their culture e.g. their family.

**Master Identity**: As the literature reviewed stated, it is theorized that a person has several identities, while at the same time have one master identity that shapes the other identities. Although I found traces of transnational identities in all my respondents, it does not mean that they have taken their transnational identity as a master identity. Assuming the existence of master identities, I speculate that at the time of the interviews four out of seven respondents had a transnational identity as their master identity. I deduct this from the fact that these four respondents where open to marry anyone regardless of their religion and ethnicity, while the other three felt strongly about marrying someone either Muslim or someone from their country. This is of course only a speculation.

**Transnational Identities**: I was able to identify transnational identities in all of my respondents. Every single one said that they felt like a foreigner both in Norway and in their family’s home country. What was fascinating was that four of the seven respondents had only visited their home country once or twice after arriving to Norway but they still felt like a foreigner in Norway. Everyone except Jantine, who is considerable older than the rest of the respondents, expressed negative emotions towards being stuck in the middle of two cultures.
Artemius expresses this with “I try to keep my roots but I feel foreign here and foreign there, at the same time. I think this is a little shitty. I mean every time I go to Turkey I will always get that extra attention of being from Europe even tough I speak the same language as them”. Jantine said she too would be bothered with this when she was younger but not anymore. “As I have grown up I think that being in the middle of two cultures is completely fine and I no longer care what others think. This was harder when I was younger because I felt like I had to define who I was. This would lead me to do impulsive things which I would later regret”.

Milena expressed that she feels dissonance from being in the middle because she feels like there are expectations from both the Pakistani immigrant community and Norwegian society. It seems to her that both sides want her to identify with them more than with the other; in other words, for her to be on their “team”. Society is far from recognizing transnational identities as legitimate. She stated that she knows she belongs in both places but the problem is that others do not. As SIT assumes, it is important for the individual’s own prescribed “self-categorizations” to gain recognition in society for the sake of their own emotional wellbeing. What can thus be speculated is that being ‘in the middle’ can be tough because that specific transnational identity is rarer than the national identity of either side, and therefore it is less recognized by the media, politics and society in general. Transnational identities on this scale are a very new phenomenon and there might not be an adequate representation or community for them in society. The Norwegian identity and Pakistani identity are legitimately recognized, as well as the beliefs and practices of each, which are defined and constrained by cultural boundaries. Boundaries may at times seem ambiguous, but they are still there. The clear distinctions of each identity push transnational actors to feel like they have to belong to one or the other exclusively, and that no self-made combination of the two is truly accepted as legitimate. I therefore believe that mainstreaming transnational identities and publicly promoting them as positive and desirable can be a policy measure that benefits a significant minority of the Norwegian society.

For actors who actually identify with their transnational identity as their master identity, or in other words, identify with the particular ‘in the middle’ identity, there can be one important benefit, which serves to mitigate further conflicts. The benefit, mentioned by all of the respondents, is gaining an “outside in” perspective on both Norwegian culture and their inherited culture. This perspective improves the individual’s reflective skills (Meintel, Deirdre. 2000) and can increase the freedom of the actors to choose more consciously to what extent they will be defined by each culture. Jantine seems to have really embraced this as she
expressed that she can choose to act more Somali or more Norwegian depending on the context, without experience any conflict at all. Another remark of this perspective was that “the average Norwegian is just like the average Iraqi. They both live in their own bubble. Norwegians all read the same news, and Iraqis all read the same news, and no one gets an outsider perspective” (Gianni). Artemius had also noticed this in the form of how badly the average Norwegian was informed of the political situation in Turkey.

**Pressures from Minority and Majority Culture:** “I think that it can be hard to fit into Norwegian society when you have an internal conflict inside of you. I tried for a while to live with both identities at the same time. I would hide certain aspects of my life from the Somali community. I would, for example, have a boyfriend but never go to where the Somalis were hanging out. However, after a while, this becomes very tiring and I gave it up. Eventually I started thinking that if the Somali community wanted to label me as shameful, then it was okay and I stopped caring. This was better than hiding or living a double life”. Jantine recognizes how she first tried to construct her identity by following the structural level of both cultures but she eventually accessed her personal level to construct her identity by accepting certain characteristics of each culture, defining herself as someone that is neither Norwegian nor Somali, but someone transnational.

When there is pressure from both sides to conform to their cultural characteristics, it can be difficult for transnational actors to form a stable identity, free from the dissonance of cultural conflict, and it is therefore important for young immigrants to receive information about how to cope and manage the dissonance. Unfortunately, this can be particularly hard for girls in Muslim communities as social control is exerted more strictly on them, in various immigrant communities. Every single interviewee either knew someone personally or had heard through an acquaintance about girls in Norway who had been exposed to very specific and strict forms of social control. For example, in the Somali community there are guidelines for how a “respectable” woman should look and behave; if she does not follow the guidelines, she will be shamed by the community (Jantine). Different countries exercise different versions of social honor and social control because they have identified with a certain way of acting. “People from different countries follow their version of what ”social honor” is because it makes them feel like a proud Afghani, a proud Iraqi, a proud Turk or whatever” (Gianni).

Identification with social categories can be strong and it can be blinding. Jantine argues that radical minority identities exist everywhere. There are radical identities in minority groups but
also among Norwegians in the form of neo-Nazis or racists. Radical people operate on the same principles but in different forms. Milena says she has observed this in the comment sections of news sites. She explains that both the immigrants and the Norwegians sink just as low with their comments there. An interesting finding was that six out of seven respondents claimed that racism from the immigrant community towards Norwegians is just as widespread as racism from Norwegians towards the immigrant community. “Racism from immigrants toward Norwegians is not addressed, so it has flourished. I believe it exists to the same degree as with the Norwegians but it is never talked about” (Jantine). She goes on to say that what goes on in the darkness is scary and it should therefore be addressed in public debate.

However, it is also true that immigrants already receive a lot of attention in the media but it is generally not very constructive. When I asked Jantine if she believes the Somali community in Norway is more liberal or conservative, she answered, “I hope that the Somali community in Norway is more liberal than conservative however it is hard to tell. We only get a very bad picture of the community through media because that’s what they focus on. They should put more effort in to giving the liberal Somalis more attention”.

The Norwegian media and various Norwegian actors tend to criticize MENA immigrants through their perceptions of what is right and wrong. A notorious example is in the debate regarding the use of a hijab. The dominant society tells Muslim women that the hijab is an object of oppression. However, they miss the point that many Muslim women who are more liberal in practice may also wear the hijab to indicate their background and to represent their master identity. Feminist scholars have noted that many European Muslim women feel like they are pressured to wear the hijab in the MENA region and pressured not to wear it in Europe (Allah, 2015). The Norwegian media rarely promotes the hijab as an individual choice, which would empower the Muslim women who actually wear it on their own accord. I theorize that speaking critically about the hijab in public discourse might actually make Muslim women adhere to it even more. According to SIT, groups need to compare favorably to other groups for the sake of the members’ self-esteem; so when the media talks bad about the hijab it might make Muslim woman who wear it want to prove them wrong. In other words, they want to make sure that their identity has a favorable representation in society.

**Parent-Children Acculturation Gaps:** All respondents reported feeling culturally different from their parents and/or from their kids. However, none had experienced any serious difficulties, except for Jantine. She did not arrive to Norway with her parents, but with her
aunt and uncle as caretakers. “My uncle and my aunt were both very conservative and they wanted me to remain Somali and not mix with Norwegian culture. I was for example not allowed to have Norwegian friends”. However, this was never a “Norwegian versus Somali” culture conflict since she did not grow up in Norway. She explained how even in-between Somalis there are identity conflicts between the conservative and the liberal community. These conflicts are usually based on the conservatives shaming the “liberals” for not being religious enough. She says that the way she got over this was by finding friends while staying at an Immigration Arrival Center. These friends were her age and shared her liberal views. They used to sneak around and do things that the conservative Somali community usually viewed as shameful. My understanding is that these friends provided Jantine a sense of belonging and a community, which later helped her gain the courage to construct her identity on different parameters than what the conservatives or liberals demanded of her.

In comparison, the other respondents faced only minor issues when migrating to Norway. They all reported feeling culturally distinct from their parents which caused them minor conflicts. However, the respondents reported that constant arguments with their parents over cultural differences gradually produced some subtle positive changes in their parents’ acceptance of Norwegian and/or transnational identities. One respondent even reported feeling that she was too hard on her mom, saying, “My mom has become less religious since she got here because she has been challenged so much. I now notice that I have maybe been a little hard on her, so now she is a bit lost”. This illustrates the stricter limitations of identity transformation experienced by first generation immigrants. Lamia also has observed changes in her parents since arriving to Norway. “My little sister is now allowed to do things I wasn’t, and I believe it has something to do with my parents adjusting more to Norwegian society”.

It was especially the female interviewees who had experienced the biggest challenges when it came to cultural differences between them and their parents. They mainly reported that the reason for their difficulties was the form of social control over their interactions with boys, including the girls’ physical appearance. “When I was little my mom’s friends would immediately tell my mom if they saw me with a boy. Even tough it was completely innocent or with the school.”

**Culture Crash:** The social structures and institutions in the MENA region are very different from the Norwegian ones. Something all respondents mentioned was that Norwegians tend to be socially cold and judgmental. This, combined with Norway’s short summers, can be a
challenge for immigrants who are used to a social and warm environment. From the responses obtained, I derive that MENA cultures tend to be more collectivistic and Norwegian culture tends to be more individualistic. Norway, in particular, is an extremely systematic and bureaucratic country, which may be totally foreign to many immigrants who come from more “unsystematic” countries.

Many young immigrants that arrive to Norway without any family might experience more problems dealing with these adaptations, as they have no family to rely on. “My issue is that they accept too many young migrants alone, without doing enough follow up” (Gianni). Young migrants may also come with trauma from their experience, which requires extra management. “It is a mistake to accept more patients than we have doctors”, says Jantine.

All the respondents thought immigration was favorable. However, about half mentioned the problem with young migrants who do not receive enough support. They all mentioned other problems, such as a form of identity clash and were also not afraid to speak openly about extremism or social honor culture. In my perception, respondents were more knowledgeable about limitations and complications of immigration than the average Norwegian.

Five out of the seven interviewees reported being religious. Only two out of those five reported going regularly to a mosque. An observation made is that all the respondents had mothers who were more religious than their fathers. A majority of the respondents stated that it was their mom who usually sought to carry on the Muslim traditions, while their fathers were more indifferent and sometimes not religious at all. This reflects MENA institutions, which often expects women to have the role of managing the family’s social life.

Jantine, Gianni and Milena, who are all religious, reported having observed extremism or ultra conservatism in local mosques. They all mentioned that several types of mosques exist, ranging from being liberal to very conservative. Milena reported big expectations from the members of the mosque towards her family, in relation to their participation. Eventually, this led her to completely cutting them off because she did not agree with what they were telling her. Milena is also an active writer for a local newspaper; she described a time when, after having published an article with a picture of herself, an imam called her. At first she thought he wanted to talk about the article, but as it turned out, he merely wanted to tell her to tighten her hijab. This was something Milena disapproved of, so she made that clear to him.
Gianni also reported stories of ultra-conservatism and what he described as “fake Islam”. “There are many imams who get paid from outside of Norway and all they do is spread lies about the religion. They don’t want to lead you to Islam or to peace, they only care about money and status.” Gianni believes that immigrants who have just arrived to Norway are the most vulnerable to “brainwashing” because they experience the need for belonging more acutely. Mosques are not the only ones that try this. He also reported that Jehovah witnesses would do the same when he first arrived to Norway by knocking on his door up to several times a week, knowing that he was new to Norway.

Jantine tells us “I am not a fan of the mosques in Norway or the community around them. I feel like they are very conservative in nature. However, I have heard about a couple of good ones too.” Two of the four non-religious respondents reported not identifying as Muslim at all, and two reported having no issues with their local mosques.

The three that did report issues with the institutionalized version of Islam in Norway all explained that they have later on chosen to have a personal relationship with God. Gianni puts it like this “I have learned that your relationship with God should be personal. If you go to the church or the mosque you will get brainwashed. We have seen so much negative stuff related to religion when fleeing Iraq so it is very important for me that I don’t follow anyone blindly”. From the findings of this study, it can be deducted that denouncing institutionalized religion is a precondition for adopting a transnational identity.

When I asked the respondents why they think that some immigrants do not seem to seek adjustment to Norwegian society, and instead participate in the ultra conservative environments, Jantine answered that she believes it is a combination of choice and unconscious decisions defined by their level of social control “I think some choose themselves to not become part of Norwegian society because they believe that the identity they already have is better and they don’t want to compromise their identity. And then I also think that there are those who are held back by those who don’t want to change”

**Enclaves:** Six out of seven respondents grew up or lived close to Drammen, Norway. In this town there is a specific area, which is known for having a high concentration of immigrants living together. This area is 45% immigrant and 38% of those are from the MENA region (Høydahl, 2014). This area can be described as an immigrant enclave. However, immigrants are not from any one or a few specific countries. To demonstrate this, the local public school has hung flags outside on the school building for every nationality that attends or has attended,
and there are currently 50 different flags hanging there. In 2015 it was also estimated that in one of the public schools 77% of the kids attending were bilingual (municipality of Drammen 2011). It is very normal for immigrants arriving to this town to first reside in this enclave. Out of the six respondents living in this town three of them either lived in this area or went to school in this area. However, all six commented on the area during the interview. The respondents shared both positive and negative experiences related to it. The respondents that had lived there shared more positive than those who had not lived there.

First of all, the three respondents that actually had lived in the area or attended primary school there expressed that above all, they enjoyed the experience. Peter in particular expressed that he had only good memories from the area. They all mentioned having intercultural friendships while attending school; however, at the same time mentioned that there was a tendency for people to interact more with people from their own country. The three respondents were only able to comment on their primary school experience because they all moved away from the area when middle school started. It seems like there is a tendency for immigrants to start out there and then some of them decide to leave and some decide to stay.

Lamia described how she arrived to this area immediately after arriving to Norway and lived there for her first 5 years. A remarkable comment she made was “I grew up in ‘the enclave’ so for my first 5 years in Norway I was not really exposed to Norwegian culture. When I moved out during middle school it was very hard getting Norwegian friends because it was a culture shock and I ended up being friends with this Polish girl”. This comment demonstrates that the experience of Norwegian culture for people living in the enclaves will be to a certain degree restricted.

Lamia did not only experience a culture shock through changing her residence, but also through judgments from Norwegians at her new middle school. The enclave area has a very bad reputation among the people in the town who do not live there, and Lamia describes people saying, “Oh, so you are from that gangster place” every time she told them where she was from. This bad reputation may have an effect on immigrants living there.

The enclave’s bad reputation is quite established around the town. The three respondents that never resided in it expressed relief over it. “I feel lucky that I ended up here and not on (name of the area). (The name of the area) is a gangster place” (Gianni). Another respondent said “the only times I go there is to buy weed and everyone knows that there is a lot of problems there” (Emanuel). The problems the respondents are referring to are reflected by the fact that
MENA immigrants are overrepresented in crime statistics even after controlling for age and area of living (Skarðhamar, et al., 2011). There are several reasons for this, including trauma of immigrants, issues related to fitting-in and stigmatization. The findings of Putnam’s research, mentioned in the literature review, also serve as an explanation for why crime rates in the enclave are higher, since the decreasing levels of trust among neighbors lead to less interactions, hence more isolation, which means that people are not emotionally restricted from behaving immorally with their community (Robert J. Sampson, Stephen W. Raudenbush, Felton Earls. 1997). However, a macro perspective is also necessary. The bad reputation this enclave has gained might be exaggerated. The question is if the immigrants living there benefit from living in it or not. This paper assumes that it is better for first generation immigrants who are highly embedded in their own culture to live there because they can find a community that is closer to what they are used to. The literature and the respondents indicate that integration is an intergenerational process, not one that should be expected during the lifetime of an individual (La Barbera, MariaCaterina 2015). Integration can only be "freely" chosen and successfully pursued by non-dominant groups when the dominant society is open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity (Berry. 1997).

The three respondents that used to live in the enclave moved out because of their own free personal choices, which is precisely what I argue should be the aim of policy, to respect the agency of the individual immigrants and allow their choice of where and how to live. To accept the existence of enclaves as a positive aspect of multicultural societies is an approach that may slow down the process of assimilation, but as it was indicated by the literature reviewed, assimilation should not be forced.
5. Conclusion

The investigation first and foremost revealed that the respondents were all heterogeneous and bound to their specific context. At the same time however they did express similar opinions and experiences for many of the questions.

First of all I can conclude that every respondent had been affected by acculturation. Everybody showed signs of transnational identities because they all reported feeling different in both Norway and in their home country. They all also reported feeling culturally different from their parents or their children. The strength and type of acculturation was however different among the respondents because of their varying contexts. I would say that all respondents showed signs of having emotionally identified themselves with social categories and traditions from more than just one culture. When asked to mention good and bad things about their family culture, and about Norwegian culture they all gave reflected answers, which included positives and negatives for both cultures. The notion that acculturation is an inevitable consequence of immigration therefore seems to be true for all of these seven respondents. They were also themselves aware that they had been affected by Norwegian culture and accepted it to different extents. Some said that they were okay with their future hypothetical grandchildren being almost completely Norwegian while others said that they were going to make sure that this did not happen. This confirms that the importance of cultural identity vary in individuals.

The findings also confirm that identity transformation in adults is limited due to the fact that the respondents reported their parents still identifying with their home country culture. This was after the majority of them had lived in Norway for over 20 years. These findings were also reflected in the respondents take on assimilation versus integration. We can therefore confirm that Identity reconstruction is more imitated in adults. The findings did however also show that all the parents of the participants had adjusted and changed but mostly in minor ways. It seemed that these changes were mainly due to arguments with their kids who had grown up to be culturally different. Hence the parents were forced to make adjustments for the sake of social cohesion in the family.

The third hypothesis assumed that the actors would be emotionally invested in both cultures they grew up with. The findings confirmed this, however the strength and types of identification varied. The findings also show that the majority of the actors reported being
pulled in different directions of identification, which complicated their process of identity construction. Only two of the seven reported no internal identity conflicts.

The findings also revealed that moving to an enclave might be a beneficial option for some immigrants, but at the same time be negative for others. This may seem obvious but understanding that many immigrants live there because of choice contradicts the victimhood narrative of them being marginalized by the majority population. Other findings related to the enclave were its incredibly bad reputation. In regards to identity this reputation might create negative self-fulfilling prophecies and promote feelings of marginalization. In the case of one of the respondents, she felt that coming from an enclave had tainted her reputation when moving to a new school.

Other findings were that all respondents reported the existence of ultra conservative religious communities among parts of the immigrant community. These had even acted coercively on some of the respondents or their acquaintances with forms of social control. They also reported that these groups are often affiliated to institutionalized religious communities in Norway. I would recommend that the Norwegian government should take a closer look at these communities to make sure they follow Norwegian law, including hate speech laws.

Based on the literature and the findings I would like to recommend two social policies. The first one is the government putting more resources in to the mainstreaming of integration and that they should especially focus on mainstreaming the concept of immigrants with transnational identities. This is especially for ethnic Norwegians to gain a better understanding of the new reality of Norway as a multicultural nation. There is a need for adequate and positive representation of transnational identities so young immigrants don’t feel like they have to “choose side”. It is important that young immigrants see that it is okay to take elements from both cultures when constructing his or her identity. The findings reveal that our participants were especially worried about young immigrants in relation in this regard. The government should therefore focus on hiring and educating immigrant social workers who already call themselves “transnational” and who have already found harmony living the “middle”. These social workers should be assigned to young migrants and give them guidance with dealing with a new culture and society.

The second policy I would like to recommend is free bussing out of enclaves to other public schools with a higher concentration of ethnic Norwegians. This is because all the respondents and the literature stressed the important role of environment on identity construction. However
the option needs to be voluntary as both the literature and findings reveal that forced assimilation create backlash. Giving the option of voluntary bussing would make immigrants able to make the choice for themselves and therefore feel that their agency is being respected. However even tough the policy should be voluntary I still believe that the option should be strongly encouraged by constantly recommending the option through flyers and emails. I don’t see the problem with this as long as the choice is ultimately theirs.

The research in this paper contributes to the body of work, which tries to better understand challenges immigrants face by listening to their individual experiences. It also provides data that is specific for MENA immigrants in Norway, which is valuable for comparing responses of MENA immigrants that reside in other European countries.

The limitations of this research are first and foremost that the study is qualitative and does not represent the all of the MENA population living in Norway. The amount of respondents should also have been way larger for more diversity in the responses. For future research I would be interested in continuing with this topic by either studying what contexts create what directions of identity construction in immigrants, or by studying the phenomenon on the macro level by concentrating on things like the effect of welfare dependency on immigrants. Another topic I find highly interesting and I would to explore further is the topic of cultural pluralism versus multiculturalism.
6. Bibliography:


Høydahl, Even SSB 2014. *Innvandrere og norskfødte med innvandrerforeldre i Drammen. Rapporter SSB 2014/23*

Berry John W. 1997. *Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation. Applied psychology volume 46 issue 1*


Municipality of Drammen 2011 fjell skole:

7. Appendix:

**Information Letter**

Date:

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my BA degree in the Institute of Sociology at the Corvinus University. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

This study will focus on getting a better understanding on the phenomena of MENNA immigration and integration to Norway.

The interview in particular is aimed at understanding Norwegian Muslim immigrants individual challenges and perspectives on the situation. Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately one hour. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher.

With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded but if you are unhappy with this I can make written notes. Only I and my examiners will have access to the recording. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at +36301968740 or by e-mail at Fridtjof.Hellum@gmail.com. You can also contact my supervisor, Andrew Ryder who works in the Faculty of sociology at the university of Corvinus in Budapest. His email is andrew.ryder@uni-corvinus.hu

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Fridtjof Hellum

Signature:
**Consent Form**

I have read the above information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Fridtjof Hellum of the Department of Sociology at Corvinus University.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be tape recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the dissertation and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES NO

I agree to have my interview tape recorded.

YES NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research

YES NO

Signature:
Semi-structured Interview guide

Background:
- Where are you and/or your family originally from?
- Where you born in Norway? If not, how old were you when you arrived?
- What was the reason you and/or your family migrated to Norway?
- What do you do day to day? Do you work, study, stay at home? And what are your plans for the future?
- What formal education do you and your parents currently possess?

Integration, identity and ethnically diverse neighborhoods:
- Do you live or have you ever lived in an ethnically diverse neighborhood? If so, please give me your experiences. How was the social cohesion? Did you enjoy living in the area?
- With what ethnicities have you usually hung out with while living in Norway? Has social life been good to you?
- Can you please describe an immigrant who you believe is successfully integrated into Norwegian society?
- Why do you think that some immigrants assimilate while others don’t?
- What are the biggest differences you have noticed between the Norwegian culture and the culture your family is from?
- Would you describe yourself as mainly Norwegian or mainly the country your family is from?
- Do you often visit your families home country? If so, how is it being there? What do people there say about you living in Norway?
- Please describe some strengths and weaknesses you have noticed in Norwegian culture and the culture of your family country.
- Do you feel like you have another perspective on the world than the average Norwegian?
Culture, Religion and acculturation gaps

• Do you feel culturally different from your parents? If so please explain (this question is exclusively for second generation immigrants)

• Do you feel culturally different from your kids? If so, please explain (this question is exclusively for immigrants with kids)

• Do you think first and second generation immigrants face different challenges in Norwegian society?

• Do you consider yourself religious? And if so, what religion and how religious do you consider yourself?

• Can I ask about your family’s religion? How religious are they and do you guys ever do any religious activities together?

• Do you think you or your family has become more or less religious after arriving to Norway?

• Have you ever-experienced any form of pressure from religion. Either from religious leaders, from the family or from others in the immigrant community? What about your friends or other family members?

• We know from data that many developing countries possess a type of honor culture that emphasizes social honor and social control. Would you say this is common among MENNA immigrants in Norway?

• Have you ever experienced discrimination or racism from native Norwegians? Please share experiences. Do you think racism towards minorities is a problem in Norway?

• What about racism from minorities towards native Norwegians?

• Voluntary bonus question: If you pay attention to news, what is your opinion on Norwegian immigration and integration politics? Do you think Norway currently take too many or too few immigrants?

Thanks for participating!