



Université d'Ottawa • University of Ottawa



Université d'Ottawa - University of Ottawa

FACULTÉ DE ÉTUDES SUPÉRIEURES
ET POSTDOCTORALES

FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND
POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

Hamdi MOHAMED

AUTEUR DE LA THÈSE - AUTHOR OF THESIS

Ph.D. (History)

GRADE - DEGREE

Department of History

FACULTÉ, ÉCOLE, DÉPARTEMENT - FACULTY, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT

TITRE DE LA THÈSE - TITLE OF THE THESIS

**Multiple Challenges, Multiple Struggles:
A History of Somali Women's Activism in Canada**

B. Craig

DIRECTEUR DE LA THÈSE - THESIS SUPERVISOR

N. Abdo

CO-DIRECTEUR DE LA THÈSE - THESIS CO-SUPERVISOR

EXAMINATEURS DE LA THÈSE - THESIS EXAMINERS

A. Denis

J. Keshen

R. Ng

N. St-Onge

J.-M. De Koninck, Ph.D.

LE DOYEN DE LA FACULTÉ DES ÉTUDES
SUPÉRIEURES ET POSTDOCTORALES

SIGNATURE

DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE
AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

**Multiple Challenges, Multiple Struggles: A History of Somali
Women's Activism in Canada**

By

HAMDI MOHAMED M.A

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Ph.D.

Department of History
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

Acquisitons et
services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 0-612-90007-X
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 0-612-90007-X

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this dissertation.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de ce manuscrit.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the dissertation.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

Multiple Challenges, Multiple Struggles: A History of Somali Women's Activism in Canada

By

Hamdi Mohamed

ABSTRACT

Somali refugees arriving in Canada in the early 1990s experienced various levels of exclusion as blacks, as Muslims, and as refugees, including immigration and settlement policies that continued to structure race and gender inequality in Canada. In addition to the disadvantage of new legislation that limited their settlement as recognised Convention refugees (and legitimate residents) and placed them in a marginal position in the Canadian society, Somali women were racially targeted as members of a culture perceived as “incompatible with the Canadian”.

However, Somali women did not passively accept their “fate” in Canada. At the individual level, women have engaged in creative adaptive strategies to deal with the social and economic exclusion they faced daily. Collectively, they employed various methods of activism to help the Somali refugees make sense of their fragmented lives in a new cultural, linguistic, and structural environment and to deal with the physical, social and economic displacements the community suffered from its collective refugee experiences. These women have engaged in multiple struggles to work for the “*danta guud*” (common good).

Drawing mainly upon oral interviews with Somali women, this dissertation traces women's agency and subjectivity since early 20th century Somalia and argues that women's personal and professional history have shaped their engagement in activities beyond their personal and daily survival. Unlike those with no formal education, educated women came with transferable skills that have helped them cope with some of the difficult experiences of dislocation and uprootedness. Hence, the formal educational and professional skills combined with the spirit of agency, resourcefulness and survival inculcated by the Somali culture enabled the participants to take leadership roles in community affairs. Unfortunately, however, because women activists have themselves been dealing with being socially and economically excluded, their efforts were often limited to “making the margins liveable”.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe gratitude to many people who provided assistance, guidance and support throughout the process of this dissertation. First, my sincere gratefulness goes to the participants who shared their personal stories with me. Their strength, generous spirit, and commitment to the *danta guud* have inspired and sustained me throughout the course of this work. I would like to thank Professor Beatrice Craig for her continuous guidance, support, patience, and insights. My indebtedness to Professor Nahla Abdo whose work and discussions on gender and politics in the Third World have both instructed and inspired this work. Thanks to Ann Denis, Roxana Ng, Jeffrey Keshen, and Nicole St-Onge, my dissertation committee, for their input. To Professor Mohamed Ali Nuuh from whom I learned a great deal and who challenged me to live up to my potential despite the many challenges facing a refugee woman in academia. My gratitude to the many friends, especially Ikram Jama and Mohamud Abdulle, whose support and encouragements sustained me through a process that often felt like an endless journey. Finally, special thanks to my family for the many forms of support, particularly my mother, Asha Sheikh Abdi, whose strength, generosity, and community involvement taught me a lot and my sister, Anab Sheikh Mohamed, whose support for the family made it possible for me to continue my post secondary education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I	
Deciphering Somali women's history: A contextual framework.....	8
Articulating gender and the state.....	11
Racism, gender, immigration in Canada.....	18
Cultural essentialism and the social construction of Somali women.....	28
(Re)conceptualizing Somali women's identity.....	34
Articulating women's agency.....	40
Finding a theoretical fit.....	45
CHAPTER II	
(Re)constructing Somali women's history: Methodological notes.....	47
Methods of data collection.....	51
Primary sources.....	51
Oral history.....	52
The interview process.....	56
Profiles of the research participants.....	61
Limitations.....	75
CHAPTER III	
Women's political and socio-economic situation in traditional, colonial and post-colonial Somalia.....	76
Expressions of agency.....	84
Urbanisation & Colonialism.....	88
Female solidarity networks.....	93
Participation in nationalist struggles.....	99
CHAPTER IV	
Somali socialism and the "woman question" (1960-1980).....	107
Introduction.....	107
Socialism: Somali style?.....	110
Socialist experimentation: implications for women.....	116
Policy measures: The campaign against traditional social inequalities.....	118
Access to education and employment opportunities.....	122

Political participation.....	126
Legal changes: the family law	131
Social reactions.....	136
Contradictions of the “socialist” discourse	141
Conclusion.....	146

CHAPTER V

Redefining gender roles: politicisation through mobilisation.....	148
Introduction	148
Taking advantage of the gender policies: Individual initiatives.....	148
State sponsored Initiatives.....	152
Women's activism: Collective efforts.....	160
Attempts to change social perceptions.....	166
“Things fall apart”.....	173
Conclusion.....	178

CHAPTER VI

Somalis in the diaspora: The Canadian context.....	180
Introduction	180
Reluctant Host: Canada’s attitudes towards Somalis.....	183
Institutional barriers	184
Lack of access to trades and professions.....	192
Lack of appropriate services.....	195
Racial and cultural discrimination	198
Conclusion.....	210

CHAPTER VII

The double-bind: Internal and external pressures on women	212
Introduction	212
Cultural encounters	214
Changing gender roles.....	216
Intergenerational gaps	226
Conservatism and social backlash.....	230
Conclusion.....	232

CHAPTER VIII

The other side of the story: Negotiating identity and space within the margins.....	234
Introduction	234
Renegotiating identity.....	235
Finding solace in religion.....	240
Redefining women’s roles	243
Searching for continuity.....	247
Recreating social spaces	251
Female solidarity and neighbourhood networks.....	251
Dealing with economic exclusion.....	254
Conclusion.....	259

CHAPTER IX

Working for "Danta Guud": Continuities and discontinuities in Somali women's activism in Canada.....262

- Introduction262
- “Lifting as we climb”264
- Making the margins liveable.....269
- The politics of FGM.....279
- Struggles for institutional change.....296
- Conclusions.....300

CONCLUSIONS

Integration: Problems and Prospects.....302

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Primary sources.....311
 - Interviews.....311
 - Government documents312
 - Newspaper articles315
- Video tapes.....317
- Secondary sources.....318

APPENDICES

- A. Consent form.....337
- B. Information sheet.....338
- C. Interview guide.....340

INTRODUCTION

The Somali social, political, and economic systems have placed women in a disadvantaged position compared to that of men. However, despite these systems that made women second-class citizens, from an early age young girls were encouraged to be resourceful, industrious and clever. This early socialisation made it possible for women to take initiatives in their personal situations both at the individual level and, at times, collectively. In addition, because Somalia was an oral society prior to the writing of the language in 1972, women “had their own means of protesting and conscientizing other women through songs and poems as well as through their solidarity networks.”¹ Therefore, although women had little or no access to formal power, they exercised influence within the context of their social spaces and used whatever resources were available to them to actively seek their goals.

For instance, women in traditional Somali society devised creative strategies for change in their every day and personal lives and developed autonomous female culture. As Raqiya Haji Dualeh points out, before the women’s movement emerged in the form of organisations, “there was a feminist consciousness well under way in the traditional nomadic life of the ordinary women.”² Through songs and poetry, Somali women in the traditional society articulated the collective situation of women, participated in the struggles against colonialism, and fought to be heard at the national level in the post-colonial era. Hence, Somali women’s social and community activism, whether it was

¹ Raqiya Haji Dualeh. “Women in Somali Society: Roles and Images.” Paper presented at a UNDP conference in Hargaisa, Somalia, in 1997, p. 2.

expressed through neighbourhood networks and helping create female social solidarity, or belonging to *zaar* (referred to as a prefigurative political form),³ had been consistent throughout the long history of the country.

When Somali women came to Canada as a result of the civil war in Somalia, they came with a strong sense of agency and self-determination (although they had lost everything material). Some also came with personal and organisational skills that were gained through their involvement in different forms of activism at various levels and at different periods of Somali history. Like other professional immigrants and refugees, Somali women experienced downgrading of their professional skills and education. However, the combination of the formal skills and the spirit of agency, resourcefulness and survival inculcated by the Somali culture were useful in helping Somali women deal with their current marginalization as refugees. Using what they had learned prior to coming to Canada, the women continue to be engaged in many activities to survive, make sense of their fragmented lives, and reconstruct their identities in the new cultural, linguistic and structural environment.

The study investigates the continuities and discontinuities of Somali women's activism in the diaspora. Going beyond the either/or dichotomy thinking pervading western social thought, the study will argue that Somali women are neither victims nor heroines. They

² Ibid. p. 2.

³ Suad Joseph. "Women and Politics in the Middle East." Suad Joseph and Susan Slyomovics (eds.) *Women and Power in the Middle East*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, pp. 34-40.

have taken countless “unacknowledged yet essential actions”⁴ to ensure their community’s survival. The patterns of activism and the creation of social spheres of influence reflect their cultural differences and racialized experiences in Canada and are consistent with other activities taken by marginalized groups struggling to create spheres of social life and organization.⁵

This dissertation also explores how Somali women activists are not only making sense of their lives in a drastically different socio-cultural milieu, but also investigates how they are responding to, integrating in, and contributing to the Canadian society. It examines women’s attempts to preserve their agency while pursuing the larger goal of providing leadership for their community. How did women try to renegotiate and, in some aspects, preserve the sense of identity they had developed before the war? Why are women active? What made some women more active than the others? Are women being effective social catalysts in the host country? What are the barriers to using their previous skills and to making lasting social and institutional change? The dissertation addresses these questions. The main argument is that Somali women’s activism in Canada represents a historical tradition of women exercising agency and making the margins liveable. Because of discriminatory structures, Somali women have been unable to use their previous skills effectively in Canada. Those who were educated prior to coming to Canada became players within the context of their community and used the same skills to help the Somali community deal with the multiple oppressions they faced as refugees. These women are involved in and committed to a range of social and political issues such

⁴ Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York & London: Routledge, 1991, p. 140.

as immigration and settlement, health, education, and housing to contribute to group cohesiveness and maintain group integrity.

This dissertation is divided into two sections: Part One - the contextual framework and the methodology (chapters one and two) and the history (chapters three to five). The history chapters identify the material as well as ideological bases of the construction of gender in Somali history, culture and politics. The third chapter sheds light on the role of women in Somali culture and politics prior to colonialism, during colonialism and in the first Somali post-colonial state. It also examines women's response to the social and economic changes in early 20th century such as the creation of alternative communities based on mutual interests rather than kinship as a substitute for absent family networks. Women's participation in the nationalist movement as well as their struggles to have the civilian governments hear their voices is briefly looked at as well.

Since socialism was partly responsible for placing women's issues on the national agenda, the fourth chapter examines socialism within the Somali context as well as attempts to reconcile socialism with Islam and indigenous Somali culture. This chapter also explores the impact of the social and political changes on women's status in the family, in education and employment as well as social reactions against these policies. This chapter argues that the period between 1970s and 1980s stands out in Somali women's history because this was the only time in Somali history that women's voices found a platform on which they could raise their issues and concerns. However, despite progressive policies, a number of factors limited the successful implementation of the policies and programs intended to address social inequalities. These included, but were not limited to,

⁵ See Ibid.

lack of proper articulation of the socialist ideology, problematic conceptualization of the 'woman question' and lack of adequate resources to implement the ambitious socialist programs.

In the last chapter of part one, the degree of female participation in social and political activity, their politicisation, their varied responses, as well as the expression of their discontent with the state are investigated. Special attention will be given to activist women's expression of resistance within and against the state. Women's political participation was sanctioned and legitimated by the state and the mass social mobilisation in Somalia in 1970s provided an avenue for legitimate women's participation in the nation-building processes.⁶ Nonetheless, since the Somali society still remained socially conservative, women paid a price for their political involvement and their activism. Women's struggles against the constraints posed by the conservative backlash of the 1980s will be addressed.

Part two begins with a brief account of the historical circumstances that led to massive dislocation of Somalis and their arrival in Canada. Chapter six investigates the difficulties encountered by Somali refugees, mostly as consequences of policies and attitudes within the host country. This chapter argues that while all newcomers face difficulties in the host country, Somali women arriving in Canada in 1990s faced the disadvantage of new legislation that limited their settlement as recognised Convention refugees and legitimate residents and placed them in a marginal position in the Canadian society. In addition, as Black, Muslim, and members of a culture perceived as "incompatible with the Canadian",

Somali women were not only racially targeted but their culture and religion became markers of difference, contributing to their exclusion and the undermining of their agency as community activists.

Chapter seven examines the particular challenges Somali women have faced in Canada. Various stresses such as cultural encounters, intergenerational, and community expectations to maintain traditional gender roles involved in migrating to and settling in drastically different social and cultural environments are investigated. It is argued that women have faced the double bind of the external (i.e. racial discrimination and systemic barriers) and internal (i.e. community expectation that women conform to an idealised and romanticised past as a result of exclusion from the dominant group) pressures.

Chapter eight discusses women's individual efforts to make sense of their new socio-cultural environment and deal with the social and economic exclusion they face daily. It explores the multiple and creative adaptive strategies such as modifying some of their cultural practices to help them cope with stresses created by migration and by the experiences of being refugees. This chapter also examines how women have instigated networks of female relations and how they have created and maintained a complex web of social relations aimed at facilitating their daily struggles to survive in Canada and deal with the experiences of being dislocated and uprooted. It is argued that the female ties established in the neighbourhoods are expressions of agency and they help women alleviate the daily stresses amid poverty and social segregation and make the margins liveable.

⁶ Fadumo Alim. Former Deputy Minister of Education (Interview, May 11, 2002)

In chapter nine the various mechanisms female activists have used collectively to help the community deal with the social, economic, and political barriers to integration as well as their attempts to negotiate their community's place within the host country within the margins are outlined. Taking the example of female genital mutilation, this chapter also examines the continuities and discontinuities of Somali women's activism in Canada with particular emphasis on the historical continuity between recent past (1990s) and past (1970s and 1980s) forms of activism.

Placing Somalis' settlement experiences within the context of other racialized groups, the conclusion argues that the current policies intended to help newcomers are problematic as they place certain groups in a marginal position. Structural barriers, rather than "cultural difference", contribute to newcomer immigrant racialized groups' so called "adjustment problems"⁷ and prove to be major obstacles to full integration into Canadian society.

⁷ See Roxana Ng. "Immigrant Women and Institutionalized Racism." Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code and Lindsay Dorney (eds.) *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988, pp. 184-203.

CHAPTER I

Deciphering Somali Women's History: A Contextual Framework

Somalia is geographically located in Africa. However, because of cultural and historical exchange between Somalia and Arab countries, Somalis have developed a unique mixture of Afro-Arabian socio-cultural traits. Although the Arab influence was the strongest in the coastal areas, Middle Eastern cultural norms were often introduced into Somalia through centuries old historical trade connections and, later, through the introduction and spread of Islam.⁸ As will be discussed in chapter three, Islam, along with customary laws (*xeer*) provided a set of moral codes for Somalis. This combination of Islamic principles and customary laws also governed social and gender relations. Islam generally accommodated local culture and practices and did not drastically alter either the material culture of the converts or their many institutions. As elaborated in chapter three, there were instances where Islam and customary laws converged and other instances where they conflicted. In cases of conflict, the customary laws rather than Islamic principles often determined the roles and responsibilities of the sexes. Consequently, Somalis have

⁸ The first contact with Islam dates back to the 7th century, when a group of persecuted Muslims sought refuge in the region. This was well before Islam took root in the Arabian peninsula. At about 900 AD Arab immigrants arrived in Somalia. These were either traders or religious personalities. They established trade networks with the local traders and agriculturists, and converted them to Islam. In some cases, they intermarried with Somalis and settled there. Their wives converted to Islam and so did the rest of the family. The Islamic faith then expanded to the rest of Somalia. By 11th century Islam penetrated into interior Somalia. (Ali Abdirahman Hersi. "The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origin and Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influences in the Somali Peninsula." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1977).

developed a unique and complex set of social and gender norms that have selectively taken aspects of Arab and African cultures.

These cultural and historical processes make finding frameworks that could be employed to understand Somali women's historical experiences problematic. This study argues that to understand Somali women's lives in Canada, we need an understanding of their lives in Somalia. The thesis will draw upon contemporary Third World⁹, particularly Middle Eastern theories of gender, state and Islam such as Deniz Kandiyoti, Valentine Moghadam and Maxine Molyneaux. While these theories explain many aspects of Somali women's relationship with the state, they only provide partial answers to the understanding of the complexity of Somali women's lives that have been shaped by not only religion and state policies, but also by culture. The specificity of historical experiences of Somali women becomes clear when the issue of Islam within the context of Somalia is studied. As Kandiyoti notes, the different systems of male dominance are grounded in distinct material arrangements between the genders. Thus, to avoid the blanketing way the word patriarchy is used, she recommends exploring the internal

⁹ Definitions of the Third World concept are problematic and contentious. This study recognises the amount of dissimilarity in the historical and cultural, experience of colonial rule, forms and level of economic activity between and within Third World countries. However, it argues that nation states in the Third World have had similar experiences with colonialism and imperialism and were ruled by foreigners, directly or indirectly, at some point of their history. As the concept relates to women, the study uses it very carefully to designate a political constituency. As Mohanty argues, what constitutes Third World women as an oppositional alliance is a *common context of struggle*. Like Mohanty's, this dissertation attempts to get away from analyses which consider Third World women as victims and focuses, instead, on a dynamic oppositional agency of women. Visible minorities are included in the analysis of Third World women because of the unequal power relations between them and white women and because of their social and marginalized economic status in North America.

variations, which modify the actual practice of Islam.¹⁰ In Somalia, while, as will be discussed in chapter three, Islam assumed an important role in politics in 1980s, pre-Islamic cultures mostly determined the social and gender relations and Islamic rules were only selectively applied.

By looking at the “finely grained historical analyses of how they [kinship systems, the state, and political ideologies] intersect, interact, and change,”¹¹ this study will contribute to a better understanding of the complexity and the materiality of Somali women’s lives. This study argues that deciphering the relationship between women and the state in Somalia, during 1970s and 1980s, requires exploring a historical tradition of women exercising agency and the role of culture in fostering this agency. Notwithstanding the patriarchal nature of Somali society, Somali women had a long tradition of negotiating their place, and of exercising influence, if not self-determination. This was facilitated by a culture expecting women to be resourceful and display initiative.

This exercise of agency continues in Canada despite difficult experiences such as linguistic and cultural barriers, lack of access to trades and professions and resulting downward mobility, and loss of familiar and social support mechanisms. Women’s narratives throughout the thesis speak to the historical continuity of various themes of not only exclusion by state policies in both Somalia and in Canada, but also women’s assumption of agency through community activism and reconstruction of their

¹⁰ Deniz Kandiyoti. "Islam and Patriarchy: A Comparative Perspective." Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (eds.) *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*. New Haven and London, 1991, pp. 23-42.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 38.

communities. Because of this close connection between women's past and recent history, this study will combine theories of gender, Islam and state in the Third World with those of immigration, racism, citizenship and state construction in Canada. Combining these two (sometimes overlapping) types of theorizing will enable us to begin making sense of the long history of Somali women. The first part of the thesis situates the discussion within the broader framework of the Third World women and processes and patterns of state. The second part of the discussion places Somali women in the context of the broader framework of racism, gender and nation-building in Canada. This section will also reveal the unique challenges facing Somalis and the various levels of exclusion they experiences, as blacks, as Muslims, and as refugees in the early 1990s.

Articulating gender and the state

The process of state-construction, nationalism and modernising projects had contradictory impacts on women's lives in the Third World.¹² Women were invited to participate in nation building and they were encouraged to be national actors and citizens. As Moghadam, in her discussion of the Middle East, notes, traditional patriarchal systems have been affected by the social changes. The weakening of the traditional patriarchal structures, as demographically evidenced in changing patterns of marriage, family

¹² See Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) *Women, Islam and the State*. London: Macmillan, 1991. Kandiyoti explores state policies and the implications they have for women, which she posits as contradictory. Other theorists who also examine the relationship between the state and women include Nahla Abdo-Zubi. *Family, Women and Social Change in the Middle East: The Palestinian Case*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1987; Valentine M. Moghadam. *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*. Boulder & London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993; Suad Joseph and Susan Slyomovics (eds.) *Women and Power in the Middle East*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001; and Deniz Kandiyoti, "The Politics of Gender and the Conundrums of Citizenship." Suad Joseph and Susan Slyomovics (eds.) *Women and Power in the Middle East*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001. pp. 52-58; Amrita

structure and traditional kinship systems, have occurred as a result of numerous political and economic changes, including state-sponsored economic development, state-directed reforms, educational reforms, industrialization, urbanization, etc. She comments that revolutionary states have particularly served to undermine patriarchal structures: "whether changes to the patriarchal family structures come about gradually and non-violently or rapidly and coercively, the implications for the status of women within the family and in society is profound."¹³

However, nationalist and modernising projects "reaffirm the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct and exert pressure on women to articulate their gender interests within the terms set by nationalist discourse."¹⁴ State policies related to gender were not successful in either removing the material and ideological bases for the reproduction of inequality or in overcoming the deeply embedded gender hierarchy existing in society. As Molyneux, in her analysis of third world socialist countries, found, the emancipation of women was used as a tool for socialist transformation. She argues that there is a set of difficulties in the way in which theories on the "women question" were formulated in many socialist countries.¹⁵ One of the major limitations faced by Third World socialist states that attempted to reform society (particularly, with regard to the "woman question") is the lack of state capacity to sustain the sweeping measures of reform introduced. Moghadam also notes that it is difficult to "tackle the question of the

Chhachhi. "Forced Identities: The State, Communalism, Fundamentalism and Women in India." Deniz Kandiyoti, (ed.) *Women, Islam and the State*, pp. 144-175.

¹³ Moghadam. *Modernizing Women...* p. 24.

¹⁴ Deniz Kandiyoti. "Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Middle East Studies." Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*. Syracuse, New York, 1996, p. 9.

¹⁵ See Maxine Molyneux. "Mobilization Without Emancipation? Women's Interests, State and Revolution in Nicaragua." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1985, pp. 227-254.

status of women in the context of underdeveloped and patriarchal society and weak state authority.”¹⁶

Another weakness, as discussed by Molyneux, is the fact that the commitment of socialist states to women's emancipation has been subject to three qualifications. First, the main state concerns are economic development and social stability rather than sexual equality. Equality is realised only in so far as it contributes to or at least does not detract from other priorities. Second, the concept of sexual equality is based on the notion of male and female roles being symmetrical and complementary rather than undifferentiated. Third, “emancipation” is often seen as emancipation from the constraints of a traditional social order (this was not necessarily achieved in many countries) rather than having a broader meaning of sexual liberation.¹⁷

Molyneux's theoretical analysis is useful in helping us understand the processes of gender and nation building in Somalia during 1970s because, in many respects, the Somali state typifies revolutionary¹⁸ socialist states of its kind in the Third World. The political, social and cultural contexts within which socialism was introduced in Somalia were similar to those of some of the Third World socialist states, especially those of former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). The Somali government announced “Scientific Socialism” (based on Marxism-Leninism), rather than African or Arab Socialism, to be the official doctrine. Socialism provided the framework within

¹⁶ Moghadam. *Modernizing Women...* p. 97.

¹⁷ Molyneux. “Mobilization Without Emancipation?...”

which a number of broad and daring programs for political, cultural, and social changes, particularly in the area of women's rights, were introduced. The most important, as will be elaborated in chapter four, is the efforts to regulate marriage and family (previously under the control of the kin) through legislation.

In addition, state policies attempted to "reform and direct areas of social life and belief constituted by Islam."¹⁹ These legislative changes attempted to dismantle the previous social order and undermine the traditional kin control over women. The state improved the legal position of women and provided an opportunity for Somali women to participate in nation building and, like many other Third World countries, became "a major determinant of women's legal and economic status."²⁰ Thus, state introduced projects have been emancipatory: women were constructed as citizens, workers, national subjects, and political subjects rather than "just" mothers, wives and daughters.²¹ As Molyneux notes, "the combined effects of removing certain male privileges and granting women a full legal status, and equal rights in property and inheritance can be far-reaching. In the socialist states where Islam retained a role in social and political life, the new codes involved major changes in traditional marriage customs and property forms."²²

¹⁸As Moghadam suggests, a revolution is a special case of social changes that "attempts to rapidly transform political and economic structures, social and gender relations, and societal institutions to conform to an ideology." See Moghadam. *Modernizing Women...* p. 94.

¹⁹ Molyneux, Maxine. "The Law, the State and Socialist Policies with Regard to Women: the case of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen." Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) *Women, Islam and the State*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991, p. 238.

²⁰ Moghadam. *Modernizing Women...*p. 54.

²¹ Kandiyoti *Women, Islam and the State...*

²² Moghadam. *Modernizing Women...* p. 241.

Finally, state policies towards women were introduced within broad social, economic and political goals. Thus, full sexual equality was not attained, partly because it was not the primary aim of the reforms.²³ The policies and programs intended to improve women's positions in society were often short lived and did not have much effect beyond the urban sectors of the society. Only a small number of women benefited from the social, economic and political aspects of the national activities promoted by the state because they were also too ambitious and the state did not have the capacity to implement them successfully.

In common with PDRY, the Somali socialist state had to contend with a fragmented society where customary laws prevailed and challenged the traditional kin control over women. The government in Somalia, as will be discussed in chapter four, had to contend with a number of issues that impinged on its policies regarding women: the position of Muslim clerics, the demands of nationalism, and the dynamism of indigenous culture. These competing interests have had a number of consequences that compromised the success of the socialist programs and had negative implications for the progress made by women.

By the late 1970s, as discussed in chapter four, due to an economic and political crisis in Somalia, many of the programs intended to promote gender equality fell into the background and women had to deal with new, perhaps more restricting, social and cultural phenomenon, namely a new wave of conservatism. Somalia's case is a vivid illustration of the how fragile the gains are made by women. There have, of course, been

²³ RRaqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

similar patterns in other Muslim countries like Iran and Turkey. The economic deterioration and the following government repression profoundly affected women's lives in important ways. Policies towards gender were seen as a threat to the status quo and the existing patterns of life and state intervention in the family was viewed as inappropriate. The seeming loosening of patriarchal family controls contributed to a tremendous backlash. Similar to trends of emergence and spread of Islamist movements in other Muslim countries, conservatism gained over revolutionary ideas and women were blamed for social and economic difficulties. This new wave of conservatism resulted in problems for the position of women and raised questions regarding women's space and roles within the family.²⁴

Some scholars have argued that the conservative wave against women in the Muslim world is not necessarily a regressive trend; it is rather a coping mechanism against profound changes in sex roles. Therefore, the new Islamist movement is "an anxiety-reducing mechanisms in a world of shifting, volatile sexual identity."²⁵ Nonetheless, women were deeply affected by the new revivalism. As Mernissi notes, women's claims were "disturbing to Muslim societies not because they threatened the past but because they augured and symbolized what the future and its conflicts are about: the inescapability of renegotiating new sexual, political, economic, and cultural boundaries, thresholds and limits."²⁶ As women are cast as the embodiment of cultural identity and the custodians of cultural values, Islamist movements "have singled out precisely the

²⁴ Moghadam, Valentine. "Introduction and Overview: Gender Dynamic of Nationalism, Revolution and Islamization." Valentine Moghadam (ed.) *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*. London & Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1994, pp. 42-75.

²⁵ Fatima Mernissi. "Muslim Women and Fundamentalism." *Middle East Report*. July-August 1988, p. 11.

current generation of vocal and visible ‘modern’ women as an affront to national, cultural, and religious norms... calling for the domestication of women as the solution to the crisis.”²⁷

Subsequently, as will be discussed in chapter four, women who were at the forefront of the struggle for women’s equality felt targeted. As Moghadam explains, women are placed in a particularly precarious position within revolutionary movement. According to her, Middle Eastern feminists “walk the difficult tightrope between reclaiming a national identity and reaffirming progressive elements of the indigenous culture on the one hand and rejecting regressive traditions by subscribing to women’s liberation and gender equity on the other.”²⁸

Moreover, in the context of economic crisis and social disparities the family became a refuge. The continuing poverty and anxiety at the micro level resulted in reliance on the family as a social welfare net. This reliance on the family as a refuge undermined the emancipation of women. Kandiyoti discusses this construction of women as the guardians of tradition.

[A]s the state itself uses local patronage networks and sectional rivalries in its distributive system, citizens also turn to their primary solidarities both to protect themselves from potentially repressive states and to compensate for inefficient administration. This reinforces the stranglehold of communities over their women, whose roles as boundary markers become heightened.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid. p. 9.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Moghadam. *Modernizing Women...* p. 169.

²⁹ Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) *Women, Islam and the State*, p. 14.

In the final analysis, the Somali State during this period, like other post-colonial states, had contradictory effects on women. On one hand, in an attempt to weaken the allegiance of the population to the family/kinship ties, and re-socialise them to broaden their loyalties, women were pulled into the public sphere. The state offered viable alternatives to oppressive family or kin relationships that prevented women from realising either strategic or practical gender interest.³⁰ On the other hand, kinship system was reinforced when it suited the government's political agenda. Hence, the state defined, regulated and monitored women.³¹ However, despite the numerous contradictions and limitations of state sponsored gender policies, women had access to education, employment and legal protection for the first time in Somali history. As Kandiyoti, commenting on Middle Eastern countries, points out, "despite the circumscribed nature of the gains achieved, growing constituencies of educated, professional women did develop a major stake in both defending and expanding their citizenship."³²

Racism, gender, immigration in Canada

The international image of Canada as a tolerant pluralist society that accommodates people of diverse cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds explains one of the reasons³³ a

³⁰ Sue Ellen, M. Charlton, Jane Everett & Kathleen Staudt (eds.) *Women, the State and Development*. Albany, 1989, p. 11.

³¹ Shirin Rai. "Women and the state in the Third World." Haleh Afshar (ed.) *Women and Politics in the Third World*. London & New York, 1996, p. 26.

³² Deniz Kandiyoti, "The Politics of Gender ..." pp. 54-55.

³³ As will be discussed in chapter six, as refugees, Somalis did not plan their arrival to Canada. Rather, they came here because there were some possibilities for them to come to Canada. This included having the opportunity to join family members already in Canada who sent money to facilitate their arrival. For reasons beyond the scope of this discussion, the Canadian government did not engage in programs, similar to those offered to the Indochinese "boat people", to resettle Somali refugees. See Lawrence Lam. *From Being Uprooted to Surviving: Resettlement of Vietnamese-Chinese "Boat People" in Montreal*. Toronto: York Lanes Press, 1996.

large number of Somali refugees were attracted to large Canadian cities like Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. Upon arrival, however, many realized that the country has a long history of immigration policy that has been both ethnically/racially selective and economically self-serving. Race, nationality, and political ideologies framed immigration policies and were important selective criteria for recruiting immigrants to Canada. Potential migrants were classified into two categories: “preferred” immigrants and the “non-preferred”. Those considered desirable or undesirable changed throughout time for the white immigrants. However, non-white people particularly faced restrictive entrance into Canada and explicitly racist criteria were used to select immigrants.³⁴ Discriminatory pieces of legislations such as the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885³⁵ and the Continuous Journey Stipulation of 1908 were passed by the government to control immigration from

³⁴ Canada’s exclusionary immigration practices have been the subject of numerous historical analyses. See Freda Hawkins. *Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared*. Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988; Freda Hawkins. *Canada and Immigration: Public Policy and Public Concern*. Montreal & London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1972; Irving Abella & Harold Troper. *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jew of Europe 1933-1948*. Toronto: Lester & Orpen Denny’s Limited, 1982; Howard Palmer. *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982; Peter Ward *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy towards Orientals in British Columbia*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978; Gomer Sunhara *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War*. Toronto: Lorimer, 1981; Donald Avery. *Reluctant Host: Canada’s Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1995; and Francis Henry et al. *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society*. Toronto: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1994.

³⁵ The Chinese Immigration Act imposed \$50, which rose to \$100 in 1900 and \$ 500 by 1903, on all Chinese men coming to Canada. Chinese women were excluded from entering the country. Following public pressure to deal with this “immigration problem”, the government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act on 1923. This Act prohibited Chinese immigration. This Act was repealed in 1947. However, the entry of Chinese remained restricted.

China and India.³⁶ Blacks were actively discouraged from coming to Canada by a 1911 Order in Council prohibiting immigrants belonging to the Negro race.³⁷

Although because of economic need, there had been recruitment from the “undesirable” and visibly different groups as a source of cheap labour, the emphasis remained on white immigrants until the 1962 immigration regulations “which removed racial discrimination as the major feature of Canada’s immigration policy...”³⁸ The “point system” replaced race as criteria for selection and there has been a shift in official policy which treated all applicants applying for admission to Canada in a more universal and non-discriminatory manner. Despite this seemingly non-discriminatory immigration policy, the process of immigration control continued to be shaped by racism. For instance, immigration offices were concentrated in Europe and immigration officers were awarded wide discretionary powers to determine adaptability of potential immigrants. In 1980, as outlined by Simmons, “nearly twenty years after immigration policy had shifted away from a country-preference system, the distribution of Canadian immigration officials throughout the world was still biased towards Europe.”³⁹ Of the hundred and eighteen posts for

³⁶ This resulted in the exclusion of immigrants who could not make a direct journey to Canada. Since there was at the time no direct voyage from India, prospective immigrants from India were one of the main targets of this measure. A group of 376 Indians challenged this restriction by arriving in Vancouver on board the *Komagatu Maru* in 1914. After two months in the harbour and an unsuccessful court challenge, they were forced to return.

³⁷ The term “race” first emerged as a restrictive category in Section 38 © of the *Immigration Act* of 1910 (See Freda Hawkins. *Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989, p. 17.

³⁸ Freda Hawkins. *Canada and Immigration: Public Policy and Public Concern*. Montreal & London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1972, p. 124.

³⁹ Alan Simmons. “Racism and Immigration Policy.” Vic Satzewich (ed.) *Racism and Social Inequality: Concepts, Controversies and Strategies of Resistance*. Toronto: Thompson Education Publishing, Inc., 1998, p. 103.

immigration officers abroad, only four were allocated to sub-Saharan Africa, while thirty-nine were located in Europe (six in Paris alone).⁴⁰

Therefore, as Arat-Koc contends, despite the alleged elimination of explicit racism and sexism, immigration and settlement policies continued to structure race and gender inequality in Canada.⁴¹ In the early 1990s, the federal government proposed a major restructuring of immigration legislation. A number of restrictive measures were introduced during this period to deter refugees seeking entry to Canada from non-European countries. Some of these measures included the imposition of visa and transit requirements, immediate detention upon arrival, and the fast tracking of refugee determinations. More pertinent to this study are those measures that affected refugees already in Canada. The 1993 legislation that required refugees to provide a “proper” identity document to qualify for permanent residency status, the unprecedented setting of a refugee quota in 1997, and the lengthening of the of time to five years for acquisition of permanent resident status have been exclusionary towards minority groups like the Somali refugees.

These restrictive legislative changes made critics wonder about the extent to which racism continued to inform exclusionary refugee policies. Anthony Richmond, a refugee

⁴⁰ Ibid. Other examples of the persistence of control mechanisms in the immigration policies and the processes of racial differentiation and exclusion are the restrictive temporary visas given to domestic workers from the Third World, while European domestic workers were given landed immigrant status in 1980s. This visa system created a situation where, to avoid being deported, domestic workers from the Third World countries were forced to stay with and be submissive to employers who exploited them. See Sedaf Arat-Koc. “Gender and Race in ‘Non-discriminatory’ Immigration Policies.” Enakshi Dua and Angela Robertson (eds.) *Scratching the Surface* and Agnes Calliste. “Canada’s Immigration policy and Domestic from the Caribbean: The Second Domestic Scheme.” J. Vorst et al. (eds.) *Race, Class and Gender: Bonds and Barriers*. Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1989.

scholar asks the following question, “[h]ave we created a system of ‘global apartheid’ designed to exclude people simply because of their ethnicity.”⁴² Aiken makes similar argument by concluding that racism remains prevalent in Canada’s treatment of refugees from certain countries.⁴³ Razack discusses how the immigration reform⁴⁴ in 1990s regulates who gets in and who is entitled to the full benefits of citizenship by requiring Convention refugees to produce “satisfactory identity documents” to be eligible for resident status. Identity document, according to Razack, became a tool in the project of state construction.⁴⁵

The restrictive immigration changes were, as Stasiulis points out, “supported by first world citizens defending declining public resources against growing numbers of third world migrants, who are also ideologically constructed as ethnical/racial cultural threats.”⁴⁶ Limited citizenship rights were also defended as “justifiable restrictions on potential migrant’s individual freedom based on the perceived need to protect national identity and/or cultural membership of stable communities.”⁴⁷ Similarly, Stasiulis and

⁴¹ Arat-Koc. “Gender and Race in ‘Non-discriminatory’ Immigration Policies...”

⁴² Anthony Richmond. “Global Apartheid: A Postscript.” *Refuge*. Vol. 19, no. 4, 2001, p.12.

⁴³ Sharryn Aiken. “Racism and Canadian Refugee Policy.” *Refuge*. Vol. 18, no. 4, 2000.

⁴⁴ The author is referring to Bill C-86 (Amending the *Immigration Act*), which was introduced into the House of Commons under a Conservative government in June 1992 and passed into law six months later, and the creation of the Undocumented Convention Refugee in Canada Class in 1997 under a Liberal government. With these immigration policies and provisions, Razack argues that Canada joined other western nations in the creation of a class of people neatly labelled the “undocumented”, people marked as less deserving of juridical and social rights by virtue of their lack of passports or travel documents.” In this sense, the relationship between “white citizens and refugees are deeply colonial.” (See Sherene Razack. “‘Simple Logic’: Race, the Identity Document Rule and the Story of a Nation Besieged and Betrayed.” *Journal of Law and Social Policy*, vol. 15, 2000, pp. 181-209).

⁴⁵ Razack. “Simple Logic...” p. 185.

⁴⁶ Daiva K. Stasiulis. “International Migration, Rights, and the Decline of ‘Actually Existing Liberal Democracy’.” *New Community*. Vol. 23, no. 2, April 1997, p. 197.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 203.

Yuval-Davis stressed the differential impact of the 1990s immigration and citizenship laws. Such policies, they argue, have

[S]pecial liabilities on minority communities. Such policies explicitly or implicitly reproduced the (white) settler society assumption that only those who embodied or could be assimilated to the culture and values of the dominant racial/ethnic group were legitimate 'settlers' or citizens.⁴⁸

According to Jakubowski, discomfort with the changing colour of immigration underscored Conservative policies of early 1990s.⁴⁹ Because of their different colour, culture and religion, Somali refugees could not be assimilated to the culture and values of the dominant racial/ethnic group. Therefore, they were not considered "legitimate citizens". Prior to the 1993 Bill C-86, convention refugees were exempted from the requirement to provide identity document. Changes to refugee policies have had a particularly difficult impact on Somali refugees already in Canada at the time when the Kosovars were receiving warm welcome from Canadian immigration policy makers.

The differential treatment given to the Kosovars at the exact time when Somali refugees, already in Canada, were being denied "the right to get on with their lives" was not lost to the Somalis.⁵⁰ Many critics also pointed out how the undocumented refugee regulations

⁴⁸ Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis. "Introduction: Beyond Dichotomies – Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class in Settler Societies." Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis (eds.) *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class*. London: Sage Publications, 1995, p. 15.

⁴⁹ Lisa Marie Jakubowski. *Immigration and the Legalization of Racism*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1997.

⁵⁰ The federal government facilitated the acceptance of 26,000 refugees from former Yugoslavia at the time that Somalis were being denied the right to become permanent residents. See Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Canada Extends Special Measures to Reunite Families Affected By Civil War in the Former Yugoslavia." *News Release*, February 26, 1993; Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Canada Continues to Reunite Families Affected by Civil War in the Former Yugoslavia." *News Release* 93-24, July 29, 1993; Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Canada to Take More Refugees From Former-Yugoslavia." *News Release* 95-15, August 9, 1995; Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Success of the '3/9 Pilot Project' to Sponsor Refugees from Former Yugoslavia." *News Release* 96-11, (nd).

discriminated against Somalis (and Afghans) based on their nationality and race. Chantal Tie, an immigration lawyer acting for Ottawa's Somali community in a court challenge against the federal government, said that the treatment of Somali refugees should be compared to the welcome accorded to the Kosovar refugees in the late 1990s. Although the circumstances that forced Somalis out of their country were similar to those of Kosovars and although Kosovars also did not have identity documents, they were brought to Canada expeditiously and were offered landed status. Commenting on the unequal treatment towards Somali refugees, Tie asks:

What is the difference between the war in Kosovo and the one in Somalia? ... The difference is the government did everything it could to make sure they (Somalians) [sic] didn't come here. Virtually everyone affected is black. And it [Bill C-86] was instituted at the time when the largest group of refugees being accepted by the Immigration and Refugee Board were from Somalia.⁵¹

The differential treatment of the Third World and European immigrants was further made clear in the Minister of Immigration's defense of the policies which welcomed former Yugoslav refugees while denying similar rights to Somali refugees already in Canada. In a feeble attempt to respond to the criticisms leveled against the federal government, Bernard Valcourt, then Minister of Immigration, explained that the "Somalis' situation was less compelling owing to the fact that they were 'nomads' who didn't want to come to Canada anyway" (emphasis added).⁵² Resorting to stereotypes reflects the attitudes of the federal government towards Somali refugees and helped the casting of Somalis as the "other" and undeserving of Canada's generosity. Also, such a remark equates nomadic

⁵¹ Andrew Duffy. "Somalis claim discrimination." *The Gazette*, Montreal, December 31, 1999, p. A10. See also Andrew Duffy. "Immigration laws discriminate against Somalis, refugee's lawyers say: Required documents unobtainable from unstable African nation." *Edmonton Journal*, December 31, 1999, p. F6.

⁵² This remark further angered Somalis and sparked several protests by Somalis in Toronto and in Ottawa. See Anna Pratt and Mariana Valverde. "From Deserving Victims to 'Masters of Confusion': Redefining Refugees in the 1990s." *Canadian Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 27, no. 2, Spring 2002, p. 149.

life, as Abdo comments, with a state of “savagery or barbarism” and it is racist and discriminatory.⁵³ It is important to note that, at the time Canada’s senior government official was making this rather insensitive statement, not only were there thousands of Somali refugees whose lives were being suspended in legal limbo by the immigration policies, but also other thousands were languishing in refugee camps in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti, desperately hoping for compassion from the international community.

The discourses surrounding the introduction of the Act, constructed refugees as people who are taking advantage of Canada’s generosity and linked them to crime, threats to national security⁵⁴ and welfare fraud. Somalis became the ideal targets of this hostility and anti-immigration sentiments and became scapegoats for Canada’s economic, political and social difficulties. Ontario Liberal MPP, Lyn McLeod, quoting from a federal report, which alleged Somali refugees to be engaged in the collection of multiple welfare cheques to support warlords in Somalia, said in the legislature that the fraud was costing taxpayers millions of dollars.⁵⁵ Subsequently, several newspapers ran inflammatory articles accusing Somali refugees of not only welfare fraud but also of being engaged in criminal activities.⁵⁶ As Pratt and Valverde explain, “the resulting composite figure of the

⁵³ Nahla Abdo. “Race, Gender and Politics: The Struggle of Arab Women in Canada.” Linda Carty (ed.) *And Still We Rise: Feminist Political Mobilizing in Contemporary Canada*. Toronto: Women’s Press, 1997, p. 76.

⁵⁴ Despite the fact that there were no evidence of danger, the government justified the introduction of the requirement of identity documents “using the rhetoric of maintaining the safety of Canadian society, suggesting that without identity documents, there is no way to confirm whether or not the refugee is a war criminal or a terrorist.” See Aiken. “Racism and Canadian Refugee Policy” p. 5.

⁵⁵ Jacque Miller. “Fear and loathing in a foreign land: A discredited federal report on welfare fraud unleashes racist hatred on Somalis in Ottawa.” *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, November 19, 1993, p. B3.

⁵⁶ For instance, on the front page of Vancouver’s largest daily on October 20, 1993, the headline read: “Welfare scam ‘buying arms for Somalia’: Refugees support warlords.”; the article begin with the following sentence, “[M]illions of dollars in welfare money collected fraudulently by Somali refugees

'bogus' refugee on welfare, thought to be carefully engaged in defrauding immigration and social services simultaneously"⁵⁷ was mobilized in ways that affected a number of visible minority groups, among them Somalis, disproportionately. Somalis were labelled as the "bogus refugee" and "the foreign violent criminal".⁵⁸

The requirement of an identity document for acquisition of permanent residency was difficult to satisfy for Somalis who, because of civil war and the resulting damage to infrastructure, did not have a state to issue documents for them. As will be illustrated in chapter six, with a huge imbalance of power favouring the Canadian government and its cultural prejudices and expectations over the refugee, Somali newcomers had faced major difficulties in settling and were excluded from gaining access to citizenship rights. In addition, the discriminatory labels and the collective denigration of Somalis sparked a racist backlash towards them and had practical settlement implication for Somalis. Children were reported being teased at schools; individuals felt increased racial hostility as a result of extensive and negative media coverage of alleged welfare fraud and criminality. As one man said, "[e]verybody suspects Somalis, everywhere you go".⁵⁹

In addition to constructing racial inequalities, Canadian immigration policies have had a differential impact on women. Boyd,⁶⁰ Ng,⁶¹ and others also illustrated that in addition to

across Canada are being used to buy arms for Somali warlords." The article did not produce any facts to confirm the allegations.

⁵⁷ Pratt and Valverde. "From Deserving Victims..." p. 136.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 143.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Jean Swanson. *Poor-Bashing: The Politics of Exclusion*. Toronto: Between the lines, 2001, p. 93.

⁶⁰ Monica Boyd. "Immigrant Women in Canada." Rita James Simon & Caroline B. Brettell (eds.) *International Migration: The Female Experience*. New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld, 1986, pp. 45-61;

having a racial bias, immigration policies are gendered. As Ng observes, “[w]hile immigrant men integrate relatively quickly into Canadian society through their participation in the labour force, many immigrant women, especially if they do not speak English, become marginal members of society.”⁶² Historically, as Arat-Koc notes, “immigration of women of colour was very contentious, as women of colour were seen as threats to the racial and cultural purity of the nation.”⁶³ 1990s changes in language training, criteria regarding knowledge of official languages and measures against the family class accompanied by the introduction of a modern “head tax” have had negative implications for and further disadvantaged women of colour in immigration and settlement.⁶⁴

Similarly, Ng discusses how immigration processes systematically structure “sexual inequality within the family by rendering one spouse (usually the wife) legally dependent on the other.”⁶⁵ Given the structure of these policies, women enter Canada as dependants, as part of family packages that men are allowed to bring. The consequence of this legal status is that immigrant women are denied language training and employment assistance programs.⁶⁶ Hence, these policies construct patriarchal relations that make immigrant women financially and legally dependent on their husbands, even in cases of abusive relationships. As will be discussed in chapter six, Somali women bore the brunt of the

Boyd, Monica. “At a Disadvantage: The Occupational Attainment of Foreign Born Women in Canada.” *International Migration Review*, vol. 18, 1984, pp. 1091-1120.

⁶¹ Roxana Ng. *Immigrant Women, Class and State: The Politics of Community Services*. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1987; Ng, Roxana. “Managing Female Immigration: A Case on Institutional Sexism and Racism.” *Canadian Woman’s Studies*, 1998, vol. 12, no. 3, pp., 20-23.

⁶² Ng. “Immigrant Women and Institutionalized racism.” p. 184.

⁶³ Arat-Koc. “Gender and Race in ‘Non-discriminatory’ Immigration Policies in Canada...” p. 208.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Roxana Ng. “Immigrant Women...” p. 187.

regulatory immigration and refugee policies that limited their rights to reunite with family members. Delayed family reunification has been identified as “the single most painful and damaging aspect of life in legal limbo.”⁶⁷ The gendered nature of their experiences illustrates the material results of policies that exclude certain groups from full participation in the Canadian society. As will be discussed in chapter six, the Somali refugee women’s experiences clearly demonstrate how the Canadian State is a key institution in organising and maintaining racial and gender inequalities.⁶⁸

Therefore, as Bannerji suggests, women’s experiences must be recounted within the broader socio-historical and cultural framework “that signals the larger social organization and forms which contain and shape their lives.”⁶⁹ For this reason, Bannerji argues “an adequate description of the smallest racist incident leaves room for reference or contextualization to slavery, colonialism, imperialism; exploitation of surplus value and construction of the labour market through gender, ‘race’ and ethnicity.”⁷⁰

Cultural essentialism and the social construction of Somali women

As blacks, Muslims, and refugees, Somali women experienced multiple levels of exclusion and were constructed as the “other”. As refugees, they were generally conceptualised as problematic and a burden on the economy. As Muslims, they were

⁶⁶ Ibid.; See also Boyd. “Immigrant Women in Canada...”

⁶⁷ Andrew Brouwer. "What's In A Name: Identity Documents and Convention Refugees." Ottawa: Caledon Institute for Social Policy, 1999, p. 6.

⁶⁸ Linda Carty and Dionne Brand. “‘Visible Minority’ Women: A Creation of the Canadian State.” *Resources for Feminist Research*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1989, pp. 39-40.

⁶⁹ Himani Bannerji. *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995, p. 84.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

generally viewed as oppressed by their culture and religion and often unable to fit into the social and cultural systems of the host country. They were deemed to be "traditional", "mutilated" and to have control over neither their lives nor their bodies.⁷¹ Cultural practices like female genital mutilation were readily used as an icon of oppression in the popular discourse. As Lazreg notes, the emphasis on the religion/tradition paradigm results in a "reductive, ahistorical conception of women.... Tradition in this case is seen as exemplified by the veil, seclusion, clitoridectomy, and so on."⁷² Focus on culture as the site of women's oppression also fails to account for factors such as racism and the reproduction of gender ideology in the Canadian context.⁷³

As Abu Lughod points out, the concept of culture seems to work as an essential tool for making the 'other'; it tends to make differences seem self-evident and "into something solid and timeless".⁷⁴ The notion of culture also homogenizes women and "flatten[s] out their differences"⁷⁵. These essentializing discourses also failed to address women as subjects; rather, Somali women never "rise above the debilitating generality of their 'object' status."⁷⁶ Women are, in this process, robbed of "their historical and political agency."⁷⁷ This construction of Muslim women as oppressed by their culture and religion is quite problematic and has been the subject of recent scholarly debates.

⁷¹ Chandra Mohanty. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." Chandra Mohanty (ed.) *Third World Women and the Political Feminism*. Indiana, 1991, p. 72.

⁷² Marnia, Lazreg. "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Women on Women in Algeria." *Feminist Issues*. Vol. 14, n. 1, Spring, 1988, p. 85.

⁷³ Enakshi Dua "Racism or Gender: Understanding Oppression of South Asian Canadian Women." *Canadian Woman's Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1992, pp. 6-10.

⁷⁴ Lila Abu-Lughod. *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories*. Berkeley, Los Angeles & Oxford, 1993, p. 11.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 9.

⁷⁶ Mohanty. "Under Western Eyes..."

Many Third World women scholars⁷⁸ have discussed the problematic nature of essentializing culture and homogenizing women. Others⁷⁹ questioned the orientalist discourses on Islam and warned against the dangers of “reifying culture, apparent in the tendencies to plaster neat cultural icons like the Muslim Women over messy historical and political dynamics”⁸⁰. These scholars challenged Eurocentric concepts that produce homogenous, stereotyped discourses and texts about Muslim women in both the Third World and in the diaspora. The images of Third World women as the veiled women and the chaste virgin, the obedient wife, as Mohanty remarks, “exist in universal, ahistorical splendour, setting in motion a colonialist discourse which exercises a very specific power in defining, coding, and maintaining existing first/third world connections.”⁸¹

Discussing the particular experiences of Muslim women, Abu-Lughod and Abdo further suggest, the stereotypical constructions of Muslim women tend to be ahistorical and fail to address the complexity of the lives of women who are the “products of different histories, expressions of different circumstances, and manifestations of differently structured desires.”⁸² These constructions, as Abdo discusses, fail to account for the

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 71.

⁷⁸ See Mohanty. “Under Western Eyes...” p. 72; bell hooks. *Feminist Theory, From Margin to Centre*. Boston, 1984, 1984; Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York & London, 1991; Gayatri Spivak. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interview, Strategies, Dialogue*. London, 1990; Caroline Ramazanoglu. *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression*. Routledge: London & New York, 1989; and G. C. Spivak. “Can the Subaltern Speak.” C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Illinois, 1988.

⁷⁹ See Marnia Lazreg. *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*. New York, 1994; Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) *Women, Islam and the State*. London, 1991; Lila Abu-Lughod. *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories*. Berkeley, Los Angeles & Oxford, 1993; and Nahla Abdo (ed.) *Sociological Thought: Beyond Eurocentric Theory*. Toronto, 1996.

⁸⁰ Lila Abu-Lughod. “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others.” *American Anthropologist*. Vol. 3, p. 783.

⁸¹ Mohanty. “Under Western Eyes...” p. 72.

⁸² Ibid. p. 787.

complexity of women's identity outside of Islam and rarely address the influence of the state and class structure in Muslim countries on women's conditions.⁸³

Similarly, writing on Canadian Arab women's experiences, Abdo challenges the dualistic tendency of universalizing women's experience while simultaneously "othering". She argues, "the construction of Arab and/or Muslim women as the 'different other', as objects of passivity, silence, submission, veil, and seclusion has occupied many Western feminists for the past decade and a half".⁸⁴ In the process of "othering", as Lazreg suggests, women are deprived "of self-presence, of being"⁸⁵ and are not perceived as "historical subjects with real life experiences".⁸⁶ Furthermore, "the subject(s) involved in reconstructing the Other as inferior lay down the rules of this dichotomy by reasserting themselves as the sole agents of history."⁸⁷

Implicit in these fixations on cultural practices is the fact that Muslim women need to be saved. This construction of women as victims is not only deeply problematic but it also presupposes the superiority of the west. According to Abu Lughod, the "project of saving other women depends on and reinforces a sense of superiority by Westerners, a form of arrogance that deserves to be challenged."⁸⁸ She proposes writing "against culture" by writing against generalizations. Telling women's stories, for instance, Lughod suggests,

⁸³ Nahla Abdo. "Muslim Family Law: Articulating Gender, Class and the State." *International Review of Comparative Public Policy*, vol. 9, 1997.

⁸⁴ Nahla Abdo. "Feminism and Difference: The Struggle of Palestinian Women." *Canadian Woman's Studies*. Vol. 15, no. 2-3, 1995, p. 141.

⁸⁵ Lazreg. "Feminism and Difference..." p. 87.

⁸⁶ Abdo. "Feminism and Difference..." p. 141.

⁸⁷ Abdo. *Sociological Thought...*, p. 7

⁸⁸ Abu-Lughod. "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" p. 789.

could be “a powerful tool for unsettling the culture concept and subverting the process of ‘othering’”.⁸⁹

The othering and the structural inequalities experienced by Somali women contributed to processes whereby women are in a double-bind with external and internal pressures exerted on them. Internally, as Bannerji discussed, the othering and homogenization experienced by immigrants in Canada engenders a process of community formation whereby those who are “‘othered’ bond together *vis a vis* these designatory processes in a defensive move.”⁹⁰ As will be discussed in chapter six, The negative portrayal of Somali refugees and the failure to adequately contextualize the complex reality and materiality of women’s refugee experience in the discussion of female genital mutilation contributed to some community members feeling defensive about their culture as a whole. Some Somalis also decided to cling to their traditional practices as a source of social meaning and identity in the face of real or perceived threats against cultural and social solidarity. The sentimental defense of patriarchal cultures constituted a serious setback for Somali women’s own movement against the practice of FGM.

In an attempt to deal with the “othering from powerful outside forces,”⁹¹ the community engages in a creation of new identity, which is “stereotypically constructed and defensively self-constituted.”⁹² In this sense, communities are formed for reasons of cultural expression, but are rather the product of the pressure of external forces. Bannerji,

⁸⁹ Lila Abu-Lughod. *Writing Women’s Worlds...* p. 13.

⁹⁰ Himani Bannerji. “A Question of Silence: Reflections on Violence against Women in Communities of Colour.” Dua and Robertson (ed.) *Scratching the Surface...* p. 263.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 264.

who critiques the social construct of the concept of community and the complexities of community formation in the diasporic contexts, cautions us against taking these community constructs as natural. Arguing that they are rather severely gendered social organisations, Bannerji notes that these new formations “are legitimated as an essence of the identity of these communities” and rest “explicitly on patriarchy and on severely gendered social organisation and ideology.”⁹³ Women are marginalized and othered in this community formation process. They are expected to act in certain ways and to conform to an idealised construct of womanhood and community. As Bannerji argues, the expectation of women to conform to an idealised and romanticised past is in response to their marginalized placement in the Canadian society and is a result from exclusion from the dominant group. She argues that minority groups “are otherized and they in turn otherize women.”⁹⁴

Women are also gendered as “mothers” of their “communities”. The notions of “proper woman” are further reinforced by the perceived threat of losing one’s culture and identity in the host countries. Women who take practical approaches to dealing with the challenges posed by the new socio-cultural environment are often labelled as “Westernised”⁹⁵ and going against their “traditions”. The notion of traditional community within these contexts “rests explicitly on patriarchy and on severely gendered social

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 265.

⁹⁵ The selective and problematic application of the term “Westernization” has been discussed by many other Third World scholars such as Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.): *Women, Islam and the State*. London, 1991; Valentine Moghadam: *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*. London, 1994; Amrita Chhachhi. “Forced Identities: The State, Communalism, Fundamentalism and Women in India.” These scholars have examined the accusations of Westernization, which are often gender based, and of the shifting constructions of the term.

organization and ideology.”⁹⁶ Somali women in Canada are constructed as being *fara laga qaad* (trouble maker/lost individuals). They are accused of “conveniently “forgetting” what it means to be Somali and of becoming too “westernised” without critically questioning the western values. They are said to having become “self-centred” and forgetting about how much sacrifice it takes to hold families together. Thus they have “betrayed” their families in particular, and the community in general.⁹⁷

The portrayal of Somalis as welfare cheats, undeserving refugees and engaged in criminal activities as well as the focus on culture/religion (rather than state perpetuated racism and sexism) as the site of women’s oppression in the Canadian context promoted the notion of the “other”. These images also conform to a pre-existing stereotype of Africans as primitive and clanistic.

(Re)conceptualizing Somali women’s identity

In addition to the essentialization of their culture and religion, Somalis faced further exclusion as they were constructed as African savages trapped in clanistic violence. Western media, academics and politicians have analyzed the destruction of the Somali state and the associated violence through a clan-based explanatory model. As Besteman suggests, these analyses provide a simplified explanation of Somali history. Drawing on racist assumptions and anthropological models, American media portrayed Somalis as “savages who got ahead of themselves technologically; ... tribesman still out there

⁹⁶ Himani Bannerji. “A Question of Silence...” p. 264.

⁹⁷ Ikram Jama, Public Education Coordinator, Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre (April 18, 2002).

wandering around the primordial landscape and animosities, dutifully following the factional footsteps of their forefathers.”⁹⁸

These constructions also reduced the intricacies of Somali politics to a sole-cause, “clan politics”, and failed to address broader social, political, religious and economic changes in Somalia.⁹⁹ For instance, the historical fact that Somali kinship went through a number of transformation and that the contemporary politicized forms of clanism are different from pre-colonial kinship¹⁰⁰ is often overlooked in the analysis.¹⁰¹ The cause of Somalia’s civil war was explained as “ancient clan hatreds and rivalries”.¹⁰² Generalizations associated with the notion of clan politics in Somalia also presented Somalis as the “other” and catered to the popular imagination of Africans as kinship-based tribal people and tradition-bound.¹⁰³ As Besteman argues,

[v]iewing Somalis as caught in destructive spiral of ‘tradition’ allows us to imagine them as very different kinds of human beings, to pity them, and to feel safe. We feel safe because, on the one hand, we could never imagine kinship-based genocidal warfare happening here; on the other, Somalia provides us with a model for ethnic conflict among minorities, recent immigrants, and the underclass that denies the powerful dynamics of race and class.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Catherine Besteman. “Representing Violence and ‘Othering’ Somalia.” *Cultural Anthropology*. Vol. 11, no. 1, 1996, p. 122.

⁹⁹ Ibid; See also Abdi Samatar. “Destruction of State and Society in Somalia: Beyond the Tribal Convention.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. Vol. 30, no. 4, 1992.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 638.

¹⁰¹ Commercialism of the subsistence economy (particularly livestock and land distribution), the imposition of a colonial state on a decentralized social structure, and post-colonial state manipulations of clan configuration (which created what was referred to as “state clan”) have left their marks on the traditional Somali system of kinship which contained a number of checks and balances and was based on a complex set of unwritten customary laws (*Xeer*) and, later, Islam. See Samatar. “Destruction of State...”; and Charles Gesheker. “The Death of Somalia in Historical Perspective.” Hussein M. Adam & Richard Ford. *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st Century*. Lawrenceville, NJ.: The Red Sea Press Inc., 1997, p. 73

¹⁰² Gesheker. “The Death of Somalia in Historical Perspective.” p. 121.

¹⁰³ Besteman. “Representing Violence...”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 128.

Samatar and others have provided an alternative to the oversimplified clan-based explanations of warfare in Somalia. To better comprehend the processes that led to the total breakdown of the society, the collapse of the Somali state and “why such a seemingly homogeneous society has descended into the abyss”, Samatar suggests going “beyond the tribal convention”. He further argues, “[t]he arbitrary extraction of blood-ties from the rich and complex social web of which it was only a small part, simply panders to elite opportunism and Eurocentric racism.”¹⁰⁵

Framing Somali politics in clan tends to also give simplistic accounts of gender relations in Somalia. While I.M. Lewis’ assertion that women occupy a subordinate structural position¹⁰⁶ may be accurate within the context of clan configurations, it fails to address women’s parallel organizations within local communities. Lewis’ exclusive and simplistic use of an anthropological model of clan politics based on lineage genealogy fails to provide a full understanding of the social, economic, and political dynamics of gender relations in Somali history. This ahistorical approach contradicts the power exercised by women within the community, as confirmed by a number of studies.¹⁰⁷

To cope with the disruption of the social and economic changes during the late 19th century and early 20th century, as will be discussed in chapter three, women created multiple strategies and networks. Women in the urban settings engaged in collective

¹⁰⁵ Samatar. “Destruction of State...” p. 639.

¹⁰⁶ Lewis, I. M. *Marriage and the Family ...*

¹⁰⁷ See Amina Adan. :Women and Words.” *Ufahamu*, vol. 10, no. 3, Spring 1981, pp. 115-142; Christine Choi Ahmed. “Finely Etched Chattel: The Invention of a Somali Woman.” Ali Jimale Ahmed (ed.) *The Invention of Somalia*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press Inc., 1995, pp. 157-189; Hilarie Kelly. “The Potential Role of Women’s Groups in Reconstruction.” Hussein M. Adam & Richard Ford. *Mending Rips*

efforts and worked within their own groups, often transcending kinship relations, to deal with the challenges facing their communities. These alternative communities, based on mutual interests rather than kinship, were created to substitute for absent family networks. By coming together these women emphasised their identity as women as separate from men and with different needs. They also "claim social space not normally allotted to them."¹⁰⁸ These groups provided a framework "for women's cooperation, particularly in terms of sharing resources and vital information on strategies for survival and improved welfare."¹⁰⁹

During the 1980s, as the country faced economic and social crisis and as the regime became more oppressive, clan identity was politicized. As discussed in chapter four, "the terror of the military, the collapse of public law and order, and the fragmentation of the opposition, meant that the ordinary people were forced to find protection in the ghost of pre-colonial kinship tradition, the clan."¹¹⁰ Subsequently, women's place within the clan further became problematic as the family became a refuge. The civil society "managed to endure through a web of obligations in which lineage loyalties... provided a social security and welfare system that re-distributed resources even as the national state was entering its final death throes."¹¹¹ This reliance on the family as social welfare had problematic implications for women. Small gains made by women were lost and the tradition of male superiority gained momentum in people's belief systems.

in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st Century. Lawrenceville, NJ.: The Red Sea Press Inc., 1997, pp. 359-369.

¹⁰⁸ Kapteijns, Lidwien with Maryan Omar Ali. *Women Voices in a Man's World: Women and the Pastoral Tradition in Northern Somali Orature .c.1899-1980*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999; See also Amina H. Adan. "Women and Words." p. 71.

¹⁰⁹ Hilarie Kelly. "The Potential role of Women's Groups in Reconstruction" p. 360.

¹¹⁰ Samatar. "Destruction of Somali State..." p. 637.

The clan identity was finally affected by the new circumstances in the diaspora. In the diasporic context, Somalis actively engaged in self-definition within and against competing and negative discourses. Practical identities came to the front in different situations. These identities interact and overlap in complex ways at different space and location. Generally, as they became aware of their shared experiences of displacement and social and economic marginalisation, Somalis formed more and more collective groups. As will be discussed in chapter six, racial discrimination and the profound significance that the construction of Somalis as the “other” could have on their overall resettlement in the host country was also a key factor in Somalis recognizing that they are “all in the same boat” in Canada”.¹¹²

In addition, because of the new fears and uncertainties that accompanied being displaced persons, many Somalis tended to claim a strong Islamic¹¹³ identity. This new assertion of an Islamic identity is often “resistance to assimilation and a reaction to the realization

¹¹¹ Gesheker. “The Death of Somalia in Historical Perspective...” p. 77.

¹¹² For instance, in 1993, following the welfare fraud smear campaign against Somalis by the media and some politicians and the immigration difficulties, thirteen Somali organizations came together and formed the Coalition of Somali Canadian Organizations. As one Somali organizer of the first meeting, attended by 400 people, by the Coalition said, “it’s an issue that’s touched all of us, personally and as a community... All these different people are sitting here because we’re concerned about how we are being portrayed.” See Francis Dub. “Somalis unite to protest welfare fraud allegations.” *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, November 7, 1993, p. A 1.

¹¹² Francis Dub. “Somalis unite to protest welfare fraud allegations.” *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, November 7, 1993, p. A 1.

¹¹³ Islam is an important factor in Somalis’ life and provides a framework for understanding their experiences in Canada. It provides comprehensive guidance and includes the social, economic, political, moral and spiritual aspects of life. It, theoretically, transcends divisions of race, nationality, ethnicity, language and gender. The Quran is to remind an individual of the purpose of life on earth, of duties and obligations towards one’s self, siblings, community, other fellow beings and the Creator

they are identified as ‘other’ (read, not belonging)”.¹¹⁴ “Frustrated by what they viewed as unjust exclusion and negative stereotyping, many Muslims chose to claim their space in society by declaring their presence.”¹¹⁵ For Somali women, one way of declaring their presence has been to start wearing the veil (*hijab*), a dress code associated with Islam, for the first time. Women take up the veil “not only because of their personal religious beliefs, but also out of a wish to assert openly the presence of the Muslim community.”¹¹⁶ The *hijab*, in this sense, is more than clothing; it is rather an important site and symbol of shared Muslim identity.”¹¹⁷ Wearing the *hijab* is also “a means of visually creating community.”¹¹⁸

Establishing a new personal identity that is focused on Islam has also helped many to be part of a larger community of Muslims who share common values. This new Muslim identity does not necessarily contradict the fact that many continue to have strong emotional and financial ties with their extended families in both Somalia and in Canada. The new Muslim identity in the diaspora superseded Somali nationalism. This proves the fact that identity is contextual. Thus, the refugee experience made clan affiliations mostly inoperable.

Within the process of redefining their identity, Somali women have been engaged in the balancing act of reconciling two completely different value systems for their own

¹¹⁴ Homa Hoodfar, Sajida S. Alvi and Sheila McDonough. “Introduction.” Homa Hoodfar, Sajida S. Alvi and Sheila McDonough (eds.) *The Muslim Veil in North America*. Toronto: Women’s Press, 2003, p. xi.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. xii.

¹¹⁶ Homa Hoodfar. “More than Clothing: Veiling as an Adaptive Strategy.” Homa Hoodfar, Sajida S. Alvi and Sheila McDonough (eds.) *The Muslim Veil in North America*. Toronto: Women’s Press, 2003, p. 39.

¹¹⁷ Hoodfar, Alvi and McDonough. “Introduction” p. xix.

¹¹⁸ Hoodfar. “More than Clothing...” p.4.

meaningful purposes. They have combined ways of dealing with new issues with some of the old approaches to problem-solving. Female-based institutions that brought women together across class and clan lines in Somalia have been recreated and modified to help women cope with new challenges in Canada. Support networks, reconstructing familiar social spaces and recreating aspects of female-based institutions such as *hagbad* have been important elements of women's adjustments and daily survival in an environment where they are otherwise isolated. These women's activities illustrate not only the fact that identity is contextual and that women are practical in the process of identity construction, but also indicate various forms of women's subjectivity and agency.

Articulating women's agency

In the introduction¹¹⁹ to *Arrangiarsi*,¹²⁰ a book that brilliantly documents the life experiences of the Italian immigrants, Perin argue that it is necessary to place the immigrant in a protagonist role when recording history. The authors make a particularly important contribution as discussions on immigration tended to often center on immigration bureaucracy and policies rather than immigrants and their experiences. This analysis gives agency to the immigrant. Rather than the image of the immigrant who is alienated, transplanted (as presented in Oscar Handlin's epic, *the Uprooted*¹²¹) and who "prefers to bleach away every trace of their immigrant origin shine forth... as

¹¹⁹ Roberto Perin. "Introduction. The Immigrant: Actor or Outcast." Roberto Perin and Franc Sturino (eds.) *Arrangiarsi: The Italian Immigration Experience in Canada*. Montreal: Guernica Editions, 1989.

¹²⁰ Roberto Perin and Franc Sturino (eds.) *Arrangiarsi: The Italian Immigration Experience in Canada*. Montreal: Guernica Editions, 1989.

¹²¹ Oscar Handlin. *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951.

whitewashed Canadians”¹²² (completely discarding his/her culture and tradition to become “North American”), the authors present a complex network of immigrants who negotiate and employ strategies to not only survive but also make a home for themselves. The immigrant, according to Perin, is “not some kind of amorphous clay,”¹²³ but actively engages in struggles and negotiations to shape his new reality.

Similarly, Jean Burnet’s *Looking into My Sister’s Eyes*¹²⁴ pioneering collection of essays from historians discusses subjectivity and agency among immigrant women who were previously constructed as victims of patriarchal societies. These essays discuss community networks, identity, and strategies for maintaining or improving the quality of family, ethnocultural and economic lives of Ukrainian, Italian, Greek, Polish, British, Finnish, Mennonite, and Chinese women in Canada. The authors in this collection discuss how women initiate and maintain the familial and other social networks that sustain and help immigrant communities adapt old world customs to the new world settings.¹²⁵

¹²² Perin. “Introduction...” p., 31.

¹²³ Ibid. p., 25.

¹²⁴ Jean Burnet’s *Looking into My Sister’s Eyes: an Exploration in Women’s History*. Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986. Before 1980s ethnic historians paid virtually no attention to women’s experiences of migration. Ethnic history was largely informed by male perspectives. Women were treated as an undifferentiated category and solely as dependants of male migrants, not as subjects whose migration is socially and economically significant on its own right. Existing studies also homogenised and ignored the diverse nature of previous backgrounds in terms of race, age and a range of other factors that determine women’s experiences in the host countries. Not only were these women lumped together as a group, but also immigrant women were defined in stereotypical manner. As a result, few studies focus on the pressures faced by immigrant women population in terms of their own personal resources and their ability to adjust to new environments.

¹²⁵ See Varpu Lindstorm-Best’s *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada*. Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1988; and Frances Swyripa. *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891-1991*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993 for discussions on various aspects of the adaptive strategies employed by the immigrant women in the Canadian context. While the historical literature on immigrant women, class, ethnicity, and state is growing and becoming more sophisticated, studies on the experiences of “visible minority” women are limited. Dionne Brand’s *No Burden to Carry*¹²⁵ on Black women in Ontario whose lives was previously ignored fills an important gap in ethnic and immigration history. Through personal narratives of a group of Black women in Ontario, Brand studies Black women’s experiences, which includes racism, during the early

Somali women's subjectivity comes out clearly throughout the analysis of women's narratives. In Somalia, as will be illustrated in chapter five, Somali women negotiated with the state and contested the marginalization of women in all levels of government and at various social settings. As Kandiyoti, in her work on Middle Eastern women found, while there is a set of concrete constraints that regulate gender relations, women strategize within them. Women contest, redefine and renegotiate this set of rules. These bargains, termed patriarchal bargains by Kandiyoti, "exert powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered ideology in different contexts."¹²⁶

In Canada, as will be discussed in chapters eight and nine, women have contested (both individually and collectively) various victimizing policies and engaged in efforts that are aimed at making the margins liveable. Individually, as discussed in chapter eight, women have instigated networks of female relations and they have created and maintained a complex web of social relations aimed at facilitating their daily struggles to survive in Canada and deal with the experiences of being dislocated and uprooted. The study argues that the female ties established in the neighbourhoods are expressions of agency and they help women alleviate the daily stresses amid poverty and social segregation and make the margins liveable.

twentieth-century Canada. The author examines individual as well as collective struggles of Black women to survive and cope with racial discrimination and their role in the early women's movement in Canada.

¹²⁶ Deniz Kandiyoti. "Islam and Patriarchy: A Comparative Perspective." Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (eds.) *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*. New Haven and London, 1991. p. 27.

Women have also taken collective and countless “unacknowledged yet essential actions”¹²⁷ to ensure their community’s survival. The patterns of activism and the creation of social spheres of influence reflect their cultural differences and racialized experiences in Canada and are consistent with other activities by marginalized groups struggling to create spheres of social life and organization.¹²⁸ This study argues that by developing pragmatic solutions to the new challenges faced by their community, activist women are forging an alternative history in Canada.

This study problematizes the essentialized notions of culture and argues that Somali women cannot be lumped together as one homogenous group. The simplistic conceptualisations of women are problematic and fail to adequately explain both women’s social and historical past as well as their complex realities in the diaspora. Their lives in Somalia and diaspora, as the study will clearly illustrate, are a testimony to the complexity of their lives and situations in both contexts. Women's accounts of their realities also shatter the myth of the Somali women’s passivity and help us understand that their daily lives do not fit into essentialized categories. We observe and get a sense of female agency and subjectivity as well as of multiple struggles in which Somali women are engaged in their daily lives. We also get glimpses of women’s various attempts to define themselves in ways that do not correspond to stereotypes of the oppressed the mutilated, the "vulnerable refugee" woman, or the Westernised recipient of a culture over which she has no control.

¹²⁷ Collins. *Black Feminist Thought...* p. 140.

¹²⁸ See Ibid.

Following hooks' discussions of subjectivity and agency, this study attempts to conceptualise Somali women as subjects in their own right.¹²⁹ To articulate agency, the study argues that while women are vulnerable on many levels and were *victimized*, they are not *victims*. The study draws upon the post-colonial scholars' debate on the issue of framing a non-essentialist analysis of the construction of subjectivity that allows for agency while still recognising the material boundaries within which the agent is constituted. Speaking specifically about black experiences and subjectivity, bell hooks suggests that a critique of essentialism can generate a liberatory and oppositional affirmation of "multiple black identities, varied black experience. It also challenges colonial imperialist paradigms of black identity which represents blackness one dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy."¹³⁰

This study shifts away from the portrayal of Somali women as victims. It takes an anti-racism discursive approach as presented by Dei in his article "Rethinking the Role of Indigenous Knowledges in the Academy". This approach celebrates political and material resistances of marginalized groups and shifts away from a sole preoccupation with victimisation. Drawing from Foucault's conceptualization of power, this approach recognises that power does not only reside with the dominant group. Rather, there are sites of resistance and discursive agency and the power to resist resides in/among entirely by the marginalized groups. As Dei explains, these "myriad resistances help sustain the local human conditionalities" of the colonised "other."¹³¹

¹²⁹ bell hooks. *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Boston, 1990, p. 28.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ George J. Sefa Dei. "Rethinking the Role of Indigenous Knowledges in the Academy." Paper presented at the African Development Dissertation Workshop at Queens University, Kingston (April 15-19, 1998).

Finding a theoretical fit....

The main problem with the theoretical frameworks discussed above is their inability to take into account the continuities in the lives of refugees. While each set of theories addresses one aspect (either in Somalia or in Canada) of Somali women's lives they do not explain the entirety of women's experiences. As the following poem by one of the participants poignantly points out, many of the issues women faced (still face), whether in Somalia or in Canada, are interconnected and women's experiences extend from colonialism to state oppression and colonial legacy, and now the experiences of racist and sexist state policies. Entitled *The Whole Me*, the poem illustrates that Somali women's complex realities do not fit into any essentialized categories, and defy the stereotypical image of refugee women as helpless victims.

She comes out and tells me " Madam, your son is very
sick, is your husband with you"?
I look at her and say no
She still looks at me with pity in her smile
Looks at me with blame in her eyes
Eyes that say how could you travel with eight
children alone? Why did you have so many children?
And with a smile that says " you poor woman? Life must
be hard for you? And the news of your son's illness must be a shock to you?"
"You must be depressed"?
"You are smiling. How could you? When do you grieve?"

I look at her with eyes that say, my dear lady
Do not attempt to define me
I have lived through the residues of colonialism
I have lived through the invisible hand of neo-colonialism
I have lived through the turbulence of nominal independence
I have lived through the silencing of dictatorship and the catastrophes of war
I have buried a child and miscarried quite a few
I said goodbye to loved ones, homeland and many dreams
I have lived, laughed and cried many a time

Through it all I defied definition-
So don't attempt to define me, to place me in one category or another
Sometimes I am able, other times I am not
Through life I have learned an important wisdom
That no matter what, one must carry on
So don't try to define me
For I am neither Victim, nor Victorious.¹³²

Placing women's activism in a cultural and historical context, this study argues that we should not focus on the continuity/discontinuity dichotomy. Women's narration speaks to the historical continuity of various themes of exclusion by state policies in both Somalia and in Canada, and to women's assumption of agency through community activism and reconstruction of their communities. Hence, the women in this study are not fragmented beings, but are rather individuals who succeeded in remaining *whole*.

¹³² Ikram Jama, Public Education Coordinator, Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre (April 18, 2002)

CHAPTER II

(Re)constructing Somali women's history:

Methodological Notes

Some aspects of the literature on Somalia and Somalis have been rapidly growing in the past few years. However, scant attention has been given to contemporary women's lives and history in the wider scholarship on Somalia. The tendency of this literature has often been, and continues to be, very gender blind. Boulding's argument that history suffers from a problem of sampling and that the understanding of women in World history suffers from a triple bias: a male bias, a class bias, and a Western bias¹³³ is very relevant in this case, especially as far as the third bias is concerned. Claims to universality, as well as orientalism and othering among Western scholars have silenced and invalidated the histories of non-Western people and women.¹³⁴ This partially stems from the politics of knowledge construction. As a result of historical domination (slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism) third world indigenous knowledges have been negated. Processes of historical construction produced and maintained "the privileges of men/white/the West by constituting women/people of colour/the east as other and lesser beings."¹³⁵

In this sense, the scholarly literature on women in Somalia, or lack thereof, has not differed markedly from that of women in other parts of the world. Somali women's social

¹³³ Elise Boulding. *The Underside of History: A View of Women Through Time*. London & New Delhi, 1992 (vol. 1).

¹³⁴ Edward Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon, 1978; Nahla Abdo (ed.) *Sociological Thought Beyond Eurocentric Theory*. Toronto, 1996; Chandra Talpade Mohanty. "Under Westenn Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse." Chandra Talpade Mohanty (ed.) *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991, pp. 51-80.

history, their perception of their own situation, their subordination and their own resistance have all remained 'invisible' until recently. Women's experiences have been excluded from historical accounts. If they were at all mentioned it was mostly as a footnote or part of a subtext. As feminist scholars made it clear earlier in the women's movement, challenging the processes and practices that inform the constructions of particular knowledges raises questions concerning the often taken-for-granted assumptions which underlie dominant understandings of knowledge constructions.¹³⁶

It is only in the past three decades that systematic study of women's experiences has become widespread in the West, mostly under the pressure of Western feminism. Thanks to feminist scholarship, women's history has developed into a conventional historical field. Prior to that period, most historical studies reflected male experiences. Western feminism has however been accused of being biased in favour of White middle class women and of neglecting to address the concerns of lower class, non-white and Third World women. Historical writing partly reflected those biases. While women's perspectives and their lives have been the centre of many important works in the West, early feminist literature in English was dominated by a White middle-class Anglo-Saxon perspective.¹³⁷ Initially, feminist writings documented women's experiences solely in a framework of gender analysis, ignoring the interconnections of race, class and culture in the shaping of women's lives. Feminist conceptions of women's oppression were

¹³⁵ Kathy Ferguson. *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory*. Berkeley and New York: University of California Press, 1993, p. 39.

¹³⁶ See Sandra Harding. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989; Dorothy E. Smith. *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987; and Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought...*

¹³⁷ Mohanty. "Under Western Eyes..." ; Suad Joseph. "Gender and Civil Society." *Middle East Report*, July-August, 1993, pp. 22-27.

challenged as being rooted in narrow version of Western women's experiences.¹³⁸ Black feminists like bell hooks have criticised the language and concepts used by white Western feminists and felt that their own experiences had been overlooked.¹³⁹ Deeply rooted Western attitudes about non-Westerners complicated the historical approach to Third World women and distorted Third World women's realities and struggles. The equation of the West with progress and modernity, the rest with stagnation and tradition still colours much of the discussion of women in the Third World. Historical experiences with colonialism, slavery, and forced labour are rarely documented.

Recently, many excellent historical and sociological studies from women's perspectives and based on their experiences in both the Middle East (both Muslim & non-Muslim) and Africa have emerged. However, Somali¹⁴⁰ women's lives generally fall “between the cracks” and outside the area of study of both regions. Recent literature in the region brings previously excluded people centre stage in scholarship. However, Somali women continue to be invisible in any serious study of history in both the African and Middle Eastern studies. Like histories of other women until very recently, Somali women's history is still nothing more than a few footnotes about their role in the family, and neither women's daily struggles nor their lives are ever a matter of public record in

¹³⁸ Lazreg. “Feminism and Difference...”

¹³⁹ See bell hooks. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to the Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984; Patricia Collins. *Black Feminist Thought...*

¹⁴⁰ Somalis are part of the Muslim world and Somali women's lives have been largely shaped by Islamic principles and ethos. Somalia is also geographically located in Africa. However, from early on people from the Horn of Africa region had established trade links with the people from the Middle East and the Mediterranean region. Because of this trade a common civilization developed: what Prof. Kitisikis refers to as the Intermediary Region. (For further details on the Intermediary Region see Dimitri Kitsikis' *L'Empire Ottoman*. Paris, 1985, p. 16).

Somalia. One strong exception is Lidwein Kapteijn's work¹⁴¹ on gender relations in the pre-colonial and colonial state. It provides important insights for understanding the dynamics and the history of Somali women during these periods. However, while her writings and her recent analysis of women's oral literature have been very valuable for this study, she does not provide a critical analysis of how the post-colonial state policies have shaped and reshaped women's lives. Thus, not only is the history of Somali women neglected by the scholarship emanating from Somalia, but it also is not covered by the women's and feminist studies of Africa and Middle Eastern/Muslim societies.

This study attempts to fill the gaps in the knowledge of Somali women's history. It tries to reconstruct Somali women's lives much the same way as women's history did in the 1970s in the West and, more recently, in other Third World countries. It studies women as subjects and agents of history rather than objects of study. By providing women's perspectives on issues and activities impacting on their lives during these historical periods and by documenting women's narratives of their everyday lives and experiences, the study will ultimately provide an alternative account of the political and social realities of Somali women. Thus this study employs feminist methods that reaffirm women's daily experiences that have been largely ignored and minimised.

¹⁴¹ See Lidwien Kapteijns. "Women and the Crisis of Communal Identity: The Cultural Construction of Gender in Somali History." Ahmed I. Samatar. *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?* Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 1994; Lidwein Kapteijns. "Gender Relations and the Transformation of the Northern Somali Pastoral Tradition." *International Journal of African Historical Studies*. vol. 28, no. 2, 1995; and Lidwien Kapteijns with Maryan Omar Ali. *Women's Voices in a Man's World: Women and the Pastoral Tradition in Northern Somali Orature .c.1899-1980*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999.

Methods of data collection

Primary Sources

In-depth interviews, archival research, analysis of written works, and extensive participant observation in the community were the methods used for data collection. Somalia's infrastructure has completely collapsed as a result of the bloody and destructive civil war years. Consequently, the country's official and non-governmental archives have disappeared and there is no access to national archives, library or government documents. However, copies of some important government publications were found outside of Somalia. There is a large reservoir of documentation at the Library of Congress as well as the Africana collection at the Indiana University Libraries¹⁴² in Bloomington. There are important documents including government-produced literature, speeches, newspaper articles and United Nations reports. However, legal documents such as the family law and the constitution, which were pertinent for this study, were missing in these repositories.

In Canada, searches were done in a number of historical sources and government departmental records at the National Library, Immigration and Refugee Board Library, Citizenship and Immigration Library, Parliamentary Library in Ottawa. In addition, newspaper articles and immigration statistics were consulted to ensure that comprehensive research on the topic has been done.

¹⁴² The Indiana University Libraries published a document entitled *Finding List of Materials on Somalia and in the Somali Language*. 1993. This is a comprehensive list of materials on Somalia and in the Somali language. The materials are available via interlibrary loan.

Oral history

In-depth interviews with 16 Somali women, three Somali men and two non-Somali women were conducted for this study. Oral history methodology was used since it offers the benefits of seeing the world of women in its full complexity. Oral history also “affords a primacy to the opinions and interpretations”¹⁴³ of the women interviewed. The study was interested in how women felt about the issues that affected their daily experiences. This technique of data gathering, according to Reinhartz, “explores people's views of reality”.¹⁴⁴ In addition, interviewing “offers the researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher.”¹⁴⁵ These first person accounts allow us to “understand the subjectivity of a social group that is ‘muted,’ excised from history”¹⁴⁶.

The lack of written texts on Somali women's lives reinforces the significance of oral history in documenting women's lives and realities in both Somalia and Canada. An oral history approach was, therefore, used because it is the only way to reconstitute the experiences of people whose lives are not the subject of studies. As Reinhartz suggests, interviewing is particularly important for the study of women because “learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women.”¹⁴⁷ Interviewing has the “potential of bringing women ‘into’ history

¹⁴³ Dionne Brand. *No Burden to Carry...*, p. 31.

¹⁴⁴ Shulamit Reinhartz. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 18

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Cited in Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 19.

and making female experience part of the written records.”¹⁴⁸ The purpose of this study was also to “create a written record of interviewee’s life from his/her perspective in his/her own words.”¹⁴⁹

Oral literature is particularly important in the Somali context where the language was only written in 1972. Prior to this period, Somali songs, poems and folk stories were transmitted orally from one generation to the other. Somalis have even been referred to as nation of bards and poets by historians and social anthropologists of both Somali and non-Somali origin. Poetry and songs in Somalia provide meanings that go well beyond the merely artistic function they have in Western society. Poetry in Somalia has social, cultural and political functions. It has described important political and historical events to many Somali generations who did not have access to the written word for centuries. As John Johnson in his study of Somali oral literature points out, poetry has many functions in Somali society. He explains that poetry is "employed as a running commentary on the latest news, a lobbying pressure device for social and political debates, a record of historical events, a revered form of aesthetic enjoyment, and an expression of deep feelings about love.”¹⁵⁰ As such, the poet is a "prominent public figure within the society who commands a following.”¹⁵¹

Studying poetry in Somalia would provide us with a better understanding of women’s experiences because women's experiences have been excluded from Somalia’s historical

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 134.

¹⁴⁹ Shulamit Reinharz. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford: Oxford Universtiy Press, 1992, p. 133.

accounts. I. B. W. Andzejewski and Lewis' *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*, John Johnson's *Heellooy* and Axmed Cali Abokor's *Somali Pastoral Work Songs* provide different aspects and analysis of Somali poetry. Lidwein Kapteijn's *Women's Voices in a Man's World* is a brilliant collection of a large number of Somali oral texts and popular songs from the colonial period to contemporary songs which "developed as an important cultural site for debates about women and gender norms." Her study critically unravels a complex social world that presents "insights into women's subjectivity and points of view"¹⁵² and challenges received notions of women's past in particular and Somali traditions in general. Similarly, Zainab Jama's study on Somali women's involvement in the struggle for national independence uncovers muted women's voices through an analysis of women's poetry. Jama and Lidwein's work were particularly useful in providing an insight into the myriad ways in which Somali women negotiated within and, at times, successfully resisted some of the restrictions imposed by the social, political and economic systems in traditional Somalia and during colonial resistance. Although women's voices in Somali oral literature were muted, women still used the medium of poetry to make comments on their personal and collective situations. This often took in the form of work songs and lullabies.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ John William Johnson. *"Heellooy": Modern Poetry and Songs of the Somali*. London: HAAN Publishing, 1996, p. 1.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Lidwein Kapteijns with Maryan Omar Ali. *Women's Voices in a Man's World: Women and the Pastoral Tradition in Northern Somali Orature .c.1899-1980*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999.

¹⁵³ See Ibid.; Amina Adan,. "Women and Words." *Ufahamu*, Spring 1981, vol. 10, no. 3; Dahabo Farah, Amina H. Aden & Amina Mohamoud Warsame. "Somalia: Poetry as Resistance against Colonialism and Patriarchy." Saskia Wieringa (ed.) *Subversive Women: Historical Experiences of Gender and Resistance*. London & New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1995, pp. 165-182; Zainab Jama. "Fighting to be Heard: Somali Women' Poetry." *African Languages and Cultures*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 43-53.

Canada is home to one of the largest Somali population outside of Somalia. There are over a hundred thousand individuals of Somali origin in major Canadian cities like Toronto and Ottawa. These people provide a unique and large reservoir of "historical sources". The basic assumption of this dissertation is, as Johnson pointed out, "memory sometimes fails on minute points" and opinions vary. However, "the memories of people in oral societies are used much more than those of persons who can make notes in writing. For this reason they may be more accurate than the memories of literate men [and women]."¹⁵⁴ Thus, Somalis may be better informants for a study relying heavily on oral history, because they belong to an oral culture.

One of the main purposes of the study was to collect memories while they were still accessible and to leave a historical record of the experiences of activist women who shaped and continue to shape the lives of the average Somali Canadian everyday. It is hoped this study becomes "the instrument through which a community gets its history told."¹⁵⁵

The participants spoke for themselves and from their own perspectives on events in both Canada and Somalia. The discussion is not on their personal lives and on themselves *per se*, but rather about the issues that affect them in particular and the Somali community in general. Their personal narratives reflected on the myriad issues they, along with the rest of the Somali community, faced. These discussions were used to inductively arrive at an understanding of several important aspects of the Somali community's experience in

¹⁵⁴ Johnson. "Hellooy" ... p. xvii.

Canada. They also guided the overall themes and direction of the study. Analyses were often provided by the researcher to place women's narratives in the larger historical context.

The limitations of oral history were taken into account when doing the interviews. For instance, it is recognized that sometimes participants forget details on certain issues and dates. To avoid this pitfall, other available secondary and primary written records on both Somali refugees' experience in Canada and women's experiences in Somalia were consulted to cross check and to compare accounts provided by women.¹⁵⁶ However, it is recognized that while respondents could confuse details about certain events, it is more difficult to forget feelings about these events.¹⁵⁷

The interview process

Participants were recruited through varied personal and professional networks. Some were referred by others (snowball technique for sampling). Initial contacts were made orally: often by a phone call or at a community meeting. After initial contact, there were phone calls to the potential interviewees to confirm their participation. A time that was convenient for the interviewees was set, after the person had consented to an interview. Setting up interview dates was often a long process and rescheduling for meetings was a

¹⁵⁵ Valerie Raleigh Yow. *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists*. London, 1994, p. 144.

¹⁵⁶ Alice Hoffman. "Reliability and Validity in Oral History." David Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (eds.) *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1984, pp. 67-73.

¹⁵⁷ Paul Thompson. "Problems of Method in Oral History." *Oral History*, vol. 4, 1972, pp. 14-17.

common occurrence. The rescheduling of meetings reflected women's hectic lifestyles in Canada.

Using a consent form approved by the Social Science and Humanities Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa before each interview, participants were told that the information they provide would only be available to bona fide researchers who are ruled by the ethical norms that govern their discipline and that tapes would not be labelled with an informant's name but with a catalogue number (See Appendix A). However, they were reminded that sources must be identified in historical research and were informed of the fact that their anonymity cannot be entirely preserved and the data cannot be as anonymous as in the social science disciplines. Low-level government officials could remain anonymous in publications, and be referred to only by their title and position. However, in cases where individuals' position (because they held such an important and often known position) gives away their identity, the permission to name the interviewee in publications was requested. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw their consent and terminate their participation at any point during this study.

An interview guide that was approved by the University of Ottawa Ethics Committee was used to ask a series of questions about the respondents' historical experiences and their recent past in Canada. (See Appendix C) Participants were encouraged to talk on topics about which they had the most to say rather than extracting identical bits of data from everyone. Interviews were conducted in the Somali language, the mother tongue of all the participants (except the two non-Somalis who were interviewed in English).

Interviews lasted approximately one to two hours, but some ran as long as three to five hours. There were many second or even third interviews to get more information from the women. Follow up phone calls were made to the participants in cases where background information was missing. These calls and/or visits provided for much of the background information for the study. Crosschecking of dates and events was easy to achieve in the second meeting or the follow up calls.¹⁵⁸

The format of interviews employed was a semi-structured one. The semi-structured approach was chosen to respect and address the concerns of the participants who came from a society where structured interviews are viewed as threatening. This approach was also used to create a sense of trust and to provide an environment where respondents were comfortable discussing important issues in their lives and the lives of their community. To further make interviewees comfortable, relatives were occasionally encouraged to sit in on the interviews and express opinions. If there were sensitive issues that could not be discussed among friends and family, a follow up interview was requested to obtain more details. General frustrations about their refugee and diasporic situation and the condition of the community in Canada were always topics of discussion prior to the interview. This usually took time; however, it often allowed the participants to vent and to become more comfortable. Seeing that the investigator had had similar experiences of dislocation, loss of professional identity and status contributed to the building of rapport with the participants and reduced the scepticism about the research.

¹⁵⁸ Stephen Devereux and John Hoddinott. "Issues in data collection." S. Devereux and John Hoddinott. *Fieldwork in Developing Countries*. Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1993, pp. 525-40.

This process of building a relationship with the participants sometimes took several hours.

Although there were potential participants who refused to participate in the study for fear of negative impact on their immigration process, most of those approached were quite delighted to be given the opportunity to participate in the building of new knowledge. Those who refused to participate in the study were afraid that what they disclosed would have negative implications for their immigration status¹⁵⁹ and were often quite concerned about the Canadian government's investigations of "war criminals" and the fact that some people were made "guilty by association." These individuals were rather hesitant to identify themselves with the Somali government at any level. Thus, although they mentioned that they would have liked to participate had circumstances been different, fear that information divulged would negatively affect their immigration process made these individuals to refuse to participate in the research. To alleviate some of these fears, the assistance of an older relative was solicited to assure the participants that the research was for purely academic purposes and would have no effect on their immigration status. The contact through a trusted and an older individual from the community contributed to the process of building a relationship of trust between the investigator and the participant.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ These perceptions that discussions of their past positions will have negative repercussions have been exacerbated by the Canadian "guilty by association" policy, adopted by the Canadian immigration officials in which anybody who had senior position in a government that has had a bad human rights record is considered a war criminal.

¹⁶⁰For an interesting analysis of the role of a trusted community contact in facilitating research process see Lila Abu-Lughod. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and poetry in a Bedouin Society*. London, Los Angeles & Berkeley, 1986, p. 123.

Because of their current position as refugees and the fact that certain memories might trigger negative/unpleasant events in the past, precautionary measures were taken and the emotional vulnerability of the interviewees was respected. As various studies have agreed, interviewing refugees who have experienced tremendous trauma poses various sensitive and ethical dilemmas to the researcher. Respect for the trauma experienced by refugees must be an integral part of an ethical framework for the researcher, recommended Vargas in an article entitled, "Ethical Challenges in Refugee Research: Troublesome Questions, Difficult Answers." She suggests that there must be a delicate balance of three critical ethical pillars in any qualitative research on refugees: a) confidentiality, b) an active and positive approach to cultural differences, including gender issues, and c) respect for the emotional experiences of victims.¹⁶¹ The researcher must also be aware of the delicate condition of refugees and their families. These conditions include uncertain legal status, racial discrimination, lack of access to services, and post-traumatic stress as a result of trauma/stresses related to dislocation and pre and post migration experiences. Researchers must, therefore, bring sensitivity to the task of conducting qualitative research with refugees.¹⁶² This study is also guided by a "feminist ethic of commitment and egalitarianism in contrast with the scientific ethic of detachment and role differentiation between researcher and subject."¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Claudia Maria Vargas. "Ethical Challenges in Refugee Research: Troublesome Questions, Difficult Answers." *Refuge*, vol 17, no. 3, August 1998.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Reinharz. *Feminist Methods...* p. 27.

Profiles of the research participants

Participants came from widely different social and economic backgrounds and included university graduates as well as individuals with no formal education but with enormous personal local knowledge of issues covered in the study. They are individuals (women and men) who held government positions (both senior and junior) during the period of 1970-1980, as well as women who were active at various levels of government and in neighbourhoods in Somalia. The majority of these women currently live in Ontario and continue to be active in Canada. Additional key individuals who were referred to by the initial interviewees were also interviewed. Some of these people lived in the United States.

Women (and men) who were interviewed for this study have four things in common: they were educated (albeit at various levels), were (mostly) active in Somalia and they continued to be active, and they all came to Canada as refugees. Their age ranged from around early thirties to late seventies. Some of the participants were "experts" (held higher positions and participated in the formulation of policies) on the issues discussed in the first part of the dissertations, while others developed considerable expertise on the realities of Somalis in Canada because of their active involvement in community affairs. Some others were religious figures who were/are still respected in the community for their knowledge of Islam.

Some women had no formal education and some were working class women whose lives had been affected by the gender policies introduced by the later Somali regime. Although

the Somali women in this study have varied educational, age, and socio-economic backgrounds, their commonality as refugees and as activists in Canada is much greater than their differences. All the participants have shared similar experiences of flight, being uprooted, and struggle to make sense of their new reality. They also share a sense of determination to go beyond the self and their commitment to contribute to the *danta guud* (the common good). The majority of the participants have played a vital role in the reconstruction of the Somali community in Canada after the social and economic displacements and after refugeeism. They have been involved in various activities aimed at reconstructing not only their personal and professional lives but also at helping the community resettle in the new socio-economic environment.

Hawa Jabril is one of the most unique and inspiring figures among them. Aged around eighty, Hawa is still very active in both the Somali diaspora and in Somali politics. As a self-educated poet, she enjoys high respect among Somalis, both young and old. As a young woman she participated in the nationalist struggle against colonial powers in Somalia, she spoke against the injustices and lack of gender participation in the first post-colonial state, and challenged the socialist government to deliver its promised gender equality policies. Hawa was among hundreds of thousands who fled their country due to circumstances beyond their control (i.e. the civil war). She has not stopped being active, she has composed and recited poetry speaking on the civil war and the human tragedy experienced by Somalis. She has also commented on the pains and sorrows experienced

by Somali refugees in Canada. She keenly follows the political processes in Somalia and was invited to the *Arta* peace negotiations¹⁶⁴ to address the participants.

Amina Abdulle is another older (in early 70s) member of the community who was self-educated in Somalia. Like women in her age group, she did not have access to education as a young woman. However, benefiting from later educational programs, she went to night school during the 1970s. She also became active in the neighbourhood groups and was a member of the Somali Women's Democratic Organization (SWDO). According to her, she has learned not only how to read and write later in her life but also how to organize, participate in meetings, take minutes and be very active in the local women's branch in the neighbourhood. She proudly speaks of the international women's meetings she has participated in representing SWDO. Although Amina is not very active at the moment, she inspired her daughters who are currently active in the community.

Dahabo Farah, Fadumo Alin (Hawa Jabril's daughter) and **Raqiya Haji Dualeh** (now residing in Washington D.C.) are three women who have been politically active in Somalia for almost two generations. They are all in their fifties and were the first Somali women who had access, albeit limited, to higher education in Somalia. Their education was controversial because it was not normal for women to be educated at that time and there were no universities in Somalia. Their families resisted the pressures from the community and they were all sent abroad for higher education. They went to Italy,

¹⁶⁴ The Somali peace and reconciliation conference in Arta, Djibouti was the 13th (there had been 12 failed major national conferences prior to that) attempt by Somalis and the international community to negotiate peace in Somalia. The transitional government that came out of the Arta process is, thus far, the most successful attempt at resurrecting the Somali State.

Pakistan and Sudan respectively. When they came back they all were placed in junior positions in various government departments. They mentioned that they had to "work under men who had much less education than them". Frustrated by their experiences as women who were denied citizenship rights and equal participation, they founded the first active Somali women's organisation, the Somali Women's Movement. They actively challenged and critiqued state policies that denied women access and silenced them in the first post-colonial Somali State. They also shaped and were shaped by the state-sponsored gender policies during the second Somali post-colonial state. They later held high government positions in Somalia. Dahabo was the first and only female Dean of a faculty in the National University, Faduma was a Deputy Minister and later the Minister of Education, Raqiya was Deputy Minister of Health and Vice President of the Somali Women's Democratic Organisation. These women continue to be active in the diaspora.

Fadumo Dirie is one of the Somali women who sat on the Ontario Task Force on Female Genital Mutilation. She was also a trained Public Health Nurse when she came to Canada but could not practise here. She has worked for the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture where she founded the first successful support group for refugee women. This program was so successful that it has been used as a model to develop support groups for various ethnic groups in both Ottawa and Toronto. Faduma was also one of the first women who put the issue of Female Genital Mutilation on the agenda in Canada despite resistance from community members who felt that she was washing their "dirty linen" in public. She is now exploring ways of contributing to women's grassroots development in Somalia using the community development model they have developed in Toronto.

Khadija Ali, Amina's daughter, is a trained physician who studied in Italy and practised medicine in Somalia. Due to barriers to accreditation and access to trades and professions, she could not practice in Canada. However, that has not stopped her. She is now being retrained and is taking many accreditation exams in order to be certified in Canada. She said these tests are incredibly expensive but she and her whole family make the sacrifice so she will be able to practise medicine again. She has also been active and volunteered in many places including the Red Cross where she received a certificate of honour. She currently works as a Health Promoter. Khadija's articles on health, nutrition and social issues are regularly featured in the widely circulated and respected Somali newspaper in Toronto, *Somali Press*.

Sahra Habbane, Fouzia Ismail and Fowsia Abdulkadir are three other interviewees who currently live in Ottawa. Sahra was born in Borama in 1954. She has a B. A. Degree from Lafole College of Education, Somali National University. She married in 1979 and has four children. She continued her education in the US where she obtained a Master's in Public Health from UCLA. She came to Canada in 1991 with her four children. Her husband joined her later. When asked about her activism in Somalia, she responded, "Nobody needed us there." This remark is interesting and points to the fact while many could afford to concentrate on personal and professional development in Somalia, they have now become activists because of the multiple needs of the community and their position (as people who were educated) in the new context. She is now an Outreach worker at the Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services and is the founder of

the West-End Women's Support Group. Sahra is very active among Somali women in Ottawa. She organises activities for women and children, runs support groups for women, and participates in mediation and conflict resolution among Somalis and between Somalis and other ethnic groups in social housing communities in the West End of Ottawa.

Fouzia Ismail was a Public Health Nurse who was trained in Mogadishu, Somalia. She travelled around the country and worked at the Mother and Children Health Centers where she was active in educating parents about the harmful health effects of female genital mutilation in Somalia. Like other Somali women, she had to go back to school because of barriers to access to her profession. She has now almost finished her degree as a Registered Nurse and works as a Health Promoter at the South-East Ottawa Centre for Healthy Community. She was one of the Somali women who sat at the Ontario Task Force on Female Genital Mutilation and runs groups on health and nutrition for women from various ethnic groups. She is also one of the founders of the Horn of Africa Resource and Research Group in Ottawa. Using her background in Public Health and her experience in the campaign against FGM in Somalia, Fouzia helped organize sensitisation workshops for health professionals in Ottawa on how to incorporate an understanding of FGM into their medical care. She has received a "Canada Volunteer Award" from the Ministry of Health for "improving the health and social well-being of Canadians".¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Pat Bell. "Serving her new country." *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, January 3, 1996.

Fowsia Abdulkadir was born in 1960 in Mogadishu. She did her schooling in Arabic at Jamal Abdel-Nasser Elementary and High School in Mogadishu. She went to India in 1979 where she finished a degree with a major in Economics and minors in Political Science and Psychology. She got married after graduating in 1983 and has four children between the ages of 12 to 17 years. She came to Canada in the early 1990s. She went back to school to receive a certificate in teaching English as a second language (CTESL) and started teaching as an Adult ESL Teacher in 1992. Fowsia mentioned that her knowledge of languages such as Arabic, Somali and English became very useful when she was teaching. She has taught at many levels from literacy to advanced level. She has continued her education at Carleton University and is now finishing her Honours in Social Work. She has been involved in various activities such as being member of the Board of Directors of the Canadian African Solidarity since 1993, member of the Association of Somali Canadian Teacher of Ottawa-Carleton since its founding in 1996, and member of YMCA Parent Advisory Group from 1993-1996. She is currently the Site Administrator for the International Language Program in the West End. This program is run by the Ottawa-Carleton School Board.

Halima Abade has a degree in economics from the Somali National University. She then went to work at the Somali National Bank, where she later became a Branch Manager. She was also active with the Somali Women's Democratic Organisation (SWDO) and went to many countries abroad leading Somali women's delegations. She came to Canada in early 1990. She became active in the community, particularly in neighbourhood networks. She became the Communication Officer for the Foster Farm Tenant's

Association, the second Somali woman to hold a position in the Tenant's Association in Ottawa. Halima has been teaching Quran and women's rights in Islam to women for about 8 years now. She was the first woman who held the position of Quranic Teacher in the Somali community in Ottawa. Only men were the teachers prior to this. She is a very respected teacher in the community and is invited to speak at many women's meetings in Ottawa.

Asli Jama has a degree in Agriculture from Lafole College of Education of the Somali National University. She came to Canada in early 1990s. She began organising activities with people she knew in Somalia and her colleagues from the Lafole College of Education right after her arrival. She was one of the founders of the Learning Together Home Work Club. The first in its kind, the club's mandate was to help Somali children who are having difficulties with school to get help from people who have teaching background. Asli explained, "many of the kids were having difficulties because of their refugee experiences, sometimes their education was interrupted or their parents do not speak the language or they are too busy with day to day settling matters of immigration etc." Asli was also one of the Board of Directors of the Somali Center for Youth, Women and Community Development and works for Agriculture Canada on a part time basis.

Sirad Hashi has an economics degree from Somali National University. She worked for the National Insurance where she later became Head of a Department. She came to Canada in early 1990s and is active at the neighbourhood level. Sirad was the first Somali woman in an executive position in a Tenant's Association in Ottawa. She has been the

Vice-President of the Russell Heights Tenants' Association. She has been active in organising activities for not only Somalis but also other tenants of the neighbourhood as well. Her main focus has been "helping young Somalis maintain their cultural and religious identity." To achieve this, she has organised homework clubs, cultural events, and International Languages Programs in the neighbourhoods. She has also spent much time sensitizing Somali parents about cross-cultural parenting issues.

Shukria Samatar had a successful import and export business in Somalia. She came to Canada in 1989 with her four daughters and her husband. Shukria has been active in women's issues and neighbourhood activities. She has organised activities such as women's meetings and social activities. She was one of the first people who recognised that, as refugees, Somali women are often isolated and do not have a space to socialise in the new context. She has organised "social activities to help women vent and just let their hair down". These social activities have become popular and have been organised quite frequently in both Ottawa and Toronto. Shukria was a member of the Board of Directors of the Somali Center for Youth, Women and Community Development.

Hayat Saban was born in Hargeisa. She married young and had two sons. She lived and worked in Middle Eastern countries for many years. She is currently very active in the Ottawa Somali neighbourhood issues where she is engaged in women's mutual support programs. Hayat is well respected in the community and is often called in to participate in family conflict resolution meetings. The role of mediating family conflicts was generally granted to only men in Somalia. Hayat also participates in fundraising activities for local

development initiatives in Somalia. She is currently the Executive Administrative Assistant of Somali Centre for Youth, Women and Community Development.

The youngest research participant was born in Hargeisa, currently lives in Ottawa, and has a Master's degree in Political Science. **Ikram Jama** went to school when female education in Somalia was a right rather than a privilege. She is one of the founders of the Somali Centre for Youth, Women and Community Development, a major community organisation that serves provides social services to Somalis in Ottawa. Ikram believes that being active and being involved in the *danta guud* (the common good) is a social obligation rather than a choice. She feels that those who were fortunate enough to be educated should give back to the rest of the community that is facing multiplicity of issues including lack of access to appropriate social services, education, housing, lack of immigration papers, isolation and other barriers.

Two men were also interviewed because of their participation in the policy development in Somalia and the insight they could provide during the later Somali government. **Ahmed Hashi** was educated in Moscow and was one of the young socialist ideologues who were quite active in the conceptualisation of Somali State socialism. He was also one of the men who were advocating and were proponents of women's equality in Somalia. Trained as a lawyer, Ahmed held many important government positions including Minister of Education and Deputy Minister of Justice and Religious Affairs. In Canada, Ahmed was active in the Court Challenge case launched by the Somali

community against the Federal government. He is now the new Somali Ambassador to the United Nations.

Sheikh Mohamed AhmedNur Omar (Gadhyare) was the Minister of Justice and Religious Affairs and he presided over many family law cases in Somalia. He self-exiled and went to Saudi Arabia because he did not agree with the government's Family Law in 1975 which gave women legal rights within the family for the first time in Somali history. Sheikh Mohamed feels that the state sponsored Family Law was against Islam and was responsible for family breakdowns in Somalia. He is a respected religious leader in Toronto.

Chantal Tie is the Executive Director of South Ottawa Community Legal Services where she practices immigration and refugee law. She teaches immigration and refugee law at the University of Ottawa Law School as an adjunct professor. South Ottawa Community Legal Services has helped many Somalis with their immigration processes and received a number of awards from Somali agencies and groups for excellent and sensitive services to the Somali refugees in Ottawa handled many identity cases. Chantal was one of three lawyers representing Somali refugees in the 1996 court challenge that argued that the undocumented refugee regulations discriminated against Somalis based on nationality and race. Taking the federal government to court was intended to free Somali refugees from residential limbo that created serious problems for them. Through her long involvement with refugee issues in general and Somali refugees in particular, Chantal has gained insights that are important in understanding issues facing refugees in Canada.

Dr. Mohamed Ali Nuuh is the former Dean of Lafole College of Education of the Somali National University. He taught African History at University of California in Los Angeles and currently teaches African history at Carleton University. Using linguistic and archaeological evidence, Dr. Ali's Ph.D dissertation¹⁶⁶ placed the origin of Somalis in the southern highlands of Ethiopia with the speakers of eastern Cushitic languages of which Somali is one. This historical work contributed to the debates on the history of Somalis. He came to Canada as a refugee after the collapse of the Somali state. Dr. Ali has been very active in community issues and is very respected in the community.

Barbara Fulford is a psychologist by training. She is the wife of the former (in the early 1980s) Canadian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, who was also responsible for Somalia. As diplomats, Fulford and her husband were invited to participate in many Somali national ceremonies including events organized by the Somali Women's Democratic Organization. She mentioned she was impressed by the activities undertaken by the organization, particularly the self-help schemes for women and national campaigns against female genital mutilation.

The Somali women who were interviewed in this study were all the products of a specific historical process. They were all educated in Somalia and gained the skills to negotiate in the Canadian social, economic and political scene. Some of them participated in the various policies and initiatives intended to enhance women's status in Somali society, although at different levels. Those women's narrations tell us what it had been like to be a

¹⁶⁶ Mohamed Ali Nuuh. "The History in the Horn of Africa, 1000 B.C. – Rift Valley and Indian Ocean." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1985.

woman and to live through a self-proclaimed socialist regime that turned into dictatorship and then into tyranny. They also share with us their current experiences of being refugees and their experience of becoming community leaders. They describe to us their actions at various levels to help those who were not fortunate enough to have been educated or to have had access to professional and personal skills to deal with the experiences of being dislocated and uprooted.

As women's degree of integration is determined by many factors including social and education background, age, and their prior employment status, those who came with personal and professional skills were in a position to facilitate the rest of the community's integration process. The skills obtained outside of Canada were valuable in assisting the participants in particular, and the community in general, to make sense of their disruption, displacement, fragmented lives and being at the margins of the host society. Experience as refugees also helped many of the activist women get involved in community issues. As Fowsia Abdulkadir says, "we were there, we could speak the language, we were educated, and we were exposed to the realities of being dislocated and refugees. So we became the buffer for the community and the bridge between the host country and the Somali refugees who had no where else to turn."¹⁶⁷ Hence, it is women's historical background that makes them active in Canada. In this sense, there is continuity in women's activism. There is a historical precedent to these women's activism in Canada. Five of the participants had been very active in Somalia.

¹⁶⁷ Fowsia Abdulkadir, Site Administrator, International Language Program (Interview, Ottawa, May 2, 2002).

Women who are interviewed for this dissertation are unique for two reasons. First, they provide an important historical link between Somalia and Canada. A large portion of their lives was spent in Somalia. Many were not only educated in the country but they had their first professional positions there. They came to Canada equipped with a strong sense of personal agency, education, professional experience, and sometimes a history of activism. One woman's life spans four historical eras in Somali politics, namely colonialism, independence movement, post-colonialism, and post-state (civil war) and refugee period. The majority lived in Somalia under two different state policies. In Canada, these women have struggled with dislocation and often the resulting family fragmentation.

The other unique aspect of these women's lives lies in the fact that they are a "dying breed". Their historical recollection of the events in Somalia and the early history of Somali migration and refugee experience contribute much to our understanding of an important, but neglected, aspect of Somalia and Somalis' history, namely women's history. There has been a rupture in Somali history. Those who are in Somalia and are still experiencing the lingering impact of war may not be interested in keeping records of that element of the country's history. The younger generation of Somali refugees may only be interested in "living their lives in Canada" and may desire to focus on a future where Canada is their home and the centre of their identity. Consequently, there is an imminent danger in losing some of the important historical experiences of Somali women. This dissertation is an attempt to bring Somali women's lives in both Somalia and Canada into focus by providing the links between the two worlds and by explaining

the continuities and discontinuities in women's lives. The study will broaden our understanding of Somali women's history and experiences.

Limitations

There is one important part of women's personal experiences that has not been included in this dissertation, namely, their experiences of the civil war and flight. The main reason for this was that, because the memory of those experiences was too fresh in women's minds, after the first interviews it was realised how painful it was for women to recollect the civil war and flight. This was a period of intense and high emotions and women felt reluctant to discuss it in detail. For instance, one interviewee talked about her experiences of witnessing the death of a family member and started weeping. The interview was interrupted because of this. Another discussed having to travel hundreds of miles on foot with a daughter who lost her whole arm. She had to cover the daughter's arm with many clothes to hide the fact that she was bleeding and for fear of alerting the wrong people. She said, "the whole time we [she and the children] were afraid of being killed. We never thought we would make it to the refugee camp in Kenya alive." Covering these powerful emotions within the limited scope of this dissertation was impossible and it is difficult to do justice to the specificity of these painful realities and the dehumanising experiences of the war. However, this is an area that deserves full attention. This study should be pursued at a later date when women are properly settled, have had enough time to reflect on that part of their history, and are psychologically prepared to discuss it.

CHAPTER III

Women's political and socio-economic situation in traditional, colonial and post-colonial Somalia

Somali history has generally been examined from men's perspectives. This does not mean that women have been passive and that history was made by men only. Somali women's lives have been as dynamic and as changing as the societies in which they have lived. Although their status in Somali society was shaped by social, economic and political factors, women have consistently acted to improve their condition. This chapter explores the conditions that shaped or were shaped by, women's lives, roles and status in Somalia. It examines the role of women in Somali culture and politics prior to colonialism, during colonialism, and in the first Somali post-colonial state (1960 to 1969). Although women's lives had been circumscribed by a host of social, economic and political factors, it will be shown that they negotiated within these systems and, at times, successfully resisted some of the restrictions imposed on them.

Social relations in traditional Somali society were patriarchal.¹⁶⁸ However, there were wide differences between regions and socio-economic categories. They ranged from what Kandiyoti termed as "pure corporate male headed entities" and less corporate forms of households. Three different ecological systems (the pastoral, coastal and the agricultural) sustained different economic bases and forms of social organization. In the coastal trading areas where the Arab influence was the strongest, there was generally more

¹⁶⁸ For the purpose of discussions in this study, patriarchy is defined as a set of rules regulating gender relations. According to Kandiyoti, both sexes accommodate to yet renegotiate these rules. Women

restriction on women's movement. In places where pastoral nomadic cultures were prevalent, kinship was the base of social organization and women's non-conformity to the rules set by the kin was more visible. These were generally areas of relative women's autonomy. In the interriverine agricultural area, there was more reliance on territorial alliance rather than on genealogical affiliation. Women had relatively better control of production and reproduction. Variations thus are explained not only by social background, but also by regional background. In addition, because of external influences and movement of people to and from various regions, a combination of systems can be found in many areas of Somalia today. Due to the nature of the available literature which mostly concentrates on pastoral Somalis, the study, unless otherwise specified, discusses pastoral regions.

Kin groups form the basis of traditional socio-political life in Somalia's pastoral communities. This Somali notion of kinship¹⁶⁹ is based on an "entire networks of family relations" which are contrary to Western concept of kinship, which "limits the family group to the closest members."¹⁷⁰ Family relations through kinship "allows each individual to have an identity, to be acknowledged and identified, and that he can use

strategize within these sets of concrete constraints. For further analyses of the concept of patriarchy see Kandiyoti. "Islam and Patriarchy..."

¹⁶⁹ The full meaning of kinship in the pre-colonial Somali social organization has been defined by Ahmed Samatar as: "[t]he ideology of kinship had two central elements: blood-ties and *Xeer*. The first was essentially a product of genealogical connections buttressed by a patrilineal system harking back to a real or invented common origin/ancestor; the latter was the embodiment of common wisdom and the locus of inter/intra generational and, in its most general depiction, a pan-Somali code of conduct. The combined meaning of these elements constituted the milieu in which both the private and the public were defined. This, then, was the basis of kinship – an ideology commensurate with reciprocal production relations." (Ahmed S. Samatar. "Under Siege: Blood, Power, and the Somali State." Asfa Hizkas (ed.) *Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the Horn of Africa*. Washington D.C., 1993, p. 9.

¹⁷⁰ Mohamed-Abdi Mohamed. "Somalia: Kinship and Relations Derived from it." Hussein M. Adam & Richard Ford. *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st Century*. Lawrenceville, NJ.: The Red Sea Press Inc., 1997, p. 145.

according to his needs and circumstances."¹⁷¹ The family, known as *qoys* (immediate relatives) or *reer* (agnatic kin), are traced through the patrilineal lines.¹⁷² The continuation of the family name, loyalties and property devolved on male descendants in this system has always been considered important. Kinship was composed of two important elements, blood ties (through common male lineage - *tol*) and marriage ties (*hidid*) and set the basis for decision-making.¹⁷³

The social relationships among the kin were cemented through marriage. Marriage was a very important institution since it formed an alliance between two clans or *reer*. Thus, it was more than a private affair or a choice between two people. As Abdalla points out, marriage was "a business transaction, a contract with assumed specific rights and obligations of the two parties. It is a major means of strengthening the clan and clan's relationship with other groups."¹⁷⁴ Hence, negotiations and arrangements for marriage were carried out by the larger extended family rather than by individuals.

Through marriage, women become the links between different groups and through them positive interactions between two (sometimes warring) communities were established. In this context, a woman's identity was placed within her agnatic kin and she was subject to the authority of her father and his kin until she married, at which point she came under the control of her husband and his family to whom she was expected to be loyal.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Amina Adan and Margaret Khalakdina. "Women." *Women and Children in Somalia: A Situational Analysis*. UNICEF, Mogadisho, Somalia, 1987. p. 120.

¹⁷³ Ahmed I. Samatar. "The Curse of Allah: Civil Disembowelment and the Collapse of the State in Somalia." Ahmed I. Samatar (ed.) *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal*. Boulder & London, 1994. p. 109.

Although women's membership to her patrilineage and tribe remained unchanged, her attachment to her husband's kin grew as she bore children, particularly sons. Women's loyalty, therefore, was owed to two (sometimes competing) tribes: one through blood, the other through marriage. Lewis explains women's dual loyalty,

During her marriage she is increasingly absorbed morally into her husband's group especially through her sons but she is never fully identified with it in the legal sense. Indeed at law, a man is not fully responsible for his wife. In keeping with the strength of agnatic loyalties, a woman is never fully cut off from her natal kin, and whatever the character of her effective relations with her husband and his kin, never identified with them.¹⁷⁵

Gender relations were also structured through marriage. As Kapteijns argues, marriage represented a locus in which to enforce what she termed as "an ideology of kinship."¹⁷⁶ The definition of the marriage included specific guidelines for behaviour in matters of sex, obligations to offspring, in-laws, and kin, the division of labour within the household, and other duties and privileges of marital life. What constitutes a "proper woman" and women's qualities according to the prescribed social norms were important aspects of the guidelines for women's behaviour. Women's conformity to these norms was closely examined when marriage was being arranged and the notion of "proper women" reinforced the traditional gender roles and conduct on which the clan's honour rested. As Drysdale observed, "the conduct and bearing of women plays an important role in clan esteem, for however honourable a man might be, his wife's waywardness can ruin his reputation and that of his family and the clan".¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Raqiya Haji Dualeh Abdalla. *Sisters in Affliction: Circumcision and Infibulation of Women in Africa*. London, 1982, p. 54.

¹⁷⁵ Lewis, I. M. *Marriage and the Family*, p. 47.

¹⁷⁶ Lidwein Kapteijns. "Gender Relations and the Transformation of the Northern Somali Pastoral Tradition." *International Journal of African Historical Studies*. vol. 28, no. 2, 1995.

¹⁷⁷ J. Drysdale. *The Somali Dispute*. London: Pall Mall Press, 1964, p. 12.

As part of their marital rights, husbands had rights to women's productive and reproductive labour and could demand obedience from their wives. That meant women's production and reproduction "were to serve a household headed by a man."¹⁷⁸ Women could not maintain an autonomous household; they belonged to a household headed by a male and they were economically dependent on their husbands, brothers, and sons. The Somali proverb, *naagu hadday dheri guriga la soo gasho waa laga jebiyaa* (if a woman brings a container to her new household, it must be broken), meant if a woman brought something to the household, she would want to have a certain power in the decision-making. Thus, women's economic autonomy was curtailed.

While marriage bound women to their husbands by economic and social ties, they were still entitled to claim protection and support from their family after marriage.¹⁷⁹ Women had claims to material and moral support as well as protection from mistreatment and abuse from a circle of family relations. Women could activate these networks of kin support. Therefore, although the traditional social and gender relations were organised around patrilineal descent and women were prevented from attaining the social statuses open to men, women were given "a place, however temporary, with their brothers in the tribe and lineage."¹⁸⁰ This support and protection provided by the family generally mediated patriarchal control over women.

¹⁷⁸ Kapteijns with Ali. *Women's Voices...* p. 18.

¹⁷⁹ The saying *dhiiggeeda ma lihid ee dhaqnakeedaad leedahay* (a husband does not control his wife's person, but her services)¹⁷⁹ points to women's rights to protection from her agnatic family.

¹⁸⁰ Lila Abu-Lughod. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society.* London, Berkley & Los Angeles, 1986. p. 123.

These social and gender relations within the family and society were traditionally regulated and codified by a set of strictly enforced customary laws known as *xeer*.¹⁸¹ In addition to being control mechanisms for familial relations, this unwritten code of ethics provided moral, economic and social guidelines for the Somalis. *Xeer* also provided the general framework and moral standards by which individuals and groups were judged. *Tol waxaa loo yahay, nin qalloocan qabashadii, nin qumman quweyntii, iyo nin qolman wax siintii* (people are bound together for the checking of unjust action; the encouragement of righteous and virtuous actions; and the assistance of the weak and the needy).¹⁸² This particular set of codes is gendered: it provides differential roles for each sex, and has different implications for men and women. In addition to the customary law, Islam provides a moral code for Somalis. Thus, a combination of Islamic principles and customary laws governed social and gender relations. Islam generally accommodated local culture and practices and did not drastically alter either the material culture of the converts or their many institutions. Consequently, there were instances where Islam and customary laws converged and other instances where they conflicted. In cases of conflict, the customary laws rather than Islamic principles often determined the roles and responsibilities of the sexes.

For example, while the girl's consent is important in marriage under the *Shari'a* law, the father's consent is emphasised under the customary laws. This is why *masaafu*, in which

¹⁸¹ *Xeer* has been defined as a set of customary laws that provided general rules and created order and continuity in the traditional Somali society. For a good discussion on Somali customary law see Ali Moussa Iye. *Le Verdict de l'arbre (Go'aankii Geedka): Le Xeer Issa Etude d'une Democratie Pastorale*. Djibouti, 1990. While there are similarities in principle and purpose in these customary laws, there are considerable variations among the approaches of the different regions.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* p. 43.

the couple elopes because of fear of disapproval of the bride's family, is widely practised among both the pastoralists and agropastoralists. With respect to the practice of polygamy, there seems to have been some fusion between *Shari'a* principles and the customary law. Somali men took advantage of the Islamic rule of polygamy, which, in exceptional cases, allowed a man to marry up to four wives at a time. There were no legal restrictions on a man's number of wives in customary law. Also, while the Quran stipulated the importance of maintaining *'adl* (justice or full equality) between all wives, there was no such requirements under the male-biased customary laws.

In addition, despite the Islamic law which stipulated that daughters were entitled to receive a certain portion of inheritance (depending on the circumstance), women did not inherit land or any other property under the customary laws among either the pastoralists and agropastoralists. However, in the agricultural settings women could engage in some independent economic activity by using the borrowing strategy. They frequently borrowed a portion of a friend's or a relative's farm for a specified period. The husband was not consulted in these affairs and women assumed full control of the production from these borrowed plots. Women borrowed regularly to "get something of their own." They also used the income to meet personal needs.¹⁸³ Nonetheless women did not have rights of ownership in either context.

Despite the economic and social restrictions imposed on women, their contribution to the household economy, which was the unit of production, was critical to the local economy.

Their work, which included making the family's food, tending animals, making tools and other articles used by the family, and constructing the portable homes (*aqal*) and other residences was "acknowledged to be crucial to the well-being and survival of society."¹⁸⁴ Women's contribution to the social and economic domain, particularly the household, was indeed recognized and was continuously mentioned in the Somali oral culture. According to the Somali traditional literature there are three sources of knowledge: *cilmi wadaad* (religious knowledge), *cilmi habreed* (old women's knowledge) and *cilmi abwaan* (the knowledge of the sage, elder, or wise man). The knowledge women have about many community affairs is expressed in the proverb *cilmi habreed ninkii diida carruur la'aan baa leh* (he who refuses women's knowledge will lose his children).¹⁸⁵ Therefore, women's labour, both in nomadic and agricultural settings, provided for the foundation of the household and community economy.

Notwithstanding the patriarchal nature of Somali society, women were neither passive nor helpless. They had a long tradition of negotiating their place, and of exercising influence, if not self-determination. This was facilitated by a culture expecting women to be resourceful and display initiative. Creativity, courage, intelligence, and wit were all desired qualities of the rural woman and girls. One of the positive characteristics a woman must have is a sharp mind.¹⁸⁶ Women used these qualities and skills to their own

¹⁸³ Catherine Besteman. "Local Land Use Strategies and Outsider Politics: Title Registration in Middle Jubba Valley." Catherine Besteman and Lee V. Cassanelli (eds.) *The Struggle for Land in Southern Somalia: The War Behind the War*. London: HAAN Publishing, 1996, p. 39.

¹⁸⁴ Kapteijns. "Gender Relations...", p. 244.

¹⁸⁵ Mussa Galal. "Some Observations on Somali Culture." *Perspectives on Somalia*. Mogadishu: Somali Institute of Public Administration, 1968, p. 51.

¹⁸⁶ Amina Adan. "Women and Words." *Ufahamu*, Spring 1981, vol. 10, no. 3, p. 132.

advantage and to mediate the difficult social and economic situations in which society placed them.

Expressions of agency

Every mortal circumstance seems against her and yet the dominant and extraordinary personalities of the Somali women have been remarked by travelers since Egyptian time.¹⁸⁷

In Somalia's traditional socio-political context, men wielded more power than women did and women did not formally take part in the public and political affairs. However, there are no indications that all women were strictly confined to a "domestic" sphere. Although they were generally expected to live by circumscribing social prescriptions, many women had the confidence and intelligence to carve out ways of satisfying their personal needs within these formal social restrictions. Women resisted some of the patriarchal restrictions imposed on them through private processes of negotiations within individual households. There was a long tradition of women's poetry, work songs and lullabies sung to children that point to multiple expressions of agency and of women raising their concerns within the family and society at large. Women were aware of injustices within marriage and a bride is reminded, through the following excerpts of a song, that she should always be on guard.

*Hadaqan ay hoy Daadow,
Naa hooy ninku, aabahaa ma ahee
Berito ku eryi*

The man you are going to be wedded to

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in Ibid.

Is not of any relation to you
So you should be alert and take care of yourself and be ever on guard.¹⁸⁸

The following lullaby is sung to children but the mother is conveying an important message to her daughter, whom she (the mother) sees as a fellow female, about the “wrongs which men spread against them”.¹⁸⁹

Gudoy wayno gefeene
Ardaa aan gabadhi joogin
Gudooy geel laguma maalo
Gamaan faras laguma raaco

Oh my daughter men have wronged us
For in a dwelling where women are not present
No camels are milked
Nor are saddled horses mounted.¹⁹⁰

The woman who composed the following song is promising her daughter that she will not let her be married to a man who does not treat her well. This woman understood that marriages are arranged by male members of the family, but she is assuring her daughter that she would not be silent and will protest if the interest of her daughter is not given proper weight. As Adan points out, “a mother has a say and a great one at that, and this is what the song is conveying. The bottom line here is that she herself, being a woman, knows how an intimidating husband could a disastrous match.”¹⁹¹

Haddii gedahaagugaadho
Haddii guur kum maloobo
Haddi guulle alle yeelo
Mid baas oo xero bilaal ah
Mid baas of bowdo jebiya
Ku siin maayo ku seexo.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 140.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 117.

¹⁹⁰ Quoted in Ibid. 116-117.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 124-125.

When you reach marriageable age
 And if God keeps his approval
 A wicked mean man
 A wife-beater and intimidator
 To such a man (I promise) your hand won't go.¹⁹²

Moreover, women were very mobile¹⁹³ and conducted social and economic affairs¹⁹⁴ across the land and because of the open public spaces, women and men interacted on various levels and private grievances were often made public. These women's grievances, although presented by male relatives, were taken seriously in the council of elders.

Flirting or courting, for instance, done in very sophisticated and subtle ways and through poetry and other oral literature mechanisms, was permitted and common practice. Men and women met at watering holes and participated in *sacab*, courtship dances. For young people “courtship dances were serious business, as they were one of the few approved outlets for being in physical contact with members of the opposite sex and expressing sexual desire.”¹⁹⁵

While male relatives (fathers and brothers) retained the power and the right to refuse permission for women to marry the person of their choice, women often had the choice of marrying secretly through elopement if parents and brothers did not approve their choice

¹⁹² Quoted in *ibid.* 124.

¹⁹³ Women did not wear the veil. The traditional dress code for women varies according to age and the part of the country in which they live. Prior to marriage they did have a certain hair do (usually braided and at shoulder's length). Hair and dresses were worn certain ways to signal to men their [women's] availability for marriage.

¹⁹⁴ Women participated in trading activities between local areas and traveled to visit family members in different villages.

¹⁹⁵ Kapteijns with Ali. *Women's Voices in a Man's World...* p. 26.

of partner.¹⁹⁶ Somali folktales feature strong smart heroines who outwit men in authority to get what they want, as the following folk story about a young woman who wanted to marry a man from the enemy “camp” illustrates clearly.

One night the young man came to look for the woman so they can elope. When he came to her encampment, the young woman was sitting and conversing with her two brothers. Knowing that if they see him, he will be killed, the young man crawled on his belly up to the girl from behind, touching her back gently. So as not to signal her brother to the situation, the woman calmly continued her conversation with the brothers. She asked her brothers, “should the man you refused me the permission to marry come to you tonight what would each of you do?” Puzzled and scared that he was being given away for the kill the young man remained still. “I'd kill him at once, the impudent rogue,” said one of the brothers. “I'd peel off his skin alive, so that he'd suffer the longer,” said the other brother. “And I'd have asked him three questions: Is it fate that brought you here, mad man? Should he say “yes”, then I'd tell him: come in front of my brothers. Has love brought you here? Should he say “yes”, then I'd tell him: go and wait for me beneath the big Lebi tree. Has hunger brought you here? Should he say “yes”, I'd tell him: take the milk-container in our hut and drink the milk in it said the girl talking to her lover indirectly.

The brothers did not suspect their sister's elaborate scheme to communicate with her lover in front of her brothers. This story points to the fact that women were subjugated by the social structures that relegated them to the inferior. However, they were not victims and that they did strategize, often individually and without the knowledge of their relatives, to contest factors that circumscribed their lives. The woman in the story made it abundantly clear what she wanted. She was going to marry the man of her choice irrespective of her family's wishes.¹⁹⁷

This folk story illustrates the clever designs women devised to make their situations liveable. While a whole set of laws (both customary and Islamic) codified gender relations and circumscribed women's lives, women made important contribution in terms of labour (both productive and reproductive) and to the survival of the community. The fact that women's participation was appreciated is indicated by the encouragement of

¹⁹⁶ Although sometimes conditionally accepted, elopement often had serious social sanctions and repercussions. One of these was support provided to women in case of mistreatment became limited if they married someone of whom their family did not approve.

¹⁹⁷ Ahmed Artan Hanghe. *Sheekoxariirooyin Somaaliyeed (Folktales from Somalia)* Stockholm: Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC), 1988, p. 155.

creativity and resourcefulness as appropriate behaviours. As a result, women were able to gain a degree of control over their lives.

Urbanisation & Colonialism

Although urbanisation in Somalia can be traced to the city-states¹⁹⁸ of the early 13th century, its effect on the Somali social, economic and political structure was limited and only affected people who lived in the cities. There were generally two social classes in the towns: the wealthy merchants and the poorer townspeople. The poor people were engaged in seasonal wage labour and often performed manual labour. The economic and social roles of town women were different from those of their rural counterparts. In addition, women in towns, like the men, were divided along class lines. As Kapteijns argues, in contrast to pastoral women, the labour performed by the middle-class urban women was not considered “crucial to the central economic pursuits of the city-state, that of buying and selling”.¹⁹⁹ Accordingly, women’s labour was relegated to the domestic sphere. Since they did not get monetary compensation for their labour, middle-class women became dependent on their husbands and fathers. In addition, as individuals became more self-sufficient and did not need the extended family’s assistance, marriages were now negotiated outside the framework of the extended family. Consequently, “a wife’s role as a bearer of reciprocal rights and duties between two groups became less

¹⁹⁸ The city-states’ economy was based on trade. These towns on the coasts of Somalia such as Mogadishu, Berbera, and Zaila had trade relations with the commercial posts that took Somali merchants to neighbouring Arabia, Persia and sometimes as far as China.

¹⁹⁹ Lidwien Kapteijns. “Women and the Crisis of Communal Identity: The Cultural Construction of Gender in Somali History.” Ahmed I. Samatar. *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?* Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 1994, p. 219.

significant than in rural society” and the processes of “housewifization” were underway.²⁰⁰

The situation was different for lower class women who, because of economic circumstances, had to earn their own living. These women were engaged in petty commodity production such as baking bread (*anjeelo*), weaving baskets and mats and selling them in the market. Thus they did not become dependent on their husbands and fathers. However, it is not clear whether they enjoyed the same social approval as their middle class sisters or if they were marginalized within the community.²⁰¹ Despite these early developments of the urbanisation process, the pastoral economy and social relations generally remained unaltered.

These early processes of social and economic change were accelerated in the 20th century as a consequence of colonialism. Somalia became slowly integrated into the world economy as part of the British, Italian and French colonial systems. The process of being incorporated into the world market, Kandiyoti posits, “frequently led to the destruction of local communities, the aggravation of social inequalities and a weakening of kin solidarities.”²⁰² By 1940s, pastoralism and its social organisation through kinship ceased to dominate Somali society and economy, as the region became linked to the outside world. This gradually transformed and undermined traditional social relations: within the new economy, an individual's labour was remunerated by wage.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid. p. 220.

The new changes such as commercialization of the subsistence economy, which was the material backbone of the traditional way of life, also resulted in anti-traditional, bureaucratic social order and market-oriented economic relations.²⁰³ The monetization of the rural pastoral economy continued to affect the nomadic culture and the ideology of kinship. These changes were often incompatible with the customary laws used by the pastoralist to govern social and economic structure. Samatar's explanation of this process deserves a lengthy quotation:

The communitarian social order based on the production of the livestock, and governed by the tenets of *Xeer*, as well as by the requirements of the household in a marginal environment, was no more. It was superseded by an economy in which competition for access to commodities, the consumption of objects beyond one's productive capabilities, and accumulation of wealth in the urban centers were paramount. The ethos and the reproductive requirements of this commercial order began to erode the effectiveness of the rules of kinship."²⁰⁴

Not only did change take place in the rural Somalia but cities were also affected by these changes. A new stratum "in the shape of pastoral producers, merchants and petty bourgeoisie" emerged in the cities.²⁰⁵ The relationship between the urban and rural groups was maintained through kinship ties that remained strong, however.²⁰⁶

Hence the kinship ideology of belonging to a group for the accumulation and maintenance of wealth became less relevant in the urban setting.²⁰⁷ The introduction of wage labour made the calling on the reciprocal rights and duties vested in kinship unnecessary, hence families no longer needed to form alliances through marriage ties.

²⁰² Kandiyoti. *Women, Islam and the State*. p. 13.

²⁰³ Samatar. "Destruction of State..."

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p. 632.

²⁰⁵ Kapteijns. "Gender Relations..." p. 247.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Consequently, urbanisation and colonialism led to a process of individualisation where individuals did not closely consult with the extended family with regards to personal issues such as marriage. Exogamous²⁰⁸ marriage began to be gradually replaced by endogamous marriage during this period.

The colonial administration envisioned the place for women in this new, small, Somali middle class as "exclusively that of wives, mothers, and daughters, economically and legally the wards of their immediate male kin."²⁰⁹ As the regional economy was incorporated into a cash economy, women were increasingly excluded from the area of production in which they had previously been involved, and relegated to the domestic sphere. The traditional division of labour, where women were indispensable to the household economy and contributed an essential part to the productive process, was disrupted and women were reduced to inferior status. As Gordon points out, "although both men and women were exploited within the colonial economy, men gained some access to important resources such as money, skills, land, education less available to women."²¹⁰

In addition, traditional gender ideologies that denied women any political voice were reinforced and enshrined in law under the colonial rule. All-male "native authorities" were created in many areas "to allow some local government, based on frequently

²⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 255.

²⁰⁸ According to Kapteijns, "the explicit aim of exogamy was to increase the likelihood of peaceful conflict resolution and resource sharing by extending the idiom of kinship to some members of the other group (and through them to the group as a whole)." Ibid. p. 247.

²⁰⁹ Lidwien Kapteijns. "Women and the Crisis of Communal Identity..." p. 224.

²¹⁰ April A. Gordon. "Women in Development." April A. Gordon & Donald L. Gordon (eds.) *Understanding Contemporary Africa*, p. 254.

arguably 'traditional' or 'customary' laws."²¹¹ Tradition was usually "interpreted in ways that favoured men's control over women, allowing men to gain at women's expense."²¹² Because the colonial administrators needed a recognised authority they could work with, they made use of the kinship *diya*²¹³-paying groups. "Local authorities (*akils*) were appointed by the British government as the heads of the larger *diya*-paying groups, and smaller *diya*-paying groups had un-salaried but government recognised headmen."²¹⁴ Only the few men who were chosen by the British authorities had political power to preside over the *shir*.²¹⁵ Thus "every 'traditional' pastoral leader the state recognised or supported became *ipso facto* a 'new' man, whose power and authority (or lack of such) derived from that support."²¹⁶ Needless to say these men became very influential among the group. This created a hierarchy that had not existed in the pre-colonial Somali *xeer*. In consequence, the balance of power between groups also shifted. This transformation was incompatible with pastoral *xeer* that had been in use for centuries. The change in pastoral politics had implications for the household economy.

Although urbanisation and colonialism had similar effects in terms of disrupting the traditional subsistence economy, where women had an important economic as well as social role, they differed in terms of magnitude. While colonialism affected a much larger area in Somalia, the effect of urbanisation was very limited to few cities like Mogadishu

²¹¹ See Martin Chanock. "Making Customary Law: Men, Women, and Courts in Colonial Northern Rhodesia." Margaret Jean Hay and Marcia Wright (eds.) *African Women and the Law: Historical Perspectives*. Boston: University Papers on Africa 7, 1982. pp. 53-67.

²¹² Gordon. "Women in Development." p. 254.

²¹³ *Diya* (*mag* in Somali), which is originally from the Arabic *diiya*, is blood wealth the kinship group collectively pays to compensate for a murder crime committed by a member of their group against another.

²¹⁴ Ioan M. Lewis. *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somalia*. Lawrenceville, 1994, p. 21.

²¹⁵ *Shir* is a Somali term for an assembly or council meetings where issues of importance to the group are discussed.

and Zeila. The process of colonialism involved dramatic change in the economy and society which in turn affected women's roles. Colonialism also codified some of the existing legal inequalities and indirectly increased men's rights over women without any of the recourse to traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution and mediation.

Female solidarity networks

The changes engendered by urbanisation and colonialism coupled with the ensuing lack of family and kin support placed many women who migrated to the newly emerging cities and towns in a socially and economically vulnerable situation. Increased urbanisation thus undermined women's place in society. While upper-middle class women continued to be engaged in domestic and reproductive labour, lower class women increasingly joined the informal market. These women did not often have any other means of support. Women, however, were not passive in the face of the social and economic changes during the late 19th century and early 20th century. They created alternative communities based on mutual interests rather than kinship to substitute for absent family networks. These communities based on *macruuf* (neighbourhood and personal relations), termed in other places as an "informal structure of instrumental relationships"²¹⁷ have been increasingly observed in newly created urban environments in other Muslim and African countries like Morocco and Kenya.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Kapteijns. "Gender Relations..." p. 255.

²¹⁷ Venessa Maher. "Kin, Clients, and Accomplices: Relationships among Women in Morocco." Diana Leonard Barker & Sheila Allen (eds.) *Sexual Divisions and Society: Process and Change*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1976, pp. 52-75.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

Some of the women's networks that developed during the late 19th and early 20th century were *abbaay siti* (literally means lady sister), *hagbad or shaloongo* (rotating credit), and the *zaar* cult (or spirit possessions). *Abbaay siti* is a form of women's congregation in which women of all ages and classes come together to discuss issues of importance to them and to sing religious songs. Interestingly, when they were invoking the help of religious figures, they bypassed male religious and mystical powers. Instead they created access to and appealed to the most distinguished women of early Islamic history from Eve to Fatima, daughter of the Prophet, thus feminising religion.²¹⁹ The *abbaay siti* gatherings, however, had also social functions. As observed by Kapteijns, *abbaay siti* gatherings "are cultural and social activity in which Somali women come together to support each other as women, deal with women's issues" and help each other. By coming together these women emphasised their identity as women as separate from men and with different needs. They also "claim social space not normally allotted to them."²²⁰ While they provided essential support to each other in the new urban environment, these women did not directly challenge patriarchy; their activities were exercised in women's separate domain. However, through their songs, they challenged some of the gender-based aspects of their lives as urban women. In the following song, heard at one of those gatherings, women ask that the "mothers of the believers"²²¹ take care of them in this life and the hereafter in paradise:

Shining Eve and her companions
Amina and Asiya and the whole community of sittaat
And you, Maryam, daughter of Imran, mother of Isa

²¹⁹ Kapteijns with Ali. *Women's Voices in a Man's World...*; See also Amina H. Adan. "Women and Words." pp. 70-71.

²²⁰ Ibid. p. 71.

²²¹ Ibid. p. 70.

And Fatima and her highly favoured mother
 And the wives of the Prophet, mother of the believer
 Who are the Prophet's family, praised by God
 Well brought up girls and their companions
 May God make us whole [by allowing us to follow]
 The road along which you passed
 Teach us how to walk, look upon us as your children
 Merciful God, don't keep Fatima away from us
 May she take us by the right hand
 On the Day On Which One Is Sorrowful
 Make us their companions, Compassionate God
 May we all live in one home with their mothers and daughters
 May we all eat together with the *sittaat* and [the Prophet's] family
 May we come to live in paradise.²²²

*Zaar*²²³ or spirit possession is other women-centred avenues for expression of particular needs and concerns. In the *zaar* ceremonies women become the centre of attention and their grievances (usually against a husband or male relative) are dealt with by *zaar* functionaries. During these possessions, women are allowed to express themselves in ways that are generally restricted in "normal" behaviour. *Zaar* activities, therefore, as observed by Hale in her work on Sudanese women, give "women a rare chance for uninhibited entertainment and drama."²²⁴ Unmarried women can publicly announce their interest in certain male and even express sexual desire for him. The following is a song at a Somali *zaar* event:

[The young woman]: My skin is crawling - Is it them?
 And I am choking - Is it them?
 My flesh is creeping - Is it them?
 The spotted one - Is it them?
 An angry *saar* spirit - Is it them?

²²² Ibid. p. 72.

²²³ The origins of the *zaar* spirit possessions are unclear. It is agreed that the practice predates Islamic practices. There are some speculations that trace its origins to Ethiopia where similar patterns of possession exist. (See I.M. Lewis. *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism*. England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1971; Mohamed Mohamed Abdi. *Histoire des croyance en Somalie*. Paris: Annales Littéraires de l'University de Besancon, 465, 1992.

²²⁴ Sondra Hale. "Sudanese Women and Revolutionary Parties: The Wing of the Patriarch." *Middle East Report*, January-February 1986, p.

Who can drive it out? - Is it them?
 I am calling Xareer [name] - Is it them?
 I am calling Xasan - Is it them?
 With the strong arms - Is it them?
 [The young men]: I will drive it out, sister
 It is what cut the strength of your arms, sister
 The one who made you furious.²²⁵

Just like the *abbaay siti*, the *zaar* has social functions and provides isolated women with an opportunity to participate in women's activities. *Zaar* gatherings and performances offer "both the promise of cure and ongoing membership of a common interest, multi-ethnic group, and widely ramifying network of *zaar* based contacts."²²⁶ This gathering of women is also "a spontaneous occasion for consciousness-raising, self-help, and emotional, collective solidarity."²²⁷ Its extra-organisational function "is to help women deal with their repressed state and oppressed status within the domestic sphere."²²⁸ For many women, the *zaar* was a forum where they could express their anger at a particular situation (often a husband marrying a second wife), by forcing men, albeit temporarily, to submit to their demands. These women used possession to manipulate the society around them. For many women, *zaar* "remains an available and viable means of coping with life within the existing social parameters of a highly 'traditional'/conservative society".²²⁹ There is also increasing evidence that women used networks created through *zaar* activities to form friendships, to provide support to each other and to promote economic

²²⁵ Kapteijns with Ali. *Women's Voices in a Man's World...* p. 30.

²²⁶ Pamela Constantinides. "Women's Spirit Possessions and Urban Adaptation." Patricia Caplan and Janet Bujra (eds.) *Women United, Women Divided: Cross Cultural Perspectives on Female Solidarity*. London: Tavistock, 1978, p. 195.

²²⁷ Sondra Hale. "Transforming Culture or Fostering Second-Hand Consciousness? Women's Front Organizations and Revolutionary Parties – The Sudan Case." Judith Tucker (ed.) *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 164.

²²⁸ Sondra Hale. "Sudanese Women and Revolutionary Parties..." p. 29.

²²⁹ I.M. Lewis. "Zaar in Context: The Past, The Present and Future of An Healing Cult." I. M. Lewis, Ahmed Al-Safi and Sayyid Hurreiz (eds.) *Women's Medicine: The Zar-Bori Cult in Africa and Beyond*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991.

transactions. Once established, "the network tends to extend well beyond the actual activities of the cult itself. The reciprocity principle is quite strongly institutionalised."²³⁰

Hagbad or *shaloongo* (rotating credit) is a saving strategy that gives women the opportunity to have an income of their own and to take care of their personal needs. A group of women who trust each other agree to put small amounts of money from their household budget in a common pot and give the accumulated amount to one participant at the end of a specified period on a rotating basis. The length of the rotating cycle depends on the number of participants. The greater the number of the participants the more money received and the lengthier the rotation cycle. The *hagbad* gave women an opportunity to increase their economic independence and buy things they could not otherwise afford. The default rate was very low and its organization was quite effective. As in other countries where similar strategies are used, the credit for their low level of default "goes solely to social pressure and the threat of economic isolation."²³¹ The *shaloongo/hagbad* not only helped ensure economic survival and solidarity but it also fostered leadership and strategy training.²³²

The *abbaay siti*, *zaar* and the *hagbad* constituted effective responses to the problems faced by ordinary Somali women in the absence of the traditional support networks they enjoyed in the countryside. These networks opened up collective social spaces where women's demands were articulated. Although they rarely challenged patriarchy, they

²³⁰ Constantinides. "Women's Spirit Possessions..." p. 198.

²³¹ Loren B. Landau. "What Role Can History Play for the Newly Urbanized Women of Kenya and Tanzania?" *Ufahamu*, August, 1996, p. 49.

²³² *Ibid.*

helped women to continuously contest (often in private), and survive in spite of the material conditions that circumscribed their lives. The *abbaay siti*, *zaar* and *hagbad* reveal some of the methods women employed to protest in their “private domains in response to collectively felt pains.”²³³

In addition to participating in collective women's groups and networks, many women tried to improve their individual situations. Those from the upper classes manipulated their reproductive functions by having more children to improve their social status, while others gained respectability through subscribing to the dominant male ideologies and manipulating symbols of the “obedient woman”.²³⁴ The following story points to the fact that while women had limited options and marriage was the only means to economic security for many of them, they strategized and manipulated situations to get maximum personal results.

A woman was confronted with her husband taking a second wife through *dumaal* (his brother died and under the customary law he had to marry the wife of his deceased brother to care for the children). After a long analysis of her situation, the woman decided to not raise a "fuss" over her husband's indiscretion. The reasoning behind her decision was if she raised a fuss no one would sympathise with her and she would gain the scorn of the society and her husband. If, on the other hand, she asked for a divorce she would lose the security marriage provided.

She decided, despite her feelings and immediate reaction, to manipulate the situation and to pretend to be fine with the arrangement. By doing this, she calculated, she would gain respect and financial remuneration for sharing her husband. In fact she was greatly rewarded by her husband. In addition, she gained major respect from him, who was observed proudly telling his neighbours and friends about the decency and *gobnimo* (nobility) of his first wife. She went so far as befriending the other wife. She told her friends and neighbours that now that her husband had taken another woman she had indeed more freedom to do what she pleased with her time. Rather than look after her

²³³ Saskia Wieringa (ed.) *Subversive Women: Historical Experiences of Gender and Resistance*. London & New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd. 1995, p. 5.

²³⁴ Christine Obbo. *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence*. London: Zed Press, 1980.

husband all the time (her children had grown and she was mostly home bound because of her husband's demands on her time and energy), she could now devote her spare time visiting friends, family members and socialising.²³⁵

The woman in the above mentioned story, like countless others in Somalia, did not passively accept the strong patriarchal domination of women in her culture. She had rather devised a personal coping strategy that worked for her and made her particular situation more liveable. She made a bargain. As Kandiyoti, in her work on Middle Eastern women found, while there is a set of concrete constraints that regulate gender relations, women strategize within them. They contest, redefine and renegotiate this set of rules. These bargains, termed as *patriarchal bargains* by the author, “exert powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered ideology in different contexts.”²³⁶

Participation in nationalist struggles

Despite their limited access to formal education and lack of formal organization of their own during the early 20th century, Somali women participated in the 1940s and 1950s nationalist movement with great vigour and determination. Their resistance to colonialism, as expressed in oral literature,²³⁷ was not peripheral to the liberation of Somalia, but rather an important part of the overall struggle. Women nursed and visited

²³⁵ Ikram Jama and Sahra Ali (January 6, 2000).

²³⁶ Deniz Kandiyoti. "Islam and Patriarchy..." p. 27.

²³⁷ See Dahabo Farah, Amina H. Aden & Amina Mohamoud Warsame. "Somalia: Poetry as Resistance against Colonialism and Patriarchy." Saskia Wieringa (ed.) *Subversive Women: Historical Experiences of Gender and Resistance*. London & New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1995, pp. 165-182; Zainab Jama. "Fighting to be Heard: Somali Women' Poetry." *African Languages and Cultures*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 43-53. My interviews also confirmed this point.

the sick, organised fundraising activities²³⁸ for the cause, and organised public gatherings and rallies to encourage people to participate in the movement. Women also toured rural areas to mobilise people and to explain the importance of independence. Women from various social groups took part in the fight against colonialism because of their experiences with it. One interviewee stated, "I participated in the struggles because I wanted my children to be able to go to school in their free homeland. I did not want them to grow up in a dependent country, or go through the humiliating experiences of being subjugated by colonialism, like I was."²³⁹

In spite of their determination, women were generally pushed to the margins of the struggle. Their voices were not considered in the decision-making processes and they were systematically excluded from the political discussions of the Somali Youth League (SYL).²⁴⁰ Those women who were very involved in the movement were also scorned and seen as unconventional and unwomanly by the general public. Traditionally, women, regardless of their background, were largely excluded from the formal sphere of political activity. Women's place within the traditional culture was within the home as a wife, mother, daughter, and sister. Hence, women who actively participated in the liberation struggle often endured criticism from family and friends. "Some of the married women who joined the liberation movements were divorced as a result. Those who were unmarried at the time had to carry the stigma of being 'loose women', and some were

²³⁸ Many women sold their jewellery, baked bread, made quilted hats and other items for household decoration which they sold to support the cause of liberation. Hawo Jabril (Interview, Toronto, December 29, 1999).

²³⁹ Hawo Jabril (April 7, 2000).

even disowned by their parents."²⁴¹ The following poem points to the fate of women who behave in an “unwomanly fashion” within the society:

Young girls always talk a lot.
 I have got a grievance against you girls.
 If you don't lower your speech,
 Who will marry you, since we men are suspicious of you?
 The loud voices we used to hear, and those girls who play,
 Their outspokenness has caused restrictions.
 You have disgraced yourselves and the men are very angry,
 Why don't you be quiet so that you get self-respect?²⁴²

In addition to ostracism, women who participated in the nationalist movement, like their male counterparts, experienced humiliation such as detention, prison sentences, and physical and psychological torture at the hands of the colonial administrators. Several women had even given birth while imprisoned. Jama reports that women like Timiro Ukash who was one of a large number of SYL rounded up in Kismayo in 1952 because of their participation in an unauthorised demonstration to protest the return of Southern Somalia to Italian trusteeship. Timiro served a number of years in a high security prison in Kismayo where she gave birth. She composed the following poem on nationalism while she was serving her prison sentence.

Let them start war and lock us away,
 Let them burn us with fire and bullets men and women,
 The few who are left will attain independence.
 Dahabo daughter of Musa fellow prisoner don't you ever despair,
 Let them make us porters and treat us like dirt,
 Let them treat the wise men of the League like Hujuris [people who do menial jobs].
 Until the independence which we have struggled for is realised we will not be upset by what the Italians are doing,

²⁴⁰ Founded on May 15th, 1945, SYL was the main nationalist party in the country in the former Italian colony of the south of Somalia.

²⁴¹ Zainab Jama. "Fighting to be Heard: Somali Women' Poetry." *African Languages and Cultures*, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 49.

²⁴² Quoted in *ibid.* p 48.

May the Italians be destroyed and nothing left of them.
 May they explode by bombs and be torn to pieces.
 May they be sacrificed for the flag of the League.
 Say amen that God answers my prayers.²⁴³

Despite difficulties and scorn from society, women persisted and used poetry, among other mechanisms, to instil a sense of nationalism in people. In the following poem, one woman tries to raise the population's awareness of the issues – she particularly tries to raise the awareness of other women, on issues of nationalism and encourages them to be involved in the struggle for independence:

Men are dying of sleeplessness, as they don't come home any more.
 They are working all night so that we succeed.
 We decided to stand by their side.
 So, Somali girls tighten up your skirts.
 Don't let us divide and let the infidels buy us.
 Until we hit the target, we must not rest.²⁴⁴

Women's involvement in the struggle led them to question their position (i.e. their exclusion from decision-making) within the SYL. They also became increasingly conscious of their inferior status in society and at home. The activities in which women participated had significance in women's lives and contributed to making women politicised. For these women, nationalism was the primary mobilising factor that made them aware of their inferior position in society.

By late 1940s, women had noticed that only men occupied the leadership positions in the SYL movement and that they were relegated to the lower ranking positions, despite their

²⁴³ Ibid. p. 47-48.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 45.

high degree of involvement in the struggle for independence.²⁴⁵ Women like Hawo Jabril recognised gender discrimination within the independence movement and, consequently, began to demand women's political rights be recognised within the broader movement.²⁴⁶

In 1954, women spoke at the SYL's national meeting which was held in Mogadishu. Hawa, who was selected by the women to speak on their behalf said, "I told them that we were not happy about our marginal position within the struggle against colonialism despite our many and important contributions."²⁴⁷ At this meeting women challenged the male leadership of the SYL. These women explained to the SYL male leadership that they were an integral part of the struggle and demanded that the issue of women's absence from leadership positions be addressed immediately.²⁴⁸ Two women, Hawo Jabril and Ardo Dirir were later asked to sit on the SYL's Central Committee.

As Farah, Aden and Warsame found, "women saw in the struggle for independence not only a chance to achieve general improvement in Somalia's socio-economic situation, but more specifically, an opportunity to bring a dramatic change in their situation."²⁴⁹ Some of the gender-specific issues women were fighting for included equal citizenship rights

²⁴⁵ Hawo Jabril (December 29, 1999).

²⁴⁶ Ibid; See also Dahabo Farah, Amina H. Aden & Amina Mohamoud Warsame. "Somalia: Poetry as Resistance against Colonialism and Patriarchy." Saskia Wieringa (ed.) *Subversive Women: Historical Experiences of Gender and Resistance*. London & New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1995, pp. 165-182.

²⁴⁷ Hawo Jabril (December 29, 1999).

²⁴⁸ Ibid. Hawo was one of the leaders advocating for a stronger role for women at the senior levels of SYL. See also Farah, Amina H. Aden & Amina Mohamoud Warsame. "Somalia: Poetry as Resistance..."

²⁴⁹ Farah, Aden & Warsame. "Somalia: Poetry as Resistance..." , p. 172.

and breaking away from seclusion and from marginalization in the society. Poetry was again one of the tools they used. For instance, Hawo Jabril composed this poem:

We wanted to break away from our seclusion
 We wanted to have the responsibility
 To express our feelings and our views
 We wanted to show our concern for our country.²⁵⁰

Despite women's pressure, by the time independence was attained in 1960 there still were very few women in leadership positions in the SYL. The pattern of marginalization of women continued in the first two governments. Women were denied an opportunity to participate in the parliament when the first government was formed. Little, in terms of policies and legislation, was done to improve women's condition in the country. Women's role in public affairs was limited and their legal situation remained the same during this period.²⁵¹ As few women had graduated from universities abroad in the 1960s, there was a significant lack of women in public administration and politics.²⁵²

This gender discrimination in politics led many women to publicly denounce the government and express their grievances in poetry. Poetry in this sense carries subversive messages; it was the discourse of opposition to the system.²⁵³ The following by Hawo Jabril, who actively participated in the nationalist struggle, expresses how she felt let down, how the struggles for freedom were incomplete from a woman's perspective. The poem reflects her frustration and disillusionment, as well as her attempt at rousing other women against what she perceived as an injustice.

²⁵⁰ Quoted in Ibid.

²⁵¹ Said S. Samatar. *Somalia: a Country Study*. Washington D.C, 1992, p. 89.

²⁵² Ahmed Hashi (August 20, 1996).

Sisters you sold your jewellery
Depriving yourselves,
Enriching the struggle.

Sisters, you stayed as one,
United, even when your brothers
Divided and deceived our nation.
Sisters, you joined the fight -
Remember the beautiful one,
Hawo - stabbed through the heart.

But, sisters, we were forgotten!
We did not taste the fruits of success
Even the lowest positions
Were not offered
And our degrees were cast aside as dirt.
Sisters, was this what we struggled for?²⁵⁴

Dissatisfied by the government's unwillingness to address women's issues, a group of educated Somali women founded the first²⁵⁵ women's organization in Somalia in 1967.

We were politicised very early in life. I was inspired by Egyptian women's movement, which I followed very closely, when I was there to go to high school. We were also very much exposed to what was going on [the nationalist movement] in Somalia. We used to get news of how things were evolved. I was interviewed by newspaper reporters like *Al-ahram* about the political situation in Somalia so many times that I got the nickname "asuhufiya" (the journalist)... When I graduated from university and came back from Italy back in 1963, I was very unhappy about how women were marginalized and how they have not really benefited from the independence. It was like we did not have the right to fully enjoy independence as equals. My women colleagues, there were only few of us who graduated from university, who were also frustrated and I got together and found the *Somali women's movement* in 1967.²⁵⁶

These women formulated an indigenous feminist project. One of the major aims of the organization, called the *Somali Women's Movement*, was to fight for women's rights, including equality in decision-making within the home and balance in gender representation in the political arena. The organization advocated women's full

²⁵³ Abu Lughod. *Veiled Sentiments*... p. 251.

²⁵⁴ Quoted in Farah, Aden & Warsame. "Somalia: Poetry as Resistance..." p. 80

²⁵⁵ According to Raqiya Haji Dualeh, Former Deputy Minister of Health, Washington D.C. (April 4, 2001) and Fadumo Alim, Former Deputy Minister of Education (May 11, 2002) there was an earlier women's organization but it mostly had a social rather than political functions.

participation in all social, economic, and political aspects of the Somali society. It took a clear political stand with regard to women's issues. After operating for a few years, it had gained acceptance of its feminist agenda. For instance, it boycotted the election in 1969 because "all the candidates were men. We encouraged women not to vote for any of the men. Because of this, one party nominated a woman for its candidate. We became a voice to reckon with."²⁵⁷ Although this organization had a clear vision and was considered very radical at the time, it was short-lived.²⁵⁸ It closed its doors when the Barre regime banned the existence of all social and political organisations within the country in 1970.

The first two Somali governments by and large ignored women and gender issues.²⁵⁹ On the other hand, the government that came into power in 1969 initially indicated a commitment to gender equality. This commitment was partly due to the official espousal of Scientific Socialism as the nation's ideology. Since socialism was partly responsible for the placing of women's issues on the national agenda, the following chapter will examine socialism within the context of Somalia. In addition to general socialist strategies, the chapter will explore attempts to reconcile socialism with nationalism, Islam and the indigenous Somali culture as well as the impact of the social and political changes on Somali women's status within the society.

²⁵⁶ Fadumo Alim (May 11, 2001).

²⁵⁷ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

²⁵⁸ Fadumo Alim (May 11, 2002).

²⁵⁹ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

CHAPTER IV

Somali socialism and the "woman question" (1960-1980)

The need for change was great. Although, they did not know the nature of the regime, the public welcomed it spontaneously.²⁶⁰

There was a lot of disappointment with the regime. People have fought hard for independence. They were expecting a paradise. Many have lost their lives. Women have made many contributions to the nationalist struggles but they never saw the fruits of their labour. The new Charter was very convincing. It was a tool that promised to address pressing social and economic issues. It promised economic restructuring and a society based on equality.²⁶¹

Somalia [after independence] remained under the domination of international capitalism – its economy was controlled, fully dependent and therefore its politics, social and cultural life continued to suffer under neo-colonialism. This untenable situation called forth a reaction and this came in the form of a popularly supported coup staged by the Somali Armed Forces led by Jaalle Mohamed Siyaad Barre. The October 21st 1969 Revolution gained the support of Somali workers, peasants, nomads, progressive intellectuals and patriotic-minded traders and businessmen.²⁶²

Introduction

On October 15, 1969, the Somali President, Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, was assassinated. A few days later, on October 21, 1969, Commander Major General Mohamed Siyaad Barre led a military *coup d'etat*. Upon coming to power, the new regime promised to remedy the mistakes of the former government such as the worsening living standards for the majority, the abuse of national institutions, and dangerous external economic dependency.²⁶³ It promised to build a new kind of state. On its first anniversary, 21 October 1970, it proclaimed 'Scientific Socialism' (*Hantiwadaagga cilmiga ku dhisan*:

²⁶⁰ Ahmed Hashi (May 16, 2001).

²⁶¹ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

²⁶² Hussein M. Adan. "The Establishment of A Vanguard Party in Somalia." *Halgan*. No. 1, October 1976, p. 17.

²⁶³ Ahmed I. Samatar. *Socialist Somalia: Rhetoric and Reality*. London & New Jersey, 1988, p. 3.

literally, wealth sharing based on knowledge) to be the nation's official ideology.²⁶⁴ Self-reliance was to be the cornerstone of the new system. Barre announced,

In our revolution we believe that we have broken the chain of a consumer economy based on imports, and we are free to decide our destiny. And in order to realise the interests of the Somali people, their achievement of a better life, the full development of their potentialities and the fulfilment of their aspirations, we solemnly declare Somalis to be a Socialist country.²⁶⁵

With socialism providing the general framework, the new regime committed itself to achieving rapid progress, equality, and popular control of the means of production, self-reliance, and disengagement from world capitalism.²⁶⁶ The development strategy was greater self-reliance, collective ownership of the means of production, and creation of sufficient employment. Socialism was to provide the basis for “a society based on labour and on the principles of social justice”²⁶⁷ and change was to take the form of a principled revolution against a bourgeois model of government. This was welcomed by the general public who “were anxious for social, economic and political change.”²⁶⁸ As such, the new regime received a positive reaction from the Somali population.²⁶⁹ The state waged war against what Barre considered to be the country's enemies: poverty, disease, and ignorance. In its First Charter, the new military regime, the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) promised that it would “guarantee everyone the right to work, strengthen

²⁶⁴ Mohamed Siyaad Barre. *My Country and My People: Selected Speeches of Jaalle Siyaad*. Mogadishu, 1979.

²⁶⁵ “The Somali Revolution and the Development of National Culture.” *Halgan*, no. 10, August 1977, p. 27.

²⁶⁶ Jan M. Haakenson. *Scientific Socialism and Self-Reliance: The Case of Somalia's "Instant" Fisherman*. Norway, 1984, p. 76.

²⁶⁷ Basil Davidson. “Somalia: Towards Socialism.” *Race & Class*, vol.17, 1975, p. 28.

²⁶⁸ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.* Ahmed Hashi. (May 16, 2001); Hawa Jabril (December 29, 1999).

principles of social justice, and stimulate economic growth."²⁷⁰ It also promised to eliminate tribalism and devise a system to write down the Somali language. One other principle of the Charter promised the equality of *all* citizens. Equality was a theme that was recurrent in Barre's socialism. In its initial stage, the government pursued social policies intended to address inequalities based on gender and class.

However, how much impact did these social policies have on women? Did the socialist state change women's position in Somalia significantly? There were a number of policies and legal reforms from which women gained considerably such as the egalitarian ideology, and the introduction of specific laws intended to remove the material and ideological bases for the reproduction of inequality, and access to education and employment. Women's access to education, paid employment, social benefits and political participation increased during this period. Nevertheless, as Molyneux found in other countries, women's emancipation was a means to the larger goal of economic development, and full equality was never secured.²⁷¹ Many of the measures intended to improve the status of women officially constituted a priority in the government agenda during the period of 1969-1980.²⁷² After 1980, however, in the wake of an economic and political crisis in Somalia, many of the programs intended to promote gender equality were either completely abandoned or fell into the background. Consequently, women suffered disproportionately from the social, economic and political crisis in the 1980s and the relationship between the state and women deteriorated. Thus, ten years after the

²⁷⁰ Ahmed I. Samatar. "The Curse of Allah: Civic Disembowelment and the Collapse of the State in Somalia." Ahmed I. Samatar. *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?* Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994, p. 116.

²⁷¹ Maxine Molyneux. "Family Reform in Socialist States: the Hidden Agenda." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 21, 1985, p. 57.

revolution, egalitarian models were coexisting with strong remnants of the traditional sexist ideology and with a generally conservative view of the role of women.

This chapter examines some of the major legal and social changes affecting women which were introduced in Somalia during 1969-1980 period. The introduction of socialism has been partly responsible for these changes. The socialist government, however, had to contend with issues that impinged on its policies regarding women: the position of Muslim clerics, the demands of nationalism, and the dynamism of indigenous culture. In the end, full sexual equality was not attained, because it was not the primary aim of the reforms, a situation not unique to Somalia.²⁷³ First, an analysis of the articulation of the socialist ideology in Somalia and how issues of Islam, nationalism, indigenous culture and socialism were reconciled within the context of Somalia is necessary.

Socialism: Somali style?

Barre and his group were soldiers. They liked regimentation. They would like the whole country marching. They preferred discipline. The trend was transferring the military code of regimentation to the society and I suspect that is what attracted them to socialism. Barre went for scientific socialism. Also, they knew [Barre and his group] that they had to bring a new social order and they knew the public could not relate to capitalism because of colonial history and legacy. Finally the military was not involved in the politics of the country while the police was. They [military] were a national institution above the fray. The truth of the matter is that the push to more scientific socialism rather than African or Arab socialism came from the intellectuals from the left. Socialism was an ideology tool to mobilise Somali masses to enhance development in the country. People easily responded to the populist component of socialism and the call to development.²⁷⁴

²⁷² Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ahmed Hashi (Ottawa, May 16, 2001).

Ours is the religion of common man. It stands for equality and justice. Consequently, socialism as applied to our particular condition cannot identify religion as the obstacle to the progress of the working class and therefore cannot negate it.²⁷⁵

The meaning of socialism was never clearly articulated and it is difficult to construct it through Barre's official statements. The official ideology comprised three components: development based on the principle of self-reliance, a form of socialism based on Marxist principles, and Islam. A combination of three often competing and sometimes conflicting ideologies - Islam, indigenous culture and Marxism provided the guiding principles to social progress in Somalia. Thus, Somalia's socialism, like many other Third World socialisms, was highly eclectic. This eclecticism, according to Nkrumah, one of the major proponents of African nationalism, "enables African society to digest the three ideologies in such a way as to reconcile them with the African personality."²⁷⁶ Somali socialism was based on these varied sources. Somalia, however, distanced itself from African and Arab socialism and claimed scientific socialism to be the ideology of the state. Barre stressed this notion, claiming that,

[o]ur socialism is scientific socialism founded by the great Marx and Engels... our socialism cannot be called Somali socialism, African socialism or Islamic socialism. It is the original scientific socialism and emanates from the true principles of the noble products of thought of mankind and the sum-total of the experiences of man. Our socialism is independent and governed by its own specific conditions to produce a society based on equality, social justice and unity, in coherence with the general laws of scientific socialism.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Mohamed Siyaad Barre. *My Country, My People: Selected Speeches of Jaalle Siyaad*. Mogadishu: Ministry of Information and National Guidance, 1979, p. 94.

²⁷⁶ Kwame Nkrumah. *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with Particular Reference to Africa*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1964.

²⁷⁷ Quoted in Jan M. Haakenson. *Scientific Socialism and Self-Reliance: The Case of Somalia's "Instant" Fishermen*. Norway, p. 72.

Russian influence was strong and Barre borrowed some elements from the Soviet model in terms of general implementation. Barre did not have any formal training in the teachings of Marxism-Leninism. However, he was quite open to ideas from the young intellectuals who either studied in socialist countries such as the Soviet Union, China and Cuba or came under the influence of communist parties in Europe. The writings of Mao Tse-tung, who was referred to as “a great socialist leader” by Barre, have frequently been quoted. Korea was another influence and Kim Il-Sung served as a source of inspiration for Barre.²⁷⁸

Barre was conscious of the gap between Islam and socialism and reminded Somalis that by accepting scientific socialism he was not infringing on the Somali culture and values. The nationalism element of Barre's socialism was so strong that it was often argued that he crafted his own brand of socialism. Lewis called the process “Somalisation”.²⁷⁹ There were many references to “Cultural Revolution” intended to revive Somali culture and to weave the Somalis in the country and outside into one national and cultural unity. The development strategies implemented within the framework of socialism had strong national undertones. For instance, the writing of the Somali language and the literacy campaigns were to end the legacy of the country’s colonial past. Similarly, the rural development campaigns had the objective of teaching the urban youth how their comrades in the rural area lived and to strengthen collaboration between urban and rural areas. The campaigns, according to the government literature, “created a sense of awareness and unity of the people, the government in the cities and the towns as well as a

²⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 74.

sense of co-operation.²⁸⁰ In an article in *Halgan*, a monthly scholarly journal in English that took the government line and used socialist language and concepts, there was a discussion about decolonizing the Somali language and culture. Quoting Walter Rodney, an esteemed Afro-Caribbean scholar, nationalist and author of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*²⁸¹, the article said,

In our situation, colonialism, in pursuing its cultural objectives looked with strong suspicion at the development of the Somali Language, for they sensed that written Somali would greatly contribute to the consolidation of national consciousness.²⁸²

To make it more attractive and culturally acceptable to the Somalis, socialism was explained within the cultural framework of sharing and communalism.²⁸³ Socialism was officially translated in Somali as *hantiwadaag*, which literally means wealth sharing. There is a powerful implication in this translation that socialism is grounded in the Somali tradition of hospitality, sharing and mutual aid. Concepts such as *wadajir* (unity), *isku kalsoonaan* (self-reliance), and *iskaa wax u qabso* (self-help) were deeply rooted Somali tradition.²⁸⁴ New socialist terms entered into the Somali political discourse. For instance, the universal term *ina adeer* (cousin) was replaced by the word *jaalle* (comrade).²⁸⁵ The regime often spread its socialist message through popular poetry and song. As pointed out by Laitin, “the choice of words for propagandising a new political

²⁷⁹ I. M. Lewis. "Kim Il-Sung in Somalia: The End of Tribalism" William A. Shack and Percy S. Cohen (eds.) *Politics in Leadership: A Comparative Perspective*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, pp. 13-44.

²⁸⁰ *Revolutionary Somalia in the Eyes of the World...* p. 72.

²⁸¹ Walter Rodney. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1972.

²⁸² "The Somali Revolution..." p. 28.

²⁸³ Ahmed Hashi (May 16, 2001)

²⁸⁴ I. M. Lewis. *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa*. Boulder: Westview, 1988, p. 209.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

line in the indigenous language is of considerable import.”²⁸⁶ Referring to Somali proverbs and use of cultural symbols and precepts, Barre was creating a national and a popular brand of socialism. As Hashi points out, “using self-reliance and egalitarianism as a basis for socialism created huge self confidence among the public and enabled the regime to achieve the impossible [in terms of social development]”.²⁸⁷ In addition, Barre was presenting himself as a leader who was of the people, who respected and was in touch with the popular culture and tradition.

Similarly, Barre was very careful to appease the Somali’s Muslim sensibilities. Although Barre himself was not a devout Muslim, he participated in and gave speeches at the mosque on Muslim holidays.²⁸⁸ Linking Islam with socialism was a question of tactical necessity for him; he did not want to alienate Somalis who are close to 100 percent Muslim. In addition, understanding that certain sectors of the society would oppose its socialist project, notably the religious section of the population, he made a tremendous effort to present socialism and Islam as compatible. He constantly underlined the fact that socialism was not in conflict with the principles of Islam. In fact, according to Barre, the principles of Islam and the practical measures of constructing a socialist society were in perfect harmony. He claimed, “there is no conflict between Islam and socialism, as they both enshrine the principles of human dignity, mutual respect, co-operation, progress, justice and well-being for all.”²⁸⁹ Hence, socialism and Islam *can be* reconciled with a

²⁸⁶ David D. Laitin. "Somalia's Military Government and Scientific Socialism." Carl G. Rosbery & Thomas M. Callaghy (eds.) *Socialism in Sub-Saharan Africa: A New Assessment*. Berkeley: University of California, Institute of International Studies, 1979, p. 202.

²⁸⁷ Ahmed Hashi (May 16, 2001)

²⁸⁸ As the head of the state every Somali president was expected to perform certain ceremonial religious duties such as participating in public religious ceremonies and giving speeches on religious holidays.

²⁸⁹ Cited in Laitin. "Somalia's Military Government..."

progressive Islamic theology. Barre claimed: "Our Islamic faith teaches us that its inherent values are perennial and continually evolving as people progress. These basic tenets of our religion cannot be interpreted in a static sense, but rather as a dynamic force, as a source of inspiration for continuous advancement."²⁹⁰

In an ongoing attempt to find solutions for the conflicts between culture and religion, Barre made use of verses from the Quran and traditional tales and proverbs. Like many other Third World Muslim leaders, he constantly appealed to the ideologies of Islam and to traditionalism to maintain his legitimacy.²⁹¹ "Ours is a socialist revolution which in its own particular and concrete way, is harmonised with the Islamic religion,"²⁹² he insisted, for example. Barre claimed that Islam not only gave Somalis its anti-individualistic ethic and a sense of discipline and personal integrity but it also contributed to their strong sense of outrage with regard to poverty, their sense of fairness and justice, and their collectivist orientation.²⁹³ Also, when explaining the concept of *self-reliance*, which was a key element of Somali socialism, he called on Somalis to concentrate their energies and efforts on what they could do with their own resources rather than relying on foreign aid. Using a very popular proverb, the President made the concept more attractive by linking *self-reliance* with *self-respect* and *dignity*. He said:

The Somali proverb that "one can quench thirst only with the use of one's own hands" substantiates the correctness of this proverb, which is a vindication of the principle of 'self-reliance'. What the proverb means in everyday language is that one's success is dependent on one's own efforts. The purpose of self-reliance is that it safeguards the

²⁹⁰ Barre. *My Country, My People...* p. 86.

²⁹¹ Haleh Afshar (ed.) *Women, State, and Ideology: Studies from Africa and Asia*, Albany, 1987, p. 4.

²⁹² Mohamed Siyaad Barre. *Philosophy of the Somali Revolution*. (A book review) *Halgan*, no. 1, October 1976, p. 51.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

interests of the nation. It brings to surface the intrinsic values of the people and forces them to use their own resources, energy and brains to bring about economic prosperity.²⁹⁴

By blending socialism and Somali social, cultural (including religious) and national realities, Barre was able to create his own brand of socialism and even provide a model of development for neighbouring countries.²⁹⁵ For instance, according to Hashi, the Marxist regime in Ethiopia²⁹⁶ borrowed many elements from the Somali model of socialism. The ideological infrastructure of the *Keble* in Ethiopia was similar to that of the orientation centres in Somalia for example. The emphasis on literacy and education, the domination of the military and the power structure of the high security organization of the party were other examples.²⁹⁷

On the one hand Barre was using socialism to receive economic and military aid from the Soviet Union. On the other hand, he knew that this was something that could be exploited by the opposition groups, such as religious leaders. This partially explains his emphasis on the compatibility of Islam and Socialism and on the indigenoussness of socialism in his public speeches.

Socialist experimentation: implications for women

The successful development projects like the expansion of education and school system, the agricultural programs, and the health project across the country were all made

²⁹⁴ Quoted in Haakenson. *Scientific Socialism...* p. 76.

²⁹⁵ Ahmed Hashi. (March 13, 1997).

²⁹⁶ Ethiopia's socialism is problematic as well. While scholars like Molyneux and Halliday hailed it as socialist, others have critiqued its militaristic style and its negative treatment of minority nationalities within its territories.

²⁹⁷ Ahmed Hashi (March 13, 1997).

possible because of socialism... In 1975, Somalia received an UNESCO award for countries with highest literacy rate. This created a national self-boost.²⁹⁸

Training and employment programs for street youth and the poor, recognition of women's contribution to the society, local centres that provided platforms where talents will be demonstrated and opinions expressed were all programs that enabled the previously marginalized, grassroots groups, and the civil society to participate in the development of the country.²⁹⁹

Barre made it public that his regime was interested in bringing women's issues forward. Of course, he wanted to get the allegiance of every sector of the Somali population and he wanted to gain legitimacy from them. .. Middle class women who had the education were able to claim their rights. They were mostly the ones that benefited from the gender policies.³⁰⁰

Being one of the earliest groups who has wholly supported our sacred revolution, the Somali woman has shown an unquenchable zeal in sharing the aspirations of the other sectors of the community, in the advancement of the ideals of the revolution.³⁰¹

The adoption of socialism gave a strong impetus to the introduction of policies, which were inspired by the Marxist ideological goals of equality for women. These social transformations can be categorised as: 1) those that affected women directly, laws like *Xeerka Qoyska* (Family Law), enacted and designed specifically to assist women; and 2) those that affected them indirectly like the attempts to eliminate traditional social structures, the language reform and education.

While the Somali socialist government attempted to improve the status of its female citizens, several factors either limited or prevented progress for women altogether. First, the practical necessities of reconciling socialism with indigenous culture, nationalism and Islam made the process problematic. Second, there were limitations inherent in the enactment of laws and the conceptualization of policies, which were not sufficient to

²⁹⁸ Ahmed Hashi (May 16, 2001).

²⁹⁹ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

³⁰⁰ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

overcome the deeply embedded gender ideology and hierarchy existing in society. The government's policies caused major resentment among the public and a pervasive resistance to change, particularly from the religious authorities, who perceived certain aspects of Barre's policies as either revisionism or a wholesale attack on Islam. Thirdly, much of the enforcement and implementation of the new legislation was problematic in the country, and thus it was often limited to urban areas. In the end, only a small number of women may have benefited from the social, economic and political aspects of the national activities promoted by Barre's government.

Policy measures: The campaign against traditional social inequalities

An ideological battle against bourgeois and racist interpretation of our history should go hand in hand with the practical tasks required to replace tribal consciousness in our society with patriotic and, socialist consciousness.³⁰²

Qabiilku (the clan system) undermines women's participation in politics. No clan is comfortable being represented by a woman. In fact, being represented by a woman brings shame to the name of the tribe. It means that particular tribe could not find any "good men" to represent them. The authoritarian state was helpful in two senses; 1) because it forced the society [that was not ready for women to be politically active] to accept women as citizens with equal rights...2) because the official abolition of tribalism gave women an opportunity to participate in politics on their own merits without representing a tribe.³⁰³

Certain reactionary forces utilise tribal relations for their own narrow selfish interests, thereby hampering progress, comradely-spirit in work and the cultural unity and solidarity that exist among the masses. The masses have to realise also that the presence of colonial forces in Africa constantly exploits these issues for their own sinister objectives. Hence, efforts were made to combat tribal consciousness and replace it with patriotic social consciousness.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ *Revolutionary Somalia: 21 October 1969-1978*. Mogadishu: Ministry of Information and National Guidance, (nd), p. 111.

³⁰² Mohamed Siyaad Barre. *Philosophy of the Somali Revolution*. (A book review in *Halgan*, no. 1, October 1976, p. 49.

³⁰³ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

³⁰⁴ Mohamed A. Sheikh. "The Revolution of October 21st, 1969 and the Party." *Halgan*, no. 1, October 1976, p. 12. Educated in Italy as a physician, Mohamed was a member of Central Committee of the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party and one of the socialist ideologues who were instrumental in conceptualising many of the socialist policies, including gender. He was Barre's personal advisor and held many important

Enrolment of women in administrative and technical fields has increased enormously in our revolutionary era. This is due to basing education and ability, as the qualifications required for jobs.³⁰⁵

Ololaha aasidda qabiilka (campaign to bury tribalism) was one of the first policies intended to address inequality based on class and gender and also engender social reform. The primary objective was to transform the traditional relations that constituted, according to the popular discourses, obstacles to economic development and social reform. This campaign had important implications for women. Launched from February to March 1971, the campaign was, in the words of Samatar, "seriously orchestrated and subsequently generated a great deal of enthusiasm."³⁰⁶ Tribalism, symbolically buried in 1971, was considered a criminal offence under Barre's regime. In addition, the *diya* institution was outlawed. The *'aaqils* were renamed *nabad doon* (peace-makers). In the attempt to eliminate clan allegiance, merit rather than clan membership was announced to be the criterion for success in public life. The regime's motto was: "it is not who you know but what you know."

As a positive measure against tribalism, the government undertook measures to undermine institutions that sustained social inequalities. For instance, to discourage the need for kin support among the urban poor, the government provided funeral expenses for those who died in towns without relatives available to help them perform these

political positions including being the Minister of Information and National Guidance. He, along with five other political figures, was later, in 1982, arrested and stayed in jail for 6 years without any conviction. Their cases received international attention. According to Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001) and Ahmed Hashi (May 16, 2001) he was a great friend of women's movement in Somalia.

³⁰⁵ *Revolutionary Somalia: 21 October...* p. 112.

³⁰⁶ Ahmed Ismail Samatar. "Self Reliance in Theory and Practice: Critique of Somali Praxis, 1969-1980." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Denver. 1984, p. 265.

services.³⁰⁷ By offering social support services previously provided by the extended family and kinship relations, the government presented itself as an alternative to them. For instance the state assumed the traditional right of families to control marriages and movement of their members. Marriages, originally organised and paid for by the family, were now to be conducted at the local orientation centre, with its resident community replacing the kin of bride and groom.³⁰⁸ Thus, women's relations with the state slowly began to weaken the patriarchal control over them.

A beginning of the breakdown of the material structures that sustained gender inequality was observed among the younger generation.³⁰⁹ The weakening of the patriarchal structures had influenced the socialisation of this generation who often internalised the socialist messages of social equality. *Sinnaanta ragga iyo dumarka* (gender equality) was part of this group's daily vocabulary and lives. They neither questioned nor saw themselves fighting (at least not on a daily basis against patriarchal structures) for basic human rights like the generation before them.³¹⁰ For most of this generation, loyalty to the kin was often alien and they considered themselves as individuals with full legal rights within the state with an identity that is separate from the kin.³¹¹

Staging an effective educational campaign via radio and later on television and through the use of poetry, songs and traditional sayings and proverbs, the state attempted to convince the general public, particularly women, that their loyalty must now lie with the

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ To encourage and publicise this idea, the first marriage that took place at the orientation centre was that of a top government official's daughter.

³⁰⁹ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

state rather than with their family and kin. Women were encouraged to come out of the home and participate in public initiatives such as the self-help schemes and other development strategies intended to boost the economy and to build the nation.³¹²

As the state sanctioned women's participation, women could challenge their families if they were not allowed to participate in the national activities. There were instances where women would threaten to report their husbands if a family objected to the political activism of a female member. A representative from the government might pay a visit to this family to teach them a lesson. The government was able to impose its will through extensive use of the *guulwadayaal* (Victory Pioneers),³¹³ whose main objective was to maintain revolutionary discipline and surveillance.³¹⁴

The implication of the campaign against tribalism for women was particularly important. This policy had the potential to weaken the traditional family and kinship structures, which had a strong influence on women and to disrupt kinship-based structures with their gender and age hierarchies. The material bases of patriarchy were beginning to slowly break down under the new gender policies. The extended family, which often included other kin, was slowly being replaced by the nuclear family among the urbanised and

³¹⁰ Ikram Jama (December 17, 1999).

³¹¹ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ The aim of the program was to combat urban unemployment. It involved training volunteers in paramilitary services, health and sanitation work. Food and uniforms were provided to the participants during the initial training period. See Hussein M. Adan & Mohamoud Sheikh Omar. "Reflections on the Somali Working Class." *Halgan*, no. 8, June 1977.

³¹⁴ Amina Abdulle (December 29, 1999). This coercive aspect of the state control was signified by a logo of an eye on a flag in public places. The logo signified the "ever watching eye" of the state that no one can escape.

educated.³¹⁵ Women's loyalty had, to a certain extent, shifted from the kin network to the state and they were assuming public identity apart from the private ones of kin and community.³¹⁶

Access to education and employment opportunities

Women who did not have access to education were the ones who mostly benefited from the writing of the Somali language. "*Way ilbaxeen*" (they became enlightened and informed). They came out and participated in meetings... they read the newspapers. .. They become aware now...³¹⁷

Thanks to the literacy campaign, a dialogue has started between the Government and the public. The Government can explain its policies to an enlightened public and the people can competently voice their needs and participate in the running of the nation's affairs.³¹⁸

The introduction of free and universal education, the expansion of the school system to accommodate more students, and provision for higher education reflected the philosophy of the regime and increased enrolment of Somali women in all levels of education. Further, the regime's ideology, which emphasised education and professional work as legitimate venues for upward social mobility, contributed to slowly gained acceptance within Somali society. The education of women, understood to be meeting a social and economic need, became something of a status symbol.

Women began having more access to education when the Somali language was written. They learned enough to be able to sign documents. They really benefited [from the writing of the language]. .. There were people who received diplomas. These diplomas were from elementary at the adult schools at night. .. I also took two diplomas. I used to

³¹⁵ Daphne Williams Ntiri. "Experimenting with Family Life Centers in Africa's Development: A Case Study of Rural Women in Somalia, East Africa." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, vol. 21, Autumn 1991, pp. 73-88.

³¹⁶ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

³¹⁷ Hawo Jabril (December 29, 1999).

³¹⁸ Mohamed Siyaad Barre, quoted in "The Somali Revolution and the Development of National Culture." *Halgan*, no. 10, August, 1977, p. 27.

go until I finished grade four. When I finished the elementary level, I went to the upper level.³¹⁹

Indeed, it was in the field of education that women's opportunities greatly advanced. Four years after the introduction of the universal and compulsory education through the 8th grade,³²⁰ there was an increase of 67 percent of girls in elementary school enrolment, 36 percent in intermediate schools and 57 percent increase in secondary schools.³²¹ In 1984, to provide educational opportunities for women who had little chance to attend formal schools, the Ministry of Education established the Women's Education Department (WED).

However, there were several factors that continued to favour the education of men over that of women. Due to prevailing socio-cultural attitudes, which deemed women's education to be less valuable and kept women from any form of formal learning, girl's enrolment rate remained lower, about 1/3 of that of boys in primary school. In addition, sociological factors such as early marriage and discouraging employment opportunities after graduation contributed to slow progress towards women's higher education.³²² For instance, during the 1972/73 school year, the female population at the elementary level was 25.8 percent of the total population. This has decreased to 22.8 percent at the

³¹⁹ Amina Abdulle (December 27, 1999).

³²⁰ During the period of 1973-74 a massive and extensive literacy campaign was undertaken across the country. The motto of the literacy campaign was *Bar ama Baro* (If you know, teach. If you don't, learn). The objectives of the literacy campaign were multiple: "to give everybody the opportunity to learn reading and writing...to eradicate social balkanisation and fragmentation into tribes and sects...to bring about an absolute unity." (Cited in Ioan M. Lewis. *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somalia*. p. 222-223.)

³²¹ *Ibid.* p. 19.

³²² Amina Adan and Margaret Khalakdina. "Women." *Women and Children in Somalia: A Situational Analysis*. UNICEF, Mogadiscio, Somalia, 1987, p. 130.

intermediary level and subsequently fell to 16.3 percent at the secondary level.³²³ Female dropout rates were higher than those of males because of pressure on girls to follow the traditional path for women: that is to marry early, have children, and take care of families. Asli's story confirmed the existence of barriers to female education: "I was married off before I was 16 years old and by 17 I had the first child. My schooling was interrupted because of this."³²⁴

The importance of educating girls was, however, slowly gaining wider acceptance. As one woman said, "If a boy learns he goes somewhere else and won't help his mother. A girl never forgets her mother. That is why we like to educate girls more than boys."³²⁵ While in the past, girls' education was not accepted, or even not allowed, it became quite normal for the younger generation in urban areas. The following two stories point to the changes that have taken place in less than one generation.

Sirad is in her fifties. She is also one of the first four women in the former Italian Somaliland who were sent abroad to have access to post secondary education. When her family made the decision to send her and her sisters to school, there was a major outcry and resistance³²⁶ from the kin group who were completely against sending a girl to school. In fact, there were clan delegations to her father trying to convince him to change

³²³ Elisabetta Forni. *Una Nuova Vita in Somalia: Note sulla condizione femminile e su un'esperienza di sedentarizzazione dei nomadi nella Somalia socialista*. Milano Italy: Faracno Angeli Editore, 1984.

³²⁴ Asli Jama (February 16, 2001).

³²⁵ Quoted in Merryman. "Women's Welfare..." p. 193.

³²⁶ Sirad Yusuf (September 15, 2000). This strong reaction could also be related to the fact that at that time (1950s) the schools in Mogadishu were generally run by Catholic nuns. It is not clear how much the reaction was a cultural opposition to girls' education and how much it was fear of children being educated in a non-Muslim environment and taking alien values. It is important to point out that boys' education in schools with strong religious non-Muslim undertones was socially accepted.

his mind. The elders insisted, “sending a girl to school is inviting trouble into your home. She will lose her culture and religion. Also, you will open a floodgate of women wanting to ‘study’.”³²⁷

In contrast, Ikram’s schooling was “taken for granted”. The issue was not even open for discussion. “When the time came I was sent to school without any questions asked.”³²⁸

Ikram is in her early thirties and she went to school in the 1970s and 1980s when universal education was widely accepted in the society, at least among the middle class, urbanised sector of the population.

Through increased access to education, women's participation in the labour force increased and they became more visible in various fields such as administrative activities, medicine, broadcasting, construction, factories, schools, universities, diplomatic corps, army police and national campaigns.³²⁹ Many women benefited from Barre's socialist principles that promised equal access to and opportunity in employment for all. Many also took advantage of positive legal supports such as legislation which guaranteed women maternity leave of four months together with pay and time off during working hours to nurse infants (Labour Law, 1974). Day-care centres became national priority and were established throughout major cities.³³⁰ These supports increased women's opportunities to better integrate into the workforce.

³²⁷ Sirad Yusuf (September 15, 2000).

³²⁸ Ikram Jama. (December 17, 1999).

³²⁹ *The Role of Our Socialist ...* p. 31.

³³⁰ Abdalla. *Sisters in Affliction...* p. 59.

Although it is difficult to obtain enough information to accurately ascertain the progress women made in this sector, increasing numbers of women participated in the economy and became wage earners.³³¹ According to the Ministry of Education, which published the sex ratios of its teaching employees, the percentage of women teachers in Somalia's schools increased during this period, from about 10 percent in 1969 to about 30 percent in 1979.³³² However, women were underrepresented in many sectors (with large concentrations of women in community, social and personal services) and there were marked inequalities between men and women's involvement in government employment.³³³ Although the increase in labour force participation is partly explained by the national needs that arose because of local economic development during that period, only a limited number of women obtained prominent positions in the government.

Political participation

We worked with the regime so that they won't view us as negative. We played the politics. Our aim was to work within the system to ensure that there were no clashes. That was our strategy.³³⁴

The notion that only men can be in political leadership was prevalent in the society. *Dadku uma bisleen* (society was not ready for) women being politically active. If anything went wrong we were blamed for it, "why don't women go back home." And "they neglected their children." The state was forceful ... People used to say, "*kacaanka idin kibriyeye waxba maydnaan noqon lahayn*." (You wouldn't be anything if it were not for the revolution). People who would not have counted otherwise became empowered and became active political participants.³³⁵

³³¹ As discussed in chapter one, women in the rural sector are very active in both productive and reproductive areas. In the urban sector, lower class and poor women were always mobile and were involved in petty trading and other income generating activities. However, like in other developing countries, these activities are not included in the GDP.

³³² David Laitin & Said Samatar. *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*. Boulder: Westview, 1986, p. 87.

³³³ Adan and Khalakdina. "Women." p. 130.

³³⁴ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

³³⁵ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

The organization [Somali Women's Democratic Organization] created a sense of unity among women. Women got to know each other and we worked together. Women from across the country were brought together [for meetings and work]. Today I recognize women from different regions [whom I met while working for the organization] and they recognize me. We used to travel to different regions. .. The organization had branches all over the country. They used to do work everywhere. They had offices and representatives everywhere. Then there were national meetings where women from Hargaisa (far north) to Boosaaso (far northeast) would come together once a year. When we came together, we used to exchange ideas.³³⁶

Representatives of workers, women, and youth began to participate actively in commissions to oversee various state functions – justice and defence, health and sanitation, social and educational matters, and economic matters.³³⁷

In the realm of politics, the government vowed to increase the political participation of the masses. In the words of one former government official, "in order to raise the national basis of society, it is dialectically necessary to raise the political consciousness and organization of the masses."³³⁸ A relative success had been achieved in increasing public participation at the local level. As Adam outlines:

Representatives of workers, women and youth began to participate in local commissions to oversee various state functions – justice, security, health and sanitation, social and educational matters and economic matters.³³⁹

In addition, the political and ideological debate in the Somali language "has induced popular participation and has engaged many intellectuals in the polity."³⁴⁰ This process made political debate more accessible to the general public, particularly women, when it was previously limited to the educated minority. Women's entry into the political arena

³³⁶ Amina Abdulla (December 27, 1999).

³³⁷ Amina Adan. "The Establishment of a Vanguard Party... p, 18.

³³⁸ Mohamed A. Sheikh. "The Revolution of October 21st, 1969 and the Party." *Halgan*, no. 1, October 1976, p. 12.

³³⁹ Hussein M. Adam. "Language, national-consciousness and Identity – the Somali experience." I.M. Lewis (ed.). *Nationalism & Self Determination in the Horn of Africa*. London: Ithaca Press, 1983, p. 36.

³⁴⁰ David D. Laitin. "Somalia's Military Government and Scientific Socialism." Carl G. Rosbery & Thomas M. Callaghy (eds.) *Socialism in Sub-Saharan Africa: A New Assessment*. Berkeley: University of California, Institute of International Studies, 1979, p. 202.

and their integration into public life was encouraged. There was an unprecedented flurry of political activity among women at both the local and, to a certain extent, the national level. The establishment of orientation centres by Barre's regime opened new avenues for women's participation in local politics. The orientation centres were local community centres³⁴¹ that had various functions including family counselling, legal clinics, adult education and literacy, health, and entertainment. The staff were often unpaid or paid in kind and were largely recruited from street youth, the urban poor and the unemployed.

Located in different districts, the centres were also responsible for getting local communities involved in various voluntary community projects and schemes, such as *Iskaa wax u qabso* (collective action/self-reliance), intended to improve social conditions. *Iskaa wax u qabso* schemes were successful in the implementation of important projects like building schools, health clinics, and housing projects at lower costs. Women were particularly active in these national initiatives: they made up 70 percent of the total labour force in the implementation of these projects.³⁴² These projects were co-ordinated through local committees at orientation centres and contributed to women's political participation at the grassroots levels.³⁴³ Amina concurred with this by talking about how women actively participated at the grassroots level,

There was much work that was done at the *degmooyinka* (districts) level: street-cleaning campaigns, *bacaadcelinta* (Sanddune project³⁴⁴). Women mostly participated in these

³⁴¹ Mogadishu was geographically divided into 14 quarters and each had its own orientation centres.

³⁴² Elisabetta Forni. *Una Nuova Vita in Somalia: Note sulla condizione femminile e su un'esperienza di sedentarizzazione dei nomadi nella Somalia socialista*. Milano, Italy: Franco Angeli Editore, 1984, p. 40.

³⁴³ Ibid. p. 25

³⁴⁴ The Sanddune scheme that was part of a large reforestation, soil erosion control and dunes stabilisation project carried out by the Somali Ministry of Livestock, Forestry and Range was an important example of the mass mobilisation for self-help. It involved thousands of Somalis collectively (both men and women)

activities from the orientation centres...There were, you see, competitions between the districts. The one that wins would get prizes, like the one given at the sports competitions (little laughing). We won the cup three times at my district, Waaberi (there is a sense of pride in her voice as she talks about it). We later lost it to Boondheere. Women were particularly active in the building of local schools. Most of the schools in the country at that time were built through self-help schemes.³⁴⁵

The self-help projects Amina is talking about were not only quite successful in realising many national projects including the construction of the best hotel in Mogadishu, Jubba, but they received international attention. This article referred to the collective participation in self-help projects by saying, "I was vividly reminded of the films I saw of the Chinese, or North Koreans, working on their projects, like human ants. Somalia is the first country in the individualist African and Moslem worlds to attempt anything like it on such a scale."³⁴⁶

According to Basil Davidson, in addition to their social and cultural functions, these centres provided the platform for "thousands of Somali men and women who had never before possessed the least right to any part in government," to discuss "their local interests and make decision on their local problems."³⁴⁷ The orientation centres, as Lewis points out, "represented the new nationalism based on friendship and patriotism, not

working to stop, by planting cacti and shrubs, the shifting dunes that were threatening to overwhelm the fertile agricultural Lower Shabelle basin (an area covering about 70 miles south of Mogadishu). According to one international press article, the project is "a mammoth undertaking, but the success so far achieved underscores the immense importance of the Revolution's Self-help policy." Another international news article reported, "when I was there recently on a Friday which is rest day in Somalia, I saw what must have been about five thousand people of both sexes busily planting shrubs and cacti amidst a chorus of singing, chanting, drum-beating and horn-blowing." Both were cited in *Revolutionary Somalia in the Eyes of the World: A Real Assessment of our Revolutionary Actions*. Mogadishu: The Ministry of Information and National Guidance, 1974, p. 37 and 38 respectively.

³⁴⁵ Amina Abdulle (December 29, 1999)

³⁴⁶ Quoted in *Revolutionary Somalia in the Eyes of the World... p. 39.*

³⁴⁷ Basil Davidson. "Somalia. Towards Socialism." *Race & Class*. vol. 17, no. 1, 1975, p.33.

kinship, and should be the nerve centers of the vibrant new revolutionary life."³⁴⁸ Many uneducated women, for the first time, obtained the opportunity to improve their lives through participation in orientation centres activities. Through this participation and assistance from the local women, many were able to take adult education at night and gain better paying employment.

Women's political participation was further facilitated by the establishment of the Somali Women's Democratic Organization (SWDO) on March 8, 1977, International Women's Day. The number of members increased from 500 founding members to 10,000 by fall 1978. In the early 1980s the membership swelled to 40,000.³⁴⁹ The SWDO was a state-sponsored organization whose "leadership, budgetary capabilities, choices, and pragmatic direction were all subjected to the approval of the Party's (Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party -SRSP) supreme office."³⁵⁰ The organization was initially supposed to be an extension of the party and its leaders were carefully selected to be pro-state and not inclined to challenge the party on the issues of gender. However, as Dahabo Farah, Secretary of Foreign Affairs from 1977 to 1978 contends, it later became an "*avant garde* feminist organization."³⁵¹

Nevertheless, while greater participation in local politics is observed during this period, women remained largely under-represented in the upper echelons of the party leadership. Only a few women held positions with key decision-making and policy-making capacity.

³⁴⁸ I. M. Lewis. "Kim Il-Sung in Somalia...", p. 24.

³⁴⁹ Astrid M. Slottved. "Role of Women in the Somali Revolution." *Horn of Africa*, vol. 2, no. 2. April/June, 1979, p. 19.

³⁵⁰ Samatar. "Self Reliance in Theory and Practice..." p. 276.

Women's limited access to higher education and wage employment "offers some explanation for their near absence at the top, though limitations in men's education have not prevented them from assuming even positions as heads of state."³⁵²

Legal changes: the family law

Marriage is a contract between a man and a woman who are equal in rights and responsibilities; its base is a reciprocal understanding and respect; its objective the formation of a family unit; the basic unit of the society.³⁵³

I knew a case where the man wanted divorce and his wife would not give it to him. He used to say, "allow yaa madaxayga iga siiya." (If only I could get my freedom). This is quite interesting because only women used to say this [because men could arbitrarily divorce women before the family law].... The court system really *gasacadaha naga jajabiyey* (gave us grief), however. Powerful men who themselves were practising polygamy were the ones who were in charge of the courts.³⁵⁴

The introduction of the family law was a major historical event. A country, like Somalia, where people are 100 percent Muslims, it was a very daring step. It indicated a commitment to gender equality [on the part of the government] and was a step towards the elimination of the traditional family structure.³⁵⁵

Seeing men divorcing women arbitrarily and leaving them hungry, without any support [financial or emotional], and with no other means of taking care of their children was one of the reasons we wanted the family law redrafted.³⁵⁶

On January 11, 1975³⁵⁷, Barre announced a decision by the Supreme Revolutionary Council and the Council of Ministers to give equal rights to women in several respects. This was the *Xeerka Qoyska* (Family Law). The underlying principle of the new Family Law was *sinnaanta ragga iyo dumarka* (gender equality). "As of this day," said Barre,

³⁵¹ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

³⁵² Jane L. Parpart and Kathleen A. Staudt. *Women and the State in Africa*. Boulder & London,: L. Reinner Publisher, 1989, p. 9.

³⁵³ Article 5 of the family law. See Elisabetta Forni. *Una Nuova Vita in Somalia: Note sulla condizione femminile e su un'esperienze di sedentarizzazione dei nomadi nella Somalia socialista*. Milano, Italy: Franco Angeli Editore, 1984, p. 41.

³⁵⁴ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

"the Somali men and women are equal. They have the same equality, the same rights and the same share of whatever is inherited from their parents."³⁵⁸ Passed under the sponsorship of Somali Women's groups, the family law was considered to be "a milestone for women's legal equality and basis for the increasing strength of women's legal status in Somalia."³⁵⁹

The goal of the new Family Law was to transform the legal position of women within the family. The Law raised the legal position of women by granting men and women equal rights within marriage in matters concerning property and inheritance. Unilateral divorce, polygamy and exclusive male custody over children were limited as well. Women were given the right to sue for divorce and custody of the children. Previously, the married couple had been conceptualised as one represented by the husband who had extensive rights over his wife, and women had no legal rights as independent persons after marriage. The possibilities for women to challenge the patriarchal control over them increased. Female-initiated divorce in court reportedly increased during this period, for instance.³⁶⁰

However, while the Family Law was the most important piece of legislation that addressed women's oppression within the family and society, it was shrouded with controversy. Barre's regime sought to project a modern image of Somalia without much regard for local realities and needs. The law was contested by many groups from various

³⁵⁷The date coincided with the 27th anniversary on the death of the famous Hawo Osman (popularly known as "Xaawo Taako"), who was killed in an anti-colonialist demonstration in Mogadishu in 1948.

³⁵⁸Barre. *My Country...* p. 3.

³⁵⁹Bhoola. "Household structure, decision-making..." p. 181.

perspectives. Feminists who drafted it and pushed for its announcement were shocked about the final contents of the Law because they did not want to challenge Islam in such a way.³⁶¹ Because it touched the most “sacred” and protected realm of the society – familial - local religious leaders condemned it and advised women against using it. Average women were afraid of the implications of such an “anti-Islamic” approach in resolving domestic matters.

In addition, several factors undermined the law’s implementation and effectiveness. Initial conceptualization and enforcement of the law was weak. As Bhoola points out, “many of these changes were not adequately enforced, partially because the Law has a distinct, if unintended urban bias.”³⁶² Individuals who were the implementers of the law did not themselves obey it or even agree with the changes in gender norms. According to Sheikh Mohamed AhmedNur Omer (Gadhyare), Director of Religious Department at the Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs at the time, “although the family law said one thing, we still ruled based on the *Shari’a* (Islamic law). Later, in practice, the family law was just a name.”³⁶³ Many of the sheikhs who were supposed to enforce the Family Law had more than one wife.³⁶⁴ Some of them strongly believed that men had a religious right to have more than one wife.

³⁶⁰ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Bhoola. “Household structure, decision-making...” p. 183.

³⁶³ Sheikh Mohamed AhmedNur Omar (Gadhyare) (December 29, 1999).

³⁶⁴ Barre had another wife as well, but the official first lady was Khadija. She was the one who went with the president on official tours and hosted foreign delegations.

A second limitation of the Law is that it was not accessible to all women. A woman who initiated divorce proceedings had to give up her *meher*.³⁶⁵ Thus, lower class women did not have the financial means to divorce and claim their legal rights. This particular inequity in divorce settlement was a controversial issue among women's groups in Somalia. They demanded an amendment to the Law and a more equitable legal status for women. As Bhoola explains, "many educated Somali women question the Law's present ability to adequately safeguard women's rights unless the divorce sections are changed, and overall compliance increased through media information and community education."³⁶⁶

A third limitation in the Family Law was its unpopularity among traditional sections of the population, namely the religious groups. The state intervention into the familial realm was challenged and highly resisted by a campaign led by religious men. The Law had met with a pervasive resistance from Muslim Sheikhs who considered state interference in this area an intolerable curtailment of their religious authority³⁶⁷ and accused the state of "interfering in spiritually and theologically governed spaces of Somali life."³⁶⁸ According to many religious leaders, the Family Law confronted Islam "in the crucible of women's role and place in society."³⁶⁹

³⁶⁵ *Meher* refers to a set payment (money or property) given by the man to the women upon marriage. Although it can be claimed during the marriage, it is intended to provide women with a means of support after divorce.

³⁶⁶ Bhoola. "Household structure, decision-making..." p. 183.

³⁶⁷ Kandiyoti *Women, Islam and the State...*, p. 17.

³⁶⁸ Samatar. *Socialist Somalia...* p. 109.

³⁶⁹ Ahmed I. Samatar. "Underdevelopment in Somalia: Dictatorship without Hegemony." *Africa Today*. vol. 32, no. 3, 1985. p. 29.

The fourth limitation of the law was that women, even if they knew about the existence of the law and its benefits for their lives, were afraid of the social consequences. The majority of middle and lower class segments of the society viewed the “liberation” of women with suspicion. They viewed the gender policies as something “foreign” and “unIslamic” that had the potential of breaking up families. Not every woman could afford to be a social outcast and alienate her family and neighbours. Despite the fact that women could obtain significant benefits from the law, Somalis generally believed that it was men’s prerogative to initiate divorce and any women who deviated from this general principle risked resistance from the society and becoming a social pariah.

Ultimately, despite all the weaknesses and limitations, it can, however, still be argued that the family law was an important step towards addressing social inequality based on gender. For the first time in Somali history, it gave women the legal power and the basic rights to challenge traditional gender inequities entrenched in the culture. Although many of the interviewed women complained about the lack of proper implementation of the law, they nonetheless maintained that it was a positive step towards the improvement of their legal and social position within the society. Raqiya Haji Dualeh, one of the activist women who drafted the family law and who appealed for an immediate action to finalise the law in 1971 maintained that despite the limitations in the implementation process, women, including average women, benefited from the basic recognition of their rights within the family. She talks about one particular case to illustrate this point,

I remember one particular case. This woman was sick. Her husband divorced her and took on another woman. He also threw her out of her home. She came to the SWDO to

complain. The organization helped her through a long process of claiming her rights. She got her home back and a financial settlement.³⁷⁰

Other women said that the social debates about family law and related public discourses provided much-needed exercise in addressing women's legal rights within the family and society. According to these women, both the introduction of family law and the processes it engendered in terms of social debates were important steps in the move towards gender equality. As one interviewee maintained:

Maybe the project [the introduction of the family law] was not always perfect but it started people talking about these issues. Why else was the religious and conservative sector of the population against it. Even against it was good, because many people were saying there is a problem within the family that needed to be addressed.³⁷¹

Social reactions

There was a major backlash against the Family Law and the perceived changes of social and gender relations. For instance, men would not give courtesy [in terms of seating in the buses]. They [men] would say, let the state give you seats. Women were harassed in the streets. Women were killed by their husbands in extreme cases.³⁷²

We supported the measure and it became a law [family law]. So it wasn't necessary to go that far [execute 10 religious men who were against the law] and create enemies. The religious people were power to reckon with. The law also antagonised the Islamic world. Some countries like Saudi Arabia and Libya would not receive Somali delegates. They stopped aid and condemned the Somali regime. I think the reception of the family law would have been better if they [the religious men] were not sentenced. A significant group of the society across the board became what we used to call anti-revolutionary.³⁷³

The government's attempts to change gender relations, transform the traditional kinship based system, expand literacy and provide women access to education and employment outside the family met with significant opposition from the general public. Despite the government's efforts to move gender policies into the arena of popular culture through

³⁷⁰ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

³⁷¹ Ikram Jama (December 17, 1999).

³⁷² Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

propaganda, as observed in other countries, efforts to improve the status of women were often constrained by a social structure characterised by patriarchal gender relations.³⁷⁴ The growing visibility of women in public spaces and their participation in political affairs were seen as a threat to the Somali social fabric. This opposition mostly came from the conservative sector of the society, particularly the sheikhs³⁷⁵. As Moghadam points out, "contenders who are in danger of losing their place in a polity are especially prone to 'reactive' collective action, often taking communal forms."³⁷⁶ Although there were many Somali men who showed concern for women's secondary status in society, not too many favoured fundamental transformation of gender relations within the home or society.³⁷⁷ To the conservative men, the family law challenged the fundamental base of the family in which men, by virtue of their sex, were automatically placed in a superior social position. Consequently, an organised opposition was staged by these religious leaders. Barre was excommunicated from the Muslim world. His action was publicly denounced by religious authorities. Many Somali religious scholars went into self-exile and wrote articles in Arab/Muslim papers, calling the introduction of the Family Law in Somalia revisionism and an attack on the religion.³⁷⁸

³⁷³ Ahmed Hashi (May 16, 2001).

³⁷⁴ Valentine Moghadam. "Reform, revolution, and reaction: the trajectory of the 'Woman Question' in Afghanistan." Valentine Moghadam (ed.) *Gender and National Identity: Women and politics in Muslim Societies*. London & Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1994, pp. 81-109.

³⁷⁵ The term "sheikh" refers to religious men in the Somali context. These men can either be very well educated on Islamic *Shariah* (law) or they can have just general knowledge of Islam but meet the criteria of being an old, and often, respected men.

³⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 108.

³⁷⁷ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996) & Hawo Jabril (October 12, 1996 & April 12, 2001).

³⁷⁸ Sheikh Abdiqani Sheikh Ahmed, Minister of Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs from 1972-74, voted against the proposed bill when it was brought in front of the Supreme Revolutionary Council and the Council of Ministers for debate. Later on, he went in self-exile to Kuwait. Other religious authorities who went on self-exile to Muslim/Arab countries included Sheikh Mohamed Ahmed Nur Omer (Gadhayare),

The introduction of the law met with a major resistance from traditional sectors of the Muslim Sheikhs.³⁷⁹ They considered state interference in this area to be an intolerable curtailment of the autonomy of their religious authority.³⁸⁰ This had negative implications for the implementation of the Family Law in a devoutly Muslim and conservative society. The local jurists, who were supposed to enforce the law in the legal courts, disdained the principles of the Family Law. They believed that it was at odds with Islam and the way Somali family should be governed.³⁸¹ Many strongly believed, for instance, that men had the religious right to have more than one wife. Religious leaders compared verses from the Quran with that of the family law at local mosques and other social gatherings to mobilise the masses and to create opposition.³⁸² Since “religion gave them certain rights over women,” many men were unwilling to relinquish their authority/power within their family.

Many religious authorities and personalities have also considered the introduction of scientific socialism in Somalia as an “indication” of the government distancing itself from Islam.³⁸³ Some scholars argue that this initial movement, which had religious undertones, was the first opposition movement against Barre’s regime. This could have developed into a potent movement if it had not been brutally suppressed by the regime.³⁸⁴

Director of Religious Department at the Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs at that period, who went to Saudi Arabia.

³⁷⁹ Ten religious leaders were executed for publicly denouncing and opposing the legislation, later that year. This incident created a public uproar and significantly contributed to anti government sentiments among the general population.

³⁸⁰ Samatar. *Socialist Somalia...* p. 109.

³⁸¹ Sheikh Mohamed Ahmed Nur Omar (Gadhyare) (December 29, 1999).

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Mhasin Alsafi. “Islamic Resistance in Somalia: Reflections on the Present Situation.” Paper presented at the fifth International Congress of Somali Studies, Worcester, Massachusetts, December 1-3, 1993.

Government officials dealt severely with the "disobedient" sheikhs. Referring to them as *wadaad xume* (bad sheikhs), which accused them of being right wing reactionaries and creating a conflict between Islam and socialist policies. In January 1975, ten religious leaders were executed for publicly denouncing and opposing the legislation. The execution of dissenters was perhaps not the right approach toward securing legitimacy.³⁸⁵ By trying to de-legitimise the sheikhs and their authority among Somalis, Barre's regime showed contempt for "tradition" in the eyes of the general public.³⁸⁶ He was criticised for the direct attempt to undermine religion and culture and for the erosion of traditional security and support systems that were to be replaced by the state. This contributed to a tremendous backlash against the government and had a negative impact on women.³⁸⁷ Social conservatives took advantage of this unstable period.

Socialism was rejected as religiously inappropriate and culturally alien. It was construed as the enemy of Islam.³⁸⁸ Some religious scholars were not happy with the choice of Latin as the national language script either. They interpreted the choice of Latin rather than Arabic script as "a practical step towards adopting western imperial policies to the detriment of Islamic policies which will serve the enemies of Islam."³⁸⁹ In addition, Barre's policies towards gender were seen as a threat to the status quo. The impositions of social measures also resulted in anti-government sentiments by many people. The

³⁸⁵ Ali A. Mazrui. "Crisis in Somalia: From Tyranny to Anarchy." Hussein M. Adam. & Richard Ford. *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for the Somali communities in the 21st Century*. Lawrenceville, NJ, 1997. p. 8.

³⁸⁶ Sheikh Mohamed Ahmed Nur Omar (Gadhyare) (December 29, 1999)

³⁸⁷ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Ibid. See also Mhasin Alsafi. "Islamic Resistance in Somalia..."

weakening of the patriarchal system of gender relations as a result of increased female education and employment created anxiety among Somali men.

This seeming erosion of the traditional structures of patriarchy has, as in many other countries, “created a favourable climate for the emergence of a conservative backlash against the emancipation of women articulated in the idiom of religious fundamentalism.”³⁹⁰ Raqiya Haji Dualeh, the former Deputy Minister of Health, explains how, in late 1980s, when her book, *Sisters in Affliction*, was translated into Somali, it engendered public rage, particularly from the religious sector of the society. The book that dealt with FGM was seen as “offensive and an insult to women.” Raqiya said,

I had not anticipated this sort of reaction [especially when people’s attitudes seemed to be changing and the issue was becoming more public]. My life was in danger in many respects. The conservatives saw me as someone who was propagating freedom of sex. Which, interestingly, had nothing to do with the issues I am discussing in the book.³⁹¹

In addition, more young religious men went to and were educated in the Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia. Coming back to Somalia, they brought with them more conservative readings of Islam. The religious elements of the society became more prominent.³⁹² There was a tremendous desire among the conservatives to go back to some mythical and romanticised past in which women were kept in some sort of gendered prison. Women were to conform to an idealised construct of womanhood and community. More and more young women started wearing the *hijab*³⁹³ and women were encouraged to go back to their primary roles as wives and mothers. In a very simplistic fashion, the social and

³⁹⁰ Mernissi. “Muslim Women and Fundamentalism.”; Kandiyoti. “Islam and Patriarchy...”

³⁹¹ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (March 29, 2001).

³⁹² Dr. Mohamed Ali Nuuh (March 6, 2002).

³⁹³ Traditionally, women in Somalia did not wear the *hijab*.

economic crises in Somalia during this period were blamed on women who presumably "strayed from Allah's way." This revival of Islamic ideologies reinforced traditional views on the status of women.

The economic crises in the 1980s, exacerbated by the structural adjustment imposed by the IMF and World Bank, had profound implications for women's lives and affected the original socialist goal of emancipation of Somali women. As the economy deteriorated, women were blamed for social difficulties and conservatism gained over revolutionary ideas. In addition, the increased female education, employment and visibility in public spaces challenged the system of patriarchal gender relations. These developments also caused anxiety among many men who felt that women's participation in the workforce and national development took employment away from men, thereby reducing their ability to support their families and resulting in their consequent loss of dignity. This anxiety felt by men and projected on women had its roots elsewhere. As discussed by Moghadam, "the socio-economic insecurity of a class seems to have its corresponding set of socio-psychological anxieties often projected on women."³⁹⁴

³⁹⁴ Moghadam. "Reform, revolution, and reaction..." p. 15.

Contradictions of the “socialist” discourse

Economic and political crises gave the conservatives the excuse they needed to resist the extension of women’s rights. These groups wanted to enforce restriction on women’s advances and their recently gained rights.³⁹⁵

Slowly, the situation went out of hand.³⁹⁶

The defeat in the Ogaden war³⁹⁷ in 1978 and the humiliation of not being able to fulfil his nationalist vision of reuniting Somalis throughout the Horn into one nation-state, coupled with the economic crisis, resulted in Barre's regime becoming repressive and lacking in ideological leadership. The Marxist ideologues who had played an important role in the conceptualization and development of many socialist programs were alienated or taken to prison. Consequently, the public confidence in the government was undermined and the jubilation with which the revolution had been welcomed slowly declined. In its place there was disenchantment when people realised the discrepancy between the promise of socialism and its concrete achievement was gradually widening.

The contradictions in Barre's gender policies became magnified during this period.³⁹⁸ On the one hand, in an attempt to weaken the allegiance of the population to the family/kinship and re-socialise them to broaden his loyalty, he pulled women into the

³⁹⁵ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

³⁹⁶ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

³⁹⁷ In 1977 the Somali government carried out a massive military invasion on Ethiopia, making territorial claims to much of eastern Ethiopia, the Ogaden This is an area inhabited by people of Somali origin.

³⁹⁸ The internationally renowned Somali author, Nuruddin Farah's trilogy *Sweet and Sour Milk, Sardines, and Close Sesame* (the author gives the overall title *Variations on the theme of an African Dictatorship*) captures the atmosphere of political tyranny and repression in Somalia. His books reflect intrigue, brutality, and insensitivity characterizing the Somali politics in late 1970s.

public sphere. On the other hand, he reinforced the father/patriarch in the family when it suited his political agenda.

In addition, progress made earlier began to disappear during the latter part of his regime as the government started leaning towards dictatorship. As Barre's popularity began to slip away, his government became less effective in implementing social policies and enforcing laws such as those promoting gender equality. Budget allocations for social services dramatically decreased as the regime's focus shifted from social issues to military spending. For example, allocation for primary and secondary education had fallen from 11 percent of the national budget during the 1974-75 to a record low of 2 percent in 1987.³⁹⁹ The government cuts in social services spending also reduced the mechanisms for enforcement of the social policies introduced in the early 1970s. Thus women's rights were disregarded.⁴⁰⁰ Finally, the continuing poverty, fear of social intimidation and lack of awareness of their basic rights undermined the actual consequences/effectiveness of such legislation on women's lives.

In his novel, *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Nuruddin Farah establishes a parallel between the patriarch in the family and the head of the state. The head of the state is the most powerful figure in the country just like the father is in a patriarchal family. The short epigraph from William Reich, in the introduction of part II of Farah's novel, summarises this parallel: "In the figure of the father, the authoritarian state has its representative in

³⁹⁹ Nancy Hawk Merryman. "Women's Welfare in the Jubba Valley: Somali Socialism and After." Catherine Bestman and Lee V. Cassanelli (eds.) *The Struggle for Land in Southern Somalia: The War Behind the War*. London: HAAN Publishing, 1995, pp. 179-198.

⁴⁰⁰ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

every family, so that the family becomes its most important instrument of power”.⁴⁰¹

Barre manipulated this father/patriarch figure to fit his political agenda.

In addition, as the economic crisis persisted and the government salary was, because of hyperinflation, not sufficient to maintain a family, many started depending on extended family networks to help them survive during this difficult period. As Simons points out, “virtually all civil servants needed ‘outside’ sources of income, whether these came from other family members or other jobs, and although many cite friends as sources of assistance, friends were never of direct primary support”.⁴⁰² This reliance on the family as a social welfare net undermined the emancipation of women and had negative repercussions for women. As a result the tradition of male superiority gained momentum in people’s belief system.

The family became a refuge because of the repression and alienation faced by many Somalis. This resulted in the preservation of the traditional concept of the family. Women were expected to stay at home and provide that “refuge” and their primary role of being mothers and wives was reinforced by the community.”⁴⁰³

Furthermore, women's traditional role as guardians of morality was transferred into the public sphere. This is the contradictory construction of women as guardians of traditional cultures or as icons of modernity that Kandiyoti referred to in her book *Women, Islam*

⁴⁰¹Nuruddin Farah. *Sweet and Sour Milk*. Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1992, p. , 95.

⁴⁰² Anna Simons. *Networks of Dissolution: Somalia Undone*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995, p. 128.

⁴⁰³ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

and State. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, one security guard tells a woman who attempts to protect Loyaan, a character, during the *Ololaha Nadaafadda* (cleaning of the city campaign), "we want you to guarantee before everybody here that this man will behave and not make a nuisance of himself again. And to do that I need your name, and your husband's name."⁴⁰⁴ Thus, women, constructed as protectors of the family, were entrusted with the task of ensuring that men would not "endanger their own lives and the lives of the women and the children who were financially dependent on them."⁴⁰⁵

As Kandiyoti argues, women were perceived as the guardians of tradition and dire consequences were predicted for a society if they deviated from their "traditional" role and responsibility. Like many other Third World states that introduced progressive gender laws, the Barre regime did not want to "risk affronting the patriarchal sensibilities of their constituents by radically tampering with male prerogative in the family."⁴⁰⁶

While, for Barre, improving women's position in society might have been a means to an end (project a modern image, weaken traditional kinship, re-socialise and broaden his loyalty, and tap into an untapped labour pool), women gained from these state-directed legal measures and public campaigns. His government opened up the possibility for reshaping the existing social order. However, the encouraging signs of achievements in terms of gender in Somalia became secondary in the later period of Barre's governance. As the country deteriorated socially, economically and politically, women had the most to lose.

⁴⁰⁴Ibid. p. 189.

⁴⁰⁵Ibid. p. 191.

Conclusion

The socialist experience in Somalia was a failure in many respects. First, the socialist ideology was not properly articulated by the government and formal statements were often only rhetoric. Secondly, the Barre regime's conceptualisation of the 'women question' was filled with serious limitations and qualifications. However, according to participants in this study, there were successes on gender issues in Somalia during the period under study. And, as has been referred to elsewhere and confirmed by this study, the socialist strategy followed by the Barre regime, particularly the gender policies, was a "significant social catalyst."⁴⁰⁷

Two social policies under the Barre government had a potentially transforming effect on women's role and legal status in Somalia. These two policies were the introduction of gender laws, which were to address women's inequality in the household, in the economy and in politics, and the attempts to deconstruct the traditional socio-economic order. As discussed by Molyneux, the deconstruction of traditional socio-economic systems had the possibility of freeing women from some of the traditional familial and cultural constraints.⁴⁰⁸

The gains were smaller than some of the proponents had hoped and they had inherent weakness. The Family Law, for instance, was not always accessible to all women and it lacked support from most of the local jurists who were responsible for its

⁴⁰⁶ Kandiyoti, (ed.) *Women, Islam and the State*, p. 13.

⁴⁰⁷ Merryman. "Women's Welfare..." p. 193.

⁴⁰⁸ Molyneux. "The Law, the State and Socialist Policies ... " p. 258.

implementation. In addition, the law was sporadically applied and its initial conceptualization was problematic. Although the gender policies during this period had enabled women to assume public roles and claim more individual legal rights than in any other period in Somali history, the sexual division of labour remained essentially the same and women still had limited autonomy both within the household and in public.

Nonetheless, these legal changes constituted a significant change of policy for many women who never had legal protection. They addressed forms of subordination based on gender and, to a certain extent, succeeded in removing some of the material and ideological bases for the reproduction of gender inequalities in Somalia. To fail to acknowledge this is to fail to account for and document women's struggles for change during this period. This was the first time that women's issues in Somalia were put on the national agenda.

CHAPTER V

Redefining gender roles: politicisation through mobilisation

Introduction

The mobilisation process facilitated by the gender policies introduced by Barre's regime and the politicisation of women during this period had lasting impact. Through participation in nation building activities and community self-help projects such as schools, hospitals and community clinics, women gained valuable skills. Many used these opportunities to claim their rights to have careers and participate in civic activities to and to elevate their position in the society despite the conservative backlash of the 1980s.

This chapter examines women's politicisation through the process of mobilisation in Somalia and the way women learned to negotiate their place within the community, the society, and *vis-à-vis* the state. The chapter will also consider women's struggles to have their voices heard in the public arena and their attempts to gain political recognition. It will investigate, finally, the difficulties and social repercussions encountered by women and their struggles against some of the resilient cultural stigma attached to women in public activities/duties.

Taking advantage of the gender policies: Individual initiatives

There were many opportunities that did not exist before for women. I finished high school in 1973. I then worked at the National Insurance for three years. I received a full scholarship from the agency. I was getting paid full time while I pursued university. Those were the opportunities we had. The National University was also paying for my

pocket money, food and shelter. When I received a degree in Economics, I went back to work. Since I am educated now, after a while I was promoted from one of the staff of the Finance Department to Deputy Director of the Financial Department.⁴⁰⁹

The Somali State during this period stated that development would only be achieved through women's equal participation in the process of nation building. Thanks to this declared commitment to women's issues, women could now claim their right to higher education and access to many professions. Equality was not automatically granted to women, though. Those who wanted to claim these rights had first to be aware of their existence and then they had to face the resistance of many people, including family, to attain them.

Thus, through knowledge of their legal rights women gained a sense of power, which enabled them to negotiate familial and social relations. Some women were able to do so because they knew that the state provided protection against their families and encouraged and sanctioned their public participation. They were told they could call upon a government representative (according to the participants many did)⁴¹⁰ to step in when a family objected to the political activism of a female member for instance. State intervention in favour of women greatly contributed to the legitimisation, to a certain extent, of women's participation in public affairs. In addition, as in other countries where social realities lagged behind legal reforms, the official state sponsorship of social equality gave "legal support to women's demands for equality in the face of opposition from their families and the traditional milieu."⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ Sirad Hashi (Ottawa, June 12, 2001).

⁴¹⁰ Amina Abdulle (December 27, 1999); Hawo Jabril (December 29, 1999).

Informed women often benefited considerably from the opportunity that was offered to them to improve their position in society. Given the rights they gained, women devised personal strategies to either challenge the traditional family structures or improve their status in the society. These women took advantage of the public discourses and official government speeches that declared that women's liberation was a necessary feature of national development.

In addition, education had contributed to some women's awareness of their disadvantaged situation within the family and society. Literacy and education are considered primary change agents to open the eyes of women and give them the courage to challenge social constraints. The following two stories show women taking control of their lives by challenging a family and a principal in a high school.

Asli's family married her off to an older man when she was 16 years old. However, she was determined to finish high school. So she insisted that her family give her the opportunity by caring for her children while she went to school. She even threatened that she would leave the marriage (and disgrace the family) if they did not allow her to pursue her education. The family eventually gave up and allowed her to pursue her education. She finished university and had a professional job, although she had six children.⁴¹²

In the 1980s Marwo was in a high school where the principal used pejorative words when talking to the female students. She decided "he had no right talking to them that way" and

⁴¹¹ Molyneux. "The Law, the State and Socialist Policies...", p. 257.

⁴¹² Asli Jama (April 27, 2000).

as a citizen in pursuit of equality she decided personally to intervene in the situation. She telephoned him one day pretending to be an officer from the Ministry of Education who had heard about the principal's behaviour. She warned him that if he did not change his methods, action would be taken against him. Marwo reported that the reason she did that was because she knew her rights. The principal did not use "bad words" against girls from that day on.⁴¹³

Thus, by devising personal strategies, Asli and Marwo were able to challenge the traditional ideology, which constructed women as mothers, wives, and sisters rather than citizens with legal and personal rights.

Education and literacy also contributed to women feeling more empowered within their community. The following story, related by Ntiri, shows how knowledge allowed one woman to help members of her community, how she gained their respect, and how she became a role model for other women in the process:

Since I learned how to read and write, I have gained a lot of respect and power in my village. Many women come to me with questions and want help with decision-making. I help to bargain for better deals for business credit for them and I even write their names for them at the health clinic. I am sure many women want to go and learn to read like me. Many people ask me for advice.⁴¹⁴

Although women were active prior to Barre's regime, their activism received positive attention from the government during the socialist period. For instance, Hawa Jabril was a poet and activist for many years prior to Barre's government. She actively participated

⁴¹³ Marwo Mohamed (April 24, 2000)

in the struggles for independence in Somalia. She used poetry to mobilise people against the Italian colonial power during 1940s and 1950s and to challenge the governments before Barre to introduce policies on gender equality during 1960s. She was recognised as a gifted poet by the state and received a silver national medal for her role in the nationalist movement in 1979.

Through their participation in various national campaigns and programs, women in urban settings slowly began to be aware of their legal rights. According to Raqiya, these women “became equipped to question gender inequalities in the existing social systems and institutions. State policies provided them with the tools to respond to the possibility of a life that did not bind them to the family and kin authority.”⁴¹⁵

State sponsored Initiatives

SWDO was a powerful organization and people were afraid of it. .. It had a political say, this is not a joke, you know.⁴¹⁶

SWDO had the family law committees in all courts. They educated women about their rights, accompanied them to the court and supported them throughout the legal process. They had much authority. They raised awareness on women’s issues among the general public. Men were particularly afraid of the organization. We often tried to analyse situations and not to be gender biased. However, men generally just hated the idea of their authority being questioned.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁴ Quoted in Daphne Williams Ntiri. "Experimenting with Family Life Centers in Africa's Development: A Case Study of Rural Women in Somalia, East Africa." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, vol. 21, Autumn 1991, p, 85.

⁴¹⁵ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

⁴¹⁶ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

⁴¹⁷ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

Many of the participants were distinctly aware of and quick to point out the differences between the two Somali governments. The former did not deem women's issues important enough to warrant public attention. However, the latter government officially announced, albeit sometimes only rhetorically, policies that promised women an improvement of their position in the family and society. The women interviewed were quick to articulate these differences between the two types of post-colonial regimes and the implications for women.

Dahabo Farah, Raqiya Haji Dualeh, and Fadumo Alim understood that improvement in women's position under socialism, as compared to pre-Barre periods, was a result of the Government's willingness to address social inequalities. They still sharply distinguish between the previous two governments and Barre's, which differed in substance and quality, in terms of before and after Barre. According to Fadumo,

Although we have been actively involved in women's issues decades prior to Barre, his government provided us a space, however limited, to voice our concerns. Also, his government's social and legal policies have given us the tools to move ahead with our objective of women's social, economic, and political empowerment.⁴¹⁸

Contrasting the two periods, participants reported an important shift in the significance of the women's rights issue in Somalia. While in the first period, women's status had not received national attention, in the second period, although it was part of a broader political project of nation building, the state sponsored many programs that tackled women's issues and championed women's emancipation. Many of the participants agreed

⁴¹⁸ Fadumo Alim (May 11, 2002).

that women did appreciate the fact that this government provided them with a unique opportunity which had not been available during the first period. As one interviewee said:

There was not a role for women in the previous government. What helped us during Barre's regime were the espousal of socialism as the national ideology and the pronouncement of the *sinnaanta ragga iyo dumarka* (gender equality policies). We pursued these policies and made sure they were not forgotten and were implemented properly. We were everywhere making sure people understood and implemented these policies. The regime was forced to listen to us.⁴¹⁹

Another woman concurred by talking about the importance of this period for women's history and struggles in Somalia by saying,

There is no comparison [between the two post-colonial regimes and their policies towards women]. The latter regime (Barre's) may have had major problems later on, you see. Clan politics may have been exploited, there may have been fragmentation in terms of national unity, they may have been political movements against it, and the President may have become dictator. However, there were still major differences between the prior government and Barre's in terms of gender issues. The latter government [Barre's] was better for women. There cannot be any comparisons between the two regimes!⁴²⁰

The simple fact that this state acknowledged that women were oppressed within the family and society was a step up for many female activists. The Somali Women's Democratic Organization (SWDO) was an important state established institution that addressed some of women's concerns at local, national, and international levels.⁴²¹ The creation of the organization was an important step forward for women, as recognised by many, "in their long struggle to escape the suffocation of patriarchal domination and the old culture of genuflection and silence."⁴²² SWDO contributed to women's activism and politicisation through its various grassroots activities. The organization had branches

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Hawo Jabril (October 12, 1996).

⁴²¹ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996); Raqiya Dualeh (April 4, 2001); Fadumo Alim (March 11, 2002); Amina Abdulle (December 27, 1999); and Halima Abade (February 6, 2000).

⁴²² Ahmed I. Samatar. *Socialist Somalia...* p. 111.

throughout the nation, in the capital city, in all districts, as well as rural settings. It provided numerous programs intended to let women know what was available to them, from business and career opportunities to education and training, and to advocate for the empowerment and equality for women. Although it was essentially active around welfare issues,⁴²³ it also advocated equal rights for women. Through its various projects and training, SWDO initiated conscious-raising and led to grassroots mobilisation process.

The leadership was a mixture of educated women and self-made women initially recruited from the orientation centres. This gave the image that SWDO was not an elite-run organization with exclusive membership and that it was very much in touch with the grassroots. The leaders of the organisation have been described as "well informed, committed, and insightful about the needs of women in their communities; they frequently were significant agents of change."⁴²⁴ SWDO was effective in increasing women's awareness about their situation in the society and home. Local leaders used various media to inform women about their rights and encourage them to assert their newly achieved legal rights. Poetry and public speaking were two forms of oral media used at the orientation centres.

SWDO also reached the public through the printed media and radio. The organization published a journal once every year. The journal, entitled *Himilo* (aspirations), featured

⁴²³ Through training and financial assistance, the SWDO helped many women with the development and creation of small income generating projects like a dye factory, weaving and selling mats, hats etc. (Barbara Fulford (December 20, 2000).

⁴²⁴ Merryman. "Women's Welfare in the Jubba Valley..." p. 193.

articles discussing women's issues.⁴²⁵ Various topics that dealt with women's concerns were also presented on the national radio. According to Dahabo Farah, who was the first Secretary of SWDO, activist women were able to push for their agenda within the organisation and later through other Ministers and programs.⁴²⁶ They fought for the repeal of practices that harmed women and of laws that discriminated against them. For instance, they were able to bring forth the issue of FGM. Socialist countries, like Ethiopia and the Former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, viewed sexuality as a private matter and refused to confront the issue because of fear of provoking the hostility of conservative sectors of the population.⁴²⁷ In contrast to this general refusal to deal with the issue in socialist countries in the Third World, SWDO convinced the Somali State to directly intervene in this matter.⁴²⁸ For instance the government fully supported the national campaign initiated by SWDO in collaboration with the Italian Association for Women and Development (AIDoS). The national efforts to eliminate FGM have received international attention. Fran Hosken, who is the author of a number of publications⁴²⁹ on the issues, stated

⁴²⁵ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001)

⁴²⁶ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996)

⁴²⁷ Maxine Molyneux. "Family Reform in Socialist States..."

⁴²⁸ Female genital mutilation (FGM) involves cutting parts of women's genitalia. The severity of it and the parts that are cut depends on the type, varying from making incisions on the clitoris, cutting the labia majora, to cutting both the labia majora and the labia minora and sewing it together leaving a small opening for urine and menses. Over one hundred million women around the world are affected by this practice. FGM has serious to deadly health consequences for women. Some of these health complications include shock, haemorrhage, urine retention, urinary tract infection, and painful sexual and childbirth complications. On November 1990, at the Inter-African committee Regional Conference, *Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children: "How Far Forward,"* in Addis Ababa, the delegates recommended that since the terms "female circumcision" and "excision" could be misleading and may not fully describe the extent of the practice, they must be replaced by "FGM."

⁴²⁹ See Fran P. Hosken. *The Hosken Report: Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Females*, 1983; She is also editor of *Women's International Network News*, a quarterly journal on women and development worldwide.

[E]very department of the Somalian [sic] government is involved in this national initiative led by the outspoken president of SWDO, who wields considerable political power... It took considerable courage to take up this issue. Thanks to the perseverance of its leadership, it now has become a national campaign supported not only by the Health Ministry, but also by the Ministry of Education and others [these included Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs]. The campaign to eradicate FC/GM is going on in all the schools; it is discussed on the radio and TV. Indeed, no occasion is missed to create awareness among the population about the damage done by infibulation; all families are urged to stop having their daughters 'done'.⁴³⁰

Hosken referred to Somalia's campaign against the practice as groundbreaking and "an example for the leadership in other African countries where these practices prevail."⁴³¹

She goes on to say,

It took time, considerable perseverance, a deep commitment, as well as great skill to implement the 1979 WHO Seminar recommendations to abolish these practices: the present national Action Campaign in Somalia is one direct result. SWDO-AIDoS⁴³² programme for action is an example for the rest of the many African countries where FC/FGM is still practised today by a substantial number of families.⁴³³

Conclusions from this government initiative should be drawn cautiously, however. While it was the state that publicly put the issue on agenda, without women's initiatives and activism and the groundwork done by them, state intervention would not necessarily have taken place. According to Dahabo Farah, this change in policy was the outcome of many years' lobbying, much of which predated Barre's regime.⁴³⁴

For instance, Raqiya Haji Dualeh, Former Director of Culture in the Somali Ministry of Culture and Higher Education who was one of the activists against the practice of FGM,

⁴³⁰ Fran Hosken. "Somalia campaigns to eradicate infibulation." *People*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1989, p. 31.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² AIDoS (the Italian Association for Women and Development) provided financial support to SWDO to undertake the campaign against FGM in Somalia

⁴³³ Fran P. Hosken. "Somali women organize to end female circumcision." *Development Forum*, March-April, 1989, p. 19.

⁴³⁴ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

wrote in her book that she aimed to convince “people and government of the need to eradicate the custom”.⁴³⁵ Raqiya further argued that by providing accurate information about its negative physical and emotional effects on women and girls, she sought to “help bring about significant actions, including legislation, to eradicate the practice.”⁴³⁶ Because of advances in education, the growing public spirit of change, and vigorous debates on women’s issues, female activists who previously dealt with issues of sexuality behind closed doors were able to bring it out in public. They began to openly challenge what they considered repressive, oppressive, and harmful practices with regard to health and sexuality.⁴³⁷ Despite initial social resistance, SWDO organised public forums and workshops throughout the country to discuss such previously taboo subjects as FGM, and also polygamy across the country.

Consequently, people’s attitudes towards the practice slowly began to change. Raqiya pointed out,

[T]he taboo and secrecy surrounding the continuation of this brutal practice, the unwillingness of those involved in it to face reality, and the excuse that cultural practices are sacrosanct, are no longer convincing to many women today. They realise that action must be taken now, against this mutilation which humiliates and degrades them. Their former silence was not because they did not experience pain and suffering, but because they were unaware that other alternatives to silent acceptance did exist.⁴³⁸

As Warsame, Ahmed, and Talle also comment, a significant indicator of people’s changing attitudes with regards to the issues was “the breaking of the silence surrounding

⁴³⁵ Abdalla. *Sisters in Affliction...* p. 3.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

⁴³⁸ Abdalla. *Sisters in Affliction...* p. 2.

it as many people start questioning its social and cultural significance and validity. Just ten years ago or so, female circumcision was not at all an area of discussion".⁴³⁹

SWDO was also active in the campaign to raise women's awareness about their rights within the family. Every SWDO branch in all the regions and districts had Family Law Committees. The Committee's main mandate was to educate women about their rights and to support them throughout legal processes. According to the participants, the SWDO had power and men hated this.⁴⁴⁰ The orientation centres also provided platforms where women could openly discuss issues that were of concern to them. Some of these were gender-based issues, such as male violence, FGM, and polygamy; others were class-based, such as poverty and wages. Women were energetically involved in community development and in social improvement activities that were taking place at their district level. Involvement in various local political activities had paved the way for other fields. Local feminist discourse articulating many women's perspectives had emerged through these processes.⁴⁴¹

The activities at various levels provided an opportunity for many women to gain better knowledge of the laws and to challenge the laws and socio-cultural structures that placed them in a subordinate position in society. In addition, many women, who did not have opportunities to have access to education, obtained a chance to improve their lives through participation in local politics and activities. For instance, many were able to take

⁴³⁹ Amina Mahamuud Warsame, Sadia Muse Ahmed and Aud Talle. *Social and Cultural Aspects of Female Circumcision and Infibulation: A Preliminary Report*. Women's Research Unit, Somali Academy of Sciences and Arts (SOMAC). Mogadishu/ Stockholm, November 1985.

⁴⁴⁰ Hawa Jabril (December 29, 1999); Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996); Raqiya Haji Dualeh. (April 4, 2001).

adult education at night and access paid employment.⁴⁴² According to Amina Abdulle, who was very active at the local level, these jobs were generally odd jobs for uneducated, poor, and older women.

Requests for different positions were sent from the main office (SWDO's) to our local offices. We used to see poor women who needed jobs and then we would distribute the employment among them. .. Janitors, office cleaning, working at schools, at banks, ministries wherever there was job opening... We used to see who needs the jobs most and then give the jobs accordingly.⁴⁴³

Although many of the participants pointed out that Barre's regime compared favourably with the previous regime, they also acknowledged that many of the changes were possible only because women were active in either challenging or reminding the state to honour its declared policies of gender equality. Hence, despite the fact that women did find Barre's regime much better when it came to their particular issues, they still challenged the state to do better.⁴⁴⁴

Women's activism: Collective efforts

During the period under discussion, the Somali government, as in many other Third World countries, was a major determinant of women's legal and economic status. However, it is important to understand that women were not passive recipients of state policies. They were active agents and social actors who attempted, at various levels, to change and contest the material and cultural factors that circumscribed their lives.

⁴⁴¹ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

⁴⁴² Amina Abdulle. (December 27, 1999).

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

Women worked (both individually and collectively) against overwhelming odds, for deeply embedded gender ideologies could not be easily changed.

Many women actively challenged the status quo, pressured the government to reform its policies towards gender and, on many occasions, called upon the state to honour its declared commitment to gender equality. According to one of the participants, had it not been for women, Barre would not have introduced the gender laws. It was women who challenged him to introduce the changes he had promised in the socialist framework. Gender activist women orchestrated much of the gender policies introduced during this period.⁴⁴⁵

For instance, in 1971, right after socialism was proclaimed, women activists took upon themselves to draft a new family law providing women with greater rights within the family. Raqiya Haji Dualeh and Fadumo Alim discussed in great detail the many meetings in the underground at the Somali National University. Raqiya explains,

One of us worked at the university then, so we used to sit and talk. We provided detailed analysis and comments once a week for two years. We wrote a memorandum to the Socialist Revolutionary Council as a group of women who took the initiative of studying, commenting on and revisiting the family law. We made an appeal for an immediate action to finalise the family law. We also asked for open and public discussions on the law. After a while the Family Law Commission was created. Some of our group was invited. Fadumo Alim, Dahabo Farah and I, along with other men were members of the Commission. We worked very hard to lobby politicians and get public support. The Chair of the Commission was the Minister of Justice and Religion Affairs. In 1974, we had our last meeting. In January 1975, the Family Law was announced to the public.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁵ Fadumo Alim (October 12, 1996).

⁴⁴⁶ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

Although women's autonomous political initiatives were generally discouraged, many women participated in national organisations and the state-sponsored women's organization (SWDO). These women became active and politicised through the process. However, the process of politicisation began prior to this period and continued with women like Dahabo Farah, Fadumo Alim, Raqiya Haji Dualeh, and Hawo Jabril struggling for greater representation of women at every level of the political and social arena.⁴⁴⁷ These women also fought for equitable and effective participation in all levels of government. According to the participants, women's discourses at the level of the women's organization were grounded in and emerged from their particular experiences of discrimination and oppression based on gender.

Hawo Jabril was one of the women who were very active at both the local and national levels. Hawo was a well-respected poet and one of her roles was to educate women about and encourage them to claim their newly recognised legal rights. She explains,

I tried to tell women that they must claim the legal rights promised by the government [in the family law]. I told them that they must speak out when they are mistreated [by their husbands or the society]. They have to construct their identity, protect their dignity and show their strength. I told them that in situations where they are divorced arbitrarily, they must challenge their husbands and say, “the law says that divorce cannot take place without our consent and unless there is a good reason like abandoning our home and children.”⁴⁴⁸

In the following poem, Hawo reminds women that they must understand the dynamics of the society and that they must show a united front when challenging traditional gender roles otherwise they [women] deserve what they get [mistreatment] and men will get away with ill-treating women.

⁴⁴⁷ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

*Kuwaa seddexdooda lagu yeershay sabab la'aan
 Sidii gacantaasoon saxur saaxur lagu ogayn
 Raggana la su'aAlim meeshay ku sugan yihiin
 Ee dhib badan baa in sugaysee ha seexanina
 Kumandoos salalaya oo saamaha isla hela
 oo salaan bixinihaya oo qalbigooda saafi yahay
 haddaan saansaankeennu u ekaanin
 ina sallima nimanku waxay nagu sameeyeenna inaku suge
 ee dhib badan baa ina sugaysee ha seexanina.*

Some women are divorced without a reason
 They are sent empty handed [with no finances to fall back on]
 No one dares to ask the men their whereabouts
 From the state of things we are bound to face lots of difficulties
 So please be alert.

Unless we conduct ourselves like a well trained army,
 Who do not miss a step when marching
 Who are ready physically and emotionally
 We would continue to be subservient and we deserve it
 So please be alert.⁴⁴⁹

Barre was continuously challenged by the Marxist ideologues (both men and women) as well as women who pressured him to include women in his socialist program. These groups negotiated with the state and contested the marginalization of women at all levels of government. They often reminded policy makers to implement the declared social equality by constantly asking "is this a government by men and for men?" at official meetings. Activist women were not apologetic in asking for their rights; they frequently reminded the male-dominated government that the inclusion of women was a necessary step towards nation building. According to one of the participants, Barre was forced to take the young Marxist ideologues seriously because he needed them for the conceptualization of his programs and their implementations.⁴⁵⁰ As Raqiya Haji Dualeh points out in an article in *Himilo*, the women's journal by SWDO,

⁴⁴⁸ Hawo Jabril (December 29, 999).

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

[T]he emancipation of women is not an act of charity, the liberation of women is a fundamental necessity for the Somali Revolution, the guarantee of its continuity, the condition for its final victory. The liberation and participation of women in national development assures the establishment of sound economic, social, political and cultural foundations.⁴⁵¹

However, women could not easily articulate their concerns in public forums. Participants pointed out that they often had to use the “legitimate forums” to raise their concerns.

According to Fadumo Alim,

[W]e had to sometimes be part of the pro-government propaganda to get what we wanted. Although we were thankful for the venues [social policies] provided by the government, it was not easy playing the politics all the time. We were often accused of being anti-revolutionary and we were perceived as a threat to the government.⁴⁵²

Women activists understood clearly the context within which they were operating. They understood the patriarchal nature of the Somali political systems (even after socialism was officially proclaimed). They also understood the intricacies of the male-dominated Somali society and what “language” and forms of resistance were considered appropriate. One of the participants mentioned Barre himself was often exasperated by their insistence on inclusion of women's issues in various government programs and agendas. He said, "it is much easier to work with older women who ‘understand’ than young radical women like you."⁴⁵³

This did not mean women activists were not clear about their concerns or were afraid of challenging male dominance. It simply meant that they manipulated the situation and used the “appropriate” means to challenge the system. For instance, it was quite difficult

⁴⁵⁰ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

⁴⁵¹ Raqiya Haji Dualeh. “The Legal Status of Somali Women.” *Himilo* (Aspiration), Somali Women’s Democratic Organization, March 1984, p. 11.

⁴⁵² Fadumo Alim (May 11, 2002).

for the Somali society at that stage to accept young women who spoke “loud” on women’s issues. So, women activists did not mind (in fact pushed for) the nomination of a less educated, older, and more traditional looking woman to be the President of the SWDO. According to Raqiya, “we worked closely to sensitise Murayo Garaad [the president of SWDO] about the complexity of issues facing women in the Somali society. We also worked closely with her, provided technical assistance when necessary, and provided support as needed. Murayo later became a vocal spokesperson for women and their issues.”⁴⁵⁴

In addition, while many women welcomed gender policies, they were not naive enough to believe these policies would automatically translate into full equality within the Somali society. Many were sceptical about the ability of legislation to change women’s real life conditions. They saw legal reforms only as a necessary step in a long and difficult journey to emancipate women. This short poem by Hawo Jabril illustrates women’s reluctant stance in the promised gender equality.

*Sadkii naga maqnaa oo aan saluugsanayn
Siyaad wuxuu yiri ragga waad la simantihiin
Ee dhibaato badan ina sugaysee ha seexanina*

Our overdue right has been recognised
Siyaad said you are equal to men
But we have a long way to go so please be alert ⁴⁵⁵

Others observed that the reinforcement of the laws fell short of Barre’s promise to full participation in state construction. So they took an assertive part in critiquing government

⁴⁵³ Quoted by Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

⁴⁵⁴ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

⁴⁵⁵ Hawo Jabril (December 29, 1999).

policies on gender. The following poem by Hawo Jabril illustrates the discrepancy between the rhetoric and the reality and calls upon the Secretary General, Barre himself, to honour his declared commitment to gender equality.

*Xoghaye guudow go'aankaagii waxaa ku jirey "haweenku waa garab aan maangaabku garanayn"
Waxaa gobollada iyo golaha dhexe ku jira laba gabdhood weeye gar Ilaah miyaa?
Sow ka guban meysid qeybteenna gaasirka ah?
Mase gaf baa dhacoo gadaal baad ka soo waddaa?*

O! Mr. Secretary General, you declared, "women are power that the narrow minded cannot appreciate"
Is it fair that there are only two women in the Central Committee?
Doesn't this political inequality bother thee?
Or is it an error to be rectified later?⁴⁵⁶

Attempts to change social perceptions

The progressive forces in Somali society fully supported the struggles of women against all forms of exploitation and oppression. However, the conservatives wanted the maintenance of the status quo. Women's increasingly public visibility, in terms of education, employment and even political activity, was acceptable so long as it did not challenge the traditional gender ideologies. While the regime had taken steps to challenge the prevalent inequality, the gender policies introduced had only limited impact. According to Raqiya Haji Dualeh, the policies only scratched the surface because of the embeddedness of gender inequality in Somalia. For instances, most people were afraid

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

that their daughters would not find husbands if they departed visibly from traditional roles.⁴⁵⁷

As in many other countries, the social policies introduced by the state were unable to address the sexual division of labour at the domestic level. Despite the efforts to raise awareness within the society and appeals to public opinion, many men were unwilling to relinquish authority over their family. Raqiya, former Deputy Minister of Health, argues that while many women benefited in theory from the policies introduced, "unless there's a change in the attitudes of men, the rights will be difficult to implement."⁴⁵⁸ "Men's thinking is changing, but not as much as women's," she said. "They don't help at home. For many men, it is an insult to be in the kitchen or help with the children."⁴⁵⁹

As gender roles were not completely challenged, women faced the burdens of the "double work day." Fatuma Omar Hashi, former chairwoman of Parliament's Social Affairs Committee, said women in politics find their double role very difficult. "The woman has to care for her children, her house, her husband, then do her job as a politician, then get criticised for coming home late," she maintained. This was quite costly to women. As Fatuma explains, this double day of work has emotional implications for women. "She can get depressed mentally and physically."⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001); See also Ministry of Information. *The Role of Our Socialist Women*. Ministry of Information and Guidance, Mogadishu, 1974, p. 8.

⁴⁵⁸ Quoted in David Creary. "Somalia women Buck Islamic Tradition to Advance with Government Help." *The Associated Press*, January 25, 1986.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

In addition, women paid a price for their political participation in ways that men did not.⁴⁶¹ They faced all sorts of harassment and public ridicule as well as negative sexual or political labelling if they raised feminist issues and were scorned for assertiveness. Participants agreed that there was a great cost to the newly achieved progress; women endured physical abuse, social ostracism and/or public ridicule.⁴⁶² The following song, sung by little children, points to the sort of social scorn that women who decided to be active outside of the home generally faced, *Waa hooyo, waa hoogto oo waa habar dhillo* (she is a mother,⁴⁶³ she is cursed and she is a prostitute).⁴⁶⁴ Although this song was sung on the streets of Burro and Hargaisa, by the little children, its lyrics reflect a generally sexist adult attitude within Somali society.

Women who wanted to exercise their legal rights were repeatedly intimidated by the same people who were supposed to enforce gender laws. For instance, when women went to the courts to get divorce from husbands who mistreated them, they were often asked, *ma sidii Ilaahay yiri baad rabtaa mise sidii kacaanku yiri* (do you want a ruling according to the Quran or according to the revolutionary laws).” According to Raqiya Haji Dualeh, these were attempts to coerce women into changing their minds and to discourage them from going through the court system to get justice.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶¹ The size of the cost that women paid for their political participation was often affected by their social class, family background, or financial autonomy.

⁴⁶² Shukria Samatar (December 20, 1999); Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

⁴⁶³ Mother in this context means women who were active at the local politics. They were often referred to as *hooyooyinka* (the mothers).

⁴⁶⁴ Ikram Jama (December 17, 1999).

⁴⁶⁵ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

Women who were active were also blamed for all the social and economic miseries experienced by the general population during the latter period of Barre's regime. Women did not, however, accept the social criticism for their activism lying down. Many responded by resisting the status quo and arguing what they "deserved" and their rights in various ways. One of the mechanisms used by some to voice their own opinions about the social changes taking place during this period was oral poetry and songs.⁴⁶⁶

Although Somalis have been deemed a "nation of bards" by many scholars,⁴⁶⁷ women's voices in poetry were previously only deemed culturally appropriate in the realm of the private and the familial. Women were marginalized and denied expression within the cultural domain.⁴⁶⁸ The genre of poetry that was the domain of women was the *burambur*. An important development during this period was the participation of women in poetry that had political themes. This was "an unprecedented privilege in comparison to the classical era."⁴⁶⁹ Many Somali women became empowered and politicised through this process of cultural expression.⁴⁷⁰

Many women received awards and national recognition for their poetry talents - a form of artistic expression that had previously not been available to them. Women participated in Somali folk exhibitions and presentations touring Arab countries and socialist countries

⁴⁶⁶ Hawa Jabril (December 29, 1999).

⁴⁶⁷ See B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis. *Somali Poetry: An Introduction*. London: Clarendon Press, 1964 and John William Johnson. *"Heellooy": Modern Poetry and Songs of the Somali*. London: Haan Publishing, 1996.

⁴⁶⁸ For an analysis of lack of women's voices in mainstream Somalia poetry see Jama. "Fighting to be Heard..."; and Kapteijns with Maryan Omar Ali. *Women's Voices in a Man's World...*

⁴⁶⁹ "Social Communications." *Women and Children in Somalia: A Situational Analysis*. UNICEF, Mogadishu, Somalia, 1987. p. 173.

⁴⁷⁰ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001)

and in Asia, Africa and Europe. These tours to various countries gave women more freedom of movement and exposure to different women's realities.⁴⁷¹

As Kapteijns observed, we see a distinctly “feminist subject who explicitly articulated and proudly asserts a new ideology of women’s rights and solidarity.”⁴⁷² Men’s right to constrain women's rights was vigorously resisted in songs and in plays. An analysis of these songs illustrates gender division on issues. Men often supported traditional gender relations in which women were bound by family and kin, while women advocated changes in the family/kin structures that oppressed women. In the following song the man blames women for "destroying our heritage and customary law."

[I]t was Eve who was the first to start the deceitful tricks of women
 And it was she who threw Adam out of Paradise, as Tradition [Hadith] states
 You follow the precepts of Carraweelo - it is you women who treat us badly
 And destroy the bond of our heritage and our customary law
 And it is you who pervert the order which marriage used to have.⁴⁷³

The woman responds by referring to men's long monopoly on religious knowledge and manipulation of religion to oppress women.

For the evil which ruins the bonds of our heritage, oh men
 It is you who are to blame, you who at one moment boast of your manhood
 And at another assert your strength, or falsify religion to your own ends.
 This is true and women now realise it
 If you held fast to those you have chosen
 And kept to what is lawful for you, women would not transgress
 It is you who bear the guilt. Can you not become responsible creatures?

The songs and poetry also illustrate the emergence of a sense of collective voice and gender consciousness among women. In the following song, the female singer talks about

⁴⁷¹ Ministry of Information. *The Role of Our Socialist* ...p. 30.

the way men generally mistreat women. She speaks of the fact that she, as a woman, feels pain by this mistreatment.

We have gained our freedom and gathered our rights; that you should bridle us
And shackle us – is it right, is it licit for you, is it lawful?
If a hot-tempered husband denies his wife kind treatment, it is all women who are hurt
That we should be badly treated – is it right, is it licit for you, is it lawful?⁴⁷⁴

In the following song the man reminisces the good old days:

In the old days it was custom/to pay as bridewealth for a girl
A whole herd of camels
And the most exceptional horse
And a rifle on top of that
But something has changed
You are self-absorbed
And ignore the advice of your family of birth.⁴⁷⁵

The woman responds by saying that she does not want to go back to the so-called “good old days” where women were “exchanged for a herd of camels...”

Girls used to be exchanged for a herd of camels and short-legged goats
But the religion we learned and the Quran have not allowed for this
Today we have no need for those who deal in what they do not own
And for this old-fashioned dividing up of women.⁴⁷⁶

While women activists took bold steps in challenging the traditional gender ideologies, given the social milieu, they had to move cautiously. Despite the raging public debates that revealed how much society was preoccupied by gender relations, women activists tried to avoid the backlash they knew would handicap the progress they worked so hard to achieve. The following lines are from a long poem by Hawo Jabril, which was

⁴⁷² Kapteijns with Ali. *Women's Voices in a Man's World...* p. 148.

⁴⁷³ Ibid. p. 149.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 156.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 244.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 175.

encouraging women to demand their rights and beware of being mistreated by men. Given the social context, Hawo found it necessary to add a section assuring the public that her intentions were not to break up families.

*Su'aalahu ma aha saygiinna inaad nacdaan,
Ee aqalkaa nabad lagu sameeyaaye samir ha jiro,
Oo u saai'idiya noloshaad ku sugan tihiin
Oo Ilaahay ha idin sudansiyo (waafijiyo) saxarlayaal
Ee dhib badan baa idin sugaysee ha seexanina.⁴⁷⁷*

The goal is not to hate your men
A home is built on peace and patience the foundation of peace
Work hard at improving your lives
And may God assist you in your journey
So please be alert.⁴⁷⁸

Due to activist women's insistence on their objectives and ideals and the space provided by State policies, Somali women's knowledge of their legal rights and their exercise of agency in using the system to their own advantage has increased, mostly in urban areas, during this period. Many women participated in the national campaigns that were intended to transform the economy of the country from its dependence on capitalism to "self-reliant". As a result, the social as well as legal status of many women, particularly those in the urban settings, improved. In addition, as the extended family, which often included other kin relations, began to slowly weaken, women's loyalty shifted, to a limited extent, from the kinship to the state and they assumed public identity apart from the private ones of kin and community. Unfortunately, the gains made by women during the socialist period were short-lived.

⁴⁷⁷ Hawo Jabril (April 12, 2001)

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

“Things fall apart”

A number of socio-economic achievements contributed to the initial popularity of Siad Barre. These included the introduction of the Somali orthography, nation-wide literacy campaigns, introduction of universal education, legislated gender equality policy, and greater levels of government support for the productive sectors, from livestock to fisheries and light industries. However, the economic and political gains of the regime’s early years were erased. Among the contributing factors were: a disastrous defeat in the 1977 war with Ethiopia, changing cold war politics,⁴⁷⁹ IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs,⁴⁸⁰ worsening economy and an overly-politicized public. To hold on to power, the government increasingly became more and more authoritarian.

As an attempt to maintain absolute power, Barre’s regime heavily relied on military force to crush all opposition and engaged in political repression that led to “the undermining of any form of civil action not sanctioned by the state, and the dismantling of centres of authority.”⁴⁸¹ The political authority also engaged in a systematic oppression through the manipulation of clan identities; using it to simultaneously search support from those with whom it shared kinship ties and persecuting those it considered enemy (sometimes including those from the same clan) and to use clanism as a tool to divide and rule.⁴⁸² The Somali government “had become little more than a clanistic operation... its rulers having

⁴⁷⁹ Jeffrey A. Lefebvre. *Arms for the Horn: U.S. Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia, 1953-1991*. Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburg Press, 1991.

⁴⁸⁰ Michel Chossudovsky. *The Globalisation of Poverty: Impacts and World Bank Reforms*. Penang, Malaysia: Third World Network, 1997.

⁴⁸¹ Nat J. Colletta and Michelle L. Cullen. *Violent Conflict and the Transformation of Social Capital: Lessons from Cambodia, Rwanda, Guatemala, and Somalia*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 2000, p. 158.

⁴⁸² Terrence Lyons and Ahmed I. Samatar. *Somalia: State Collapse, Multilateral Intervention, and Strategies for Political Reconstruction*. Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995, p. 14.

absolutely no compunction about their vulgarization of power.”⁴⁸³ This dictatorial repression resulted in the politicization of the clan⁴⁸⁴ and the formation of numerous armed opposition factions based on clan membership and loyalty. This disregard of basic liberties, the institutionalization of corruption, the formation of clan-based opposition militias, also precipitated a process whereby, as Samatar points out, clanism acquired “a life of its own” that transformed it into an “active agent for a narrow common identity among some at the deadly exclusion of others”.⁴⁸⁵ This organisation along clan lines, as several scholars agree,⁴⁸⁶ is a new phenomenon “not only quite different from the kinship of old... but, in fact, is a manifestation of other things that have gone awfully wrong in Somalia.”⁴⁸⁷ This new social phenomenon of regrouping along clan lines, was also fraught with “suspicion and liable to foster violent degeneration against itself”.⁴⁸⁸

The resulting social, economic and political crises culminated in a full-fledged civil war in 1988. On May 27, a civil war broke out in Hargeisa, the second largest city in the county, as the regime attempted to suppress one of the opposition groups, the Somali National Movement (SNM). The civil war in the north that claimed the lives of tens of thousands of civilians and completely destroyed cities⁴⁸⁹ was “key in the gathering storm

⁴⁸³ Ahmed Ismail I. Samatar. “The Curse of Allah...” p. 117.

⁴⁸⁴ Charles Gesheker. “The Death of Somalia in Historical Perspective.” Hussein M. Adam & Richard Ford. *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st Century*. Lawrenceville, NJ.: The Red Sea Press Inc., 1997, pp. 65-98.

⁴⁸⁵ Ahmed I. Samatar. “Introduction and Overview.” Ahmed Samatar (ed) *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?*. Boulder, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994, p. 9

⁴⁸⁶ See also Catherine Besteman. “Representing Violence and ‘Othering’ Somalia.” *Cultural Anthropology*. Vol. 11, no. 1, 1996; Abdi Samatar. “Destruction of State and Society in Somalia: Beyond the Tribal Convention. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. Vol. 30, no. 4, 1992, (pp. 625-641).

⁴⁸⁷ Samatar. “Introduction....” P. 9.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Full a report on the extent of the physical devastation of cities and the violations of human rights violation committed by the state apparatus, see the Africa Watch report *A Government At War with Its Own*

of explosive discontent and eventual implosion.”⁴⁹⁰ In November 1990, widespread fighting occurred in Mogadishu leading to Barre's exile in January 1991. The factions engaged in an unprecedented destruction and there was an increased level of inter-clan violence. The Somali social, economic and political systems disintegrated, the state collapsed completely, and the country has fallen into a decade of chaotic lawlessness.

These turn of events prompted the international community to describe Somalia as the worst humanitarian crisis in Africa. Violence claimed the lives of more than a half-million unarmed civilians,⁴⁹¹ including many children, in Mogadishu, the capital city. Tens of thousand others were wounded or maimed by the violence caused by the warring factions.⁴⁹² By 1992, an Amnesty International report warned that “the spectre of devastating famine looms over the entire country” and another 2.5 million Somalis were affected by food shortages starvation. By 1993, 60 percent of the country's basic infrastructure was destroyed and 80 percent of all social services (i.e. schools and hospitals) were damaged.⁴⁹³ The destruction of the country was so devastating that in the popular culture, Somalis refer to it as *burbur* (literally meaning "complete pulverization").⁴⁹⁴

People: Somalia, Testimonies about the killings and the Conflict in the North. Washington: Africa Watch Committee, 1990.

⁴⁹⁰ Samatar. “The Curse of Allah...”, p. 118.

⁴⁹¹ Sidney Waldon and Naima Hasci. *Somali Refugees in the Horn of Africa: State of the Art Literature Review*. University of Oxford, 1995, p. 9.

⁴⁹² Amnesty International. *Somalia: A Human Rights Disaster*. London: Amnesty International Publications, August 1992. /A/Index AFR 52/01/92.

⁴⁹³ Samatar. “Introduction...”, p. 4.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

In addition to the mass starvation, the continuous warfare led to the internal displacement of 2 million people and the fleeing of another close to one million refugees to neighbouring countries such as Djibouti, Kenya and Ethiopia, adding to the already overwhelming populations of refugees in the Horn of Africa.⁴⁹⁵ Those who fled the country were kept alive through emergency assistance and often lived in horrendous situations in refugee camps. In 1992, over 500 Somalis have died in camps in Kenya due to malnutrition and lack of basic medical care and hygiene.⁴⁹⁶

The fleeing of hundreds of thousands of Somalis as refugees was first in their long history. In the words of Samatar, “this is not the age of *tacabir* (adventure and ambition), it is the age of *qaxooti* (refugees and displacement)”.⁴⁹⁷ Women were particularly victimised in the civil war. In addition to losing family members, home, security, professional identity and/or social status, and experiencing general violence, many had been vulnerable to sexual violence. The following poem by Hawo Jabril captures some of the experiences and feelings of Somalis as they fled their homes to become refugees.

Dadkaygii iyo dalkaygii dulliga ku dhacay
Dad iyo duunyaba magaalooyin baa dam yiri
Afarta daafood dhulkaygii dab bee ka kacay...
Dhiigga daadanaya iyo meedkan dibadda yaal
Iyo dhaawacan daadsanoo daawo loo hayn
Waa dadkeenniiyoo, Soomaali dan uma aha
Qaxootiga dibada meraaya of dayacan
Oo dabaysh iyo dhaxant dhogortoodii doorsameen
Oo cudurka duumada iyo daacuunku ku dhacay
*Waa dadkeenniiyoo Soomaali dan uma aha*⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁵ Samatar. “Introduction...” p. 3.; Michelle Faul. “1.7 million Somali refugees caught in aftermath of war.” *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, October 24, 1993, p. A4.

⁴⁹⁶ Amnesty International. *Somalia: A Human Rights Disaster*.

⁴⁹⁷ Ahmed I. Samatar. “A current political analysis of the situation in the Horn of Africa and the state of the Somali refugees.” Paper presented at the International Congress of Somali Studies. Turku, Finland, August 6-9, 1998.

⁴⁹⁸ Hawo Jabril (April 4, 2001)

My people and my country have suffered (lost dignity)
There is fire in every corner
The blood that is flowing and the dead that are everywhere outside
And the injured that do not have medications
Those are our people, and it is not good for Somalis
Displaced and unprotected refugees
Whose bodies are discoloured because of cold.
Those are our people, and it is not good for Somalis

The Somalia situation came to the attention of the international community through Western media coverage of depressing scenes of emaciated bodies of famine victims. On December 3, 1992, the Security Council passed Resolution 794, approving the use of “all necessary means to establish as soon as possible a secure environment for humanitarian relief operation in Somalia.”⁴⁹⁹ In 1993, U.N peacekeeping troops, led by U.S. soldiers, occupied Somalia to deliver emergency assistance to hundreds of thousands of starving Somalis and to establish law and order in the country. This was the largest humanitarian military intervention in modern history. The international intervention provided much needed food to the famine victims and contributed to the end of hunger. However, the attempts to effectively make any changes in the Somalia situation have failed because “[t]he problem was never predominantly insufficient food but the absence of political authority and security for civil society to operate.”⁵⁰⁰ The U.N. also failed to understand the complexities of Somali local politics.

⁴⁹⁹ Lyons & Samatar. *Somalia...* p. 34.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 32.

Conclusion

Through collective as well as individual strategies, Somali women activists have made various attempts to challenge the traditional gender ideology that restricted them and constructed them not as citizens but solely as mothers, wives and sisters in 1970s and 1980s. These women questioned the assumptions of the traditional framework on women's roles by using the venues made available through social policies by the State during this period. Consequently, the form and the extent of women's activism expanded and women's political participation gained social approval, albeit limited and short lived, during this period.

However, despite the various women's activities to raise public consciousness and state-sponsored policies aimed at improving women's position in the society, the Somali society mainly remained socially conservative. On many occasions women had to pay personal prices for participating in the process of nation-building and claiming their rights. In the 1980s, ten years after the introduction of socialism, there were strong remains of the traditional gender ideology despite the emergence of new egalitarian models in the urban sector of the society.

Furthermore, the tragic events that unfolded in Somalia affected every aspect of Somali refugees' lives in the diaspora. Most importantly in this study, the reception (or lack thereof) received by Somalis contributed to their feeling of being unwelcome and excluded. Specifically, the media coverage of some aspects of Somali culture (i.e. FGM) culminated in the construction of Somali women as victims. However, this new label

given to Somali women masks their agency and their resistance throughout Somali history. Women's resistance against oppressive social and political systems spanned over a century in Somalia. They had engaged in many levels of struggles (at the individual and collective levels) both in Somalia and continued to do so in the diaspora as will be shown in the second part of this dissertation.

CHAPTER VI

Somalis in the diaspora: The Canadian context

Introduction

The Somali is a refugee, *malgre lui!*⁵⁰¹

Factors that precipitated escape from the violence of war were stressful and traumatising. Many had witnessed death of loved ones and other atrocities. The suddenness and the conditions of flight caused a host of psychological, social and cultural challenges to the Somali refugees, particularly women. For those who survived and were able to flee for their lives, the first stop outside the country was often a neighbouring country like Kenya and Ethiopia, where they were placed in refugee camps. Conditions in these camps were often horrendous. Although all refugees faced immense hardships, women became particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and violence in Somalia, during flight, and in refugee camps.⁵⁰²

Hundreds of thousands of Somalis became stranded in refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia. However, there were a number of lucky ones who were able to leave the difficult conditions in refugee camps. The ones that left the camps were often the educated, professional, resourceful people and those who had family members abroad.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰¹ Nuruddin Farah. *Yesterday, Tomorrow: Voices from the Somali Diaspora*. London & New York: Cassell, 2000, p. 103.

⁵⁰² Hamdi S. Mohamed. "Somali Refugee Women's Experiences in Kenyan Refugee Camps and their Plight in Canada." Hussein M. Adam & Richard Ford (eds.) *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st Century*. Lawrenceville, 1997, pp. 431-440.

⁵⁰³ Somalis who lived abroad at this point were mostly male migrant labourers who benefited from the oil boom in the Gulf States like Saudi Arabia and United Arab, those who were studying in Europe and North America, as well as a significant number of Somalis who, during the early 20th century, settled in Britain, which currently has the oldest Somali immigrant population.

Somalis who could afford to get out of refugee camps often went to wherever they could go based on the documents they had.⁵⁰⁴ These people had neither a fixed destination nor had they planned their departure. Physically displaced from their homes, they often moved from one location to the other. They usually made a few stops wherever their visas allowed them and tried from there to join their families already abroad, often in Europe and North America. Many of the Somalis who fled their homeland (sometimes stopping in a number of countries in between) came to Canada in search of a “safe haven”. They came as refugee claimants.

Aside from being a signatory to the *Geneva (UN) Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951), Canada's international image of having a compassionate attitude towards refugees is what attracted a large number of Somali refugees into large Canadian cities like Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. The flow of Somali refugees in the aftermath of their civil war represents the largest migration of people from any African nation to Canada.

The 1967 *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* defines a refugee as any person who "by reason of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group of political opinion." As signatory to this agreement, Canada has committed itself not to return “Convention refugee” (refugees as defined by the Geneva Convention) to countries where they fear persecution.

⁵⁰⁴ Because of the suddenness of their flight people were not often able to bring their documents with them. Once in refugee camps, there was no government that could issue documents such as passports because the state structure has completely collapsed. As a result many refugees were forced to use false documents provided to them at a cost.

In addition, because of the late 1980s official Canadian recognition of the human rights abuse in Somalia and the violence that engulfed their home country, Somalis received one of the highest acceptance rates of any national group during this period. Somalia was one of the top refugee/immigrant producing countries by early 1991 and Somalis represented 58 percent of the total intake of landed immigrants in Ottawa-Carleton from African sources in early 1990.⁵⁰⁵ By 1993, Somalis represented the largest group of new immigrants in the Ottawa-Carleton region, for instance.⁵⁰⁶

Because of the difficulty of obtaining travel documents, families often were forced to leave the husbands behind while the women accompanied the children to wherever their documents would take them. They came to Canada hoping they would be reunited with the rest of their families later. In addition, many men died during the civil war. As a result, it is often the women who bring the children to the asylum countries. Consequently, women and children⁵⁰⁷ represent a significant portion of the Somalis who came to Canada as refugees.

Like other refugees, particularly those from Africa, Somalis were socially constructed as problematic, a burden on the system, and culturally unequipped to adjust to life in the host country. In addition to challenges faced by all refugees, stemming from differences

⁵⁰⁵ Elizabeth Chin, Hamdi Mohamed & Beate Schifeer-Graham. *The World within Our City: A Study of Social Service Needs of Immigrants and Refugees in Gloucester*. Ottawa: Gloucester Center for Community Resources, 1992.

⁵⁰⁶ "Ottawa-Carleton hasn't seen such a sudden influx of newcomers since the region opened its heart to nearly 4,000 'boat people' from Southeast Asia more than a decade ago," said an article in the *Ottawa Citizen* (November 26, 1992). There are approximately 100,000 Somalis in Canada.

in culture and religion, Somalis were also targets of racial discrimination. These difficulties made it harder for Somalis to survive. This chapter explores the particular challenges Somalis have faced in Canada. Those difficulties had profound implications for their ability to be part of the larger society.

Reluctant Host: Canada's attitudes towards Somalis

A place where they speak a different language
 A place where there is no one related to you
 A place where you look different from everyone
 A place where your colour invites a stare from passers-by
 A place where nobody worships God
 Canada, a place more prosperous to hear about than to live in.⁵⁰⁸

Albaab furan lama galee weji furan. (open doors, closed faces)
 A Somali saying

The above poem powerfully captures the anxieties and the pain Somali refugees have felt about their social, cultural and religious difference in Canada in a society where they were alienated and socially isolated. It also points to feelings of uprootedness, disappointment, and loneliness. The Somali proverb points to the reception (or lack thereof) of Somalis to Canada. In addition to the personal barriers to integration, there are structural and social barriers that often hinder integration into the larger society. External factors slow down Somali women's overall adjustment capabilities. These include restrictive immigration policies, lack of access to trades and professions, lack of appropriate settlement services, and racial discrimination. Many Somalis had high expectations of Canada when they arrived. Many believed that Canada would be their "safe haven". They thought they would be able to feel safe, put their children to schools,

⁵⁰⁷ According to 1994 Immigration and Refugee Board Statistics, children younger than 18 years constitute 40 percent of Somali refugees in Canada.

find suitable employment, and finally live in peace. Unfortunately, it did not take them too long to realise that things were not going to be as smooth as they had hoped. As one woman said:

It looks like the grass is all green⁵⁰⁹ and everything is beautiful. You think now you can finally get on with your life. After living in refugee camps for so long and crossing so many borders, things will be fine and there will be peace (both physically and mentally). But we soon learn that things are not as easy as they look. While the grass is still green and nice, we did not know that there were so many thorns underneath the grass. You can't really see them, that is what makes them more dangerous and tricky.⁵¹⁰

The difficulties they faced upon their arrival have contributed to many Somalis feeling unwelcome in the host country. The first challenges Somalis faced when they arrived were the institutional barriers such as restrictive immigration policies.

Institutional barriers

The Bill C-86 of 1993 coincided with the huge influx of Somalis. There was no requirement [of identity document] prior to that. This was a racist measure aimed against Somali refugees. They [the government] knew they [Somalis] could not get papers [identity documents]. They [the government] just wanted to stop the black hordes from Somalia. Most refugee rights advocates consider it [the bill] a racist measure against Somalis. It violated the Charter of Rights. The Somali refugee claimants were treated unequally. Somali refugees are excluded from basic human rights guarantees of protection.⁵¹¹

We felt like being in a cage. We were allowed to come into the country but our lives were put on hold. We could not sponsor our family. I was separated from my husband for ten years. Some of my children finished high school but could not go to university [because

⁵⁰⁸ Quoted in Mohamoud H. Abdulle. *Somali Immigrants in Ottawa: The Causes of their Migration and the Challenges of Resettling in Canada*. M. A. Thesis, University of Ottawa, 2000, p, 66.

⁵⁰⁹ "The grass is green" is a commonly used Somali phrase that is based on pastoralism and refers to prosperity and rain, both of which are sought after and desired. In this context it refers to the expectations of peace and a good life as people come.

⁵¹⁰ A Somali woman at a community meeting in July 11, 2000, at Lower Town Community Resources Center in Ottawa where residents in the neighbourhood (most of the residents in the area live in social/subsidized housing) were invited to discuss their issues and concerns. Other community organisations like the Somali Center for Youth, Women and Community Development and Ottawa Housing was invited to the meeting, which intended to listen to community members and then develop appropriate programs for youth and women in the area.

⁵¹¹ Ahmed Hashi (Ottawa, May 16, 2001)

as Convention refugees they could not have access to student loans]. We waited and waited and nothing came. We suffered a lot.⁵¹²

They were in flight for their lives, with well-founded fears of persecution in their own country. But they could not become landed immigrants under the stricter terms of the new law... Many cannot even find self-supporting work in Canada, because employers are understandably wary of their backgrounds —and their future. Fixing the law is a necessity. To condemn true refugees to lives of needless solicitude is not fair.⁵¹³

The struggles of adaptation and attempts to create some sort of cohesion in fragmented families are compounded by institutional barriers such as the recent restrictive immigration policies and lack of access to trades and professions. The legislation, Bill C-86 of 1993, which mostly affects refugees from Somalia and Afghanistan, requires refugees to provide a “proper” identity document to qualify for permanent residency status. As Goodwin-Gill argues, Canadian immigration policy in this case is premised on the assumption that refugees should, and are able to, acquire documentation from the authorities in their country of origin.⁵¹⁴

The demands of the Bill are in conflict with the reality faced by the Somalis who were fleeing war situations. It is almost impossible to meet this particular requirement for various reasons. First, Somalis in Canada fled disastrous civil war and violence to come to Canada. It is an impossible task for a refugee fleeing a war situation to acquire passports or travel documents. Secondly, Somalis came from an oral culture where identity documents are not necessarily deemed important. People procure them only when it is absolutely necessary like when travelling abroad in peacetime. Thirdly, even if

⁵¹² Fadumo Elmi (Ottawa, January 19, 2002)

⁵¹³ *Ottawa Citizen*. June 15, 1996, B4.

⁵¹⁴ Guy S. Goodwin-Gill, “The 1951 Convention relating to the status of Refugees and the Obligations of States under articles 25, 27 and 28, with particular reference to refugees without identity or travel documents.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, May 2000.

Somali refugee claimants tried to meet the requirements of the provisions of the Immigration Act, there was no government left in Somalia and no functioning embassies abroad to issue these documents.

The Canadian government's rationale for introducing the provision was to discourage criminals from coming to Canada. The government was making an artificial link between criminality and lack of identity. However, the Bill had the opposite effect. People from Somalia were forced to look for identity document by all means, which, since there is no functioning state that would issue them, meant acquiring false documents. It was easier for the tiny minority of criminals to get identity documents.

Furthermore, by making Bill C-86 into law, Canada, as a signatory to the *Geneva Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, was in violation of its international obligations. Articles 27 and 28 of the Geneva Convention oblige states to issue identity papers and travel documents to any refugee residing in their territory. Article 27 states, "the contracting parties shall issue identity papers to any refugee in their territory who does not possess valid documents." This article, as Goodwin-Gill and Kumin point out, lays down a straightforward, unequivocal obligation on Contracting States, "making it clear that *every refugee* was intended to benefit from this provision."⁵¹⁵

Prior to this Bill, the Canadian government did issue identity documents for refugees. Convention refugees applying for permanent residence in Canada after being recognised

⁵¹⁵ Guy S. Goodwin-Gill and Judith Kumin. *Refugees in Limbo and Canada's International Obligations*. Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Ottawa, September 2000, p. 5.

by the Immigration and Refugee Board were exempt from furnishing identity documents in any particular form. A case in point is the European refugees during the World War II who were issued identity documents after their arrival in Canada. Refugees from Somalia were not granted the same protection under the law. “The requirement for identity documents is an important enforcement measure since identification is necessary to carry out criminal and security checks and to ensure that we keep out people who have committed crimes against humanity,” announced a government news release.⁵¹⁶ The Minister of Immigration in 1996 stated, “because they have no ID, we will not grant *these people* permanent resident status until they have had time to *demonstrated respect for the laws of Canada*” (Emphasis added). The assumption here is that “these people” are not as law abiding as the Europeans, and must overcome additional hurdles before being granted the same rights as European refugees. The racism inherent to the introduction of Bill C-86 is quite clear.

The discriminatory nature of this Act has been noted by many activists and scholars. As Abdo remarked, “the differentiation [of the third world and European immigrants] was made very clear in the Minister’s [of Immigration] defence of policies which opened the gates to Yugoslav immigrants while simultaneously slamming the doors in the face of Somalis.” Abdo continued saying that “it is appalling that the Minister could get away” with making racist remarks and his explanation of the reasons for discrimination was Somalis were “[N]omadic people with little or no family values,” and his equating nomadic life to a state of “savagery or barbarism.”⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁶ Citizenship and Immigration Canada. *News Release on Undocumented Refugees*. Ottawa, June 1, 1994.

⁵¹⁷ Nahla Abdo. “Race, Gender and Politics...” p. 76.

In addition, the identity document requirement duplicates the identification process already established at the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) Hearings. The refugees (most of whom are women or children) have already demonstrated that they face persecution if returned to their home countries.⁵¹⁸ The IRB hearings are often a long process of intense interrogation and the issue of identity is critical to the hearing. Somali refugees were often confused and angry that after a little over a year later when they were submitting the application to get their residence status, they were asked, again, to establish their identity. There is no need for a duplicate identification process for the same convention refugee at the IRB and Citizenship and Immigration Canada.⁵¹⁹ The identity document regulation created a growing underclass of refugees.⁵²⁰

In 1997, Ottawa, in response to pressures to alleviate the difficulties faced by Convention refugees without identity documents, introduced a new immigration class, the Undocumented Convention Refugee in Canada Class (UCRCC). Refugees become eligible for receiving residence status for five years (reduced to three years in 2000) from the date they were granted asylum. The program theoretically allowed undocumented Somali and Afghan refugees to acquire landed status in Canada after this period if they meet other statutory requirements. At the practical level, however, this has created new problems as Immigration officers reviewing landing applications applied the new

⁵¹⁸ Brouwer. "What's In A Name..."

⁵¹⁹ Ahmed Hashi (May 16, 2001)

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

restriction very inconsistently.⁵²¹ Consequently, since the introduction of the UCRCC, "the community reported an escalation in the rate at which Somali and Afghan documents, including passports, were being summarily rejected without proper consideration."⁵²² Thus the new immigration class has been unsuccessful in landing refugees. Since 1997, only 21 percent⁵²³ (or 1,746 people) of the approximately 8000 convention refugees who could not be landed because of a problem with identity documents in 1994 had been landed in the undocumented class.

Both Bill C-86 and the introduction of the UCRCC had discriminatory impact on the Somali refugees, as pointed out by critics and scholars. Without landed status it is extremely difficult to get employment, get higher education or sponsor family members who are often still in refugee camps or stuck in some other countries. Since reuniting members of the family is a critical step in integration and making a successful life in the new country, the community is particularly affected by the inability to sponsor the missing members of its family because of lack of documents.

The delays in the acquisition of permanent residency status negatively affected the overall integration of Somalis. Because they were denied the right to be landed, they did not have access to any of the rights that accompanied it, including the right to settle in the

⁵²¹ Little guidance and training was provided to the Immigration officers and most were given discretionary powers to determine what constituted "satisfactory identity documents". There were reported cases where Somalis were refused landing because they were holding identity documents issued in Italian. The Immigration officer in this case was not aware of the fact that the Somali language was only written in 1972 and any official documents before this period was issued either in English or Italian depending on the part of the country in which it was issued.

⁵²² Brouwer. "What's In A Name?..." p. 12.

country and apply for citizenship, the right to work without a permit, the right to go to university without paying international students fees, and most of all, the right to reunite with family members. Women are disproportionately affected by the restrictive immigration policies. Many women, as discussed earlier, had left family members (including husbands and children sometimes) and looked forward to the time when they might be reunited. That dream did not come true for many because of lack of landed status. Not being able to reunite with family members after so many years because of lack of permanent status negatively affects women's ability to make a life for themselves and their families. The long period of separation not only violates the fundamental rights of women to reunite with their families, but also creates stress within the family. As such the successful integration of women in the new society is seriously hampered.⁵²⁴ The long delay in family reunification has been identified as "the single most painful and damaging aspect of life in limbo."⁵²⁵

In an interview on the issue, Chantal Tie, an Immigration lawyer who worked closely with Somali clients, discussed the difficulties women experience as a result of the lack of effective reunification plans by the State. She talked about many of her cases where women were affected psychologically by long separation between children and mother or between husband and wife.⁵²⁶ In a study on Somali Convention refugees in Toronto, it

⁵²³ This is according to the Citizenship and Immigration Canada latest (May 18, 2000) available figures. Of the 1749 people, 1685 are Somalis. This figure is only for principle applicants and does not include children.

⁵²⁴ Family reunification is not a privilege but rather a fundamental human right as recognised by international law to which Canada is signatory. Article 16 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states, "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State."

⁵²⁵ Brouwer. "What's In A Name?..."

⁵²⁶ Chantal Tie (January 12, 2001).

was found that lack of ability to reunite with family members caused extreme stress for women. One Somali woman who is a Convention refugee talked about the painful realities of family separation. She said, “the major difficulties that I face are that my children and my husband are still abroad. It has been difficult for me to endure five years without my children and my husband.”⁵²⁷ Shukria discussed how, as a Convention refugee without resident status, she lacked the freedom of movement and could not visit her father when he was diagnosed with cancer.

[t]he most challenging thing as a refugee for me was in 1993 when I found out through family that my father, who was in France, was diagnosed with cancer. Being separated, I could not go and see him. I was a Convention refugee and did not have any resident papers. I spent two years trying. They told me that I could go but there was no guarantee of re-entry. I was put in a very difficult situation. One officer said, “you can’t have the best of both worlds”. He meant I had to choose between my family here and my father there. I will never forget. I used to go to the immigration office every morning looking for possibilities. It was extremely difficult and I went through an agony. I wanted to be with my father when he needed me the most. As the eldest of my family I could not fulfil my obligations as a daughter. He died before I could be with him. I love my father; I could not comfort him and be next to him when he took his last breath. I failed the expectations. They [Canada] took that away from me.⁵²⁸

Shukria’s situation was not unique. Because of lack of resident papers there were many people who could not be with their family in other countries. Many have experienced agony because they could not care for family members, sometimes parents who were ill. This had particular impact on women because they were socialised to take care of others and not being able to fulfil this social role was devastating. In addition to the emotional drain of not being with loved ones and worrying about them all the time, the financial drain on the family is sometimes substantial. Women are often forced to support their family in refugee camps for a long time from their meagre incomes.

⁵²⁷ Neita Kay Israelite, Arlene Herman, Fadumo Ahmed Alim, Hawa Abdullahi Mohamed, Yasmin Khan and Lynn Caruso. “Waiting for ‘Sharciga’: Resettlement and the Roles of Somali Refugee Women.” *Canadian Woman’s Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3, Fall 1999, p. 83.

Lack of access to trades and professions

Lack of access to trades and professions affects all immigrants. However, refugees are particularly vulnerable because of delays in getting landed status. Because of these delays, it often takes Convention refugees much longer to access retraining programs and work towards achieving their professional goals.⁵²⁹ The lack of access to trade and professions had negative effects on the refugee's ability to be self-supporting and to make a proper life in Canadian society.

Because their previous qualifications are not recognised, many Somalis had to start from the bottom of the social ladder by accepting jobs that are at a much lower level just to survive. This was quite problematic because a large number of Somalis came here with strong professional background and skills. As a study on Somali refugees in Ottawa found,

The problem with Somali professionals in terms of getting employment was that more than 60 percent of those who had jobs prior to coming to Canada had white-collar jobs. For instance, someone who had worked in Somalia as a judge or a lawyer stands very little or no chance of getting the same job in Canada. Those who had blue colour jobs in Somalia are also disadvantaged in the face of performance-oriented employers who view the skills and experience of third world immigrants with suspicion.⁵³⁰

The limited labour market choices available to Somali professionals excluded them economically and placed them in a place where they could not compete equally. Sirad explains her frustrations of not being able to find a job even though she had a university degree.

⁵²⁸ Shukria Samatar. (March 9, 2002)

⁵²⁹ Fowsia Abdulakadir (September 7, 2000).

⁵³⁰ Abdulle. *Somali Immigrants...* p. 94.

It is impossible to get your profession back. There are all kinds of barriers. Like do you have Canadian experience? They will tell you, even if you have a university degree, will you be a cleaner... and things like that.⁵³¹

Although women did understand the dilemma of accreditation is not unique to Somalis, they felt that they have been denied employment opportunities because they are black, Muslim and come from the Third World. The above-mentioned study also found that non-transferability of skills becomes a convenient excuse by Canadian employers who would like to exclude non-whites.

The question of credentials or qualifications is irrelevant... I received most of my education in the UK and in the USA... yet nobody is accepting them... what do you call this? I believe if my colour was different, it might influence these employers to consider my education and experience... many employers are blinded by their prejudice and stereotypes about immigrants from Africa... you cannot convince them that these people can perform as good as anyone else... it is a reality we have to face.⁵³²

Difficulties in obtaining a professional job consistent with one's field of education and experience are not only faced by those educated outside of Canada but also by Somalis who obtained their education in Canada. Ikram discusses how her current job is well below what she deserves.

When I got my first degree in Sociology I wanted to work on social issues like poverty but not necessarily in the Somali community. When I got my MA in political science I wanted to work on policy issues at the international level. I wanted to focus on Africa. I am doing neither. I am working on community issues now getting paid way below my credentials.⁵³³

This systemic barrier, according to Fowsia, is much more difficult to deal with than the day-to-day racism.

The institutional barriers and the whole rigidity of access to trades and professions in

⁵³¹ Sirad Hashi (June 12, 2001).

⁵³² Quoted in Abdulle. *Somali Immigrants...* p. 95.

⁵³³ Ikram Jama (April 18, 2002).

Canada are really difficult to deal with. .. Going back to school and getting retrained in professions is every immigrant's nightmare. Disregarding all the things you came with [in terms of professions] and starting from the bottom all over is not easy. Or having the qualifications and not getting the jobs for which you were trained is quite frustrating and painful.⁵³⁴

Adequate employment is crucial to a sense of well being for most adults in contemporary society. The stresses caused by unemployment and socio-economic downward mobility had negative social and psychological impacts on the Somali refugees as well. Talking about her feelings of frustration in not being able to practice her own profession, one woman said,

What hurts most is that I have a profession... I studied law and now there is nothing I can do for myself... I believe it is wrong and a simple act of enslavement to keep down healthy and youthful human beings and deny them movement and any chance for personal self-development.⁵³⁵

Lack of permanent status and lack of recognition of previously acquired skills and experience are two of the major systemic barriers that contribute to the hardships faced by Somali refugees in Canada. The inability to have residence papers (being in limbo) combined with the lack of credential recognition denied Somali refugees the opportunity to achieve any meaningful economic adjustment. Consequently, the systemic barriers imposed by the state and Canadian employers inhibited integration into the larger society and encouraged social isolation. This placed many Somali refugees in a marginalized position where they are unable to fully participate in the Canadian social, economic and political institutions.⁵³⁶ As Shukria elucidates, "Canada received only 50 percent of our

⁵³⁴ Fowsia Abdulkadir (September 7, 2001).

⁵³⁵ Quoted in Israelite et al. "Waiting for 'Sharciga'..." p. 84.

⁵³⁶ E. Opoku-Dapaah. "Integration of Landed Refugee Claimants in Canada: Toward an Explanatory Model." *Refuge*, vol. 13, no. 9, February 1994. pp. 12-14.

potential because they have incapacitated us and we could not contribute much.”⁵³⁷

Lack of appropriate services

People have had traumatic experiences. ..They came to a place [Canada] that was not ready to welcome them. Maybe mentally they [Canadians] were ready to welcome people [Somalis] but there were no physical structures that will welcome people and help them. Take me for example, when I came, the first thing I had to face was when I was coming I called my family. If everyone did not have a family or friend, I don't know what would have happened to him or her. They were not even appropriately dressed for the cold weather because people came not knowing the weather to which they were coming. They came not being dressed [properly], not having a place...⁵³⁸

It was December 16, 1989, when Nasim picked herself up off the pavement at the Buffalo bus station, loaded her children into taxi, and arrived, tired, hungry and frightened, at the Canadian border. She told Canadian immigration officials that the family wanted to claim refugee status. A network of Somalis in Toronto put her up at a local home and took her to the hospital, where a doctor put a cast on her leg. Ottawa, they said would be a better place for the family. It wasn't as crowded, housing was easier to find and there was a large Somali community.⁵³⁹

In the host country, Somalis, like many other refugees, faced family separation, language and cultural barriers, disproportionately high unemployment rates, and economic difficulties. In addition, many are dealing with post-traumatic stress⁵⁴⁰ as a result of significant personal losses, including violent deaths of family members and friends.

Yet, the majority of Somalis received neither counselling nor reliable information on the existing newcomer adjustment services, on their arrival to Canada.⁵⁴¹ People were at the mercy of the individual hosting them, often a family member or a friend who took care of the logistics of the basic survival such as finding a place, a school, going through the

⁵³⁷ Shukria Samatar (December 20, 1999)

⁵³⁸ Khadija Ali (July 17, 2000)

⁵³⁹ Jacquie Miller. "Flight from chaos ends in struggle for new lives in Ottawa." *Ottawa Citizen*. December 16, 1992.

maze of the immigration process, and finding employment. There were no structures to welcome Somali refugees into Canada. Somalis fled their native land in large numbers because of circumstances beyond their control and they shared this "push" factor with earlier groups of refugees such as the Vietnamese "boat people". However, the social and economic context to which they have arrived was significantly different.⁵⁴² The resettlement of the Vietnamese refugees had been a national effort with different levels of governments participating. Both the private sector and individuals participated in the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees in Canada.

The people of Ottawa are not cold, uncaring or lacking generosity, but we have failed to recognize the desperate needs of the Somali families in our midst. The 8,000 to 10,000 Somalis in the region arrived under different circumstances. Sponsorships for the Asian refugees were arranged in advance, their refugee status was settled before they set foot in Canada, and local families were financially committed to helping them for one year. By comparison, most Somalis have been fending for themselves since coming to Canada... The needs of these people, however, are just as great.⁵⁴³

This lack of an organised response to the needs of the Somali refugees has forced many to fend for themselves upon arrival or often rely on information from other Somalis who came earlier.⁵⁴⁴ This "co-dependency" has usually been very problematic because since Somalis did not have earlier roots in Canada and since they all came at the same time, they were not very knowledgeable about the existing services. Thus the information they gave to each other could sometimes be faulty and/or misleading. This lack of appropriate resettlement services has contributed to a large number of Somali refugees in Canada

⁵⁴⁰ Post-traumatic stress syndrome refers to a series of symptoms that follow a trauma outside the range of normal human experience. In this context experiences of flight and displacement and refugeeism.

⁵⁴¹ Opoku-Dapaah. *Somali Refugees in Toronto...* p. 26.

⁵⁴² See Lawrence Lam. *From Being Uprooted to Surviving*; and W. Courtland Robinson. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*. London: Zed Books, Ltd., 1998, pp. 138-143.

⁵⁴³ Jacqui Miller. "Somali refugees; Reach out to help the lonely." *The Ottawa Citizen*. December 1, 1992, A10.

⁵⁴⁴ Jacqui Miller. "'Compassion fatigue' hits refugees." *Calgary Herald*, Calgary, May 29, 1994, p. A5.

becoming one of the most disadvantaged ethnic groups in major Canadian cities like Toronto, Ottawa and Vancouver. A combination of lack of structures that welcome refugees and lack of awareness of existing services has contributed to a tendency among Somalis to seek out family, friends, and other familial support when they come to Canada.

The first two months, I remember, you don't have money, or house, until you find a house and get your immigration papers together (*lagaa oggolaamaayo*).⁵⁴⁵ You are at the mercy of someone with whom you come to live. It is difficult and you are under a lot of pressure. You may be seen as a burden and they may dislike you [because of this] if they are not your relatives. If your relatives can't look after you, things take time. It takes around 15 to 20 days to get social assistance. These were some of the difficulties faced by people and they still face them. Still there are no structures. .. There are no structures in place to help welcome and settle Somalis and it is like this for all refugees, unless they are the Kosovars that were brought here and resettled. But the rest of the normal people coming through the border and the open doors, there is no plan for this. This is the first difficulty they face.⁵⁴⁶

The lack of appropriate services is compounded by the fact that Somali women are unaware of existing services in the city where they end up living and rarely seek counselling upon their arrival in a "safe haven." There are many reasons for this. First, dealing with immediate needs such as access to appropriate housing and employment, and education for their children take precedence over addressing mental health and issues particular to them such as sexual violence experienced in either Somalia or in refugee camps. Khadija, who is a Health Promoter at Rexdale Community and Health Centre in Toronto, talks about how people find support within the network of relatives, friends, and sometimes acquaintances and how they are often unaware of services. She says,

By the time they come to you [as a service provider], they are like, ooh. You are going to

⁵⁴⁵ The Somali phrase *mallagu oggolaaday* literally means, "were you accepted". This illustrates the fact that they recognize the importance of having immigration papers to start a settlement process and the anxiety caused by lack of these papers.

⁵⁴⁶ Khadija Ali (July 17, 2000).

say, “why didn’t you come to me earlier” ... and you feel bad for her. She will say, “I just found out about you [the service]”. This is after she has gone to a doctor and she paid for that service. Because a child was sick, they were forced to see a doctor, for example. It is only after *rafaad* (many difficulties) that they come to the Health Centre.⁵⁴⁷

Second, there is a cultural stigma attached to having been raped, thus women do not come forward and admit to being raped. As Dirie points out, women do not often speak of their traumatic experiences of sexual assault, “because it is too painful, too shameful for their particular cultural beliefs, ... and because many have opted for denial to keep their sanity.”⁵⁴⁸ The other reason is related to the fact that their conceptualisation of counselling is dramatically different from that of the Western world. Both mental health and psychotherapy are foreign concepts to the Somali community.⁵⁴⁹ Because of this unfamiliarity with mental health concepts, many refugees and immigrants rarely seek outside advice or talk about their problems with mental health professionals.⁵⁵⁰

Racial and cultural discrimination

I can’t speak English but I can read expressions on faces. A smiling face is welcome to me but why do you give me a look that hurts so much and says, “Go away”?⁵⁵¹

I don’t know about the majority, but what I have experienced and seen is, and I don’t want to generalise because there are a lot of good people. But what I have experienced is a lot intolerance, a lot of rejection like you are not welcome. I am beginning to realize that it has something to do with the identity and label of color, having a different heritage, being from different race, being black and all the above... And there is a lot of intolerance to acceptance based on either one of all of these labels. You can read that

⁵⁴⁷ Khadija Ali (July 17, 2000).

⁵⁴⁸ Fadumo Jama Dirie. “Idman’s Story: The Accident.” INSCAN, vol.7, no. 2. Winter 1993. p. 5.

⁵⁴⁹ Cultural understanding is vital in multicultural counselling where the client and the counsellor are not necessarily from the same culture. The traditional methods of obtaining assistance in the Somali culture based on Somali values need to be incorporated into any counselling programs. See Mubarak Mah. “Working Effectively with the Somali Community: Appropriate Intervention Counselling, INSCAN, vol. 7, no. 2, Winter 1993. p. 4).

⁵⁵⁰ Darold Wing Sue and David Sue. *Counseling the Culturally Different: Theory and Practice*. New York & Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1990. 2nd edition. pp. 16-17.

⁵⁵¹ Quoted in Canadian Council for Refugees. “Best Settlement Practices: Settlement Services for Refugees and Immigrants in Canada.” February 1998.

from the way that you are portrayed in the media, from the way you are accepted in the general society, from the way you are treated in the streets.⁵⁵²

We are not aware of it [racism]. Because we did not have any previous experience with it, we usually do not even notice when people are racist towards us.⁵⁵³

Some years ago, when my son was in grade five, one day as he was walking from home, about five minutes walk, he saw a little girl sitting on a fence singing, "dirty Somalis go back where you came from." This is a girl who does not even go to school, where does all this come from... This is such a learning experience for me. It comes in bits and pieces but unless you make the links it does not make sense to you.⁵⁵⁴

The struggles of Somali women to reconstruct their lives in this new environment is further complicated by racism, negative media portrayals and the major conflicts that exist between the Somali and the host society's cultures. Fowsia mentions that what compounds the difficulties faced by Somali women is the stereotyping.

The stereotype that all Somali women are dominated by their husbands and all Somali women are illiterate is absurd! Many of the people that came here, they may not have the language skills but you know, they were heads of their family, they had roles in their society before they came here. They were working in their own language; they were nurses, teachers, and professionals.⁵⁵⁵

Refugees do not cast off past life experiences and identities when they arrive.⁵⁵⁶ Thus, as Kunz pointed out, one of the major factors that determine the degree of integration of refugees is the strain of cultural conflict between themselves and the host society.⁵⁵⁷ In his article, "Exile and Resettlement: Refugee Theory," Kunz points out that a high degree

⁵⁵²Quoted in Abdi M. Kusow. "Stigma and social identities. The process of identity work among Somali immigrants in Canada." Muddle Suzanne Lilius (ed.) *Variations on the theme of Somaliness. Proceedings of the EASS/SSIA International Congress of Somali Studies*, Turku, Finland: Centre for Continuing Education, Abo Akademi University, August 6-9, 1998, p. 322.

⁵⁵³ Sahra Habbane. (October 27, 2000).

⁵⁵⁴ Fowsia Abdulkadir (September 7, 2000).

⁵⁵⁵ Fouzia Ismail (October 20, 2000).

⁵⁵⁶ Moussa. "The Social Construction of Women Refugees..."

⁵⁵⁷ Egon F. Kunz. "Exile and Resettlement: Refugee Theory." *International Migration Review*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1981. p. 46.

of conformity is demanded from the newcomer in “monistic”⁵⁵⁸ cultures.

He further explains that monocultural societies are less likely to be hospitable to people who cling to their different cultures than pluralistic societies with broader experiences.⁵⁵⁹

The high demands of conformity can exert great stress on refugees prematurely forcing them to face emotionally charged choices. Indeed, inability to cope with the unaccustomed values and practices could lead many immigrants to withdraw and isolate themselves from outside contact.⁵⁶⁰

Because of their background, Somalis possess many differentiating social, cultural and religious attributes that set them apart from the mainstream Canadian. This socio-cultural difference between the Somali Canadians and native Canadians contribute to continued racial discrimination towards Somali refugees in Canada both on the streets and in the media. Their religion, culture and visibility in terms of dress (particularly women) make them visible targets for racial attacks. Some of the participants feel that members of the dominant society often become threatened by their (Somalis) distinct physical appearances and their ways of life that are different from those of the dominant society.

Most Somalis are unaware of, and/or are unprepared to deal with, the profound significance that the construction of Somalis as the “other” could have on their overall

⁵⁵⁸ While in theory and in official public pronouncements, Canada is a multicultural society, in practice cultural difference (race plays an important factor in this) is frowned upon and assimilation is encouraged. Thus, I place Canada in Kunz’s monocultural category. For discussions of culturalist forms of racism see George J. Sefa Dei. *Anti-Racism Education: Theory and Practice*. Halifax, 1996; Paul Gilroy. *The End of Anti-Racism*.” James Donald and Ali Rattansi (eds.) *‘Race’ and Culture and Difference*. Newbury Park, CA, 1992.

⁵⁵⁹ Kunz. “Exile and Resettlement ...” p. 48.

resettlement in the host country. The following conversation between a white interviewer and a Somali interviewee about racism in Canada is quite revealing:

Q: Do you think being a woman of colour is going to be hard for you?

A: Which colour?

Q: We're different colours, you and I. Do you think it is harder to be your colour in Toronto?

A: No. It is ok. If I don't like it, who is going to change my colour.⁵⁶¹

While some have been really disturbed by the lack of sensitivity towards refugees in general and Somalis (because of their multiple markers of difference), others have chosen to see it as simple nuisance that, if ignored, will not have much effect on their adjustment abilities. As an adult ESL Teacher, Fowsia Abdulkadir, remarked, “[I]t is much harder to deal with the loss of socio-economic status and marginalization. I do not think racism at the individual level, unless you have been attacked, is not something that could hinder people’s adjustment abilities.”⁵⁶²

In addition to their skin colour, Somalis are othered and excluded on many other levels. Their cultural and religious background, their lack of ability to speak English or their having an accent when doing so all constitute elements of exclusion and racial discrimination. According to one interviewee, “our accent becomes a barrier when we are looking for employment.”⁵⁶³ Visibility of their garb and their religion contribute to negative remarks towards Somali women. One woman pointed out:

I was working at a store when an old white customer I was serving remarked, “it must be

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 47.

⁵⁶¹ Quoted in Kathryn E. Rumble. *Somali Women in Metropolitan Toronto: Overcoming the Barriers*. M.A. thesis. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990, p. 7.

⁵⁶² Fowsia Abdulkadir (September 7, 2000).

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

nice to be able to not wear the *hijab* and be liberated.” I was really annoyed and upset by her ignorance and prejudice. I wanted to point out that first of all not everybody in Somalia wore the *hijab* and that wearing the *hijab* is not oppression but an individual choice. But since, the customer is always right I could not answer her back.⁵⁶⁴

Many participants sounded frustrated about the ignorance of the general public and the negative remarks that they have to endure and ignore just to get by and survive. Some referred to the fact that it is quite difficult for a person who was not a refugee to even begin to fully comprehend the scars from the traumatic experiences many have had recently as a result of the civil war and the ensuing migration. The following quotation points to how one woman feels that it is shallow to define people by what is on their “outside” rather than on their “inside”.

People think they know when they describe what they see of us on the outside – black skin, Somali, veils. How can they think they know us when they have no idea what is happening to us inside?”⁵⁶⁵

Despite attacks and negative remarks based on the colour of their skin and their cultural and religious background, facing and dealing with racial discrimination has been particularly difficult for many Somalis. One of the reasons could be attributed to the fact that the concept of race as a basis for social identification did not exist in Somalia and nothing in their background in Somalia could have adequately prepared them for the implications of racism in their struggles to resettle. Therefore, people are often unconscious of the culturally embedded racism that constructs certain groups as inferior to others in Canada.

⁵⁶⁴ Haweya Hashi (October 14, 2000).

⁵⁶⁵ Quoted in “Best Settlement Practices...”

In addition, as Kusow's study on identity process among Somali immigrants in Toronto found, a strong identity category had already been established in their self-concept⁵⁶⁶ prior to their arrival in the host societies. Thus, "the racialized identity hierarchies in Canada in which whites are seen as the dominant group are irrelevant to Somali immigrants."⁵⁶⁷ This should be qualified by adding that adult immigrants whose identity had been established are generally not the ones that are mostly affected by individual racism. Age is a determinant factor in the integration process. The young generations often integrate faster and retain less of their cultural identity than the older generation. The older generation generally define themselves with regard to their society of origin and are generally more focused on the past than their children are. Thus, the civil war and the subsequent migration have created different, sometimes conflicting, ways of (re-) defining Somaliness for the older and younger generation of the community. For many parents, *caado laga tagay caro Allay leedahay* (an abandoned custom brings about God's wrath).

In an article on young Muslim Algerian girls in France, Malewska-Pyre argues that experience of conflicting cultural values between immigrants and a receiving nation has more detrimental impact on youth than on adults.⁵⁶⁸ Cultural incompatibility leads to feelings of rejection and negative self-image among the youth. The most dangerous

⁵⁶⁶ The issue of self-concept becomes more complex when dealing with younger people whose identity was not firmly ingrained prior to migration. The younger generation, in this sense, may have a totally different experience with racism and racial discrimination. Thus, racial discrimination may have much deeper impact on their identity formation and self-esteem than it might have on adults.

⁵⁶⁷ Abdi M. Kusow. "Stigma and Social Identities: The Process of Identity Challenges and Transformation Among Somali Immigrants in Canada." Paper presented at the International Congress of Somali Studies, Turku, Finland (August 6-9, 1998).

⁵⁶⁸ H. Malewska-Pyre. "Identité négative chez les jeunes immigrants." *Sante Mentale au Quebec*. vol 18, no. 2. 1993, pp.116-117.

response is internalisation of the racist stereotypes and the distorted images of themselves and their community in the host society. Another way of responding to these stereotypes is to react aggressively or repress a racist experience by negating it. For some, assimilation goes as far as putting down one's very own community.⁵⁶⁹

Even those Somalis who have become aware of racial discrimination have had difficulties understanding the obliteration of the immigrants/refugees' diverse histories and the concentration on what are considered similarities in skin colour. This lack of understanding is not unique to Somalis. Moussa found that Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees find that the equation of "Blackness" with inferiority is an affront to their identities as Africans. As one woman in Moussa's study points out, "I am African and I am black but I want to be called Ethiopian."⁵⁷⁰

In addition to the systemic barriers (racial discrimination, lack of accreditation for skills and education, subsistence-level employment, and blame for "being on welfare") previously discussed, this section will critically examine mainstream Canadian media's "spectacle" over the issue of female genital mutilation (FGM). By examining how Somali women were represented as mostly helpless victims of brutal misogyny,⁵⁷¹ we can see a very clear underlying attitude of patronising superiority felt by the writers and reporters who took on this issue. These same writers and reporters chose to almost completely overlook or ignore the hardships imposed on Somali women by the Canadian government and the great efforts made by Somali women to improve conditions for themselves and to

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Moussa. *Storm and Sanctuary...* p. 204.

get justice for their community as a whole regarding Bill C-86. The huge media spectacle created over FGM reveals more about Canadian mainstream attitudes and prejudices than it did about Somali women's lives as a whole.

While the harsh impact of Bill C-86 on the Somali community went virtually unnoticed in popular Canadian media, the issue of FGM particularly grasped the attention of Canadians. The media presentation of the issue led to the discrediting of Somalis and their culture. In early 1990s,⁵⁷² the issue of FGM had received wide coverage in the Canadian media, both print and broadcasting. On the whole, the media constructed Somalis as "butchers" whose culture was in contradiction with "civilised society." Simplistic and broad conclusions were characteristic of these reports.

These reports on FGM and communities who practice it conjured up "horror" and "outrage" among the Canadian public. Although there are other immigrants in Canada (such as Sudanese, Ethiopians, and Egyptians) from places where FGM is practiced, media coverage concentrated on Somalis.⁵⁷³ Somalis were depicted as "barbarous" people who "butcher" their little girls and who "imported" this "barbaric custom" to this otherwise "civilised" world.⁵⁷⁴ The reports generated a heated debate and various levels of accusations and counter-accusations between Canadians who saw the practice of FGM

⁵⁷¹ Sherene H. Razack. *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms*. Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 1998, p. 98.

⁵⁷² There were three periods when the topic of FGM received a wide coverage in the Canadian media: 1) in 1991 when the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario was releasing its policy statement; 2) in July 1994 when a Somali woman and her children were granted refugee status based on the fear that her daughter will be infibulated; 3) during the United Nations Population Conference in Cairo in September the same year.

⁵⁷³ "Outlaw female circumcision, women's group tells Ottawa." *The Montreal Gazette*, March 8, 1994, A11.

as “barbaric” and the African immigrants who reacted defensively claiming it as a “private” matter. An article in the *Globe and Mail* asks a rhetorical question, “culture or torture”:

In a post-colonial world, it has become unfashionable to describe the practices of other cultures as barbaric. But it is hard to think of another word for what Fatma endured.⁵⁷⁵

In a manner typical of much of the writings on the issue, the article continues to describe in graphic detail⁵⁷⁶ the pain involved and how much is cut from the woman whose life is reduced to one organ and whose “culture” is blamed for sanctioning such a “torture”. The issue of FGM gave Canadians a chance to employ a morally superior tone, African immigrants were accused of “sadistic mutilation” of their women. There were requests that a condition be made on the admission of refugees to Canada. “Sending word back to their countries of origin that anyone contemplating seeking admission to Canada should be prepared to adopt the mores, customs, and laws of the new homeland,”⁵⁷⁷ said one newspaper journalist. In addition, it was suggested that child-protection agencies be involved in stopping the practice. If, for instance, the Children’s Aid Society determines a child had been “harmed,” assault charges should be considered. The act is considered child abuse and aggravated assault under Canadian law.

The accusations of “child abuse” had in turn provoked a counter-defence from the African immigrant communities. Enraged that the media had raised such a “personal” and “private” issue in public, some African immigrant groups argued that Canada had no

⁵⁷⁴ Fouzia Ismail (May 7, 2002)

⁵⁷⁵ “Culture, or torture?” *The Globe and Mail*. October 3, 1994, A 14.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.* See also the CBC Newsworld piece entitled “Roughcuts – Our Daughters Pain,” April 15, 1995. This presented a very graphical detail of the procedure on young girls in Africa.

business meddling in their own “private” affairs. They further claimed that it should be parents’ “right” to choose to circumcise their children if they wished. “Africans living in Canada have the right to decide whether to have their daughters circumcised,” asserted members of the Ottawa-based Canadian African Women’s Organization. A representative from the group, defensively added, “I don’t think you have a right to tell us to do otherwise.”⁵⁷⁸ Other African immigrants were perplexed by the amount of coverage received by this particular issue. One Somali man said that there is no proof that it is being performed in Canada and he did not understand, “all the drum beating, dust blowing and alarms.”⁵⁷⁹

Simplistic, ahistorical coverage failed to attend to the complex political and social dynamics underlying the practice. Women’s experiences were reduced to those of sexual mutilation in the process. In addition, the ill-informed and sensationalist media coverage contributed to heightened tension and resentment between native Canadians and Somali Canadians. As some of the participants believed, being not only refugees but also sexually mutilated became the imposed and the only important markers of Somali women’s identity in their new home. One woman commented that during the early 1990s, at the peak of the debate on FGM, she was “afraid of being on the street and telling people that I was Somali because I knew that they will automatically think about my genitalia.”⁵⁸⁰ Others felt that they were demonised and stigmatised and that all people

⁵⁷⁷ “Female Circumcision: Practice in parts of Africa and Asia may be gaining a toehold here.” *The Ottawa Citizen*. Ottawa, June 10, 1991, B1.

⁵⁷⁸ “Female circumcision: Parent’s right, group says.” *The Ottawa Citizen*. Ottawa: 1991 June 26, B5.

⁵⁷⁹ “Female Circumcision: Practice ...” B1.

⁵⁸⁰ Fowsia Abdulkadir (January 23, 2002).

think about when they see them is their private parts and their “oppression.” According to one interviewee:

We were harassed by the questions [about FGM]. It was like, “O my God, you guys come from a culture that does this to women. And it was like, ‘O, women oppressed’.”⁵⁸¹

This sort of analysis denied the complexities of women’s experiences with refugeeism and resettlement that needed to be addressed. Women were portrayed as “helpless victims” and their agency was lost in this sort of approach. No attention was given to the fact that women *do know* about and have *lived through* the multiple pains of FGM. The whole debate on the issue has conveniently ignored the long history of women actively challenging the practice in Somalia. These women did not certainly need Canadians to tell them how to take control of their bodies!⁵⁸²

In addition, the offensive stance taken by the Canadian public and the media has pushed some Somalis to feel that they had to take a defensive approach and defend their “culture” at any cost. Being newcomers in an alien community, many Somalis tended to interpret this patronising stance on FGM as a direct outside attack on their culture. As Fouzia explains,

Whenever the media uses FGM as a label ... it has a negative repercussions. People become more defensive, angrier and see that other communities are imposing their ideas on them and that makes them more defensive or even to do it under the table.⁵⁸³

This labelling would even hamper the community’s willingness to integrate into the larger Canadian society. Some Somalis also decided to cling to their traditional practices

⁵⁸¹ Fowsia Abdulkadir (September 7, 2000).

⁵⁸² Ikram Jama (September 25, 2000).

as a source of social meaning and identity in the face of real or perceived threat against cultural and social solidarity. The sentimental defence of patriarchal cultures constituted a serious set-back for Somali women's own movement against the practice of FGM, which had in fact been gaining success in Somalia for the past few decades and had continued in Canada. As will be elaborated in chapter nine, the media spectacle entrenched misconceptions about FGM and undermined Somali women's ability to address the issue on their own terms (and thus with true effectiveness).

In the experience of many Somali women, the colour of their skin, their clothes and the most private part of their body have been proclaimed by government and social institutions in Canada as the most important factor in defining and constructing their identity. Furthermore, the defensive community backlash against negative representation has created another obstacle for Somali women actively engaged in attempting to do their own progressive gender-relations work in their communities. They have been put into the classic double-bind, being criticized for not assimilating to Canada or Somali traditional norms. Thus, the racialization and sexualization of Somali women has had far-reaching and complex implications for their overall ability to adapt to the new socio-cultural environment.⁵⁸⁴ In addition, the mainstream Canadian media image of women as victims "whose bodies are cut" entirely ignores the realities, as chapter 7 will show, of women who have been engaged in multiple struggles to make sense of their dislocation and make lives for themselves and their families.

⁵⁸³ Fouzia Ismail (October 20, 2000).

Conclusion

Somali women in diaspora communities experienced a very high degree of trauma due to the disastrous civil war and the violent breakdown of the Somali State structures. Like other refugee women, Somali women experienced profound stress and disruption in their lives and families; their aspirations and dreams clashed with the harsh reality of the countries where they found asylum.

All newcomers face difficulties such as linguistic and cultural barriers, lack of access to trades and professions, resulting in downward mobility, and loss of familiar and social support. However, Somali women arriving in Canada in 1990s faced the very distinct racial disadvantage of new legislation specifically designed to prevent their settlement as recognised Convention refugees and legitimate residents.

Furthermore, as Black, Muslims, and members of a culture perceived as “incompatible with the Canadian”, Somali women were not only racially targeted but their culture and religion became markers of difference, contributing to their exclusion and undermining their agency as community activists. Interactions between an immigrant and her host community have “a strong impact on the immigrant’s identifications with that community”.⁵⁸⁴ Quite clearly, with a huge imbalance of power favouring the Canadian

⁵⁸⁴ As Somalis, many of my participants felt targeted by particularly anti-Somali sentiments including ideas that women who went through FGM have no sexual feelings.

⁵⁸⁵ R. N. Lalonde, Donald M. Taylor, and Fathali M. Moghaddam. “The process of social identification for visible immigrants women in a multicultural context.” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 1992, vol. 23, no. 1, p. 26.

government and its cultural prejudices and expectations over the refugee, Somali newcomers had little choice in accepting their place at the margins of their new country.

CHAPTER VII

The double-bind: Internal and external pressures on women

Women face many difficulties that make them tired and many frustrations. They also have many stresses, mostly economic related, in their lives. Because it is, even if they work, their income is low and their expenditure and what they need are many. Plus, you know, the country you left and the people you left are not economically doing as well as they used to. ... People who took care of you and gave you something [in Somalia] who had land or houses, who are now in a situation that is difficult [financially]... This increases women's responsibilities. You have to be responsible for your father, mother, if they are not alive your [other] close relatives... this creates a lot of stress and frustrations.⁵⁸⁶

Coming to a new country involves many difficulties. But if you, you come when you are not prepared is even worse. If you have a choice for something... if you were given a choice and you were told, "go if you want, stay if you want" and you made your own decision. Already you come with a peace of mind, and you made the decision... You will say, "ok, I will deal with the problem. But ... [when you come saying] "*Ilaahoow i bixi*" (O God save me), you come to a place you don't know, have no information on what it is. This has its own problems. I believe the most of the problems faced by Somalis are that because they were forced to come, it was not a decision they made. Although they saw it as "safe haven" and left war and were saying, "*Ilaahoow meelaan madaxa dhigto aan helo*" (O God give me a place to exhale), still it was very difficult for them. Leaving your home, your life behind, people dying... many day after day traumatic experiences.⁵⁸⁷

I was the head of the financial department at the National Insurance in Somalia when the civil war broke down. I never thought of or planned coming abroad before. ...The civil war and the difficulties I have faced forced me to leave my home and my country.⁵⁸⁸

Although I traveled abroad on a number of occasions before on scholarships to Italy and other seminars I never thought of myself living anywhere but Somalia. I run with some of my family members to another town and then another town, then to a refugee camp in Kenya for six months. During this time, I did not know if my husband and two of my sons were alive. We left everything, home, security, profession, family, neighbours and a country we loved.⁵⁸⁹

Introduction

Women's experience with refugeeism is quite different than that of their male counterparts. Due to their placement within the family, women have shouldered most of

⁵⁸⁶ Sahra Habbane (October 27, 2000).

⁵⁸⁷ Khadija Ali (July 11, 2000).

the responsibilities in the process of resettlement in the asylum countries.⁵⁹⁰ As Fouzia says,

[a]lthough they share the same problems like unemployment, lack of recognition of previous skills with men, but it is compounded for women because they have to juggle so many things. They have to be role model for their kids. It is compounded when you are a single mother because you are doing two roles. They have to take care of the outside work, taking care of the house, taking care of the children, helping them adjust to the new environment. So many things... lack of day-care and supporting young children.⁵⁹¹

Somali refugee women's experiences are complicated by two important factors. First, because of lack of traditional social support systems, women predominantly have assumed the responsibility of caring for the family, including sometimes being the sole financial providers. This task of caring for the family often has involved not only survival but also making effective adjustment in the new social and economic environment.⁵⁹² Second, because of their role as the guardians and bearers of culture, women have been expected to not only maintain the culture but to also transfer it to the next generation. This is problematic because, women, not men, have been expected to subscribe to traditional, sometimes even more restrictive definitions of womanhood.⁵⁹³ They have been held solely responsible for the social and cultural adjustments of not only themselves and their families but also the Somali community at large. This chapter will explore the specific difficulties Somali refugee women have encountered in Canada. These include cultural encounters, intergenerational and community expectations to maintain traditional gender roles involved in migrating to and settling in a drastically

⁵⁸⁸ Sirad Hashi (June 12, 2001).

⁵⁸⁹ Asli Jama (Ottawa, February 16, 2001).

⁵⁹⁰ Isabella M. Sales. "Immigrant Women: Some Points of Stress." *Working with Immigrant Women Survivors of Wife Assault: Towards Equal Access*. Immigrant and Visible Minority Women Against Abuse, Ottawa, 1991.

⁵⁹¹ Fouzia Ismail (October 20, 2000).

⁵⁹² Ikram Jama (September 25, 2000).

different social and cultural environment. It is argued that women have faced the double-bind of the external (i.e. racial discrimination and systemic barriers) and internal (i.e. community expectation of women to conform to an idealized and romanticized past as a result of exclusion from the dominant group) pressures.

Cultural encounters

If you come to a country where everyone has only one eye, you have to take one of your eyes so that you can fit in. Integration is that painful.⁵⁹⁴

For instance, teachers are not always supportive of women's multiple roles in the new environment. If parents do not come to all meetings, they [teachers] assume that they [parents] don't care about their children.⁵⁹⁵

I left home, a country where I was somebody and I was respected. Here I am someone who is an outsider. Although we were welcomed, we will always be outsiders. Even our children will be outsiders. I had family and friends [in Somalia], here I am alone.⁵⁹⁶

As Somalis come from a background that is socially, culturally and religiously very distinct from the dominant society, they have been clearly set apart from the host society. This socio-cultural difference between the Somalis and mainstream Canadians has contributed to continued cultural clashes between them. Sahra Habbane discussed difficulties women, especially those who were never exposed to the western world, have faced because of lack of understanding in the way that this system works:

[w]e all know that we came to a different culture and we are dealing with a new system, with education system, legal system, and you name it. You know, those of us who lived abroad and were educated, we have had it! ... I was told about a woman who called the police telling them "my young son stole a car, please go and get him for me." ... Her husband was away so she thought the police would just go and bring the kid home.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹³ Fowsia Abdulkadir (September 7, 2000).

⁵⁹⁴ Quoted in "Best Settlement Practices..."

⁵⁹⁵ Sahra Habbane (October 27, 2000).

In addition to the psychological and social challenges related to adjusting to a new environment, women have had to make cultural adjustments as they struggle to reconstruct their lives. In a world of individualism and materialism, many Somali women long for their traditions of communality and sharing, common to many African countries. Proverbs like "I am because you are. We are because I am" and *Nin ani yiri dad iska saar* (he who says I alienates everyone else) point to the communal context from which Somalis come. Many have felt that "migration took them from the protective, familiar environment and extended families to the margins of a society"⁵⁹⁸ whose culture and language they did not understand. Others have found that what they held dear including social and cultural values have not been easily adaptable in this new environment. As one individual relates:

A lot of things meant a great deal when the country functioned. Property meant a great deal when the country functioned. Property meant something, being "educated", being neighbourly, being responsible to the community, all this meant something... Because life has no more the same meaning as it did before the civil war.⁵⁹⁹

Hawo contrasts this "culturally alien environment where neighbours are strangers to one another" and the lack of interactions between them to Somalia where the community was close knit and its members were like family to each other. She says, "*Qofkaad aragtaba albaabkiisaw qafilan waa qaloodey oo cidladu waa wax lagu qandhoodaa* (every one has his/her door shut. I am feeling lonely and it is emotionally agonizing.)"⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁶ Sirad Hashi (June 12, 2001).

⁵⁹⁷ Sahra Habbane (October 27, 2001).

⁵⁹⁸ Suresht R. Bald. "Coping with Marginality: South Asian Women Migrants in Britain." Marianne H. Marchand and Jane L. Parpart (eds.) *Feminist/Postmodernism/Development*. London & New York, 1995. p. 124.

⁵⁹⁹ Quoted in Farah. *Yesterday, Tomorrow...* p. 4.

In the following poem she talks about culture shock and the feelings that she lost her ability to function properly in the new society. The poet talks about how, when she first came, everyone in the family went to either school or work and how she felt stuck home not being able to speak the language. She discusses how, despite her background as a long time activist, she felt inadequate and “unenlightened” when she came here.

Qof aan indho beelin oo aafu ayan ku dhicin
 Oo addimadiisiyo lixaadkiisu idilyihiin
 Oo dibadda aan aadiinoo soo adeegan karin
 Oo albaabka ka bixinoo ka baqaya inuu ambado
 Oo eheladiisiyo saaxiibo u imanayn
 Oo ilbax is moodahayay oo beenowday inuu ahaa
 Oo ilaahay ka baryaya ceebtiisa inuu asturo.

A person who is not blind and who is not physically challenged;
 A person who did not lose any of his/her limbs but cannot go anywhere;
 A person who cannot go shopping for he/she is afraid of getting lost;
 A person who does not have relatives and friends visiting;
 A person who thought her/himself to be learned but is not;
 God, help us for we need a lot of assistance.⁶⁰¹

Coming to a culture where there is not much interaction with neighbours and where friends and family members have limited time for socializing because of the demands of daily lives has left many the Somali refugee women isolated. This isolation has been particularly difficult for those who had a long history of activism but now cannot even communicate with others outside the Somali community because of linguistic difficulties.

Changing gender roles

Women juggle so many things. Role of being a mother, role model for kids. They play two roles – outside the house and inside the house. They must acquire new skills [language etc.], they must work outside to earn income, and they must do all these without the support networks that helped them in Somalia.⁶⁰²

⁶⁰⁰ Hawo Jabril (April 12, 2000).

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Fouzia Ismail (October 20, 2000)

Migration and the resettlement experience have had enormous implications for gender relations in the Somali community in diaspora.⁶⁰³ Due to their placement and role as the primary care givers within the family, women have assumed more family responsibilities in the process of resettlement. Some of the main reasons that women have assumed these additional responsibilities during the adjustment include the dramatic change in the family organization and the lack of traditional support systems and social networks that generally provided assistance.

Because of the absence of men, women have become the heads of the household assuming, for the first time, leadership roles within the family.⁶⁰⁴ In this new family situation, women have been obliged to look after their children, often alone, care for the elderly and manage the household during the whole process of migration and in refugee camps. Women have made many sacrifices trying to save family members from the difficulties including death and injury. In the following short poem a woman tells her son to take the money and save his life.

Intaan shilku sheedda kaa helin
 Amaan boobuhu bowdo kaa jebin
 Noolka hooyoo orod Noorway nafta kula roor⁶⁰⁵

Before you get injured
 Or before you lose a limb
 Take this money and run for your life to Norway!

In the diaspora, women, by default, have often assumed more active roles. In addition to

⁶⁰³ It must be pointed out here that the factors that affect the family in diaspora are dealt with differently by different groups and individuals depending on their age, education and social background, and the general process of their migration.

the traditional role of caring for the family, many women take the responsibilities for various other tasks, traditionally done by men, managing the family affairs and negotiating for the family in the public sphere. These tasks include dealing with authorities such as immigration lawyers, welfare workers and dealing with the school system. As Moussa suggests in her study of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugee women in Toronto:

Women must not only take on added roles and responsibilities formerly held by male members, but they also have the added pressure of holding together a fragmented family and adapting to a totally new set of social relations in culturally unfamiliar countries.⁶⁰⁶

In addition, the social system that sustained the family through difficult times and provided assistance (both economic and emotional) in crisis situations in the past had broken down with migration and refugeeism. “The whole support network [women were used to in Somalia] that was the family is missing. Often times, they come here as single mothers and father’s role is missing also. The support of their husband is also missing,”⁶⁰⁷ Fowsia says. The roles of husbands and wives were traditionally defined by the society. As illustrated in chapter three, there were hierarchies of relations within the family in this context. This hierarchy was based on gender and age. The husband held the ultimate decision-making power over everyone else in the family; boys over the girls (even if girls were older); and older girls over younger ones. While there were structural inequities in these familial relations, there were often checks and balances, intended to control the potential for abuse inherent in this system.

⁶⁰⁴ Hibaaq I. Osman. “Somalia: Will Reconstruction Threaten Women’s Progress?” *Ms Magazine*. vol. 3, no. 5. March/April 1993. p. 12.

⁶⁰⁵ Quoted to me by Fadumo Alim (October 26, 2001).

⁶⁰⁶ Helene Moussa. *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees*. Toronto: Artemis Enterprises, 1993, p.17.

⁶⁰⁷ Fowsia Abdulkadir (September 7, 2000)

If there were conflicts within the family, there were conflict resolution mechanisms employed to resolve the issues and help establish a “stable” family. In this system, the good of the family, rather than individual rights, was sought. Male relatives represented women’s rights within these counsels. This means that women’s voices and perspectives were never really presented within this social framework.

As discussed in chapter one, women had, however, access to a strong network of support from relatives (mostly women). They were able to activate these networks of kin support at any time. This support mechanism mediated the inequities prevalent within the family relations. In the company of women relatives and friends, difficulties within the family were discussed, women were provided with an opportunity to vent their frustrations and deal with their oppressed status within the domestic sphere. However, although women’s concerns were taken seriously in these settings, neither male superiority nor structural inequities within the family were challenged or even questioned.

Change in the family structure from an extended family (the family circle in Somalia was wide and included such other kin as grandparents, aunts, and uncles) to a nuclear family has had negative repercussions on women. In contrast to the situation in the homeland where the spirit of community prevailed and where the extended family and often neighbours provided support, women in diaspora lack any assistance in the asylum country. Indeed, separation from the extended family is "one of the most painful

experiences women had to face and continue to grieve for."⁶⁰⁸ With this absence of social support networks, the fulfilment of traditional roles regarding child-rearing and domestic affairs has become the sole responsibility of the mother. Women's responsibilities, both at home and outside, also increase as the family unit and dynamics change because of the civil war and migration. As one woman, referring to the African proverb observed, "it takes a village to raise a child," said, "we are raising children away from the village that helped raise the child."⁶⁰⁹

In the Somali context, children are not considered the private property of one family. They rather are the future and resources of the whole community. When a child is welcomed to the world s/he receive a blessing from the community which says, *kii dadkiisa, dalkiisa, iyo diintiisa, anfaca Allaha ka dhigo* (may he be one that positively contributes to his people, his nation, and his religion). This means the child is born to the community rather than to one particular family. Hence, the rearing of children is rather the responsibility of the community as a whole. The following quotation points to the challenges and tremendous responsibilities that women have assumed without a support system in diaspora.

I am a single mother with six children. I have to care for them, go to a language class and do everything by myself... in Somalia there were aunts, uncles, sisters, and neighbours to help you. In Canada no one is around to give a hand... and it is very cold here. If one of the children gets sick, what can you do? There is no one to help you ... and the children ... they have totally changed, the way they talk, the way they dress and the way they treat their parents and elders... and what if you try to discipline them or even talk to them? There is Children's Aid Society, there is the police and I don't know what will become of

⁶⁰⁸ Moussa. *Storm and Sanctuary...* , p. 222.

⁶⁰⁹ Fowsia Abdulkadir. "Living in Two Worlds: Somali Youth and Parents." Presentation at a youth conference organized by the Somali Center for Youth, Women and Community Development. Ottawa, March 16, 1999.

them. I just look at them and keep quiet.⁶¹⁰

In families with fathers present, men have made little or no contribution to household work. This is due to the fact that household duties were traditionally constructed as solely women's responsibility and men did not get involved in domestic affairs. As one woman said: "Here in Canada, men are not used to working in the home with the housework and children. It is not their fault. That is our culture."⁶¹¹ In this new setting, Somali men have usually been very hesitant to be involved in household duties such as caring for the children and doing chores. In the host countries where women lack the traditional help in managing the household, the clash between the old and the new values in terms of gender has caused tensions in the home.⁶¹² As one woman articulates it:

Somali men, they never cook. Only women cook. Only women look after kids. Only women do everything. We say the husband is only name. We know [sic] Somali women! We say the man is only the name. Everything else is the woman.⁶¹³

Indeed, a combination of the stress of adjustment to a new cultural environment and the responsibilities of dealing with authorities has made the task of parenting without the support of the extended family and community a daunting task for many women.⁶¹⁴ As one mother commented, "when I came to Ottawa, I woke up one morning and realised I had to take care of nine children by myself."⁶¹⁵ On this frustrating experience of raising a family in a social context where they are isolated and occupy a marginal position, another woman noted:

⁶¹⁰ Quoted in Abdulle. *Somali Immigrants...* p. 104-105.

⁶¹¹ Fowsia Abdulkadir, Susan Lee and Janet Hunter. *Refugees in the Classroom: Resources and Materials for Teachers*. 1997.

⁶¹² Khadra Mohamed (July 27, 1998)

⁶¹³ Quoted in Rumble. *Somali Women in Metropolitan Toronto...* p. 84.

⁶¹⁴ Abdulkadir, Lee and Hunter. *Refugees in the Classroom...*

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

Children had a whole world in which to run around. The women were not locked in their homes; we had neighbours and many relatives who helped with the children. [Here], everything has to be done by you - the children, the house, the shopping, the bills ...⁶¹⁶

The situation is further compounded in asylum countries if the traditional men's role as providers for the family is undermined by high unemployment rates. A needs assessment report produced by Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services and Jewish Family Service of Ottawa states, "many of the men have become depressed, since the very basis of their identity as providers has been usurped by the Canadian welfare system."⁶¹⁷ Lack of employment often leads to a large number of men becoming demoralised by this threat to their "manhood" as providers of the family. While many problems and stresses come from joblessness and reluctant dependence on welfare for the whole family, there have been many conflicts that arise in the family as a result of this redefinition of traditional gender roles between men and women.⁶¹⁸

In addition, women's acquisition of independent incomes has been seen as weakening the position of men as the provider and the head of the family. As men have lost the dignity of being able to support their own families, many have felt threatened by women's "new found" economic freedom. They have believed that as soon as women achieved some level of financial independence, they acquired a new status as independent members of the community and they began to be "disrespecting" of their husbands. As a result, women have often been accused of going against the established gender norms, deviating

⁶¹⁶ Quoted in Zulkhfa A. Yusuf. *West-End Somali Women Needs Assessment*. Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Centre, September 1995, p. 3-4.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 3.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*

from the traditional norms, and “absorbing foreign cultures.”⁶¹⁹ However, according to Hayat, women have not been blindly absorbing alien cultures but have been doing what is practical in the new situation. She says women have had more options in terms of making their own money in the host country. She continues,

[w]omen stayed in difficult situations for economic reasons. They tolerated their husband’s affairs and indiscretions and men having other wives. Some women are still tolerating men who are mistreating them because they are afraid of being divorced. Although there is a Somali saying, “*silic ku nool soddon guursataaa dhaanta*” (better to marry thirty times than live in bad situation), it is shameful to be divorced. It [being divorced] is becoming more and more common and is now being socially accepted more though. If the man is sitting around, doing nothing, and is mistreating her, if she kicks him out, she is not absorbing alien culture. She is doing what she has to do.⁶²⁰

The following poem by a Somali man strongly speaks to the adjustment difficulties, including dealing with what are perceived as “woman dictators”, men have faced in the diaspora. The poet touches on some of the anxieties Somalis in Canada feel about the changing gender roles.

Meel uu sidii ciid ufo leh baraf ku aasaayo
 Meel ay islaamuhu raggii ku amartaagleyni
 Aqoontaada meel aan larabin abid haddaad joogto
 Meel aad agoon sidii aad tahay cayrtu aqooli.⁶²¹

A place where the snow buries you like a quick sand
 A place where women act like dictators over men
 A place where your knowledge and skills are not needed
 A place where like orphans you depend on handout for the indigent.⁶²²

The changes in gender roles have led to power struggles between men and women. As a result of this redefinition of traditional gender roles there have often been many conflicts that arise in the family. In addition, the stresses placed on the family have often escalated and have manifested themselves in increased incidents of family breakdown and,

⁶¹⁹ Hayat Saban (October 24, 2000).

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ Quoted in Abdulle. *Somali Immigrants...* p. 66.

sometimes, domestic violence. In cases where these tensions lead to divorce, women have become sole supporters of families thus compounding their responsibilities at home. Since issues of abuse or stress are often kept within the privacy of the family and any public disclosure is considered as a source of shame and family dishonour, women do not generally discuss their familial affairs outside the family context.⁶²³

There are practical reasons why men and women have had difficulties communicating to each other their different perspectives on how family issues should be handled in this new context and building a stable home for their families. However, the community entertains a number of explanations as to why things are not working properly. The most popular of these explanations is that women have deviated from Somali culture and religion and have absorbed alien western culture. Women have been accused of becoming "*fara laga qaad*", too "liberated", or too "Westernized" and contributing to or being mainly responsible for the "loss of the Somali family" in diaspora.

Examining more closely the popular culture that interprets social realities, one becomes particularly impressed by the magnitude of these gender tensions within the family and the community's explanations of these issues. Songs like Shimali Ahmed Shimali's⁶²⁴

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ Shukria Samatar (December 20, 1999).

⁶²⁴ Shimali is a Somali singer who is popular among the younger generation. He now lives in Saudi Arabia, but his albums can be found in Somali record stores in Toronto. He has an album that talks about men and women's relations in diaspora. One of his songs alludes to his particular personal experience. His wife left him for a non-Somali man after she came to Canada. The song, *Anmaa kir kaa mudan*, talks about how Somali women have supposedly become "liberated" in the Western world and how they have lost all values including family.

Anmaa kir kaa mudan and Mohamed C/lahi Sangub's⁶²⁵ play *Qabyo*⁶²⁶ point to tremendous anxiety and conflicts between Somali men and women in the diaspora.

What has not often been appreciated when analysing the situation of the Somali family in the popular discourse is that the issue is much more complicated than a simple "women's or men's fault". Rather, as the Somali proverb "*ridu qawl leh, orgiguna qawl leh*" (both the he and she goats are right) implies, both men and women have rights to their feelings of pain due to the uncertainties and the instability of their family. What has not also been properly analysed is the fact that the civil war, fragmentation of family members, the ensuing flight to countries of asylum, and the resettlement have had an immense impact on families and their abilities to properly function in the new socio-economic context.

Family reconciliation and mediation often have become extremely difficult because the parties who provided the moral and the financial support to the family are either too busy with their struggles to keep their own families together or they have not made it to Canada and are refugees in some other country. There have been some attempts to deliver mediation services by proxy from long distances. One of the more tangible difficulties in providing family mediation by proxy is the fact that implementation of advice has failed

⁶²⁵ Sangub is a very famous and respected Somali poet and playwright who now lives in Minnesota, United States. He has produced a number of poems and plays that attempt to interpret and critique the Somali experiences in diaspora.

⁶²⁶ The play *Qabyo* is a biased portrayal of women and how they have changed in diaspora. It is about a woman who came to Canada and in her first encounter with Canadian officials (welfare worker in this case), she is informed about her "rights" as a woman in the new country. She is told, "in Canada women, children, cats and dogs have rights." What is implied here is that men do not have any rights in the new context. The woman uses these "rights" and wrongly accuses her husband of abusing her. The husband is thrown out of the house and [it is implied] gets charged with wife abuse. The solution proposed is *waa la noqonayaa* (we are going back). What is interesting is how the play single-handedly makes women responsible for the tensions, and sometimes the break-ups, of the Somali families in diaspora. This, of course, simplifies a complex situation where many of the factors affecting the family are external.

because it could not, due to the social vacuum, be enforced either through force or censure.

The clash between the deeply embedded expectations of male-female roles and the changing social and economic realities not only has painful effects on male and female dynamics, but also a negative impact on the family and the community.

Intergenerational gaps

In addition to cultural difference between themselves and the host society, women have often dealt with cultural clashes between themselves and their children. Although different in nature, many participants agreed that the latter are more personally felt and painful. Because youngsters integrate into the larger society more easily than their parents, cultural conflicts as well as clashes of values have resulted between them and their parents at home.⁶²⁷ As Sahra points out, “those with teenagers have the most difficulties in adjusting to the new environment.”⁶²⁸

Parental expectations of traditional norms have generated familial conflicts as well. Consequently, parents expressed great concern that they would be unable to effectively transfer their values to their children against a competing value in the new context. For

⁶²⁷ With their parents being too busy with the day-to-day activities of settlement, young Somali women and men in diaspora lack the indigenous knowledge, which according to Dei includes values, belief systems and worldviews that are transferred from the older generation to the young generation (See Dei. “Rethinking the Role of Indigenous Knowledges...” p. 2.). These young individuals often do not have much recollection of “home” and through the process of schooling and interaction with the wider community, young Somali men and women often lose significant awareness of and contact with their cultural heritage. This dual cultural conflict affects their sense of identity and leads many to be distanced and separated from any attachment to the roots, origins and ancestors with which their parents identify and to which they belong.

instance, a Somali mother's traditional approach to caring and disciplining children is often in conflict with popular Canadian notions of parenting.⁶²⁹ The traditional style of parenting rests upon the notion that parents have the ultimate authority and that they know best. On the contrary, children have seen their parents' authority diminishing in the new environment as they (children) often have ended up assuming new responsibilities. Failure to learn the new languages and understand the system has often reduced mother's ability to adapt to the new society. Because of this language barrier many mothers, many of whom are single parents, have relied on their children to translate when dealing with institutions in Canada. Children have been expected to go to the school meetings of their younger brothers and sisters and deal with landlords. A young woman remarked that "suddenly, I went from teenager to father figure in our household."⁶³⁰

The change in children's role in the family and their assumption of new roles and responsibilities has often resulted in undermining parental authority in the eyes of their children.⁶³¹ Consequently there is a shift in the balance of power between parents and children. Children have used this shift of power to their advantage. As Sahra says, they have been smart enough to use the system [in terms of the child welfare agency's role in intervening on behalf of children] for their own benefit and have played their mothers for

⁶²⁸ Sahra Habbane (October 27, 2000)

⁶²⁹ Peter Hume. "Culture gap poses rift between Somalis and Children's Aid Society." *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, January 30, 1993, p. B7.

⁶³⁰ Jama. "The Effects of War and Migration...." p. 34.

⁶³¹ For instance, because the Somali parents' lack linguistic ability and their dramatically different conceptualization of education and the role of the teacher, children are the ones who translate for parents in the interaction with teachers and school administration. Generally, Somalis have a good faith in the educational system. The teacher played a key role in not only educating but also raising the child and providing a moral guidance for him/her. He was not only *bare* (teacher), but also *barbaariye* (guidor) in Somalia. In fact, the Ministry that took care of the educational issues was called *Wasaaradda Waxbarashada iyo Barbaarinta* in Somali (literally translated as Ministry of Education and Guidance).

“fools”.⁶³² The role of the mother is then compromised in the new situation. Fouzia, a Health Promoter and a Registered Nurse, says that children have a different view of their mother “when they go to school here and they see people speaking other language and the mom speaks her little broken English... I saw one mother saying ‘yes I speak ESL English [as the kids call it], but my little broken English is what brought you to Canada’”.⁶³³

This has been compounded by the fear of state intervention (a totally new concept) and authorities such as Children’s Aid Society (CAS) contributing to parents being extremely intimidated by their children and their “new found powers in Canada.” One woman said “we rather keep our children with their bad behaviours than lose them to the authorities.”⁶³⁴ This has further contributed to the home often becoming a contested terrain and a site of struggle, not only between husband and wife but also between parents and children in the process of adaptation to the new environment and culture.

In addition, youth have started questioning traditional values to the dismay of parents who often find it difficult to understand their children’s experiences. This has been particularly problematic with young women who have complained about gender asymmetry and differential treatment between them and boys. Girls’ movements have generally been more restricted and their actions more regulated than boys. Mothers, on the other hand, have felt that children are not as responsible as they ought to be. As one

This difference is interpreted by the young people as lack of parent’s ability to fully interact in this environment, which leads to lack of respect for parents and undermining of their authority in the home.

⁶³² Sahra Habbane (October 27, 2000).

⁶³³ Fouzia Ismail (October 20, 2000).

interviewee points out:

Women do everything, including taking care of teenage children. They cook for them and clean up after them. Our kids are not like the ones in Somalia; neither are they like the kids here. They benefit from the parent's vulnerability in the new environment. They are quite smart!... They exploit and manipulate both situations.⁶³⁵

Mothers have been also quite distressed and baffled about "the sudden loss of connection with their teenage children."⁶³⁶ Although many have recognised that their method of child rearing and disciplining may not be as effective in the new environment, they have been distressed about the powers the institutions that are mandated to protect children have over them. Some parents have even felt betrayed by their children and have felt not aided by the child protection system which is viewed as encouraging children to undermine parental authority. Women have had to play the role of the neighbours (by watching children when they want to play outside), religious school (by helping their children learn about religious values), grade school (by following their children's daily progress and helping with their homework). Many have also become aware that organising children's social and recreational activities, for example, does not come cheap in this country. Constant work is needed to help children survive and thrive in this environment. Contrary to the situation in Somalia where the whole neighbourhood provided children's entertainment and stimulation, one must have time and money to keep children entertained and to help them develop socially and emotionally.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁴ *Caawima Carruurta.*

⁶³⁵ Sahra Habbane (October 27, 2000).

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

Conservatism and social backlash

In addition to external pressures women have had to deal with internal community pressures, namely, a new conservatism in the community engendered by a perceived threat of Western culture. This trend of conservatism and blaming women for social and economic difficulties has historical precedent in Somalia. Although some of it may have started in Somalia in the late 1980s, this conservatism became even more pronounced after the civil war in 1990s and in the diaspora for many reasons.⁶³⁸ First, the perceived threat from Western values have led to many being more and more afraid of contacts with members outside the community. Women were blamed and made responsible for social problems such as youth identity crises, weakened family structures, and high levels of divorce and deteriorating parent-children relationships.⁶³⁹ The construction of gender, in this sense, is tied with constructions of the “other”.⁶⁴⁰ This politicisation of gender has often been the result of the need to set the group identity apart and to “protect” the community from outside threat. As Papanek points out, where a group identity becomes paramount, and where defensiveness is present, women are controlled. Alternative forms of identity, such as feminism, become suspect and unacceptable as a result.”⁶⁴¹

In addition, traditional interpretations of religious beliefs have provided conservatives with the comfortable sense of doing the right thing,⁶⁴² albeit at the expense of women, in

⁶³⁸ Dr. Mohamed Nuuh Ali (March 6, 2002).

⁶³⁹ Khadija Ali (July 17, 2000)

⁶⁴⁰ Valentine M. Moghadam. “Introduction: Women, and Identity Politics in Theoretical and Comparative Perspective.” Valentine Moghadam (ed.) *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, p. 46.

⁶⁴¹ Hanna Papanek. “The Ideal Society: Control and Autonomy in the Construction of Identity.” Valentine Moghadam (ed.) *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, pp. 42-75.

⁶⁴² Dr. Mohamed Nuuh Ali (March 6, 2002)

these changing social environments. Self-proclaimed religious leaders have employed selected and misinterpreted verses from the Quran to demand women to submit to male controls and conform to an idealised construct of womanhood.⁶⁴³ The patriarchal association of womanhood with motherhood was propagated by the “readings” of Quran. Religious leaders have argued this idealised construct of womanhood is requisite to the attainment of a “Muslim” community in an “anti-Muslim” society. Women’s movements are increasingly regulated and monitored.⁶⁴⁴ The veil, in this context, has often become a symbol of women’s identity as “Muslim” and a mechanism of social control.

While the phenomenon of making women “the carriers of tradition” has not been unique to Somalis, the challenges it has posed to Somali women in the diaspora are complex because “tradition” includes a male-dominated interpretation of religion as well and the two (tradition and religion) are fixed in meaning (whereas religion by itself has been argued by Muslim women to be flexible and open. Along with the multiple responsibilities of ensuring that they and their families adjust to the new social and economic realities, these new developments have created new threat to women. In addition to sexism and racism in state policies they now have had to deal with religious conservatism within their community.

I would say things must change- the method of teaching, not the religion. ... Instead of providing for solace and helping them find peace, there is a lot of accusations and judgements. You know, “you did not do that, you have to do that”⁶⁴⁵

For Somali women, encounters with the Canadian society involved culture shock,

⁶⁴³ As Dr. Ali maintained, “the ideological aspect of this phenomenon was controlled by men. It was only after a decade that we see more women participating in this dissemination of knowledge of Islam.”

⁶⁴⁴ Khadija Ali (July 17, 2000).

⁶⁴⁵ Sahra Habbane (October 27, 2000).

children integrating at a much faster pace than their parents, assisting the family, and the community by extension, to adjust to the new environment and the pressures of maintaining and transmitting culture to the next generation. For some women, tensions of balancing life inside and outside the home create sense of hopelessness and powerlessness. As one woman expresses, “[S]ometimes you feel so helpless. I lost my husband; I lost my country, I lost my people. We are better than if we were in the middle of a civil war, but we live in a poor, undignified life”.⁶⁴⁶

Conclusion

The multiple challenges posed in the new social and cultural environment have contributed to women adopting new roles, some of which were at odds with their habitual roles in pre-civil war Somalia. Men on the other hand lost their traditional role of providers and as a result felt their position in the household has diminished. Many men and conservatives have seen the new roles assumed by women as a threat to traditional gender norms, to their place in the society, and to their perception of Somali identity. These social disruptions and the perceived threat from “outside and alien culture” has led to some members of the community advocating for a return to “tradition” as part of their search for stability. This “tradition” has often been mythical, constructed, and has had little or no correspondence with historical reality. It has emphasised extremely differentiated gender roles and has involved the reinterpretation of Islam at the expense of women’s moral and social agency. At the practical level, this new tradition blames women for all the current social problems and places new restrictions on their autonomy.

⁶⁴⁶ Quoted in Shawn McCarthy. "Starting Over: Somalis find refuge in Canada." *Canadian Geographic*.

As chapters three and five have shown, the “tradition” invented in the diaspora has no historical basis. Women had been active both in the rural and in the urban settings in Somalia and there were many expressions of agency and self-determination rather than passivity. In Canada, women have not abandoned their culture and traditions. On the contrary, women have used aspects of their tradition to help them cope with the new reality of being uprooted. Unlike most men, women have taken a pragmatic (rather than an ideological) approach to tradition and modified for their own purposes. The following chapter will explore the various mechanisms (including formulating strategies based on their traditional values) Somali women have used to address institutional and structural constraints in the new social and economic environment. It will also examine women's struggles against various victimising forces, the ongoing day-to-day struggles they have engaged in to survive, and make sense of the displacement they experienced and to reconstruct their identities in the new cultural, linguistic and structural environment. The chapter is also concerned with understanding the ingenious ways in which women have managed to cope with marginality, and sometimes even achieve personal growth, during these uncertain and unsettling times.

CHAPTER VIII

The other side of the story: Negotiating identity and space within the margins

Introduction

By braving the unknown, which is the first in a series of fixed steps beginning with the idea of home and ending at the threshold of the refugee's state of mind, the Somalis made a commitment to saving their lives rather than waiting for possible death.⁶⁴⁷

You will hear them [women] say "I am tired" ... still they never lose their stamina. They are always on the go and moving, you know. They went to school and now they are working. From the day they came to this country they said "sister I want to work. You know, I want to do something, I want to be useful". I remember one woman, she said she wants to go to full time school, and she did. To me, it seemed difficult, because she had six kids, the oldest of whom was around six and the youngest was few months, and their father was not here and she was young, around twenties. So it looked to me that she was better off taking care of her children until they grew up and go to full time school... I was very frank with her. I said, "[L]isten sister, why don't you wait until they all start going to school. Then you will have more time." She ended up going to school full time and raising her children. She got her high school diploma and I think she went to college... Although women face many difficulties and frustrations, they really work hard and try hard.⁶⁴⁸

This chapter explores how individual women coped with their marginality and adapted to a new culture and a drastically different socio-economic environment. Contrary to conservative perceptions, Somali women did not abandon their traditions. They adapted them to their new environment. As this chapter discusses, many women formulated strategies based on their traditional values, reconstructed familiar social spaces while responding to changes, and often recreated and modified (or fit in the new environment) female-based institutions that brought women together across class and clan lines in Somalia.

⁶⁴⁷ Farah. *Yesterday, Tomorrow...* p. 31.

⁶⁴⁸ Sahra Habbane (October 27, 2000).

Renegotiating identity

Aar qoyay aqoon gaabka dacow ula ekaa. *Haddii aad ogsoontahay in uun asal waxaan ahaan jirey, eraygan aad I leedahay afka sooma mariseen* (A wet lion looks like a fox to the narrow-minded. If you only knew some of my past qualities, you would not dare pronounce from your mouth the words you are saying to me.)⁶⁴⁹

I knew how to be a foreigner because I left Somalia when I was 19 years old and lived in different countries. But the realisation that I might never go back was emotionally draining. I did not have the luxury of picking up my bags and going back home any more.⁶⁵⁰

I am staying here whatever happens. I know I would meet people who would not be soft with me, but there is no going back home – there is nothing. Let them [those standing in her way of making a life for herself] do whatever. They can scream, they can yell. I don't care...!⁶⁵¹

Being a refugee means losing everything - family, friends, profession, home - that allows an individual to establish a personal and communal identity. This loss of self and identity contributes to a sense of uncertainty. As Moussa asserts, people's sense of self comes from their community, their profession or occupation, families, their sense of history, their ideology and faith. When they become refugees, "they are stripped of all of the structures which maintain these relationships. This represents a massive threat and challenge to the individual's coping and adaptive capacities."⁶⁵² One interviewee concurred with this by talking about how difficult it is to lose your sense of history and identity in diaspora where "no one knows your worth," by saying, "maybe in Somalia all you needed to be was yourself. Here you have to constantly prove yourself."⁶⁵³

Because they lack the protection of a state, refugees are conceptualised as those who are

⁶⁴⁹ *Qabrigii Jacaylka* (Somali Play).

⁶⁵⁰ Fowsia Abdulkadir (January 23, 2002).

⁶⁵¹ Quoted in Rumble. *Somali Women in Metropolitan Toronto...* p. 100.

in a "nonplace" where they are considered as "not merely as marginal, but also without agency, and one who is 'agency-less'."⁶⁵⁴ Hence, women's identity has changed from Somali women to "Somali refugee women." With this identity change, imposed from without, came the representation of women as dependent, helpless victims who are unable to adjust to their new environment. Somali women in Canada have not accepted this imposed identity. Women's lived realities shatter the myth of refugee women being helpless victims.

Many Somalis, because they came from a racially homogenous country, lacked an understanding of "cultural and linguistic nuances" as they exist in Canadian society. Thus, it was difficult for them to be attuned to racial discrimination.⁶⁵⁵ However, after the first few weeks or months of being in Canada, many Somalis realise, sometimes quite violently, the cultural and racial differences between themselves and the receiving society. Women's adjustment experiences, therefore, bring not only their racial identities but also their cultural identities to the surface.

Because of their skin colour, Somalis were lumped together by their host communities with other black immigrants and black Canadians. This was a surprise to many Somalis who could not comprehend why they must be associated with people with whom they share nothing but skin colour.⁶⁵⁶ They have had difficulty understanding the obliteration of the immigrants/refugees' diverse histories and the concentration on what are

⁶⁵² Helene Moussa. *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees*. Toronto, 1993, p. 27.

⁶⁵³ Fouzia Ismail (October 20, 2000).

⁶⁵⁴ Nevzat Soguk. "Critical perspectives on refugees." *Refuge*, vol. 17, no. 6, December 1998, p. 3.

⁶⁵⁵ Rumble. *Somali Women in Metropolitan Toronto...* " p. 70.

considered similarities in skin colour.

However, while many Somali women lacked any critical understanding of the phenomenon of racial and cultural discrimination upon arrival, this has not necessarily stopped them from resisting the way they are labelled and put in little boxes. Despite the difficulties of dealing with religious and cultural difference and the stereotypical images portrayed about Somalis, many women have striven to improve their circumstances and ignore the negative image of their community. One woman said, “the only way to prove everyone wrong is to go ahead, not to stop. Teach them who you are and prove them wrong.”⁶⁵⁷ Through these processes of resisting stereotypes, women have succeeded in redefining their identity in their new environment.

Finding solace in religion

After going through a mourning period, I made a conscious decision and perhaps accepted the fact that I may never go back. At an individual level, this decision helped and grounded me.⁶⁵⁸

Many Somali women have turned to religion as a coping strategy and for comfort. Somalis are close to 100 percent Muslims and Islam is partly the source of their cultural and social identity and plays a central role in their daily lives. In Canada, because religion often has played the only stabilising role in their current lives as refugees, many women have emphasised their Islamic identity in search of a source of strength. The trend of claiming a strong Islamic identity started in Somalia in 1980s and continued until the

⁶⁵⁶ Shukria Samatar (December 20, 1999).

⁶⁵⁷ Fouzia Ismail (October 20, 2000).

civil war. This trend was more intensified in the diaspora because of the new fears and uncertainties that accompanied being displaced persons. McGowen, who studied the process of integration of Somalis in Toronto, found that instead of “assimilation” and losing their Islamic values, Somalis, in general, have opted for adherence to their religion. She argues that, as opposed to Somali nationalism, Somalis have taken steps to make religion the "material of their identity."⁶⁵⁹

Establishing a new personal identity that is focused on Islam has helped many to be part of a larger community of Muslims who share common values. Focusing on Islam means self-consciously asserting one’s Muslim-ness in a culture where the norm is a secularised Christianity (in contrast to the Somali context). As McGowen's study found, almost all participants identified their community to be Muslims, not Somalis.⁶⁶⁰ Islam, and belonging to a larger and multinational Muslim community, had not only provided many with the emotional strength to cope with the challenges of their current displacement, but it also has given them a sense of belonging in a world where they are mostly marginalized and isolated. As Haddad and Smith argue, "to be Muslim is to belong to a kind of universal family, to share in a unity that depends on mutual co-operation."⁶⁶¹ The search for a sense of belonging is significant in the process of adjustment because refugees not only experience loss of home and loved ones, but also of their sense of belonging.

⁶⁵⁸ Fowsia Abdulkadir (January 23, 2002).

⁶⁵⁹ Rima Berns McGowen. *Muslims in Diaspora: The Somali Communities of London and Toronto*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, p. 96.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 157-158.

⁶⁶¹ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idelman Smith. *Muslim Communities in North America*, 1994, p. 21.

Moreover, the difficulties encountered in the mainstream society and the fear of cultural difference and “losing children to assimilation” have compelled many parents to renegotiate their previous identity. Religion has become one of the tools used by women to convince themselves that they have control over their new situation in the diaspora. This has manifested itself in the way they dress and the way they raise their children.⁶⁶² Many women have made the decision to take on a more Islamic identity (including wearing the *hijab* and participating in religious classes) to provide moral guidance to and be role models for their children in a threatening environment. Like many Muslims, there is the perception among Somali parents that “Islamic identity will guarantee the preservation of the family and prevent the children from total integration into the host country.”⁶⁶³ Parents often hope that being “more Muslim” and being involved in the wider Muslim community will provide their children with correct moral development and that Islam will “provide both themselves and their children with a moral compass in a dangerous world.”⁶⁶⁴ In this sense, religion has enabled women to deal with the presumed cultural intrusion and threat to their values and has been a key element in the transmission of values systems to the next generation.

Religion, in this case, has provided them with the strength to cope with uncertainties and the challenges of their current displacement. In a study on Somali women who have had traumatic experiences, it was observed that in support groups for victims of torture and rape, for instance, “vivid flashbacks of the traumatic event, as are often described in rape

⁶⁶² Dr. Mohamed Nuuh Ali (March 6, 2002)

⁶⁶³ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad. “The Impact of the Islamic Revolution in Iran on the Syrian Muslims of Montreal.” Earle H. Waugh, Baha Abu-Laban & Regula B. Qureshi (eds.) *The Muslim Community in North America*. Alberta, 1983. p. 180.

survivors, do not seem to be experienced by Somali women."⁶⁶⁵ This ability to "leave the past behind and get on with daily life" is attributed to the Somali women's strong religious faith. "If it were not for our faith we would be committing a lot of suicide. We believe in divine destiny..."⁶⁶⁶ one woman said. Another talked about how in every situation and whenever faced with difficulties in the new environment [in this case bad weather], she seeks God's help. She said,

When I'm overwhelmed with everything, I pray. I pray to the ground not to be slippery, I pray to the wind not to be too strong. I pray to the snow to stay away. Sometimes it works. God is my only friend.⁶⁶⁷

Having faith has provided women not only with the strength to make sense of their displacements but also the security to know that they can always count on Allah amidst the uncertainties in their present situation. In this sense, religion has provided peace and strength in spirit for women. Many women explained the fact that they can always depend on Allah when all else fails and when they have no other support in this new environment. In the following poem, the poet talks to Allah and invokes him to help her deal with loss of home, loved ones, and isolation.

Awood badanow, Ilaahow Arxamu Raxiim, urugo iney heyso
Oo dalkeedii olol ka kacay;
Waxay doonayso waad ogtahay, adaana arki karaya uurkeeda waxa ku jira;
Oo eheladeedii qaarba meel aaday ururin kara;
Oo arwaaxa iyo faraxa ay doonayso u ebyi kara ee sahal umuurteeda;

⁶⁶⁴ Delia E. Rothenberg. "Diversity and Community: Palestinian Women in Toronto." *Canadian Woman Studies* (special issue on immigrant and refugee women), vol 19, no. 3, Fall 1999, p. 77.

⁶⁶⁵ Blakeney, Jill, Fadumo Jama Dirie and May Anne McRae. "Support Group for Traumatized Somali Women: A Pilot Project of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture." Wenona Giles, Helene Moussa and Penny Esterik (eds.) *Development and Diaspora: Gender and the Refugee Experience*. Toronto, 1996, p. 300.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷ Cited in *Best Settlement Practices...*

Aamiin baan leeyahay, Ilaahow aamiin.⁶⁶⁸

Oh Allah, the most powerful and merciful you know that I am a person who is preoccupied and whose country is burning;
 You know what I want, only you can know what is in my heart;
 You can bring together my displaced relatives;
 You can bring the peace and happiness I long for (I seek);
 Amen I say. Oh God amen.

Unlike in Somalia where women did not have formal access to Islamic knowledge, there are an increasing number of women in Canada who take classes to learn about the principles of Islam. These women (both students and now gradually more teachers) learn not only how to read the Quran and Hadith but they also interpret it.⁶⁶⁹

Interestingly, many women in diaspora are using Islam to claim their rights within the family and society. Some of these women are, for the first time, beginning to provide feminist interpretations of religion.⁶⁷⁰ As Halima, a religious teacher in Ottawa, points out,

If I had the knowledge I have now, I would suggest that we use the Quran [instead of socialism] to ask for our basic human rights. Although we were 100 percent Muslims we had not practised much and we did not know much... Women, in particular, did not have knowledge about the religion or their rights.⁶⁷¹

The process of learning the religion and using it as a tool to demand women's rights had begun in Somalia, but it became more obvious and urgent in the diaspora when women came into contact with different cultures. Fadumo Dirie decided to educate herself about Islam at an early age when she learned that FGM was not recommended by Islam. "When I was going to college in London, I met with other Muslim female students who did not go through the surgery. I was quite surprised and after some investigation found that

⁶⁶⁸ Hawo Jabril (April 12, 2001).

⁶⁶⁹ Halima Abade (February 6, 2000).

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

FGM had nothing to do with Islam.”⁶⁷² This discovery inspired Fadumo to make a personal goal of embarking on a lifelong pursuit of knowledge in Islam. She went back to university as a mature student just to learn Arabic. “My family and friends were all surprised and could not understand why I went back to university so late in my life. They thought I went mad,”⁶⁷³ she said.

I needed to study Arabic because I wanted to read and understand the Quran. After 2 years of studying Arabic, I can now research, understand and debate the Quran. I tried to read it in Italian but it is difficult to understand the original meaning. Arabic is very rich and many of the translated words in other language do not encompass the real meaning of the Quran. For instance, the term *nas* means people but it is translated as he or mankind. Arabic has vast terminology and English is limited in this sense. This was one of the best things I did for myself.⁶⁷⁴

Knowledge about religion also empowers women to know about and assert their rights both within the family and society. In addition, women's awareness on their rights over their bodies has increased as a result of more knowledge of Islam. As this woman says about FGM, “I would have done it if it weren't for Islam and that I know it is not Islamic and therefore taking away something God gave women.”⁶⁷⁵ Using Islam, women are beginning to assert their rights within the family as well. Many are learning their husbands' obligations towards them. For instance, Asli points out, “if the women has a child, the husband is obligated to get her a maid, if he can afford it. If not, he must help her. Even her breast milk he has to buy.”⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

⁶⁷² Fadumo Dirie. (July 14, 2001).

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ Quoted in McGown. *Muslims in Diaspora...*, p. 151.

⁶⁷⁶ Asli Jama (February 16, 2001).

By making religion the basis of their identity and finding empowerment within it, women are defying both the host society that has excluded them and has placed them in a marginal space and the conservative aspects of the Somali community that perceived them as a threat to traditional gender norms and to their perception of Somali society. Turning to religion has given many of them a solace, security, an element of continuity, space and belonging to a larger Muslim community as well as the courage to embark on a journey of self-discovery.

Redefining women's roles

Many women put their energy through their children. That is what they do. They try to push their children to achieve their [mother's] goals. Some succeed some don't but they all have that aim, at least educate the kids. 'If my children are educated, they will be ok and I will be taken care of, you know.' And they do odd jobs to contribute to the betterment of their economies but through their children, they are hoping to change their lives.⁶⁷⁷

The civil war and emigration caused a transformation of gender roles. The absence of men and or their failure to attend to the daily survival of the families resulted in the transformation of women's roles.⁶⁷⁸ The disruption of what constituted "normal" and "natural" familial relations, in which men provided for them and the extended family and community protected them, has given many women the opportunity to examine past gender relations. Furthermore, as studies of other immigrant women have observed, encounter with a different culture does not only involve difficulties but also provides

⁶⁷⁷ Ikram Jama (September 25, 2000).

⁶⁷⁸ Hibaaq I. Osman. "Somalia: Will Reconstruction Threaten Women's Progress?" *Ms Magazine*. vol. 3, no. 5. March/April 1993. p. 12.

women with opportunities to question, modify or abandon the traditional gender ideology prevalent in Somali society.⁶⁷⁹

Many have started resisting and questioning the patriarchal relations in which the husband was the head of the family. Others have realised how difficult, and often it is undesirable, to maintain the traditional gender roles in their new social context. While most men have been eager to maintain and support traditional gender roles, the assumption of new family responsibilities has enabled some women to become aware of their potential as individuals and begin challenging and questioning the traditional restrictions and expectations of women.⁶⁸⁰ However, for other women (those who had professional jobs in Somalia), being in diaspora has robbed them of the rights they had and the respect they enjoyed for their role as mother.⁶⁸¹ Thus, there were two very different levels of negotiations concurrently taking place among Somali women in diaspora.

Through their negotiation on behalf of the family in the public sphere, the first group of women became conscious of their ability to provide for the family without any assistance from a husband or extended family. This ability to take care of the family provided many with an opportunity to question gender inequalities in the existing Somali social systems. In this sense, an awareness that came from their experiences of gender inequality in Somalia made many women quick to respond to the possibility of a life that did not bind

⁶⁷⁹ Lillian Petroff. "Contributors to Ethnic Cohesion: Macedonian Women in Toronto to 1940." Jean Burnet (ed.) *Looking into My Sister's Eyes: an Exploration in Women's History*. Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986, p. 136.

⁶⁸⁰ Shukria Samatar (December 20, 1999).

them to the family/kin authority and restriction in Canada.

Based on the challenges faced in the new environment and the demands made on them, others have reinvented themselves and have renegotiated their identity. For instance, a significant number of women replaced their professional identity with motherhood. Halima Abade is a well-respected community leader and religious teacher. She has a degree in Economics and Commerce and had been quite active in the SWDO, which she represented in many international conferences. When she came to Canada she made the difficult decision of putting her credentials aside and concentrating on her family and raising her children in this “society where they are bound to get into trouble [because they are young black men].”⁶⁸²

When I have seen [the situation]. .. There [in Somalia], although we were working, we had maids who did the housework, we did not work at home, and we had help. Mmm, some looked after the children and took care of them, some did the cleaning and cooking. We were like men, really. That situation really changed when we came here. We could not get used to the new situation. I personally had many difficulties in the early years. It became something very strange when the kids are around and there is no one helping you... There were not any of the things [support] you were used to. You called from the office ... and everything was ready on the table when you came home and everything... there was none of that now. Really, I had faced many difficulties in the first few years. .. When I saw that things were not the same and I could not get the things [support] I used to get and it was like, you have to depend on yourself alone, I decided to help my husband. This means, he will work outside [and provide for the family] and I will take care of the children and you know the home...I decided to help my children... Five of my children finished high school. We have the two younger ones, one is in grade eleven and the other is in grade seven.⁶⁸³

Sirad, after having had extreme difficulties in accessing her previous profession, decided similarly that she would concentrate her energy on taking care of her family. After

⁶⁸¹ Fowsia Abdulkadir (September 7, 2000).

⁶⁸² Halima Abade (February 6, 2000).

making many attempts to get into her original profession in economics and analysing her and her family's situation in the new social environment, Sirad made a decision to be active in her neighbourhood and take care of her family instead.

I had a university degree when I came here. Since I finished university in Italian, I went to Algonquin College to learn English. I made many attempts to get to my profession. I sent my transcript to be evaluated. My skills were not recognised. My dignity (*damiir*) would not allow me to ... Sixteen years of education cannot be wasted in washing dishes... I had the choice to go back to university. This meant getting loan. I did not want my children and I to receive loan at the same time. I decided to rather build their lives... I moved to this neighbourhood and became active... I personally decided to do voluntary work instead of just complaining about what I could have been.⁶⁸⁴

Halima and Sirad are examples of the many educated women who have exchanged their professional identity for motherhood. These women have made this difficult decision because they have recognised that child rearing without any support from family and the larger community involves a lot of work and a significant awareness about how the new environment and its values affect their children. These women have acknowledged that the community (extended family, neighbourhoods, religious schools, and teachers at grade schools) that raised the children in Somalia is not available in this context.

Other women have decided to juggle the two roles of motherhood and their professional identity. This group of women, made up mostly of those who were professionals in Somalia, see themselves as losing out in the new environment. These women have felt that their role within the family is undermined. They have talked about a time when they were able to juggle work and home because they had a lot of support in the family to help them run their home smoothly and efficiently. This group has complained about the loss

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ Asli Hashi (June 12, 2001).

of respect they had as mothers and wives and how extremely difficult it has become now to manage a home while having a job. According to this group, “women have not gained any ‘freedom’, they lost a lot. They are like machines now. Never having a moment to take a breather. The situation is very exploitative, I think.”⁶⁸⁵ Fowsia continues:

We do the child rearing and everything else. So it is like the work has expanded. .. Coping with being breadwinner, working outside not because you want it and it is a choice but you have to do it. It is a survival and the kids need it and you still have to work at home. So the work has doubled for Somali women for sure.⁶⁸⁶

Yet another group has started working for pay for the first time in their lives for two reasons. First, because they suddenly found themselves to be without the husbands who provided for them. Secondly, they want to provide role models for their young children and show them their mothers can take care of them without any social assistance from the state. They want to teach their children the values of independence and self-sufficiency.⁶⁸⁷

Searching for continuity

Women, whether they had education or outside work experience, it did not matter, they all shared and came with a hope and the resolve to work hard or harder than they used to. .. You know, I can say they are all survivors because all of them came with... in most cases, 99 percent of adults, I don’t have the exact number of percentage, it could be in the 80s or 90s were single mother, as you know. There were a large number of them that were educated in different languages, Italian, Arabic, French or whatever and there were many that were not educated. But you could see a lot of energy, working hard. You know, a lot of sacrifice for children to settle. One of the reasons that helped them survive was our tradition of being an oral society. We shared information... They tell each other things.⁶⁸⁸

If there are jobs opening in one place they tell each other. Their use of technology is

⁶⁸⁵ Fowsia Abdulkadir (September 7, 2000).

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁷ Shukria Samatar (December 20, 1999).

⁶⁸⁸ Sahra Habbane (October 27, 2000)

amazing. Many women have three lines and some follow Quranic studies through connections of many lines like this. Also, when they need translation to talk to their workers for example. They use conference call and connect you to their workers. So they use technology like this to survive. As they say, “*nin tuur leh isagaa yaqaan suu u seexdo*” (a man with a hump knows how to sleep).⁶⁸⁹

Somalis help each other. Some of them had relatives and things like that, their parents that are here. After people deal with these [settlement-related] problems and they find houses and they settle, then there comes the basic problem. Most of them are women. They have at least 3 to 6 children with them. Dressing them, buying clothes for them, their food, the weather you know, finding school, finding doctors all are done through friends.⁶⁹⁰

To cope with their new lives as refugees, Somalis have resorted to and often have modified certain cultural practices that provide strength and support. Women have activated and have modified the cultural practices they find the most appropriate in the new social context.

Recreating social spaces

Women have many contacts with each other no matter what the reasons for meeting is; whether it is a wedding or whether it is get together or wedding, or in times of death, or whether it is Quranic classes... Although people are scattered, the bulk of the populations [Somalis] live in social housing. So they made networking groups among themselves. This [networking] helped them to really settle. From the day I came to this country to this day, that is about nine years, it has not happened or it is very rare that somebody did not call or come by saying they need something. So it is very outstanding how people are taking care of their affairs. They would come to you and say, “I have a letter from the immigration and I do not read, please read and let me know what it says” and she will give you all the answers... without reading. When you read for her and tell her “they want you to do this and that”. She will say, “ok, I will do this and that.” So it is very outstanding...⁶⁹¹

As a response to the social exclusion experienced by Somali refugees, women have recreated social spaces and female-based institutions. They have felt accepted and can interact with other women of similar experiences within these spaces and institutions,

⁶⁸⁹ Khadija Ali (July 17, 2000)

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

which often offer solutions to their social isolation. Somali women have organised social activities such as wedding festivals, parties, religious discussion meetings, and support groups. These social gatherings have constituted creative ways of combating isolation and provide some sort of substitution for the communities in their homeland. These communities have helped fill the need to be with other women and relieve loneliness in the new alien surroundings. They have also provided a forum in which participants share their experiences. Women have also created these social spaces to make the boundaries constructed by the host society group more liveable and to deal with their social isolation. In other words make the margins more hospitable.⁶⁹²

To make up for the need to connect with people with similar experience and to find opportunities to find expressions for their frustrations and as a mechanism for creating a safe space, women have organised "women only" tea parties and get togethers. Using their traditional role of organising family gatherings, women have engaged in creating activities that are intended to deal with their current isolation. Some of these activities are quite interesting and are a new phenomenon in the diaspora while others are modified cultural activities. For instance, although there were gender specific parties and get togethers in Somalia, the ones organised in Ottawa and Toronto are much larger in scope, more frequent, and have different functions. As opposed to specific community gatherings in Somalia (which had a single purpose such as weddings), a large component of the parties in the diaspora is entertainment where there are live band singing and DJs

⁶⁹¹ Sahra Habbane (October 27, 2000).

⁶⁹² As Bald has pointed out, these "constructed margins" are created by the mainstream society to ensure that ethnic groups do "not go beyond certain limits" and to differentiate the "margins" (intended for the

playing the latest Somali records.⁶⁹³ These social gatherings have practical and functional aspect to them as well. They provide a forum where women connect with one another, provide psychological support to each other and exchange important information and tips on where to go for appropriate services, where to buy cheap merchandise, and other practical information on surviving in the new cultural and social context.⁶⁹⁴

Women are told [by religious leaders] that they can't listen to music, it is *haram* (forbidden). But they need these gatherings for their mental health. They are frustrated by all the responsibilities they have and they do not have any social outlets. They come to these get togethers and often say, "*naqaskaan iska bixinaynaa*" (we will get rid of the stress). They let loose and dance all night.⁶⁹⁵

Women come to these parties wearing their finest clothes and jewellery. They come to have fun⁶⁹⁶ and often dance till the next morning. There are occasional discussions on issues of concern such as familial relations such as teenagers and their behaviour as well as life in diaspora in general. Information on community members who are sick or having financial problems and how to help them is exchanged between women at these gatherings as well.

"other") from the "centre" (intended for the dominant society). This marginalization, according to Bald, maintains the centre. Bald. "Coping with Marginality..." , pp. 110-126.

⁶⁹³ Hayat Saban (October 24, 2000).

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁵ Shukria Samatar (March 9, 2002).

⁶⁹⁶ Men and women take different stands (although opinions sometimes cross sexes and the division is not always 100 percent) on the issue of women's entertainment. For women, it is essential that they "de-stress" after long and monotonous days of cooking, cleaning, running errands and managing the household affairs. Thus, to them, going to these parties is not only entertaining but it also has a critical function for their overall well-being and mental health. For men, on the other hand, those women have become "*fara laga qaad*" (bad women). They (men) feel that these parties are nothing but waste of time and believe that women who frequent them are neglecting their families and their obligations as wives and mothers.

Female solidarity and neighbourhood networks

The main arena for networking and providing mutual assistance has been the neighbourhood. According to Sahra Habbane, “social obligations towards your neighbours are still being respected and observed on a daily basis despite the fact that the structures that sustained [extended family and kinship networks] them have mostly collapsed as a result of the civil war and migration.”⁶⁹⁷

Each neighbourhood organises its activities, calls on assistance when there is a need and is generally self-sufficient. Women from other neighbourhoods are rarely allowed to participate in these networks of assistance. When women from a different neighbourhood attempt to get involved in another’s daily networks of mutual assistance, it is said, “*xaafadi waxay xaafad ugu tagtaa waa xasarad*”(trouble brews when a given neighbourhood crosses into another’s boundaries).⁶⁹⁸

Neighbourhood networks have been an important component of women’s adjustments and daily survival in an environment where they are otherwise isolated. Hayat Saban who is quite active in community affairs discussed the extent to which women in the same neighbourhood provide mutual assistance in many areas like childcare, grocery shopping, and other things. The neighbourhood has become a substitute for and has replaced the support provided by the kin and extended family and has become an alternative extended

⁶⁹⁷ Sahra Habbane (October 27, 2000).

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

family. She said that it works so well that “it is like having an extended family in the neighbourhood.”⁶⁹⁹ According to Saban, women survived war, migration, dislocation, family fragmentation and terrible circumstances in the diaspora simply because “they help each other.”

For instance, say you have three women in one neighbourhood, one takes all the kids to school in the morning, and the other picks them up, the third runs errands for them. On the weekends [when more groceries are needed], two women go grocery shopping for the three families while the third looks after all the children. There are even cases when women need to go out of town or out of the country for family emergency and they leave their children with neighbours.⁷⁰⁰

Saban continued and discussed how she one time had to look after four kids of a friend and neighbour who had to leave the country to take care of an urgent family situation in Djibouti. The kids’ ages ranged from four years old to thirteen years old. She said she did not want to disrupt the children’s daily routine and make them uncomfortable and because her kids were a bit older, she left her children with her sister while she moved in with the friend’s children. She said,

I was going to school part-time then. I cooked, cleaned, helped them with their homework and organised recreational activities for them during the weekends. I took them to birthday parties, got to know their friends and their families. I did not even have a car then. So I used to use my sister’s car to take them around. It was not easy initially; the kids were a bit uncomfortable. But after a while we became comfortable with each other. One time their mother called to tell them she would be delayed a bit. They all said “yes!” I guess because I used to give them more leeway than their mother. We became friends; the kids still call me to ask me to talk to their mother when they want to convince her something or to just talk to me.⁷⁰¹

These support networks among the neighbours is very spontaneous and based on the new and immediate needs of the families involved. Men sometimes get involved in the

⁶⁹⁹ Hayat Saban (October 24, 2000).

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid.

provision of services. Fouzia says, “I see men who pick up women, sometimes five of them, to do their grocery shopping.”⁷⁰²

In addition to practical support, women have provided emotional support to each other. As Fouzia pointed out, “women encourage each other when the barriers become too discouraging. We remind each other that the barriers can limit your success but they cannot stop you.”⁷⁰³ Hayat further explains,

In cases when people are not quite capable of taking care of your needs you know they are thinking of, praying for, and inquiring about you and your family. Knowing people care about you enough to take the time to think about you and your family feels really great! As the Somali saying indicates, “*maxaad qabtaa*” *waxba kaama qaaddee qalbigey u roontahay*. (“How are you feeling” does not alleviate your problems but hearing it is good for the soul).⁷⁰⁴

Although they may have not always been compatible or practical in the new environment, women have kept and continued to practice many of communal aspects of their lives such as visiting the sick, caring for one another in the neighbourhoods, being there for friends in need.

When you leave the office and get home and into the Somali community [neighbourhoods] you completely forget... that you are in another country. [little laugh] believe me. You think you are still in the old country. The way people are talking, the use of technology, the networks that are taking place. It is, it is ... a whole other world, you know. So it is.. um.. it looks like.. in a way it is difficult because people lose a lot of hours because you are still expected to fulfil the old obligations that was part of the culture. This means, you are supposed to visit everybody you know who is in the hospital, you have to go to everyone who has death in their family, not necessarily here but even in Somalia, if someone is sick you have to visit. So it looks like people still want to maintain their own ways and culture. But the reality here is that the young woman who cleaned your home is not available, no one is cooking for you.⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

⁷⁰² Fouzia Ismail (October 20, 2000)

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴ Hayat Saban (October 24, 2000).

However, in many instances they have modified these practices to fit their new context. For instances, for many reasons, visiting for the sake of visiting to chat and to enquire about the well-being of family rarely takes place as it did in Somalia. One of the reasons is that, due to the lack of support from family members, women are overwhelmed with the daily activities of managing a household such as caring for children, running errands etc. Another reason for not being able to just visit family members, friends and neighbours is that travelling becomes daunting without transportation, especially during the winter months.

Dealing with economic exclusion

One of the coping mechanisms is to challenge yourself. To make sure that you not only survive because survival is very basic... A lot of women are opting to build a future here. Not as a large number as I would like to see, but a great number of them are going beyond the survival issues with which refugees get stuck. One major thing I have seen in my age group is getting education. "*Qurbaha ka dabaalo*"⁷⁰⁶,⁷⁰⁷

Although there were limited labour market opportunities and women have encountered many difficulties in accessing professions and trades for which they had acquired skills, they have not given up easily. They have taken the initiative in terms of applying themselves. As upgrading takes a long time and costs a lot of money, this has often meant making sacrifices, both personal and familial. Many have decided that instead of being stuck in dead end jobs because of lack of recognition of their credentials in Canada, they would make the necessary sacrifices, in terms of time, energy, and finances and concentrate on the future. In this sense, upgrading and getting education has been seen by

⁷⁰⁵ Sahra Habbane (October 27, 2000).

⁷⁰⁶ Developed in the diaspora, this metaphor literally means "swim out of exile". Being a refugee is likened to being thrown in an ocean. You either can swim (have the skills to survive and make it) or you cannot. If you cannot swim, you drown in the ocean.

many women as key to success and the only viable solution to what was described as “being stuck in nowhere.”

Khadija, for instance, was a practising physician in Somalia. She was educated in Italy. However, like many other immigrants, she could not practise. She has not given up and kept on persisting. She is now being retrained and is taking many accreditation tests to be certified in Canada. She said these tests are awfully expensive but she, and her whole family, make the sacrifice so she will be able to practise medicine again. However, despite the difficulties of being excluded and not given the opportunities to meaningfully participate in her profession and contribute to her adopted home, Khadija was able to see her being in Canada as positive. She explains that being in Canada has indirectly provided her with the opportunities to be a better physician when she gets certified. She says that because she spent so much time doing community work and understanding the various aspects of being healthy, she now has a holistic picture of what health is about.

I took many courses on counselling, parenting, drug addiction, abuse and rights of children that I now am more capable of seeing the patient as a whole. I don't see the disease only. So I really learned a lot and my perspectives as a doctor towards health and wellbeing has broadened since I came here. I understand the patient more than before I started working in the community. When I start practising again, I will have better understanding of the patient and the impact of socio-economics such as poverty on their health. For instance, when somebody has a headache, I only treated the headache. I never thought of poverty and if that person could afford having breakfast that morning. I now understand many things, like unemployment and poverty, determine people's overall health.⁷⁰⁸

Ikram is another women who sees education as one of the very few options women in the diaspora have to improve their lives and increase their success in their chosen professions

⁷⁰⁷ Ikram Jama (August 20, 2000).

⁷⁰⁸ Kadija Ali (July 17, 2000).

and trades. For Ikram, the pursuit of higher education is an important goal because she recognises that, due to systemic barriers, there are no guarantees of finding the “right job” even after being educated here. After not being able to have access to her chosen career in women and development, she went to graduate school to further educate herself. She said,

[g]oing back to school and continuing education in this environment is a life insurance for many of us, I think. It might not necessarily pay the bills now, you know. Nonetheless, it gives you the confidence to say I have the training to survive here. Now, whether I can eat with it or not depends on Allah’s will but I have actually attained the degree. Not only getting the 1st degree but also 2nd and 3rd one. So education, for the group I know, is a way to create a sustainable livelihood.⁷⁰⁹

Another female-based institution that has been recreated in the diaspora to respond to the economic exclusion is the *hagbad* or *shaloongo* (rotating credit). As discussed in chapter one, *hagbad* is a process whereby a group of women agree to put in a certain amount of their income in a common pot and give the accumulated sum to one participant at the end of a specified period on a rotating basis. Women have often used this money to make purchases they would not otherwise afford like a car, furniture and paying the first and the last month’s rent for an apartment.

Suppose I need two thousand dollars today. I don’t have that kind of money and I don’t want to get a loan and I don’t want to ask for donations. I will contact friends and neighbours and organize *hagbad*. It is understood that I will get the first round of the money because I have emergency situation. I have to stay with the group and make the payment for the identified period of time. I am obliged to stay with the group and maintain the payments for as long as the group is together, until everyone gets their turn. This is all done by word of mouth; there is no written contract. There is trust among the group.⁷¹⁰

In a case of severe financial difficulties and there is no time to organize *hagbad*, there is *qaaraan* (community donation). *Qaaraan* is a collective and spontaneous economic

⁷⁰⁹ Ikram Jama (September 25, 2000).

activity to respond to an urgent financial need. As opposed to *hagbad* which the person in need takes the initiative to organize, *qaaraan* is organised from outside, often without the knowledge of the person who will be receiving it. Through social networks or at gatherings, a person or a family is identified as having an urgent financial need and often a spontaneous decision is made to take a *qaaraan*. The process involves organising to collect a specified amount of money, depending on the donor's financial situation and ranging from twenty to hundred dollars, from an identified circle of donors.

In Somalia, *qaaraan* had generally been a male's institution and a way of providing assistance to members of kin groups in need. Kinship ties provided the basis for activating these networks of assistance in Somalia. However, women appropriated it for their own use in the diaspora. Unlike the traditional one, which is organised around clan lines, the women's transcends clan lines. Hence, their usefulness goes beyond the traditional meanings of *qaaraan*. This new money-collecting system based on women's needs rather than the kinship needs has not completely replaced the traditional form of *qaaraan*; it simply coexists with it.

Sometimes the immediate family, sometimes the extended family and other times people who just know each other participate in the collection of *qaaraan*. Some people are assigned to go around knocking doors and collecting the money. Paying the *qaaraan* very important. In fact, it is a must. Otherwise, your family and you will be shamed. The amount varies. It is usually \$ 30 to \$ 40 per singles and about \$ 100 per family.⁷¹¹

Through the above-mentioned supportive networks, women have responded to their immediate needs and take care of personal and family issues. They have provided support

⁷¹⁰ Shukria Samatar (March 9, 2002).

⁷¹¹ Hayat Saban (October 24, 2000).

to each other in cases of family emergency and/or in times of need. However, Ikram sees these efforts as a means of reaching short-term goals and immediate survival issues. She argues,

[s]hort-term projects are always at the heart of women's organization. They participated in *hagbad* (rotating credit) for a year then they buy a car. These are all basic economic necessities. They participate in *hagbad* to buy a car, furniture for the house, pay first and last month of rent. All the necessary stuff that they need in the house, they care of by creating *hagbado*. They meet their needs on a short-term basis. I don't think they have met their needs on a long-term basis.⁷¹²

Fouzia, on the other hand, believes that while women are engaged in many activities to take care of their immediate personal and familial needs, it is still too early to see the benefits for the larger community. She talks about examples of women who have put their children through university and now, she says, “[W]e see more and more young people of Somali origin graduating from university thanks to the sacrifices made by their parents”.⁷¹³ By taking care of their families, women's efforts are indirectly contributing to the larger community and “making a difference”, Fouzia thinks. “There are many women who are going back to school, seeking higher professions, I think the community will reap the benefits in the near future. It is coming.”⁷¹⁴

The comments of these participants provide evidence that, despite the multiple barriers, Somali women have adjusted to the new environment without abandoning or compromising their core values and beliefs. “Canada grows on you because you experience the country and interact with its people,” says Ikram. She continues,

⁷¹² Ikram Jama (September 25, 2000).

⁷¹³ Fouzia Ismail (October 20, 2000).

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

“[W]omen experience Canada on their own terms. They do not want to compromise their values. They choose their own socialisation and negotiate the level of their integration.”⁷¹⁵

Some see the new cultural environment as enriching and a learning process, while others see it as a threat to their fundamental values. According to Fouzia, “every culture has positive aspects. If you take good things from every culture you become very rich. Whatever that agrees with your values... I see no conflict. It is a matter of choice, no one can force you.”⁷¹⁶

Conclusion

Somali women’s lived realities shatter the myth of refugee women being helpless victims. Women have struggled to renegotiate the appropriate values with their children, redefine the “proper” role of women and their place within the family. Through these personal renegotiations and through their dealing with cultural and religious difference in a Western environment, Somali women have redefined what it is to be a good mother, good citizens, and productive members of the community on their own terms. Within this process of redefining their identity, women have also been engaged in the balancing act of reconciling two completely different value systems for their own meaningful purposes.

Women have modified some traditional Somali practices to accommodate their new realities in the diaspora. They have also absorbed some Canadian values that they have

⁷¹⁵ Ibid.

felt are beneficial to them. Similar to what Moussa found in her analysis of Ethiopian and Eritrean women in Toronto, Somali women do not “want to adapt to Canadian society uncritically. Indeed, their journey was characterised by a resistance to patriarchal, cultural, racist, class and military domination.”⁷¹⁷ In this sense, they have sought to forge new identities, based on their Somali roots, but adapting to the Canadian environment. Many have succeeded in striking a balance between the old and new culture and have developed a new Somali Canadian identity.

In the process, women have developed new ways of dealing with new issues, while retaining some of the old approaches to problem-solving as an element of continuity. One thing is very clear, despite the tremendous hardships and obstacles in the path of their resettlement process in the host country and against all the odds, the Somali women have been determined to reconstruct a life for themselves and families in Canada. These negotiations between two cultures, their individual struggles to create safe social space and their efforts to challenge structural barriers have led many to become more independent and self-reliant. Many women have new realisations of a sense of self-worth and power as a result of these struggles in their new life in the diaspora.

The following chapter will investigate the collective efforts women have made to establish themselves and the community in the new environment. It examines women’s collective actions to gain rights in their new environment where they are marginalized and alienated by the existing structures and institutions. Activist women’s attempts to

⁷¹⁶ Ibid.

⁷¹⁷ Moussa. “The Social Construction of Women Refugees...”

politicise the female networks of everyday and their own personal negotiations will also be investigated.

CHAPTER IX

Working for "Danta Guud": Continuities and discontinuities in Somali women's activism in Canada

Introduction

The generous spiritedness of our womenfolk never failed to allay our worst fears, the women mending the broken, healing the wounded, taking care of the elderly and the sick, martyrlly women, forever prepared to sacrifice their lives for the general good of the entire community.⁷¹⁸

Instead of sitting around and doing nothing we decided to use the skills we had to at least try and help the community survive. We had to reinvent ourselves to become community workers. Although many of us believed in social change, we wanted to do it at another [higher] level... I am not sure we are making systemic change at any level but at least we are helping the community survive.⁷¹⁹

We have support groups, I worked with them and interacted with them both formally and informally and I am very much involved in the community in the west end. I also know the other outside ones [in other neighbourhoods] because they sometimes call us here and request to participate in our activities.⁷²⁰

As demonstrated in chapter 6, Somali refugees faced numerous challenges when they came to Canada. Because of the serious difficulties faced by the community and lack of appropriate services to help them integrate into the Canadian society, the participants in this study have become active in many levels. These Somali women have played a vital role in the reconstruction of the community after the physical, social and economic displacement it suffered from its collective refugee experiences. Community activism has been a major aspect of women's attempts to make sense of dislocation and their fragmented lives in diaspora. They have organised grassroots community groups and activities. They have also participated in neighbourhood networks, in Tenant's

⁷¹⁸ Farah. *Yesterday, Tomorrow...* p. 5.

Associations, in mainstream advisory boards, and have worked in health and community agencies to advocate for proper and serious consideration of the particular needs of Somali clients. Finally, these women have been among the founding members of grassroots community organisations whose mandates are to cater to the needs of the Somali community and to educate mainstream agencies to provide culturally sensitive services to their Somali clients. Activist women's energy, initiatives, and commitment have been key to the development of the community within the Canadian context.

Being active in community issues was not necessarily a new element in many women's lives. There is a historical precedent to the women's activism in Canada. Some of the participants for this study had been activists for many years in Somalia. For these women, devoting their time to the fight to be heard at many levels, local as well as state, has been an essential part of making Canada their new home.

War, migration and dislocation devastated many Somali women's lives in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet throughout that time they have still struggled to maintain control over their bodies and have continued to be active in such efforts as the eradication of FGM. However, both the context for Somali women's activism and the issues they have tried to raise have been quite different in the Canadian context, as will be demonstrated in this chapter. Many of the participants in this study indicated that their approach to making positive changes in the lives of all members of the community was specific to the social and political realities they faced in Canada. Their experiences show that there have been

⁷¹⁹ Ikram Jama (April 18, 2002).

⁷²⁰ Sahra Habbane (October 27, 2000).

continuities and discontinuities in the history of Somali women's activism from Somalia to the diaspora.

Challenging the state has been one of the major continuities of Somali women's activism in the new country. Participants agreed that while the state in Somalia was oppressive because the male leadership was conservative and patriarchal, their experiences of interacting with state representatives here have been shaped by patriarchal and racist immigration policies directly targeting the Somali community. This chapter explores the various methods activist women have used to challenge systemic discrimination against the larger Somali community survive in Canada, and the struggles they have engaged in as they strive to work for the "*danta guud*" (common good). How have women used previously acquired skills to contribute to the *danta guud* (common good) both at the social and political level? Why have they spent countless hours volunteering to try to meet the needs of the community? What kinds of challenges have being active in Canada brought to women? These questions are addressed in this chapter.

"Lifting as we climb" ⁷²¹

Wanaaggaad haysatid waxba kuuma aha hadday dadkaadu wada dhibaataysan yihiin.
(Your good life is meaningless if the community does not share it.) A Somali Saying

When our children grew up I became involved and decided ummm to help the community. Since Allah helped us raise our children, I wanted to give back and became

⁷²¹ The phrase "lift as we climb" was coined by Angela Davis when she advised Black women by saying, "[W]e must strive to 'lift as we climb'... We must climb in such a way as to guarantee that all our sisters, regardless of social class, and indeed all our brothers climb with us. This must be the essential dynamic of our quest for power" (Angela Davis. *Women, Culture, and Politics*. New York: Random House, 1989, p. 5.). The phrase has later become a motto used by Black political activists. For a discussion on this distinctively Black female mode of political activism see Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. London & New York: Routledge, 1990.

engaged in many activities to help the community. I am giving my knowledge, my energy and you know, my ideas to do things for the community... I now teach Quranic classes on the weekends. I was doing this for a while now [since I came to Ottawa in 1991]. I also became a member of the Tenants' Association last year. Now we are ready to raise community awareness, help women build their organizational skills and be active. I am very much involved in and work on such things.⁷²²

Women organize on issues such as ensuring that children do not get into trouble and safety. They also organize on issues of accessing facilities to run Quranic schools for their children. One of the reasons women participate in the Tenant's Association is to access space for their children to study the Quran and hold meetings. So they organize to maintain their cultural identity and traditional heritage that way. They are now beginning to organize to participate in the decision-making [of the Tenant's Associations]. For example, if they wanted to increase repairs and maintenance of their houses, they had to be on the Tenant's Associations. That is why women at Russell Heights and Foster Farm are there to push the Ottawa Housing for services. So slowly they are getting into those things as grassroots groups not as organisations.⁷²³

Like all Somali refugee women, the participants arrived in Canada with no friends to offer them support or to help acclimatise them to a new socio-cultural environment. However, unlike those with no formal education, the educated women came with transferable skills that have helped them cope with difficult situations. The skills they acquired in Somalia enabled these women to not only surpass the many barriers refugee women generally have faced in the new environment but also helped them be in a position to serve the community and to assist women to successfully integrate to the Canadian society.

I think I could say it is [I am involved in the community] because of two reasons. Because I know the Somali community came here recently and they don't have any established system that could advocate, or you know, support them. They have been through a lot of painful experiences and when they come here they get another set of problems like unemployment, immigration, [lack of] health accessibility, lack of information. Unfortunately, in Canada we don't have a system that meets that criteria and helps people in that area....So when I came to Canada, I was a nurse in Somalia, I was educated in Somalia and I had the language skills when I came here. When I first came, the Nurse Practitioner asked me about my children's immunisation. They said, when I

⁷²² Halima Abade (February 16, 2000).

⁷²³ Ikram Jama (September 25, 2000).

gave them the information they needed, “[H]ow come you know all that?”. I told them I used to do the immunisation myself in the Mother and Child Centers in Somalia. They asked me to help them because they have many Somali single parents who do not have language skills. I said, “[W]hy not, I am in the same position like them. I am a refugee in Canada. I know what they are going through. The only difference is I have the language skills and I can ask what they cannot ask.” Then I started as a Cultural Interpreter at the beginning because I did not have my certificate or transcript at that time and we have no institution in Somalia. I can’t go back to my profession like that.... So I said to myself, “why not, you know fill that gap for the community or bridge that gap between the [service] providers and the community while you are waiting for your qualification.”⁷²⁴

The above personal narrative shows how it has been possible for activist women to overcome adversity and personal trauma to achieve their personal goals and, in addition, make a remarkable commitment to community service. Their refugee experience provided them with a unique perspective and the ability to understand what it feels like to be marginalized and isolated. This personal knowledge of what it means to be a refugee also enabled many activist women to build a bond between them and those with fewer linguistic skills or less education. By working to improve the lot of the community these women have been contributing to the "*danta guud*" (common good).

I was going out of my way to take them to their appointments, to the hospital, you know, immigration, social services in my own car at my own gas expenses, paying the parking...I did a lot of volunteering in the community. It was actually recognised by the community, you know. I was awarded by the community for the services that I did but that was not what I was looking for. You know, helping a family and seeing them settled, that is very rewarding in itself.⁷²⁵

Women became active in spite of the personal trauma and losses they experienced. Shukria discusses that although she was dealing with extreme personal difficulties - lack of residence status and not being able to be with a father who was dying in another country - she still managed to provide information and assist the community access to

⁷²⁴ Fouzia Ismail (October 20, 2000).

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

services. She recounts,

While I was dealing with all these turmoils, I was happy to see that I could help. I was not selfish. I provided information and helped people access to services. People could take advantage of my skills. It wasn't easy, but it was empowering in a sense.⁷²⁶

The motivations to be active in the community have been numerous. The most commonly voiced motivation was the need to give back to the community. One of the first reasons for having been active in community affairs that participants mentioned was because they felt privileged about the fact that they already had a set of skills when they came to this country. Another reason for having been active in community affairs is the sense of responsibility towards the community. Thinking in terms of the community rather than as an individual was a common theme throughout the interviews. As Ikram said:

I volunteer a lot. I think it is a sense of responsibility to not only myself but also to what we call *danta guud* (common good). You recognize yourself to be part of a collective. As an individual, you contribute to a family, yourself. But as part of that collective - if you consider yourself to be part of a collective, that is - you also have a responsibility to contribute to the *danta guud*.⁷²⁷

In a similar analysis, another individual talked about the sense of responsibility towards the community that makes many people active in the community at various levels. As this quote illustrates, geographic space is not always what determines the sense of belonging to the group.

My community has been important to me all my life. I always think of my group. I cannot imagine living for my self; it contradicts all the things I believe in. When my friend phoned from overseas to say he wanted to come but had no money, I sent him the money, even though I had very little and it was 50 percent of my savings.⁷²⁸

Women also became active because they saw the gap in services that were available to

⁷²⁶ Shukria Samatar (March 9, 2002)

⁷²⁷ Ikram Jama (December 17, 1999)

the community. For instance, one area Sirad identified as not having appropriate services was in youth issues, particularly on issues of culture and religion. She responded to this need by organising schools for young people in the neighbourhood she lived. She said the aim was to ensure that youth learned about their culture.

I moved to this neighbourhood in 1991. I became very active in community affairs. I decided to help our kids to not lose their language and I became active in that area. The community in the neighbourhood is composed of people of different cultures and nationalities. I work for all of them. I am still very active. We opened a school for languages and culture. They run on both Saturdays and Sundays.. So we were teaching culture because a person who loses his/her own culture will not benefit another culture, you know. That is what I concentrated on really. I am still doing that. We also work on women's issues, like domestic violence. We raise awareness among women, telling them to come forward if there is something that is bothering them. Women from different nationalities participate in our programs. I would have liked to have the time to do more work in other areas but I don't have time.⁷²⁹

Services for senior women is another important area where there were no services available. So Shukria started organising older women who were often isolated and created programs for them.

I started in 1993 bringing isolated older women together so they will have tea and chat. In the winter, I would drive them around and co-ordinated activities. They wanted to be active and useful. They would not let me bring tea and refreshments, they insisted that they would do it. They liked hosting. I brought ESL volunteer teachers, Nurses and other experts to talk to them about how to dress in the winter, appropriate shoes to wear, nutrition, exercises, and other ways of adapting to Canada. I talked to them and asked them what they wanted each week. So they owned the ideas, I would just implement them by co-ordinating. There was a senior exercise program at a community centre that came out of this and we ended up having swimming lessons. I really enjoyed the whole experience. It was like spending time with my grandmothers.⁷³⁰

Activist women, like all Somali refugee women, have had to deal with great personal loss and dislocation and have had to engage in struggles to overcome social and economic

⁷²⁸ Quoted in McGowen. *Muslims in Diaspora...* p. 137.

⁷²⁹ Sirad Hashi (June 12, 2001).

⁷³⁰ Shukria Samatar (March 9, 2002).

exclusion. However, building on the long historical tradition of women helping women and using the skills and education they gained prior to coming to Canada, they managed to “lift as they climbed” (to borrow Angela Davies’ phrase). They helped other women deal with the effects of exposure to the new social and cultural norms as well as the daily stresses of being refugee, Black and Muslim in Canada.

Making the margins liveable

I get upset when people who know nothing of us talk about our experiences and make programs or policy decision about our lives.⁷³¹

We were there, we could speak the language, we were educated, and we were exposed to the realities of being dislocated and refugees. So we became the buffer for the community and the bridge between the host country and the Somali refugees who had no where else to turn.⁷³²

Nimaan hadlin hooyadiina wax ma siiso. (Nothing ventured, nothing gained)
A Somali saying

Children needed help. Women were playing the roles of the mother and father. We [mothers] needed help. We did not have time to help children. My colleagues from Lafolle College of Education and I got together and had some meetings on what we can do. We started a homework club. Charles Hulse Elementary School provided the space two nights, six to ten p.m. We tutored children from grade 4 to 12. We did math, science and English. Parents were involved as supervisors and, sometimes, as students because they needed help with their ESL homework. It was very successful. We started a model. There are now many homework clubs across the city. It was helpful for me. My son, my nieces and my nephews all came there too.⁷³³

Because of the social and economic exclusion (as discussed in chapter 6) experienced by Somalis in Canada, many live in ghetto-like neighbourhoods. However, as shown in chapter 7, women take many initiatives to improve their individual situations. In addition to these initiatives, activist women are involved in collective efforts aimed at making the

⁷³¹ Asli Jama (February 16, 2000).

⁷³² Fowsia Abdulkadir (May 2, 2002).

margins liveable. They founded and organised support groups to help women find safe space within the limited social and economic sphere that is under their control in Canada. Activist women like Sahra Habbane, Halima Abade, and Fadumo Dirie have organised mutual support groups. Occasionally, support groups have had political functions in addition to social objectives. Social support groups like the one found in Toronto by a group of Somali women with the technical assistance of Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) in Toronto have helped women to confront some of the challenges they face in adjusting to life in their adopted home. In this group, women discussed their needs and exchanged practical information on resources available to physically and socially isolated Somali women, on how the system works and on how to build a bridge between the Canadian culture and theirs.

Furthermore, they have established a surrogate extended family to provide the assistance and social networks they are lacking in Canada. In response to their longing for their traditions of communality and sharing, they have established support systems within their immediate group and have started extending it to the larger Somali community. These women considered each other as extended family, sharing babysitting responsibilities, visiting each other in the hospital and so on. Since the spring of 1990, eight Somali women's support groups have been established at CCVT and the Somali women's group model was later on adopted by the CCVT to establish mutual support groups for men and women of other refugee communities, including West Africans, Tamils, Central Americans, Iranians and Bosnians.⁷³⁴

⁷³³ Asli Jama (February 16, 2000)

⁷³⁴ Dirie. "Idman's story..." p. 6.

Women in mutual support groups have come together to make changes, to improve their present situations in diaspora, and to play a social advocacy role. Instead of merely learning about the attitudes and institutions that affect them, these women wanted to "change these attitudes and institutions."⁷³⁵ As part of addressing their particular needs in the host country, the CCVT group challenged structural barriers to settlement in Canada. In 1991, for instance, the group, consisted mostly of refugee claimants, could not afford housing at market price. Thus, they mounted a legal challenge against the Metro Toronto Housing Authority policy of excluding refugee claimants from access to public housing. They started organising, writing petitions and letters to their local politicians asking them to put the pressure on the Housing Authority. They eventually succeeded in changing the laws to make refugee claimants eligible for subsidised housing. These women have become important agents in "bringing about change in existing relations of ruling and in transforming structures that support inequality."⁷³⁶ Some of the members of these groups eventually started operating independently and came out from under the wings of CCVT that was providing a meeting place and a facilitator. The group, which named itself the Somali Women's Advocacy Group, has its own executive committee and continues to meet at a community health centre.⁷³⁷ Another group of Somali women in Toronto set up a transitional housing project for women who leave abusive relationships.⁷³⁸

Toronto is not the only place where women have been organising to meet their needs in the asylum countries. Somali women in Ottawa have also come together themselves to

⁷³⁵ Blakeney, Dirie and NcRae. "Support Group for Traumatized Somali Women..." p. 287.

⁷³⁶ Helen Ralston. *The Lived Experience of South Asian Immigrant Women in Atlantic Canada: The Interconnections of Race, Class and Gender*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996. p. 97.

⁷³⁷ Blakeney et al. "Support Group for Traumatized Somali Women..." p. 298.

confront some of the challenges they face in adjusting to life in Canada. A network of women who participate in and organize various activities for the community has emerged. An example of the support networks that were founded by women and cater to women's particular needs in Ottawa is the West-End Somali Women's Support Group.

The West-End Somali Women's Support Group was founded in 1993. It is a loosely structured entity formed by women who have organised to provide support to each other and effect change in their daily lives. The support group has provided a forum where participants share their stories, their stresses, their struggles and their coping strategies in a non-threatening and safe environment among women with similar experiences. The female ties developed by the group, explained Sahra, the founder of the group, has helped mitigate the daily stresses experienced by Somali women as socially isolated refugees. Participation in the group has also helped deal with feelings of uprootedness, confusion, anxiety, and loneliness.⁷³⁹

Sahra mentioned that she is active in the group because she lives in the neighbourhood and sees daily the marginalization and the high needs of the community that are not being met by any other institutions. She said, "I had a choice of either watching the community disintegrate under the heavy burden of being a newcomer, poor, and vulnerable or do something about it."⁷⁴⁰ She chose the latter and helped organize the group. Most activities organised by the group are intended to meet the practical needs of the community. By

⁷³⁸ Helene Moussa. "Sowing New Foundations: Refugee and Immigrant Women Support Groups." *Refuge*. vol. 13, no. 9. February 1994. p. 6.

⁷³⁹ Sahra Habbane (April 22, 2002)

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid.

focusing on a specific problem, the group provided a framework within which the participants organised for social action. For instance, Sahra mentioned,

[I]n the early 1990s there was so much unemployment and the community was facing immigration difficulties. So we organised two workshops on employment. The workshops took place at the Lincoln Heights Human Resources Development Canada centre to give the participants a chance to get to know the centre and benefit from the resources there. We also organised workshops on immigration issues where we invited an immigration officer to answer questions and try to address some of the concerns of the community.⁷⁴¹

In addition, issues identified by group participants resulted in programs that benefited not only the Somali community but also the residents of the neighbourhoods at large. For instance, early on in 1994, the group identified the need for homework clubs to help their children and the parents. Some members of the group are women who are illiterate and do not have the educational ability to help their children; some do not speak English and some simply do not have the time to sit down and help each of their children do their homework everyday. The group approached the Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Centre (PQ) and the Britannia Woods Tenants' Association in Ottawa. The homework club started as a voluntary initiative. There are now six homework club sites in the West End. The co-ordinators are paid staff of PQ. Sahra oversees three of these sites as part of her job as a Minority Outreach Worker. She mentioned that they have over twenty volunteers, mostly university students from the Somali community as well as other Canadians.

In addition to addressing the practical and daily needs of the community, the group also has been involved in encouraging the youth to retain their cultural identity. They have

organised events such as the annual Eid⁷⁴² celebrations and summer trips for young children in the west-end of Ottawa. These activities reinforce Somali culture, help youth spend more time with their community, and foster a sense of belonging. They are also important for youth who facing confusion because of the conflicting values given to them from home and from outside. According to Sahra,

[o]rganising activities like cultural dances, family and community picnics, and social dinners, we are helping our youth understand that their community is not the “victims of war and violent creatures who come from backward societies” but that they have their own culture and values. The youth who have been participating in our activities are like family now. All across, they grew together and they know each other.⁷⁴³

Activist women have also engaged in an ongoing struggle to have women’s voices heard and to ensure that women’s concerns are taken seriously within the Somali community and agencies. Ikram is one of the founding directors of the Somali Center for Youth, Women and Community Development, the major organization in the Ottawa-Carleton region. The organization came into existence in 1996 after eight community agencies amalgamated to reduce duplication of services and to better serve the community.

The Centre seeks to represent the collective concerns of its membership and initiates key projects and programs that contribute to the social well-being of the Somali community.

According to Ikram Jama, one of the founding directors,

[t]he Center ensures that community members’ voices are heard by organising community consultations and forums. This method of involving local residents in the program identification, development and implementation places great value on local and

⁷⁴¹ Ibid.

⁷⁴² Eid is a major holiday after a month of fasting Ramadan. Muslims celebrate this occasion by giving gifts to each other and organising activities for children and families.

⁷⁴³ Sahra Habbane (April 22, 2002).

grassroots leadership development and encourages community ownership.”⁷⁴⁴

Ikram discussed how, except for the Somali Canadian Youth Society, all the organisations that came together were run by male and older members of the community. Thus, having representation in terms of gender and age at the initial set up of the new organization was not always an easy task and continues to be a struggle. As she pointed out, it has not always been easy to put women’s issues on the community agenda. Discussing her experience at the Somali Center, she reveals,

[w]e fought so hard, endured insults, and challenged many resistances from both men and conservative women to have women represented at the Board level where decisions are made. We consistently argued that women must be at the decision-making level because they represent the majority in this city and no man can and should speak for them and about them. Only women can talk about their experiences. This was very important to those of us who were fighting the men daily because only by having women at that [decision-making] level will we be able to develop programs that meet women’s particular needs.⁷⁴⁵

On other occasions, while women faced no resistance upon joining and being present at the board level, they were silenced when it came to making decisions and shaping the community agenda and vision. Ikram explains this contradiction,

[I] think our participation in the Center was very much welcomed by men. They thought we were better organizers. In this sense, they appreciated and acknowledged our skills and contribution to the Center and the community. However, this recognition did not translate into being able to shape the agendas. For instance, because the Center was new and was facing many conflicts as there were competing interests and agenda. Men would want to resolve these conflicts using the traditional conflict resolution. While we liked the idea of using readily available tools to resolve conflicts, we had a problem with this particular one because there was no space for women. Men would sit in their cafés or in their living rooms and talk about the issues without our knowledge. So, we were there but we were marginalized and silenced.⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴⁴ Ikram Jama (September 25, 2000).

⁷⁴⁵ Ikram Jama (December 17, 1999).

⁷⁴⁶ Ikram Jama (April 18, 2002).

Ikram further explained that after many protests, women have succeeded in convincing the male members of the Boards that important issues that concern the whole community must be addressed at the meetings where women are present not at male-only gatherings.

Somali women have achieved success in helping their own peers participate in decision-making in the neighbourhood councils. Halima was elected as a Communication Officer at the Foster Farm Tenant's Association in 1999. She decided to run for that position because she wanted to attempt to address the particular needs of the Somali community in the neighbourhood. Some of the issues that she said were important to the community were the improvement of safety, housing maintenance as well as access to more appropriate programs such as homework clubs, recreational programs for youth and heritage language training in their local neighbourhoods. There are many reasons why women like Halima have participated in these grassroots organisations. To her, the most important ones are to ensure "our children get what they deserve [in terms of social programs] and we want to protect them [the children] from being exposed to hostility and racial discrimination."⁷⁴⁷ According to Halima,

[I]f they are exposed to the racial hostility towards Somalis that I see everyday, they [the children] are bound to respond by fighting back or something similar. The police, being what it is, will target our children and the process of criminalization of black youth begins.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁷ Halima Abade (February 6, 2000).

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid. For a good discussion of the stereotypical construction of Black youth as "up to no good" and more prone to crime, and the unfair treatment they receive from the Toronto police see Carl E. James "Up to no good": Black on the Streets and Encountering Police." Vic Satzewich (ed.) *Racism & Social Inequality in Canada: Concepts, Controversies & Strategies of Resistance*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc., 1998, pp. 157-176. James argues, because of their country of origin and because of their status as immigrants, Somali youth experience life as "double pain". As one of James's participants point out, "No matter what the situation that you are in, what your dress is like ... they will find negative way of thinking about you, because you're Black, and secondly because you're Somali, and thirdly because you're immigrant and you speak a different language." Quoted in p. 168.

However, participation in decision-making has not been an easy process. Social housing neighbourhoods are defined by poverty and limited resources. Other residents in the social housing complexes were very hostile to Somalis when they first arrived in the early 1990s. According to Ikram, “these residents viewed Somalis as people who are taking what was intended to be theirs”.⁷⁴⁹ Racism was also a factor in the white residents’ hostility towards the Somali newcomers.⁷⁵⁰ Ikram discussed how the Somali Center was called in to participate in a process intended to open a dialogue between Somalis and white residents of the neighbourhood.

One was a woman whose child was beaten by an adult resident. The adult was a father of the child with whom her [the Somali woman] child had a fight. The white family called the police and accused the woman. The woman was shocked that in addition to her child being beaten the police was called on her. She told us that she tried to explain to the police that it was two children fighting and the father had no right beating her child. The police would not hear her side of the story. She felt that she was being discriminated against. She approached the Center and we followed up with her case and advocated on her behalf. We also have found out that this was not an isolated case but there have been a number of incidents where Somali families felt they were being targeted and they did not know how to protect themselves.⁷⁵¹

She continued to say, “this was a good opportunity for the Center to encourage Somali women, who were at the margins even at this level, to participate in Foster Farm neighbourhood activities”⁷⁵². She explains the process of helping women in the community be involved at the decision-making level of the neighbourhood affairs, helping them persevere despite the challenging politics of surviving with limited resources and racial inequality.

⁷⁴⁹ Ikram Jama (April 23, 2002).

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² Ibid.

We went into that neighbourhood to help mediate conflicts. However, we knew the Somali women in the neighbourhood. They came to the Center before to get assistance in immigration issue and other things. When we got there we realized that women did not participate for the Tenants' Association and their voices were not heard at that level. So we called for a neighbourhood community meeting. We asked the women the reasons for their lack of participation at the decision-making level. They told us they did not understand the system. They also said they were not invited to join. We asked them what they thought the answer would be. Some suggested that they should start participating at the decision-making level. So we asked why not run for election. They got excited. So the Center helped them run. They already had the energy and the desire, we just provided technical know-how in running for election, doing outreach and lobbying. I will never forget that day in 1999 when the election was taking place. They came in great numbers and full of enthusiasm. Old white residents thought we were troublemakers by encouraging women to participate in "their organization". On the contrary, what we were trying to do was creating peaceful coexistence. Two Somali women were elected to the Tenantss Association that day. One became the treasurer the other communication officer.⁷⁵³

In addition to the work of creating their own organisations and struggling for grassroots-level changes, Somali women who work in mainstream agencies fought constantly to have the particular issues and concerns of Somali women on the agenda.⁷⁵⁴ The participants who held numerous positions at various community resource and health centres have been involved in sensitizing colleagues and ensuring that appropriate programs that meet the specific needs of the Somali community are developed at their agencies and that barriers to access to services be addressed. In addition to serving many clients⁷⁵⁵ they worked hard to make sure that culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate intervention strategies were developed to ensure that Somali community knows about and could benefit from these service agencies.⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁴ Shukria Samatar (December 20, 1999); Fouzia Ismail (May 9, 2002).

⁷⁵⁵ In addition to Somali, many of the participants spoke multiple languages such as English, French, Arabic and Italian.

⁷⁵⁶ Fouzia Ismail (October 20, 2000)

Because of racial inequality and poverty, many Somalis live in neighbourhoods that are socially and spatially segregated. Women activists help the community tap into the supportive aspects of these segregated communities and the comforts of cultural familiarity by organising activities catered to their needs and that are aimed at social change.

The politics of FGM

I suffer this humiliation, this inhumane subjugation of circumcision; you can never know how painful it is unless you've undergone the operation yourself.⁷⁵⁷

It is deeply embedded in people's psyche. Even now I find it shocking to hear people who say they won't do it.⁷⁵⁸

No change [in terms of eradication of FGM] is possible without the conscious participation of [affected] women.⁷⁵⁹

One aspect of Somali women's lives, FGM, has received widespread attention in Canada. Initially this attention was welcome. However, it soon became clear that the particular attention paid by media and Canadian women's groups to the issue of FGM would not include and has in fact overtaken any other discussion of Somali women's lives and their daily struggles.⁷⁶⁰

All the participants agreed that non-Somali feminists, government and/or media approaches to FGM have been quite problematic, creating additional burdens for Somali women who had previously led the fight to eradicate the practice. First, by focusing on FGM in isolation, non-Somali activists/the popular Canadian media have reduced Somali

⁷⁵⁷ Nuruddin Farah. *Sardines*. London, 1981. p. 186.

⁷⁵⁸ Quoted in McGown. *Muslims in Diaspora...*, p. 151.

⁷⁵⁹ Abdalla. *Sisters in Affliction...* p. 2.

women's entire lives to the bleak images of sexual mutilation. Second, by setting the agenda outside the community and assuming the community does not have the "expertise" to deal with the issue, the process has disempowered members of the community. Finally, the language used and the simplistic coverage of the practice portrayed Somali women as "helpless victims" and have resulted not in stopping the practice but in making people feel defensive about their culture as a whole.

Participants have argued that women *do know about, have lived through* the pains of FGM, and they did not passively accept this practice that cripples their bodies.⁷⁶¹ As early as the 1970s when the issue was first raised publicly in Somalia,⁷⁶² women were open to the idea of eradication because they had experienced the pain. Edna Ismail publicly criticised FGM at a public function in Mogadishu (Somalia) in 1978. She recounts her being afraid that the great hall full of women "might throw their shoes at me". Instead her speech received a standing ovation and the women wanted to discuss the issue further so the assembly broke into smaller group meetings. At the end they unanimously called for an abolition of the practice.⁷⁶³

Their own history clearly shows that Somali women had not been "helpless victims" in their homeland. Many became aware of the negative health impacts that FGM had on

⁷⁶⁰ Fouzia Ismail (May 9, 2002).

⁷⁶¹ African women like Awa Thiam, Nawal el Saadawi and Raqiya Abdalla discussed the negative effects of FGM on women's health and sexuality in writing (*Black Sisters Speak Out: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa*. London, 1986. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*. Boston, 1980; and *Sisters in Affliction: Circumcision and Infibulation of Women in Africa*. London, 1982 respectively).

⁷⁶² While this was the first public meeting, there were discussions and meetings on the issue much earlier than this date. Women like Dahabo Farah, Sirad Yusuf, Fadumo Alim, Raqiya Haji Dualeh had been involved in awareness raising initiatives in 1960s.

⁷⁶³ Efua Dorkenoo and Scilla Elworthy. *FGM: Proposals for Change*. Minority Rights Group, 1992, p. 31.

their health and had been actively involved in the fight against the practice in Somalia. Women activists had been engaged in these issues for decades and formulated culturally acceptable responses to the practice. As discussed in chapter 4, under the auspices of the Somali Democratic Women's Organization, many women were mobilised. In the 1970s, SWDO began to carry out national campaigns. The campaigns led to vigorous, lively debates within popular Somali culture as well. For instance, the traditional gender ideologies that prevent women from taking control of their bodies were challenged in poetry, novels (e.g., Nuruddin Farah. *Sardines*. London, 1981) and short stories. Thus, as one woman puts it, "the seeds for change have been already sown in Somalia."⁷⁶⁴ In fact, the multiplicity of actions such as education campaigns and awareness raising in Somalia "help explain the readiness of the Somalia [sic] people in Canada and elsewhere to offer leadership."⁷⁶⁵

The following poem, which won a poetry contest at the International conference held in Mogadishu in 1988, points to the level of women's awareness of the recurring pain caused by FGM. Asking women to compose poems rather than write essays on the issue is quite appropriate in the Somali context where oral literature is not only very much appreciated but is quite accessible to the general population rather than only catering to the educated elite. This popular approach empowered the local communities whose issues were being discussed at the conference. The female poet refers to the pain women experience throughout their life cycle – on the day of mutilation, the wedding night, and at childbirth – as a result of the surgery as the "feminine sorrows". After giving a

⁷⁶⁴ Shukria Samatar (July 25, 1998).

historical background of where the practice came from and refuting that it is an Islamic practice, the poet continues,

And if I may think of my wedding night, awaiting me are caresses, sweet kisses,
hugging and love?
No. Never.
Awaiting me is pain, suffering and sadness.
In my wedding bed there I lie groaning, curling like a wounded animal, victim of
feminine pain. At dawn awaiting me – ridicule
My mother announces yes she is a virgin!
When fear gets hold of me.
When my anger seizes my body.
When hate becomes my company or companion.
I get feminine advice, it is only feminine pain, they say, and feminine pain
perishes like all feminine things!
The journey continues, or the struggle continues, as modern historians say!
As the good ties of marriage matures?
As I submit and sorrow subsides.
My belly becomes like a balloon?
A glimpse of happiness appears?
A hope, a new baby, a new life?
Ah, a new life endangers my life?
A baby's birth is death and destruction for me!
It is what my grandmother called the three feminine sorrows and if I may recall,
my grandmother said: the day of mutilation, the wedding night and the birth of a
baby, are the three feminine sorrows.
As the birth burst from me: I cry for help, the battered flesh tears again.
No mercy, push they say!
It is only feminine pain and feminine pain perishes like all feminine things!⁷⁶⁶

In Canada, Fadumo was one of the first to put the issue on the agenda. She and Hawa Aden started an anti-FGM campaign at the Health in Women's Hands Centre in Toronto in early 1990s. They were "instrumental in developing the Centre's comprehensive anti-FGM programme. This was the first programme of its kind in Canada."⁷⁶⁷ Hawa

⁷⁶⁵ Joan Gullen. *Report on the First International Study Conference on Genital Mutilation of Girls in Europe, July 5-9, 1992, in London, England*, p. 2. (Family Service Center, Ottawa).

⁷⁶⁶ *International Seminar on Female Circumcision: Strategies to Bring About Change, June 13-16th, 1988.* (Report) Mogadishu, Somalia, appendix A.

⁷⁶⁷ Fadumo Dirie, Maryan A. Rahman, Vuyiswa B. Keyi, dhol M. Anshur, JWDC [Juba women's development Centre] and GECPC [The Galkayo Education Centre for Peace and Development] Toronto

amassed the largest resource database in Canada on global FGM issues at the Centre. Her work was recognised nationally and internationally. She was featured in the annual poster of “women who made a difference in Canada” by the Ontario Women’s Directorate.⁷⁶⁸

Despite this important work and the commitment invested by Somali women in the eradication of FGM in Canada, Fadumo feels, “they were not as successful as they hoped.” She thinks one of the reasons for this is “the issue was taken out of their hands.” She also attributes this lack of success to the approach taken by people who were outside the community but had the resources to “dictate the agenda”.⁷⁶⁹

Fadumo argues, “women who have experiential knowledge of the pains of FGM and are capable of addressing it on their own, must be able to identify their own priorities and the approaches they find useful for the eradication of the practice”.⁷⁷⁰ If women are to think about their *strategic interests*, they first have to be empowered to deal with their *practical interests* and decide what their priorities are in the host country. This approach must neither deny the complexities of women’s experiences in the asylum country nor reduce them to the single issue of sexual mutilation.⁷⁷¹ In addition, a holistic approach that addresses FGM not in isolation but shows how it is connected with all the other issues women face in this new socio-cultural environment will ultimately have the greatest effect.

The need for alternative strategies and approaches in dealing with FGM was emphasised

support group volunteers. “Hawa does it Again’: Challenging and Changing the Legacy of War and its Aftermath in Somalia.” *Refugee Update*, no. 41, Winter 2000.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁹ Fadumo Dirie (July 14, 2001).

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid.

at a January 13, 2001 conference on FGM in Toronto. The participants of the conference were activists and leaders from the Somali community in both Toronto and Ottawa, mainstream service providers including health care professionals as well as researchers.⁷⁷² The conference focused on the development of strategies from the perspectives of and based on the experiences of the Somali community. The assumption was, as Uma Narayan, in her article "Contesting Cultures: 'Westernization,' Respect for Cultures and Third World Feminists," pointed out, that those who were born of a culture are most effective in formulating homegrown and local plans to contest it. She asserts, "it is often precisely one's status as one 'inside' the culture one criticises, and deeply affected by it, that gives one's criticisms their motivation and urgency."⁷⁷³

Ikram, Fouzia Ismail, Fowsia Abdulkadir, Raqiya, and Sahra have also pointed out that FGM cannot be dealt with separately from other issues and challenges women face in the diaspora. Focusing "primarily on FGM is a luxury that many Somali women cannot afford currently."⁷⁷⁴ Indeed, as Rakiya Omaar, a Co-ordinator of the Africa Right, a human rights organisation, points out, "Somalis cannot comprehend the focus on this issue when their entire country has fallen apart."⁷⁷⁵ Fouzia Ismail was a member of The Horn of Africa Resource and Research Group, in Ottawa, which has sponsored a number of activities on the issue. The group, which was made up of a partnership of Somali women, men and non-Somali agencies, had the mandate to improve access to health and

⁷⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷⁷² Khadija Ali (January 5, 2001).

⁷⁷³ Uma Narayan. "Contesting Cultures: 'Westernization,' Respect for Cultures and Third World Feminists." Linda Nicholson (ed.) *Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theories*. New York & London, 1997, p. 412.

⁷⁷⁴ Julie Flint. "Putting Rites Wrong." *Guardian Weekly*. May 22, 1994, p. 25.

⁷⁷⁵ Quoted in Ibid.

community resources. Using her background in Public Health and her experience in the campaign against FGM in Somalia, she helped organize sensitisation workshops for health professionals in Ottawa on how to incorporate an understanding of FGM into the way their medical care was undertaken. With a grant from the Women's Health Bureau of the Ontario Ministry of Health, Fouzia and other Somali women, who had medical backgrounds and who were involved in the campaign to end the practice in Somalia, made 15 presentations to approximately 300 health and child protection professionals. Members of the group also participated in international conferences/meetings in London and Sweden.⁷⁷⁶

Fowsia also participated in community education projects, helping to organize and facilitate a series of groups with Somali women in their neighbourhoods. The issue was not addressed in isolation in these groups but as one of many resettlement issues facing women. Fowsia emphasised the need to articulate the discussions of FGM within the broader context of other daily issues and struggles with which women are engaged. The ultimate goal should be, according to Fowsia and Ikram, women's overall empowerment and the development of a dignified and healthy life for girls and women. This holistic approach was also used in the campaign against FGM in Somalia and produced results. In a seminar in Khartoum in 1979, Raqiya (with a Somali women's delegation), enumerated the measures they thought were necessary to combat FGM:

[A]ny law must be supported by a day-to-day action campaign, throughout the country, in order to inform women and men of medical facts and encourage them to re-examine their

⁷⁷⁶ Lula J. Hussein. *FGM: Report on Consultations held in Ottawa and Montreal*. Department of Justice Canada: Research, Statistics and Evaluation Directorate, Civil Law and Corporate Management Sector, 1995.

attitudes; organization of discussion groups among women, workers and young people; wide use of the mass media in the aim of informing the population sufficiently that the idea of change can be accepted, and a new relationship between the sexes established.⁷⁷⁷

Hence, the emphasis on the issue being a social one and the need to deal with it in a holistic manner rather than in isolation are not notions developed in Canada. Women used this approach in the fight to abolish the practice in Somalia. The point the participants in Canada have reiterated in various forums, “addressing FGM in isolation have the opposite effect of alienating people,” echoes the arguments made by the Somali delegation in 1979 in Khartoum.

One such holistic strategy was proposed Edna Ismail, a health worker and one of the pioneers in bringing the issue of FGM onto the public agenda. She recommended that FGM must be treated within the context of women’s overall health. She warned that “a campaign, from outside, of alarmist information would provoke ‘righteous indignation’ and would antagonize people.”⁷⁷⁸ Other African activists on the issue of FGM concur with this. Efua Dorkeno, director of FORWARD (Foundation for Women’s Health Research and Development), which is at the forefront on the eradication campaign against FGM in Britain, points out that any hint of “feminism” or “women’s liberation” would kill their campaigns.⁷⁷⁹

Khadija, Fowsia Ismail, Fowsia Abdulkadir, and Ikram have also stressed the fact that FGM is a social issue that affects women, men, and children. The struggle to eradicate

⁷⁷⁷ Dorkenoo and Elworhty. *FGM...*, p. 31.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

FGM should be a collective effort by men and women rather than by women only. The participation of not only women but also cross-sectional groups of women, men and youth was important in Somalia, as Raqiya highlighted at the Khartoum seminar on FGM in 1979.⁷⁸⁰ Men do play an important role in the perpetuation of the practice when they insist on marrying only women who are circumcised and, as fathers, if they do not stop it from happening to their daughters. The following poem portrays a women who is aware of the interconnections between FGM and marriage and pleads with her father not to let her go through the practice even if it meant not being able to marry [for her] and loss of bride price [for the father]. It demonstrated that the father is often both aware of the practice and able to prevent his daughter from undergoing it, if he chooses.

O beloved, father let me go
 Let it (my clitoris) remain there, but let me go
 Let it (my clitoris) hang there, but let me go
 Even if I do not get someone to marry me
 Even if you do not get camels for the bride price.⁷⁸¹

Khadija raises a similar point in Canada.

We need collective efforts from both men and women if we are to succeed in the fight against the practice. We must remember, the practice is not by women for women. It is by women for men. So men must be actively involved in the struggles against FGM. They cannot continue excusing themselves and putting the blame on women. Unless men are part of it, the struggle to eradicate FGM is doomed to fail.⁷⁸²

The participants proposed approaches that not only respect women's personal and

⁷⁷⁹ Sue Armstrong. "Female circumcision: fighting a cruel tradition." *New Scientist*. vol. 2, February 1990, pp. 41-47.

⁷⁸⁰ Sponsored by World Health Organization (WHO), this was the first international seminar on the issue of FGM. Somalia was one of the nine participating countries. The country's Health Minister and several delegates from SWDO participated in this seminar.

⁷⁸¹ Amina Mahamuud Warsame, Sadia Muse Ahmed and Aud Talle. *Social and Cultural Aspects of Female Circumcision and Infibulation: A Preliminary Report*. Women's Research Unit, Somali Academy of Sciences and Arts (SOMAC). Mogadishu/ Stockholm, November 1985.

⁷⁸² Khadija Ali (January 5, 2001).

collective agency and acknowledge that people who live in these realities had been/are figuring it out, but also empower the community to develop local strategies to effectively deal with FGM. They have insisted that for these projects to be successful, the expertise of women who lived through FGM and who had been actively involved in the campaign against the practice both in Somalia and in Canada should actively be sought.

When the people that have been affected by it [FGM], the community itself handles it, you see positive changes. I did a lot of health education around it. When they come for health check ups or annual physicals or baby well checks, I always ask them as part of their routine visits, if they come with baby girls, “are you going to circumcise your daughter”. They often respond, “oh no, now I know it, there is a lot of medical complications and it is not necessary because people used to believe that it is necessary because it is religious requirement but now I know.” So I see a lot of positive changes in the community here.⁷⁸³

In addition, we must recognize, says Ikram, that social change is a slow process and does not happen overnight.⁷⁸⁴ Fowsia also maintains that Somali activist women understand that the process will take a long time to take full effect and to educate the society about the complex nature of the issue. She says, “it will take maybe a century but that is fine. At least a process has begun. It took 80 years for women to be considered persons under the law in the West.”⁷⁸⁵

Given the slow pace of change, widespread education instead of blaming and “fingering”, as Fowsia Abdulkadir put it, is the key to the successful and eventual eradication of the practice.

⁷⁸³ Fouzia Ismail (May 9, 2002).

⁷⁸⁴ Ikram Jama (September 25, 2000).

⁷⁸⁵ Fadumo Dirie is one of the first women who brought the issue of FGM into public. She now lives in Toronto and is involved in a women’s grassroots movement to eradicate the practice in Somalia. (July 14, 2001).

It is not about going on Oprah and saying I am “damaged goods”... It is one thing to sort of appeal to the Western world’s population, but we must remember that they are not the ones who are going to stop FGM. It is not their daughters that go through the practice. People who can stop and will stop it are the grandmothers. So what we need to do is come down to, you know the level of, and I am not meaning “down” in the sense they are lesser but getting down to the real business of educating our women that this is doing more harm than good to their children. But not in a condescending manner that says, you know, “you are not good”, “you are not good.”⁷⁸⁶

Fouzia Ismail, who in her profession as a nurse comes across many Somali women with young children, believes that education and awareness raising are key to effecting positive changes and they must be ongoing within the daily context of women’s activities. She points out that she talks to women with young daughters about the negative effects of FGM. Sometimes, Fouzia mentions the legal repercussions of circumcising as a deterrent. She said that she came across only two cases where women wanted to circumcise their daughter in the past five years. When she mentioned the law is against it in Canada, they both said they would not do it.⁷⁸⁷ The thought of going to prison scared the women in this case, says Fouzia. Although it worked in these instances, Fouzia is against the criminalization of FGM. What is needed, she argues, is education to make people “understand that what they believed for so long and has been socially ingrained in them is actually detrimental for them”.⁷⁸⁸

Again, the emphasis on education is a continuation from Somalia. In a report on SWDO’s strategies for a future action plan on FGM in 1987, education and sensitization of the general public were priorities. FGM and its negative health effects were to be included as a component in various educational programs including family life education, school

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid.

curriculum from primary to university level, medical and nursing curriculum, and training programs of traditional birth attendants and village health workers. The implementation of these programs were to be a concerted effort by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Sports and Labour, adult education centres, women's education departments, all agencies involved in non-formal education, agencies engaged in women's health related activities, professional (medical and nurses) associations, and other interested and relevant individuals and associations.⁷⁸⁹

Another difficulty in Canada was the language used by non-Somalis when addressing the issue. Although there was a cultural division at some level in Somalia, because of the difference in perspectives between the urban and rural sectors of the society, there was not a dominant cultural group that imposed its values and languages around the issue. The language used to define and discuss the issue in Canada by western activists is developed in a context of constructing people from the third world as inferior. In this sense, as Foucault said, "neither language nor history are conceptually neutral."⁷⁹⁰ Such language has little ability to empower those who deal with the practice and its repercussions daily. In this sense, having "outsiders" involved in the issue and speaking about FGM to the broader Canadian public proved to be rather counter-productive, the interviewed women believed.

Somali women activists insisted that there is a need to deconstruct the language

⁷⁸⁹ Ururka Dimoqraadiga Haweenka Soomaaliyeed (Somali Women's Democratic Organisation). *Action Plan on FC [female circumcision]*. 1987.

⁷⁹⁰ Michel Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. New York: Pantheon, 1972.

developed by the mainstream social activists around the issues and to resist the labels imposed on the community. For instance, according to Fouzia Ismail, who was one of the members of the Ontario Task Force,⁷⁹¹ “while there is no doubt about the wrongfulness of the act, we must be extremely careful in naming it *abuse*.” Fowsia Abdulkadir, an adult educator, concurs with Ismail by pointing out that the language used by some Canadian groups is irrelevant to Somali women’s experiences; it may even negate women’s experiences. She says that it is important for those who have experienced the practice to develop an appropriate language on the issue. This language, according to Fowsia, “must encompass the complex issues of dealing with sexual mutilation and with cultural difference at the same time.”⁷⁹² Those who have experienced FGM are the most appropriate ones, and must be the ones who define their issues, both women agree.

Many grassroots community activists, who had been involved in the fight against FGM, have felt both the current sensationalist and alarmist approach are wrong and will damage the potential success of their campaigns.⁷⁹³ Approaches that have come with the assumption that *help* needs to come from outside and that have patronising slant tend to offend and affect the campaign against the practice negatively.⁷⁹⁴ Fowsia Abdulkadir explains that there is a need to understand that what our grandmothers did was not cruel from their perspective and that culture is not static:

Get them on board without making them the demons and the evil people that did this [circumcised] to us. We have to make sure that our young children do not see them as

⁷⁹¹ The Ontario FGM Prevention Task Force is a joint community-government initiative aimed at providing information and advice to governmental departments such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Justice, so they will come up with informed and appropriate legislations and policies.

⁷⁹² Fowsia Abdulkadir (September 7, 2000).

⁷⁹³ Fouzia Ismail (July 27, 1998).

⁷⁹⁴ Dahabo Farah (October 13, 1996).

that. Because grandmothers, their grandmothers and their grandmothers were all products of a culture and time, there wasn't evilness in them. We certainly have a lot of work to do in terms of educating everybody, whether it is the young Somali girls (both those who have gone through it and those who have not) or mainstream institutions. We have to make them see that this [FGM] is an outdated cultural item that is no longer needed. What ever purpose it served, I think we should not get stuck in "why", you know "why did they do it?" This is not going to help anybody.⁷⁹⁵

Another factor that contributed to the lack of success is that non-Somalis hijacked it.⁷⁹⁶

The appropriation of FGM by mainstream feminists, the way FGM is debated within popular discourses, the subsequent media sensationalization, and the continuing construction of the "other" as oppressed, veiled, and mutilated were counterproductive. In addition, the sensationalism contributed to backlash against Somali activists who were accused of putting the community's "dirty linen of the outside." Finally, interviewed women have felt frustrated by what they called "the attempts to silence them" by the mainstream society and, sometimes, their own community, some of whom feel that discussing FGM in public and with outsiders is betraying them. Third world feminists who speak out against harmful cultural practices are often placed in contradictory and sometimes compromising positions.

On the one hand, as Narayan maintains, they are criticised and blamed for using "Western" values in attacking "non-Western cultures" and are said to be expressing an "incarnation of a colonized consciousness." They are labelled as "Westernised." "Many feminists from Third World context confront voices that are eager to convert any feminist criticism they make of their culture into a mere symptom of their 'lack of respect for their

⁷⁹⁵ Fowsia Abdulkadir (September 7, 2000).

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

culture,' rooted in the 'Westernization' that they seem to have caught like a disease."⁷⁹⁷ On the other hand, they are accused of being "too close" and/or "too emotionally involved" with the issue to undertake "objective" research. Thus, they are either located as members of a privileged class who are not in touch with their "people" and their "culture" or are positioned on the margins and defined as the "other."⁷⁹⁸ Yet, interviewed women recognize how important it is for *them* (as insiders of the culture) to engage in ongoing debates and bring the issue forth and to contest it. Uma Narayan, in her article "Contesting Cultures: 'Westernization,' Respect for Cultures and Third World Feminists," discussed the importance of those who were born of a culture contesting it. She asserts that "it is often precisely one's status as one 'inside' the culture one criticises, and deeply affected by it, that gives one's criticisms their motivation and urgency."⁷⁹⁹

As a result, some activists, because they did not like the approach and they did not want to alienate the community, stayed out of the issue of FGM.⁸⁰⁰ As many of the participants pointed out, the mainstream society was generally ill-informed about the issue. Fowsia Abdulkadir remarked,

I was doing a workshop on torture and survivors of war when I was asked if the dictatorship regime in Somalia used FGM as a form of a torture. I was like, stop! There is absolutely no relationship between FGM and torture. The definition of torture is a deliberate act, you are sought individually for the sole purpose of breaking you. We are talking about torture and state control, political prisoners and methods of torture, you know, and FGM. How did we get here!! Let's separate the issues. This [FGM] is not

⁷⁹⁷ Narayan. "Contesting Cultures..." p. 197.

⁷⁹⁸ Vijay Agnew. *Resisting Discrimination: Women from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean and the Women's Movement in Canada*. Toronto, 1996.

⁷⁹⁹ Narayan. "Contesting Cultures..." p. 412.

⁸⁰⁰ Some of the participants, who are otherwise quite active in the community, informed me that they did not get involved in the issue because the approach was counter productive. One interviewee even declined a lucrative employment opportunity with an international NGO because she said, "I did not want to be in a project that was going to deal with FGM in isolation of the many other issues Somali women are concerned with including reconstructing communities after long civil war."

something that people use to torture other people. It is a cultural practice.⁸⁰¹

Hence, despite the various activities initiated by Somali women to take control of their lives and bodies, many activists are quite disappointed and feel that they have not been really effective in making as much change as they had anticipated at the community level. Fowsia Abdulkadir commented, “[M]ainstream society was not effective or anything close to being effective. If anything, they spoiled it for us by running with it, because you really had no choice.”⁸⁰² These women’s general impression was that, although it was always their ultimate goal, not much has been achieved in terms of education and awareness raising within the community.⁸⁰³

Finally, attention is rarely given to the fact that the transportation of traditional practices across the world and to a different cultural and political setting generally affects how people feel about them. As Rumbaut points out, going into exile itself constitutes a crucial act of self-definition.⁸⁰⁴ Coming outside of their country provided many Somalis a chance to define their own identity and to question cultural practices. It also gave them an immense opportunity to free themselves from the socio-cultural pressures and the "ever watching eye" of their community (which worked as a social control mechanism in many African countries.)⁸⁰⁵ The opportunity to be away from the social controls of the

⁸⁰¹ Fowsia Abdulkadir (September 7, 2000).

⁸⁰² Ibid.

⁸⁰³ Fouzia Ismail (October 20, 2000).

⁸⁰⁴ Ruben G. Rumbaut. “The Agony of Exile: A Study of the Migration and Adaptation of Indochinese Refugee Adults and Children.” Ahearn, Jr. and Jean L. Athey (eds.) *Refugee Children: Theory, Research, and Services*. Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins Press Ltd., 1991. p. 60.

⁸⁰⁵ There have been reported cases in Europe and the Middle East where Somali families have taken their daughters back home to have the surgery done in the past. However, the combined effect of the civil war and financial restrictions are likely to reduce the phenomenon, or even prevent it from taking place in the future.

community of neighbours and the close-knit kin groups allowed many, particularly those who were educated, to attempt to change the status quo and stop practices that are detrimental to their health and their bodily integrity.⁸⁰⁶

There were many cases in Somalia where parents had become aware of the detrimental health and sexual effects of FGM and decided not to subject their daughters to the operation. However, the older group would “take matters into their hands” and circumcise their grand daughters.⁸⁰⁷ “I used to have nightmares that my mother-in-law would take and circumcise my daughter when I was at work,” said one woman who did not circumcise her four daughters.⁸⁰⁸

The above mentioned and many other activities initiated by Somali women indicate that they have not submissively accepted what was prescribed to them and that they have been continuously criticising aspects of their “traditions” that have victimised them. The approach employed by activist women in Canada, which emphasises empowering the local communities to deal with their own issues, addressing FGM in a holistic manner, raising awareness and education is similar to the approach used by women in Somalia. Contrary to the alienation felt by the community in Canada by “outsiders trying to fix them”, this approach produced positive results in Somalia and gives the ownership to the women who have experienced FGM and know how to deal with it. Fouzia, who, as a

⁸⁰⁶Through my work and personal relations, I came across a significantly large number of Somali women who have not operated on their daughters when they reached the circumcision age (7-9 years old). As a result, there are an increasing number of teenage girls who never went through the surgery.

⁸⁰⁷ Raqiya Haji Dualeh (April 4, 2001).

⁸⁰⁸ Interview with a community activist, Ottawa. For an interesting analysis of this socio-cultural pressure on young mothers to circumcise their daughters see Nuruddin Farah. *Sardines*.

Public Health Nurse at Mother and Child Health Centres (MCH) throughout Somalia and had been involved in the fights against FGM, discussed how FGM was not a taboo subject in the 1980s because of all the work undertaken by SWDO. She mentioned, “because of the SWDO campaigns throughout Somalia, it was much easier to discuss the issue [FGM] with mothers who come to the MCH centres.”⁸⁰⁹ Hence, there is a clear historical continuity between the forms of activism and the approaches chosen to effectively eradicate FGM in Somalia and in Canada.

Struggles for institutional change

So many people were unlanded [without permanent resident papers]. People were fed up. We organised demonstrations, we appeared in front of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Nothing was happening. Then we decided to challenge the federal government under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In this court challenge we argued that the identity provision, s. 46.04(8) of *Immigration Act* was discriminatory against Somalis on the basis of national origin. This is contrary to s.15 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.⁸¹⁰

The major barrier Somalis faced in Canada was its restrictive and discriminatory immigration policy. As discussed in chapter three, the restrictive immigration policy of the early 1990s not only affected people’s ability to work and their access to post secondary education but it also negatively affected people’s right to reunite their family members.

Somali activists have contested this immigration policy from the beginning. One of the first tools used to resist the immigration provisions and to create public policy changes

⁸⁰⁹ Fouzia Ismail (October 20, 2000).

was the organising public demonstrations. In addition, community activists organised individual and collective advocacy initiatives through facilitated discussions and presentations to local and federal legislators. Also, they brought the media's attention to the negative effects the provisions had on the community's ability to successfully integrate into the larger society.

However, none of the community actions produced satisfactory results. Consequently, using the cases of people whose lives had been adversely affected by discriminatory immigration policies, community leaders with the help of other social activists, community organisations and lawyers mounted a constitutional challenge where the federal government was accused of being racist towards Somalis. In this court challenge, the identity provision, s. 46.04(8) of *Immigration Act* was alleged to have the "effect of discriminating on the basis of national origin, contrary to s.15 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*."⁸¹¹ The plaintiffs argued that

since Somali nationals are unable to obtain existing documents from Somalia owing to the collapse of that country's bureaucracy, their inability to satisfy the requirement arises because of their country of origin. The subsection thus creates a distinction between Somalis and other convention Refugees.⁸¹²

Somali community leaders (with the help of legal experts, social activists, national refugee advocacy agencies such as Canadian Council for Refugees and international NGOs such as UNHCR) have presented compelling legal arguments. They argued that

⁸¹⁰ Ahmed Hashi, a lawyer in training, Hashi is one of the people who were effective in the process of court challenge. Refugee Issues Coordinator, Citizens for Public Justice (Interview, Ottawa, May 16, 2001).

⁸¹¹ Razack. "Simple Logic..." p. 185.

⁸¹² Ibid.

despite the “seemingly strong equality clauses,⁸¹³” systemic inequalities based on national origin still characterise the Immigration Act. Somali refugees were excluded from the basic human rights guaranteed by the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees and under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Hence the immigration act had differential impact. The case was settled on December 14, 2000. The settlement agreement states that where there are reasons [related to country conditions] for a Convention Refugee not to be able to produce identity documents, the Convention Refugee can instead produce a sworn declaration. This declaration can come from either someone who knew him/her before arrival in Canada or an organization representing nationals of the person's country of origin. This was a monumental victory for Somalis and the settlement has implications beyond that particular community. However, because immigration officers still retain immense discretionary powers to accept or refuse the sworn affidavits as identity documents, community leaders still feel that there is a lot of work that needs to be done before things truly change.⁸¹⁴ Activists are currently pressuring the legislators to amend Bill C-11 and to have mandatory training for immigration officers to sensitise them about issues facing refugees. In addition, a need to put monitoring mechanisms to follow up implementation was identified.⁸¹⁵

Immigration is not the only basis on which Somali women have challenged the state. Many Somali women activists like Fadumo have contested the “process of legalisation of FGM, and the ensuing criminalization of the community, without being supported by the

⁸¹³ Arat-Koc. “Gender and Race in ‘Non-Discriminatory’ Immigration Policies.” p. 229.

⁸¹⁴ Ahmed Hashi (May 16, 2001).

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

needed educational campaign.”⁸¹⁶ Although the spirit of the law was positive and many women thought that a law prohibiting the practice would be a powerful deterrent against it in Canada, they were “shocked” when they read the Bill C-27, Section 268, Subsection (3) & (4). The most surprising part of the Bill was that it would have “profound negative implications and would criminalize the practising communities while giving *carte blanche* to doctors to do the surgery “if a consenting adult requested it.” “The Bill was double standard,” said Fadumo. It should be penalising the doctors and not the families who obtain it for their daughters.⁸¹⁷

Women like Fadumo Dirie intensively lobbied to address the double standard and to make amendments to the Bill before it became a law. “This was not easy,” said Fadumo, “because we did not have any resources to advocate for amendments.”⁸¹⁸ This points to the vulnerability of the refugees and their lack of resources. However, Somali women sought an alliance with women with whom they shared experiences of exclusion and marginality within the State (i.e., racialized women). Women from Toronto, with the assistance and support from Somali women who were then students at Carleton University and University of Ottawa, presented their case and recommendations for amendments in front of the parliamentary hearing on November 26, 1996. Their recommendations were not taken into consideration when the legislation was drafted. Fadumo looks at this not as a loss but as a learning experience. Through the campaigning and coalition building, Faduma says, she learned a lot. She now uses her activism,

⁸¹⁶ Fadumo Dirie (July 14, 2001).

⁸¹⁷ For a good discussion on the issue of FGM and the arguments made by women activists to the Parliamentary Hearings see The FGM Legal Community Committee, *Brief to the Parliamentary Standing*

knowledge and skills to help women in Somalia and to help develop comprehensive and integrated projects there that would sensitise women and girls about the harmful effects of FGM.

Conclusions

As discussed in chapter 6, the Somali community has generally faced tremendous barriers in their attempts to integrate into the larger society. The participants, as individuals who came with strong professional backgrounds and academic credentials acquired prior to their arrival in Canada, have faced particular challenges. Systemic barriers such as racial discrimination, lack of “Canadian experience”, and lack of appropriate upgrading and training services prevented the majority of them from being able to use their professional qualifications to successfully integrate into the labour market in Canada. These inequalities disrupted activist women’s capacities to fully exercise self-determination. Despite these limited occupational opportunities in the labour marker and drastic downward social mobility, Somali women activists in Canada have used their skills, knowledge, and energy to engage in various struggles aimed at helping the community survive.

The participants’ experiential knowledge of being refugees, their commitment to the “*danta guud*”, their personal and professional history, and their education have shaped their engagement in activities beyond their personal survival. They have been

Committee on Justice and Legal affairs, re: Bill C-27, Section 268, Subsection (3) & (4). November 26, 1996.

⁸¹⁸ Fadumo Dirie (July 14, 2001).

instrumental in organising programs aimed at social change such as homework clubs, women's support groups and making institutional changes that have positive social impacts on Somali refugees as well as others. They have also participated in organisations seeking social and political change. However, because they themselves have been dealing with being socially and economically excluded, their efforts were often limited to "putting fires out" and "making the margins liveable".

Somali women have an admirable history of social and political activism. But being an activist in an environment where they are a racial and cultural minority has been a new and disempowering phenomenon. As the case of FGM becoming a high profile controversy shows women had difficulties in being able to deal with the practice effectively in Canada. This is ironic, because at the outset it would seem that an effective eradication of FGM would be an easier task in Canada where the feminist agenda is more advanced than in Somalia. Also, because of the lack of a social and cultural context sustaining the practice, it seemed that the efforts to eradicate of FGM would be more successful. Unfortunately, because of outside factors, such as the overall negative representation of Somali culture that contributed to some community members defending the practice, Somali women activists' efforts were undermined. In spite of lacking "voice" in the new environment, women have persisted and have been engaged in an on-going education and awareness raising of the Somali community about the negative health effects of FGM; these women's voices are being heard where they count the most.

CONCLUSIONS

Integration: Problems and Prospects

In one way Canada welcomed me and gave me home but it also took a lot from me.⁸¹⁹

*Allow guri roon na gee
Oo geedo badan
Uu joogo gacal
Oo gudini taal⁸²⁰*

O Allah take us to a peaceful place
With plenty of pasture
With relatives (good neighbours) close by
With the necessary tools to make a living

Set in a nomadic context, the above poem illustrates the importance placed on practical issues such as peace, prosperity, the ability to work, and relatives and good neighbours for social support in making a place home. While moving from one place to another is not a new phenomenon for Somalis, in the past, it was often planned ahead. A *sahan* (surveyor) would be sent to explore the land and ensure that the place to which the family was moving had all the critical features, like peace, good pasture, good neighbours, and work possibilities, to make it home. Unfortunately, Somali refugees did not plan their coming to Canada. They were pushed out of their homeland by circumstances beyond their control and came here as refugees.

In Canada, although they were physically accepted as refugees, the reception stopped there. There were no structures in place to help settle them and systemic barriers made economic integration difficult. They were not offered a warm welcome. The possibilities

⁸¹⁹ Shukria Samatar (March 9, 2002).

of making a meaningful integration into the Canadian society and making Canada a home were also limited. Like other refugees and immigrants from racialized groups, Somalis have been the victims of negative stereotypes and systemic barriers. Women in particular faced racist and homogenising perceptions of immigrant women that obscure their heterogeneity and the agency of these women. Inherent in this perception of the “other” groups as different from “Canadians” on the basis of their cultural and ethnic characteristics is “a racist bias that implies the inferiority of these groups.”⁸²¹

The racial hostility towards refugees and immigrants from certain countries was sometimes blamed on their cultural difference rather than putting the blame on public policies that marginalized them. For instance, a government task force struck to address the problems of racism in Toronto in 1976 explained that South Asians were victims of violence because they have “a cultural tradition which is unfamiliar and threatening to some people. The turban, the sari, the spiced food, the articulation... are all aspects of high visibility.”⁸²² Similarly a 1982 discussion paper by the Secretary of State blames difficulties faced by immigrant women on their culture. The document titled “Multiculturalism - Priorities” states, “immigrant women are isolated both within their own and the larger society often as a result of limiting cultural traditions and lack of basic life skills, particularly official language.”⁸²³ The focus on “culture” and the “blame the victim” approach are both problematic and fail to address the systemic barriers faced by

⁸²⁰ Quoted to me by Sahra Habbane (April 22, 2002).

⁸²¹ Nayyar S. Javed. “State-Imposed Multiculturalism: Social Change or Illusion of Change.” Caterina Pizani and James S. Frideres. *Freedom Within the Margins: The Politics of Exclusion*. Alberta: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1995, p. 235.

⁸²² Quoted in Avery. *Reluctant Host...* p. 216.

⁸²³ Tania Das Gupta. “The Politics of Multiculturalism: “Immigrant Women” and the Canadian State.” Dua and Robertson. *Scratching the Surface...* p. 193.

racialized groups, no matter how many generations they have lived in Canada. In addition, as Das Gupta points out, the emphasis on culture “removes the focus of analysis from power inequalities existing in society which deny women, in general, and immigrant women, in particular, equal opportunities in life.”⁸²⁴

As discussed, the construction of women from the Third World as unassimilable is based on the same racist policies that argued certain immigrants would not make good Canadians because of their cultural backgrounds. This process of culturalization of racialized groups is referred to as cultural racism. The gender aspect of this analysis is employed by policy makers and the general public to exclude women from the Third World. This often has practical settlement implications for the racial/ethnic minority communities.

Somali women refugees in the 1990s are one of the most recent groups to experience the historical legacy of racial and gender biases that have informed policy making in Canada. As Blacks, Muslim, and members of a culture perceived as “incompatible with the ‘Canadian’”, Somali women were not only racially targeted but also their culture and religion became markers of difference. All newcomers face difficulties such as linguistic and cultural barriers, lack of access to trades and professions, resulting in downward mobility, and loss of familiar and social support. In addition, Somali women arriving in Canada in 1990s faced the very distinct racial disadvantage of new legislation that prevented their settlement as recognised Convention refugees and legitimate residents.

⁸²⁴ Ibid. p. 194.

This additional burden contributed to Somali refugee women's exclusion, undermining their agency as community activists.

As women who came with previously acquired education and skills, the participants in this study also faced institutional barriers that blocked their occupational mobility. Despite these multiple barriers to their integration, however, Somali women have not accepted their "fate" in the host country. They have devised individual and collective strategies to reconstruct their lives in Canada. Using aspects of their tradition, as the study demonstrated, women have often reconstructed familiar social spaces through support groups and social networks to help them cope with the new reality of being uprooted and create a sense of belonging. New communities were created in neighbourhoods to deal with the break from customary familial relations and to offset isolation in the host country. These women have shaped their immediate circumstances to fit their needs, they have been able to affect their own lives, and have created new social spaces and identities. They have also maintained some aspects of their cultural and religious identity in neighbourhood interactions and social networks. In this sense, these women have been "both agents of change and sources of continuity."⁸²⁵

Somali women have also engaged in collective struggles to deal with the social and economic exclusions⁸²⁶ experienced by the community. Building on a long history of women's activism and agency, participants have maintained a wide range of activities

⁸²⁵ Susan Forbes Martin. *Refugee Women*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1992. p. 7.

⁸²⁶ Exclusion is defined as a comprehensive and dynamic process "of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person

such as organising support groups for women, being founding members of organisations and participating in a web of affiliations to diverse organisations that are engaged in social justice. They have struggled hard to make a place for the community. Their activism was key to the cohesion and every day survival of the community. While the struggles Somali activist women engaged in are formidable and have contributed to community development, they were often in response to the challenges of discrimination, exclusion, inequality, and were geared towards making the margins liveable. Like those of other racialized groups, Somali women's efforts are "restricted to a narrow sphere of the ethnic enclave."⁸²⁷ Participants have spent countless hours to maintain community integrity in a racially and culturally hostile society.

Somali activist women's community development initiatives have had considerable effect on the daily lives of members of the Somali community. However, given the persistent external constraints, it is difficult to be optimistic about the impact of their activism on undermining institutional barriers. The systemic racism in the labour market and other social and political institutions that limit choices in social and economic integration persist despite multiculturalism policy that promised equality. The inequalities of power between the European founding groups and those of aboriginal or non-European origin are often taken for granted in the context of multiculturalism.⁸²⁸ Therefore, by ignoring systemic racism at its inception, official multiculturalism "has done little to eradicate the

in a society." See A. Walker and C. Walker (eds.) *Britain Divided: The Growth of Social Exclusion in the 1980s and 1990s*. London: Child Poverty Action Group, 1997, p. 8.

⁸²⁷ Javed. "State-Imposed Multiculturalism..." p. 236.

⁸²⁸ Pizanias and Frideres. *Freedom Within the Margins...* p. ix.

barriers preventing”⁸²⁹ racialized groups, like Somalis, from meaningful participation in Canadian life.

Some argue that all refugees and immigrants undergo a period of initial hostility and discrimination as part of what was termed a “rite of entry”⁸³⁰. While it is true that all newcomers meet challenges in their journey towards integration, this statement only tells half of the story. Has being excluded systematically been a “rite of entry” for Somalis? Somali refugee experiences in Canada illustrate that the answer is no. In the end, they are still not integrated. The experiences of other racialized groups are also historical indications that the process of “integration” has not been as smooth as it sounds for all refugees and immigrants.⁸³¹ Canada’s multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-cultural character is consistently denied and the identities of the racialized groups are suppressed, for example, “when people continue to be asked ‘where are you from?’ or are grilled about their accent, skin colour, language, name or ethnic origin.” These questions suggest, “such people are not viewed as Canadian.”⁸³² As Mukherjee points out, “being ‘just-Canadian’ is a privilege only white people enjoy in Canada. It is we non-whites who are seen as deviants from the norm. So we are tagged with identity cards, some worn proudly, and others with resentment. I am always conscious of my being non-white and

⁸²⁹ Javed. “State-Imposed Multiculturalism... p. 237.

⁸³⁰ See Donald Avery. *Reluctant Host: Canada’s Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1995; Franca Iacovetta, Paula Draper and Robert Ventresca: *A Nation of Immigrants: women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s*. Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press, 1998.

⁸³¹ Iacovetta, Draper and Ventresca: *A Nation of Immigrants...* p. x.

⁸³² Carl James and Adrienne Shadd (eds.) “Introduction.” *Talking about Difference: Encounters in Culture, Language and Identity*. Toronto: Between The Lines, 1994.

how that fact determines my total life experience.”⁸³³ The following poem by Dionne Brand also shows being excluded is not something only newcomers experience but other racialized groups, no matter how long they lived in Canada, have experienced as well.

I am not a refugee
I have my papers
I was born in the Caribbean
Practically in the sea
I have a Canadian passport
I have lived here all my adult life.⁸³⁴

Thus, because of the existing structural barriers all refugees and immigrants “do not compete on an equal footing with each other”⁸³⁵ and some are denied the rights to meaningful economic and social participation. These people experience structured racial exclusion, “a process by which individuals and groups who do not possess or are denied the attributes, to secure a greater share of society’s valued goods, rewards, privileges.”⁸³⁶ The structural barriers imposed on racialized refugees and immigrants seriously limit their mobility and integration into the society and continually position those who are non-white as the “other”. As discussed, the exclusion experienced by these groups is not a new phenomenon but it continues to be reproduced; the history of Canada’s immigration policy is full of reports that reveal the appalling treatments of groups considered as “racially inferior”.⁸³⁷

⁸³³ Arun Mukherjee. “The ‘Race Consciousness’ of a South-Asian (Canadian, of Course) Female Academic.” James and Shadd (eds.) *Talking about Difference...* p. 202.

⁸³⁴ Quoted in Himani Bannerji. *The Writing on the Wall: Essays on Culture and Politics*. Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1993, p. 24.

⁸³⁵ Anver Saloojee. “Inclusion and Exclusion: A Framework of Analysis for Understanding Political Participation by Members of Racialized and Newcomer Groups.” Paper presented at Metropolis Conference, Ottawa, March 2002, p. 9.

⁸³⁶ Ibid.

⁸³⁷ See Avery. *Reluctant Host...*; Iacovetta, Draper and Ventresca: *A Nation of Immigrants...*

Somali refugees are among the latest in a long line of racialized groups whose social and economic participation is undermined because of structural barriers. While all the participants in the study are now Canadian citizens, they continue to be marginalized. They experienced citizenship loaded with “inequality and exclusion, rather than citizenship as form of equal and inclusionary membership.”⁸³⁸

Despite this exclusionary politics of citizenship, however, as discussed in the dissertation, Somali women have not been just victims. Rather than helpless, participants in this study have been proactive and engaged in many activities that had collective consequences for their community and helped their community to survive the systemic racism and sexism which contributed to their exclusion. These women have built on their collective consciousness, historical patterns of female expressions of agency, educational backgrounds, and, sometimes, a long history of activism to achieve their personal goals as well as making the margins liveable for the rest of the community.

By developing pragmatic solutions to the new challenges faced by their community, activist women are forging an alternative history in Canada. What can we learn from the life of these women? The main lesson from these women’s experiences in Canada is the importance of looking at not only the skills and education brought by refugees into this country, but also their cultural and historical backgrounds. Somali women’s strong historical sense of self-determination, rooted in a culture that values female resourcefulness and initiative, has provided them with the necessary tools to survive in an

⁸³⁸ Daiva Stasiulis. “Introduction: Reconfiguring Canadian Citizenship.” *Citizenship Studies*. Vol. 6, no. 4, 2002, p. 365.

often hostile environment where they are socially and economically marginalized.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources

Interviews

1. Abdulle, Amina. Interview by author, Toronto, December 27, 1999.
2. Dr. Ali, Mohamed Nuh, Lecturer, Carleton University. Interview by author, March 6, 2002.
3. Alim, Fadumo, Former Deputy Minister of Education. Interview by author, October 12, 1996, October 28, 2001 and May 11, 2002.
4. Abade, Halima, Religious Teacher and Communications Officer, Foster Farm Tenant's Association. Interview by author, Ottawa, February 6, 2000.
5. Abdulkadir, Fowsia, Adult ESL Teacher. Interview by author, September 7, 2001, January 23, 2002, and May 2, 2002.
6. Ali, Khadija, Health Promoter, Rexdale Community Centre. Interview by author, Toronto, July 17, 2000.
7. Dahabo Farah, Former Dean, Faculty of Linguistics, Somali National University. Interview by author, Toronto, October 13, 1996.
8. Dirie, Fadumo, Community Activist. Interview by author, Toronto, July 14, 2001.
9. Dualeh, Raqiya Haji, Former Deputy Minister of Health. Interview by author, Washington D.C., March 29, 2001 and April 4, 2001.
10. Fulford, Barbara, Psychologist. Interview by author, Ottawa, December 20, 2000.
11. Habbane, Sahra, Minority Outreach Worker, Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services. Interview by author, October 27, 2001 and April 22, 2002.
12. Hashi, Ahmed, Former Deputy Minister of Justice and Religious Affairs in Somalia and Refugee Issues Coordinator, Citizens for Public Justice in Canada. Interview by author, Ottawa, August 20, 1996 and May 16, 2001.
13. Hashi, Sirad, Vice President, Russell Heights Tenant's Association. Interview by author, June 12, 2001.

14. Ismail, Fouzia, Health Promoter. SouthEast Ottawa Centre for Healthy Community. Interview by author, Ottawa, October 20, 2000 and May 9, 2002.
15. Jabril, Hawo, Poet, Community Activist. Interview by author, October 12, 1996 and April 12, 2001
16. Jama, Asli, Member, Board of Directors, Somali Center for Youth, Women and Community Development. Interview by author, February 16, 2001.
17. Jama, Ikram, Community Developer, Somali Centre for Youth, Women and Community Development, and (since November 2000) Public Education Coordinator, Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre. Interview by author, December 17, 1999, September 25, 2000, April 18, 2002, and April 23, 2002.
18. Samatar, Shukria, Multicultural Liaison Officer, Ottawa Carleton Immigrant Services Organisation, and (since February 2001) Case Manager, Youth Services Bureau. Interview by author, December 20, 1999 and March 9, 2002.
19. Omer, Sheikh Mohamed AhmerNur, Former Minister of Justice and Religious Affairs. Interview by author, December 29, 1999.
20. Saban, Hayat, Executive Administrative Assistant, Somali Centre for Youth, Women and Community Development, Interview by author, Ottawa, Ontario, October 24, 2000.
21. Tie, Chantal, Executive Director, South Ottawa Community Legal Aid Clinic. Interview by author, Ottawa, January 12, 2001.

Government documents

Adan, Amina and Margaret Khalakdina. "Women." *Women and Children in Somalia: A Situational Analysis*. UNICEF, Mogadiscio, Somalia, 1987.

Female Circumcision: Address by the Delegate of the Somali Democratic Republic. Regional Conference, Lusaka, Zambia, December 6, 1979.

Barre, Mohamed Siyaad. *Philosophy of the Somali Revolution*. (A book review) *Halgan*, no. 1, October 1976.

Barre, Mohamed Siyaad. *My Country, My People: Selected Speeches of Jaalle Siyaad*. Mogadishu: Ministry of Information and National Guidance, 1979.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Refugee arrivals, 1989-1998, by country of origin." Unpublished document, February 1999.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Speaking notes for the Honourable Lucienne Robillard, MP, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada. For the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration Concerning the Main Estimates." House of Commons, March 18, 1997.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Lucienne Robillard Announces the Introduction of the Undocumented Convention refugee in Canada Class. *New Release*. 97-05, January 22, 1997.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Success of the '3/9 Pilot Project' to Sponsor Refugees from Former Yugoslavia." *News Release* 96-11, (nd).

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (e). "Canada to Take More Refugees From Former-Yugoslavia." *News Release* 95-15, August 9, 1995.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (d). "Canada Announces Extension of Special Measures for Citizens of the Former Yugoslavia." *New Release* 94-76, July 29, 1994.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. *News Release on Undocumented Refugees*. Ottawa, June 1, 1994.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Citizenship and Immigration Statistics." CIC Govt. CA1 MMH IM1 S72, 1994, c2.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Canada Continues to Reunite Families Affected by Civil War in the Former Yugoslavia." *News Release* 93-24, July 29, 1993.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Canada Extends Special Measures to Reunite Families Affected By Civil War in the Former Yugoslavia." *News Release* 90-21, February 26, 1993.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Speech by the Honourable Bernard Valcourt, Minister of Employment and Immigration following tabling of Legislative Proposals on the Immigration Act." Ottawa, 1992.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. "Minister Announces New Immigration Policy for Eastern Europe." *News Release* 90-21, August 17, 1990.

Dahabo Faarax's Speech at the International Seminar on Female Cicumcision: Strategies to Bring about Change. Mogadishu, June 13-16, 1988.

House of Commons of Canada. *Evidence. Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration*. Meetings No. 31 and 32, December 3, 1996. 35th Parliament, 2nd Session.

House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Third Report, Standing Order 108 (2), December 12, 1996.

House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Report, December 11, 1996.

House of Commons Debates. December 4, 1992 and March 23, 1993,

Hussein, Lula J. *FGM: Report on Consultations held in Ottawa and Montreal*. Department of Justice Canada: Research, Statistics and Evaluation Directorate, Civil Law and Corporate Management Sector, 1995.

Immigration and Refugee Board. *Human Rights Briefs: Women in Somalia*. Research Directorate, Documentation, Information and Research Branch, Ottawa. DDV CA1 MI 361/94W57.

International Seminar on Female Circumcision: Strategies to Bring About Change, June 13-16th, 1988. Report, Mogadishu, Somalia.

“Resolutions of the 3rd Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party” *Halgan*, February 1977.

Revolutionary Somalia: 21 October 1969-1978. Mogadishu: Ministry of Information and National Guidance (nd).

Revolutionary Somalia in the Eyes of the World: A Real Assessment of our Revolutionary Actions. Mogadishu: The Ministry of Information and National Guidance, 1974.

Somali Women’s Democratic Organization and UNICEF Somalia. *Report of a National Seminar on Health Hazards of Female Cicumcision and It’s Iradication in Somalia*. Mogadishu, March 14 – 16, 1988.

“Speech delivered by the President of SWDO, Hon/le Murayad Garad Axmed.” International Seminar on “Female Circumcision: strategies to bring about change” Mogadishu, 13-16th June 1988.

“Speech delivered by comrade Mohamed Siad Barre, General Secretary of the SRSP on the 8th anniversary of the 21 October, 1969.” *Halgan*, October 1977.

Statistics Canadian. “Population by home language, provinces and territories.” *2001 Census*. <http://www.statcan.ca>

Statistics Canadian. “Population by home language.” *1996 Census*. <http://www.statcan.ca>

Statistics Canadian. "Top 10 Places of Birth for Total Immigrants, Immigrant Arriving Before 1961 and Recent Immigrants, for Provinces and Territories – 20% Sample Data." *1996 Census*. <http://www.statcan.ca>

The FGM Legal Community Committee, *Brief to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Justice and Legal affairs, re: Bill C-27, Section 268, Subsection (3) & (4)*. November 26, 1996.

The Role of Our Socialist Women: An Active Role in Nation-Building. Mogadishu: The Ministry of Information and National Guidance, June 1974.

"The Somali Revolution and the Development of National Culture." *Halgan*, no. 10, August 1977, pp. 23-29.

Ururka Dimoqraadiga Haweenka Soomaaliyeed (Somali Women's Democratic Organisation). *Action Plan on FC [female circumcision]*. 1987.

Ururka Dimoqraadiga Haweenka Soomaaliyeed (Somali Women's Democratic Organisation). *Seminar on Health Hazards of Female Circumcision*. Mogadishu, September 15, 1986.

Ururka Dimoqraadiga Haweenka Soomaaliyeed (Somali Women's Democratic Organisation). *Future Action Plan on the Eradication of Female Circumcision*. Mogadishu, October 3, 1980.

Newspaper articles

"Apologize Ms McLeod." *The Ottawa Citizens*, Ottawa, November 19, 1993, p. A10.

"Arrestations a la suite du tournage d'une excision." *La Presse*. September 13, 1994.

Bell, Pat. "Serving her new country." *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, January 3, 1996.

Brennan, Richard. "Somalis ripping off welfare to fuel war, McLeod says." *The Windsor Star*, Windsor, October 28, 1993, p. A13.

Creary, David. "Somalia women buck Islamic tradition to advance with government help." *The Associated Press*, January 25, 1986.

Coyle, Jim. "McLeod guilty of callousness in running with report on welfare fraud." *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, November, 2, 1993, p. A10.

Crosby, Louise. "Minister shoots down report on welfare fraud." *Vancouver Sun*, Vancouver, November 13, 1993, p. A1.

“Culture, or torture?” *The Globe and Mail*. October 3, 1994, A 14.

Dub, Francis. “Somalis unite to protest welfare fraud allegations.” *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, November 7, 1993, p. A 1.

Duffy, Andrew. “Somalis claim discrimination.” *The Gazette*, Montreal, December 31, 1999, p. A10.

Duffy, Andrew. “Immigration laws discriminate against Somalis, refugee’s lawyers say: Required documents unobtainable from unstable African nation.” *Edmonton Journal*, December 31, 1999, p. F6.

Farrow, Moira. “Warlord’s scam confirmed.” *Vancouver Sun*, Vancouver, March 4, 1994, p. A1

Farrow, Moira. “Suspect in welfare fraud subject bench warrant.” *Vancouver Sun*, Vancouver, November 25, 1993, p. A1.

Farrow, Moira. “Welfare scam ‘buying arms for Somalia.’” *Vancouver Sun*, Vancouver, October 20, 1993, p. 12.

Faul, Michelle. “1.7 million Somali refugees caught in aftermath of war.” *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, October 24, 1993, p. A4.

“Female circumcision: Parent’s right, group says.” *The Ottawa Citizen*. Ottawa, 1991 June 26, P. B5.

“Female Circumcision: Practice in parts of Africa and Asia may be gaining a toehold here.” *The Ottawa Citizen*. Ottawa, June 10, 1991, p. B1.

“Female Circumcision Genital Mutilation.” *Forward News*, no. 2, October 1990.

Flint, Julie. “Putting Rites Wrong.” *Guardian Weekly*. May 22, 1994, p. 25.

Goyette, Linda. “Somali refugees owed an apology; Immigration.” *The Edmonton Journal*, Edmonton, December 5, 1993, p. A 9.

Hume, Peter. “Culture gap poses rift between Somalis and Children’s Aid Society.” *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, January 30, 1993, p. B7.

Lila, Sarick. “Marchi’s immigration shift criticized.” *The Globe and Mail*, September 1, 1994.

Miller, Jacquie. “Somali Groups call merger a step forward.” *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, October 14, 1996.

Miller, Jacquie. "After troubled start, Somali unite as Canadians." *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, June 30, 1996, p. A9.

Miller, Jacquie. "Ottawa groups going to court to help Somalis win citizenship; Legal challenge aimed at changing immigration policy." *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, February 13, 1996, p. A.4

Miller, Jacquie. "'Compassion fatigue' hits refugees." *Calgary Herald*, Calgary, May 29, 1994, p. A5.

Miller, Jacquie. "Fear and loathing in a foreign land: A discredited federal report on welfare fraud unleashes racist hatred on Somalis in Ottawa." *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, November 19, 1993, p. B3.

Miller, Jacquie. "Flight from chaos ends in struggle for new lives in Ottawa." *Ottawa Citizen*. December 16, 1992.

Miller, Jacqui. "Somali refugees; Reach out to help the lonely." *The Ottawa Citizen*. December 1, 1992, A10.

Miller, Jacquie. "The Somalis: They have quickly become the city's largest visible minority." *The Ottawa Citizen*. Ottawa, November 28, 1992, p. A1.

"No evidence here of welfare scams aiding Somali strife." *Edmonton Journal*, Edmonton, October 22, 1993, p. B3.

"Outlaw female circumcision, women's group tells Ottawa." *The Montreal Gazette*, March 8, 1994, p. A11.

"Somali plight goes to court." *The Province*, Vancouver, February 14, 1996, p. A16.

Stewart, Monte. "Restaurant owner named Calgarian of the Year." *Calgary Herald*. March 2, 1995, p. B4.

"Welfare scam changes anger local Somalis." *The Windsor Star*, Windsor, November 23, 1993.

Weston, Greg. "Immigration secrecy a recipe for racism." *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa, December 13, 1993.

Video tapes

Caawima Carruurta. Ottawa: Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services, 1994.

CBC Newsworld. *Rough Cuts – Our Daughters Pain*. April 15, 1995.

Secondary sources

Abdalla, Raqiya Haji Dualeh. *Sisters in Affliction: Circumcision and Infibulation of Women in Africa*. London: Zed Books, 1982.

Abdi, Mohamed Mohamed. *Histoire des croyance en Somalie*. Paris: Annales Litteraires de l'University de Besancon, 465, 1992.

Abdo, Nahla. "Muslim Family Law: Articulating Gender, Class and the State." *International Review of Comparative Public Policy*, vol. 9, 1997.

Abdo, Nahla. "Race, Gender and Politics: The Struggle of Arab Women in Canada." Linda Carty (ed.) *And Still We Rise: Feminist Political Mobilizing in Contemporary Canada*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1997, pp. 73-98.

Abdo, Nahla (ed.) *Sociological Thought Beyond Eurocentric Theory*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 1996.

Abdo, Nahla. "Feminism and Difference: The Struggle of Palestinian Women." *Canadian Woman's Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2-3, 1995, pp. 141-145.

Abdo-Zubi, Nahla. *Family, Women and Social Change in the Middle East: The Palestinian Case*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1987.

Abdi, Mohamed Mohamed. *Histoire des croyance en Somalie*. Paris: Annales Litteraires de l'University de Besancon, 465, 1992.

Abdulkadir, Fowsia. "Living in Two Worlds: Somali Youth and Parents." Presentation at a youth conference organized by the Somali Center for Youth, Women and Community Development. Ottawa, March 16, 1999.

Abdulkadir, Fowsia, Susan Lee and Janet Hunter. *Refugees in the Classroom: Resources and Materials for Teachers*. 1997.

Abdulle, Mohamoud H. *Somali Immigrants in Ottawa: The Causes of their Migration and the Challenges of Resettling in Canada*. M. A. Thesis, University of Ottawa, 2000.

Abella, Irving and Harold Troper. *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jew of Europe 1933-1948*. Toronto: Lester & Orpen Denny's Limited, 1982.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others." *American Anthropologist*, vol. 3, 2002, pp. 783-790.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories*. Berkeley, London, Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. London, Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986.

Adam, Hussein M. "Language, National-consciousness and Identity – the Somali Experience." I.M. Lewis (ed.). *Nationalism and Self Determination in the Horn of Africa*. London: Ithaca Press, 1983, pp. 31-42.

Adam, Hussein Mohamed. *Somalia: Revolutionary Transformations: Somali Papers Presented at the Third Frantz fanon Conference, Mogadishu, June 18-24, 1979*. Mogadishu: State Printing Agency, October 1979.

Adam, Hussein M. and Mohamoud Sheikh Omar. "Reflections on the Somali Working Class." *Halgan*, no. 8, June 1977, pp. 12-15.

Adam, Hussein M. "The Establishment of A Vanguard Party in Somalia." *Halgan*, no. 1, October 1976, pp. 14-21.

Adan, Amina. "Women and Words." *Ufhamu*, vol. 10, no. 3, Spring 1981, pp. 115-142.

Adan, Amina and Margaret Khalakdina. "Women." *Women and Children in Somalia: A Situational Analysis*. UNICEF, Mogadishu, Somalia, 1987.

Afshar, Haleh (ed.) *Women, State, and Ideology: Studies from Africa and Asia*, Albany: State University of New York, 1987.

Agnew, Vijay. *Resisting Discrimination: Women from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean and the Women's Movement in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.

Ahmed, Christine Choi. "Finely Etched Chattel: The Invention of a Somali Woman." Ali Jimale Ahmed (ed.) *The Invention of Somalia*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press Inc., 1995, pp. 157-189.

AIDOs (associazione italiana donne per lo sviluppo – Italian association for women in development). *Information Campaign for the eradication of Infibulation in Somalia*. (nd)

Aiken, Sharryn. "Racism and Canadian Refugee Policy." *Refuge*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2000, pp. 1-8.

Ali (Bayr), Mohamud Abdi. "Mongolia's Lessons for Somalia – The Question of Nomadic Cooperatives." *Halgan*, no. 3, December 1976.

Ali (Bayr), Mohamud Abdi. "Revolutionary Transformation from Nomadism." *Halgan*, no. 1, October 1976, pp. 27-32.

Alsafi, Mhasin. "Islamic Resistance in Somalia: Reflections on the Present Situation." Paper presented at the fifth International Congress of Somali Studies, Worcester, Massachusetts, December 1-3, 1993.

Amnesty International. *Somalia: A Human Rights Disaster*. London: Amnesty International Publications, August 1992. A/Index AFR 52/01/92.

Andrzejewski, B. W. and I. M. Lewis. *Somali Poetry: An Introduction*. London: Clarendon Press, 1964.

Arat-Koc, Sedef. "Gender and Race in 'Non-discriminatory' Immigration Policies in Canada: 1960s to the Present." Enakshi Dua and Angela Robertson. *Scratching the Surface: Canadian Anti-Racist Thought*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1999, pp. 207-233.

Armstrong, Sue. "Female circumcision: fighting a cruel tradition." *New Scientist*, vol. 2, February 1990, pp. 41-47.

Avery, Donald. *Reluctant Host: Canada's Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1995.

Bald, Suresht R. "Coping with Marginality: South Asian Women Migrants in Britain." Marianne H. Marchand and Jane L. Parpart (eds.) *Feminist/Postmodernism/Development*. London and New York, 1995, pp. 110-126.

Bannerji, Himani. "A Question of Silence: Reflections on Violence against Women in Communities of Colour." Enakshi Dua and Angela Robertson (eds.) *Scratching the Surface: Canadian Anti-Racist Feminist Thought*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1999, pp. 261-277.

Bannerji, Himani. *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995.

Bannerji, Himani. *The Writing on the Wall: Essays on Culture and Politics*. Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1993.

Baron, Beth (eds.) *Women in the Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991.

Besteman, Catherine. "Local Land Use Strategies and Outsider Politics: Title Registration in Middle Jubba Valley." Catherine Besteman and Lee V. Cassanelli (eds.) *The Struggle for Land in Southern Somalia: The War Behind the War*. London: HAAN Publishing, 1996.

Besteman, Catherine. "Representing Violence and 'Othering' Somalia." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1996, pp. 120-133.

Blakeney, Jill, Fadumo Jama Dirie and May Anne McRae. "Support Group for Traumatized Somali Women: A Pilot Project of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture." Wenona Giles, Helene Moussa and Penny Esterik (eds.) *Development and Diaspora: Gender and the Refugee Experience*. Toronto, 1996, pp. 280-301.

Boulding, Elise. *The Underside of History: A View of Women Through Time*. London and New Delhi, 1992.

Boyd, Monica. "At a Disadvantage: The Occupational Attainment of Foreign Born Women in Canada." *International Migration Review*, vol. 18, 1984, pp. 1091-1120.

Boyd, Monica. "Immigrant Women in Canada." Rita James Simon and Caroline B. Brettell (eds.) *International Migration: The Female Experience*. New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld, 1986, pp. 45-61.

Brand, Dionne. *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s to 1950s*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1991.

Brouwer, Andrew. "What's In A Name: Identity Documents and Convention Refugees." Ottawa: Caledon Institute for Social Policy, 1999.

Burnet, Jean. *Looking into My Sister's Eyes: an Exploration in Women's History*. Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986.

Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. *Female Genital Mutilation: Backgrounder*. March, 1994.

Canadian Council for Refugees. *Best Settlement Practices: Settlement Services for Refugees and Immigrants in Canada*. February 1998.

Carty, Linda and Dionne Brand. "'Visible Minority' Women: A Creation of the Canadian State." *Resources for Feminist Research*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1989, pp. 39-40.

Cassanelli, Lee. *The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People 1600-1900*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.

Chanock, Martin. "Making Customary Law: Men, Women, and Courts in Colonial Northern Rhodesia." Margaret Jean Hay and Marcia Wright (eds.) *African Women and the Law: Historical Perspectives*. Boston: University Papers on Africa 7, 1982, pp. 53-67.

Chhachhi, Amrita "Forced Identities: The State, Communalism, Fundamentalism and Women in India." Deniz Kandiyoti, (ed.) *Women, Islam and the State*. London: Macmillan, 1991, pp. 144-175.

- Chin, Elizabeth, Hamdi Mohamed and Beate Schifeer-Graham. *The World within Our City: A Study of Social Service Needs of Immigrants and Refugees in Gloucester*. Ottawa: Gloucester Center for Community Resources, 1992.
- Chossudovsky, Michel. *The Globalisation of Poverty: Impacts and World Bank Reforms*. Penang, Malaysia: Third World Network, 1997.
- Cirillo, Cirillo. *Somalia: Information Campaign Against Infibulation*. SWDO/AIDos Project, 1985.
- Colletta, Nat J. and Michelle L. Cullen. *Violent Conflict and the Transformation of Social Capital: Lessons from Cambodia, Rwanda, Guatemala, and Somalia*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 2000.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York and London: Routledge, 1991.
- Constantinides, Pamela. "Women's Spirit Possessions and Urban Adaptation." Patricia Caplan and Janet Bujra (eds.) *Women United, Women Divided: Cross Cultural Perspectives on Female Solidarity*. London: Tavistock, 1978, 185-205.
- Das Gupta, Tania. "The Politics of Multiculturalism: "Immigrant Women" and the Canadian State." Enakshi Dua and Angela Robertson (eds.) *Scratching the Surface: Canadian Anti-Racist Feminist Thought*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1999, pp. 187-205.
- Davidson, Basil. "Somalia: Towards Socialism." *Race and Class*, vol.17, 1975, pp. 19-37.
- Davis, Angela. *Women, Culture, and Politics*. New York: Random House, 1989.
- Dei, George J. Sefa. "Rethinking the Role of Indigenous Knowledges in the Academy." Paper presented at the African Development Dissertation Workshop at Queens University, Kingston, April 15-19, 1998.
- Dei, George J. Sefa. *Anti-racism Education: Theory and Practice*. Halifax: Fernwood Publisher, 1996.
- Devereux, Stephen and John Hoddinott. "Issues in data collection." S. Devereux and John Hoddinott. *Fieldwork in Developing Countries*. Boulder, Lynee Reinner, 1993, pp. 525-40.
- Dirie, Fadumo Jama. "Somali Women and Islam." Paper presented at the Somalia National Week, University of Ottawa, June 26, 1996.
- Dirie, Fadumo Jama. "Idman's Story: The Accident." *INSCAN*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1993, pp. 5-6.

Dirie, Fadumo, Maryan A. Rahman, Vuyiswa B. Keyi, dhol M. Anshur, JWDC [Juba women's development Centre] and GECPD [The Galkayo Education Centre for Peace and Development] Toronto support group volunteers. "'Hawa does it Again': Challenging and Changing the Legacy of War and its Aftermath in Somalia." *Refugee Update*, no. 41, Winter 2000, pp. 3-5.

Dorkenoo, Efua and Scilla Elworthy. *FGM: Proposals for Change*. London: Minority Rights Group, 1992.

Drysdale, J. *The Somali Dispute*. London: Pall Mall Press, 1964.

Dua, Enakshi. "Racism or Gender: Understanding Oppression of South Asian Canadian Women." *Canadian Women's studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1992, pp. 6-10.

Dualeh, Raqiya Haji. "Women in Somali Society: Roles and Images." Paper presented at a UNDP conference in Hargaisa, Somalia, in 1997.

Dualeh, Raqiya Haji. "The Legal Status of Somali Women." *Himilo* (Aspiration), Somali Women's Democratic Organization, March 1984, pp. 11-12.

El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*. Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1982.

Farah, Dahabo, Amina H. Aden and Amina Mohamoud Warsame. "Somalia: Poetry as Resistance against Colonialism and Patriarchy." Saskia Wieringa (ed.) *Subversive Women: Historical Experiences of Gender and Resistance*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1995, pp. 165-182.

Farah, Nuruddin. *Yesterday, Tomorrow: Voices from the Somali Diaspora*. London and New York: Cassell, 2000.

Farah, Nuruddin. *Close Sesame*. Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1992.

Farah, Nuruddin. *Sweet and Sour Milk*. Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1992.

Farah, Nuruddin. *Sardines*. London : Hienemann, 1981.

Forni, Elisabetta. *Una Nuova Vita in Somalia: Note sulla condizione femminile e su un'esperienza di sedentarizzazione dei nomadi nella Somalia socialista*. Milano Italy: Faracno Angeli Editore, 1984.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. New York: Pantheon, 1972.

Galal, Mussa. "Some Observations on Somali Culture." *Perspectives on Somalia*. Mogadishu: Somali Institute of Public Administration, 1968.

Gesheker, Charles. "The Death of Somalia in Historical Perspective." Hussein M. Adam and Richard Ford. *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st Century*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press Inc., 1997, pp. 65-98.

Goodwin-Gill, Guy S. and Judith Kumin. *Refugees in Limbo and Canada's International Obligations*. Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Ottawa, September 2000.

Goodwin-Gill, Guy S. "The 1951 Convention relating to the status of Refugees and the Obligations of States under articles 25, 27 and 28, with particular reference to refugees without identity or travel documents." United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, May 2000.

Gullen, Joan. *Report on the First International Study Conference on Genital Mutilation of Girls in Europe, July 5-9, 1992, in London, England*. Ottawa: Family Service Center (nd).

Jan M. Haakenson. *Scientific Socialism and Self-Reliance: The Case of Somalia's "Instant" Fisherman*. Norway, 1984.

Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. "The Impact of the Islamic Revolution in Iran on the Syrian Muslims of Montreal." Earle H. Waugh, Baha Abu-Laban and Regula B. Qureshi (eds.) *The Muslim Community in North America*. Alberta, 1983.

Hale, Sondra. "Transforming Culture or Fostering Second-Hand Consciousness? Women's Front Organizations and Revolutionary Parties – The Sudan Case." Judith Tucker (ed.) *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993, pp. 149-174.

Hale, Sondra. "Sudanese Women and Revolutionary Parties: The Wing of the Patriarch." *Middle East Report*, January-February 1986, pp. 25-30.

Handlin, Oscar. *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951.

Hanghe, Ahmed Artan. *Sheekoxariirooyin Somaaliyeed (Folktales from Somalia)*. Stockholm: Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC), 1988.

Harding, Sandra. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Hawkins, Freda. *Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989.

Hawkins, Freda. *Canada and Immigration: Public Policy and Public Concern*. Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972.

Henry, Francis et al. *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society*. Toronto: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1994.

Hersi, Ali Abdirahman. "The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origin and Development of Arab enterprise and Cultural Influences in the Somali Peninsula." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1977.

Hoffman, Alice. "Reliability and Validity in Oral History." David Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (eds.) *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1984, pp. 67-73.

Hoodfar, Homa. "More than Clothing: Veiling as an Adaptive Strategy." Homa Hoodfar, Sajida S. Alvi and Sheila McDonough (eds.) *The Muslim Veil in North America*. Toronto: Women's Press, 2003, pp. 3-40.

Hoodfar, Homa, Sajida S. Alvi and Sheila McDonough. "Introduction." Homa Hoodfar, Sajida S. Alvi and Sheila McDonough (eds.) *The Muslim Veil in North America*. Toronto: Women's Press, 2003, pp. xi-xxiv.

hooks, bell. *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Boston, 1990,

hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to the Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.

Hosken, Fran. "Somalia campaigns to eradicate infibulation." *People*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1989, pp. 31-33.

Hosken, Fran. "Somali women organize to end female circumcision." *Development Forum*, March-April, 1989, pp. 19-20.

Fran P. Hosken. *The Hosken Report: Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Females*, 1983.

Iacovetta, Franca, Paula Draper and Robert Ventresca: *A Nation of Immigrants: women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s*. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1998.

Inter-African Committee (IAC). *Plan of Action for the Eradication of Harmful Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children in Africa*. Proposed and Approved at the Inter-African Committee Regional Seminar in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 6-8 April 1987.

Ismail, Edna Adan. *Female Circumcision – Physical and Mental Complications*. WHO/EMRO Technical Publication 2, 1982, pp. 267-277.

Israelite, Neita Kay, Arlene Herman, Fadumo Ahmed Alim, Hawa Abdullahi Mohamed, Yasmin Khan and Lynn Caruso. "Waiting for 'Sharciga': Resettlement and the Roles of Somali Refugee Women." *Canadian Woman Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3, Fall 1999, pp. 80-86.

Iye, Ali Moussa. *Le Verdict de l'arbre (Go'aankii Geedka): Le Xeer Issa Etude d'une Democratie Pastorale*. Djibouti, 1990.

Jakubowski, Lisa Marie. *Immigration and the Legalization of Racism*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1997.

Jama, Zainab. "Fighting to be Heard: Somali Women's Poetry." *African Languages and Cultures*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1994, pp. 43-53.

James, Carl E. "Up to no good': Black on the Streets and Encountering Police." Vic Satzewich (ed.) *Racism and Social Inequality in Canada: Concepts, Controversies and Strategies of Resistance*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc., 1998, pp. 157-176.

James, Carl and Adrienne Shadd (eds.) "Introduction." *Talking about Difference: Encounters in Culture, Language and Identity*. Toronto: Between The Lines, 1994.

Javed, Nayyar S. "State-Imposed Multiculturalism: Social Change or Illusion of Change." Caterina Pizantias and James S. Frideres. *Freedom Within the Margins: The Politics of Exclusion*. Alberta: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1995, pp. 233-241.

Joseph, Suad. "Women and Politics in the Middle East." Suad Joseph and Susan Slyomovics (eds.) *Women and Power in the Middle East*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, pp. 34-40.

Johnson, John William *"Heellooy": Modern Poetry and Songs of the Somali*. London: HAAN Publishing, 1996.

Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Middle East Studies." Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*. Syracuse, New York, 1996.

Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation." Patirck Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.) *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, pp. 378-391.

Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Islam and Patriarchy: A Comparative Perspective." Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (eds.) *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*. New Haven and London, 1991, pp. 23-42.

Kandiyoti, Deniz (ed.) *Women, Islam and the State*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.

Kapteijns, Lidwein. "Gender Relations and the Transformation of the Northern Somali Pastoral Tradition." *International Journal of African Historical Studies*. vol. 28, no. 2, 1995, pp. 241-259.

Kaptejns, Lidwien. "Women and the Crisis of Communal Identity: The Cultural Construction of Gender in Somali History." Ahmed I. Samatar. *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?* Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 1994, pp. 211-231.

Kaptejns, Lidwien with Maryan Omar Ali. *Women's Voices in a Man's World: Women and the Pastoral Tradition in Northern Somali Orature .c.1899-1980*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999.

Kelly, Hilarie. "The Potential Role of Women's Groups in Reconstruction." Hussein M. Adam and Richard Ford. *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st Century*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press Inc., 1997, pp. 359-369.

Khan, Shahnaz. *Aversion and Desire: Negotiating Muslim Female Identity in the Diaspora*. Toronto: Women's Press, 2002.

Kitsikis, Dimitri ' *L'Empire Ottoman*. Paris, 1985.

Laitin, David D. "Somalia's Military Government and Scientific Socialism." Carl G. Rosbery and Thomas M. Callaghy (eds.) *Socialism in Sub-Saharan Africa: A New Assessment*. Berkeley: University of California, Institute of International Studies, 1979, pp. 174-206.

Laitin, David and Said Samatar. *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*. Boulder: Westview, 1986.

Lalonde, R. N., Donald M. Taylor, and Fathali M. Moghaddam. "The process of social identification for visible immigrants women in a multicultural context." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 1992, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 23-37.

Lam, Lawrence. *From Being Uprooted to Surviving: Resettlement of Vietnamese-Chinese "Boat People" in Montreal*. Toronto: York Lanes Press, 1996.

Landau, Loren B.. "What Role Can History Play for the Newly Urbanized Women of Kenya and Tanzania?" *Ufahamu*, August, 1996, pp. 29-54.

Lazreg, Marnia. "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria." *Feminist Issues*, vol. 14, no. 1, Spring, 1988, pp. 81-107.

Lefebvre, Jeffrey A. *Arms for the Horn: U.S. Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia, 1953-1991*. Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991.

Lewis, Ioan M. *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somalia*. Lawrenceville, 1994.

Lewis, I.M. *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism*. England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1971.

Lewis, I.M. "Introduction: Zaar in Context: The Past, The Present and Future of An Healing Cult." I. M. Lewis, Ahmed Al-Safi and Sayyid Hurreiz (eds.) *Women's Medicine: The Zar-Bori Cult in Africa and Beyond*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991, pp. 1-16.

Lewis, I. M. *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa*. Boulder: Westview, 1988.

Lewis, I. M. "Kim Il-Sung in Somalia: The End of Tribalism" William A. Shack and Percy S. Cohen (eds.) *Politics in Leadership: A Comparative Perspective*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, pp. 13-44.

Lewis, I. M. *Marriage and the Family in Northern Somaliland*. Kampala: East African Institute of Social Research, 1962.

Lightfoot-Klein, Hanny. *Prisoners of Ritual: An Odyssey into Female Genital Circumcision in Africa*. New York: Harrington Park Press, 1989.

Lightfoot-Klein, Hanny and Evelyn Shaw. "Special Needs of Ritually Circumcised Women Patients." *JOGNN*, vol. 20, no. 2., May 1990, pp. 102-107.

Lindstorm-Best, Varpu. *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada*. Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1988.

Lyons, Terrence and Ahmed I. Samatar. *Somalia: State Collapse, Multilateral Intervention, and Strategies for Political Reconstruction*. Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995.

Mah, Mubarak. "Working Effectively with the Somali Community: Appropriate Intervention Counselling." *INSCAN*, vol. 7, no. 2, Winter 1993, p. 4.

Maher, Venessa. "Kin, Clients, and Accomplices: Relationships among Women in Morocco." Diana Leonard Barker and Sheila Allen (eds.) *Sexual Divisions and Society: Process and Change*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1976, pp. 52-75.

Malewska-Pyre, H. "Identité négative chez les jeunes immigrants." *Sante Mentale au Quebec*. vol 18, no. 2. 1993, pp.116-123.

Martin, Susan Forbes. *Refugee Women*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1992.

Mazrui, Ali A. "Crisis in Somalia: From Tyranny to Anarchy." Hussein M. Adam. and Richard Ford. *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for the Somali communities in the 21st Century*. Lawrenceville, NJ, 1997. pp.5-11.

McCarthy, Shawn. "Starting Over: Somalis find refuge in Canada." *Canadian Geographic*. Jan/Feb 1993. p. 67-72.

McGowen, Rima Berns. *Muslims in Diaspora: The Somali Communities of London and Toronto*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

Mernissi, F.. "Muslim Women and Fundamentalism." *Middle East Report*, no.153, July/August 1988, pp. 8-11.

Merryman, Nancy Hawk. "Women's Welfare in the Jubba Valley: Somali Socialism and After." Catherine Bestman and Lee V. Cassanelli (eds.) *The Struggle for land in Southern Somalia: The War Behind the War*. London: HAAN Publishing, 1995, pp. 179-198.

Moghadam, Valentine. "Introduction and Overview: Gender Dynamic of Nationalism, Revolution and Islamization." Valentine Moghadam (ed.) *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*. London and Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1994, pp. 1-17.

Moghadam, Valentine. "Reform, Revolution, and Reaction: the trajectory of the 'Woman Question' in Afghanistan." Valentine Moghadam (ed.) *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*. London and Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1994, pp. 81-109.

Moghadam, Valentine M. "Introduction: Women, and Identity Politics in Theoretical and Comparative Perspective." Valentine Moghadam (ed.) *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, pp. 42-75.

Moghadam, Valentine M. *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993.

Mohamed Hamdi S. "Somali Refugee Women's Experiences in Kenyan Refugee Camps and their Plight in Canada." Hussein M. Adam & Richard Ford (eds.) *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st Century*. Lawrenceville, 1997, pp. 431-440.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse." Chanra Talpade Mohanty (ed.) *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991, pp. 51-80.

Molyneux, Maxine. "The Law, the State and Socialist Policies with Regard to Women: the case of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen." Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) *Women, Islam and the State*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991, pp. 237-271.

Molyneux, Maxine. "Mobilization Without Emancipation? Women's Interests, State and Revolution in Nicaragua." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1985, pp. 227-254.

Moussa, Helene. "Sowing New Foundations: Refugee and Immigrant Women Support Groups." *Refuge*, vol. 13, no. 9. February 1994, pp. 3-7.

Moussa, Helene. *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees*. Toronto: Artemis Enterprises, 1993.

Moussa, Helene. "The Social Construction of Women Refugees: A Journey of Discontinuities and Continuities." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1992.

Mukherjee, Arun. "The 'Race Consciousness' of a South-Asian (Canadian, of Course) Female Academic." James, Carl and Adrienne Shadd (eds.) "Introduction." *Talking about Difference: Encounters in Culture, Language and Identity*. Toronto: Between The Lines, 1994, pp. 201-207.

Narayan, Uma. "Contesting Cultures: 'Westernization,' Respect for Cultures and Third World Feminists." Linda Nicholson (ed.) *Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theories*. New York and London, 1997.

Ng, Roxana. "Managing Female Immigration: A Case on Institutional Sexism and Racism." *Canadian Women Studies*, 1998, vol. 12, no. 3, pp., 20-23.

Ng, Roxana. "Immigrant Women and Institutionalized Racism." Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code, and Lindsay Dorney (eds.) *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993, pp. 184-203.

Ng, Roxana. *Immigrant Women, Class and State: The Politics of Community Services*. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1987.

Ng, Roxana. "The Social Construction of Immigrant Women." Roberta Hamilton and Michele Barrett (eds.) *The Politics of Diversity: Feminism, Marxism and Nationalism*. Montreal: Book Center Inc., 1987.

Nkrumah, Kwame. *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with Particular Reference to Africa*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1964.

Ntiri, Daphne Williams. "Experimenting with Family Life Centers in Africa's Development: A Case Study of Rural Women in Somalia, East Africa." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, vol. 21, Autumn 1991, pp. 73-88.

Nuu, Mohamed Ali. "The History in the Horn of Africa, 1000 B.C. – Rift Valley and Indian Ocean." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1985.

Obbo, Christine. *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence*. London: Zed Press, 1980.

Opoku-Dapaah, E. "Integration of Landed Refugee Claimants in Canada: Toward an Explanatory Model." *Refuge*, vol. 13, no. 9, February 1994, pp. 12-14.

Opoku-Dapaah, Edward. *Somali Refugees in Toronto: A Profile*. Toronto: Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, 1994.

Osman, Hibaaq I. "Somalia: Will Reconstruction Threaten Women's Progress?" *Ms Magazine*. vol. 3, no. 5. March/April 1993, pp. 12-13.

Palmer, Howard. *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982.

Papanek, Hanna. "The Ideal Society: Control and Autonomy in the Construction of Identity." Valentine Moghadam (ed.) *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, pp. 42-75.

Parpart, Jane L and Kathleen A. Staudt. *Women and the State in Africa*. Boulder Colo.: L. Reinner Publisher, 1988.

Perin, Roberto. "Introduction. The Immigrant: Actor or Outcast." Roberto Perin and Franc Sturino (eds.) *Arrangiarsi: The Italian Immigration Experience in Canada*. Montreal: Guernica Editions, 1989.

Perin, Roberto and Franc Sturino (eds.) *Arrangiarsi: The Italian Immigration Experience in Canada*. Montreal: Guernica Editions, 1989.

Petroff, Lillian. "Contributors to Ethnic Cohesion: Macedonian Women in Toronto to 1940." Jean Burnet (ed.) *Looking into My Sister's Eyes: an Exploration in Women's History*. Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986, pp. 125-138.

Pratt, Anna and Mariana Valverde. "From Deserving Victims to 'Masters of Confusion': Redefining Refugees in the 1990s." *Canadian Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 27, no. 2, Spring 2002, pp. 135-161.

Rai, Shirin. "Women and the state in the Third World." Haleh Afshar (ed.) *Women and Politics in the Third World*. London and New York, 1996, pp. 25-39.

Raleigh Yow, Valerie. *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists*. London: Sage Publications, 1994.

Ralston, Helen. *The Lived Experience of South Asian Immigrant Women in Atlantic Canada: The Interconnections of Race, Class and Gender*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996.

Ramazanoglu, Caroline. *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression*. Routledge: London and New York, 1989.

Razack, Sherene. "'Simple Logic': Race, the Identity Document Rule and the Story of a Nation Besieged and Betrayed." *Journal of Law and Social Policy*, vol. 15, 2000, pp. 181-209.

Razack, Sherene H. *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms*. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 1998.

Reinhartz, Shulamit. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Resolutions from African Campaigners. Inter-African Committee regional Conference on Traditional Practices affecting The Health of Women and Children: "How Far Forward?", Addis Ababa, November 19-24, 1990.

Richmond, Anthony. "Global Apartheid: A Postscript." *Refuge*. Vol. 19, no. 4, 2001, pp. 8-13.

Robinson, W. Courtland. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*. London: Zed Books, Ltd., 1998.

Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Dar-es-Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1972.

Rothenberg, Delia E. "Diversity and Community: Palestinian Women in Toronto." *Canadian Woman Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3, Fall 1999, pp. 75-79.

Rumbaut, Ruben G. "The Agony of Exile: A Study of the Migration and Adaptation of Indochinese Refugee Adults and Children." Ahearn, Jr. and Jean L. Athey (eds.) *Refugee Children: Theory, Research, and Services*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins Press Ltd., 1991, pp. 53-91.

Rumble, Kathryn E. *Somali Women in Metropolitan Toronto: Overcoming the Barriers*. M.A. thesis. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon, 1978

Saloojee, Anver. "Inclusion and Exclusion: A Framework of Analysis for Understanding Political Participation by Members of Racialized and Newcomer Groups." Paper presented at Metropolis Conference, Ottawa, March 2002.

Samatar, Abdi. "Destruction of State and Society in Somalia: Beyond the Tribal Convention." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. Vol. 30, no. 4, 1992, pp. 625-641.

- Samatar, Ahmed I. "A current political analysis of the situation in the Horn of Africa and the state of the Somali refugees." Paper presented at the International Congress of Somali Studies. Turku, Finland, August 6-9, 1998.
- Samatar, Ahmed I. "Introduction and Overview." Ahmed Samatar (ed) *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?*. Boulder, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994.
- Samatar, Ahmed I. "The Curse of Allah: Civil Disembowelment and the Collapse of the State in Somalia." Ahmed I. Samatar (ed.) *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal*. Boulder and London, 1994.
- Samatar, Ahmed I. "Under Siege: Blood, Power, and the Somali State." Asfa Hizkas (ed.) *Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the Horn of Africa*. Washington D.C., 1993.
- Samatar, Ahmed I. *Socialist Somalia: Rhetoric and Reality*. London and New Jersey, 1988.
- Samatar, Ahmed I. "Underdevelopment in Somalia: Dictatorship without Hegemony." *Africa Today*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1985.
- Samatar, Ahmed Ismail. "Self Reliance in Theory and Practice: Critique of Somali Praxis, 1969-1980." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Denver. 1984.
- Sheikh, Mohamed A. "The Revolution of October 21st, 1969 and the Party." *Halgan*, no. 1, October 1976, 11-13.
- Silvera, Makeda. *Silenced: talks with working class West Indian women about their lives and struggles as domestic women in Canada*. Toronto: Williams-Wallace, 1984.
- Simmons, Alan. "Racism and Immigration Policy." Vic Satzewich (ed.) *Racism and Social Inequality: Concepts, Controversies and Strategies of Resistance*. Toronto: Thompson Education Publishing, Inc., 1998.
- Simons, Anna. *Networks of Dissolution: Somalia Undone*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995.
- Slottved, Astrid M.. "Role of Women in the Somali Revolution." *Horn of Africa*, vol. 2, no. 2. April/June, 1979.
- Smith, Dorothy E. *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987.
- Soguk, Nevzat. "Critical perspectives on refugees." *Refuge*, vol. 17, no. 6, December 1998, pp. 2-7.

Stasiulis, Daiva K. "Feminist Intersectional Theorizing" Peter S. Li (ed.) *Race and Ethnic Relations in Canada*. (Second Edition) Oxford and New York, 1999, pp. 347-397.

Stasiulis, Daiva K. "International Migration, Rights, and the Decline of 'Actually Existing Liberal Democracy'." *New Community*. Vol. 23, no. 2, April 1997, pp. 197-214.
 Stasiulis, Daiva and Nira Yuval-Davis. "Introduction: Beyond Dichotomies – Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class in Settler Societies." Diva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis (eds.) *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class*. London: Sage Publications, 1995, pp. 1-38.

Sue, Darold Wing and David Sue. *Counseling the Culturally Different: Theory and Practice*. New York and Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1990. 2nd edition.

Sunhara, Gomer. *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War*. Toronto: Lorimer, 1981.

Swanson, Jean. *Poor-Bashing: The Politics of Exclusion*. Toronto: Between the lines, 2001.

Swyripa, Frances. *Wedded to the Cause: Ukranian Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891-1991*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993.

The Horn of Africa Resource and Research Group. *Somali Women's Education Project*. Sponsored by The Family Service Centre of Ottawa-Carleton, Ottawa, 1992.

Thiam, Awa. *Black Sisters Speak Out: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa*. London: Pluto Press, 1986.

Thompson, Paul. "Problems of Method in Oral History." *Oral History*, vol. 4, 1972, pp. 14-17.

Toubia, Nahid and Susan Izett. *Female Genital Mutilation: An Overview*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 1998.

Vargas, Claudia Maria. "Ethical Challenges in Refugee Research: Troublesome Questions, Difficult Answers." *Refuge*, vol 17, no. 3, August 1998.

Waldon, Sidney and Naima Hasci. *Somali Refugees in the Horn of Africa: State of the Art Literature Review*. London: University of Oxford, 1995.

Walker, Alice. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992.

Walker, A. and C. Walker (eds.) *Britain Divided: The Growth of Social Exclusion in the 1980s and 1990s*. London: Child Poverty Action Group, 1997.

Ward, Peter. *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy towards Orientals in British Columbia*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978.

Warsame, Amina Mahamuud, Sadia Muse Ahmed and Aud Talle. *Social and Cultural Aspects of Female Circumcision and Infibulation: A Preliminary Report*. Women's Research Unit, Somali Academy of Sciences and Arts (SOMAC). Mogadishu/Stockholm, November 1985.

Warsame, Mohamed. "Medical and Social Aspects of Female Circumcision in Somalia." Mogadishu (nd).

Wieringa, Saskia (ed.) *Subversive Women: Historical Experiences of Gender and Resistance*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd. 1995.

Yusuf, Zuliekha A. *West-End Somali Women Needs Assessment*. Ottawa, Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Centre, September 1995.

APPENDICES

- A. Consent form**
- B. Information sheet**
- C. Interview guide**

APPENDIX A

Consent Form

The undersigned _____ authorizes the use of recordings and of transcripts of the interviews carried out by _____ on the _____ at _____, and designated by the reference numbers listed below for the purpose of historical, literary, scientific or educational research.

- A. It is duly permitted that
1. The researchers listen to the recordings and read the transcripts of the said recordings for the purposes of their research or for educational purposes.
 2. Qualified researchers use the interviews as a reference or use part of the interview in publications, according to customary procedures in the writing of official or educational papers.
 3. Researchers publish the transcripts as historical documents accompanied by the critical study customarily used to present historical or literary texts.
- B. Possible restrictions
1. None
 2. _____

Authorized access and publication shall be granted to *bona fide* researchers subject to the restrictions listed above and, if applicable, by the director of the history department of the University of Ottawa or by the director of the archives where the documents are stored.

If the date upon which the documents are to be released for use by the researchers is omitted, the informant's one hundredth birthday will be used as a substitute.

Interviewed at: _____

Date: _____

Interviewee's Signature: _____

Interviewer's Signature: _____

Reference numbers of the recording: _____

APPENDIX B

Information Sheet

Project Title: *Redefining Gender Roles; Redefining Women's place: The Experiences of Somali Women in Africa and in Diaspora (Canada)*

Investigator:

Address: ::

Supervisors:

Affiliation: _____

The purpose of this study is to fill the gaps in the knowledge of Somali history by documenting women's narratives of their everyday lives and experiences. The study investigates the continuities and discontinuities of Somali women's activism in the diaspora. How has their exposure to social, economic and political activities in Somalia during this period shaped their vision of community development? How have the changes that have taken place during the Barre regime contributed to women's politicization in Somalia and activism in Canada? Through interviews of women (and sometimes men), both political figures and people who were active at the community level, this study shall explore the connection between women's negotiations and struggles within Somalia, during this period, and their activism in Canada.

You will be interviewed at least twice. I will be asking questions about your occupation/position in Somalia, during this period, and in Canada. What are your perceptions of the gender policies introduced by the Somali government during the period of 1969-1980? How have you experienced the social, economic and political changes during this period? How have these changes contributed to women's politicization in Somalia and activism in Canada? Each interview will last about 1 to 1 1/2 hours and will be audiotape recorded. Your name will not appear on the tape so your identity will not be associated with it. If you do not wish to be referred to by name in my thesis or subsequent publications derived from it, you will be referred to by your first initial and your position. However, if you held a high level government position, that identifies who you are, this will not be sufficient to entirely preserve your anonymity and I would like you to be aware of this fact.

The tapes will not be labeled with names, only with a reference number. They will be deposited either with the history department or at an archive (for instance the National Archives) where they will only be available to *bona fide* researchers who will have to abide by the ethics standards of their discipline.

There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant of this study, but the construction of Somali women's history through oral interviews will bring the absent women's voices out and contribute to addressing silences in Somali history. There are no physical or legal risks associated with this study, however, because we will be talking about your experiences in Somalia before the Civil War there might be a potential for some level of psychological discomfort. If this is the case please feel free to request to take time if preferred or interrupt and terminate the interview if necessary.

You can refuse to answer any question during the interviews. You have the opportunity to withdraw your consent and terminate your participation in this study at any time. You will also be given the opportunity to ask whatever questions you desire. A copy of research will be provided to you upon request.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this important study.

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge. Information given as part of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Thank you.

Name: _____

Age: _____

IN SOMALIA

1. Did you live in? (Circle the number that applies to you)

A large city A small city A large town
Small town A rural settlement

2. What was the highest level of education completed? (please be specific)

- No formal education
- Elementary
- Intermediate
- Secondary
- Some post secondary College Diploma
- University degree

3. What years did you go to school?

4. Whose decision was it that you go to school?

5. What was the highest level of education your parents completed?

- No formal education Father Mother
- Elementary
- Intermediate
- Secondary
- Some post secondary
- College Diploma
- University degree

6. Did you work outside the home?

7. If yes, did you work?

- In the public sector (for the government)
- In the private sector
- Was a student
- Other

8. Were you involved in other issues/activities outside your work/home?

9. If yes, what issues were you involved in?

10. Why were involved in these particular issues?

11. What are your perceptions of the gender policies introduced by the Somali government during the period of 1969-1980?

12. How did you/women experience the social, economic and political changes during this period?

13. In your opinion, how did these changes contribute to women's politicization in Somalia?

14. In your opinion, how did the changes that took place in Somalia during the period of 1969-80 contribute to women's activism in Canada?

IN CANADA

16. When did you come to Canada?

17. Could you speak English or French when you came?

18. What is your legal status in Canada?

- Canadian Citizen
- Landed immigrant
- Convention Refugee
- Refugee Claimant
- Other (please specify)

19. Marital Status

- Married
- Single
- Widowed
- Separated
- Divorced

20. Do you have children?

21. If yes, how many children do you have?
22. How many of them were born in Canada?
- All of them
 - None of them
 - Number of children born in Canada
23. Are you currently working?
24. If yes, is your work related to your occupation in Somalia?
25. If no, why?
- Lack of recognition of previous qualifications
 - Difficult upgrading requirements
 - Lack of residence status
 - Lack of "Canadian experience"
 - Lack of information about the labour market
 - Racial discrimination
26. What is the highest education completed in Canada?
- Elementary
 - Intermediate
 - Secondary
 - Some post secondary
 - College Diploma
 - University degree
27. Are you involved in other issues/activities outside your work/home?
- How did you decide to get involved? (was it because someone invited you to be involved, did you read about it, did you hear it on the radio?)
 - Do you derive any direct benefits from it?
 - Is it fun/do you enjoy doing it?
28. Is there a connection between what you are doing now and what you were doing in Somalia?
- Have you used any of the skills (personal, writing, organizational etc.) developed in Somalia?
 - How have you been able to transfer?
29. Tell me about your personal/women's experiences of being a refugee(s) in Canada?
30. In your opinion, did women's position change in Canada?
- For better, for worse, neutral?

32. What has contributed to these changes?
- Being in new environment (different country, country...)
 - Belonging to a minority community
 - Influence (or lack of) of community
 - Other
33. Around what issues do you/women organize?
- Immigration issues (family reunification, court challenge, getting landed etc.)
 - Female genital mutilation (awareness raising, representing Somali women's perspectives in mainstream/feminist committee/organizations, young women education, media & FGM etc.)
 - Neighborhood networks (tenant's associations, organizing Quranic studies for women and/or youth, organizing women only get togethers, working with other communities in the neighborhood etc.)
34. Tell me some of your/women's experiences with racism and/or dealing with cultural and religious differences?
35. Tell me some of your/women's experiences of raising children in a new socio-cultural environment? (Intergenerational/intercultural issues)
36. What mechanisms do you/women use to cope with the new culturally and religiously different society/ environment/ values? ? (gender and race relations)
37. How do you/women shape their identity as women in relations to the Somali community? (gender relations)
38. How do you/women shape their identity as women in relations to the Canadian society? (gender & race relations)
39. How does having citizenship (theoretically having the same rights and responsibilities of the Canadian born affect your sense of identity as Somali and as women?
40. Do you have other comments?

Thank you

Questionnaire Developed by
 Hamdi Mohamed
 September 7, 1999
 Modified on December 17, 1999
 Modified again on September 15, 2000

