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Memory and Identity:

Inter-Generational Resilience and Construction of Diasporic Identities Among Somali Refugees

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master in Migration Studies

By Hamida Dahir Sheikh Ahmed, May 14, 2021

University of San Francisco

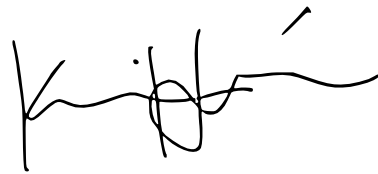
Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:



May 14, 2021

Advisor



May 18, 2021

Academic Director

Dean of Arts and Sciences

Date

Abstract

The violence and displacement many refugees face often create a lifelong trauma that manifests in many ways within themselves, their families, and communities. The Somali refugee community in the United States is no different. Since their resettlement in America started in the 1990s following the civil war, the community has struggled with different manifestations of that trauma; substance abuse and gang violence among the youth, prominence of depression and suicide rates, rise of domestic violence, as well as other direct and indirect results associated with mental health. This is the reality of many refugee and immigrant communities, coming directly from the lack of mental health services within resettlement projects. Therefore, what I seek to highlight in my research is the need for mental health services to refugees after resettlement as well as better integration models. Furthermore, through an analysis of art, poetry, and storytelling, I show how despite the community's struggles, they remain resilient and hopeful. This creates a different point of interaction with refugees in general; communities who are vulnerable to toxic hypervisibility but retain their agency throughout.

In essence, my research is advocating for the provision of culturally-sensitive mental health services to refugees (both the Somali community as well as other immigrant and refugee communities), understanding the reconstruction of the Somali identity in the diaspora and how continued production of Somali indigenous knowledge is being used to combat historical and cultural trauma as well as building resilience across generations of Somali refugees. This research seeks to add to that pool of knowledge and create a counternarrative to the stereotypical image of what Black, African and Muslim refugees are like.

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Dedication:

I long for you, as one / Whose dhow in summer winds
Is blown adrift and lost / Longs for land, and finds —
Again the compass tells / A grey and empty sea.

Balwo, Somali oral song, translated by Margaret Laurence

This thesis is for those who have left their homes in search of a better life, like my parents, and those whom the unfavorable winds of misfortune have left them running. Your resilience, struggle, and courage have guided me to do more, do better, for myself and those in community with me.

Memory and Identity:

Mental Health Challenges and Creative Resilience Among Somali Refugees

Somalis have been at the center of the discussion throughout the analysis of migration patterns from Africa into Europe and the Americas in the last three decades, using data from humanitarian organizations such as the United Nations Refugee Agency. Since the fall of the state in 1991, over 800,000 Somalis became refugees in neighboring countries and 2,000,000 became internally displaced people in the country (Hammond, 2014). With the protraction of the civil war in the country and further displacement from famine and droughts, Somali refugees accounted for the largest refugee crisis at the end of the 20th century, becoming the largest population in the biggest refugee camp in the world, Dadaab camp. This pattern of migration and displacement does not occur without regard to the psychological effects of war and violence on refugee identity both throughout migration and after resettlement.

Though there is not one global consensus definition of the word trauma, the American Psychological Association defines it broadly as “events that pose a significant threat (physical, emotional, or psychological) to the safety of the victim or loved ones/friends and are overwhelming and shocking” (Krupnik, 2019). The scientific and clinical impact of trauma often causes post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), an acute psychological syndrome that is often characterized by victims’ inability to recover from the dangerous events they experienced. With the continuation of the civil war and an ever-present connection to their homeland, Somali refugees often find themselves re-experiencing the pain of both historical and political trauma within their diasporic lives.

Trauma exists in the Somali community as a product of this continuous forced migration and displacement over the last century. The legacy of European imperialism and colonialism has created a shift in power structures within the Somali nation that contributed to the past three decades of civil war and a continuous cycle of violence and conflict. This in result has led to the migration of millions of Somalis out of the horn of Africa as refugees (Bokore, 2018). In resettlement across new host countries, Somali refugees have formed local connections with their host communities, invoking a sense of tradition through clan connections and religious institutions. However, this does not happen without the disintegration of previously existing societal structures and forming new ones in destination countries. Therefore, traumatic historical experiences and the formation of new diasporic identities invoke a collective memory through refugeedom.

That history becomes the launch point of this research, which is meant to explore how new diasporic identities are formed after experiencing trauma from violence and displacement. The purpose of this research is to explore how the collective social memory defines the formation of the community's diasporic identity, and how inter-generational trauma create cycles of violence. Additionally, I will explore how these cycles are being broken in the community through transnational activism and creative storytelling within cultural adaptations.

My research will be built and guided by several questions: How does the community conceptualize trauma and mental health (in general)? What are the common narratives of migration in post-resettlement? What are the counternarratives being shared to inspire hope and through what channels is that being achieved? This will be what my literature review will explore.

Roadmap

In section one, I discuss a detailed theoretical background to my research that roots in counter-narrative storytelling and critical psychology. This includes an examination of why mental health as a theme is rarely raised among refugee communities after resettlement, and how emerging challenges have led to the rise of so many integration failures. In my second section, I explore the historical background to the events leading up to the civil war, explaining how colonialism became the fracturing root of an ethnically homogenous community. This section will also provide a conceptual understanding of what the patterns of migration out of Somalia looked like post-1991, throughout resettlement to the United States.

I theorize Somali refugees' collective memory and the formation of their post-colonial diasporic identity that is rooted in cultural developments within new host communities. Through this, I seek to highlight the inter-generational trauma that's shared, passed down, and often neglected in public discourse across the Somali diasporic community, which highlight patterns of parental violence, cultural (dis)connect of younger Somali generations from the historical and psychological trauma of their parents, addiction as a coping mechanism as well as other mental health concerns within the community. In this section, it's important to understand the role of social stigma as well as ignorance about mental health and psychology in the continuation of these challenges.

Furthermore, in my third and final section, I challenge the often-misguided public discourse of singular refugee narratives and stories. While the community does suffer from significant challenges in adapting to its new host communities across the world, I will look at remittances and financial development as a way of engaging with families and relatives

left behind after the civil war. This financial development also serve as an economic lifeline for the home country's economy. Similarly, I highlight their transnational activism in connection to their homeland and how the community is using creative storytelling as well as poetry in passing on reservoirs of communal knowledge and history, hence shaping its identity in the diaspora while maintaining a sense of belonging. Narratives of healing and social cohesion become central to this part of the community's identity analysis. I will also explore how religion is used as an organizing factor. Despite tragic narratives of Islamophobia and xenophobia arising in the post-9/11 global political discourse, the Somali diaspora has thrived and integrated in ways so many other refugee communities have not. In this part of the analysis, I explore why this was possible and how other refugee and migrant communities can learn from this restorative act of communal healing.

While my research focuses on social cohesion, storytelling, and transnational activism as ways of healing from historical and political trauma, I will conclude my findings and highlight formal channels that Somali refugees can use to address mental health challenges within their community. Critical psychology is applied as a theory in this chapter, where I will critique traditional Euro-centered methods of disseminating mental health services to migrants and refugees, such as therapy and clinical treatment. While some of the mental health challenges Somali refugees experience ought to be clinically treated such as substance abuse and addiction, other social challenges such as inter-generational trauma can be addressed in less formal ways, with a focus on community development and healing through cultural ways.

In conclusion, what this thesis seeks to highlight, and address is the reconstruction of diasporic identity among Somali refugees using collective social memory and communal

identity in their new host communities. While many communities will experience struggles in post-migration resettlement, Somali refugees have had a particular experience of migration as the civil war in their homeland continues and new waves of violent attacks and displacement happen daily throughout the Horn of Africa. This research seeks to establish a way forward from all the chaos and displacement and find a futuristic integration model of refugee engagement and resettlement with a focus on mental wellness and creative storytelling.

Positionality

This research became essential for me because of my Somali heritage and personal experience. I spent a decade of my childhood in Mogadishu and saw what war and violence can do to so many that are left with so little. Though I have never been a refugee and my family had lived in the city of their own accord, the complex layers of the national trauma that are shared by all Somalis are significantly obvious and challenging. Even in pain, there is diversity in the depth of that struggle. Yet, Somali refugees have thrived in their host countries; Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, and the United States (among many other countries that took in Somali refugees in the last three decades). So, I sought to do this research to highlight that struggle and reject the often attached (self)victimization that comes with the identity of ‘refugeeness’. Hence, throughout this paper, I write as both an insider and outsider – an insider who has experienced that historical and political trauma yet as an outsider who has never been a refugee. I invoke my community’s resilience while showing their vulnerability and struggle. I am of them, for them, and with them throughout this research.

Section 1: Theoretical Framework

From the initial step of migration after the civil war in 1991 to the decades following resettlement, Somali refugees' stories rarely center on the effects of migration on psychological health but rather on the immediate aftermath of displacement – the success of the humanitarian process. So, how is trauma experienced and shared to assist in recovery and healing? That becomes the objective of the research. While focusing on the Somali community as research participants, I explore communal attitudes towards Eurocentric mental health and psychological treatment due to their cultural conceptualization of mental health – and trauma. In this step, it will be necessary to highlight how the community is dealing with collective trauma, away from Western traditional psychology, hence creating a counternarrative framework to work in. This will be mainly done through analysis of efforts undertaken by the community.

I also critique the often-overlooked implications of Eurocentric forms of psychological treatment that do not align with the Somali cultural forms of healing and wellbeing. In this step, critical psychology becomes an important theoretical framework, where healing and recovery are not centered on individual therapy and counseling but communal connectivity and social activism. Considering that Somalia is known as a “Nation of poets”, storytelling and poetry become central tools in the recollection of social and collective memory. Therefore, historical trauma, collective memory, and recovery through hope and social healing become the central themes of this research.

I. Research Methods and Methodology

The question that catapulted me into this research seeks to address mental health when different variants such as migration, war, and mental health are molded into one group's experience across international borders. The question I pose is, "How is the diasporic Somali identity shaped by the collective traumatic memory of migration and war?" From this departure point, I rely on both historical and personal experiences of the civil war and migration routes that Somali refugees took to safer destinations and resettlement. Furthermore, I explore how psychosocial violence-affected older Somalis create intergenerational trauma that has been passed down to younger Somalis in the diaspora. Eventually, I hope to highlight how Somalis, as a cultural community, conceptualize and stigmatize trauma and how forms of social therapy and healing lead to new norms. I hope that by the end of this research process, I have a strong background from which I can draw solutions to such a complex topic and research.

Hence, my research involved two key steps of data collection and analysis. First, I structured my research in a theoretical framework of counternarrative and critical psychology that built up relevant scholarly literature on mental health, trauma, and social recovery among migrant communities. Within this step, I state my positionality concerning the research and how my experience is complemented by the available literature review. Unfortunately, since this research was done during the Covid-19 global pandemic, my interview process was interrupted and the possibility of holding discussion groups became impossible. Hence, my research depended on content and literature analysis of academic and scholarly work as well as creative methods of storytelling and poetry to drive this research.

In the last step of the research, I explored recommendations of how to engage in social therapy as a way of dealing with trauma and creating a path for recovery and healing. This could be possible by exploring non-traditional sources of change within critical psychology and the larger framework of decolonizing knowledge and narratives. It would be in forms of narratives, storytelling and poetry within the community as forms of knowledge and memory reproduction.

Section 2: Literature Review

This section of the thesis introduces the historical and political background of the Somali migration and resettlement in the diaspora across countries like the United States of America, and what that integration process looks like. Despite the swift humanitarian efforts in Somalia after the beginning of the civil war, the country and community continue to suffer from significant losses through migration and displacement, as well as the continued war in their homeland. This creates added levels of collective trauma, which triggers a mental health challenge among resettled refugees and a communal stigma against treatment and healing.

I. Displacement and Migration

Bokore (2018) explores the historical trauma and displacement that creates the base for understanding refugee trauma within the Somali community. Historically, Somalis were a 'Nation of Poets' that relied heavily on their Somali indigenous poetic tradition as a source of knowledge. This was complemented by the influence of Islam on their culture and region. However, this cohesion was torn apart when secular Western traditions challenged the production of indigenous knowledge, pitching the Orient - including Africans - versus the Occident, hence presenting the image of Africans as barbaric and uncivilized to the world. Furthermore, Islamic tradition which focuses on the gendered relationship of knowledge was portrayed as degrading and dehumanizing in the face of Missionary colonialism in Africa, in a post-World War II world that was experiencing the second wave of the feminist movement. This systematic recreation and reproduction of that Western knowledge and image distorted a rich history of the nation and its people that were caught

in a cycle of colonization and exploitation. Bokore (2018) argues that this was the first historically traumatic experience the Somali community endured.

In the early 1960s, right after gaining independence, Somalia elected its first democratic president. The post-colonial Somali community was already divided along ethnic lines and internal conflicts were already brewing, as a result of the historical influences of colonialism. By 1969, the assassination of President Sharmake led to a military dictatorship led by Major General Mohammed Siad Barre that lasted till the beginning of the Somali civil war in 1991. Under his rule, extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, and conflict created massive waves of internal displacement and migration to neighboring countries, eventually leading to the creation of Dadaab and Kakuma camps in Kenya (UNHCR, 2016). Over the decades, millions more were internally displaced as others fled to neighboring countries (Gardner et al, 2004). Further layers of trauma and social violence were experienced as Somali refugee families migrated towards camps in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. As of 2016, nearly two million Somalis born in the country lived outside its borders while ongoing conflicts and terrorism from Al-Shabaab – the militant group with links to Al-Qaeda, continue to displace more every year (PRC, 2016). Poverty, drought, and dire humanitarian conditions in refugee camps became the most recent marker of that continued historical trauma that many Somalis have lived through and continue to experience to this day.

II. Redefining Norms; Life After Resettlement

Koinova (2016) writes on how survivors – diasporic refugees - remain “connected to the source of their suffering”. She explains how unresolved traumatic migration and the continuous conflict between host country and home country create a dual identity among

refugees in the diaspora. She argues that while this can be very beneficial, it can create an identity crisis and can lead to further conflict and trauma. A sense of ‘longing and belonging’ is often predominant in how older Somali generations speak about their homeland and are emotionally and economically invested in their home country. Somalis send nearly \$1.4 billion annually in remittances and contribute to nearly a quarter of the country’s gross domestic product (Dahir, 2016). While this is beneficial in addressing the community’s financial growth, it also creates a barrier for Somali refugees to integrate and acculturate in their host countries, often distinguishing them ethnically and nationally. This is due to the already established connectivity to the community’s source of suffering, a homeland that’s still in political turmoil and a source of insecurity for its region.

Furthermore, due to the older generation’s firsthand experience in the home country, younger Somalis in the diaspora only know of the homeland through social and collective post-memory (Bui, 2016). This memory is often dependent on the memorialization of war, violence and clan conflict. This is where the contentious clan-relations and association that started the civil war in Somalia are carried forth into the new host countries, in what Bokore (2018) references as “internal othering”. On top of that, the diasporic identity is compounded by the Muslim identity that’s usually hypervisible in the post-9/11 security world and is often portrayed negatively in the media (Shams, 2017). Therefore, this dual identity and the continued and underscored effects of repressed historical and cultural trauma become evident as Somali refugees show signs of violence, depression and suicidal behaviors in their new communities. Hence, it generates another barrier to social healing and ethnic cohesion in the Somali community, even in the diaspora.

III. Cultural Development in Post-resettlement

The lack of ethnic and tribal cohesion in a rather homogenous community is the main cause that led to the displacement and conflict among Somalis today. Resulting from the accumulation of power by some clans in the post-independence Somalia in 1960 to 1990 and the persecution and marginalization of some others, clan conflicts have continued to this day in modern Somalia. A forward moving discussion on healing cannot be engaged without addressing this tribal rift, that has now been passed down to the next generation of Somalis in the diaspora. Bokore (2018) elaborates that this is due to prolonged emotional and psychological trauma that alters cognitive processes and shapes our responses and attitudes. Therefore, she argues that in order for refugees fleeing violence to heal and integrate properly, appropriate intervention and policy change should be designed to eliminate toxic environments that is exposed to resettled refugees. Multiculturalism, as often proposed by integration models in countries like Canada, is not always the answer. Xenophobia, islamophobia, ethnic identity, individual and communal experiences of trauma and intergroup differences are some of the challenges facing refugees in host countries and are ways in which they are categorized and hyper-visualized. Bokore (2018) intentionally invokes trauma intervention and provision of mental health service as a solution but also acknowledges the need to understand refugee identities and complexities of cultural conceptualization of Western-oriented knowledge of psychology in the diaspora.

Family composition and dynamic also change after migration and this in many ways defines the diasporic Somali identity. Despite Somali constructs of gender relations being patriarchal in nature, Boyle and Ali (2010) find that more Somali families are headed by

women (in their research based in the United States). Additionally, the definition of the term ‘family’ shifts and changes as more families blend in relatives while other maintain singular family units. Grandparents and uncles become prominent childcare providers as mothers and women become breadwinners for their families while arranged marriages reduce due to the loss of extended familial relations and clan ties. Considering that it was men who often went to war and filled the army and clan ranks that still fuel the Somali civil war, this cultural shift serves a significant role in shaping the diasporic identity through family structures. Additionally, the attitudes of younger generations of Somalis who are becoming aware of this historical trauma through what’s perhaps feminist lens are engaging with this this history differently.

IV. Intergenerational Trauma and (Dis)connect

The psychological effect of the general identity crisis among diaspora Somali teenagers has led to poor integration, a rejection of societal norms that would rather ease social development (Omar, 2019). Hence, the rise of substance abuse, gang violence, domestic violence, and mental illnesses are direct results from this identity crisis within an already struggling community, whose grief is invisibilized by the normality of the over-shadowing life-long identity of “refugeeness”. Therefore, expressing these communal problems in a way is a rejection of the ever-hopeful message of migrant success stories and communal integration.

More often than not, social memory becomes a powerful tool with which societies reshape and reconstruct their experiences. Kolber (2006) discusses “therapeutic forgetting”, an intentional process of “memory dampening” in the field of neuroscience. He explains that while medicine and drugs can be used to dampen the effects of traumatic

events in one's life, people can sometimes choose to engage in a process of "intentional forgetting" in order to cope. However, this can sometimes prevent individuals or communities from dealing with their trauma in a real manner. Somalis in the diaspora have often consciously or maybe unconsciously engaged in this process by 'diluting' traumatic incidents or omitting them from familial narratives. This creates a gap where family members suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can behave a certain way that may otherwise not be explained leading to change in beliefs, values and identity in a phenomenon called posttraumatic growth (PTG) (Ellis et al, 2015). Some of the most prominent symptoms of PTSD that Kolber (2006) highlights and can be observed in PTG are emotional numbing and withdrawal, suicidal tendencies, and violence - or support for illegal and violent actions. This framework and phenomenology are used to explain why some diasporic children, especially within the Somali community - even though at smaller rates - have joined terrorist organizations such as Al-Shabaab or engage in criminal activities.

V. Critical Psychology; Transcultural Treatment and Social Therapy

Memory, symbolism of remembrance and engagement with one's life experiences, can be 'sculpted' in many ways and often, in damaging ways. "Official memories" emerge from nationalistic investment in building essential identities across global affairs and international relations (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2014) and serve the purpose of creating dominant narratives about cultures, history and foreign affairs. Yet, what we see across critical psychology – which is rooted in critical race theory (CRT) - is the emerging challenges to such dominant narratives. These challenging narratives are seen as "dangerous" because "the danger is in the practice (i.e., action) of remembering the past in

new ways that are disruptive to taken-for-granted assumptions about a group's identity; these ways establish new understandings of personal and collective identities that enable solidarity" (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2014, p. 197).

Additionally, Bui (2016) shares ways through which refugees have always been able to account for their own journeys and build methods of resistance and resilience across multiple generations. Whether it's art, music, poetry and performances, refugees and their descendants have always been able to curate their 'personhood' through multimedia platforms that humanize their narratives. They often do this through an examination of *post-memory*, a shared inter-generational trauma of displacement and loss that comes after war and migration. As Bui (2016) notes:

sometimes those who grew up in survivor families adopt the traumatic experiences of others as part of their own life story, and this process of transference expresses the "curiosity, the urgency, the frustrated need to know about a traumatic past. (p. 113)

Hence, younger generations engage in a "narrative retelling of the past" in order to "concoct new imaginary forms that still directly speak to that muddled past" (p. 113).

Hence, when refugees re-engage with their given identity of "refugeeness", they are questioning the barriers of the integration models that were applied after their resettlement. They are also navigating new academic and medical fields and challenging existing care models for patients suffering from trauma but come from cultural backgrounds that are not in tune with their new host community's. Though ideal integration models don't exist, a priority that needs to be highlighted is the advocacy for culturally sensitive mental health services for refugees. Language barriers, cultural mis-perceptions,

and religious traditions are the biggest barriers in Somali patients receiving care in psychiatric departments in the United States (Williams & Logan, 2007). Therefore, before any treatment, medical professionals should come to their patients with an understanding of their history and culture.

Most refugees have come through war, violence, camps, and long resettlement processes (some with severe interrogations) that has bred suspicion against authority and foreigners (Williams & Logan, 2007; Ferguson et al., 2017). Therefore, medical treatment is rejected in favor of coping mechanism such as religious practices, traditional medicine and herbs. Complicating that further is linguistic deficiency as the older Somali generation rejects such modes of integration. This is why it becomes necessary for service providers to have translation and interpretation services or allow family members to translate on behalf of the patients, establishing the base for a more accommodating care. In more severe psychiatric cases, family interpretation services can be exchanged for professional interpretation, since families might alter the truth in order to protect their relative. However, they can remain there for moral support (Scuglik et al., 2007).

Additionally, younger Somali generations are engaging in communal advocacy about mental health and destigmatizing their communities about what mental illnesses are. This is often being done within family units as well as already existing cultural establishments, such as mosques and schools. Scuglik et al. (2007) argue that though most Somali families are patriarchal, such institutions can be beneficial in creating a “family-approach” dynamic where mental health care is advocated for. Furthermore, (Ferguson et al., 2017) argues:

Diversifying concepts of mental health symptomatology, beyond the framework of Western diagnostic systems, may help ensure that individuals in need of services do not fall through the cracks between pathology and superstition. Assessment of psychiatric distress, beyond conventional Western diagnosis, could help those who present with symptoms outside the “normal” diagnostic criteria be effectively identified and treated within their cultural context. (p. 646)

Given the severity of mental illnesses and distress among Somali refugees, a holistic approach that weaves cultural competency with decolonial mental health services is necessary in moving the conversation forward. European methods of knowledge application are not compatible with the cultural norms of Somali refugees. Therefore, using culturally-competent terminologies and framework shapes how information is presented and executed in advocacy for mental wellbeing. Awareness about the socio-economic backgrounds of the community as well as their diverse level of migration patterns (camp-registered refugees, former refugees – now citizens of host country, asylees, undocumented migrants, first generation children of refugees) helps further inform the nuances of this process. While Somalia is still in a protracted state of insecurity, many Somalis in the diaspora remain connected to those they left behind or relatives they are still in contact with. This continued physical and emotional displacement from home has pro-longed mental health effects. The solution lies with the community as well as its allies.

Section 3: Recovery

While it's important to highlight the mental health struggles of Somali refugees in the diaspora, it's essential to attach a sense of agency to communities who are establishing their own ways of engaging with their collective traumas and pain. While individual struggles with trauma and its effects are diverse and unique, collective healing from trauma pulls on communal efforts to address suffering, integration difficulties as well as re-engaging with the sad yet essential historical violence and displacement. In this section, I share findings from the literature analysis within my research on how the community is creating efforts to mitigate and address these challenges.

I. Deconstruction of Communal Suffering

Under refugee resettlement programs within international regimes, there is a lack of mental health service provisions that cause so many to be left with dealing with the trauma of displacement and migration. However, when such services are provided, there is the often-overlooked implications of Eurocentric forms of psychological treatment that do not align with the cultural forms of healing and wellbeing of a traditional migrant society. Therefore, critical psychology as a theoretical framework comes to view - where healing and recovery are not centered on individual therapy and counseling but communal connectivity and social activism. Art, creative writing and storytelling are tools through which this communal memory and activism are highlighted and shared.

In my research, memory is a central theme. Even though Somali refugees and migrants have significant age differences and experiences, the evolution and development of their identities are connected and disconnected. The older generation experienced colonial Somalia while younger generations were born in the time of the civil war, and a third

generation coming along as first generation Americans. Therefore, the obvious identity (dis)connection is visible and portrayed in how they express this notion of a “home”. This can only be understood through a post-colonial diasporic identity framework – a definition of the colonial impacts on social development in the post-independence era.

From this lens of decolonial psychology emerges a “psychology of liberation” (Gondra, 2013). The work of liberational psychology within decolonial storytelling is not new but is coming to view as I critique global resettlement frameworks. This field of study highlights the necessity to investigate, understand and in some way come to accept the source of a community’s suffering and pain. This pain and suffering of course exists with our social and cultural fabric, as well as political landscapes. Whether this pain is individual or communal, physical, psychological or spiritual, the co-dependency of human interaction causes shared vulnerability. In understanding our pain and suffering, we get to explore our own experience of our “becoming” (Baró, 1964). Therefore, this research aims to highlight this process of “de-ideologization” and deconstruction of narratives of communal pain and emphasize Somali refugees’ shared courage.

Additionally, this elaborate understanding of suffering comes with an anti-dote of some kind; a tradition of *self-care* (Hobart & Kneese, 2020). This concept is often underpinned by feminist theory and practice, where often activists within this field find themselves challenging systemic and institutional racism and sexism – an exhaustive practice in its own right. Therefore, radical self-care becoming a method of resistance as well within decolonial frameworks of Critical Race theory (CRT). Of course, this journey of self-care can be individual, communal and/or global.

Critical analysis of the history of colonization and slavery helps understand the emergence of liberation theology and psychology, fields of work requiring revision and re-evaluation on how we exist and co-exist despite religious and racial tension. Through this we see a unity in human values of democracy and social justice, a rejection of white supremacy and racism, and reconstitution of what is considered in essence ‘humane’. In short, we’re co-dependent and our individual success is that of our communities and nations. Therefore, a radical practice of self-care in itself is decolonial and anti-racist, and the Somali diasporic community engages within in multiple platforms. At the height of suffering and loss, cultural attitudes shift towards resisting passive victimhood.

II. Transnational Activism and Community Building

Unlike Kolber’s (2006) medicine-oriented treatment of trauma, critical psychology explores social change as a mean of trauma recovery and prevention of psychopathology, away from mainstream psychology – often Eurocentric therapy and counseling focuses on the individual. Diasporic engagement in the reconstruction of Somalia’s economy and education sector creates a transnational wave of active connection between host and home countries and their Somali communities. This level of transnational acts as a form of social therapy and recovery from national trauma, a rebuilding of a nation from abroad, where every family invest in its land, village and community back at home. Somalis, largely a pastoral community experiencing decades of conflict, struggle to establish proper infrastructure for education, health and transportation. However, annual remittances provide families to seek educational opportunities for their children (Lindley, 2008). This diasporic philanthropy as referred to by scholars is a major income source for many Somalis and is almost a cultural shame to not send remittances home. This is the first step

in engaging in a process that does not focus on the negative impacts of experienced historical and cultural trauma but on the communal sense of duty and support across borders and continents.

Dryden-Peterson and Reddic (2019) highlight that “diaspora are also increasingly positioned as development actors, particularly as connected to private sector investment, poverty alleviation, and replacement social service provision made necessary by fragility and conflict and/or reductions in foreign assistance” (p. 214). They introduce a “model of education in fragile and conflict- affected settings (FCS),” where the main source of investment in these countries such as Somalia is the diaspora’s financial contribution and allyship. The necessity for this is unlike that of global education development models, often engineered through international non-governmental institutions (INGOs), “diaspora engagement in businesses, for example, is driven not only by financial returns but also emotional and social status returns, connected to personal and identity-based attachments” (p. 5). Additionally, Somali refugees have an attached identity to their homeland, with a hope of return some day. This has created the absolute dependency on remittances sent home, for the many left stuck with abject poverty, insecurity and underdevelopment. In 2015, the total estimates of remittances in Somalia was US\$1.4 billion and in support of nearly 23% of the country’s GDP (World Bank, 2016).

Hence, this network of diasporic engagement and local development has created a slow but sure stream of spread of new schools and universities being opened, higher rates of school enrollment among girls, real estate development, among many other forms of infrastructures.

III. Creative Storytelling and Poetry

A counternarrative consciousness is being engaged by younger and more hopeful Somali refugees in the diaspora, who feel the need to rebrand what it means to be a Muslim refugee in today's world. Somali-Canadian artist, former refugee and singer K'naan Warsame is just one of many Somali refugees in the diaspora who made a global mark when his song 'Waving flag' was chosen to be the 2010 World Cup anthem. The importance of that is not lost at all as its lyrics and rhythm, as well as his other songs and albums, detail his journey from refugeedom to fame and how in the process, cultural identity evolves even within a single community across time and place. Similarly, Warsan Shire is another Somali poet whose poetry won several awards and was quoted by world renown singers like Beyonce in her album, *Lemonade*. This is a signifier of the changing attitudes towards migrant identity, especially in the face of ethnic hypervisibility and xenophobia. Their work, like many others, is a continuation of Somali indigenous poetic sources of knowledge yet shared in Western framework and setting. This is another form of storytelling; a consciously active way of retelling traumatic experiences and looking towards healing as a community.

For this part of my thesis, I decided on this sample of data by highlighting some of the more globally known poets, writers and musicians who are sharing their work on different platforms and are engaging with a global Somali diaspora, despite the variations of their residence. Most of these artists are refugees and have capitalized on that identity to push these conversations forward. Of course, this data sample is not representative of all Somali creators out there who engaging with this theme in so many different ways. Instead, it's a representation of the angle of my research I had wanted to share.

I will share K'naan's music that inspired entire generations of Somali youth to engage in self-expression despite the struggle – his personal life always seeping through his music. I will give credit to Saredo and Surer Mohamed, two Somali sisters who are advocating for storytelling as means of speaking to the past's losses, if we are to move forth from normative victim agendas. Similarly, I underpin poet and educator Warsan Shire's work that not only advocates for human rights and refugee integration but has in the last five years emerged in pop culture as a signifier of refugee resilience. She has also cemented the essence of refugee creativity at the highlight of a migration crisis in the world. These forms of artistic expression become voices that envision the progress of the community and their hope that one day Somalia will become a politically-stable country and journey towards 'home' will end.

i. Poetry: Introducing the Somali *Gabay*

The Somali *gabay* is practiced as means of communication as well as knowledge production. Anyone who has come into contact with Somali culture and literature has seen its prominent poetry and vibrant tradition, where poetry is/was used to quell arguments, settle financial deals, propose to families or even sang to herding camels. The multi-functionality of this type of art and its prominence has made Somalis be known as a "Nation of Poets" (Laurence, 1954).

The Somali language had no orthography before 1972 with minimal translation efforts, and hence very dominantly remained foreign and new to Western knowledge until recent decades. Due to the absence of an official orthography pre-1972, many Somalis wrote in Arabic, English or Italian and documentation of any oral history was rare. Because of this, the community's history and 'word' was shared orally until linguistic researchers

such as Margaret Laurence and B. W. Andrzejewski came to the former Somaliland Protectorate in the 1950s to pursue cultural research (Xiquez, 2015, p. 34). With the assistance of Somali poets who could speak English, Laurence and Andrzejewski wrote multiple translations of oral Somali poetry and history, bringing to light the first of its kind work that highlighted the richness of the Somali language and poetry.

Laurence eventually publishes the first anthology of translated Somali poems, *A Tree For Poverty*. In her works, she emphasizes that this project was meant as an encouragement for Somalis to do more transcribing and preservation of their own art. For many, she brought to light the incredible literature that was buried so deep in many Somalis daily lives, that seemed hidden from the world. Whether the poems are *Balwo* or *heelo* (love poems) or *Buraanbur* (wedding songs) or *geeraar* (war poems) or *hees* (music), the Somali poetry is present in all forms of life in post-1991 civil war era today.

a. K'naan

K'naan is a Somali poet and singer-songwriter who came to global fame when he sang “Wavin flag” as the headlining Coca-Cola anthem for the 2010 World Cup, the first time the event made it to Africa (Kessler, 2009). His journey to fame and the poignancy of his art is not devoid of his life’s story, a migration from war-torn Somali to North America. Born and raised in Mogadishu, his family fled the war and migrated to New York first then to Toronto. Growing up in Mogadishu (also known as Xamar by the locals), he understood the power of music when censorship of anti-government songs started (K'naan, 2012). So, after his family’s migration as refugees, he found music to have the power to “encapsulating magic or spread alarm” as he puts it. In many ways, it was a way of paying tribute to his homeland too.

He started recording music and at first, many thought his music was full of angst and vivid description of war – a not so palatable art. But despite his persistence and staying true to his music, he eventually was signed and recorded two albums, “Wavin flag” being one of the songs in his debut album. In the foreshadow of his debut album, it says, “K’naan thanks WAR, Warlords, Immigration . . . Correctional Facilities, Financial Institutions, Public Schools . . . for making me fight harder. For giving me convictions” yet his “songs are infused with an awareness of injustice, [but] they eschew a victimhood mentality in favor of a sense of optimism and personal responsibility.” (Kessler, 2009, p. 91).

“Fatima”

In the song “Fatima”, K’naan paints a picturesque scenery of what war and peace looked like in Somalia for so many refugees. He writes of and to *Fatima*, his neighbor’s daughter - on whom he had a crush on (whether she was an actual person or a metaphor of every young Somali girl’s life in the country can not be determined by the listener). He writes of the bustling day-to-day life of pre-war Mogadishu – a city that was a regional center for trade, development and travel. The weather is warm, sunny and the local markets are flooded by buyers and sellers while the morning breakfast rush produces a mixture of aromas of spices and foods from homes along the street.

Picture the morning taste and devour / We rise early pace up the hour

Streets is bustling hustling their heart out / You can't have the sweet with no sour

Spices herbs the sweet scent of flower / We came out precisely the hour

Clouds disappear the sun shows the power / No chance of a probable shower

But as the song progresses, this image fades and the essence of the first hints of war emerge. The beautiful young girl whom he admired at the age of 12, who spoke Swahili and Arabic and studied with him, didn't show up one day. When he discovers she has been killed, he writes,

Fatima, what did the young man say / Before he stole you away /

On that fateful day Fatima / Fatima, did he know your name /

Or the plans we made / To go to New York City, Fatima

Fatima's murder, like so many of her Somali compatriots, shocks yet informs every one of the reality that was unfolding in the country. So, migration became an essential tool. In the song, he also writes to Fatima, about his success as a singer-songwriter in North America, and how his trauma persists despite the distance from his childhood (both physicality and in time).

Fatima Fatima, I'm in America / I make rhymes and I make 'em delicate

*You woulda liked the parks in Connecticut/ You woulda said I'm working too hard
again*

*Damn you shooter, damn you the building / Whose walls hid the blood she was
spilling*

Damn you country so good at killing / Damn you feeling, for persevering.

But despite the success, the growth and the communal integration, K'naan's songs and work centers on memory as an essential tool in reconstructing narratives of pain into resilience and optimism. He acknowledges that despite what's lost, the community has

achieved a lot since moving to the diaspora and that we can celebrate and rejoice through art, music, and creative platforms. He ends with;

Now I just want to make it clear / I don't want you to shed a tear.

Because this here, is a celebration,

We're not mourning / We're celebrating

“Until the Lion Learns to Speak”

In his sultry song “Until the Lion Learns to Speak”, K’naan writes to inform his audience about the essential use of poetic music to combat stereotypes of Africans and specially, refugees. He highlights the art of expression through rhythmical stanzas showing a life from poverty and war, to the corners of fame and success. The “lion” in this poem in a lot of ways representative of the struggling persona, mighty in their pain and yet weak because it cannot speak for itself.

Until the lion learns to speak / The tales of hunting will be weak

My poetry hales with in the streets / My poetry fails to be discrete

It travels across the earth and seas / From Eritrea to the West Indies

It knows no boundaries / No cheese

His poetry failing to be discrete is acknowledgement to the testament that there is a universal suffering that’s often shared and might even be expected if you come from a specific community/country. So, by acknowledging one’s own reality of darkness, you

walk “into the flood and through it” (Dahir, 2017). The stories he highlights are geared towards hope, a refutation of the message that all Africa and Somalia know are poverty and war.

*I was born and raised in a place / Where torn of flame would place
Where the foreigners not embrace / Where they warn you jog and pace
Where loners low what they gaze / Where the corners slow at a chase
Where they tarts and turn in the maze / With the pistol upon your face*

These lines paint the historical and cultural memories that are highlighted in the previous section of my second section. Like in most of his work, K’naan always paints vivid descriptions of a ‘burning home’, a beloved figure that is transforming itself to be a source of violence and destruction. This home is both physical and metaphorical. The actual land that many fled from and many more were killed in stands very evident till today. Genocides preceding the civil war indicate the death of nearly 200,000 people in the Northern Somalia region in the process of controlling government dissidents, and subsequently igniting a civil war that displaced millions (Einashe and Kennard, 2018). But on the other hand, the metaphorical imagined land to which many Somalis want to return to is not existent yet, as the violence rages on. Hence, the persistent struggle of transforming that home to something that’s worth having, together, is this artist’s motive to inspire through his lyrics.

So come with me to my longs / The death and deal we run

With passion see how I come / No cash I am free in the slums

The past can we overcome / I am asking we be the ones

To actually be the ones / To free our people from gun

While the song is full of self-praise and has a “room for grandiosity” (K’naan, 2012), he actually points out that for critical hope and action to be realized against violence, we must look beyond our dark past. This sense of hope is not a mythical “individualistic up-by-your-bootstraps hyperbole” (Andrade, 2009. P. 182) but is a “critical hope [that] demands a committed and active struggle against the evidence in order to change the deadly tides of wealth inequality, group xenophobia, and personal despair” (p. 185). This message of course critiques those with the false hope that despite not addressing the deep communal suffering and trauma and division that exists, somehow Somalia will be a stable state again where they can return to.

b. Warsan Shire

Warsan Shire, born in Kenya to Somali parents, is a British-Somali artist whose work came to global fame in 2016 when Beyoncé featured her in her album “Lemonade” (Hess, 2016). The poem the album quotes is called “the unbearable weight of staying — (the end of the relationship)”, highlighting the necessary loss within relationships – often for the benefit of the one leaving. While Shire’s work is diverse and engages many themes, some of her most prominent work includes her poem “home”, and her book “teaching my mother how to give birth” – an anthology of feminist literary work that weaves in war, trauma, and resilience.

“Home”

“Home” presents migration in a different light. Despite the reverberating images of migration that have been dominant in the news and in political spaces, it seems difficult to persuade many of the humanity of such images. The complex push-pull factors that lead to migration crises are often not dependent on the sending country only, but on national foreign policy as well as global management frameworks. Whether one is fleeing from war or violence or marginalization, every human is entitled to a safe space in which they prosper. The “claim of necessity” that’s required of refugees and migrants doesn’t meet the destitute situations many are in as they flee violence (Walzer, 1983). Shire makes the case for this sense of duty and hospitality we owe refugees.

No one leaves home unless / home is the mouth of a shark

You only run for the border / when you see the whole city running as well

Your neighbors running faster than you / breath bloody in their throats

The boy you went to school with / who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory

Is holding a gun bigger than his body / you only leave home /

when home won’t let you stay.

Shire’s words are poignant and descriptive of the realities of many refugees who run from home and leave nearly everything behind. That’s often because the push factors are life-threatening, and the only way out is through the treacherous journey of becoming a refugee. This is not a tribute to those migrating only, but the many that have stayed, or

left behind. Shire of course draws from the constant reality of her parents' homeland - a place she calls home too. In one of her interviews (Reid, 2013) she states,

I'm from Somalia where there has been a war going on for my entire life. I grew up with a lot of horror in the backdrop – a lot of terrible things that have happened to people who are really close to me, and to my country, and to my parents; so, it's in the home and it's even in you, it's on your skin and it's in your memories and your childhood. And my relatives and my friends and my mother's friends have experienced things that you can't imagine, and they've put on this jacket of resiliency and a dark humor. But you don't know what they've been victims of, or what they've done to other people. Them being able to tell me, and then me writing it, it's cathartic, being able to share their stories, even if it is something really terrible, something really tragic. Sometimes I'm telling other people's stories to remove stigma and taboo, so that they don't have to feel ashamed; sometimes you use yourself as an example.

This poem invokes memory, identity loss as a refugee and a very difficult integration process for especially Black migrants from Africa. She documents the historical violence and racism many come to face in their new host countries.

*if you survive and you are greeted on the other side / with go home blacks, refugees
dirty immigrants, asylum seekers / sucking our country dry of milk,
dark, with their hands out / smell strange, savage -*

look what they've done to their own countries, what will they do to ours?

Yet, these nationalistic attitudes and narratives about refugees are not independent of the global frameworks of power. The ascendance of systemic capitalism and globalization over human rights has led to inequality and severe poverty in most urban cities and major economies in the world, where a large number of people live in dire poverty or are homeless. Similarly, wars and violence have erupted in nations where resource exploitation have led to class divisions and extrajudicial killing. Therefore, with the rise in rural to urban migration in developing countries and the global south to north migration trends, we see a rise in class and racial conflict in global cities and the world at large. Sassen (2014, pp. 36) argues that “the reality at the ground level is more akin to a kind of economic version of ethnic cleansing in which elements considered troublesome are dealt with by simply eliminating them” or pegging them as harmful, unnecessary and invasive. This is how refugee narratives have become centered on a ‘people’ that are invading a new land in search of a better life, what Shire called “sucking our country dry of milk”.

“Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth”

This anthology comes as a gut-punching soul-awakening metaphor, where Shire uses the human body – especially women’s bodies – as the canvas upon which she paints her work. From the captivating title to the poems’ lyrics and imagery, she personifies the experience of refugee women who are acculturating to new lives and customs while struggling to celebrate their tradition. She paints “visceral images of war-torn landscapes,

roving bands of militia, and life lived on the edge of terror. Shire confronts the reader with the humanity of those forced to leave their homes under perilous circumstances, a theme that has spectacular resonance in the wake of the subsequent global Syrian migrant crisis” (Alice, 2016). In this work, Shire shares imagery of physical, emotional and psychological violence that grows within a person after enduring such harsh realities. In “Conversations about Home (at the Deportation Centre)”, Shire writes,

They ask me how did you get here? Can't you see it on my body? The Libyan desert red with immigrant bodies, the Gulf of Aden bloated, the city of Rome with no jacket. I hope the journey meant more than miles because all of my children are in the water. I thought the sea was safer than the land. I want to make love, but my hair smells of war and running and running. I want to lay down, but these countries are like uncles who touch you when you're young and asleep. Look at all these borders, foaming at the mouth with bodies broken and desperate. I'm the colour of hot sun on the face, my mother's remains were never buried. I spent days and nights in the stomach of the truck; I did not come out the same. Sometimes it feels like someone else is wearing my body.

The Somali migration crisis continues as the country experiences protracted violence, insecurity, with a severe humanitarian crisis that continues to propel Somalis towards Europe and North America and has left many lost at sea and in human trafficking. This trauma manifests in the community both at home and in the diaspora. Shire notes that despite the efforts and success of many resettlement programs for Somali refugees, she

acknowledges the continued lack of healing that the community suffer from. She elegantly approaches the future with measured critical hope but with the fear of a person aware of the danger of unifying human experiences into a tragedy.

I know a few things to be true. I do not know where I am going, where I have come from is disappearing, I am unwelcome and my beauty is not beauty here. My body is burning with the shame of not belonging, my body is longing. I am the sin of memory and the absence of memory. I watch the news and my mouth becomes a sink full of blood. The lines, the forms, the people at the desks, the calling cards, the immigration officers, the looks on the street, the cold settling deep into my bones, the English classes at night, the distance I am from home. But Alhamdulillah, all of this is better than the scent of a woman completely on fire, or a truckload of men, who look like my father pulling out my teeth and nails, or fourteen men between my legs, or a gun, or a promise, or a lie, or his name, or his manhood in my mouth.

I hear them say go home, I hear them say fucking immigrants, fucking refugees. Are they really this arrogant? Do they not know that stability is like a lover with a sweet mouth upon your body one second; the next you are a tremor lying on the floor covered in rubble and old currency waiting for its return. All I can say is, I was once like you, the apathy, the pity, the ungrateful placement and now my home is the mouth of a shark, now my home is the barrel of a gun. I'll see you on the other side.

Shire's work highlights very compellingly how many Somali writers and creatives are engaging with their lost homes and the new one they are adopting to. The trauma remains but hope perseveres despite the chaos.

ii. Storytelling

Publications and writing are mediums of engaging communities as well as the world. For many Somali refugees and their children, oral stories are the best way they hear about their familial experiences as well their country's history. By this virtue, storytelling becomes an essential tool to capture the most recent history and imagine ways to move forward from it. In this section, we meet young Somali women who are engaging in narrative art to highlight their beliefs as first generation Somali diaspora but also share their parents' individual experiences throughout migration and displacement.

Saredo and Surer Mohamed: "On Things We Left Behind" – A Podcast Analysis

"On things we left behind" is a podcast focused on (re)telling migration stories through multiple mediums including interviews with migrants as well as poetry. The podcast describes itself as a "story-driven podcast that explores the hidden afterlife of war" (Acast, 2020). The presenters, sisters Saredo and Surer Mohamed are daughters of Somali refugees who migrated to Italy after the outbreak of the civil war in January 1991, then on to Canada. In the first episode, Saredo recounts her life through her father's lens. She interviews her dad, a former pilot for the Somali Airlines, about how his dream of flying was cut short by the war and the subsequent migration. This interview takes place in Mogadishu, the city her dad, who she refers to as *aabo* (dad), worked and lived in for decades. The dialogue takes form as an open-ended interview and a poetic narration by the

interviewer, painting sceneries of loss, grief, migration horrors as well as triumphs in the face of war and displacement.

Subsequently, the episodes that follow carry a similar rhythm including an interview; an interview with their mom, Shukri Adan Camey, an architect whose vision is to rebuild her home city of Mogadishu. Additionally, the series' first season includes an interview with author Nadifa Mohamed, who though left Somalia right before the war broke out, reminisces the effects that her family's cassette letter tapes had on her when she discovered them after her family's migration. She re-envisioned the world she has lost, the beauty and peace before it was gone, and the prospects of what a peaceful life looks like in the future – both for Somalis and Somalia.

What this podcast casts light on and pulls from is the diversity and struggle of human migration and the resilience of migrants and refugees in the face of history, war, and displacement. Yet, these stories – as shown in the podcast - are interwoven and are often occurring within global structures that dehumanize migration, constantly prioritizing the application of law over the humanity of the process of migration and displacement.

Reconstruction of Memory

In exploring diasporic identities, Koinova (2016) writes on survivors' attachment "to the source of their suffering" - their lost home and country becoming the source of attachment as well as departure. She explains how unresolved traumatic migration and the continuous conflict between the host country and home country create a dual identity among diasporic refugees. She argues that while this new identity can be very beneficial in assisting them to cope with their new environments, it can create an identity crisis and can

lead to further conflict and trauma. A sense of ‘longing and belonging’ is often predominant in how refugee generations speak about their homeland and their emotional investment in their home country she argues.

What “*On Things We Left Behind*” highlights is the creative process of drafting, writing, and narrating refugee migration stories without maintaining their sense of victimhood and loss. We see the interviewees reminisce about their childhood, speak about their loved ones, recollect their dreams and aspirations, and what they had to do in order to survive and move through. Memory, hence, becomes the tool. As the narrators tell their stories, it’s obvious that some are simply recollecting memories or sharing thoughts they have inherited from their families and loved ones. Nadifa (ep. 2) shares the significance of her father’s cassette letters in how she got to know about herself. In going back to a time of comfort, she realized the true personalities of her family and of her dad.

Athanasia (2017) argues that refugee diasporas “self-fashion” their identities through generational memories - in her examination of storytelling as a process of familial remembrance. With time she continues, it becomes impossible for one to think of themselves without drawing in from their family’s history and that projected mythical notions of home and belonging. So, as we listen closely to the images of life being highlighted in the podcast’s interviews, new identities form as refugees explore viable options to move forth from their lost lives or the potential of what could have been. Athanasia argues that “translating an ‘I’ that hails from storytelling and being, inevitably, imaginative in nature, into a corporeal self, is extremely challenging. But it can also allow subjects [refugees] to dictate their own terms of belonging in postwar” life (pp. 62). This

seems to be the essence of the podcast as Saredo and Surer push against the notions of the vulnerable refugees whose upended lives would never be sorted.

Unpacking the Suitcase: Addressing Multi-generational Trauma

This podcast, as Saredo and Surer state in the pilot episode, seeks to define the place of younger refugee generations and engages the complex process of post-migration identity and cultural development, which takes place within migrant communities and families. Despite fleeing violence and displacement from Somalia, Rwanda, and other African countries, most older refugees find themselves racialized and “othered” in the new host communities they are living in and have to go through a process of cultural and identity readjustment. Re-entering society through education, employment and activism becomes the central means to an end. The cultural attachment to home countries yet with a geographical disconnection creates the loophole for either re-occurrence of trauma among the young generation or a source of self-construction in this new imaginative process. Music, poetry, performance art, as well as storytelling/counter-storytelling, are interwoven to produce a platform of self-empowerment and communal contribution to defining new diasporic identities.

A forward-moving discussion on healing cannot be engaged without addressing prolonged emotional and psychological trauma that alters cognitive processes and shapes our responses and attitudes (Bokore, 2018). Therefore, Bokore argues that in order for refugees fleeing violence to heal and integrate properly, appropriate intervention and policy change should be designed to eliminate toxic environments that are exposed to resettled refugees. Multiculturalism, as often proposed by integration models in countries like

Canada, the USA, and the UK, is not always the answer. Xenophobia, Islamophobia, ethnic identity, individual and communal experiences of trauma, and intergroup differences are some of the challenges facing refugees in host countries and are ways in which they are categorized and hyper-visualized. Bokore intentionally invokes trauma intervention and provision of mental health service as a solution but also acknowledges the need to understand refugee identities and complexities of cultural conceptualization of Western-oriented knowledge of psychology in the diaspora. Therefore, the work Saredo and Surer are doing is essential in giving war refugees a voice while helping families and communities create a space to heal, have a path for open dialogue and reform in how we tell migration narratives centered on mental health and critical ethnographic understanding of psychology.

Social Therapy: *Fadhi Ku Dirir*, Religious Organizing, and Humor as Healing

Mechanisms

In this section, we engage with the previously stated ways of engaging in the praxis of critical psychology among the community and indigenous Somali ways of understanding social healing and community activism.

iii. Fadhi Ku Dirir

Social settings among Somalis anywhere is always over a cup of tea or *caano geel* (camel milk). Whenever guests visit or groups meet up in cafes, tea is always served – in many cases, provided with every meal of the day. Since the beginning of time, the nomadic

Somali community has herded camels (Ferdinand, 2019) and always used its milk therapeutically. This type of traditional medicine was used to manage digestive bile, digestive problems, strong immunity and other gut problems (Carruth, 2014). Camel milk is “Rich in iron, vitamin B and C, and low in fat” and is valued for its medicinal purposes against diabetes and allergies (Dahir, 2019). In the last few years, camel milk’s popularity has disrupted milk industries across Africa, but its most prominent promoters are Somalis in East Africa, a region that’s home to “more than 12.2 million heads of camel” (Dahir, 2019). This nomadic community’s culture is not only building the economy but is highlighting the benefit of their customs.

One way Somalis enjoy tea is with camel milk. From the arid regions of Ogaden to the cold winter-stricken streets of Minnesota, Somalis would always have camel milk tea ready for order. But in these same spaces (cafes and restaurants) where tea and camel milk are being served, Somalis also engage in conversations and arguments called “*fadhi ku dirir*”, meaning “fighting while sitting down” (Hirsi, 2010). These conversations are political, ranging from their local news and businesses to issues happening in Somalia. Elections in Mogadishu, territorial disputes in Somaliland, Al-Shabaab-caused insecurity, among many others. These spaces are generally gendered - open to men, because “only men have the social “right” to public space” (Aidid, 2018). This in many ways reflect the patriarchal society that Somalis practice but also, it speaks to the larger picture that politics is for men, and women are simply spectators.

This is not to say that in today’s Somalia (at home and in the diaspora), women are not participants on politics. They are. Nearly 30% of the parliament in Somalia is made of women (Omer, 2021) while congresswoman Ilhan Omar was elected to office as the first

Muslim Somali-American in 2018 (Dahir, 2019). This speaks to the active role women have within their communities. However, *fadhi ku dirir* creates a platform to engage Somali men on their history, and their role in the continued fractures within their households communities. Aidid (2018) underpins this, “Somalis have produced the political through *fadhi ku dirir*, the public sphere where political ideas have been constructed, contested, and disseminated. And so, the state has always been deeply concerned about the power of political gossip; in an oral society, speakers can reach everyday people in ways writers cannot.”

But many atimes, these spaces can be infiltrated, especially by younger Somali generations in the diaspora who have integrated better and are culturally and linguistically in-tune with their host community. They can be spaces in which generational relations can be nurtured and molded. Younger Somali men can be producers of more liberal knowledge that weave traditional customs, religious practices and Western knowledge. However, in less public spaces but just as essential are women’s space – the home - where they commiserate over their roles as mothers, sisters and caregivers. It’s these women who manage households, often work to provide as well and suffer the brunt of their community’s struggles (Aidid, 2018). The personal is very political in this space. Both these spaces serve the same purpose; highlight different gendered coping mechanism among Somali refugees in the diaspora.

iv. Humor

“Perhaps the only thing in Somalia that has not been destroyed by war is the national sense of humor. But comedy is closely related to tragedy. Humor is one of

the last forms of protection from the terrifying reality that is Mogadishu.” Carlos Mavrolean (April 1992).

Somalis are a pastoral community, always light and poetic in their words, yet passionate and engulfing in their speech. One of the ways they do this is through their sense of humor, always pushing into the most serious of events with a sense of positive humor. “Humor is 'laughter made from pain, not pain inflicted by laughter'. From studies of slavery to those of the Holocaust, learning what makes people laugh may help us better understand how they survive” (Geshekteer and Warsama, 1996). Therefore, humor invoked in the face of tragedy, displacement, and violence like that known to many Somalis might be a marker of mental health, argues Geshekteer and Warsama (pp. 142). Studies done have shown that good-natured comedy helps in reappraising negative or frightening experience (McClure, 2011). Despite the exhibited levels and variations of traumatic and distressful experiences that many Somali refugees have, humor remains an effective coping strategy.

All across the Somali language, there are similes, metaphors, and proverbs highlighting the humor and irony - twisted and dark at times - about any subject you might come across. In general, Somalis are dismissive about tragedy and illnesses and so, in talking about things like the struggle of death, Somalis would joke ‘*hadii la dhiman dhareerka waa la iska duwaa*’, meaning “even if you’re dying, you shouldn’t dribble saliva” or a “sick or dying man, if simply asked 'how are you?' might well respond: 'I'm much better than those who are worse off than I am'” (Geshekteer and Warsama, 1996, p. 146). Similar to proverbs, the art of *googalysi* (asking riddles) is common among teens and young adults. They would rhythmically device humorous jokes and riddles to educate or

inform each other of certain topics. It was a source of entertainment and to pass time for a community that migrated a lot for pasture and grazing. But this form of humor evolved to be more nuanced in other fields, such as political jokes. Warsama (1996) says;

The political joke is a unique form of humour which relies on sarcasm, mocking or exaggeration. Nearly all Somalis can contribute something to the voluminous range of resistance satire, irony and vulgar humour that flourished under the regime of Siyad Barre. The following example is attributed to Farah Galoole:

Q: How would you know that Jaale [comrade] Siyad had finally overcome clan favouritism and created equality in Somalia?

A: When we would see an Isaaq volunteer guulwade [victory pioneer], an Abgal ambassador and an unemployed Marehan.

The above example brings out the nuanced clan relations, power hierarchies among them and their evolution of who filled the power vacuum after the civil war. Somalis, to this day, use humor as both a coping strategy as well as a weapon to support, critique and mobilize their communities.

In his time as a media advisor in Mogadishu, Justin Marozzi, highlighted the process of him being nicknamed. When he got his ID badge to legally work in the country, he realized he had been called given a nickname; *Timo Cadde* (white hair) (BBC, 2014). This, he shared, made him feel accepted after working in the country for over a year. Somalis' habit of giving people nicknames is often based on their physical appearances

and most prominently, their deficiencies or negative traits. Nicknames could include *Faroole* (no fingers) for someone missing finger, *Jeex* (slice) for a skinny person, *Yarisow* (tiny) for a small or short person, *Afwayne* (big mouth), *Lugay* (one leg) for someone missing a leg, and so on and on. These nicknames are a way of invoking humor into the obvious God-given physical characteristic of a person as well as those marked by war and violence. They would sound rude to a foreigner but to many Somalis, that's the norm. Friends would tease each other with such nicknames and families would stamp their approval if they liked it. These nicknames are shared across continents, are multi-generational and continue to be reproduced in the diasporic Somali communities (Geshekteer and Warsama, 1996).

v. Religious Organizing

After quarantining alone for five weeks in San Francisco, I travelled to Minneapolis to be with my grandparents and family. It was an exciting surprise that had its own risks. International travel was halted, local travel was still open with intense restrictions and of course, my elderly grandparents were among those considered to be at a higher risk of fatal infections. The world was still adjusting to this “new norm” of social distancing and wearing masks. Yet, small moments of human kindness, joy and resilience were trending everywhere. For Minneapolis's Muslim community, that moment of joy came from the local mosque in my grandparents' neighborhood.

It was the sixth week of quarantine and there was no one on the streets. The *Adhan* was broadcasted on Thursday evening over the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis. The melodious call to prayer happened to be broadcasted on the first night of *Ramadan*,

Muslims' Holy month of fasting. Muslims in Minneapolis came outside, celebrating, recording, and congratulating each other the entire evening. This moment remains significant in many ways. Unlike Muslim-majority countries across the world that broadcast the Adhans over loudspeakers into their communities, Muslim-minority countries like the United States have regulations barring religious communities from broadcasting religious sermons and other speeches. But with a “partnership between the city of Minneapolis, Dar Al-Hijrah Mosque and the Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-MN), Muslims in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood can hear the adhan as they hunker down during the COVID-19 pandemic” (Sahan Journal, 2020).

So, at this moment when the world was in fear and isolation, this act of togetherness and acknowledgment of the city's diversity was a symbol of hope. But this did not happen in a vacuum. Somali refugees in the diaspora have gravitated towards religious organizing as a coping mechanism as well as an agent of community building (Guribye et al, 2020). This has helped build support structures that are preferred before any other authority structure. Mosques, Islamic centers and Imams (Islamic leaders) are consulted for dietary restrictions against non-halal food, family and reproductive health, integration into Western communities, among many others. This is not only because Imams are respected and are considered more knowledgeable but also, they can give *fatwa*, “a legal pronouncement with regard to Islam” (Siegel, 2005). Hence, their advice is trusted and heeded. This makes them the perfect messengers of unity and building trust within the community.

Additionally, mosques are informal channels to family units within Somali households. While mosque spaces are segregated by gender, both men and women go to these shared spaces. Subsequently, for example, the Imam's speech at Friday Prayers will eventually be discussed at home, bringing multi-generational and multi-gendered nuances to it. Therefore, these networks are a way of establishing a community that's protective and connected to one another. This is a coping mechanism against distress and other emerging problems within the community across the world, and both insiders and foreigners understand the complexity of using this space to address issues pertaining to existing challenges such as gender equality, substance addiction, gang violence, domestic abuse, among many others.

Conclusion

In order to create a natural environment that allows healing in an ethnically homogenous yet tribally inclined community, previous traumatic experiences of inter-tribal conflict have to be addressed. Clash of ethnic Somali identity with Western identity, continued attachment to the home country with protracted insecurity, weak social bonds, traumatic violence and psychosocial conflict met with xenophobia and Islamophobia has hindered the integration and acculturation of Somali refugees in their host communities. So, culturally sensitive mental health services, reconstruction of the Somali identity in the diaspora and continued indigenous knowledge production are the only ways to understand and address the historical and cultural trauma experienced by multiple generations of Somali refugees. This research sought to add to that pool of knowledge and create a counternarrative to the stereotypical image of what Muslim refugees are like.

Despite all the obstacles, Somali refugees have rejected the self-victimization process and shown resilience through creative work such as art, music and storytelling. Psychological treatment for mental illnesses and advocacy among the community has risen over the years but has a long way before being thoroughly productive. But means of resistance such as personalized narratives that project social cohesion have been dominant in the representation of the Somali narrative. Political figures like Ilhan Omar, activists and poets like Warsan Shire and K'naan have shed light on the community's struggle but also persistence despite of all the challenges. Even in the chaos of trauma and cultural violence, Somali refugees in the diaspora have found a ground to work from towards a better future.

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