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The Port and the Island: Identity, Cosmopolitanism and Islam among Somali Women in Nairobi and Johannesburg

PhD Thesis by

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Supervised by

Ingrid Palmary and Eric Worby

University of the Witwatersrand

April 2016

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.



_____ 7th April 2016

Nereida Ripero-Muñiz

For Fatuma and Saytoon, in friendship

Some nomads are at home everywhere. Others are at home nowhere.

– Robyn Davison

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Prologue

Tell your friend that I am not wearing the burka *because I am very religious; I am wearing it so people in the village don´t recognise me when I go around*.

I am in Isiolo, the last town in Eastern Kenya before the arid desert begins, mostly inhabited by Somalis, descendants of Somali soldiers brought here by the British colonisers during the World War I. My friend Fatuma has invited me to come with her to visit her family. We are at her sister's house when one of her multiple cousins arrives, removing her *burka* as she enters the living room.

I had met Fatuma some years ago, at the United States International University of Nairobi, where I was working as a lecturer of Spanish. Fatuma, a Somali-Kenyan, had just finished her PhD in Spain and had come back to teach at the university where she had studied as an undergraduate. We shared an office and in a short time became close friends. She introduced me to her "Somali" world: her family and friends, and Eastleigh, her friends' weddings and to her home town of Isiolo. It was there, when her cousin arrived explaining in Kiswahili why she was wearing a *burka*, where I firstly became aware of the complexity of being a Somali woman nowadays and the layers of meanings associated with it. I realised how the portrayal they normally have in public imagination, fed mostly by mainstream Western media, is incomplete, inaccurate and many times far from a more complex reality.

In an international world obsessed with "Islamic terrorism" that insists on seeing Africa as a dark continent and source of multiple maladies, Somalis are normally represented by most of the international media and political discourses as the jihadist *par excellence*, the pirate of the Indian Ocean, the helpless refugee, the dying malnourished child and the constrained woman. However, the intricate realities I found "behind the veil" were so far from these preconceived images that they led me to the of question what it really must mean to be Somali in today's global world?

The pages that follow are an attempt to show other realities, narratives and discourses, to tell another story and in that way present a more complex representation of a group of people who tend to be constantly misrepresented: the Somalis.

Introduction

> *I am a civil war child. I survived murderers. I survived hunger, I survived diseases, I survived refugee camps. I survived many borders. I am strong. I stand strong.*

Five years after the trip to Isiolo, I find myself at a women's meeting at Tawakal Clinic in Eastleigh, the predominantly Somali neighbourhood of Nairobi. Two groups of women meet every Saturday morning and afternoon to talk about a broad range of topics. The topics on the day of my visit are physical and mental wellbeing, how to deal with older relatives and nutrition. The morning meeting has just finished and I am staying a bit longer chatting with some of the women that remained in the room as they finish the soft drinks and biscuits handed out to them at the end of each session. After we finish talking and they finish their drinks, Amal, one of the women attending the meeting, wants to take me to have some henna done on my arms. Her cousin, who came back from Saudi Arabia a couple of years ago, owns and runs Sacdiya Beauty Salon situated along Jam Street, at the heart of Eastleigh. On our way there we stop at Dallas International College of Modern Teaching. "Your way to success", reads the motto. Amal has been learning English and community health there and needs to collect her degree.

At the beauty salon, just below Dallas College, a wedding preparation is taking place in the backroom and the bride and bridesmaids are getting ready for the evening celebration. The beauticians are busy bleaching the bride's skin, doing her hair and decorating her whole body with henna.

In the front of the salon Amal and I sit down with four other women who are also having some henna done. This new trend comes from Sudan: big flowers in your forearms. Nasra and Samira are visiting from Sweden, where they have been living for the last 10 years. Nasra is a mother of two sets of twins and she likes coming to Nairobi during the Swedish winter with her children. Samira, a medical student in Stockholm, here now on holiday, is very keen to show us some pictures of her wearing a white coat next to a model skeleton.

Daris is getting ready because she is travelling to Sudan to see her husband who is currently working there. She explains that she likes to have henna done at least once a month to please her husband. *You have to keep active*, Amal clarifies, *if you are not active your husband will get bored and* look for another woman. And she goes on explaining how you need to have the house clean, cook some nice food and then do your henna and your hair, put lotion in your body, cook a nice meal, wear a nice *dirac*[1] and burn some *unzi.*[2] *Then your husband will come home and be very pleased and happy, never wanting to leave.* All of us laugh. Amina is getting married very soon and seems to know very well how to keep *active* in order to keep a husband. She is travelling to Ethiopia the following week, where she is meeting her husband-to-be, a distant cousin who is coming from the UK to marry her in Addis. The plan is for her to join him in the UK after they have been married. Six months later after our visit to the beauty salon, she is already there.

All of these women are, or were at some point, forced migrants from a country normally portrayed as the epitome of the failure of the nation-state. The political chaos that came after Siad Barre was overthrown from power, alongside the frequent droughts and consequent famines, and the rise of Al-Shabaab have made thousands of Somalis leave their country, making Somalia into a "refugee producing nation" (Hopkins 2010, 323).

Nowadays, Somali migrants can be found, not only in refugee camps in Northern Kenya (Horst 2006a/b; Crisp 2000), but in many of the big metropolises around the world: in London, New York, Minnesota, Victoria, Stockholm or Toronto (Hopkins, 2010; Crosby, 2008; Harris, 2004; Cole and Robinson, 2003; Holman and Holman, 2003; Griffiths, 2002; Kusow, 2001); and also in African urban hubs such as Cairo, Nairobi and Johannesburg (Carrier 2015, Carrier and Lochery 2013, Al-Sharmani 2010; Jinnah 2010; Sadouni 2009; Campbell 2006).

This is not a static diaspora, with Somalis moving constantly across boundaries. The women at Sacdiya Beauty Salon were all coming from or going to another country, their lives take place across national boundaries, something that has become a common practice embedded in the daily lives of many Somalis. Moreover, the transnationalism

[1] "A long, loose-fitting dress…made out of printed cotton voile (a semi-transparent fabric) and it is worn with a fancy slip called *gorgorad* which hangs down several inches below the diraq (Akou 2011, 82).
[2] Somali "cooked" incense, but different from frankincense, a resin. *Unzi* is made by women mixing sugar with different perfumes.

and cosmopolitanism they transmit is not unique to Sacdiya Beauty Salon; it can be found at every corner of Eastleigh, where vernacular, religious and cosmopolitan practices are performed in a context of displacement.

Transnational nomads

Even if transnationalism is a quite new concept in the social sciences connected to discourses on postmodernity and globalisation,[3] it has been present in the lives of Somalis from centuries, preceding even the creation of African nation-states by the colonial powers. The pastoralist way of life of many Somalis has taken them to move along the Horn and East of Africa reaching places as far south as Tanzania.

Nomadism is considered by the majority of Somalis as a natural disposition and "way of being". Historically, only Somalis settled in the fertile lands of the south of the country, between the Juba and Tana rivers had a sedentary agricultural lifestyle (Besteman 1998, 1996 and Lewis 1998). Actually Somalia is one of the few countries in the world in which a nomadic way of life is praised and admired instead of demeaned (Harper 2012). As Mohammed, one of the men interviewed for this research explained, it was a common practice for people living in urban centres to send their children for some months to relatives living "in the bush" so they could learn the arts and perils of the nomadic lifestyle. Even if this way of life has been threatened in the past decades, due mostly to the security situation in the country, it hasn't completely disappeared. On the contrary, it has increased, even if nowadays Somalis have gone from being local nomads to transnational ones (Horst 2006a).

Most of the women I spoke to in Johannesburg had previously lived in at least two countries. And the ones living in Nairobi had either returned from abroad or were in their way to somewhere else. Even for those who haven't left Somalia, the contact through new technologies with relatives overseas provides an access to new cultural practices and ways of being. As Mary Harper notes, Somalia was one of the first African countries "to develop a mobile phone system" (2012, 10) and Somalis are eager

[3] For a general approach to transnationalism, see the works by Vertovec 2009, Brettell 2006, Portes et al. 1999. Other works that specifically deal with cultural transnationalism are Morris and Wright 2009, and Mahabir 2004. And for the effect of transnationalism on identity see: Erol 2012, Bradatan et al. 2010, Butcher 2009 and Vertovec 2001.

users of the internet. When I asked Amal for her email address, so we could keep in touch, her response was: *Which one should I give you? I have thirteen.*

I was struck by how many Somalis were eager to move somewhere else in order to improve their lives and those of their families. People living in Somalia keep strong links with their relatives in the diaspora, who normally play also a key role in the migration process of their siblings, spouses, parents, cousins or nephews living in the country. This wish to move is even reflected in the Somali language, the expression *reer-guuraa*, which means a constant desire to move from one place to another. According to one respondent, this concept refers to the *nomad we all have inside*.

More interesting is the concept behind *buufis*, a word that means the unfulfilled desire of migration and the anxiety generated by the impossibility to move that sometimes can result in a strong depression or even temporary madness. Old Somalis identify *buufis* with *saar*, the spirit of travel that possesses the person affected and only leaves after having fulfilled his desire: of that of travelling (Horst 2006b). As Horst (2006b) argues, *buufis* are sometimes the result of the strong transnational connections of the Somali diaspora, in which those staying in Somalia or refugee camps get constant updates from relatives residing in Western countries of better living standards, creating a constant desire for improvement by migrating.

Moreover, as Horst declares, it is important to understand this desire to move within an historical culture of migration:

> Current resettlement dreams need to be understood through a historical analysis of migration: they are part of wider cultural discourses and practices that place migration at the centre of Somali culture (Horst 2006b, 155).

This "culture of migration" together with the harsh conditions they find in their home country are what makes most Somalis eager to relocate to a place that can offer better opportunities to improve their lives and those of their families and relatives. In the global world that we live in today, it doesn't matter if those places are far away from their homeland at the Horn of Africa, as they are still reachable for Somalis. And, as mentioned earlier, Somalis can be found nowadays in some of the biggest metropolises around the world, where they have to constantly renegotiate in their everyday lives what it means to be Somali and the implication this has in the modern global world.

However, even if Somalis are widely spread around the globe, they still share a strong sense of being connected and belonging to a collective or group. Therefore, the main objective of this thesis is to explore how the Somali diaspora constitutes itself as a collective by analysing translocal identity formation processes.

For the analysis of translocal identity formations, I focus on the two particular contexts of Nairobi and Johannesburg. In these two cities Somalis challenge the widespread stereotype of the refugee in Africa, enclosed in a camp, a victim figure unable to provide for their families and completely dependent on humanitarian aid. Moreover, these two urban African hubs are connected by the migration route of many Somalis and in both places Somalis have transformed the neighbourhoods of Eastleigh in Nairobi and Mayfair in Johannesburg, popularly known as "little Mogadishus", a phenomenon that will be explored in relation to collective identity and translocality.

This research also aims to present other narratives and experiences that contest the misrepresentations that some of the Western media has contributed to create about Somali refugees (Hawkins, 2002 Klep and Winslow, 1999 Mermin, 1997; Besteman 1996), where Somalis tend to be portrayed either as war victims, starving children and oppressed women, or as "gun-toting gangsters" (Farah 2000, 192). The recent attacks by Al-Shabaab have contributed to increase this last representation of the Somali as a terrorist in the global imagination, which seems to fit perfectly in the negative discourses used to represent Africa (Mbembe 2001, Ferguson 2006) where "its people appear as victims many times over" (Ferguson 2006, 8).

This victimisation gets exacerbated in the representation of Somali women. Even if some attempts have already been made to present other narratives, like *Aman, The story of a Somali girl* (Barnes and Boddy 1994) Somali women are still seen in the global imagination as helpless victims of a patriarchal society that completely relegates them to a second place, making them passive subjects of their circumstances. A dominant representation that fits perfectly with the powerful stereotype of the "Third World Women" as black, Muslim and uneducated (Mohanty 1988), without taking into account a more complex scenario in which women migrate by themselves, start businesses on their own, get organised in supporting groups, take control of many of their cultural practices or the agency and power circulation that a situation of displacement have generated in the Somali society (Jinnah 2010; Al-Sharmani, 2010;

Hopkins 2010; Langellier 2010; Gardner and El Bushra 2004; Farah 2000; Bryden and Steiner, 1998).

At the same time, women tend to represent the embodiment of national culture (Yuval Davis 1993, 1997). They are considered as the bearers and spreaders of vernacular practices and national identity, as they "are given the social roles of intergenerational transmitters of cultural traditions, customs, songs, cuisine, and, of course, the mother tongue" (Yuval-Davis 1993, 627). Women's role in constructing and transforming a collective identity shouldn't be underestimated as it becomes crucial in transmitting and transforming cultural, religious and gender practices that contribute to the formation of a strong collective identity, as it will be explored in the pages that follow.

Therefore, this study intends to move beyond the prevailing representations of Somali women present in the global imagination by being open to other discourses and narratives that explore the dynamics of identity constructions these women undergo in relation to cultural, religious and gender practices in the urban contexts of Nairobi and Johannesburg**.**

Moreover, Somaliness cannot be understood today without the diasporic experience most Somalis live through, hence, this research also aims to analyse how collective identities are constructed in the interconnected, postmodern world where migration and displacement have become more common than before, where identities are not as certain as they used to be and a translocal sense of being connected surpasses fixed national borders.

The cosmopolitan refugee

Dr. Warsame and Dr. Maimon initially established Tawakal Clinic in Eastleigh as a gynaecologic and physician clinic. However they noticed that the patients coming over and over again complaining of physical pains, such as headaches, insomnia or high blood pressure, were really suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms. They decided to start offering psychological counselling together with weekly group meetings in which women could speak freely and share their experiences and anxieties. Along the years the meetings, run by young women, have developed to cover a wider range of issues: how to eat healthily, how to forgive, how to deal with everyday

cohabitation problems with other family members, the importance of exercising everyday etc. The meetings are conducted by facilitators, whom the visiting women regard as "teachers". Hibo, one of the teachers, is a 22-year-old student of Islamic Studies at UMMA University in Thika. She loves preparing for the meetings and talks with joy about how good it is for women to have a space where they can talk freely about their worries and experiences.

Our conversation took place in January 2014, when the Kenyan police was starting to raid Eastleigh looking for undocumented migrants and Al-Shabaab members. Hibo was outraged by those raids that where just beginning, as a response from the Kenyan government to the Westgate terrorist attack perpetrated by Al-Shabaab at Westgate mall, and that dramatically culminated months later with the massive arrest of Somalis at the Kasarani stadium.

Her joy turned into anger as she was telling me about this; especially when she referred to the stereotypical image people normally receive of Somalis as ignorant refugees with terrorist aspirations. *"People think we are stupid that we don't even know who Rihanna is!"* she exclaimed loudly at some point of our conversation, taking out her arms from under the *jilbab*[4] covering her head and half of her body as she moved her hands holding her smart phone in one of them .

Hibo's exclamation denotes a position that is not unique to her, but shared by many young Somali women. The women at the beauty salon introduced at the beginning of this section also moved between a sense of global modernity – travelling from Sweden to Nairobi for holidays; studying at a school called Dallas International College with the continuation of vernacular practices; having henna done on their bodies or getting ready for a "traditional" Somali wedding. I suggest that these cases are not just a result of transnationalism or globalisation, but they also denote the great cosmopolitan experience lived by the Somali diaspora.

Cosmopolitism should be distinguished from transnationalism. As Mau, Mewes and Zimmermann summarise, transnationalism refers to "individuals involved in cross-border interaction and mobility", while cosmopolitanism is seen as "a particular

[4] "Ensemble consisting of a small head wrap, a larger head covering that fits tightly around the face, and a matching skirt"(Akou 2011, 120)

worldview, characterised by the capacity to mediate between different cultures" (2008, 2).

Cosmopolitanism had a revival in the social sciences some years ago. Some of the most relevant works in this topic include Appadurai 2013, Werbner 2008, Appiah 2006 and 1997, Beck 2006, Beck and Sznaider 2006, Furia 2005, Gilroy 2005, Darieva et al. 2012 Pollock 2000, Pollock et al. 2000 and Waldron 2000. The vast use of cosmopolitanism has made its meaning multiply. As Vertovec and Cohen 2002 summarise, cosmopolitanism can be understood as a socio-cultural condition, a philosophy, a political project, an attitude or a practice. Moreover, as Skrbis et al. note: "Cosmopolitanism is not only embodied, but also felt, imagined, consumed and fantasized" (2004, 121).

However cosmopolitanism doesn't normally appear as a characteristic of forced migrants. It actually tends to be associated with cultivated elite from Western countries (Appadurai 2013, Skrbis and Woodward 2007, Waldron 2000, Hannerz 1996). This is an elite, embodied in the traveller or the expatriate, that pursue "deliberated activities associated with literacy, the freedom of travel, and the luxury of expanding the boundaries of one's own self by expanding its experiences" (Appadurai 2013, 197).

Nevertheless, this unique conception of cosmopolitanism is too narrow and incomplete as it leaves out of the picture other forms of cosmopolitanisms taking place nowadays. Besides, some authors have recently explored other forms that the cosmopolitan condition can adopt. Lamont and Aksartova (2002) propose an ordinary cosmopolitanism available to conventional people, which they see as a "cultural repertoire" (2002, 2) that people use independent of their race, nationality or class and that is based on "cosmopolitan experiences and ideals" (Skrbis and Woodward 2007, 744).

At the same time, challenging the contemporary and Eurocentric connotations of the term, Gilroy proposes South Africa, and specially Johannesburg, as the cradle for "a new cosmopolitanism centred in the global South" (2005, 289), an idea that is developed further by Achille Mbembe in his concept of afropolitanism (2007, see also Mbembe and Nuttall 2008). This is a cosmopolitanism born and practiced in Africa with

a long history in which Johannesburg is presented as the main cosmopolitan hub of the continent.[5]

Authors such as Landau and Freemantle (2010), Kothari (2008), Werbner (1999) and Malkki (1995) have gone one step further applying the cosmopolitan condition to migrants or refugees. Landau and Freemantle propose a "tactical cosmopolitanism" adopted by many migrants to South Africa as a strategy "to negotiate partial inclusion in South Africa's transforming society without becoming bounded by it" (2010, 4). Kothari (2008) also claims this strategic cosmopolitanism happens among peddlers from South Asia and West Africa living in Barcelona that:

> Are members of transnational networks who accumulate and share knowledge about how to cross spatial and cultural borders. They create, exist in, and invoke global networks as they travel across the world, producing cross-cultural interactions and sensitivities (2008, 501).

And Liisa Malkki, in her 1995 book *Purity and Exile*, explored the cosmopolitan constructions of identity that Hutu refugees experienced in Kigoma, and observed that, "in the process of managing these "rootless" identities in a township life, they were creating not a heroized national identity but a lively cosmopolitanism" (1995, 36).

Something similar could be said about most of the Somali women I talked to in Nairobi and Johannesburg, for whom cosmopolitanism is not only strategy but the result of a transnational experience in which they have to reinvent themselves in the diaspora. Moreover, in the case of the Somali diaspora, this cosmopolitanism is not incompatible with a strong sense of Somaliness. As Anthony Appiah (1997) points out, the cosmopolitan ideal actually resides in taking your roots with you wherever you go. He states, making a reference to his father who he describes as a cosmopolitan patriot, that "there was no point in roots, if you couldn't take them with you" (1997, 618). Appiah´s arguments showcase how the two apparently contradictory terms of patriotism and cosmopolitanism can actually cohabit in the mind of the same person. How Somali women in Nairobi and Johannesburg experience and feel their Somaliness in respect to

[5] Other authors that explore other cases of African cosmopolitanism are: LaViolette (2008), who analyses the cosmopolitan nature of the Indian Ocean Swahili coast that has been going on for centuries. And Diouf and Rendall (2000) that focuses on the Senegalese Murid diaspora.

a cosmopolitan experience and context will be one of the key points analysed along these chapters.

However Liisa Malkki (1992) had strongly criticised some years earlier the use of metaphors around roots normally used to explain feelings of cultural belonging and processes of identity constructions. In this misleading assumption, culture and identity are seen as fixed characteristics linked to a particular physical territory, outside which they seem unable to operate. However, as she affirms in *Purity and Exile:*

> Working in social settings of displacement invites in a very direct way the further questioning of the anthropological concepts of culture, society and community as bounded, territorialized units. Similarly, one is led to question the notion of identity as a historical essence rooted in particular places, or as a fixed and identifiable position in a universalizing taxonomic order (1995, 2).

Even if it is spread all around the world, and despite the fact that Somalia normally appears as the classical example of the collapse of the nation-state, the Somali diaspora shares a very strong sense of national and cultural identity. This challenges the idea that cultural identity, as a static characteristic of an individual or a collective is contained within national boundaries (Appadurai 1996, Malkii 1992, Keesing 1990 and 1974).

All this leads Malkki to claim the need for "a new sociology of displacement, a new nomadology" (1992, 38), that moves beyond the boundaries imposed by roots and botanical metaphors. That is in the direction in which this study intends to move in order to explore how identities in the postmodern world have become more and more de-territorialised, with feelings of belonging to a collective that is expanding across territorial boundaries.

As will be explored in this thesis, the nomadic identity is still very present in Somalis' sense of self (Harper 2012, Lewis 2008), together with Islam and a strong feeling of Somaliness that is rooted in vernacular practices and in a collective feeling of the Somali diaspora being translocally connected.

However, there is one more very important aspect that should be taken into account to understand the dynamics of identity formation among the Somali diaspora and that is what Appadurai describes as cosmopolitanism from below, a cosmopolitanism that

"builds on the practices of the local…but is imbued with a politics of hope…It builds towards global affinities" (2013, 198). This is grounded cosmopolitanism in which the vernacular and the local interweave with the "politics of hope". The aspiration to improve their lives was the main motive behind the decision to migrate was what the women said during interviews. All Somali women, and men, I talked to along the four years that this research took place expressed a strong desire for membership in the "new world order" (Ferguson 2006), in which they can work, study and move freely around the world.

This cosmopolitanism from below, emanating from "the politics of hope", becomes a powerful engine for migration. However embracing this cosmopolitanism doesn't make Somalis leave their national and vernacular identifications behind. As Appiah stated cosmopolitanism is perfectly compatible with nationalism.

This becomes especially apparent in the Facebook and Instagram accounts of young Somali, where motivational quotes encouraging for a better life cohabit with nostalgic representations of a lost Somalia, and Islamic messages. The quotes that open up every chapter are taken from these sources as they showcase how this popular cultural practice reflects the subjectivities and identity formation processes of a collectively.

Thereafter the collective desire of membership and inclusion in the "new world order" doesn't mean leaving behind more vernacular practices and ways of being, as they are still very present in the Somalis' everyday lives and ways of being. Rihanna maybe one of Hiram's favourite singers but that's perfectly compatible with wearing her *jibal*, having henna done for a special occasion and studying the Qur'an.

Moreover, in the case of Nairobi and Johannesburg this rooted cosmopolitanism or cosmopolitanism from below that Somali women denoted takes place in a context where the Somali diaspora has transformed two urban spaces, Eastleigh and Mayfair, into what is popularly known as "little Mogadishus".

This may seem contradictory; in the sense that this cosmopolitanism takes place in spaces that is a physical and symbolic reproduction of a lost homeland and around which Somalis cluster together. However this phenomenon can be explained trough translocality, a concept also introduced by Appadurai in his 1995 essay "The Production of Locality" and developed later by Brickell and Datta (2011).

Translocality emphasises the agency of the migrant in the transnational experience (Brickell and Datta 2011). It can be considered here as a "grounded transnationalism" or how all the transnational ties and links take place and are embodied in a particular locale. It links together migrants' imagined distant places that materialise in spatial recreations embedded with cultural meanings.

This has implications for identity formation processes, as Greiner and Sakdapolrak pointed out, where for them "translocality is used to describe socio-spatial dynamics and processes of simultaneity and identity formation that transcend boundaries" (2013, 373). Such is the case of the Somalis living in Eastleigh and Mayfair. The two neighbourhoods are interconnected between them for Somalis but at the same time these two places are also linked to Somalia and to any other place in the world where Somalis can be found in the collective imagination of Somalis.

Hence, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how collective identities are constructed and maintained in a context of diaspora; how in the case of Somalis, a culture of migration together with the translocal reproduction of vernacular and religious practices creates a sense of belonging to a collective that is independent of the territorial boundaries of the nation state.

As explained in this section, the direct or indirect cosmopolitanism Somalis experience becomes, on one hand, an engine of migration, with the widespread desire of belonging to the "new world order", and on the other, the result of the migration experience. This cosmopolitanism is at the same time compatible with nationalistic and vernacular discourses and it's precisely in the confluence of this that Somaliness is created nowadays, which this thesis aims to demonstrate.

Therefore, taking into account the different theories presented above on and applying them to the specific context of Somali women living Nairobi and Johannesburg, this study addresses the following questions: How do people on the move constitute themselves as a collective? What is the relation of individuals to cultural and national identity in a situation of displacement? Moreover, Somalia is presented as the classic example of the collapse of the nation-state, then, how do people without a functioning nation-state and spread all around the world have such strong feelings of belonging to a collective, namely that of being Somalis?

Taking into account that identity is always the result of a dialogical process, as it will be explored in next chapter, how and why do the dominant representations on Somalis in the global imagination affect the constitution of a collective Somali in a context of displacement?

But to start with, how is Somaliness constructed in the first place? What roles do cultural, national and kinship identifications play in the construction of a collective identity? How do Somali women experience and express their Somaliness? And how does this process take place in the two contexts studied?

Somaliness cannot be fully understood today without taking into account the influence Islam has had in unifying Somalis among clan divisions and its role in the construction of a strong collective identity, which leads me to my next question: how do vernacular and religious practices interweave? How do women negotiate their Somali and Muslim identity?

Also, in both cities, Somalis have transformed the landscape of the two neighbourhoods of Eastleigh and Mayfair, therefore how does place matter in relation to identity? How do places shape meaning? And how is collective identity able to transform spaces?

Finally, a focus on women, perceived as the bearer of national culture, as stated above, allows analysing how the different factors that shape collective identity are perpetuated or transformed in context of migration. How does migration and life in the diaspora affect the gender practices and roles of Somali women? How does this affect the construction of Somaliness? And has the migration experience affected power circulation and Somali women's agency in the two contexts of Nairobi and Johannesburg?

Chapters outline

In this introduction, I have presented the topic of study: Somali women's identity formation processes in Nairobi and Johannesburg, two cities connected in the migration route of many Somalis and where they have transformed the urban landscape with the creation of two "little Mogadishus" of Eastleigh and Mayfair.

I have laid out the research problem and questions under the theoretical frameworks of cosmopolitanism and translocality, as I believe they are useful to approach the study of how the Somali diaspora constitutes itself as a collective in a situation of displacement and in relation to Somalia and to other places in the world where there is a significant presence of Somalis.

Building on works by Horst, Malkii, Appiah, Appadurai and Ferguson, among others, I propose the concept of the cosmopolitan refugee as a way to approach the study of Somali women living in Nairobi and Johannesburg, where cosmopolitanism is both the motivation behind migration and a result of it.

Chapter 1, titled "Narratives of the Self", discusses how identity is always dialogical and how a narrative approach, the methodology initially chosen for this research, provides a good method to access the identity formation process of the dialogical self. I next explain and reflect on the limitations of a purely narrative approach and how, as fieldwork advanced, I started to incorporate participant observation and a more ethnographic approach to the collection and further analysis of data. I finally explain the particularities of fieldwork and comment on the ethical considerations taken into account for this research.

The second chapter, "The Port and the Island", describes in detail the two contexts studied of Nairobi and Johannesburg in relation to Somalis. Somalis consider both cities as transitional places but the creation of the "little Mogadishus" also generates a sense of temporary home. In this chapter I explore, through the metaphors of Nairobi as a port and Johannesburg as an island, how historical and social factors shape the relationship Somalis have with these two cities and the links that exist for the Somali diaspora between them and the rest of the world.

Chapter 3, "Identity in Movement: Constructing Somaliness outside Somalia", explores how Somali collective identity or Somaliness is constructed in a diasporic context. In the first part of this chapter I approach the different vernacular and national identifications Somali women use to define themselves, taking into account the failure of the Somali nation state. I then analyse the impact that the diasporic experience has on the identity formation processes of Somalis and how the hybrid identity of Somaliness is built. I reflect on how these processes differ or align in the two context studied, to finally explore the dynamics of collective identity formation in relation to place making

and translocality, in order to explain the transformation of urban spaces of the "little Mogadishus" of Eastleigh and Mayfair.

In chapter 4, "Somaliness and Islam", I focus on how Islam became a unifying factor among Somalis after the war and a main identity source without which Somaliness cannot be understood today. I present and reflect on the intersections between vernacular and religious practices and why is important for Somali women to distinguish between these sets of practices in order to define themselves and to inform the decisions they take in their daily lives. The fact that more women nowadays are accessing the Qur'an by themselves, also gives them power to contest some vernacular practices they wish to discontinue such as female circumcision.[6] Building on Talal Asad, I approach Islam as a discursive tradition, to which Somali women keep a constant dialogue with. I also explore the cosmopolitan and political implications of belonging to the *Umma*, the larger community of Muslims all around the world and the importance of being seen as a "good Muslim".

The last chapter, "Somali Women of Nairobi and Johannesburg: Between Cultural Translocality and Cosmopolitanism", focuses on how migration has transformed gender practices and roles, increasing women's agency and decision-making power, and how this affects the transformation of Somaliness. Nevertheless, even if transformation has occurred in Somali society due to the war and subsequent mass migration, gender relations and practices are still strongly regulated by Islamic and vernacular beliefs. The politics around marriage and choosing a right husband become a good case to explore how these beliefs operate in a context of displacement, reinforcing the sense of belonging to a collective.

Finally, the conclusion sums up the different arguments made in the thesis and also links them to broader discourses on diasporas and identities.

[6] There is plenty of controversy not only surrounding this practice but also in its naming, normally referred as female genital mutilation (FGM) or female genital cutting (FGC). However I have chosen deliberately to use the term of female circumcision in this text as it was how my informants referred to it when they were talking to me. I also refer to it as infibulation, the medical term that refers to the most drastic forms of female genital cutting, as it will be explained in chapter 4.

Chapter 1
Narratives of the Self

> *Do not judge me until you know me, do not underestimate me until you have challenged me and do not talk about me until you have talked to me.*

Haweyo is a middle-aged woman who left Somalia 20 years ago for Canada, where she studied, worked and lived until a few years ago when she returned to East Africa, now living between Nairobi and Mogadishu. When I asked her about her sense of self, if after all the years in Canada she felt more Canadian or more Somali, her response was this:

> I am both. If I am at a party with Somali women, I would truly be a Somali woman; I would wear a *dirac* and makeup. I will do the henna; I will take part in the conversations they are in. I am completely Somali. My professional identity is in the office: I talk certain ways... Is it healthy? They're both healthy. That's Haweyo's theory. So Haweyo is not schizophrenic (Haweyo, Nairobi).

Haweyo's sense of self is based on different identifications, expressed in a performative way, and on the particular context where she finds herself in. As she herself says, this is not a schizophrenic self but one that is able to generate different sets of identifications according to specific situations.

Identity, as cultural, religious and gender practices, is always constructed in relation to a particular context. It is dialogical. Location and time can be considered as the main "interlocutors" of identity together with ideologies, memory and narratives. As Stuart Hall explains:

> I don't think identity is just a free-floating smorgasbord – you get up today and decide to be whoever you would like to be: that's just a post-modern fantasy. Identity is always tied to history and place, to time, to narratives, to

> memory and ideologies. It requires material conditions of existence... On the other hand, I think identity isn't inscribed, forever… It is socially, historically, culturally constructed. So in that sense, identity is always, to some extent, and open question, always, as they say, "in process"… like meaning itself it operates ultimately in relation to an open horizon, since it cannot be finally fixed (Hall 2008, 347/48).

Thereafter identifications are never fixed but constantly constructed in a dialogue with the different factors or intersections surrounding the life of a person and the context where they take place. And in this sense, narrative plays a key role in presenting and putting together the different identifications that give form to the subject.

I began this research using purely a narrative approach as the methodology, as I considered it a good technique to access Somali women identity formation processes. This approach allowed the emergence of reflections about what Somali women in Nairobi and Johannesburg considered as their identity features and what it meant to them; at the same time it opened up a space for individual subjectivities to emerge, which permitted an access to vernacular discourses on culture, religion and gender.

First person narratives can challenge the "taken for granted" dominant discourses about Somali women, offering a counter narrative that should also be taken into account in order to understand Somaliness. At the same time, a narrative approach is also a good technique to address the different intersections of gender, class, race etc. In addition, it allowed women to reflect on the influence of migration on their lives, and to consider how it had been a factor of change. Narrative also creates a timeline of the different meaningful events of a migrant life, where there is a physical disconnection from the place of origin; it allows migrants to unify in a coherent story, the discontinuous places they have inhabited and the experiences they have had there.

However, as fieldwork advanced some women's life-stories were not being expressed the way I expected, as many of the women were not sure what kind of self-narrative they were expected to produce, but at the same time more meaningful data was emerging in the casual conversations I had with women after or before the interviews. This made me become aware of the limitations of the chosen methodology and the need

for an ethnographic approach to complement the data I was obtaining from the life-stories and semi-structured interviews.

In this first chapter dealing with methodology, I would like to explain the process I undertook, moving from a purely narrative approach to a more ethnographic one. I firstly explore different theories on narratives, the role narratives play in constructing meaning and identities, and how they constitute a good method to access the dialogical self. I later question the limitations of this kind of approach, and in particular the context of the research interview, and explain how participant observation and ethnography became necessary to complete that data I was obtaining during the interviews. I then discuss the relation between narrative and ethnography and review some ethnographies that were particularly useful for this research to finally focus on the particularities of fieldwork and the ethical considerations taken into account for this study.

A narrative approach

Maria Tamboukou defines a narrative approach as "the act of treating narratives as multiplicities of meaning and creating a map of how different stories connect with other stories, discourses and practices in shaping meaning" (2008, 111).

A narrative analysis can therefore help in exploring how Somali women's stories "connect with other stories, discourses and practices". At the same time, a narrative approach can also work as a tool for self-reflection permitting the emergence of new meanings. Following Theodore Sarbin's statement that "human beings think, perceive, imagine and make moral choices according to narrative structures" (1986, 8), narratives will be considered here as an organizing principle, a structure that operates in order to create and transmit meaning.

Narratives have a double and sometimes contradictory nature: it is universal but at the same time culturally rooted. It can be considered universal because all cultures produce stories and because of the structure they present. The universal structure of narratives was first analysed by Vladimir Propp (1928), who examined the characters and the succession of events in Russian folktales, and concluded that all stories could be classified according to relatively limited number of plot patterns. The universal structure

of narratives was also studied by structuralist thinkers such as Levis-Strauss and Roland Barthes who argued that stories can still be understood independently of the culture they are embodied; as Barthes and Duisit affirm "narrative is international, trans-historical, transcultural" (1975, 251). Before Lévi-Strauss argued in his seminal article, "The structural study of myth" (1955), that the myth of a particular culture will be always understood by any other one because:

> its substance […] [lies] in the *story* which it tells. It is language, functioning on an especially high level where meaning succeeds […] the true constituent units of a myth are not the insulated relations but *bundles of such relations* and it is only as bundles that these relations can be put to use and combined so as to produce meaning (1955, 430–431).

So narratives can be seen here as universal human devices to understand and generate meaning. Meaning is created by the relations of actions or events; it does not lie in a particular event but in the relation it presents to the other events presented in a story, what we call the plot, and it is precisely the way a plot is structured that gives stories their universal character.

Plots develop over time and Ricoeur introduced the concept of human time, as the time we encounter in narration that allows us to link in a causal or sequential order the events that drive the plot, so time here is not just "the succession of time, but change through time" (Andrews et al. 2008, 10). According to Ricoeur, it is the narrative, the story that constructs the identity of the character (1995, 147). Through narrative identity human beings are able to give the different events in their life a time framework, from past, present to future, and to make meaning of it. And in this regard hindsight plays an important role on it as "the process of looking back […] and seeing things anew drawing connections" (Freeman 2010, 4). In hindsight distance appears naturally imposed by the passing of time, but migration also generates a spatial distance from which things are quite likely to be seen differently. In a situation of displacement, the migrant leaves behind a familiar reality to inhabit a new one; this uprooting can create, in Edward Said words: a "discontinuous state of being" (1984, 50). Narrative can help to put this "discontinuity" together, acting as a link between past, present and future; as Polkinghorne writes: "the autobiographical narrative shows life as unified and whole" (1988, 36).

It is precisely in the plot were the main distinction between narrative and discourse lies (Polkinghorn 1988; Culler 1981). Discourses don't need a plot. Narratives do. Narrative, to be recognised as such, needs a significant sequence of events, an ordered time span and an emplotment. As Polkinghorn explains:

> Discourse uses a variety of protocols of formal logic to organize its sentences into a higher order of meaning. Narrative productions, in contrast, organize sentences according to a "narrative logic" which group sentences according to their contribution to the plot […] Narrative is particularly sensitive to the temporal dimension of human existence, it pays special attention to the sequence in which actions and events occur (1988, 36).

Meanwhile discourses can be considered as systems of representations of a particular time where all knowledge and practices are created and performed (Foucault 1972). Discourses in this sense become major paradigms from which different narratives emerge, and discourses are present in every narrative at the same time that certain narratives, especially the ones connected to power, contribute to the creation of discourses.

Maria Tamboukou (2008) applies the Foucauldian sense of power and discourse to women's narratives. She states that power "intervenes in creating conditions of possibility for specific narratives to emerge as dominant and for others to be marginalized" (104), which is the case of women's narratives had historically been relegated to a second place, silenced or suppressed. Tamboukou goes on arguing that "the self [of women] is a discursive formation, emerging from the margins of the hegemonic discourses […] Auto/biographical narratives thus constitute a discursive regime creating the conditions of possibility for counter-discourses to arise and unruly subjects to emerge" (106).

Narratives can then be seen as a tool to generate and transmit meaning within a particular discourse or ideology. However, it cannot be forgotten that meaning does not lie in the narration itself but in the encounter it has with the reader or listener, as the linguist Roman Jakobson (1960) and the philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1986) noted. Ricoeur was very critical of some of the structuralist thinkers (Polkinghorne 1988). For him, structuralism didn't take into account the importance of the context in which the communicative encounter takes place. Here narrative is still considered as a

hermeneutical tool to create and transmit meaning but it highlights how it is also open to interpretations by different individuals at different points in time. A story "is not a static structure but an operation, an integrating process which [...] is completed only in the reader or in the spectator […] in the *living* receiver of the narrated story" (in Wood, 1991, 21). So we can say that the meaning of a story emerges in this dialogical relationship between the narration and the "living receiver".

This concept was also explored by Bakhtin (1981), for whom "the other" becomes fundamental for the creation of meaning. He argued that meaning can only emerge from a dialogical encounter – what has later become known as dialogism. In dialogism, dialogue is applied in its broader meaning; it can refer to the dialogic relationship between the emitter and the receiver of an utterance, between a narration and a "living receiver" or to the "dialogue" between different texts (intertextuality). For Bakhtin, even the self is dialogic in nature, pointing to the constant internal dialogue we keep with "ourselves" and as Danow points out this is a never-ending dialogue because the self is an "ever changing self" (1991, 23).

In any case, meaning is always mediated through dialogues in whatever form they may take and what interests me here are the meanings that emerge in the dialogic encounter with "the other" that can be seen, in Bakhtin´s words, as "an intersection of two consciousnesses" (1984, 289). This intersection of consciousness is possible only through dialogue and interaction. Moreover, from this point of view, dialogue is not only a hermeneutical tool to create and transmit meaning but also one of the ways in which our identity is constructed. We cannot become ourselves without "the other", as "our sense of self […] emerges out of the performativity work we engage in when we interact with others" (Atkinson et al. 2008, 66).

The narratives embedded in every dialogue are part of this "performativity work"; through them we present ourselves to others at the same time that we learn about them. But in this process we also became "complex, fluid matrix of co-authored selves" (Ochs and Capps 1996, 31).

Here the self is seen as fluid and interactional, and not as a static entity, but in a process that keeps changing; we should take the self not as something "we are" or "we have" but as something "we perform". And one of the ways that the self is performed is in the

autobiographical narratives produced during social interaction. As Ochs and Capps, put it:

> Narrative and self are inseparable in that narrative is simultaneously born out of experience and gives shape to experience […] Narratives bring multiple, partial selves to life" (1996, 19)

Toni Morrison goes even one step further when she affirms that "narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment is being created" (Morrison 1994, 22).

However, it is not only the self that keeps changing, the contexts in which the self is performed also do. Contexts keep changing through time and space and they define everything (Geertz 1973). Moreover if we take into account that "context is socially constructed and sustained interactionally" (Cortazzi 2001, 388), the possibilities of new contexts and the narratives produced within them can be endless.

This complex, never-ending relation between selves, contexts and narratives is what keeps generating the constant emergence of different meanings and why meaning is always relative.[7] For Bakhtin, we are all part of a never-ending dialogue in which the last word is never said.

To recapitulate, self-narratives work as a structure that help us to put together the different dimensions of time and space and the events lived within them. What we have lived, are living and would like to live become a coherent unit through narrative. Self-narratives become a construction, one's own story, and in this story past, present and future are interwoven in order to create meaning. Nevertheless, meaning only occurs in the encounter it has with the other, which makes it never fixed but always changing and open to new interpretations. In this sense, the self is always dialogical, constructed in the narratives produced and the actions performed according to a particular situation.

From narrative to ethnography

Above I have presented some narrative principles and discussed some theories about narratives as a way to construct and access meanings and identities, as well as the

[7] Holquist (1991) even compares dialogism with Einstein theory of relativity.

possible uses of narratives when doing social research. I next question the limits of it and propose a more ethnographic approach based on interaction, participant observation and a more ethnographic way or writing.

A narrative approach to qualitative research presents some limits and problems. If we consider narratives as performances of the self that are "highly context-sensitive" (Atkinson et al. 2008, 98), the particular context of a social research interview presents certain factors that are going to affect the emerging narratives and the creation of meaning.

These factors include external elements, such as the fact that the "conversation" is being recorded, making respondents always cautious of what they are saying, to more complex ones, such as the hierarchical power relationship between researcher and respondent.

At the same time, the stories related during interviews do not emerge naturally from a social interaction taking place in a particular context, as Wolfson affirms, "conversational narratives are performed, those told in interviews are not" (1982, 390).

Moreover, following the research interview canon, in which researchers should keep certain distance with the participant, do not respond to questions they may be asked and do not give their opinion in order not to create any bias, leaves no place for spontaneous interaction. So even if these guidelines manage to create a "scientific and accurate" interview they detach the researcher from participating and getting involved in the conversation, highlighting the hierarchical power relationship between researcher and respondent, and they don't really help in creating rapport, something of great importance when conducting social research.

Rapport and interaction

The benefits of creating rapport with informants are broadly recognised (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011, Lichtman 2006, Berger 2001, Oakley 1981, Sjoberg and Nett, 1968). It allows the respondent to feel more relaxed, confident and open when responding to the interview questions. But as Sjoberg and Nett note: "Frequently researchers, in the course of their interviewing, establish rapport not as scientist but as human beings"

(1968, 215). This took some authors, like Oakley (1981), to start challenging the canonical forms of interviewing. She strongly criticises the distance that has to be kept between researcher and participant, in which any evaluation by the researcher is considered as bias towards the study and the fact that participants are not supposed to ask questions back. This doesn't allow for a real interaction between researcher and respondent and it really doesn't contribute to create rapport. As she pointed out: "general and irreconcilable contradictions at the heart of the textbook paradigm are exposed" (1981, 41) because "social research is not like is presented and prescribes in those texts. It is infinitely more complex, messy, various and much more interesting" (Bell and Encel 1978, 4).

The absence of rapport also contributes to make the hierarchical power relationship between researcher and respondent stronger. In this respect, Georgakopoulou points out that: The research interview […] not only cast the interviewer in a role of elicitor of a story but it also generates asymmetrical and lacking in intimacy interpersonal dynamics. (2006, 5). This lacking in interpersonal dynamics is going to affect the way respondents wants to be seen, how they are going to construct their narratives and the meaning they are seeking to create.

Stories are many times "responses" to other stories; sometimes their aim is to illustrate some cases raised in other stories and for this interaction is fundamental. When this interaction is lost, plenty of meaning gets also lost. As Oakley summarises:

> It becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest her own personal identity in the relationship (Oakley 1981, 41).

In this same line, from an ethnographic point of view, Berger (2001) analyses how being open and sharing her own stories and opinions with her participants increased rapport and mitigated the hierarchical gap between researcher and respondents. She claims that "offering my own experiences as part of an ongoing process of exchange" (512) makes the interview much more fruitful for both researcher and participant.

During social interaction, anecdotal stories as well as important episodes in someone's life naturally come into conversation. And the tone and level of intimacy is going to

depend enormously on the context where they take place and the relationship between the narrator and the receiver of those stories.

The research interview

From this point of view and taking into account that narratives are performances of the self, occurring in a particular context, then the narratives told in interviews become not only detached from a particular context but also detached from the self. This is why in some cases the setting of an interview can create narratives that are mere accounts of events ordered around dates; make respondents present themselves in the way they want to be seen by the researcher or make them relate the story they think the researcher wants to hear. If the narratives of an interview are not performed the self is somehow lost and this is something a narrative analysis sometimes forgets. As Atkinson et al. summarise:

> Narrative analysis, too often proceeds in a social vacuum. But narratives are part of everyday social fabric […] Researchers always have to be reflective about the ways in which narratives are told in their normal social setting, such as among friends […] and the ways in which they are recounted to a researcher (2008, 97–98).

When I started to conduct life-stories interviews, I noted that this lack of "social context" made many women confused about what kind of narrative to produce. After explaining the nature of the research and obtaining their verbal consent to record the interview I always started with the very open statement: "Tell me about your life? How was your life in Somalia? How is your life here?" Some of them started the narration straight on with sentences like: "My life in Somalia was very good", "I was born in …" or "I came here because..." Nevertheless other women asked me about what kind of episodes in their life I was interested in, while some others remained silent for some seconds not sure of what to tell and asked further questions to obtain some more clues, such as: " Where do I start?", " Do I start when I came here or when I was born?" . One woman even asked: "What do you want to know? Just ask me!" And even if I insisted I just wanted to know about her life, that she could relate any relevant thing she considered, she was still reluctant, so I started asking simple questions like "Where

were you born? When did you leave Somalia?, etc." until the conversation flowed and she ended up telling plenty of things about her life in Johannesburg and in Somalia.

On top of it, some women, especially the youngest, got quite nervous when narrating their lives. They felt like being put on the spot and their nervousness and discomfort was apparent.

Most of these life stories, even if they were told in their Somali mother tongue, also resulted in very short narratives, just a succession of dates and events, without women going into detail or expressing their real feelings or evaluations about an event. Nevertheless, as I explain later, details were plentiful when engaging with them in conversation.

Life stories were then followed by semi-structured interviews and they were focused on questions around cultural and gender practices in relation to identity. As these interviews progressed religion became a main feature of women to describe their identity, so even if initially I had not planned to look at religion, Islam became so interweaved with Somaliness that questions regarding this topic were also introduced and became a relevant part of this research, as will be explored in chapter 4.

During the semi-structured questions, a similar pattern was observed. Many women were also nervous and unsure of what to reply and others gave the responses they thought I wanted to hear without really giving their own opinions or points of view. Others were elusive, not really answering the questions and changing topics.

Even when the life-stories and semi-structured interviews provided valuable data for my research, as I advanced with it, I became aware of the limits of these methods for this study. This was particularly apparent during the group discussions, a more dynamic and dialogical form of collecting data, and in which women were much more relaxed and open, thus enabling a very anecdotic style to emerge naturally.

The same occurred during interaction with participants outside the interview setting. These casual conversations, in which both they and I asked question about each other, borne out of genuine interest and curiosity, indirect references to cultural and religious practices, gender and identity were made much more explicit than during the interviews. Moreover, these references where exemplified with episodes of their life and interesting discourses appeared embedded in the anecdotic.

Participant observation

Therefore, based on what has been stated above, I started to incorporate an ethnographic approach to this research. As Hume and Mulcock point out: "by 'being there' and actively taking part in the interaction at hand, the researcher can come closer to experiencing and understanding the "insider's" point of view" (2004, xii).

This was already deeply explored by Clifford Geertz (1973; 1983) who extensively explained how "being there" was indispensable to get the local point of view. **T**he fact of "being there" provides a first-hand account of what happens at a particular and concrete local level, and how this locality interweaves with other global processes. It also allows access to the "small narratives" circulating in the everyday life of a group of people, to their actions and motivations.

As Jorgensen notes:

> The methodology of participant observation is exceptional for studying processes, relationships among people and events, the organization of people and events, continuities over time, and patterns, as well as the immediate sociocultural context in which human existence unfolds (1989, 12).

In regard to this research, participant observation provided a better understanding of how people belonging to the Somali community in Nairobi and Johannesburg interacted and how identity formation processes took place at an individual and collective level. At the same time that it allowed to see if the discourses and narratives produced by Somali women were concordant or discordant with their everyday practices. Participant observation also provided access to other kind of narratives, such as the "small stories" that circulate in the form of rumours with transnational scope and that become a way of social control of women, which I will further explain in detail in chapter 3. Finally, an ethnographic approach to the field, also provided access to the narratives being constructed in the virtual spaces of Instagram and Facebook, that on the one hand, constitute a direct reflection of the participant's subjectivities, of their values and desires and on the other hand, provided an useful tool to understand how Somaliness is constructed on a collective narrative taking place in the virtual space, as it will be explored along these pages.

Nevertheless, as some authors (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011; Behar 1996) have pointed out, participant observation could be seen as a paradox, as the act of "observing" requires some distance from the object of study and "participation", where certain involvement is necessary.

However, it is precisely this paradox that creates an ethnographic account. Observing is necessary to generate an understanding upon which to later reflect but this observation is incomplete without participation, which provides the necessary dialogical interaction with the other and the context they inhabit.

Still, the ethnographer is never completely "there" as he always will be a visitor going and coming as he pleases from his field site, which raises some important questions about the fact of "being there". Actually Geertz in his later work (1988) already pointed out how the fact of "being there" was more a rhetoric tool of ethnography writing than an epistemological tool, following the critique made by Clifford and Marcus (1986), as next section will explore.

Ethnography as narrative

Both observing and interacting are highly subjective, as the ethnographer is always going to determine what he/she sees, how he/she interacts with it and moreover how they are going to represent the encounter he/she had with "the other".

The unavoidable subjectivity any ethnography presents is what has led it to be strongly criticised as an inaccurate knowledge production form, seen mostly as a subjective representation of someone else's world (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Leach 1984; Ruby 1982)

This subjective factor of ethnography writings is what makes them very close to fictional literature (Collins and Gallinat 2010). Bruner even sees ethnography as a "genre of storytelling" (1986, 139) and Clifford Geertz already recognised ethnography as a "fictional" narration:

> Anthropological writings are themselves interpretations … They are, thus, fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are "something made," "something fashioned" – the original meaning of fiction – not that they are false,

> unfactual, or merely "as if" thought experiments. To construct actor-oriented descriptions of the involvements of a Berber chieftain, a Jewish merchant, and a French soldier with one another in 1912 Morocco is clearly an imaginative act, not all that different from constructing similar descriptions of, say, the involvements with one another of a provincial French doctor his silly, adulterous wife, and her feckless lover. In the latter case, the actors are represented as not having existed and the events as not having happened, while in the former they are represented as actual, or as having been so. This is a difference of no mean importance; indeed, precisely the one Madame Bovary had difficulty grasping (Geertz 1973 15–16).

Geertz vision of ethnography as "something made", as in story constructed by the ethnographer, based on "truths" he has observed and reflected upon, makes ethnography a kind of narrative, a particular representation in which the views of the ethnographer are always going to determine what is told and how it is told. In these sense ethnographies are a representation of reality not an accurate description of it, as reality is always bigger and more complex than the stories told about it. However, as Kermode pointed out, the same could be said about history or literature, as they are "fictive models of a temporal world" (1968, 54).

Moreover, according to Bruner, ethnographies are always co-authored between the ethnographer and their informants in which "the ethnographer appears not as an individual creative scholar … but more as a material body through whom a narrative structure unfolds" (Bruner 1986, 150).

However, narratives are not only structures of meaning but also structures of power (Tambouku 2008; Bruner 1986), which explains the different representations and approach to the field under a colonial gaze versus a postcolonial one and the different representations of peoples "and their cultures" a long time. This speaks directly to the ethics and politics of representation – Of what story to tell? What perspective to adopt? What to include and not to include? Who is telling the story? Who creates knowledge? These are questions that I will address in the ethics section at the end of this chapter and very relevant nowadays regarding Somali studies as the current debate on *Cadaan*[8] studies has shown, as I explain below.

[8] *Cadaan* means white in Somali.

Thereafter, taking into account these different theories and critiques I will consider ethnography as a particular kind of narrative created by the anthropologist after listening to other narrations and actively observing and participating in certain patterns of behaviours, habits and events that take place in a specific spatial context in a particular time.

Moreover ethnography allows access to the "small stories" happening at a local level at the same time as to that of the "big stories" circulating at a global level, as the ethnographic approach moves constantly between the local and the global. In this sense ethnography becomes an exceptional tool to the study of change (Bruner 1986).

Some ethnographic models

I finalise this section commenting on some ethnographic works that have been particularly useful in my work.

Liisa Malkki's *Purity and Exile* constituted the main example I followed for this study. Her account of Hutu refugees in Kigoma versus their counterparts in Mishamo refugee camp, Tanzania provided an excellent model for a comparative study of refugees in two different contexts. Her findings demonstrated how those refuges in Kigoma were creating a cosmopolitan way of being in opposition to those in the refugee camp who recreated a nostalgic nationalism. As I will demonstrate along these pages something similar was observed in regard to Somali women in Nairobi and Johannesburg.

Cindy Horst's *Transnational Nomads* provides a compelling portrayal of what the life of Somali refugees in Dadaab looks like. She contests the common assumption of refugees as "vulnerable victims", arguing for a more transitional approach to refugee studies by analysing the role that the transnational connections play in the lives of Dadaab´s inhabitants. This is an approach that I have also followed in this study in order to move beyond the widespread victimised representation of Somalis refugees and in order to showcase the multi-layered interconnections taking place among the Somali diaspora all around the world. In this regard, Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* also provided a good example for studying a world in constant movement and the different dynamics taking place in the interconnected modernity we live. James

Ferguson's *Global Shadows* was also very illuminating in understanding the desires and aspirations that take people to migrate in search of a better reality.

Even if Richard Burton (1856) did provide some of the first accounts on Somalis to the Western colonial world of his time,[9] I.M. Lewis is considered by many as the founding father of Somali ethnography. His book *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*, published in 1961, focuses on the kinship relations among the Isaaq and Daarood clans. In a structuralist line of enquiry that he continued through his career, *A Modern History of the Somali* (1965) still remains a classic; however his view and approach to the study of Somalis have been often criticised, as many still see in them a strong colonial gaze when representing Somalia.

Probably his best well-known detractor is Catherine Besteman. In her 1996 essay, she criticises the explanation of the Somali conflict Lewis gives based uniquely in divisions among the clans, in line with the Western media and political discourses. However, Besteman points out how "shifting cultural constructions of difference such as race, language and status, and … occupation and class" (1996, 123) played also a key role in the breakout of the violent conflict that began in 1991 followed by the collapse of the Somali state, that cannot be only understood based on clanship conflicts.

Moreover, what Besteman (1996; 1998) does is strongly criticise the static representation of Somalia based purely in segmentary lineages and unchangeable "traditions" that some Western scholars still try to portray today.

This is a still very relevant debate taking place nowadays in contemporary Somali studies, with the new emergence of *Cadaan* studies, in which young Somali scholars are contesting and rebelling against the constant study and representation of the Somali world by Western scholars, at the same time that they question the production of knowledge and under what gaze is done (Aidid 2015a; 2015b; 2015c).

This debate was initiated by Safia Aidid, a PhD candidate in History at Harvard University, as a reaction to the launching of the new *Somaliland Journal of African Studies* (SJAS), whose editorial board did not include any Somali scholars at all (Aidid

[9] It is interesting to follow how Burton ridicules the Somalis for believing that the malaria was caused from the bite of a mosquito (Aidid 2015c)

2015a). The debate, started on the online platforms of Facebook and Twitter, was ignited by Markus Hoehne´s response to the non-inclusion of any Somali scholar on the editorial board as arising out of a lack of young Somali scholars.[10] This generated a collective response in an article titled, "Can the Somali Speak?" signed by Aidid and 200 young Somali intellectuals from all over the world, questioning Hoehne's assertions and moreover the production of knowledge within Somali studies.[11]

This is an ongoing debate and linked very much to other forms of decolonising knowledge taking place, for example, at South African universities at the present moment. And it cannot be forgotten that this critique made by Somali scholars about who creates knowledge is also the result of the diasporic experience many Somalis have gone through. Living in the diaspora has allowed Somalis access to the academy and to the necessary discursive tools to criticise the representation of Somalia that until very recently was mostly produced in the West by western scholars.

As this research also focuses on Muslim women in two African contexts, Adeline Masquelier's account of Muslim women in Dogondoutchi also provided an excellent case study to approach the practice of Islam among Muslim women in the African context. The Islamic revival that took place in Niger shares some similarities with the Somali context, as I will explore in chapter 4. And Clifford Geerz's *Reilgion as a Cultural* System was very useful to approach the meaning religion and culture have for Somali women, while the essays in *The Interpretation of Cultures* provided an excellent approach to understand the principles of ethnography. *Islam Observed* also constituted a good model to observe the different interpretations and implementations of Islam in two compared contexts.

Finally Eric Worby (2010 and 2009) provides some useful case studies to understand the dynamics of migrants' transnational relations in Johannesburg, the role of race in relation to space in the post-apartheid city and the ephemeral nature of many spaces in the city.

In this section, I have criticised the research interview setting as a data production form, as stories told in interviews become decontextualised. I argue for a more dialogical

[10] For a detailed recount and timeline on how the debated on *Cadaan* studies unfolded see Hassan 2015.
[11] See Aidid 2015b for the full text of this open letter.

approach to the social research interview by increasing rapport and interaction with participants and by including participant observation. I then reflected on the contradictions of ethnography and how the subjectivity it presents makes it a particular form of narration and representation. I have finally reviewed some of the ethnographic works that have been relevant for this research. I will next explain the particularities of fieldwork and end this chapter stating the ethical considerations taken into account for this research.

In the field

I started to conduct interviews in Mayfair, Johannesburg in January 2012 and in two years I interviewed 20 women and 10 men. The interviews consisted of a life story followed by semi-structured in-depth interviews. Four group discussions were also carried out.

In Nairobi, I carried on preliminary observations from 2008 to 2010 and from December 2013 to January 2014, I spent two months conducting the interviews that followed the same pattern in Mayfair, with life stories, in depth interviews and group discussions. Another 20 Somali women were interviewed in this city together with 5 men.

The interviews took place either in English, which the majority of participants were fluent in, or in Somali when they weren't able to speak English fluently. A Somali research assistant was always present during the interviews and she played the role of interpreter when needed.

Most of the current literature about conducting qualitative research interviews nowadays acknowledges that the result of a qualitative interview is a negotiated text based on interaction between the researcher and the respondent (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011, Lichtman 2006, Fontana and Frey 2000, Karp 1997, Weiss 1994). In other words, that meaning here is also co-constructed through dialogic interaction.

The role of the interpreter in the "making meaning" process of a social research interview should been taken into account, not as someone distorting the original meaning of the speaker but as someone that adds meaning to the interview construction

process by acting as an intercultural mediator (Palmary 2011, Venuti 2000, Alexieva 1997).

If we take into account what was mentioned before following Bakhtin (1981) about the dialogical encounter as a key process for the generation of meaning, the in-depth interviews can be considered "as a site for the creation of meaning" (Elliott, 2005:19). As Mishler affirms: "the discourse of the interview is jointly constructed by the interviewer and the interviewee" (1986, 21). Therefore when an interpreter is needed, he/she also becomes part of the meaning construction process.

This can create questions regarding transparency and accuracy, which leads Anderson to raise the question "Should the interpreter be a mere echo, or should he be an advisor and ally?" (1976, 212). However, interpreting isn´t just about translating languages but also about "translating" cultures, as Alexieva (1997) and Venuti (2000) have explored. In this sense the interpreter becomes a mediator between different cultures, adding any supplementary information that may be needed. As Cronin argues:

> [Interpreters] are conduits for privileged `inside´ information on the society and culture […] interpreters are translating more than just words and are central to the production of knowledge in social research (2002, 386).

Therefore, instead of considering the interpreter as someone distorting the original meaning of the speaker, I have taken them as intercultural mediators that have added meaning to the construction process of a social research interview. As the interpreters for this study were also my research assistants, interviews were always commented upon afterwards and they clarified and added any information that I may have missed, becoming in this way the main informants of this research. I worked with a total of four, two in Nairobi and two in Johannesburg.

Moreover, we cannot forget that that interpreting doesn't only take place at the interview level. As stated above, the analysis and writing of the data is also an interpretation of what has been collected (Geertz 1973 Behar 1993, Riessman (2008). Ruth Behar (1993) not only sees the whole ethnographic research project as a translation or interpretation among cultures but also highlights how along this process the researcher is firstly the listener to become later the story teller.

As fieldwork progressed, and I moved from a narrative approach to a more ethnographic one, the interviews became a way to access the field instead of the main data production forms. However, all data collected has been used for this research.

Life-stories and semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards. Transcription was made in a faithful way, keeping the broken English of most of the respondents intact. I have tried to illustrate most of the points I make along this thesis with quotes extracted from the interviews to reflect directly woman's voices.

I approached the body of narrative data with a thematic analysis. I grouped the narratives collected in Nairobi and Johannesburg in thematic clusters, compared what was said in the two contexts with regard to a particular topic and contrasted it with my notes of observations in the field, always moving between "faith and suspicion" (Josselson, 2004).

Finally, it should be noted that the last period of the fieldwork for this research was affected by a tragic event: On 21 September 2013 the world witnessed with horror a horrific terrorist attack in Kenya. In the attack, several armed men entered Westgate Shopping Mall in the upper income neighbourhood of Westland, killing 67 people and wounding 175. The siege lasted 4 days with confusing information coming from the government and the media about the fate of possible hostages. The role of the Kenyan police and army was later deeply criticised as it emerged they were actually the ones looting the shops, restaurants and casino. Part of the mall was later demolished by the army, alleging that was the only way to end the stalemate with the attackers but some media denounced it as a way to cover up the looting that took place. After this event the Kenyan government decided to pass a law against the freedom of press.

Accounts by witnesses described the operation being directed by a woman with a British accent, prompting claims that one of the heads of the operation was Samantha Lewthwaite, popularly known as the white widow. She is a British woman that converted to Islam and later joined the jihad, and is married to one of the London bombers. Information emerged that she has entered Kenya with a South African passport and actually resided in Mayfair for some months.

One week after the Westgate attack, an imam was murdered in Mombasa and riots followed. Raids by police increased in Eastleigh, trying to identify members of Al-Shabaab who were believed to have infiltrated the county to plan the attack.

Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack. The jihadist group had been operating in Somalia and along East Africa from 2006, with their increasing intensity since the Kenyan army entered Somalia in 2011. Smaller blasts took place in busy areas of Mombasa and Nairobi, the kidnapping and killing of British tourists in the Kenyan northern town of Lamu and the kidnaping of two humanitarian workers for MSF in Dadaab refugee camp.

The Westgate attack had enormous repercussions for Somalis all around the world but especially for those in Nairobi, who months later, from January 2014 experienced constant harassment by the Kenyan police that culminated in the passing of a government bill against undocumented Somali refugees and the arresting of thousands of Somalis at the Kasarani stadium in April 2014.

I went to Nairobi in January 2014, four months later after the attack and found the city had profoundly changed: security checks were in place before entering almost any public building and even to board some bus lines, people looked with suspicion as each other as they made their weekly shopping at Nakumat or any other major shop in Nairobi, expatriates were so scared to go anywhere in the city and the vibrant Nairobi night life had even been acted with many bars in Westland almost empty at night.

In Eastleigh the atmosphere was even tenser, as police raids were starting in the neighbourhood. Eastleigh was unofficially declared “no-go” area for any foreigner and walking along its dusty streets became a tense mission. I remember one occasion when walking along 1st Avenue, a mattress displayed in front of a shop fell down making a noise similar to a small explosion; everyone screamed and started to run, just to laugh minutes afterward when they realised what really happened, but the tension was palpable.

Even in Johannesburg, the consequences of the event could be felt, especially in the month following the September blast as reports of Lewisham living in Mayfair some months before the attack emerged. Mayfair became quieter with people staying indoors and commercial activity decreasing. They were worried of any backlash that might

happen from the black South African population, from whom they already felt threatened.

This event even had an effect on Somalis all around the world – and to some extent in the whole Muslim world. Since 9/11, every time there is a major "Islamic" terrorist attack, Muslims, and in this case Somalis in particular, are over and over again perceived as a major threat to international security, as several respondents asserted, especially Somali-Americans and Somali-Canadians residing in Nairobi. This has repercussions in the way collective identity is built and strength as a form of resilience to the dominating international media discourses is formed, as I will be exploring in the next chapters.

Ethical considerations

As I explained in the prologue to this thesis, my contact with Somalis came initially through my friendship with a colleague at the university I was working at in Nairobi. As I entered her world I realised all the misconceptions built around Somali women and the need to tell another story about them, based on their own visions and opinions of what it means to be Somali in the contemporary world.

Throughout these pages, I have tried to represent Somali women in an open and honest way based on the stories I heard from them during interviews and fieldwork and in the observations I made in the time I spent in Eastleigh and Mayfair.

I have tried to do so in the most dialogical way possible, taking into account their views and ideas, allowing their own voices, normally silenced or unheard in the public domain, to guide this research, in order to showcase their agency and decision-making power and to present a counter narrative to the mainstream representations of Somali women.

I don't intend to present an all-optimistic account of Somali women's lives or to deny other harsh scenarios that Somali women face but to overcome the victimisation under which they tend to be portrayed. I think it is important to showcase other aspects of their lives and especially to give them voice to explain themselves and their world.

It should be taken into account the role that my own identity, as a non-Somali, white, middle-class, foreign researcher played when I was in the field. This initially created some small misunderstandings, as both Mayfair and Eastleigh are not especially

occupied by such people, with many women assuming I was working for the UN or some other NGO. It was common that they brought me their documentation to check if I could help. Once in Eastleigh, on a day when my regular research assistant could not come with me, I was accompanied by her sister who introduced me to a group of woman, without me knowing, as an UN worker doing some kind of survey. I was surprised at the unusual openness of these women and their willingness to talk to me, only to learn later when we left what my "temp researcher" had told them about me. I was horrified at the lie and the consequences it may have had for my fieldwork but she was really proud of her "strategy", explaining that without it the women wouldn't have talked to me. Luckily, this episode didn't have any further consequences regarding my identity as a researcher and none of the data collected that day has been used.

However, during the interviews and participant observation, the fact that all the claims and observations women made were addressed to me, also had some implications for the way they wanted to be seen and how they wanted to be portrayed. This has been taken into account when analysing the data and that is the reason why participant observation became very useful for this research, to determine whether the information women were disclosing was concordant or discordant with their acts in their daily lives.

The information I have included in these pages has been carefully chosen not to cause compromise my informants' reputation or wellbeing. Names have been changed, as well as some distinctive personal details of the respondents, in order to ensure the anonymity of the women who participated in this research. Nevertheless, confidentiality and anonymity could not be completely guaranteed during participant observation, as my presence was very noticeable in both neighbourhoods.

I am aware that I disclose some sensitive information, such as the migration routes Somalis take from Somalia to South Africa and from South Africa to the United States, however I don't give particular details on this and I consider it is important for this research to explain the movements of Somali migrants as they play a very important part in their "transnational nomadic" life.

Self-narratives may also seem intrusive in the participants' lives and identity. I took all the necessary steps to avoid or minimise any distress that might arise from this study in line with best practice: all the interviewees were with women 18 years old and older, the interviewees were informed of the nature of the research, who gave verbal consent prior

to the interview, the verbal consent was on-going, and participants were able to stop the interview at any point if they wished to do so.

Apart of my research assistants, no other women were paid to participate in this research. Even if some of them experienced a situation of economic need, I made it clear from the beginning that participation in this study was voluntary and un-remunerated. All the women that decided to participate did so in an open and enthusiastic way; even if their circumstances at the moment were far from ideal, they were happy to talk and express their views and opinions and many actually asked for their names not to be changed, as they wanted their own voices to be heard. Nevertheless, I decided to change all names in order to ensure anonymity, so as to be sure that I would not cause any trouble or distress in their lives.

In the last year of my fieldwork in Mayfair, I started working with a photojournalist in a parallel research project *Metropolitan Nomads: A Journey through Joburg's Little Mogadishu*[12] that sought to visually document the daily life of the neighbourhood through photography and video recordings.

The use of visual documentation brought with it unforeseen ethical quandaries. To start with the use of photography, for obvious reasons, cannot guarantee the anonymity and confidentiality of the subject being photographed and raised other complicated ethical questions that could not always be answered: How do we navigate ongoing consent on the field? How do we obtain verbal consent to photograph a group of people participating in a social event, such as a wedding? Where is the visual material going to be displayed? Is verbal consent at the moment that the photo is taken enough or should written consent be obtained later on for the publication of the photos?

Moreover, as this project was the result of a collaboration with a photojournalist, it should also be taken into account the different sets of ethics at play: the academic ethical considerations, more mindful and strict that have to be approved by the university´s ethics committee versus photojournalism ethics, which are much more relaxed and where the subjects in the photos will normally never see the photographs

[12] The project is supported by the African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS) and MOVE: Methods.Visual. Explore from the University of the Witwatersrand. An exhibition under the same name was on display at Wits Anthropology Museum from 3rd of September to 9th of October 2015. This work was also showcased during the 12th Somali Studies International Association Congress held at the University of Helsinki from 19th to 23rd of August 2015 and at the OSISA Gallery (Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa) in Johannesburg from the 22nd of February to 22nd of March 2016.

taken of them. This was a constant source of discussion with the photojournalist I was working with and as Posel and Ross put it, these kinds of situations highlight:

> The ethical conflicts and conundrums that arise in the thick of fieldwork, when researchers have to respond as human beings as much as exponents of disciplinary ethical codes, and when the unanticipated complexities of social relationships in the field throw up the latent tensions or ambiguities in the codes themselves. (Posel and Ross 2014, 1)

During the fieldwork for this particular project, there was one particular episode that highlighted and illustrated all these tensions. The photo below was taken during a *todoba*, a traditional ceremony taking place seven days after the wedding and only attended by women.



Photo by Salym Fayad

This photo showcases a woman dancing with a yellow scarf covering her head and her face. This became the flagship photo of the exhibition and the photojournalist decided to use it in promotional postcards used to publicise the exhibition; he didn't't see any problem in using this image as the woman could not be recognised. However, a postcard ended up in this woman´s hands and she called us, extremely distressed. Her

family and friends assumed she has received some money for this photo. Her husband accused her of selling her body and all her friends were calling her asking for money. It turned out that even though we thought no one would recognise her in the photos, everyone in Mayfair knew it was her. And even if she had given her consent to have the photo taken, she was never asked for permission to use her photo as a promotional image. We went to meet her in order to apologise, explain what happened and to try to get her consent to use the photo. We spent three hours inside a car – one of the few private spaces in Mayfair – with her brother and her explaining why this photo was important for our project. After we profusely apologised, the woman accepted the use of her photo and even asked if we could give her a larger copy of the image. Deep inside, she was evidently happy and proud of her image, but all the politics and social pressures surrounding Muslim women's bodies were at play in this particular situation.

Even if I have only used photography as a minor part the methodology of this research, I have told this story to showcase the different and sometimes conflicting sets of ethics that served as points of reference here, the one of the researcher, the one of the photojournalist and the one of the woman photographed. I was concerned that we didn't get consent prior to circulating the photo as a promotional image, but agreed that the woman could be hardly recognised; the photojournalist didn't see any problem at all using the image, as for him the person could not be recognised; meanwhile the woman who had been photographed experienced it as a small personal tragedy damaging her honor.

Moreover, this story does not only showcase the different sets of ethics at play and the different perceptions of the same object (the photograph) but makes clear how consent should be ongoing and "an active and relatively open-ended process in the research field (rather than something that is all done and dusted ahead of the research when ethical clearance was secured)" (Posel and Ross 2014, 5).

Furthermore, this episode also highlights questions around power and decision making. Who should have the last word in the way photographic data is used? The photographer, the researcher or the person photographed? I don't have a straightforward answer to these questions but in my opinion, and I write this more as an human being than as researcher, it should always be the person photographed who should decide if their photograph should be used and in what context or in what kind of platform.

As the photographer Paul Weinberg explains:

> Whenever we take photographs, we have a responsibility, and that responsibility is to be human, really, finally. You need to make choices and decisions when you take those photographs. It's not just about your camera and your camera bag. It's a whole set of values that is going to have consequences and you need to be wired to them and take responsibility. (Weinberg, in Posel and Ross 2014, 252).

Therefore, to conclude this section, I argue that participant consent is not always straight forward but a complex process based on a built trust between researcher and participant. Consent should also be ongoing not only throughout the research process but revisited after fieldwork is completed and based on an honest and open dialogue between all the parties involved in the research process.

Conclusion

In this chapter I laid out the methodology I used for this research. I started the work initially by using only a narrative approach to access the process of identity formation among Somali women in Nairobi and Johannesburg, but moved to a more ethnographic approach when the former didn't feel sufficient to obtain the data needed for this research.

I dedicated the first part of this chapter to explain some theories on narrative and how it works to create and organise meaning. Narrative plays a key role in the construction of the self, as this is always dialogical and performative. I then went on to explain how these narrative principles work in order to access and understand identity formation processes, but how they get distorted along the research interview context, as the narratives produced within them are detached from a natural interactional context.

I then criticised the life story and semi-structured research interview methodologies by arguing for a more interactional approach and for the inclusion of participant observation in order to access other kinds of stories. Participant observation also allows for seeing if the stories women told were concordant or discordant with the practices of their life, providing in this sense a more complete approach to this study.

I have also reflected on how ethnographic writing becomes a form of subjective interpretation of reality and reviewed the most relevant ethnographic works I used in this research.

I finally explained the technicalities and details of fieldwork and reflected on the use of an interpreter when collecting the data for this research. I also reflected on the attack on Westgate Mall in Nairobi that took place by the end of my fieldwork and the consequences it had for Somalis in Nairobi and Johannesburg and how this also affected the identity formation process of Somalis as a collective.

Finally I presented the ethical considerations I took when conducting this research, the quandaries that arose along and after fieldwork was completed, and how I have tried to take an open and dialogical approach to the lives of the Somali women I present in these pages.

In the next chapter, I describe in detail the two settings for this research: the African cosmopolitan hubs of Nairobi and Johannesburg in relation to Somalis and the experiences and expectations they live within them, as well as the interconnectedness between these two cities and with the rest of the Somali diaspora.

Chapter 2
The Port and the Island

> *Every morning you have two choices: continue to sleep with your dreams or wake up and chase them. The choice is yours.*

As mentioned in the Introduction, Somalis can be found nowadays all around the world. The transnational networks this diaspora has created are shaped by multi-layered connections in which people, goods, money, ideas and practices move. In this sense the Somali diaspora appears to incarnate "the five dimensions of global cultural flows"[13] proposed by Appadurai (1996): among its people you can find women like Heda, a mother of five young children and a successful business woman who runs Nura Lodge in Mayfair and who previously resided in London, Egypt and Nairobi; cultural products, like music video clips featuring Somali "traditional" music, in which women appear with "open" hair and white robes in a Horn-of-Africa setting are produced in London and are consumed in Toronto and Nairobi; the fifteen online accounts of Amal that she uses to communicate with family and friends all around the world; money transfer systems such as *hawala* that allows money to quickly and reliably travel from the USA to the streets of Eastleigh so a relative can start a business; political ideas about the fate of the country and the role of the terrorist group Al-Shabaab are discussed as vigorously by Somalis in Mogadishu as in Minnesota.

Books such as *From Mogadishu to Dixon* (Kusow and Bjork 2007) or Nuruddin Farah's *Yesterday. Tomorrow. Voices from the Somali Diaspora* (2000) focus on how a forced exile has transformed many aspects of the lives of those who had to flee Somalia in the aftermath of the war – transformations that not only occur at the individual level but that also affect "economic, social and political processes" (Kusow and Bjork 2007), at the same time that a collective Somali identity, known as *soomaalinimoo* or Somaliness is performed and renegotiated in different contexts around the world. The transnational situation most Somalis live in has also transformed families in ways such that their

[13] The five are ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes.

members can be spread around several continents (Al-Sharmani 2007) and the investment in the diaspora plays a crucial role in the reconstruction of Somalia itself (Farah 2009).

Apart from in the USA, the UK, northern Europe or Australia, Somalis also settle in other African countries. Probably the most significant work in this regard is Cindy Horst's *Transnational Nomads*, which mostly focuses on the experiences of Somali refugees in the camps of northern Kenya. When it comes to Somalis in African urban centres, the main focus seems to be on those living in Egypt (Al-Sharmani 2010, Kroner 2010) Nairobi (Carrier 2015, Carrier and Lochery 2013, Campbell 2006) and Johannesburg (Jinnah 2010; Sadouni 2009).

Where is Mogadishu?

I met 23-year-old Waris from Puntland in Johannesburg when she was living in a room in Mayfair with other three Somali women. She had come to Johannesburg two years ago, in search of a better life, after having previously resided in Nairobi for three years, where she studied English and Community Development in one of the many Eastleigh colleges. Her family had sent her to Kenya with an aunt so she could have an education and better opportunities, but after finishing her studies and being unable to find a job there, she came to Johannesburg, also with the economic support from her family. Once here, things were not going as she and her family had expected. She was unable to study any further and after a failed business in Jeppe Street, she didn't find another job so she remained economically dependent on her relatives. One day, she disappeared. Her phone was found switched off and she was not replying to my messages. I later learnt from some of her friends, that her relatives couldn't keep supporting her and sent her back to Nairobi. Some months later, when I was in Nairobi, I tried to contact her via Skype. When I finally found her, to my surprise she was in Indonesia. During our conversation, she related how, in a period of six months, she went from Johannesburg back to Nairobi, then to Somalia, and after finding some "trouble" there, she went back to Kenya from where she took a boat to Australia. She was unable to reach her desired destination, ending instead in an Indonesian island, where she was initially helped by locals and then relocated to an UNHCR camp, where she is still is couple of years later.

Waris' case is not unique. Nairobi and Johannesburg are deeply connected in the migration route of many Somalis, as many of them living in Johannesburg have journeyed through or resided previously in Nairobi, which gives rise to strong social networks linking these two cities.

Both cities have also become transitional places for Somalis as many of them journey through or temporarily inhabit these two cities that are used as platforms to get to Western countries. However, a more stable Somali population also exist in both places.[14] The Somali community in Nairobi, formed by refugees, Somali-Kenyans and diaspora returnees, is bigger and more established than the one in Johannesburg, and offers a larger network of support for Somalis transiting through or living in the city.

Meanwhile in Johannesburg, a much smaller Somali community is found and isolation seems to be the main collective feeling. Many Somalis also see the city as a transitional place by those who arrive here with the aim of being relocated later on as refugees to the USA, Canada or any other Western country. However, the city is also perceived as a land of opportunities; its thriving economy, quite unique in the African context, makes it a treasure island for many African migrants. This is also the case for Somalis, who endure a tough journey through the African continent full of great expectations that start disappearing as soon as they reach the city.

In both countries, Somalis have also transformed the two neighbourhoods of Eastleigh and Mayfair into two "little Mogadishus". Distinctive "Somali" businesses, restaurants and products, together with the reproduction of cultural and religious practices recreate at a small scale the social, economic and cultural everyday life of a peaceful Mogadishu that no longer exists. Moreover, these symbolic recreations of the lost city, spaces in which everyday practices take place, also maintain some of the commercial and cosmopolitan spirit that the Somali capital once had as one of the main hubs in the Indian Ocean. Eastleigh and Mayfair have become commercial and economic global hubs for the Somali diaspora, which make them some of the few places in the African continent where urban refugees can be independent from humanitarian aid (Campbell 2006).

[14] There is no exact data of how many Somalis live in each city.

A comparative study between the two cities showcases the different transnational connections among the Somali diaspora, while allowing for the noting of the similarities and differences that take place in two contexts. Moreover, it can help to understand the multi-layered dynamics of meaning-making that are taking place across and within the Somali diaspora. In this way, I hope to contribute to an understanding of how meaning is created and organised in an increasingly disjunctive world (Appadurai 1996).

In the next section I will describe the context Somalis encounter in South Africa and Kenya and then focus specifically on Nairobi and Johannesburg and the journeys Somalis endure between the two cities. I will approach the description of the two cities and my further analysis based on the meaning the two cities have for Somalis, on the way they imagine and experience these two places, on the expectation they built and the realities they find.

Between hostility and cosmopolitanism: The situation of Somalis in Kenya and South Africa

Kenya and South Africa are two of the countries in Africa that attract the most Somali migrants. Kenya has a long history as a Somali refugee-receiving nation, due to its geographical proximity to Somalia and historical ties. Recently, the number of Somalis refugees in Kenya rose to 409,199 in September 2015 (UNHCR 2015a). But this figure must be taken as an estimate because the Somali diaspora in Kenya is integrated not only with refugees living in the northern camps, where UNHCR makes its population counts, but also with urban refugees in Nairobi and other Kenyan cities (Campbell, 2009). Simultaneously, the Somali diaspora in Kenya is integrated with Somalis that has obtained a legal status and count as Kenyans and Western diaspora returnees.

There is no exact data of the number of Somalis in South Africa. The UNHCR estimated a count of 24,000 in January 2015 (UNHCR 2015b). Somalis started arriving in South Africa after the civil war started and the droughts that devastated the country during the early nineties. Jinnah (2010) identifies and describes three other waves of Somali migration to South Africa: in the mid-nineties; in 2000, when Ethiopia invaded Somalia; and the last wave of arrivals between 2010–2011 as a result of the droughts and famines.

Even if South Africa and Kenya represent very different destinations for Somalis, both countries also share certain characteristics for them. To start with, the geographical position of Kenya and South Africa in relation to Somalia and the permeable African borders make them more accessible to reach from Somalia than Western countries. And in many cases both countries become a trampoline to relocate later to the US, Canada or Europe.

In both countries, Somalis also encounter a great deal of hostility by members of the local population and governmental organisations (Jinnah 2010; Sadouni 2009; Murunga 2009) as the recurrent xenophobic attacks on Somali shopkeepers in South African townships and the massive arrests by the Kenyan police taking place in April 2014 show. However, the reasons behind this hostility are different in both countries.

In the case of Kenya, hostility against Somalis is not a new phenomenon. It has been present since colonial times due to conflicts in both countries caused by the territorial division and introduction of borders during and after the rule by Western countries. The pastoralist way of life of many Somalis didn't recognise borders and Somali nomads used to move freely around the different regions of the Horn and the East of Africa. The introduction of borders during colonisation divided Somalis into different territories administered by different colonial powers.[15] The disputes between Somalia and Kenya originated in the North-Eastern Province (NEP), a semi-arid area inhabited by Somali nomads that the British colonial authorities annexed to Kenya at the beginning of the twentieth century (Otunnu 1992). During the independence process in Kenya in 1963, both the Somali inhabitants of this region and the Somali government in Mogadishu, asked for this territory to be returned to Somalia, following the idea of reunification of all territories inhabited by Somali ethnic people under the unique territory of Greater Somalia; a request that was rejected both by the British and the later government of Jomo Kenyatta (Al-Safi 1995; Otunnu, 1992). This generated an independent and dissident vision of the Somalis living in this region in the Kenyan imagination.

Somalis in Kenya are normally stigmatised both by the government and its citizens. As the writer Farah notes: "In Kenya a Somali is either a *shifta*-bandit or a refugee" (Farah

[15] During the colonial times, Somalia was divided into: a Italian Somalia in the South; two British Somalia, Somaliland in the north east of the country and the north east region of the actual Kenya; French Somalia in the North (today Djibouti) and the region of the Ogaden in the West, which is today's region five of Ethiopia (Murunga 2009, 200).

2000, vii). Godwin Murunga (2009: 200) points out that this stereotypical vision of the Somali as a criminal has become part of the "state imagination" that filters down to the lower layers of the Kenyan citizenry. Current events, such as the military intervention of the Kenyan army in Somalia since October 2011 and the consequent terrorist attacks in Nairobi and Mombasa in the last couple of years, have exacerbated the hostile relations between the two countries and Somalis living in Kenya, especially in Nairobi, are constantly harassed by police demanding bribes in order not to arrest them as I will later explain.

South Africa doesn't share the conflict-ridden history with Somalia that Kenya does. Nevertheless, as Jinnah notes, Somalis encounter hostility in South Africa from: "government officials, public servants, hospitals and government departments and from ordinary citizens" (2010, 93). South Africa, being one of the most developed countries in sub-Saharan Africa, attracts great numbers of migrants from the rest of the continent. But it is also a country of great social and economic inequalities. As happens in many other places, the immigrant population is willing to undertake lower paid jobs or to start businesses where they offer products at lower prices, as it is the case with Somalis. Due to the mentioned inequalities, this is something not well received by some of the local black population and this hostility against migrants has tragically materialised in recurrent xenophobic attacks on different occasions, and is still on-going. Probably the most significant attacks took place in May 2008, leaving behind 64 dead and thousands displaced (Hassim et al. 2008) and more recently in January 2015.

The book, *Go Home or Die Here*, gives different clues to understanding the reasons behind this xenophobic violence. In the introduction it is noted that the South African ideal of the "rainbow nation" is just pure idealism and a less poetic metaphor is proposed of that of the onion:

> The rainbow becomes an onion: a way of imagining degrees of national belonging layered around an authentic core. In this view, the fragile outer skin is made up of black immigrants: Somalis, Congolese, and Zimbabweans (Worby et al. 2008, 16).

This xenophobic violence was more significant in townships, were many Somalis live running *spaza*[16] shops. During May 2008 black South Africans started attacking these

[16] Small convenience shops selling everyday goods found in South African townships.

shops, looting them and physically attacking and killing any Somali they could find. Jonny Steinberg (2014) gives a detailed account of this period through Asad, the main character of his last book, who narrates in first person the hardship, fear and horror of those days. One of most striking things about Asad's narration is that Somalis were assaulted by their South African customers and neighbours, who after the violence they provoked, simply apologised to them afterwards and then continued coming to buy from them as if nothing has happened. The xenophobic violence against Somalis running small *spazas* shops in townships, or as they call them "locations", is still an ongoing problem (Landau 2012).

In urban centres this xenophobia is not as violent but it also happens, especially in the form of verbal abuse. Several women I interviewed in Mayfair related how walking on the street or when in a taxi they were told by black South Africans "When Madiba dies we are going to kill you all".

Therefore, one can see that the hostility Somalis find in Kenya has a conflicted historical background while in South Africa it take the form of xenophobic attacks, which are mostly the result of the failure of the post-apartheid state in creating an egalitarian society both with respect to the guarantee of rights and access to resources. (Hassim et al. 2008; Pillay 2008; Mngxitama 2008).

However, apart from hostility, xenophobia and marginalisation, Somalis in Kenya and South Africa also find in these spaces that their Somaliness is contested, negotiated and transformed. They find themselves in these two cosmopolitan spaces an African modernity that flourishes while at the same time the urban areas of Eastleigh and Mayfair are deeply translocally connected to the Somali diaspora all around the world, as next chapter will explore.

Nairobi: The port of Somalia

Nairobi is nowadays one of the most rapidly changing urban metropolises in Africa. I first arrived in this city in 2006. The Nairobi you arrive today in 2014 is a very different place that the one I first saw. There is a construction boom happening in the centre and surrounding suburbs of the city: flashy glass office buildings mushrooming in the CBD, Westlands and Kilimani; new flats and houses being built almost everywhere to

accommodate a rapidly growing middle class; main roads have been expanded in order to ease the nightmare of the Nairobi traffic. The old Thika road, nowadays renamed as Thika Super Highway, with its six lanes, flyovers, tunnels and ring roads connecting it with other parts of the city is probably one of the most representative road works that has transformed the face of the city. Along its sides blocks of flats and chalet compounds have also proliferated, together with shopping malls and the project, already in construction, of Garden city, a massive 32-acre compound that will include "the biggest mall in East Africa", 500 houses and leisure facilities.

All this urban "development" contrasts enormously with the unpaved muddy roads of the townships surrounding the development boom areas. Just a few kilometres away from the Thika Highway lies Mathare, a slum in which around half a million people lives in metallic shacks without electricity or running water.

In the streets of Nairobi's city centre these stark contrasts come together in the inhabitants of the city. In the early afternoon, business men and women wearing their best suits come for meetings at Java House in Koniange Street, avoiding the street kids inhaling glue they find on their way. In the busy Moi Avenue, populated by street vendors selling fruits and disabled beggars, a disoriented masai looking for a building he cannot find asks busy passers-by for directions. As the sun sets, queues of *matatus*[17] wait to be filled with people they would drive to any corner of Nairobi, sex workers start to arrive to their designated spots along Koniange Street as they pass some scared tourists in khaki outfits heading for sundowners at the Norfolk Hotel. The central mosque starts calling for the evening prayers. Among this mix of people populating Nairobi's streets, ethnic Somali men and women, highly recognisable by their physical features and their way of dressing, are fully part of the everyday life of the city as they come to town to shop, work, to meet friends at cafés or to pray at the central mosque, as many other persons living in Nairobi would do.

Along Mboya Street, hundreds of *matatus* accumulate, as they wait to leave for the northern neighbourhoods of Nairobi. The chaos is continuous. It never changes but it's always different. The street is always busy with people selling and buying things. But the road is even busier, full of white or colourful *matatus*, some moving, some others

[17] Kenyan mini buses.

waiting to filled up with people. The majority just stuck in traffic. Loud music comes from most of them as people melt inside in sweat.

At one side of the road, opposite the fire station, the 6/9 minibuses that are going to Eastleigh make a perfect moving line, waiting their turn for departure. The bus has a double number – 6/9 – because it can take two routes to Eastleigh, either through Pangani or through Karioko market and River Road.

Some Somali men and women wearing black *burkas* are about to board the first one that is already getting full. The buses are a bit bigger than the average *matatu*. Some are pink, blue or yellow but the great majority are painted black, as if they were wearing a *burka*, too. The entrance to Eastleigh begins here.

The next morning I get into one of these buses. I am going to visit Amal in Eastleigh; she has invited me for lunch at her sister's flat. We go via Pangani, stalls and shops on the sides of the untarred roads display their goods in the front: sofas, beds or graves stones.

After spending a long while sitting on the traffic of Juja Road that moves very slowly, the driver decides to take a detour thought a side untarred road, full of bumps at the back streets of Eastleigh where Kenyan street kids collect and pile up plastic bottles, with rubbish spread around them, rotting under the hot sun.

The bus route ends at Eastleigh 1st Avenue, a muddy road full of massive potholes filled with brown stagnant water. Amal is waiting for me there. After years of negligence, the Nairobi Council is finally building proper tarred roads. According to some passers-by the company undertaking this task is Israeli, "*That´s why they are taking so long and everything is so messy*", they say. Tractors alternate with *matatus* and *boda-bodas*[18] along the avenues that have become a construction site, mushroomed with improvised street vendors. They are in the process of building the foundation of the road for which some digging is necessary first. This has created a situation in which the pavement with the entrances to the shops and restaurants is around two meters above the muddy road, so to cross from one side to another one literally has to climb or use one of the improvised and unstable wooden stairs or ramps. We go to pick up a suitcase she has bought as she is travelling to Addis-Ababa the next week. There she will meet her

[18] Motorbike taxis.

future husband: a cousin that lives in the UK and who is also travelling to Addis where the wedding will be celebrated. After the wedding she will wait there until the process of family reunification is finished and she can also move to the UK. Many Somalis living in East Africa choose to marry in Ethiopia as the process of resettlement seems to be easier from there.

After getting her suitcase in Jam Street, we get a taxi to her house in Pumwani, which she says is not far but the road is dusty and dirty. The taxi stops outside her compound of several blocks of flats. She stays in a top flat in the corner with her sister's family. Amal has been staying with them for a couple of years. We enter the flat from the kitchen, where Muna, Amal's niece, just a few years younger than her, greets us. Today she didn't go to school because she was not feeling well so she is staying at home taking care of her younger brothers. There is also a house help, a Kenyan woman. The kitchen has a small balcony, with astonishing views of Nairobi city centre, where they do the laundry and some of the cooking in a charcoal stove. They are cooking a "Somali pizza", Amal explains, a wheat base with goat meat and tomato on top. She removes her *hijab* and takes her new suitcase to the big living room, an ample space with a big plasma TV on one of the walls. She brings a bunch of clothes and packs them, together with a couple of body lotions and books from her courses in English and Community Development that she took at Dallas School. Her luggage is now done. I wonder what kind of dreams and fears she also put in there. When the pizza is ready we eat it sitting on the living room floor, accompanied by salad and soda. The kids join us. After we finish we chat for a bit. Muna, who was born in Kenya, tells me she want to study Medicine at Nairobi University, but even though she got very good marks for her A-levels they are giving her problems registering. She thinks it is because she is Somali-Kenyan. When we are ready to leave, Amal puts on her *hijab*. This time we walk back to Eastleigh 1st avenue and we pass the garbage dump and the kids. Amal tells me they are orphans. We get to Jam Street through the back roads. It is a very hot afternoon. People come and go, especially women, all wearing *hijabs*. Others cook and sell snacks on stoves on the streets. *It feels like home!* Amal exclaims as she takes me to the bus stop.

And Eastleigh has become a home away from home for the majority of its inhabitants; even if it is only a transitional one, they feel integrated in the everyday life of the

neighbourhood where a "Somali" way of life flourishes everywhere and where the movement of people and goods is constant.

Three distinct groups form the Somali population in Nairobi: Somali-Kenyans, Kenyan nationals of Somali ethnicity, and refugees fleeing Somalia and diaspora returnees coming back from Western countries.

Somali-Kenyans, known as *sijuis* by other Somalis, hold a Kenyan passport and have been living in Nairobi and other regions of Kenya – mostly the coast and the nort-eastern region – for generations. Kiswahili is their mother tongue together with English that they learn at school. Some of them also speak Somali but this a minority in the younger generations. Depending on their class and economic status, they live in different areas of Nairobi such as Westlands, Kilimani, Pangani, South C, Komrok or Eastleigh. As I will explore in the chapter about identity, they consider themselves both Kenyan and Somalis. They perform and reproduce many of the cultural practices they consider as truly "Somali", such as the way of cooking or dressing or the rituals at especial events such as wedding celebrations. They are normally looked down by Somalis from Somalia as they cannot speak Somali properly and they don't know "Somali culture" well enough. Actually *sijui* literally means "I don't know" in Kiswahili.

Somali refugees have been fleeing to Nairobi and settling in Eastleigh since the beginning of the war in Somalia in 1991, even though the first Somalis – including Somali-Kenyans – started living in this area from the 1970s (Steinberg 2014). The number increased in the last ten years as a result of the security situation in Somalia, the severe droughts, consequent famines and the rise of Al-Shabaab in the country. The majority of the late arrivals are undocumented refugees who cross the permeable border to Kenya and go to Nairobi directly. Others register and maybe stay for a while at the refugee camps in northern Kenya but don't want to live there so they settle in Eastleigh and just go back to the camps to sign when UNHCR conducts its recounts in order to keep their refugee status and "papers" to show the police in case of harassment or arrest. They have also become the main target of the Kenyan police who constantly run raids in Eastleigh, harassing Somalis and asking them for bribes in order not to be arrested due to their undocumented situation. I will came back to this issue later on, as this harassment is a constant fact affecting Somalis living in Nairobi, whether they are

refugees or not. These raids were taken to another level altogether when the massive raids and arrests took place in Eastleigh in March 2014.

Finally, during the last few years there have been an increased number of Somali returnees from the Western diaspora. They hold American, Canadian or British passports and they mostly settle in the upper-class suburb of Kilimani. They have chosen to settle in Nairobi, a place where they can live in peace, enjoy its cosmopolitan facilities whilst at the same time be close to Somalia. Many of the women I spoke to go often to Somalia. The reasons from their return are various: from wanting to "give back" to their motherland communities, to the desire of their children to grow up in an African setting, far from the West, so they don't get "too modernised".

According to Charton-Bigot, this seems to be part of the nature of Nairobi, which "because of its origins and its nature … started as a place of passage and never really, for the majority of its inhabitants, a place for a definitive life" (2006, vii).

In this sense, for Somali refugees and diaspora returnees, Nairobi constitutes a transitional place to get out of or get into Somalia. Its geographical position together with the historical, cultural and social links between the city and Somalia have made it an entry and exit point into and out of the country, not only for people but also for goods, money, ideas and cultural and different social practices, thus making Nairobi, and specially Eastleigh, one or the busiest ports of Somalia.

In its origins, during the colonial times, Eastleigh used to be the "Indian" neighbourhood of Nairobi. Somali refugees chose this area to settle because there were some Somalis already residing there and due to the commercial links they had with the Indian population that later started to move to other suburbs of Nairobi such as Ngara or Parklands. Since the outbreak of the civil war in 1991, large numbers of Somali refugees started to live in or transit through Eastleigh, transforming "a quiet residential suburb to a major East African commercial hub" (Carrie and Lechery 2013, 334).

There are several studies concerned with how Somali refugees interact with the thriving economy of a neighbourhood (Kantai, 2011; Herz, 2007; Campbell, 2006) and Lindley (2010) gives a detailed account of the role of remittances from the Western diaspora to contribute to building this economy.

When the first refugees started to arrive to Eastleigh, they started informal businesses, such as selling gold in the lodges they were staying so they could continue their journey to somewhere else. Twenty years later Eastleigh has become an economic hub where banks are open for twelve hours seven days a week (Kantai 2011) and the neighbourhood is nowadays described as a global business centre (Kantai 2011; Herz 2007; Campbell 2006). The business people of Eastleigh import mostly electronics and textiles from Asia and the Middle East and sell them at very competitive prices not only in Nairobi, but all around the East African region and the world, due again to the strong transnational links among the diaspora.

These merchants are not only men, with many women also running and owning businesses; indeed, it was a Somali business woman, who saw the potential of Garissa Lodge,[19] transforming it into a shopping centre (Herz 2007). During the 1990s the phenomenon of "Dubai Mammas" appeared, women that travelled to the Middle East to buy textiles and electronic products to resell them later in Eastleigh (Kantai 2011). This trend is still quite common, especially with gold, as many women travel to the United Arab Emirates to invest in and bring back the finest jewellery made of the precious yellow metal, a sought after commodity in any women's dowry. It is women that mostly run the gold market in Eastleigh; several stalls selling rings, necklaces, bangles and earrings of yellow gold that they carefully weigh in their scales according to the price of gold of the day.

Walking through the lively streets of Eastleigh today, the whole world seems to be represented in the shops and stalls populating the busy street and avenues, as one can find, at a cheaper place that anywhere else in East Africa: the latest version of an iPhone, imported directly from China, soft textiles coming from Indonesia, Palestinian scarfs, fabrics from different origins to make any kind of dress, incense and gold from Dubai, coconuts, oranges and pineapples from Kenya and spices from every corner of the Indian Ocean. The Good Start School, The Disney Bar and Restaurant, a rusty stall with a name so far away from any Disney movie that it seems even more ironic**.** The streets are really dirty and messy, the unpaved roads contrast with some of the most modern buildings with their glossy and shiny glass-and-metal look. 2nd Avenue has

[19] Situated in the corner of Jam Street and 1st Avenue, Garissa Lodge is an iconic place in Eastleigh. It was one of the first lodges a newly arrived Somalis to Eastleigh would go to to stay in the early 1990s. There, people, especially women, started to sell their gold in their rooms, as a way to survive. Later it became a popular mall.

already been tarred and the stalls here are tidier. This is the area of beauty products, neatly towered on top of one another according to size and colour, as Eastleigh businesses are distributed thematically. There is the TV mall, the *bui-bui*[20] mall, electronics, mattresses, gold market and gold shops. As I walk by I hear *muzungu, muzungu,* being called out from here and there**.** I feel the surprised gaze of passers-by, some women tell me: "*Muzungu, we are here because of you! Give us some money!*"

Somali refugees have made of Eastleigh a transnational place par excellence, as they arrive in Nairobi with the desire of going somewhere else, a transit that can last from just a couple of weeks to several years. Refugees come not only from Mogadishu or the south of the country where Al-Shaabab is stronger and conflict part of everyday life, but also from the more peaceful, semi-independent and relatively stable regions of Somaliland and Puntland. When I asked some of the women coming from these more stable areas for their reasons for leaving if the area was safe, their responses were always similar: *There is nothing there, I want to have a better life, I want to help my family…* Poverty and lack of opportunities become here the motor of migration rather than war and conflict.

Even if the majority of Eastleigh inhabitants are always in transit, becoming a floating population, there are certain structures in place that remain, allowing the transit to continue. Probably the most important of them is a thriving transnational economy based on strong kinship links. Newcomers to Eastleigh normally rely on the help of their relatives. This help can take many forms, from offering a space to sleep in Eastleigh during the time or their transit, to sending remittances from the Western diaspora so the person can live. If the family is wealthy, some distant uncle or cousin living in Canada, can decide to invest in a business in Eastleigh that his relative will run. Relatives and clansmen often decide which will be the next destination of the person in transit and economically support the move, something they call being sponsored. Sometimes this decision can take a long time or things can go wrong and a relative that was supposed to sponsor you cannot longer do it. This is one of the reasons why the transit through Nairobi can sometimes take years.

[20] Kiswahili word for *abaya*: "a simple, loose over-garment, essentially a robe-like dress, worn by some women in parts of the Muslim world" (Yarwood 1978, 9).

This was the case of Samira, who left Bossaso in Puntland, following the footsteps of her sisters, one in Johannesburg, another in Addis. A distant cousin offered to sponsor her to go to London but after she arrived in Eastleigh her cousin changed his mind. "This happens a lot," my research assistant clarifies. Samira has now been in Eastleigh for several months living with some relatives that support her together with her sisters that send her some "little" money when they can. After the London plan didn't work out, Samira then thought of going to Libya via Sudan so she could reach Europe from there, but her sisters persuaded her not to, as this route is very dangerous and she could be robbed, raped or even die at sea. So for now she keeps staying in Eastleigh and even if she is stressed and suffering from *buufis* due to the lack of money and the impossibility of helping her family back home, she is also happy because now she has hope, founded in the desire of belonging to a "better reality".

Contrary to the extended belief supported by politicians, common people and the international security agenda to fight terrorism, Eastleigh is not an Al-Shabaab recruiting site. Most Somalis living here actually left Somalia because of the terrorist group and as most informants repeated they have no intention on engaging in that kind of political activity in their new destination.

The head of the Kenyan Transitional Program (KTI), an initiative of USAID to empower young Somalis and Kenyans in Eastleigh and its surroundings in order to keep them away from joining the terrorist group, also corroborated this. The programme ran from 2011 to 2014 and their main objective was **"**building self-confidence and self-identity in at-risk youth to inspire them to reject terrorism" (USAID 2014).

As the head of this programme declared: "We don't create jobs. We build their capacity and skills and then connect them to financial institutions". The programme focuses on five areas: working with government, leadership and development, rehabilitation support, cultural and recreational activities, and livelihood support.

Given the complex history of US foreign policy in the region, following the disastrous intervention of "Restore Hope" in Somalia that culminated with the shot down of two American Black Hawk helicopters in Mogadishu in 1993 together with the attacks at US Embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salam in 1998 and the blast of US Cole in 2000 outside the coast of Yemen, USAID programmes in the area, nowadays often operate

through local organisations. This allows them not to be perceived as USAID as such at the same time that ensures them certain control on the area.

This is the case of KTI, that works with several local organisations and the different initiatives they offer are normally well received by the local population, especially impoverished Kenyans living in Machengo or Mathare.[21]

They engage with local organisations providing funding so that different workshops and activities can take place. For example they facilitated a workshop with the Kenyan police to build trust in governmental organisations; funded meeting supporting groups at Tawakal Clinic; created a basketball team and a drama workshop and invested in *Eastleighwood*, where young Somalis are producing films, and started programmes at different rehabilitation centres.

During the three years that the programme lasted, they also conducted a research project carried out by a team of consultants and the findings pointed to the impoverished slum of Machengo as one of the main recruiting sites for Al-Shabaab in Kenya. The terrorist group recruits young Kenyans, who in most cases are not even Muslims under the promise of a better life for their families. However, the stigma of Al-Shabaab operating in Eastleigh has a profound effect in the everyday life of Somalis inhabiting the neighbourhood and the rest of the city, especially after the Westgate terrorist attack, with police conducting raids in the area every now and then in order to arrest people on the grounds that they are terrorists.

However, what can be found on the streets of Eastleigh are gangs of youths that commit petty crime likes stealing smart phones or money form people. These gangs are mostly formed from young Somalis coming from the Western diaspora that have been deported from the receiving countries and have no strong family links in Nairobi. The gangs operate in different areas of Eastleigh and maintain a very territorial sense of what belongs to each gang. Fights between the different gangs about operating territories are common. The biggest and most popular of them are the *Superpowers*.

One of the most widespread complaints of Somalis residing in Eastleigh is the harassment they suffer from the Kenyan police, who constantly raid the neighbourhood under the excuse of finding and detaining undocumented refugees and possible

[21] Two slums surrounding Eastleigh.

terrorists. Somalis claim that they are as seen as "walking ATMs" by the highly corrupt Kenyan police, who constantly demand bribes in order not to be arrested [22]. A young man declared that he never leaves the home without a KES 1000 note, in case of a possible arrest. These arrests have been happening constantly on and off but have increased since the Westgate terrorist attack in September 2013. From January 2014 police started arresting women and children for the first time, which led to many women deciding not to leave their houses in the evenings for fear of being arrested. These arrests also create bizarre situations, like the case of a Somali-Kenyan woman who one evening left her house in a hurry to buy some goods without taking her ID and ended up arrested under the claim that she was an undocumented refugee (Aljazeera 2013).

The constant harassment by police culminated in April 2014 with the arrests of thousands of Somalis under the name of fighting "Islamic Terrorism". A bill was passed by the Interior Ministry, which allowed police to detain any undocumented migrants, with the government even encouraging Kenyan citizen to denounce any person they may know in this undocumented situation. Hundreds of men, women and children were taken to the Kasarani stadium where they remained for several days with scarce food, water and toilet facilities[23]. The media along with humanitarian organisations were banned from accessing the premises. This event made many Somalis leave Kenya, either back to Somali or somewhere else. However, those who could not leave had to live dealing with the stigma of being considered undocumented migrants or terrorists. This is probably worst for Somali-Kenyans, who are Kenyan citizens in their own right, but are considered as "dangerous" foreigners. A Somali-Kenyan I interviewed in Nairobi complained of how this has made her everyday life extremely difficult with people, as the police are always suspicious of her.

To recapitulate, Nairobi and specially Eastleigh, where the majority of the Somali population in the city is concentrated, functions as a central port for the Somali diaspora

[22] For an historical reflection on the treatment recieved by Somali refugees in Kenya see Otunnu 1992. For more recent accounts on the abuses on Somalis committed by Kenyan police see Human Rights Watch reports: "*You Are All Terrorists" Kenyan Police Abuse of Refugees in Nairobi* (2013*), Criminal Reprisals Kenyan Police and Military Abuses against Ethnic Somalis* (2012), "*Welcome to Kenya" Police Abuse of Somali Refugees* (2010)*, "Bring the Gun or You'll Die" Torture, Rape, and Other Serious Human Rights Violations by Kenyan Security Forces in the Mandera Triangle* (2009a) *and From Horror to Hopelessness Kenya's Forgotten Somali Refugee Crisis* (2009b).

[23] For an account of how these even unfolded see: UNHCR 2014, Kushkush 2014, HRW 2014 a/b, Migiro 2014, Muhumed 2014 and Miller 2014.

that uses its proximity to Somalia either to leave the country, as refugees do, or to get into, as diaspora returnees are increasingly doing. It also functions a cargo port, as it is probably the main node of commerce for the Somali diaspora, providing goods not only for Kenya, but for East and Southern Africa too, and even to other places around the globe where Somalis can be found.

Journeys to the South

For Somalis, the journey to Johannesburg, as to many others places, begins in Nairobi. Somalis from different regions of East Africa come to Eastleigh, which has become a kind of central station where you can find transport by land, sea, or air to get to anywhere else in the African continent

Somalis arrive to South Africa crossing the border from either Mozambique or Zimbabwe, by road, either in cars, minibuses or merely walking. This is the last bit of a journey that started weeks, months or even years before in faraway East Africa.

Somali refugees normally head from Somalia to northern Kenya, where they cross the permeable northern border on foot. From there they continue to Nairobi, although some may stay at the refugee camps for a while and others may pass by Ethiopia first – depending on the region of Somalia they are leaving from or if they have family there. Once in Nairobi the journey to South Africa is organised through *mukhalasiin* or smugglers, who charge a considerable amount of money to smuggle people through the different borders they have to cross to reach South Africa. They are also of Somali origin and they can be found in every country Somalis cross on their route to South Africa. The journey can be organised in two ways; migrants either pay the full amount to a *mukhalas* at the beginning of the journey, normally in Nairobi. This full amount includes transport, accommodation along the journey, bribes to pay border officials plus the *makhala* commission. Others pay instead bit by bit as they reach the different countries that the journey entails. Towards the end of my fieldwork in 2014, the price to pay from Nairobi to Johannesburg was around $800. The money for the journey is raised among family and kinsmen.

There are three possible routes to South Africa. The most common way Somalis undertake this journey is by road. They normally go from Kenya to Tanzania and once

there, there are two possible routes, crossing directly to northern Mozambique and from there go to Maputo where the last steps of the journey are then organised, or from Tanzania they detour to Zambia, Malawi and finally Zimbabwe. However, a small minority are also able to fly from Nairobi or Addis Ababa to Maputo and from there cross the border to South Africa by road. In some other cases, people arrive by boat from Somalia or Kenya to northern Mozambique.

The journey can take from a couple of weeks to years, depending on whether migrants have the money to pay for the full journey upfront or if they stop at different places along the way. Small Somali enclaves are found along the route, such as in Dar es Salaam or Nampula, so if the migrant knows someone from his family or clan staying there, they would be able to stay there for some months before continuing their journey. People who have paid just for part of the journey may need to stay, relaying in others Somalis' help and hospitality until they raise the necessary funds to continue the journey, either working for somebody or waiting for the sponsorship of some relative, that would send money through *hawal*a, another migrant or the common money transfer facilities of MoneyGram or Western Union.

This is a journey full of perils. Migrants, normally travelling individually, regroup in small groups of ten or fifteen people. The border authorities or the police are some of the main concerns along the journey but actually the *makhalis* can became the main problem, especially for women.

Even if *makhalas* are normally reliable, in the sense that they deliver the service they have been paid for, there is no guarantee this will actually happen. Many of them are described as criminals that can drop undocumented migrants in the middle of nowhere. Women travelling alone can become the target of rapes and are subjected to constant sexual harassment by *mukhalasiin* that demand sexual favours from them in order to take them across borders. Such was the case of Saado, one of the women I interviewed in Johannesburg. She left Somalia in December 2008 and didn't arrive in South Africa until March 2010. Her journey to South Africa was full of risks. She left Kismayo to Kenya by boat, but they couldn't lay anchor on the Kenyan shores as authorities were patrolling. They continued to Tanzania in a small, overcrowded boat, "piled like sheeps". When they were approaching the Tanzanian coast the boat's engine collapsed. They spent 6 days stranded at sea, with very little water and no food. When they were

finally approaching the coast of Sima in northern Mozambique, police spotted the boat, so the *mukhalas* ordered everyone to get into the water and they ran away, half of the people in the boat, unable to swim, died. Saado was luckily helped to reach the beach with some other people. Once there the police came and took their money and the few belongings they had carried with them. Without anything, they were taken to Maratane refugee camp. She relates that there was no food or water there for them and they had to ask some Congolese refugees to build their huts for them. After 3 weeks there, a Somali man came. He was from her same clan and invited her to come with him to Sima. He said he would help her. In Sima he told everyone there that she was her fiancée. Some people warned her about him, that he was a bad man, a *mukhalas* that drank a lot and often raped women. She got confused and scared. Another woman helped her to get the "refugee papers" from the police station. The *mukhalas* found out and got very angry, obsessed with her. After getting the refugee papers, she started working at the house of some Somali men, but had to leave shortly afterwards because the *mukhalas* was causing trouble for them. When she took a plane to Maputo, he was seated 2 rows behind her. In Maputo she arranged with other *mukhalasiin* for her trip to South Africa but when she was at the border the *mukhalas* that was following her appeared. He was a powerful man in Mozambique, with a lot of money from smuggling people. He knew the police at the border who would accept his words – he was painting a bad picture of her – and his money in order not let her get into South Africa. She became very sick and was taken to the hospital. One of the guys who she was working for in Sima came to help her; he took her out of hospital and ran with her until she was at the South African side of the border. She arrived in Johannesburg where she got her refugee papers. This long, dangerous and anxious journey didn't prevent her from taking it again some months after staying in Johannesburg. While working for an Ethiopian man in Jeppe Street, she found out that her mother, who she thought was dead, was still alive and living in Ethiopia. She managed to get a refugee passport and went up again by road to Addis, crossing Mozambique, Malawi, Tanzania and Kenya, so she could see her mother again. She didn't have any problem this time because now she had "travelling papers".

Once Somalis arrive in Johannesburg, normally at Park Station, a family member picks them up or they call one of the Somali taxi drivers operating in Mayfair. They would have got this number before in their previous stop. A driver will come and pick them up

and on the way to Mayfair they will figure out what clan and sub-clan the person belongs to and drop them at a house of someone related to them. In case no kinsmen are found in the city, they attempt to find possible friends or acquaintances. As Sareedo explained:

> Before I left Mozambique, I asked the Somali guy there, "do you know anybody who drives a car or maybe a taxi driver in the Somali community?" and he gave me this guy's number. So when I got here I phoned him, I said, "Hello my name is... I am from there… I am at Park station, can you please?" He came to pick me up, firstly because I was paying him and secondly because I was speaking in Somali and he was speaking in Somali. He brought me to Mayfair and while we were on the road he was asking me where I was from, in Somali, you know? The Somalis they ask about the tribes, they don't ask the town you are from, and I tell him, "My mother is that family, my father is that family but I was born and grow up in that town" And he said, "Yeah, I know some people from that town". And he mentioned one of the families that I knew and he took me to them, I didn't know that guy but I knew the family and we were talking and I told the guy that his brother and I used to go together to the same school. So I was staying in the house for 2 nights and then I decided to go to Durban because there was this lady… her and my mother were friends, and she said "When you're in South Africa why don't you come and visit us?" And I went there and I stayed there for 3 months. And when I had stayed 3 months I couldn't stay longer, I couldn't stay jobless. I hate to be jobless and then I said "thank you very much for your hospitality, I appreciate I could stay with you but I want to move either to Cape Town or Joburg" (Sareedo, Johanesburg).

Once in Johannesburg, Somalis get their asylum seeker permit refugee permit and either continue to somewhere else in the country, like Durban, Cape Town or any township were they can start a business, or settle in Mayfair. Women normally prefer this last option, unless they have family living in another South African town, due to the safety Mayfair offers. The life in townships or, as they refer to them, locations, is a dangerous one, due to the constant xenophobic attacks and harassment by the local South African black population, so only men tend to go there.

As it can be observed in these two case studies, the clan affiliation still plays a very important role for Somalis, contrary to what Sadouni (2009) pointed out. She argues

that in Johannesburg the social organisations replace the clan and the fact of sharing a Somali nationality and language, Muslim religion and the shared experience of migration are sufficient bonds for the existence of solidarity among them, transforming in this way the social structure through the migration experience. However, I found out that the clan system still plays a key role when migrating, as I will explore further in next chapter.

Johannesburg: The Treasure Island of the African continent

Somalis endure those tough journeys to South Africa, in which they face enormous risks, some even life threatening, because of the big dreams, desires and expectations they have built about this part of the continent in which they believe they can have a better life. Stories circulate, travelling miles, reaching those in East Africa, stories about the wonderful things and good life to be found in the South of the continent: access to good education, possibility of finding a good remunerated job, starting a very successful business, making a lot of money, etc.

However, as days pass and they start to settle in South Africa they realise, like Waris, that education is expensive and in most cases inaccessible to them; that the jobs they may get working for other Somalis, Ethiopians or Indians just give them barely enough money to eat and pay their rent in a shared bedroom, and starting a business in a township can be life threatening. Somalis in South Africa become "3rd class citizens", foreigners constantly discriminated against by the local population and the South African authorities, the "skin of the onion" that can be easily peel off and discharged (Worby 2008 et al.).

Johannesburg, a city normally portrayed as the most modern, multicultural and cosmopolitan hub south of the Sahara (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008; Mbemebe 2007) is actually a city that constantly excludes. The metropolis developed demarcating very strong ethnic enclaves, making very clear who belonged where. The spatial rules imposed by the apartheid regime meant that blacks belonged to locations or Bantustans and whites to the urban centres. Even if these spatial rules based on race no longer exist, its consequences are still felt in the urban landscape and the life of the city, like a bad hangover or a very strong tide. These boundaries still exist in the collective imagination

of the city, fed by narratives of fear that become as difficult to surpass as the multiple electric fences anchored to its grounds. Dogs bark behind house fences when black gardeners or house helps walk along the streets of the wealthy northern suburbs and most white people will only go to the CBD if it is in an organised tour. It is still very clear who belongs where.

From this perspective, Somalis, considered black foreigners by the South African authorities, belong to locations or to the urban migrant areas of Yeoville or Hillbrow. For local black South Africans, Somalis are just seen as foreigners who came to South Africa to steal their jobs and businesses, one of the main reasons behind the regular xenophobic attacks they are subjected to.

However, Somalis, don't consider themselves black, nor Arabs, Coloured or Indians. They just see themselves under a different category, the one that includes people from many different clans and subclass, but who speak the same language, have common mythical origin and share a unique religion.[24] They don't see themselves as foreigners or refugees either, but as nomads that move around and are able to survive against the most tough circumstances.

Somalis chose Mayfair for settling down in the city, also a former Indian neighbourhood, but in this case their reasons were the religious links they found with the Muslim Indian population who used to inhabit this area during apartheid (Jinnah 2010; Sadouni 2009).

Mayfair, much smaller than Eastleigh, consists of a small central area along Albertina Sisulu Road and Mayfair's 8th Avenue, surrounded by a more residential area of Fordsburg on the East and Brixton on the northeast.

At the heart of the neighbourhood is Amal, a Somali shopping mall – a branch of a bigger one in Eastleigh under the same name and owner that also opened another one in Mogadishu recently. It is situated between Albertina Sisulu Road and 8th Avenue. Inside, the 2-storey mall centres around an open-air food court, always busy with Somali men eating or drinking tea as they chat. Around it, on the ground floor, always

[24] Even if the individuals' interpretations and implementations of Islam depend on context as it will be explored in chapter 4.

smelling of incense, one can find travel agencies, money transfer outlets and small shops run by women selling clothes, perfumes and a mix of Indian Ocean products. In Asha's shop you can find spices such as cardamom and cinnamon, colourful clothes, dresses, *diracs* and scarfs, plastic sandals, *Unzi* and incense, whitening creams, sesame oil, perfumes, tea and coffee and small bottles of *Zam-zam* or holy water from Mecca. One day Asha shows me a kind of electronic pen that you use to scan over the verses of the Koran and it reads it out for you. She imports all her products from Nairobi or Dubai.

Other shops, like Basra's, concentrate only on clothes for women. Her shop is a small but full of things: there are scarfs all around in the wall, hangers and shelves. She also sells jeans, T-shirts, skirts, dresses, handbags and suitcases. Inside the small glass counter at the front are makeup, lighting creams, incense, henna and teeth-brushing sticks. In a corner in the top of the shop, hidden from the view of passers-by, is female underwear on white mannequins. The shop has a backroom behind, that initially served multiple proposes: store room, prayer room, lunch room, which later she transformed into a tailor's workshops. She gets all her goods wholesale from China Mall or Dragon City, just a few kilometres away, and then resells increasing the prices a little bit so she can make some profit.

On the upper floor of Amal, bigger shops sell wholesale products normally imported from Nairobi or the Arab countries. Somalis staying in townships come periodically to get their goods here. As in many cases the journeys to Mayfair are long, those who have no family to stay with in Johannesburg during their business trips, stay overnight in lodges that have proliferated around Amal.

The streets around Amal burst with life. 8th Avenue, popularly known by Jahanama or Hell Street – because is always dirty and busy with traffic – has transformed very quickly during the last two years. When I started going to Mayfair in January 2012 just a couple of lodges, cybercafés and restaurants could be found. These businesses, run by Somalis or Ethiopian Muslims, have doubled in number in the last couple of years, making 8th avenue a lively street.

Somalis and Ethiopians enjoy good relations in the city, with many Ethiopians who run business in Jeppe Street, normally hiring Somalis as shopkeepers. At night it becomes particularly striking how the "Ethiopian side" of 8th avenue becomes extremely quiet,

with most business closed after dark, meanwhile the "Somali" side burst with life and activity. There seems to be an unspoken hierarchy among migrants living in Mayfair, with Somalis sometimes working for Ethiopians, as mentioned, but hiring Malawians or Zimbabweans for working in the houses as house help or in restaurants as kitchen porters.

The shops along 8th avenue sell food wholesale like rice, sugar and tea. There are several restaurants, a couple of convenience stores and small clothes shops, although many of them are multipurpose spaces, where is common to find, for example, a cybercafé that it is also a hairdressing salon.

Several of these businesses also hide behind a *marfish*. Crossing a back door you enter an underworld filled up with the smoke of shishas being puffed by Somali and Ethiopian men as they chat or watch a football match on a big plasma TV.

As one walks further away from Amal along 8th avenue, streets become quieter and the residential area begin. Some business can still be found, like Nura Lodge on Albertina Sisulu Road, which is one of the most luxurious hotels in Mayfair with a nice restaurant on its ground floor, where men eat and have tea as they talk watching the news on a Somali channel. The Somali embassy in South Africa began here in one of its rooms, before being fully established in Pretoria in 2013. The lodge is owned and run by Heda who arrived to Johannesburg a few years ago with her husband from London where they owned 3 prosperous businesses of a restaurant and 2 internet cafes. But she didn't like it there. She has four young children and doesn't want them to grow up there. So she went from London to Egypt where her mother and sisters stay. She was not working there, "just relaxing for 2 years". Then her husband came to South Africa and she followed with the kids. They used to have a supermarket near Church Street, also called Nura, but one night it was looted and they closed it afterwards.

Just before the evening prayers, the streets around Amal empties, the shops along 8th avenue start to close and men walk in small groups to the mosque. Saynab, my research assistant, goes to pray at the small shop of a female friend who is also praying there. Behind the counter, they lay down praying mats and kneel down. I wait standing in the front door, facing the small pedestrian alley that goes form 8th Avenue to the mosque. I can see the mosque's entrance from where I am. An electronic clock hanging from the doorjamb, the red digits indicating the seconds moving fast. Inside men kneel down and

stand up. The prayer doesn't take long and men, all Somali, emerge from the mosque like a river that inundates the passage. Life comes back to the streets of Mayfair. Along 8th Avenue, small groups of men chat outside the lodges, shops re-open, restaurants become busy serving dinner, their diners all men.

Even if Mayfair has transformed in last years into another "little Mogadishu", the hostile and xenophobic situation Somalis face in South Africa, the spatial boundaries that still exist in the post-apartheid city together with the lack of direct family support create strong feeling of insecurity, alienation and isolation among the Somali community living there. This generates a strong collective feeling of *buufis*, the Somali concept that expresses the anxiety generated by the desire and the impossibility of moving somewhere else.

In this sense, Mayfair becomes a small island from which is difficult to leave. Most Somalis residing in the neighbourhood, especially women, rarely leave the area – unless they work in the CBD – and have never been to other parts of the city, even if they often visit other relatives in Durban or Cape Town. From this perspective Mayfair is very different from Eastleigh, in which there is a constant movement of Somalis coming from or going to somewhere else. Eastleigh is also more integrated into Nairobi's life, with many Kenyans choosing to shop there due to the cheaper prices found nowhere else in the city. However, Mayfair is rarely visited by other South Africans, except for the few Indians still residing in the area. In this sense, Somalis living in the neighbourhood feel quite isolated, with few links, if any, to the rest of the city.

However, this isolation also offers a kind of protection. Some Somali businessmen in Mayfair are aware that they could be making much more money opening shops in townships but they chose to stay as they feel more secure inside this island or protective nest. Even if petty crime happens in Mayfair and Somalis are sometimes verbally abused by black South Africans, especially in public taxis, there has never been any major xenophobic attack against Somalis in this neighbourhood. Moreover, as will be explored in next chapter, during the waves of xenophobic attacks of 2008 and 2015, the numbers of Somalis in Mayfair multiplied, with shopkeepers from the townships coming to the area in big numbers looking for protection. In January 2015 the numbers of Somalis in the area multiplied, with lodges full to their capacity, hosting people for free, who even had to sleep in the corridors. Weeks later, Mayfair became to empty,

with many Somalis leaving South Africa during February and March, either back to Somalia or Kenya or to Brazil – in order to reach the US, a new extended migration route trend among Somalis. Even if the majority of Somalis leaving South Africa were mostly the ones staying in townships, where most of the xenophobic violence takes place, this had an effect on Mayfair, as many of the *spaza* shops owners buy their goods in the area. With no customers to provide for, many businesses had to close due to the lack of income and their owners also had to go somewhere else to start afresh. Strikingly during this time, I notice that the number of Ethiopian business increased in the area, probably the ones who also run business in townships that decided Mayfair was also safer for them. However, this was something contested by a Somali informant that, when asked about this, declared: "*When Somalis leave, everyone else leaves as we are the one who resist longer when things go wrong*", a sentence that reflects the Somali sense pride as being the toughest even in the most hostile circumstances.

In any case, in a period of a few months, the island became first a protective nest and soon after a temporary port, a busy transitional place from which to leave South Africa, which shows the ephemeral nature of this place, open to constant transformation depending on the always changing circumstances of the people inhabiting its streets.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the fluidity of the Somali diaspora networks in relation to the two settings being studied that of Nairobi and Johannesburg, two cities that offer a cosmopolitan but hostile environment for Somalis.

The geographical and historical links between Somalia and Kenya produce certain characteristics, such as a bigger Somali population, integrated by refugees, Somali-Kenyans and diaspora returnees that provide a larger network of support. This situation does not exist in the South African context, where a smaller population of Somalis is found and feelings of insecurity and isolation seem to be the general norm. However, what Somalis find in both countries in is a great deal of hostility in the form of xenophobic attacks in South Africa and of constant harassment by the police and other governmental organisations in Kenya.

The focus of this research is the two urban hubs of Nairobi and Johannesburg. The two cities are interconnected for the Somali diaspora at different transnational levels: through the commercial route of goods that leave the Kenyan capital in the direction to South Africa and through the migration routes of people that leave from Nairobi in the direction to Johannesburg. This is a route sometimes also made the other back as the case of Waris illustrates or during the last wave of xenophobic attacks in 2015 when many Somalis staying in South Africa went back to Nairobi after a temporary transit through Mayfair. At the same time the two cities are transitional places for Somalis wishing to go somewhere else in the Western world.

Moreover, in the two cities Somalis have transformed the urban landscapes of Eastleigh and Mayfair creating what is popularly known as the "little Mogadishus", a phenomenon that will be explored in detail in the next chapter under the theoretical framework of translocality, that showcases how the two neighbourhoods are also deeply connected between themselves and to the rest of the world where Somalis can be found in regard to collective identify processes that transcend physical boundaries.

Based on the meaning these two cities have for Somalis, how they imagine, experience and interact with them, I have proposed the metaphors of Nairobi as a port and Mayfair as an island as I believe they are especially illuminating to describe the different meanings Somalis have with each place.

Nairobi has become an entry and exit point into and out of its neighbouring country. Somali refugees and diaspora returnees use the city as a transitional place to get out or inside Somalia. Eastleigh has also become an important part of Nairobi's economy. And the transit of its streets does not only apply to people but also to goods and money that arrive to and leave from Nairobi to many other places around the world, making Nairobi and specially Eastleigh one or the busiest ports of Somalia, in which cultural and social practices are also on the move.

Due to the bigger Somali population living there, together with the historical links between the two countries, Somalis, even if they are in transit, develop greater feelings of belonging. Eastleigh has become a home away from home to the people, temporally inhabiting its streets. The fluidity of Eastleigh, in which Somalis from different backgrounds cohabit, together with a powerful transnational commercial activity, make Eastleigh a cosmopolitan hub for the Somali diaspora.

The journeys to the South of the continent normally also begin in Nairobi, where refugees arrive after leaving Somalia. The journeys are organised through a smuggler or *mukhalas* that provides transport and accommodation along the way over land to South Africa. On arrival to South Africa, migrants look for their clans, as they become the primary source of help during their first weeks in the country.

Once in Johannesburg all the great expectations Somalis have built start to disappear as they became aware of the harsh conditions they face in the city. There is no historical background connecting Somalis to South Africa and in this context they are just one more group of immigrants of the many that the country attract, but they also happen to be one of the most successful, due to their great business skills, which make them favourite targets of xenophobic attacks.

In Johannesburg, Somalis don't develop the feelings of belonging they do in Nairobi, seen by many as a temporary home. Mayfair only becomes a home away from home in difficult times, when Somalis, staying in other parts of the country feel threatened and come to Mayfair looking for protection among their compatriots. As it was stated above, Mayfair operates much like a small island for Somalis in Johannesburg where they feel some sense of safety but still none of belonging.

Johannesburg, a city normally portrayed as an example of afropolitanism or African cosmopolitanism (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008; Mbemebe 2007) is actually a conglomerate of islands, a heritage of the spatial distributions imposed during apartheid. In this context, Mayfair, much smaller than Eastleigh has become the Somali island, "a little Mogadishu" in the landscape of the city. The xenophobic situations Somalis face in the city together with these spatial boundaries of the post-apartheid city reinforce the sense of Mayfair as an island or protective nest. At the same time, the lack of direct family support creates strong feelings of insecurity, alienation and isolation among the Somali community living there. Eastleigh is also more integrated in Nairobi life than Mayfair is in Johannesburg, where no South Africans visit the area, and with Somalis rarely leaving the neighbourhood, which again reinforces this sense of Mayfair as an island.

Therefore, taking into account the relation of the Somali diaspora with each of the context studied, as has been presented tthroughout this chapter, Somalis experience a greater cosmopolitanism in Nairobi than in Johannesburg.

This has some implications for collective identity processes and how vernacular practices are reproduced, performed and transformed in the two cities. Somaliness is constantly renegotiated in relation to the peculiarities of specific contexts and the experiences Somalis have in them. At the same time, members of the Somali diaspora all around the world have contributed to the formation of an imaginary community in the diaspora, shaped by diverse transnational links and connections, as next chapter will explore.

Chapter 3
Identity in Movement: Constructing Somaliness outside Somalia

> *Don't judge me, you can't handle half of what I've dealt with. There is a reason I do the things I do, there is a reason I am who I am.*
>
> *I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become.*
>
> – Carl Gustav Jung

As I finishing with my fieldwork in Mayfair, I start working with a photojournalist in another project to visually document the everyday life of the neighbourhood. Until this point I had moved mostly in women's spaces, doing interviews in houses and shops. The fact that I was now walking with a photojournalist carrying a camera created great awareness of their possible exposure and the use we were going to do with the data we collected. At the beginning, there was a great mistrust, due mostly to the bad image Somalis normally find of themselves on the press. One day, as we were leaving one restaurant, a man objurgated me: "*I have been seeing you for the last few months and you only talk to women, why don't you talk to men? And now you are taking pictures! Why don't you take pictures to the people in your country? You said you worked for the university, where is your proof? Where is your ID?*" It was the first time in the almost four years that I had been doing fieldwork in Mayfair that I was confronted by someone with that aggressive tone. We tried to calm him down and explained to him in detail the nature of the research. It took us an hour until he was convinced and as we left, he told us: "*Whatever you do, please, don't tell bad stories about Somalis*."

This mistrust many Somalis have of "the media" is perfectly understandable as they are tired and angry of being misrepresented in the Western media, where they tend to be portrayed as the helpless black from a war-torn country, the refugee, the Indian Ocean pirate, the radical Muslim or the Al-Shabaab terrorist. A great dichotomy exists between the image about Somalis that the media has contributed to create in the global

imagination and the way Somalis see themselves: as proud nomads with transnational families, great business entrepreneurs, religious people and definitely not black.

This dichotomy has its sources in the discordant narratives and discourses constructed about Somalis. The more widespread narratives "from outside", echoed by the discourses of international political agendas and the mainstream media eclipses the collective and individual narratives about identity produced "from within", by Somalis themselves. These "external" narratives and discourses have constructed stereotypical collective identities that become problematic as they impose certain categories to a collective that doesn't identify itself with them and for which, national, religious and cultural identifications play a more important role in the construction of such an identity.

The narratives produced by the Somali women interviewed for this research, both in Nairobi and Johannesburg, showcase a more complex scenario of identifications in which hyphenated identities, feelings of belonging and non-belonging and reproduction of vernacular and cosmopolitan practices play a key role in the construction of Somaliness. However, at the same time, the existing misrepresentations constructed about them directly affects the construction of Somaliness contributing to the creation of a rigid collective identity in which certain characteristics of Somaliness are exacerbated as a way of resilience to the circulating discourses. But how is Somaliness constructed in the first place? Moreover Somaliness cannot be understood today without taking into account the impact of the civil war and the subsequent forced migration and diasporic experience it has generated. As Bauman wrote: "One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs… Identity is a name given to the escape sought from that uncertainty" (1996, 19). However, in the case of Somalis, without a functioning nation state, without a national territory to refer to and with a diaspora living all around the world, where do Somalis belong? Moreover, how do people who are not contained within the boundaries of a nation state construct themselves as a collectivity? How is Somaliness constructed in a context of displacement? What roles do cultural, national and kinship identifications play in the construction of a rigid collective identity? And how Somali women in Nairobi and Johannesburg experience and express their Somaliness?

The first part of this chapter will focus on these questions. It will examine how individuals renegotiate different flows of meaning and how the different ways of being Somali are expressed through particular sets of practices and narratives; how a dialogical relationship exist between the self – that is already dialogical (Bakhtim 1981) – and the different vernacular and cosmopolitan identifications chosen to make sense of it. I also explore how cultural, national and clan identifications keep a constant dialogue in the Somali collective imagination in order to create a strong sense of Somaliness.

However, given that both in Nairobi and Johannesburg, Somalis have transformed two neighbourhoods, Eastleigh and Mayfair, commonly known as "little Mogadishus", the second part of the chapter focuses on collective identity and the transformation of spaces. Using the theoretical framework of translocality, I address the questions of how place matters in relation to identity. How do places shape meaning? And how is collective identity able to transform spaces?

Constructing Somaliness outside Somalia: Nairobi and Johannesburg

> If I don't have tradition, technically I am a lost person. I need to have tradition. If not, I can follow anybody from another culture. I can follow any culture. I'm lost… It's like identity. I am called Zahara Somebody Somebody so if I come here and say "I will change my identity", I'll become like a Shona and all those people. It's important for me to follow my culture. As a Somalian, we don't leave our culture behind. Anywhere you go, you know this person is a Somalian. The way we dress and everything… for me it's really important. I can't leave my culture, I'm still a Somalian and I will always be Somalian (Zahara, Johannesburg).

Zahara, is a 28-year-old, whose mother lives in Ethiopia and has brothers is Norway and the Emirates. She arrived in Johannesburg four years ago after crossing part of East and Southern Africa by sea and land and now runs a small convenience shop in Mayfair. She is now a refugee in a hostile and xenophobic country, her life is full of uncertainties

and her Somali origin "and way of being" is one of the few things she is fully certain about. Her "Somali identity" becomes a stand-up point to face a very uncertain world.

However, on the other side of the spectrum, I also found women like Samia, a 40-year-old diaspora returnee that went to Canada to study when she was 18. Some years after completing her PhD, she decided to go back to East Africa, where she now lives between Nairobi and Mogadishu, running an NGO seeking to empower Somali women. Her vision on identity is very different from Zahara, as she declares:

> I am a woman with two identities, actually multiple identities: I am an African. I am a Muslim. I am from East Africa, from the Horn of Africa. I am a Somali. I am a Canadian. I am a feminist. I am an environmentalist. I am a social activist. You Know? You Know? (Samia, Nairobi)

These two cases manifest two different vernacular approaches to the expression and identification with Somaliness in the contemporary world. Zahara associates her identity with the culture and nation she has been born into, something static and that cannot be changed, otherwise the self would get lost, her Somali identity becomes an anchor in a world full of changes and she sticks to it in order to make some sense of it. For Samia, her life experiences and education make her recognise the multiplicity of identifications forming her own self.

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To talk about Somaliness nowadays we have to take into account these two approaches that Somali women take to the problem of identity, in which a more traditional sense of self, as part of a collective, cohabits with a more neoliberal approach in which one's self is responsible for one's own destiny; how "*it's up to you*", as Samia emphasised several times in our interview, to become what you want to be in life.

Zahara's vision on her Somali identity, as an unmovable characteristic, inherited from her parents and passed from generation to generation is not unique among Somalis living in Johannesburg. Lula, another respondent in Mayfair, explains her Somaliness in the following way:

> You are born into it. Like this child, she was born here but you cannot call her South African because her mother was born there in Somalia. Our grandmothers were also born there, our origin is Somali, the culture, our

> culture is different. Something you cannot change. You are born within it… Even if you have an American passport you are still Somali (Lula, Johannesburg).

In the case of Zahara's and Lula's narratives, the sense of being Somali is an immobile characteristic "something that you are born into" and where you will stay from the cradle to the grave, regardless of where you go and what you live. Their narratives showcase "national culture" as a pillar in which identity is learned and in which "tradition" is passed through generations. Here tradition becomes a kind of unchangeable set of practices chained and repeated over generations. As Lula claims: "*You are born into it … you cannot change it …even if you have an American passport*". For them, the fact of being Somali encapsulates claims of origins and traditions that are continued and unchangeable across time and place, reinforcing in this way, a very strong sense of collective identity.

In the context of Johannesburg being extremely xenophobic and hostile, identity becomes an anchor connecting Somalis to a lost homeland, to the diasporic community living all around the world and to other Somalis living in South Africa. That is why it becomes so important to strengthen certain characteristics of Somaliness, to ensure oneself a certain place among a collective. As Stuart Hall declares, these kinds of narratives "construct identities which are ambiguously places between past and future" (Hall 1992, 295). Sentences like "I was born Somali and I always will be a Somali" reinforce a sense of continuity in an always changing and uncertain world. These are narratives emanating from a strong national identification, in which the nation has become "*a system of cultural representation* … a discourse, a way of constructing meanings" (Hall 1992, 292). Their narratives showcase national culture as a pillar in which identity is learned and in which "tradition" is passed from generation to generation.

Hall gives different elements that contribute to the formation of this sense of national identity, being this: "narrative of the nation, emphasis on origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness, the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983), foundational myth and pure original people or 'folk'" (1992, 295). Some of these categories can be observed in the formation of a strong sense of Somaliness.

Based on a widespread myth of origins, many Somalis proudly claim to be descendant from Samale, a mythical father that arrived from Yemen to what is nowadays Somalia and from whom the main clans of Dir, Isaq, Hawiye and Darod are supposed to descend (Lewis 1965 and 1994; Abdullahi 2001). There are also claims that link this mythical father to the family of the prophet Mohammed in Saudi Arabia, giving in this sense, a special status to all Somalis among Muslims (Harper 2012; Lewis 1965).

The narrative of the nation was specially exploded during the Siad Barre regime, that initially, under communist ideals, tried unsuccessfully to abolish the clan system and boosted the national dream of greater Somalia (Harper 2012; Murphy 2011; Elmi 2010). Nowadays this narrative of the nation interestingly takes place on the virtual world of Facebook and Instagram, constructed by Somalis all around the world. There is one Instagram account, "The Best of Somalia", dedicated to post images and comments to boost national identity. One of the most significant latest post shows a drawing of a camel, one of Somalia more nationalistic symbols, as it evokes the nomadic past, as Mary Harper writes: "Camels represent the very essence of Somali life…The Somali camel has even had its own Facebook page" (2012, 17). Below the drawing, the caption reads:

> There is no place like home and especially when the world is all messed up and in wars at the moment. Somalia needs peace and stability and the only people that can do that are the Somali people. Forget qabil (tribalism) it is the cause of all our troubles. The only two things we as Somalis need to bring back our dignity is to love one and another and our beautiful country and practice our beautiful religion of #Islam, the rest is nonsense. Somalia has suffered enough and we have a once in a lifetime chance to bring Somalia back on the world stage. Every Somali national regardless of gender should think hard and find something they can contribute to the rebuilding of Somalia, it might be your educational background or your other life skills and experience that you think can help Somalia in any way. We live in a digital and fastly improving world where countries are competing with their economies and military improvements and we as #Somalis are still in the stone age and fighting these useless wars where innocent Somalis have to pay their lives with. Nations are uniting and we are busy "invading" and

> "occupying" our own cities and towns and chasing out and abusing our fellow Somalis because of qabil. Your tribal affiliation will not promise you heaven, we are massacring our own people for something that shouldn't be a reason to kill anyone. Let's reclaim back our country and dignity Insha'Allah. #Somalia #Somali (Best of Somalia, 2015).

This caption summarises different factors contributing to the identification with a narrative of the nation: overcoming the clan, nostalgic and idealised vision of the country from afar, Islam as a unifying factor, the wish to rebuild Somalia and a desire of national unity. What is interesting is that this discourse about national identity is mostly constructed outside the country by the Somali diaspora in the virtual space of Instagram.

Apart from a strong identification with a national narrative, other common topics that arose during the interviews as identity markers were: the way of dressing, conceptions about blackness, degrees of belonging and clan affiliation – even if this last one was contested by many women. I will next present some case studies that illustrate these identifications.

I don't look Somali because I don't dress like the majority of them do

Most Somali women, especially in the diaspora choose to wear a *jilbab*[25] (Akou 2011). This is the outfit most people associate with a Somali refugee woman, covered from head to toe in a matching garment from which you can only see their faces. The majority of women I talked to in Nairobi and Johannesburg, claim this kind of dressing as clear a distinction of their Somaliness, a claim also made in other contexts as the case study by Hopkins (2010) also found among Somali women living in London and Toronto.

The women I talked to in Nairobi and Johannesburg perceive this garment as "authentic" Somali, on the grounds that other Muslim women from other places cover themselves in different manners. Many Somali women also chose to wear an *abaya*, a common garment for women across the Muslim world.

[25] "[an] ensemble consisting of a small head wrap, a large head covering that fits tightly around the face, and a matching skirt" (Akou 2001, 61).

However, as Farzana, one of the women I interviewed in Nairobi, explained, the custom of wearing the *jilbab* was not adopted until the 1990s when the outbreak of the war took place. She is in her mid-50s and has been living in Nairobi for more than a decade. When I met her for the interview she was one of the few women I talked to who was wearing Western clothes: jeans, a shirt and no head-scarf. At some point of the interview I asked her if she found discrimination in Nairobi after the Westgate attack. She replied that she didn't because she didn't look Somali: "*I don't look Somali because I don't dress like the majority of them do.*" I asked her why she chose to dress like that, to which she replied: "*Because that's the way I always dressed, before the war everyone used to dress like this. I even used to wear shorts to play tennis!*"

Many photos from the 1960s and 1970s that circulate extensively in the virtual world portray Somali women in Mogadishu wearing high heels, big earrings, mini-skirts and afro hair, with no scarf or any other sign that denoted their Muslim identity. The *jilbab* only became "fashionable" when the war broke out. The majority of women chose to wear it for two main reasons: it was considered "safer and more Islamic" in order to avoid rape. Wearing the *jilbab* became a response to the popular extended belief that came with the re-Islamisation of Somalia that took place after the outbreak of the war in the 1990s, where the war was seen as a punishment from Allah to Somalis for not being Muslim enough.

A form of dressing that is only 25 years old has now become a strong source of national and religious identification, with claims of it being "traditional". Many Somali women residing in the diaspora still choose to wear it nowadays as a daily outfit as it has become a way of demarcating difference and easily showcasing their Somali and Muslim identifications among Somali women around the world.

Something similar happened with the *dirac*. Women see this outfit as more "traditional" or "cultural" than the *jilbab* and is now mostly worn for weddings. However, as Akou points out this is also "a new style of "traditional" dress that became popular in the 1970s" (Akou 2011, 120).

The decision of wearing the *jilbab* and the *dirac* as identity markers based on the claims that they are more "traditional" that Western clothes showcases how the "invention of tradition" operates at the everyday level as a result of the war and the consequent mass migration of Somalis all around the world.

Moreover, many Somali women in Nairobi and Johannesburg also choose to cover their faces with a *niqab,*[26] as a way to express their strong identification with the re-Islamisation of Somalia and also a way to showcase how their Muslim identity is above their Somaliness. However, in some case, like to quote at the preface of this thesis showcases, wearing a *burka* or a *niqab* is more a strategy to keep anonymity in their daily life movements in spaces that are enormously gender segregated.

The way of dressing is one of the quickest, apparent and direct ways to present our identities. The way Somali women choose to where and when denotes the existing dialogue between their Somaliness and Islamism.

"*With the blacks you learn quickly*",

One day in Amal Shopping Centre in Mayfair, I was chatting in a shop with some young women. At some point I made a comment to one of them about her English being very good, to which she replied that she had learned when working in town,[27] adding that if you worked in Mayfair you would only be speaking in Somali the whole day but working in town made her learn faster because "with the blacks you learn quickly", making very clear in an implicit way that she didn't consider herself as *black.*

This distinction also emerged in other random conversations I had with other women and during interviews and groups discussion both in Nairobi and Johannesburg. Most of the women I talked too didn't consider themselves blacks as they argued that their physical appearance was different: that their skin was brown, their hair soft and their noses and bones thin.

These claims around physical features demarcating difference were normally accompanied by "national culture" claims, stating how Somalis were different to any other African in the continent. Somalis insist in their Arab descent and defend the unity of Somali people based on language, religion and cultural unity, and they use their different physical features as a further argument to their national unity claims.

[26] "A very conservative and controversial head covering that diffused from the middle-east to Somalia in teh1980s; prior to that time, only the descendants of Arab and Persian settlers would have worn this kind of garment that covers the face" (Akou 2011, 75).

[27] Many Somali women have they own businesses or work for some other Somalis or Ethiopians in Jeppe Street in Johannesburg's CBD, where other African immigrants and black South Africans are also hawkers. They mostly sell fake brands of clothes, or Fong Honk, as it's popularly known. They buy wholesale from Chinese malls and re-sell in small shops or stalls in the city centre.

However, there is a minority group of Somali Bantus settled in the Jubba Valley in the South of the country. They are descendants from agriculturalist that lived in the Horn of Africa before pastoralist Somalis arrived and also descendants of slaves from the East African trade (Besteman 1993; 1996). They are normally looked down on by the rest of Somalis for different reasons regarding class, clan, their former status as slaves and also because they look different. As Besteman explains:

> Despite the fact that by the 1980s most descendants of slaves were fully Somali in terms of language/dialect, custom, religion, and participation in the Somali clan system (through adoption), they maintained their physical distinctiveness and are said to look more "African" than other Somali. The physical distinctiveness is captured in the term *jareer*, which means "hard, kinky hair" (Besteman 1996, 584).

Even if physical appearance is used by Somalis to demarcate difference and status, among them and also in respect to other Africans as the example above shows, the diasporic experience creates some interesting cases in which these differences are either erased or even prided. For example, in Mayfair, there is a popular coffee shop run by Ahmed, a Somali Bantu, that displays all kinds of artefacts from "traditional Somali culture" that any Somali stopping for coffee there is keen to explain very proudly to any non-Somali. Ahmed, even if coming from a minority group that is normally considered "inferior" in Somalia has become, with his coffee shop, a kind of ambassador of Somali culture in Mayfair. Something similar could be said about a young man in the neighbourhood, popularly known as "The Cultural Man", always present at any event taking place in Mayfair, showcasing his big Afro hair with pride, together with the "traditional attire" of Somali nomads. In this context the Afro hair becomes a symbol of pride, connecting Somalis to the rest of Africans, instead of a demeaned characteristic used in Somalia to refer to Somali Bantus as Besteman's quote above explains. This display of the Afro hair can also be observed in some of the posts circulating on Instagram, recreating a nostalgic vision of the Somali before the war, in which proud nomads stand with this hairstyle in the harsh pastoralist lands, as well as metropolitan men and women in Mogadishu during the 1960s. So it is not that the diasporic experience solely transforms the meaning of some physical features, as Afro hair was already present in Somali aesthetics before the break out of the war.

What a diasporic experience generates is a different sense of awareness as one woman in Nairobi expressed during a group discussion. There were seven Somali women, all declaring vehemently that they were not black – or even African. This particular woman opposed the views of her friends explaining how she became aware of her own blackness when she was living in Israel and she was treated as such. This made her realise, she explained, how she belonged to the African continent as much as Ethiopians or Congolese.

The testimony of this woman is very different to the one at the beginning of this section, that completely define herself as not black, which showcase how racial perceptions depend enormously on context.

I was also told once in Mayfair that I was not completely white, because I came from Spain – this was said as a compliment, in the sense that "you are a bit like us". I found this quite surprising and I asked them what their idea of white was. For them whites were white South Africans, British, Americans and all the Western countries that played a colonial role. The fact that Spain was in the south of Europe, that the Arabs were there for several centuries that my mother tongue was not English and that Spain had not played a major role in the colonial and postcolonial history of sub-Saharan Africa qualified me as "not fully white".

All these examples contest the idea of race as an immobile characteristic to demarcate difference and how it is actually a socially constructed category (Gates 1997; Anemone 2011). The perceptions Somalis have of themselves, of Somali Bantus, of other black Africans or even of whites, changes constantly depending on the context, just as gender and or cultural or religious practices do. Perceived racial features are used differently as identity markers depending on the occasion or circumstances Somalis find themselves. The insistence by most Somali women to being considered as non-black become one more argument – together with religion, culture, language and national sentiment – to present a narrative of an united Somalia above that of the clanship divisions.

All Somalis who are born outside we call Sijui

Among Somalis the place of origin is also used to demarcate difference. To begin with, stating what part of Somali you come from is already going to reveal your clan, however, taking into account the diasporic experience Somalis have gone through for

more than twenty years now, their distinctions in this regard go further than the national level and clan distinctions. Being Somali born or raised outside Somalia becomes an important signifier as it confers degrees of purity and belonging (Douglas 1966).

Somalis born out Somalia receive the denomination of *Dayuus baro* and *Sijuis*. *Dayuus baro* refers to the Somalis born in the West and Somalis from Somalia argue they don't know anything about Somalia.

The term *sijuis* is a bit more controversial as it initially referred to Somali-Kenyans. Literally the word means *I don't know* in Kiswahili but now it also applied to Somalis living outside Somalia for a long time as they are also looked down on by "pure" Somalis from Somalia. As two respondents explained:

> S.: "*Sijuis* are those Somalians who [are] born overseas like Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, America, all, even South Africa…. It is someone who doesn't know Somali language and culture properly, because they were born there and stayed there a long time and the culture changes, everything change…."

> I.: But I heard some stories about the name, do you know? Some Somali people that were staying in Kenya, long time, long time ago, *garanda, garanda*, like some Indians were growing here, they are South Africans. So one Somalian guy from Mogadishu came into Garissa. So when he came there, he asked something, like I need that, and they said *"Sijui"*. You know? *Sijui* in Swahili means I don't know. So this guy asked "Do you know this family?" they said "*Sijui*" [meaning I don't know]. That's why they gave that name [she laughs]

> S.: All Somalis who are born outside we call *sijui.*

> I.: Yeah, you know? Those *sijui* people, cannot speak Somali properly, when we talk to each other, we cannot understand properly.

> S.: Even we are not same culture, not the same… Even here in South Africa, when they come, Somalian *sijui*, from Tanzania or Kenya, they don't connect nicely, they stay separate, they look after each other… They stay separate because most of them don't know Somali, they speak Swahili to each other, so we call Somali *Sijui* to the Somali people from the diaspora

> I.: Somali language is only one language, do you know?

> S.: Yes, we speak only one language, one culture, one religion, we are Muslims 100%, and there is no Christian in Somalia or other religions. No it's only Muslims. Even Somali *Sijui*, even if they were born there in another county, they are Muslims, maybe their culture is a little bit different but they are Muslims.

These two respondents in Johannesburg explain how *sujuis* are different because they don't know "Somali" culture or language properly. This story emphasises how language competence demarcates degrees of belonging and "authenticity". An argument used in some cases to discriminate, as is the case of the few Somali-Kenyans staying in Mayfair. Even if they share ethnicity, language, and cultural and religious practices, they are Kenyan nationals, for which they are looked down upon by other Somalis staying in the area and they feel marginalised from the community, with few friends or support.

However, *sijuis* in Nairobi represent a whole different matter, as they are ethnic Somalis but citizens of the country, not migrants, their mother tongue is normally Kiswahili but they still reproduce many cultural practices considered Somali like for example the way of dressing or wedding ceremonies. Kenyan-Somalis living in Kenya also experience certain degree of discrimination, but this is discrimination coming from other Kenyan ethnic groups, from governmental institutions and especially from the police. During the massive arrests of Somali refugees taking place in Nairobi during February 2014, many Somali-Kenyans were also arrested on the bases of the physical appearance and because they just happen to carry their IDs with them in the moment of arrest.

Even if differences depending on the place of birth exist among ethnic Somalis, what is interesting is that the same arguments that are used to demarcate difference also made to claim unity: "we speak only one language, one culture, one religion", ends the dialogue above, after having used the same linguistic and cultural reasons to demarcate difference. This showcases the strength of an underlying narrative of "national" unity in which Islam always appears as a unifying factor, which is an argument also made to overcome divisions among the clans.

This tribalism you wonder where it came from and now it's a disease in Somalia

As the above post of the Best of Somalia states, clan identifications are pointed out as one of the main causes of conflict in Somalia and a national and religious discourse is strongly constructed to overcome it. There is vast literature dealing with the Somali clan system, the always changing sub-clans and all the complicated politics and conflicts associated with it: Lewis 1965, 1994, 1998; Elmi 2010; Harper 2012; Murphy 2011; Ahmed 1995 and Gardner and El Bushra 2004 to name just some.

However, the clan didn't appear as an identifying feature in the narratives of Somali women living in Nairobi and Johannesburg. As Fadumo, a socially sophisticated middle-aged woman residing in Johannesburg explained:

> I identify more with being Somali. In Somalia there is this problem of tribalism. They politicised the tribe, they took it and made people to hide behind the tribe but that's not how Somalis are. Somalis are people who lived together for so long. We were all different tribes but we were living in harmony… Tribes are only there to know who you are… There are not cultural differences between Somalis, same culture. Same religion, same language, culture is only one, we have the Islamic culture. This tribalism you wonder where it came from and now it's a disease in Somalia (Fadumo, Johannesburg).

All the Somali women I talked in both cities share a similar view about the clan. They consider it the source of all the maladies of Somalia and they frequently insisted on the importance of being Somali, not the clan they belong to, showcasing again the strong narrative of the nation underlying their sense of collective identity. They insisted over and over again that it was a characteristic not relevant at all for their identities. "We are all Somalis. One language, one culture, one religion" was a sentence commonly repeated during the interviews to showcase a sense of collective unity.

Somalis in both cities – and especially in Johannesburg, where numerically less members than in Nairobi are found – are normally very proud to explain the strong solidarity existing among them and how they always help each other, regardless of the clan they belong to, when in need or in adverse circumstances. I normally questioned women about the contradiction that Somalis were so solid and supportive of each other when living outside the country but kept fighting inside Somalia on the basis of clan

affiliation, the response was always similar: "In Somalia everyone wants to be the president". An affirmation that plainly explains how the continuous wars that have torn down the country for years are more a problem of power and scarce resources than of identity. Thereafter the clan identification is a feature that dissolves in some diasporic contexts (Saduoni 2009; Al-Sharmani 2010), substituted by narratives and discourses of national identity.

Nevertheless, as Fadumo declares, "Tribes are only there to know who you are" and among Somalis, it is a common custom the first time they meet, to ask each other what part of Somalia they come from so they can place the person they are meeting in the clan system. Moreover the clan still plays an important role when migrating. As it was described in the previous chapter, when arriving in Johannesburg, just mentioning your direct family to the Somali taxi driver picking any Somali from Park Station, will place them immediately in the immense genealogy that is the clan system and the driver will take them to the house of somebody that is directly related to them or their clan. Marian explains how it works:

> Most of Somalis when they come here [Johannesburg] they don't have direct family so, when you arrive here you have to ask for your tribe and they are going to show you the places or where you are going to work and everything … Your tribe helps you at the beginning, when you don't know anything (Zeynab, Johannesburg).

Therefore, for Somalis residing in Nairobi and Johannesburg even if the clan affiliation is not used to define their identities in these two contexts – at least to me, a non-Somali white foreigner –it is still very important as a direct support structure. It represents an oral genealogy, a kind of "oral ID" who says exactly who you are and where you come from and who will be able to help you in when arriving new to the city.

There were some women, especially diaspora returnees in Nairobi that openly reject the clan system. As Fiido, a diaspora returnee from California to Nairobi declares:

> I reject the clan system, the clan system doesn't give me (as a woman) the same rights and entitlements, so I am always critical of the clan system, and I just accept the membership (Fiido, Nairobi).

But what is interesting about Fiido's words is that even if she disagrees with the system, she still accepts the membership, as rejecting it would be denying her more immediate origins and extended family ties. So the clan, even if not used to describe themselves in these two contexts, it's still very present in the Somali social imagination.

Moreover, Fiido contestation of the gender discrimination that patriarchal clanships make is a result of her diasporic experience. The fact of living many years in a Western country made her aware of certain practices from her country of origin she doesn't agree with and that now she rebels against them. This kind of behaviour is something that is not well received by more traditional sectors of Somali society as I further discuss in next section.

Thereafter the clan membership is another good example of what matters where, a category that in the diaspora loses meaning in detriment of strongest national, cultural and religious identity discourses. Islam has actually played a key role unifying Somali identity, above clan divisions, as next chapter will show.

Moreover, the fact that these Somali women are not living anymore in their country of origin exacerbates these factors both as a way of resilience and as a form of defining themselves in different contexts.

It is also important to take into account the class distinctions among the women I talked to in Nairobi and Johannesburg. The particularities of each context with regard to Somalis explained in previous chapter make Nairobi the meeting point of Somali refugees, diaspora returns and Somali-Kenyans, coming from different economic backgrounds and class status. However, in Johannesburg it's mostly refugees coming from a lower economical background that can be found, which also explains the different approach Somali women take on identity.[28] Somali women in Johannesburg, with a lower education level and coming from poorer backgrounds tend to present a vision of their own identity as immovable, based on national, cultural, religious and "traditional" identifications with the lost homeland. They show a reinforced sense of Somaliness based on discourses of cultural and national identifications. Meanwhile women living in Nairobi, due to the presence of Western diaspora returnees and the

[28] In Johannesburg, there is also a small population of upper class Somalis who reside in the wealthy northern suburb of Sandton. Some of them regularly come to Nura Lodge in Mayfair to meet with other countrymen and discuss Somali politics and business. However, this group, integrated completely by men, was highly inaccessible to talk to, so the data could not be contrasted in this regard.

more cosmopolitan experience they live in the city are more open to a performative sense of identity based on context as next section explores.

The hybrid identity of Somaliness: Global and local identifications in dialogue

Samia described herself as a woman of multiple identities; actually she considers herself as "hyphenated". She declared that in all the years she spent in Canada, Somalia never left her, returned to East Africa thinking that Somalia needed her to realise once there that it was she who needed Somalia. When she is there, she considers herself both as an outsider as an insider. As she explains:

> You become stateless. Somali passport is not valid. You cannot travel with it. You don't have the state protection or access to opportunities. But then I was lucky. I worked hard, I ended up going to Canada… and I went there to start a whole new life… The sky is the limit… it's up to you to build your life… And of course you struggle. I wasn't a white woman. I was the other... You are always an outsider, you are always the other, you are always asked the question, "where are you from?", for the way I dress and the colour of my skin, I am always seen as the other… After 20 years of exile I came back to Somalia and I see myself both as an outsider and as insider… Because I changed, I am wearing different glasses. Sometimes when I am in Somalia I feel I don't belong there. Also the conflict changes people. And the same thing when I am in Canada, I am an insider and an outsider and I think is good. It gives me advantage, room to manoeuvre (Samia, Nairobi).

For Samia, her diasporic experience has made her an outsider both in Canada and in Somalia, and even if she feels she doesn't belong fully to any of the countries, this distance benefits her as she is able to successfully navigate two very different worlds. The fact that she is always "the other", both in Canada and in Somalia, doesn't make her question her "roots" or where she belongs to. She admits openly that she belongs to both worlds and that actually something that works on her favour.

As Stuart Hall pointed out, diasporic people are:

> People from different cultural backgrounds, who have been obliged to live somewhere else but who remain in some deep ways also connected to her

> homes, cultures and places of origin, and consequently develop a what I would call a diasporic form of consciousness and way of live… what DuBois called "double consciousness" (Hall 2008, 347).

This "double consciousness" is sometimes not well received by some Somalis defending a "pure" sense of Somaliness and they are accused of being westernised by other Somalis who consider they have lost their "true Somali self".

Haweyo, who also spent 20 years of her life in Canada, recently came back to live in Nairobi because she wanted her son to grow up in Africa – so "he didn't became too westernise" – expressed her views on identity the following way:

> Because of the diasporic experiences, we have reinvented the country, we have reimagined women's role, and that is quite problematic, we need to define who we are and what Somaliness is. And when we define Somaliness, we have to make a space for the hybrid identity, the hybrid identity of Somaliness. The fact that we need to embrace it… I am a Somali woman and Western at the same time. I know that invokes all kind of emotions in our circles. But let's be honest and talk about that right now. I said most of my life was in Canada, if I deny that part of me, I am not being truly authentic. I like to think I am transnational (Haweyo, Nairobi).

For Haweyo, her sense of identity is not something immovable, as some the cases previously seen. She admits both her Somali and her Canadian identities, claiming a hybrid self. She is also very aware how this is something not always welcomed in some Somali circles, where the tendency is to defend a pure sense of Somaliness, linked to its roots, imposed by "a moral imagined community" (Malkki 1995, 254), which gives "a higher moral ground to the Somali diaspora than to the homeland since the latter is associated with atrocities and chaos" (Al-Sharmani 2007, 72).

However, Haweyo and Samia admit their dual or multiple self (Henriques et al. 1984), that takes them to live "dual lives" (Portes 1997), their identifications, even if sometimes contradictory, are both coming from their same inner selves and are a result of their transnational life. As Vertovec (2001) points out:

> The identities of numerous individuals and groups of people are negotiated within social worlds that span more than one place… transnational setting

> and dynamics affect the construction, negation and reproduction of identities (2001, 573).

These negotiations are sometimes not easy as they confront two very different sets of values as Haweyo goes on explaining: "I come from a culture where being old was a privilege and grew up in a culture where being old is considered senile. I negotiate between these two." It's up to the individual to negotiate between different set of practices and values in the decision they take along their life. A diasporic identity incorporates differ sets of vernacular, religious and cosmopolitan identifications to create a new "hybrid" self that is made sometimes of contradictory practices and ways of being. This can be sometimes problematic for diasporic people looking for a fixed, united identity. As Haweyo says: "I spent most my adult life fighting the erroneous assumption of "you can be either or". I can be both." But others, like Samia, actually see an advantage in this duality.

Therefore, the way these Somali women negotiate their diasporic identity is completely subjective, based on their life experiences. As Avtar Brah explains: "A combination of the local and the global is always an important aspect of diasporic identities but the relationship between these elements varies" (1996, 195).

The relationship between the local and the global in order to define different identifications varies depending on the particular life story of an individual together with the different intersections surrounding their lives, in relation to a collective and the places inhabited, as "the identity of the diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given. It is constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively" (Brah 1996, 183).

Here the narrativisation of the self becomes crucial, both to make sense of the diasporic experience, as well as to present oneself the world. Sometimes, as in the case of Haweyo her individual story differs from that of the collective she belongs to, but it's a narrative that is also part of the Somali diasporic experience. Quoting Brah again: "Diasporic identities are at once local and global. They are networks of transnational identification encompassing 'imagined' and 'encountered' communities" (1996, 196).

However, what all women interviewed in Nairobi and Johannesburg share, regardless of their visions on identity, is a strong sense of belonging to an "imagined community"

(Anderson 1983) that of "the Somalis", the group they belong to independently of where they are in the world. The vision of the nation as a discourse or "system of cultural representation" (Hall 1992) explains well how "Somali" national identity flourishes all around the world in spite of the collapse of the nation-state. Thereafter, in the case of Somalis, the identification with an "imagined community" precedes the nation and still prevails after the collapse of it.

It should also be taken into account how the "portability of national identity" (Sassen 1998) and "long distance nationalism" (Anderson 1992) became even stronger as a response to a shattered original place. Somali national identity is nowadays constructed around narratives and practices taking place all around the world and also in the visual space of the internet.

Moreover, in the case of Somalis, a strong sense of Somaliness existed before the creation of the Somali Republic in 1960 and still prevails today, all around the world, after the collapse of the nation state in 1991. Therefore, the strong sense or feeling of Somaliness doesn't come from identification with the nation-state, that is practically non-existent, but with the identification with certain discourses, narratives and practices based on shared structures, characteristics and implementation of vernacular and religious practices. As Murunga affirms, "Somali identity is not imposed from above, by the state, but comes from below" (2009, 207). Somaliness exists independently of an original physical place to refer to – though a nostalgic mythical Somalia exist in the mind of most Somalis – and it's instead based in a translocal sense or feeling of being connected, expressed in the repetition and transformation of distinctive sets of practices and beliefs.

In this context, in which there is not a nation-state to refer to, and with the Somali diaspora spread all around the world, collective "national" identity becomes a very strong feeling that is expressed and lived through different practices that become exacerbated to denote the distinctiveness of Somaliness in other spatial contexts around the world. This collective feeling of Somaliness is so strong that it is even able to transform physical spaces, when a significant population of Somalis concentrates in the diaspora, such as the case of Mayfair and Eastleigh, as it will be explored in the next section.

In this section I have presented and analysed some of the narratives produced by Somali refugees, diaspora returnees and Somali-Kenyans living in Nairobi and Johannesburg and how these narratives express different senses of Somaliness. These narratives and case studies showcase complex scenarios in which the vernacular and the cosmopolitan, the local and the global intermingle to make sense of the identifications of the self in relation to a collective and the places inhabited.

In the case of Johannesburg, the Somali population concentrates in the island of Mayfair, where everyone knows each other and it's populated mostly by refugees, for whom tradition and vernacular practices and discourses are strongly implemented as a way to make sense but also as a form of resilience and unity against a hostile "other".

Meanwhile in Nairobi a bigger population of Somalis is found and even if the majority of the Somali population is concentrated in Eastleigh, Somalis also inhabit other areas of the city. The Somali diaspora here is formed by migrants of different status and backgrounds and Somalis interact with the life of the city in a very differ manner than in Johannesburg, allowing for more cosmopolitan narratives and ways of being to emerge.

However, the existence of "little Mogadishus" in both cities also creates a particular landscape that recreates and encapsulates a very significant "Somali" way of life. These are "diasporic spaces" (Brah 1996) that manifest "the intersectionality of diaspora, border and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes" (Brah 1996, 181) and which, in the case of Mayfair and Eastleigh, also involve a physical processes or transformation as I will explore in the next section.

Somaliness and the transformation of spaces into places: The making of "little Mogadishus"

One day my Somali research assistant asked me if there were Spanish restaurants in Johannesburg, to which I replied that they weren't any. She replied back, quite moved: "Oh, so if you want to eat your own food, do you have to cook it for yourself? What a pity! I am very sorry." Her worry about it surprised me as that was something I hadn't even thought about or even missed, but for her, living in Mayfair, where restaurants serving Somali dishes have mushroomed in the last few years, the fact that there was

not a single Spanish restaurant in Johannesburg sounded almost like a disgrace. She, like most of single Somalis living in Mayfair, has their daily meals in any of the restaurants offering homemade "Somali" food at a very affordable price. At the same time, this increase in Somali restaurants in the neighbourhood has led to some South Africans, who used to go to eat in the area, to stop going there because now they cannot find their "South African" food and the place is now full of Somalis, which make them feel strange, as one colleague related to me.

The transformation of Mayfair in the last four years has been striking. It has gone from a predominantly Indian suburb with a Somali shopping mall to a Somali neighbourhood, mimicking "the little Mogadishu" of Eastleigh, which is much bigger and longer established.

Eastleigh has also suffered strong transformations since the outbreak of the civil war in 1991. As described in the previous chapter, it was originally a residential suburb inhabited mostly by Indians. Shamso, a Somali-Kenyan I interviewed in Nairobi explained in detail:

> Eastleigh has changed a lot since I lived there as a child. Wood Street had trees… It originally belonged to the Goans… Christians and Somalis and Indians lived together. Eastleigh was super-clean. Everything started to change in 1991, when the refugees started to came and the first thing they did, was to look for other Somalis – Somalis everywhere in the world look for others Somalis – My childhood in Eastleigh was really good, it was very clean, I knew everyone, I used to play in the streets… There were only two places where to buy chips, now you find them in every corner, because refugees don't cook. Neither were lodges…. People knew each other; we were a mix-community. Somalis, Indians, Christians… When in Christmas, our neighbours cooked and invited us. When it was Eid, we did the same thing. I studies primary and secondary school in Eastleigh, in a nun's school. There were no shops to buy clothes; we had to come to Ngara… Before the war we were only Kenyans but then with the war, refugees started to arrive and we became all the same thing. Now they see us as we are all form Somalia. Somalis from Somalia can always return home… The only home I know is Kenya (Shamso, Nairobi).

Shamso grew up in the 1980s Eastleigh, when it was still a residential suburb. She emphasises several times how clean Eastleigh used to be, compared to the dirt now found in every corner. It is also striking the mention she does regarding not shop or business in Eastleigh, what has become now one of the most distinctive characteristics in the area and how people from differ ethic and religious background used to cohabit in harmony. Everything changed with the massive arrivals of refugees from 1991, something that even had an effect on Somali-Kenyans, who went from being just another one ethnic group of nationals to carry the stigmatise label of "Somalis". Refugees also brought with them a different lifestyle that completely transformed the area that soon began to be known as Nairobi's "little Mogadishu".

Both Mayfair and Eastleigh can be considered as material reproductions at a small scale of Mogadishu's lifestyle and street life created by the combination of strong cultural, national and religious identifications with a lost homeland among Somalis living in Johannesburg and Nairobi. Moreover, Eastleigh and Mayfair have become known as "little Mogadishus" not only because of the big numbers of Somalis inhabiting them but because of the transformation of the urban space through distinctive "Somali" businesses, shops, restaurants, coffee shops and the street life generated around them. Here Somaliness becomes a materialisation of a way of being that transform spaces into very distinctive places.

Place should be distinguished from space. Place is seen as "space which carries meaning and memories" (Oakes and Price 2008, 2). Place is also socially and culturally constructed (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Massey 1994; 2005). The places we inhabit are inescapably linked to our identity as they became one of the major sources of individual and collective identifications. As Giddens points out: "Place is specific, concrete, known, familiar, bounded: the site of specific social practices which have shaped and formed us, and with which our identities are closely bound up" (1990, 301). Moreover places are also constructed in relation to other places, they are not isolated units happening in an empty space, they are interconnected (Massey 2005), as the case of Mayfair and Eastleigh perfectly illustrates.

But it's not only that identities became influenced by place. Places are also affected by the collective identity of the people inhabiting them. In the case of displacement, "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983) come to be attached to imagined places, as

displaced people cluster around remembered or imagined homelands, places or communities in a world that seems to deny such firm, territorialised anchors in their actuality" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 39). In the case of Somalis living in Eastleigh and Mayfair, they not only imagine the lost homeland, they reproduce it through different sets of practices and also through material reproductions, what becomes an external reflection of Somaliness.

When I started conducting the semi-structured interviews in Mayfair, one of the questions I used to ask was what "things" they found different in the new place. I used the word "things" to allow the answer to be as open as possible. I was thinking the answers would talk about different behaviours, lifestyles, opportunities, etc. However, most respondents understood "things" literally, as material things, hence they used to answer: "Nothing is different; you can find everything you need here, Somali clothes, Somali food, Somali perfumes." Products consumed by Somalis arrive weekly from the Middle East and Nairobi, allowing them to continue a very similar material consumption that the one they used to have.

But the reproduction of places is not only made through material objects and physical spaces but also by the rhythms of the street life. On a Friday early afternoon one can see how the streets of Eastleigh and Mayfair start to empty for the midday prayers. Shops and restaurants close and the streets become deserted only to burst back to life a couple of hours later. Somalis love to stay on the street talking to neighbours, friends and passers-by until late at night, a custom also common in many Arab and Mediterranean countries, probably due to the extreme heat experienced during the day, that keeps people indoors and the cooler evenings become the time when everyone goes out to socialise. This is a practice also reproduced in Mayfair and Eastleigh where the nightlife goes on until the early hours of the morning. In the case of Mayfair, some Muslim Ethiopians have also settled in the area and opened some businesses at the end of 8th Avenue. This also makes Mayfair one of the few neighbourhoods in Johannesburg where life continues on the street after dark and when one can safely walk around.

Even if Johannesburg is not as hot as Mogadishu, or a city that invites you to wander around its streets at night, the repetition of routine also travels with Somali migrants. In this sense, as Oakes and Price note, "place is infused with meaning… place is made through the patterned repetition of behaviours in one location" (2008, 254). And it is

this repetition of behaviours that takes Brickell and Datta (2011) to apply the Bourdieu's concept of habitus to the reproduction of spaces that some migrant communities carry out in their new locations, for which they term translocality.

Translocality is quite new concept deriving from trasnationality (Brickell and Datta, 2011; Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013). As stated in the introduction, the main contribution of this concept is the emphasis it puts on the agency of the migrant: "Translocality takes an 'agency oriented' approach to transnational migrant experiences" (Brickell and Datta 2011, 3).

Translocality explores the different dimension of identity formation in relation to particular places that are at the same time interconnected: "A translocal perspective provides a vehicle to engage with subjective and phenomenological dimensions of place-making. Places, as Oakes and Schein (2006a, 18) put it, are defined by subjective 'meaning, history, and practices' that transcend various spatial scales" (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013, 378). Greiner and Sakdapolrak (2013) go on to argue that even if this approach refers to "symbolic representations" it can also be applied to "material and physical dimensions". They also emphasise the power of routine or habitus in this place-making process. In this sense, translocation "draws attention to transformations of the physical and natural environment" (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013, 380).

Rios and Watkins apply the term of "translocal placemaking" to the Hmong diaspora living in the US. And they define it "as practices that territorialise trans local circuits of social and material relations in space and time… to capture how places contain ideas and practices that circulate to and from other locations" (Rios and Watkins 2015, 2). The making of Eastleigh and Mayfair into "little Mogadishus" was not intended by any urban planning authority. It happened spontaneously as Somali migrants started to arrive bringing with them the material and symbolic practices that transformed the neighbourhoods.

In the streets of Eastleigh and Mayfair, one can find plenty of internet cafes that apart of providing internet services also sell Somali music in CDs and DVDs burned to the customer specifications in a few minutes. This "traditional" Somali music is mostly produced in the Western diaspora, especially in London and then exported all around

the world. The music video clips showcase mostly images of Somalia, and they become a good example of how translocality can bring together such different distant places as London, Mogadishu and Johannesburg. As Rios and Watkins point out "the use of visual materials and other material objects enable the symbolic and affective bridging between locations as well as a heightened sense of home" (2015, 4). And it's actually this sense of home, as a place of belonging what makes of translocality such a strong force, as it not only connects distant places but also past, present and future in the migrant imagination. This establishes a dialogical relationship between migrants, the place they now inhabit and the one left behind (Datta 2011).

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Wise (2011) applies the concept of translocality to the transformation of neighbourhoods by migrants in the receiving country to explain the making of "little Shanghai" in Sidney, where Chinese migrants:

> Have brought a series of rapid and profound changes to the landscape of the local high-street shops… A large number of shops featuring Chinese language and shopping aesthetics have established themselves along the main street. This phenomenon has significantly reconfigured the aesthetic and material character of Ashfield's urban landscape (2011, 94).

The same could be said about Mayfair and Eastleigh, where, as explained, the Somali population has transformed the landscape of the area. Again, Wise emphasises how these processes create:

> a sense of contiguous home…which connects two or more localities… both grounding transnationals and their practices within actually existing places, yet linking them across distance through material and symbolic ties (2011, 95).

This sense of belonging becomes an important anchor and a "meaning-making practice" (Wise 2011, 97) and in the case of Somalis living in Mayfair and Eastleigh a physical expression of the "imagined community" they belong to. At the same time the neighbourhoods become an initial welcoming port when arriving to the new country, a place where they know they will find assistance and support for their first months after arrival. What Sinatti defines as a **"**decompression chamber, allowing each individual to

readjust to the new condition and facilitating insertion in the host country" (2008 74). She applies the concept of translocality to explain the making of "little Senegal" in Zigonia, northern Italy, where the significant presence of immigrants from Dakar has transformed the town's landscape. She argues that:

> Transnational migrants along their routes, strongly refer to specific and locatable places as sources of belonging. … *Trans-localities* introduce the idea of place as a setting for interaction, where people are brought together in bodily co-presence… where the issue of actors' agency becomes highly visible… also the place where the home country is redefined from a distance, recreated through memory and nostalgia and through the reproduction, abroad, of familiar cues (Sinatti 2008, 74).

In the case of Mayfair, this meaning of the neighbourhood as a symbolic home for Somalis in South Africa becomes also quite relevant when any of the recurrent xenophobic attacks occur across the country. Somalis staying isolated in townships come in masses to the neighbourhood looking for settler and support in a safe environment. During the last wave of attacks during January 2015, the numbers of Somalis in Mayfair doubled for a couple of weeks with people sleeping on the floors of overcrowded lodges and restaurants serving food for free to those who have lost everything. When I asked Hassan, a 23-year-old whose shop had been looted before being burnt, why he came to Mayfair, his response was clear: "Because here I know they would help me, here is safe, there is peace and we are too many, so in case something happens we can defend ourselves." These words express very well the meaning of home Mayfair represent for many Somalis: it's a refuge where they know they would be welcomed and taken care of.

This recreation of a home outside home, as a protective nest, also generates a lack of self-awareness in the new context. It mitigates the feeling of being "the other" in a foreign environment because you are surrounded by people that look like you, carries on very similar routines and life-styles that the ones left behind. It also creates a situation in which "the other" became any non-Somali, who trespasses the barriers of the "little Mogadishus". When doing research in Mayfair, I, a white, non-Muslim foreigner, was given the name of Surprise by one of the women I knew, as according to her, it was a

surprise every time she saw me going around. I also tried several times to visit the mosque for the afternoon prayers, when women normally attend. My research assistant and the other women with whom I had a closer relationship didn't seem comfortable going with me and came up with the invented rule that non-Muslims were not allowed inside the mosque. I knew this was not true but I didn't insist. On another occasion, I was chatting to a woman in her shop before she closed it to go to Friday prayers. I asked if I could go with her, and her response was more honest as she explained to me that if she took me along with her everyone would notice my strange presence and then the whole neighbourhood would be asking her who I was and what she was doing with me.

The power of rumours shouldn't be underestimated. Gossip and rumours play a key role inside the Somali community. They are also an important tool in controlling the navigation of spaces of Somali women living in the diaspora, as Isotalo (2007) explores on Somali women living in Turku, Finland. In the case of the Somali diaspora, rumours don't stay only in the particular community where they are generated but have transnational repercussions (Shaffer 2014; Dreby 2009).

Gossip can have different functions: a source of entertainment or information or a way to influence others (Dreby 2009). Gossip can also be taken as a socio-cultural practice, which "allows individuals to creatively participate in defining these norms and values" (Dreby 2009, 4). Moreover, in this sense, rumours can also be used as a tool of social control (Shaffer 2014; Dreby 2009; Isotalo 2007). In the case of Somali diasporic communities, these rumours normally trespass borders, especially regarding the behaviour of women. Rumours are many times related to the relation between gender and place and who is allowed to be where.

Spaces for Somalis living in Eastleigh and Mayfair are extremely gendered, with women inhabiting mostly private spheres and men the public one. Even if women who work inhabit public spaces, they do that for a reason: business, but the navigation of spaces of young Somali women are deeply controlled, especially in the smaller community of Mayfair, and rumours play a very important tool in socially controlling women's movements that at the same time are aware that any wrong doing on their sides is likely to reach faraway relatives back home or other places around the world. The rumours regarding women normally have to do with her sense of virtue, piety and

decency, as prescribed by vernacular and religious practices. Such was the case of Ambro, a young woman I knew in Mayfair, who strongly refused to go with me to Amal on several occasions. When I finally insisted in knowing the reasons behind her reluctance, she explained there was an old woman there who criticised her deeply before she got married and she even questions her now: Ambro had attended a boarding school, which caused this old lady to have great doubts about her virginity. She spread her doubts all around, damaging Ambro's reputation. Here we can see how rumours become powerful "small narratives" controlling people's movements and actions, especially those of women, whose virtue is always questioned and where the honour of the entire family seems to reside, as it will be explored in chapter 5.

What is interesting here is that gossip and rumours normally tend to take place at a very local level, however in the global interconnectedness of the Somali diaspora, where everything seems to be on the move, rumours also migrate transnationally, carrying with them the power to control people's actions, as they can damage or praise their reputation. Women try to keep their reputations undamaged at all cost so an image of being a "good Somali" and a "good Muslim" is maintained at the local and translocal community, ensuring their place in it in this manner.

Conclusion

The way Somalis are perceived in the global imagination differs enormously on how Somalis see themselves and, as identity is always dialogical, this has an effect on the way they construct themselves as a collective. They seek to project a different image than the one the world has created about them based in their conflict-ridden history of clan wars, piracy and terrorism.

In this chapter I have explored how Somali collective identity or Somaliness is constructed and performed in the two contexts of Nairobi and Johannesburg. I have analysed how the construction of Somaliness is based in certain characteristics and factors, such as a common mythical origin, the way of dressing, perceived physical features, degrees of belonging depending on the place someone has born and clanship.

This last feature of the clan, as a collective identity source, was deeply contested in favour of a strong national identification that is built around a narrative of the nation that tries to surpass all the clan differences, as it is perceived by Somalis as the main source of the years' long conflict in Somalia.

The narrative of the nation nowadays takes place in the virtual spaces of Facebook and Instagram, where Somalis around the world reconstruct a nostalgic vision of a pre-war Somalia that no longer exist. In both cities, women expressed a sense of belonging to an "imagined community", sustained on narratives of national and cultural identification with a lost homeland. What is interesting about this is that this strong national identification exists independently of a territorial nation-state that nowadays is practically non-existent. The identification with a collective that is spread all around the world comes from "below" based in the performance of certain practices that act as unifying factor, together with a strong sense of belonging to an "imagined community".

The conceptions of identity Somali women have differ from Johannesburg to Nairobi. In Johannesburg, where Somalis concentrate in the island of Mayfair, Somaliness is expressed and experienced in its more "traditional form", with some vernacular practices being strengthened as they become a unifying factor and a way of resilience in a very hostile context. The fact that the Somali community here is smaller than in Nairobi and integrated mostly by refuges and asylum seekers from a lower class makes them perceive tradition as an immobile characteristic they use to make sense and in this way reinforce their sense of identity in a very xenophobic context. This is also a way to ensure their membership in the Somali community of Mayfair, to keep linked to a collective that will be the only structure they can rely in case of trouble.

Meanwhile in Nairobi, where the Somali population is integrated by Somali migrants, diaspora returnees and Somali Kenyans, belonging to different backgrounds, class and status, the sense of identity is more fluid and performative. Here the "hybrid identity of Somaliness" becomes more noticeable; with individuals negotiating between different sets of identifications, as a result of a transnational life where the global and the local keep a different, more open and fluid dialogue than in Johannesburg. This is also due to the nature of Nairobi as a port, more open to cosmopolitan ways of being and where different expressions of being Somali cohabit in a city to which they also interact more

freely than in Johannesburg, where the isolation they find in Mayfair reinforces some of the strongest characteristics of Somaliness. Nevertheless, in Nairobi, even if the diasporic experience has generated a more postmodern sense of self, the cosmopolitanism resulting from it is always added to Somaliness, never a replacement of it.

At the same time in both cities, the strong sense of Somaliness, has affected the urban landscapes with the transformation of Eastleigh and Mayfair into "little Mogadishus". This is the result of material reproduction, such as the distinctive Somali business in the areas, as well as, the reproduction of cultural and religious practices and daily life rhythms that affect and transform the neighbourhood. This situation of translocality, recreates the lost homeland in a new place at the same time that connects this two neighbourhoods between themselves as well as with other places around the world where Somali communities can be found.

In both cities, the making of "little Mogadishus" explained through translocality, showcases the dialogical relationship between identity and place and how the cultural practices and ways of being performed by a collectivity have a material impact in the transformation of an urban space. Translocality is also especially relevant to understand the dynamics of the Somali diaspora as it highlights identity formation processes that transcend boundaries.

The spaces in both neighbourhoods are also extremely gendered, which affects their navigations by men and women, where the power of rumours is able to control people's actions, as whatever they do – or don't do – wont only be known in the communities of Eastleigh and Mayfair but across all the Somali enclaves around the world, as rumours among Somalis also have the capacity to migrate transnationally. This is more noticeable in Mayfair, reinforcing the sense the neighbourhood as an enclosed island.

It is also important to take into account, that even if Somaliness seems to exist without a connection to a physical territory, it is precisely the performance of that Somaliness that recreates Somalia wherever a community of Somalis is found in the diaspora. As stated above, Somali identity survives without links to a particular place but at the same time Somalis seem to have the capacity to reproduce a "little Somalias" wherever they go.

Here Appiah's ideal of cosmopolitan patriots, taking their roots with them wherever they go in the world, becomes especially apparent, showcasing in this way how collective national identifications can be built and developed independently from an original national territory. In this way challenging the widespread belief that culture and identity are fixed characteristics, linked to a particular place, as Malkki already criticised twenty years ago.

Nevertheless, even if a strong sense of Somaliness seems to be the main source of identification for Somalis all around the world, the role of Islam as a unifying factor and as a way to define themselves also appeared as very important factor in the constitution of Somali collective identity, as next chapter will explore.

Chapter 4
Somaliness and Islam

> *The strange phenomenon of loving culture over religion is just a reflection of the age-old struggle of loving the creation over the Creator*.
>
> – Yasmin Mogahed

A week after the Westgate attacks in Nairobi, claimed by the Somali terrorist group Al-Shabaab, I went to Mayfair; Amal, the normally lively shopping mall, was quiet and people were worried. It had emerged on the news that one of the perpetrators behind the attacks, Samantha Lewthwaite, "the white widow", had lived in Mayfair before the attack, and the police and journalists had been asking questions around. People were worried about a possible backlash, the insults they had received from black South African citizens was concern about possible harassments or that another wave of xenophobic attacks. The women I talked to repeated over and over again, like a mantra that the attack was not Islamic, that Islam was not about that, that Islam was about love and peace and not death and terror. Even if the perpetrators of the attack were mostly from ethnic Somali origin, the main concern of the women in Amal was to defend and clear the name of Islam, not that of Somalis.

Initially this research didn't intend to look at religion as the main aim of this thesis was to observe and analyse how cultural practices were transformed through migration. However, when asked about culture, Islam started to come in every answer women gave which made me readjust the topics to research for this thesis. For instance, Islam regulates all gender relations for Somalis: Men and women who are not from the same family are not allowed to interact, sexual relations before marriage are completely forbidden and the uses of spaces are highly regulated. As my friend Fatuma told me once during the course of this research: "*You cannot talk about women roles in the Somali culture without Islam. If you are going to talk about gender relations, religion is always going to emerge".*

This became apparent as I moved further on with my fieldwork, both in Nairobi and Johannesburg, as all the women I interviewed – but one – declared that religion always comes first, before culture; even my research assistant in Johannesburg, tired of me asking this question in all the interviews, assured me that no Somali was going to answer differently. Religion will "*always, always"* come first for Somalis.

This is something also reflected in the opening quote of this chapter, by the Egyptian writer and public speaker, Yamin Mogahed, that was shared on the Facebook page of one of my informants in Nairobi, a Somali girl of 25 years. The quote, originally posted in Mogahed's Facebook page, got 2800 likes and was shared 391 times. As mentioned in the introduction and previous chapter, this is a common practice among young Somali that inundate their Facebook and Instagram accounts with a mixture of self-help quotes and national/cultural and religious posts.

Taking into account the solid national and cultural identifications seen before, I found this strong identification with Islam quite revealing, as in some ways it contradicts claims they have previously made. This chapter explores some of these contradictions and also asks: what are the particularities and intersections between Islam and Somaliness and how has the first become a bigger source of identification for Somaliness?

It was important for women to distinguish between religious and cultural set of practices, and they used them to support their arguments around the contested terrains of marriage or female circumcision. When the religious approach to specific situation, differs from the vernacular one, they normally always favoured the Islamic one, on the grounds that "*following religions is more important"*. And it became important also for this research to analyse how women negotiated their Muslim and Somali identities in relation to specific situations and discourses. Therefore, based on women's reflections around 'culture and religion' I made during the interviews and fieldwork, this chapter addresses the questions of: How do vernacular and religious practices interweave? How do women negotiate their Somali and Muslim identity in the two contexts of Nairobi and Johannesburg? And why is it important for Somali women to present themselves as 'Good Muslims'?

I will firstly explore how certain influence by scholars in Saudi Arabia, together with the civil war in the 1990s, have contributed to a strong Islamic revival among Somalis.

Secondly, the effects of women accessing the Qur'an and how these questions are linked to the cosmopolitan implications of belonging to the *umma*, which is an extended community all around the world with a common way of life despite national and cultural differences. I finally argue how these questions are strongly connected to the 'political image' of being Muslim in today's world.

Islam and Somaliness

> Anlaam: For me, religion is more important than culture.
> Nereida: Why?
> A: Because I'm Muslim and religion is important. I don't like culture.
> N: Why don't you like culture?
> A: I like religion. We don't follow culture. The culture is from long time, now we follow the religion. We don't follow culture because if you follow culture you don't dress like this [she is wearing a *niqab*], our culture is Muslim. We dress like Muslim. So if you dress like culture you leave your religion. We leave the culture now and we follow the religion. Everyone in Somalia follows religion for a long time now (Anlaam, Johannesburg).

Anlaam is an old woman who has been living in Johannesburg for more than 20 years now. She owns a shop in Amal and at the beginning she was very reluctant to talk to me on the basis that her English was not good enough. She sees herself as a model Muslim woman: praying 5 times a day, fasting, going to the mosque on Fridays and wearing a *niqab* covering her face. She is also very critical of younger Somali women who are not as rigorous in their everyday practices as she thinks they should be and she has caused much trouble with her endless gossip. However, her rejection of "culture" over religion is not unique from her; actually it was the most common response women gave during all the interviews both in Nairobi and Johannesburg, regardless of the age, class or education of the respondent. Their answers were simple or elaborate depending on their age and education but their message was clear and always the same. For example, Samia in Nairobi gave a more detailed explanation about her relation to vernacular cultural practices and Islam:

> Culture and religion, both are important but I don't want to accept certain elements of Somali culture, I won't accept especially those that discriminate women but I fully accept Islam. Islam, unlike culture, it is divine. I cannot question. I can engage, understand and don't rely in somebody's interpretation. Culture is man-made, no divine, That's why it can be challenged. But I cannot challenge my God. But you can challenge other human beings, because they make mistakes (Samia, Nairobi).

For her the main distinction between culture and religion is that the first one is "man-made" and can be challenged as against religion that is divine and cannot be questioned. With this statement she becomes a vernacular theorist expressing the theories she has built along her life based on her experiences and beliefs and that are going to influence her identifications and practices. Even if her reflections are more elaborate, her words carry the same message than Anlaam's and share the message of the opening quote of this chapter, a distinction between culture "a creation" that can be changed, challenged or even rejected and religion that belongs to another order, that of the divine.

This view shared also by many other Somali women of leaving culture behind in favour of religion, reflects, among other things, the strong Islamic revival that went on Somalia since the 1960s (Elmi 2010) and that was strengthen during the war in the 1990s. Works by Masquellier (2009) or Mahmood (2005) document this process of Islamic revival also taking place among Muslim women in other regions of Africa such as Niger and Egypt respectively. However in the case of Somalia, the reasons behind this Islamic revival are slightly different. During the 1960, Somali scholars who had been granted scholarships to study in the Arab countries of the Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia, began to return to Somalia, bringing with them a stronger view of Islam and what Elmi calls the Islamisation of Somalia started (2010, 48). These returning scholars had actually been schooled in *Wahabism*, one of the most radical interpretations and ideology of Sunni Islam that many see as the root of the fundamentalism and radicalisation of Islam. Even if Somalia was already a Muslim country, the Islamic interpretations and practices were more relaxed than they are today. What these scholars started to preach was an exported ideology from the Arab Emirates. And as Luul, a woman interviewed in Nairobi explained: "They were very dogmatic and they only taught their interpretation that was very radical, that had very strong views about Islam

and in Somalia people listened to them because they were the experts, the authority". This radical interpretation of Islam was strengthened later in the 1990s during the war that many Somalis viewed as a punishment from Allah for not being good Muslims. As Luul goes on to explain:

> The way Somalis practice Islam is very different from the people of the [Kenyan] coast or from Muslims from Western Kenya… In Somalia is very different. People have seen the war as a punishment from Allah, because Somalis were very open before… And Siad Barre imposed a scientific socialism that did not have a religious component. Afterwards, many people said that Barre was punished because he had left religion behind… In Somalia the radicalization [of Islam] is something that suffocates you! It is not like that in other African countries, like in Senegal, there, a 90% of the population are Muslims but they don't dress like this, they wear their traditional African clothes, they drink alcohol (Luul, Nairobi).

Therefore, in the Somali context, the new radical visions of Islam exported from the Arab Emirates during the 1960s became reinforced during the war in the 1990s due to the popular belief that it was a curse from Allah. In this sense, Islam became a religion to believe in, a faith, but also a tool to create meaning. It became the foundation of a strong collective narrative to make sense of the war and an ordered way of dealing with the chaos and traumas that the war brought with it. It became a way to make sense; regardless if that was in detriment of vernacular cultural forms that were left behind in favour of Islam. As Luul explains:

> For Somalis, everything that is culture they have looked for a justification of religion. So religion has become more important in the Somali culture. We are losing many things of our culture because of the influence of religion (Luul, Nairobi).

Muslim religion became a layer of meaning that covered a previous existing vernacular sublayer that no longer worked to make sense of the world – and that actually was contrary to many of the precepts of Islam. As Geertz notes, religion doesn't avoid suffering but helps in "how to suffer, how to make of physical pain, personal loss, worldly defeat, or the helpless contemplation of others' agony something bearable,

supportable-something, as we say, sufferable" (1973, 104). And that is why Anlaam "*doesn't like "culture" anymore*" and what takes Ambro, a 50-year-old business woman temporarily residing in Nairobi after her return form Dubai, to affirm: "*We don't have another culture behind the Muslim religion; all our customs are collected under the Muslim side.*"

However, Islam, in relation to Somalis, is not only a particular collective faith or a collective narrative to make sense but it has also become very important collective identity feature. As Elmi explains:

> Islam as a religion has played a significant role in the lives of Somalis. It was and still is a strong identity… Hersi writes, "Islam as a religion and a system of values so thoroughly permeates all aspects of Somali life that is difficult to conceive of any meaning in the term Somali itself without at the same time implying Islamic identity" (Hersi 1977, 109). Moreover Islam informs many facets of everyday activities (2010, 50).

Hersi's words were written in 1977, before the war, and already manifest the importance of being Muslim for Somalis, a tendency that has strengthened in the last decades as explained above. Actually the distinction between being Somali and being Muslim often become blurred, especially for younger Somali women, born after or during the war. For them, there is almost no difference between being Somali and being Muslim. As Fadumo declares: "*I see no difference between Somali culture and Islam, whatever we do is Islamic. Being a Somali woman means being a Muslim woman*". Fadumo equalises being Somali with being Muslim; for her there is no difference between being a Somali woman and being a Muslim woman as the first implies the other. For the majority of Somali women, vernacular cultural practices have become so interweaved with Islamic practices, that they are the same for them. Nasra, a 22-year-old staying in Nairobi says: "*There is not much big difference between our Muslim culture and our Somali culture*". Or as Zeynab in Johannesburg explains:

> I was born into the culture and the religion, I was born Muslim and I was born Somalian. I was born in both at the same time. From the start it was the same to me they go together. I was born and I was told you are Somalian and Muslim (Zeynab, Johannesburg).

Here we can see again how Islam, as national identity before, is seen as an "entity" or a pre-given structure in which you are born into and "you are told" who you are. Both Somaliness and Islam are expressed through practices in everyday life. And a part of the historical context in which an Islamic revival became a useful narrative to a way of making sense of the war, Islam could easily become a substitute for vernacular cultural practices in Somalia due to its strong performativity, implemented both in everyday practices and during rituals. Fauzia explains in this regard:

> Islam is a way of life, It's a complete way of life. From the beginning to the end that's what you are supposed to do. People who don't know about Islam maybe see another wrong picture, but Islam is a way of life (Fauzia, Johannesburg).

The definition she uses for Islam as a way of life is normally a definition applied to culture. In this sense, Islam is not only a faith but a set of practices that regulates almost all actions of the individual and that is socially constructed (Durkheim 1915). Islam, as a religion and a culture, becomes an integral way of life maintained and implemented by a collective at the same time that a strong identity source for the individual that performs the prescribed practices and codes of conduct. As Fauzia goes on:

> Our religion is a way of ruling of the life all of our rules go thought the religion. There is nothing beyond the religion… Our tradition, our food, our way of living, our way go looking and doing everything. Our religion becomes our life (Fauzia, Johannesburg).

This is especially apparent when an individual is immersed in a specific community or social group, such as Somalis in Mayfair and Eastleigh. However when one individual finds himself or herself alone in another context, the social aspect of religion disappear and with it the peer pressure to implement certain practices. That is for example the case of Deccah, who gained a scholarship to study in Italy where she spent five years living among Italians and other international students with no contact with Somalis or Muslims. She openly admits:

> I am not religious but religion governs my life. In fact in Italy I put on trousers but when I am here [in Nairobi] in this community I put on my *hijab*. Religion rules, the faith, the beliefs, all that about hell, many things… Our religion is strong; it hasn't lost strength like Catholicism in Europe (Deccah, Nairobi).

Even if Fauzia's and Deccah's conceptions and implementations of Islam are very different, both are aware of the strength of Islam as a regulating system that governs almost all aspects of Somali women's lives. This strength can be more easily understood if we leave behind the distinction between culture and religion and understand Islam as a "discursive representation" (Asad 1986):

> "The world of Islam" is a concept for organizing historical narratives, not the name for a self-contained collective agent. This is not to say that historical narratives have no social effect—on the contrary. But the integrity of the world of Islam is essentially ideological, a discursive representation (Asad 1986, 11).

Moreover, this "discursive representation" becomes a powerful tool to create meaning thanks to tradition. For Asad tradition is not an immobile entity linked to discourses of national identity, neither refers to "the invention of tradition" proposed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). For him:

> A tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to *a past* (when the practice was instituted, and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and *a future* (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through *a present* (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions). An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present… it will be the practitioners' conceptions of what is *apt performance,* and of how the past is related to

> present practices, that will be crucial for tradition, not the apparent repetition of an old form (Asad 1986, 14/15).

Taking into account what was stated in the first chapter of this thesis with regard to narrative and discourse, discourses here actually work as narratives, in the sense that they are able to link past, present and future – one of the main qualities of narratives, thanks to the plot. In fact this can happen because discourse here is constituted by interlinked historical narratives.

The organisation of historical narratives within discourse not only gives form to a coherent ideology, it actually creates it in the process. In this sense Islam can be considered as a discourse constructed by collective narratives spanning along time and across space; a discourse that is constantly contested and adapted to specific contexts for its implementation in the practice of everyday life. This is why Islam becomes a form of "discursive tradition" to which individuals can engage with depending on the context they find themselves, as Samia previously expressed.[29] Thereafter it could be said that the discursive tradition of Islam is always dialogical, within itself and in relation to a collective and the individual subjects conforming it that transmit, create and implement the ideology and practice of this discursive tradition.

As this dialogical discursive tradition cut across time and space, it creates a coherent continuity in a situation of displacement. Islam becomes for Somalis a unifying identification above the categories of clan, gender, class or even nationality, as it will be explored below in relation to the *umma*. As Tiilikainen notes among Somali women living in Finland:

> In conditions of civil war and diaspora, Islam has for many Somalis become a more conscious part of life… In a religiously, culturally and socially new environment, Islam may work as a moral and also practical compass in everyday life for Somali refugee women. Many Somali women in Finland regard Islam as an important factor not only in terms of religious reproduction, but also for cultural reproduction and maintenance of ethnic

[29] A discursive tradition that is even also contested within itself as the differences between Sunnis and Shiites showcases.

> identities. For Somali women, Islam may signify a continuity and resource, but also change and challenge, even pressure (2007, 224).

In all the cases presented above it can also be observed how all narratives, discourses and claims Somali women make, both in Nairobi and Johannesburg, are addressed to prove how being Muslim is a category above and more important than being Somali. Actually there was only one woman in Nairobi who contested this.

> Somalis are more loyal to their culture than religion. They are more inclined to culture. Religion is not only about praying and fasting is about following some fundamentals. Islam opposes racism, discrimination, social injustice and if you look at our society there are many inequalities. There is greed, exploitation… Who follows religion then? (Deggan, Nairobi).

Even if the prevalent discourse among all the women I talked to was that "religion always comes first", Deggan's words contest this vision, as other practices and customs, also do, such as the importance of marrying a Somali man, as next chapter will explore. However in the next section I explore how vernacular and religious practices and beliefs keep a dialogical relationship in order to eradicate other practices such as female circumcision.

Vernacular and Islamic practices in dialogue

I met Hodan when I was still living in Nairobi and she was studying for her degree in International Relations at United States International University. She is a Somali-Kenyan, the daughter of a well-known business woman in Nairobi. I saw her during my three visits to Nairobi in the following years. The last time I saw her, in January 2014, she had changed a lot. After graduating in Nairobi she decided to go to Khartoum to learn Arabic, where she is now living. Her parents want her to marry when she finishes the course in some months but she doesn't yet want to. What she wants is to work at the Qatar Foundation so she can practice her Arabic and live in the country. She says that if she ends up marrying any man there, an Arab, her parents would think she is crazy but

she doesn't mind because she knows that as long he is a Muslim she is not doing anything wrong.

Hodan is one of many young Somali woman in Nairobi also accessing the Qur'an herself thanks to her knowledge of Arabic. Among other things, this gives her some power, some control and a strong uncontested argument to rebel against certain customs of her "Somali culture", such as the politics around marriage. And she uses her first-hand knowledge of the Qur'an to contest vernacular practices she doesn't want to follow. This occurred at the same that Samira in Johannesburg, decided to marry a Lebanese. She did it on the grounds that he was also a Muslim, so she was not doing something wrong despite the enormous criticism she received from most members of the community in Mayfair, where she became the target of all kind of rumours for several months.

Accessing the Islamic texts gives Somali women power to decide over certain things. This is not a phenomenon happening only in Nairobi or Johannesburg but actually taking place along the Somali diaspora as Hernlund and Shell-Duncan (2007) mention with regard to Somali women living in the UK, Australia, Sweden and Norway. Women accessing the Qur'an are able to interpret the verses by themselves, without intermediaries and in this way become critical of certain interpretations that have been imposed in the past. As Samia explains:

> Those who exploit, those who have more power, they want to keep people in the dark and they will decide [to translate] certain verses… Translate the whole verse! I know because I am an educated woman but they cut, they trim it because they want people to remain where they are so they can retain their power, people don't know, so they don't question (Samia, Nairobi).

A good example of it is when it comes to or the controversial practice of female circumcision.

In Somalia female circumcision has been practiced for centuries in its most drastic form: infibulation or pharaonic circumcision that implies the cutting of the clitoris and labia that are sewn afterwards leaving a small orifice for the passing of urine and menstrual flow (Brady and Files 2007).

The physical and psychological consequences and trauma of this practice are well documented (Hernlund and Shell-Duncan 2007; Abusharaf 2001; Shweder 2000; Walley 1997; Boddy 1982). I will next reflect on some Somali women's views on this issue and how the fact that they are accessing the Qur'an is changing this practice, together, of course, with the results of years of awareness campaigns to end the practice.

All the women I talked to in Nairobi and Johannesburg are aware that this is a vernacular cultural practice and not something prescribed by the Qur'an. As Fadumo says: "*Circumcision for women is not emphasised in Islam. At least the way Somalis do it. That is Somali culture from the African side*". This is a view also shared by less educated women, who don't access the Qur'an themselves but are aware of the discourses and narratives currently circulating inside and outside the Somali diaspora. As Awa, a young refugee living in Johannesburg who doesn't know Arabic or haven't read the Qur'an herself but is informed through the talks she has with other Somali women, points out:

> Culture and religion are almost the same in Somalia, almost the same, only small things are different… Like circumcision but now they want to stop it because when you marry it's too much problem and also when you get your period and when you have a baby. But now it's changing, people understand now but before they didn't… Our mothers didn't know about it, they didn't talk, they didn't associate the pains they suffered to circumcision (Awa, Johannesburg).

Somali women living outside of Somalia have become aware that this practice is un-Islamic and that it doesn't take place everywhere. As Farhia in Nairobi states:

> When you live in a place where everyone is one-armed you believe that's the normality but then you arrive to another place where people have two arms and then you realise that having one arm is not the norm (Farhia, Nairobi).

Most of the women in both cities, also declared how the fact of having left Somalia has opened their eyes in this regard, as they have realised this is not the norm everywhere and it can be contested. As Sagal in Johannesburg declares:

> In Somalia you cannot understand because they know nothing, but when you come to South Africa you see everything and you realize and maybe you

> don't do to your daughter or someone else. The culture is not important; the most important thing is the religion (Sagal, Johannesburg).

Some of the women in Nairobi and Johannesburg emphasised how the practice is decreasing in both places, that they are not doing to it to their daughters anymore and they blamed people in Somalia of being uneducated and backward. As two women in Nairobi discuss:

> Nereida: If you are not circumcised, would it be difficult for you to get married? Will men reject you?
> Hibo: That's the funny thing; they actually want women who have not been touched.
> Ayan: Men nowadays, the ones who are from the Somalia rural areas, they want the one who's circumcised, you know?
> Hibo: they believe if a woman is not circumcised, she'll have very, very high hormones; she'll look for other men, because men used to travel. They were herders. So they would go grazing his cattle for a long time looking for rain and greener pastures. And he comes back and doesn't know what goes on behind his back (Hibo and Ayan, Nairobi).

These women explain female circumcision based on Somali nomadic traditions but others point to older women as the responsible ones for the prevalence of this practice. As Amina in Nairobi explains:

> A very old bad tradition. It's now changing. People are stopping doing it. Grandmothers and mothers used to do it because they think like that the girl will be safe, when she is going, when she is coming, outside, chatting with a man, she is safe, for the safety of her virginity (Amina, Nairobi).

Actually the fact of being away from family members, especially grandmothers, helps to question and eradicate the practice, as Fábos also explored among Sudanese immigrants in Egypt (2001, 106). And as one of the respondents in Johannesburg declared, *Now we are the ones that will become grandmothers and decide what to do.*

It is true that elder women impose a great pressure in the continuity of this practice to preserve younger women's virginity. As Luul explains about the eradication of this practice:

> In Somali culture it's very complicated. It has to be a revolution from within. It is an identity that is already constructed and to deconstruct it from the outside is very difficult. Even more, there are people who keep generating that identity the grandmothers, the mothers, the aunties… (Luul, Nairobi).

However grandmothers and older ladies cannot be solely blamed for the perpetuation of this practice, as they are acting under the rules of a very patriarchal society that back their claims using certain interpretations of the Qur'an in their favour, as Faiza, in Nairobi pointed out. To eradicate the practice in Somalia completely, it also needs a unified voice from the religious leaders in the country condemning the practice as un-Islamic. However this is not easy as many women who earn their living as circumcisers, for obvious reasons, oppose the stopping of it and will look for any religious authority to keep supporting the practice. As well as the very strong force of patriarchy still very present in Somali society, Faiza related how once they were doing a campaign in a rural area of Somalia. They talked to the elders and then let them discuss the matter. When they met with them again to check if they would support the campaign, the elders said no, on the bases that if they allowed this now, then women will come demanding other things like the end of polygamy.

She believes that even if this practice is reproduced and implemented only by women, they do so in order to fulfil men's desires, in which women became a transaction. As Fardosa explains in Nairobi:

> If a man is not going to marry your daughter because she is not circumcised then you want to circumcise them in preparation to ensure her future in place of marriage… It's like an exchange of goods. If I'm paying for this I want to be sure that no other man has touched this, you know? …Your daughter. How does the father ensure that his daughter is not touched? So that's the whole thing. That's the basis for it. It's also triggered on egos of men and using women's bodies as goods to sell (Faiza, Nairobi).

Whatever the reasons behind this practice, most of the women I talked to in Nairobi and Johannesburg were well aware that this is a practice carried out to suppress women's sexual desire in order to ensure her virginity until a marriage is formalised:

> You know what they believe? If we don't circumcise the lady, maybe she is going to have a boyfriend when she is 14 years old, and they say, the feeling

> is high, but if you cut that thing, you don't feel anything. That's what they think (Sukria, Johannesburg).

Thereafter the access to the Qur'an and interpreting it themselves gives women arguments to eradicate these practices. As Samia says:

> The more women become knowledge of their faith, the more chances the practice of FGM will decrease. Mothers aware of the Qur´an teachings, won't put their daughters through that because they know is un-Islamic (Samia, Nairobi).

Umma, cosmopolitanism and the "good Muslim"

In most of the case studies presented above, it can be observed how Somali women tend to present themselves as virtuous Muslim women. All their words and most of her actions are informed by the discursive tradition of Islam and directed to probe the virtue of their beliefs, practices and performances. The reasons for this behaviour are various, as I have explored in the first section of this chapter.

However I argue that there are extended reasons behind the pursuit of virtue in their Islamic practices in detriment to local and vernacular cultural practices: Somali women direct their words and actions towards the discursive tradition of Islam in order to earn a respectable place among the greater community of Muslims, the *umma.*

Belonging to the *umma* acts as upper category of collective identity that provides an extended network of support all around the world. As Sareedo in Johannesburg clearly explained:

> First Muslim, then Somali, because if I go for example to Spain and I don't find Somali people then I can look for Muslims. First you look for your family, then for Somalis, then for Muslims, so first always a Muslim (Sareedo, Johannesburg).

Earning a respectable place in the imaginary community of the *umma* means belonging to a bigger category that trespasses particular national and cultural identifications. Many Somali women try to erase any cultural marks, differences and identifications in favour of identifying themselves with a bigger entity. As Fiido in Nairobi summarises:

> I have seen many Arab countries there is not difference between us, only the language… I went to Egypt, Syria, Qatar, Kuwait, Emirates, Pakistan, India… The language is different but wherever you go, there is the religion, and it becomes your habit, it's not difficult (Fiido, Nairobi).

As Fiido expresses, the repetition of Islamic practices on everyday life become a habit, a common place that enables Somalis to belong to a bigger structure that surpasses national or cultural boundaries. And "it is not difficult" because it is an internalised habitus. Bourdieu defines the habitus:

> as a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception: and the objective coordination of practices and sharing of a world-view could be founded on the perfect impersonality and interchangeability of singular practices and views (Bourdieu 1977, 86).

Hence the everyday practice of Islam enables the belonging to a bigger structure, to a network of people who independent of their place of origin share a particular worldview and belief that transcend national boundaries. Today Muslims can be found all around the world, which has cosmopolitan implications for Somalis as it enables them to relate and engage with something bigger than themselves, as Saaredo clearly expressed above. This also generates a feeling of belonging to a greater community that is translocally connected. The implementation of Islamic practices in a particular locale link that place to a transnational "imaginary community". At the same time, the performances of Islamic practices by Somalis in their everyday life in Eastleigh and Mayfair have also contributed to the transformation of the neighbourhood into "little Mogadishus", together with Somaliness, as explored in the previous chapter. For instance, the street rhythms and landscapes of both neighbourhood are completely regulated by Islamic practices, with their streets empting following the call to prayers and bursting back with life after is finished; their restaurants and butcheries offering only *halaal* meat and small bottles of *Zamzam*, the holy water from Mecca, can be found in almost every shop. Moreover, the gendered nature of spaces in these neighbourhoods is regulated both by vernacular and Islamic precepts, with women navigating mostly private or "business spaces" while the men occupy the public sphere, where rumours, as explored in previous chapter, become a tool of social control over women's movements and

decency. Somali women are aware that if they break any of the non-written spatial rules governing these spaces they run the risks of being called not only as a "bad Somali girl" but also a "bad Muslim woman", which will ruin her reputation not only in the community where she lives but in the different translocal "imagined communities" she also inhabits and belongs to.

Thereafter, the implementation and repetition of Islamic practices in their everyday lives connects Somalis from the locality of Eastleigh or Mayfair to the greater global community of *umma*. This generates a sense of a cosmopolitan collective identity that transcends Somaliness. As mentioned in the previous chapter, translocality explains dynamics of identity formation across boundaries (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013). These dynamics or processes are normally multi-layered and the same Somaliness that plays an important role in the construction of a strong collective identity, at the same time erases identification with the clan. Islam and the implication of belonging to *umma* dilutes "national" identification feelings in favour of cosmopolitan sense of belonging to the world.

Umma, in this context, can be seen as another supra-structure of modernity, an alternative to Western globalisation but at the same time compatible with it.

Finally, there is one more implicit reason for Somali women's insistence to prove they are virtuous Muslims. Their narratives and actions are also driven as a response to current discourses about Muslims and terrorism. They intend to prove that they are "good Muslims", which implicitly mean that they are not terrorists.

Fadumo, a 40-year-old woman from Somalia who works in a shop in Amal knows several languages, namely, Somali, Kiswahili, English and Arabic, and she is highly opinionated in literature and religion. Our conversation starts with her telling me her life story but it soon changes to questions around culture and Islam from which she offers a very interesting insight. The interview took place after the Westgate attacks in Nairobi and her main concern was about how Muslims and Islam are being portrayed in the global media:

> There are people who believe that everyone who is a Muslim is a terrorist… The meaning of Islam is peace… But the media… these guys hijacked Islam name. They just take the Islamic name and use it for their own things. That's hijacking the Islamic name…Westgate… that was terrible. I cannot believe

> any Muslim could do that. These are abnormal people, any community could have bad people but they hijacked that name just to make the world hate Muslims (Fadumo, Johannesburg).

She goes on explaining how the focus on Islam as terrorism after 9/11 has become an obsession in the Western world:

> Every Muslim is presented as a terrorist… you're not looked at as a Somali or as an Egyptian. You're seen as a Muslim. So when a terrorist attack happens they blame all Muslims and Islam. But Islam doesn't teach terrorism, the meaning of Islam is peace (Fadumo, Johannesburg).

She compares it with the attacks in Norway in 2011, where society and the media just blamed "a crazy guy" and not an entire society or religion. She emphasises how these different discourses are created by the media and the misconception about Islam in the Western imaginary.

Fandom's statement about terrorism and Islam reflect the words of Mahmood Mamdani who explain the impact of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the Islamic world:

> President Bush moved to distinguish between "good Muslims" and "bad Muslims". From this point of view, "bad Muslims" were clearly responsible for terrorism. At the same time, the president seemed to assure Americans that "good Muslims" were anxious to clear their names and consciences of this horrible crime and would undoubtedly support "us" in the war against "them". But this could not hide the central message of such discourse: until proved to be "good" every Muslim was presumed to be "bad". All Muslims were now under the obligation to prove their credentials by joining the war against "bad Muslims". Judgments of "good" and "bad" refer to Muslim political identities, not to cultural or religious ones (2004, 15).

Hence the insistence of Fadumo and many other Somali women to present themselves as "good" virtuous Muslim women, even if that meant it was to the detriment of their Somaliness; for them it was more important to prove to the world that they were not "bad" Muslims or, in other words, fanatical terrorists. This was particularly important in the context this research took place. To start with, the women I talked to were addressing me, a non-Muslim, so it was in their own interest to present themselves as virtuous and piteous religious women. They were normally eager to explain to me all

the benefits of following Islam and how it was a much more flexible religion that was perceived.

Secondly, the last stage of the fieldwork for this research took place during the Westgate attack, which had strong repercussions for Somalis in Nairobi – like the Kasarani stadium arrests – but also for Somalis all around the world, including Mayfair. This attack portrayed, once again after 9/11, the widespread representation of Muslims as fanatic terrorists.

Somali women insistence to be seen as "good Muslims" carries with it the political implications of being presented to the world as an example of virtue and well doing, not as one of terror and madness.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the role of Islam as a discursive tradition in relation to Somaliness, and how the re-Islamisation of Somalia together with the internal conflict has made it become a main source of identification among Somali women in Nairobi and Johannesburg.

Islam appears so imbued with Somaliness that sometimes it becomes difficult to differentiate between Islamic and vernacular practices; however for the women I talked to in both cities, it was important to distinguish between different sets of cultural and religious practices with regard to their identifications and the implementation of them in their everyday lives.

The majority of women consider Islam as a way of life and when tensions arise between the Islamic precepts and vernacular beliefs, the Islamic way is normally favoured. Such is the case of infibulation, where women are aware that is a vernacular practice with devastating consequences. The fact that more and more women are accessing the Qur'anic teachings on their own, gives them power to contest and discontinue this practice, as well as unwanted early marriages, on the grounds that they are un-Islamic.

I have approached Islam in relation to Somaliness building on Talad Asad's vision of a "discursive tradition" or an ideology and discourse built of collective historical

narratives that are able to transcend time and space. Somali women engage with this discursive tradition in a dialogical way, negotiating between different sets of Islamic or vernacular practices with regard to the particular situation they find themselves.

At the same time, being seen as a virtuous Muslim woman is favoured over being seen a virtuous Somali woman. The reasons behind this are various: Islam is praised as a unifying factor to overcome the clanship divisions that have torn down the country. Islam reinforces the national identity discourse of unity among Somalis. This unifying factor of Islam plays an important role inside Somalia, and also amongst the diaspora, as it becomes another structure that has managed to generate feelings of belonging to a collective.

The unifying factor of Islam operates at two different levels: it unifies Somalis among themselves, overcoming the clanship divisions and simultaneously Islam connects Somalis to the bigger Muslim community of the *umma* that erases vernacular and national identifications in favour of a cosmopolitan way of belonging to the world.

Finally the importance of being a virtuous Muslim, has to do with the image Somali women seek to project of themselves in relation to Western discourses in which Muslim are normally portrayed as terrorist or threats to national security. The actions and implementation of their daily practices and believes, are also directed to prove that they are not a threat to anyone, that they are not terrorist and can also have a place in the "new world order".

The findings regarding the relationship of Somali women with Islam as a source of identifications were quite similar in Nairobi and Johannesburg. Women in both cities highly valued Islam and always considered it above cultural or vernacular practices. When tensions arise between the vernacular and Islamic precepts, the Islamic way is normally favoured. However there are some situations, such as the politics regarding marriage and what makes an ideal husband, in which the vernacular way is preferred, which will be explored in next chapter.

Chapter 5
Somali Women of Nairobi and Johannesburg: Between Cultural Translocality and Cosmopolitanism

> *Some women choose to follow men, and some women chose to follow their dreams. If you are wondering which way to go, remember that your career will never wake up and tell you that it doesn't love you anymore.*
>
> – Lady Gaga

I met Saynab in February 2013. She had come from Somalia to South Africa by road in 2007, crossing Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique, in a journey that took several months as along the way she stayed for days or weeks with friends and relatives that lived in Nairobi, Dar es Salam or Nampula. Her new husband was waiting for her in Johannesburg. They had never met before; their families had arranged and formalised their marriage when she was still in Somalia. He owned a *spaza* shop in one of Gauteng's townships. Saynab settled in Mayfair, "as locations are too dangerous for women" and her husband used to come and go between the township and Johannesburg.

Saynab arrived full of dreams of a better life in the south of the continent but they didn't last long. Soon after her arrival she got pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy but the relationship with her husband started to deteriorate quickly as he became to chew *khat* on daily basis, then he stopped working, neither supporting her and their child. She asked for a divorce but he didn't agree and even took her refugee papers away to stop her leaving. The families were not nearby to intervene in the conflict, as it's normally the custom, but after a lot of transnational battling and talking between both families he finally granted her the divorce. Nonetheless he wouldn't support her or the child. She started looking for a job and found one as a cashier in a shop in Mayfair but she had to send her child back to her parents in Puntland as she was not able to keep looking after

him on her own. After she saved some money, she invested it on *Fong Kong*[30] clothes that she then sold in Jeppe Street. It didn't work out, as the police used to run raids and confiscate fake branded goods. At the time I met her she had left that business and was studying English.

She agreed to help me with the fieldwork and interviews for this research. We conducted a couple of interviews in the following weeks and then she disappeared. I called her, sent her messages and emails but no response was received. I couldn't understand her disappearance and I was worried something may have gone wrong. Then, after a couple of weeks, I went to Mayfair and the first thing Anlaam told me in Amal was: *Have you heard? Saynab, she has married, to a Lebanese! Can you believe it?* She had become the gossip topic of the moment; all the women were talking about her. They told me that they didn't understand how her family had agreed to it, that something like that was unacceptable, that maybe she hadn't told them or that they didn't talk to her anymore.

When I finally found her, she had moved with her new husband to a cottage at the back of a bigger house in Mayfair. She apologised for her disappearance and told me how she had met her husband in the shop she was now working. She showed me her wedding pictures. Her wedding dress was a white "Western"-style one with a Muslim touch, as the veil covering her head was arranged the manner of a headscarf. She was aware of the gossip circulating about her but she didn't care much because she believed she had done nothing wrong, that she had married a Muslim and her family supported her.

She also told me how this husband had seemed better than the other. She kept working and taking care of the house but several months after the wedding, things started going wrong, as he started mistreating her. Less than one year later she had divorced him.

She kept working as a cashier and helping me with the interviews every now and then, until her parents called her back her to Somalia. They told her that if she was not studying or doing something worthy there was no point in her staying in South Africa. But she didn't want to go back. She wanted to study and improve her life.

Then one day, a Wednesday, I received a WhatsApp message from her saying that she was not sure but that she may be going to Brazil next week. This news shocked me,

[30] Name given to fake branded clothes from China that Somalis buy from Dragon City and China Mall and then re-sell in stalls in Jeppe Street in the Johannesburg CBD.

even though I knew that she didn't want to stay here and that this was a new migration route of many Somalis trying to reach the USA via South America.

I went to see her on the Friday and she told me how she had given $2500 to a *mukhalas* to organise the journey to Sao Paolo. She was now waiting for a call from the *mukhalas* that could happen anytime to tell her when to go. She was nervous, scared and very emotional. I suddenly found myself giving her a crash course spoken Spanish lesson, *"por favor, gracias, dónde, necesito …"* so she could have a basic vocabulary to navigate Latin America. At some point she asked me: "How do you ask for help in Spanish?" And as I told her, both of our eyes filled with tears, very much aware of the many difficulties that lay ahead and of the high risks she was taking.

On Sunday she received the call she was waiting for, and she left carrying her handbag with the American flag on its four sides. She made it through the passport control at O.R. Tambo and through arrivals in Sao Paolo. She was travelling alone, armed with just with a hostel address in Sao Paolo. Once there she met another group of Somalis and two days later they were on their way to Peru, then Ecuador. I kept track of her movements via WhatsApp. They were moving using local transport, google maps and the stories circulating amongst other Somalis. The hardest part of the journey was to be the crossing from Colombia to Panama. The Pan-American Highway stops there, due to the thick impenetrable jungle that can only be crossed on foot with a smuggler who knows how to move around. All kind of illegalities also cross that border. One week later she contacted me again from Panama telling about all the hardships she went through: the smuggler abandoning them in the middle of the jungle after he asked for more money they didn't have, then the group abandoning her because she was going too slow and getting lost several times until she reached the Panama side. After recovering from this journey, she continued going up to Mexico, from where she sent her last message: "*hi nereida. how are u? im doing good still in mexico but im leaving tomorrow in sha allah to the states. you know i wont be able to contact anyone inside the prison*[31] *the will lock me six months or less sometimes wish me good luck and remember me in your prayers i will contact u as soon as i come out of prison bye for now im gonna miss u.*"

[31] By prison she meant a detention centre.

Saynab's story, though unique, has also many of the components that Somali migrant women face in Johannesburg: arranged marriage, young motherhood, problems with husbands, divorce, struggle to make a living, remarriage, wish to study and after every attempt for improvement failing, leaving South Africa in search of a "better life" somewhere else.

The fact that Saynab took most of her life-changing decisions on her own – apart from the first arranged marriage– showcases her personal agency and decision-making power, something that contrasts with the very strong patriarchal society normally associated with Somalia.

However, the ongoing years of conflict and the subsequent forced migration have transformed gender roles, practices and relations both inside and outside the country (Jinnah 2012, 2013; Al-Sharmani, 2010; Hopkins 2010; Langellier 2010; Gardner and El Bushra 2004; Farah 2000; Bryden and Steiner, 1998).

Saynab's story also shows how Somali women's agency and decision-making power is informed by their personal experiences in relation to the cultural and religious beliefs and practices of a collective. As explored in the previous chapter, these practices and beliefs can sometimes be contradictory and it is up to the individual to decide how to navigate them. For instance, Saynab's decision of marrying a Lebanese man was a personal choice of survival, and even if that meant facing strong rejection and criticism by the Somali community in Mayfair, she still went ahead with it, supported by the uncontested argument that she was marrying a Muslim, therefore behaving as a "good" Muslim woman, something that became more important for her in this case, that being a "good" Somali woman by marrying another Somali man, following an unwritten customary practice, to ensure the clanship transmission that only happens through men. Hence, even if conflict and migration have transformed gender roles and relations among Somalis, these are still very much regulated by Islamic precepts and vernacular practices.

Thereafter this chapter address the following questions: How has the migration experience affected power circulation and Somali women's agency in the two contexts of Nairobi and Johannesburg? Women's agency and decision making is informed by different sets of practices and beliefs. As it was already pointed out in the previous chapter, there are sometimes contradictions between women's discourses and practices,

as they are full of interlinked social, cultural and religious meanings that highlight the tensions existing between vernacular and Islamic practices among Somalis. So, how do Somali women navigate these contradictions that exist between discourse and practice? Moreover, even if migration has brought many changes for Somali women, marriage still constitute two important rites of passages for them. The way they are continued, contested or transformed differs depending on the woman, so how do women deal individually with the politics surrounding marriage in respect to a collective?

Somali women and power circulation: agency, migration and Islam

> The Somali community survives because of the women, because women were taking care of all aspects of life as the men were busy with the war. The men in Somalia were controlling because they had money. But life is changing now. The economy is controlling, no the man. Before women didn't have anything, but now is changing. After the war the men don't work, they are confused they don't know what to do, where to start… But all the women are working, the women know how to take care of their husbands and their children, men have become a hassle. Somalis survive because of women, if not they'd had long disappeared (Falis, Nairobi).

The years of conflict and transnational migration have transformed Somali society, and as Falis expresses, many Somali women have now the same or even more economic power than men. Her words explain very clearly how the war has created a circulation of power in which women now can have access to economic freedom without depending on men, as the traditional Somali patriarchal society dictated. This is something that has become even more exacerbated with transnational migration.[32]

Current publications in gender and migration studies challenge the notion of the stereotyped notion of the migrant women as an invisible victim and they have acknowledged the key role gender plays in the migration process and the agency and

[32] This doesn't mean that there was no feminist contestation of patriarchy in Somali society before the war or mass migration that came after it, as the legend of Queen Araweelo illustrates. She was a female ruler, from Abyssinian descend, who is thought to have lived in the tenth century. She imposed matriarchy during her regime, as she believed women were more efficient leaders than men. She became famous for the extreme measures she took to ensure it, like castrating her enemies or hanging men from their testicles to force them to get more involved in domestic chores and childbearing. For more about this legendary queen, see Affi (1995) and Shire (2014).

power decision making of many female migrants: Palmary et al., 2010; Jolly and Reeves, 2005; Pessar and Mahler, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003; Boyd and Grieco, 2003; Yeoh, Huang and Willis 2000; Curran and Saguy, 2001; to name just some.

This literature also analyses the consequences that a context of displacement generates in the gender roles, relations and practices, as all of them are normally challenged by the migration experience. Yeoh, Huang and Willis (2000) affirm that a transformation of cultural practices may occur due to the migrant feeling more free, far from her social community and cultural norms. And Curran and Sanguy noted that "exposure to new networks with different beliefs will serve to challenge one's established world view and offer alternative value systems" (2001, 59).

Nevertheless, as it has been explored, Somali migrants tend to keep very strong links with their communities back home and in the diaspora, but their translocal and diasporic experiences have contributed to the transformation of practices and ways of thinking as explored in chapter 3.

A situation of war and conflict has also made gender become a "core organizing principle" (Boyd and Grieco, 2003) in the migration process of Somalis, in which women are normally given preference when migrating. There are two main reasons for this gendered nature of migration: firstly, it is a way to avoid war rapes for women and secondly, there is the widespread belief that women tend to be more responsible and always send some money home in order to support other family members (Al-Sharmani, 2010). As Fatuma in Nairobi also corroborates:

> Men prefer women to emigrate because they either work or send money home or they have children and receive benefits from the government of the countries they are staying. Women have become the survival kit of the Somali society (Fatuma, Nairobi).

Farah (2000) illustrates this point with some Somalis living in Italy, where Somali women become the breadwinners of the family, maintaining men completely. Women have become an economic engine both inside and outside Somalia and in many cases, they are the main provider of an entire family.

Most of the youngest and unmarried women interviewed in Johannesburg also declared that for them the main difference between living in Somalia and South Africa was that

here they have to work. Back in Somalia they stayed at home with their families but here, "you have to learn to survive on your own". Married women sometimes also find that the money their husbands are bringing home is not enough, so they also try to work and in this way keep helping their family members back in Somalia. Divorced women, as I will explore later on, are the ones that struggle most as they don't normally get support from their ex-husbands and if they work they cannot take care of their children, resulting in many sending back their children to Somalia to be looked after by parents or other relatives, as Saynab did.

However, even if the war and subsequent migrations have had an effect on gender roles and relations among Somalis, these are still very much regulated by Islamic precepts:

> Islam doesn't allow the mixing of men and woman who are not from the same family. Talking is allowed, but not the social part like mingling and dancing. That's not allowed. It's a way of controlling proximity and promiscuity. That's the difference between the West and Islam. There is that influence form the West that's coming to every part of this world... If you know about a single man that is interested on you, you can marry or not, but this thing of going out for a long time, mmmm, you are testing the water before you get in, so Islam doesn't allow it… Because children can come out of that relationship, and whose children are they going to be? (Fadumo, Johannesburg)

Fadumo's words explain very well the importance Somalis give to separate gender spheres and spaces. As was explored in chapter 3, spaces in Mayfair and Eastleigh are completely gendered and it is very clear who is able to navigate certain places and who is not. One main reason behind this segregation of genders in relation to place is to avoid "proximity and promiscuity", like Fadumo says, as sexual relations among Somalis are strongly regulated by Islam, in which any sexual contact before marriage is forbidden. However the main objective of this gender segregation among Somalis is not only to avoid promiscuity itself but moreover it also obeys a vernacular rule, strongly implemented with the cultural practice of infibulation: to avoid the possible birth of a child without a recognised father that wouldn't have a place in the Somali society and its clan's genealogies.

However, many young Somali women in Nairobi and Johannesburg manage to navigate both Islamic and vernacular precepts following their individual desires and they have

boyfriends, as one respondent in Nairobi declared: "I date. We date multiple men; not just one… As long as they don't find out." But even if they date men, Somali women, abstain from any sexual relations before marriage, as the practice of female circumcision in one of its most drastic forms tries to ensure. Women's virginity is highly valued in Somali society and an absolute requisite for a woman to marry for the first time. This doesn't apply so much to the men, as many tend to have pre-marital sexual relations, with non-Somali women. As Mariam in Nairobi says:

> They put us through FGM to arrive virgins to marriage but the boys want to try everything and then marry a virgin… When I was young, Somali boys used to go with other Kenyan girls, not with us… (Mariam, Nairobi).

This highlights the double standards normally surrounding this topic, in which the virginity of a woman becomes her most important value and also where the pride and honour of her entire family resides. As Yuval Davis puts it:

> Women often come to symbolise the national collectivity, its roots, its spirit. Its national project. Moreover women, often symbolize national and collective "honour" (Yuval-Davis 1993, 627).

Hence the insistence in strongly controlled socio-spatial behaviours and the power that gossip lays on it in relation to the reputation of the girl and her family (Isotalo 2007). Women are aware of these expectations, settle upon them and they normally do what is expected of them. They know that "if they make a mistake", as Saynab put it, and become pregnant outside marriage their whole life will be ruined, as not only the community will reject them but also their own families. Moreover the child will not, without a recognised father, have a place in the Somali society or the clan genealogies.

Therefore, female circumcision and marriage remain two pivotal events in the life of a Somali woman and even if the practice of infibulation is on decrease among Somali women in Nairobi and Johannesburg, all women interviewed for this research had gone through it. This practice is completely linked to marriage as one of its main objectives is to ensure the virginity of the woman and the bridewealth the family will get. However all of those I spoke to referred to it as a traumatic event with painful physical and psychological side effects and the majority of them declared that they won't put their daughters through it.

At the same time, the politics and dynamics surrounding marriage (and divorce) and women's ideas about what makes a good husband, are quite revealing in terms of understanding how people on the move constitute themselves as a community in a foreign land, challenging the assumption that refugees are people "without culture" because they have been uprooted from their place of birth (Malkki 1992). Moreover, migration has contributed to make Somali women question what kind of Muslim and Somali woman they are, as it will be explored along next section.

The politics of marriage

> Before the marriage you are talking, you sit here and he sits there, you are not touching, if he touches your body, you cannot marry. You must be strong and say, *Ehhh, don't touch me!* You have to have a lot of attention because all the men around the world are the same. They want to touch or sleep with you, but then they don't want you for the future. If Somalian men touch your body, then you cannot marry. So you just talk, talk, talk, just talk face to face. So then when you are happy, if he is talking to you nicely, then you marry. Before he has to talk to the family, but then you can marry. If the family doesn't like him, you cannot marry (Saynab, Johanesburg).

Saynab's words summarised, in a very honest way, the process of courtship and marriage among many Somalis and how they are regulated both by Islamic and vernacular "discursive traditions": prohibition of sexual relations before marriage, value of virginity and the involvement of the family in the whole marriage process.

A lot of expectations are built around marriage and the Somali women I spoke to expressed ambivalent feelings towards it: women marrying for the first time are full of romantic expectations both about the wedding ceremony itself and the life ahead waiting for them in which they will also have a higher status. For others, marriage is only an arranged transaction in order for them to survive and their families to benefit from the bridewealth. However, other women saw it as act of liberation and emancipation, as Somali women are dependant of their family of origin until they become married. In any case, marriage for Somalis doesn't depend only of the couple that wish to marry, as Saynab's words express. The families have firstly to agree before

it can proceed. This is a process that can take weeks and that involves the suitor talking to different male members of the woman's family.

Deccah, a woman I interviewed in Nairobi, told me how, during her time in Italy, her Italian female friends used to laugh at her when she said that for her marriage was liberating, that she wanted to get married to emancipate from her parents. She was living by herself with other students because she was studying in Italy but she wouldn't be allowed to do that back in Nairobi. After completing her PhD she returned to live with her parents as an unmarried Somali woman does, even if she was 34 at that time, economically independent and had been living by her own during the 6 years she lived in Italy. Somali women are only allowed to live by their own only if "you're forced by circumstances. Or you travel to another country to better your life", as another interviewee declared in Nairobi. Even so, the majority of women who migrate to Nairobi and Johannesburg, stay with relatives, or if there aren't any, organise themselves with other single or divorced woman to share the same household.

Marriage also elevates the status of a Somali woman in society, as she is then seen as responsible for starting a family and taking care of it. Once married, it doesn't matter if your husband is not staying with you, you are married and then you can stay on your own. When Deccah finally married her husband was still working in Italy and just went to Nairobi for a couple of months a year, but then it was fine for Decaah to stay on her own during his absence as she was then a married woman.

Arranged marriage is quite common among Somalis and the young woman, in some cases – especially for economic reasons – cannot refuse the family decision of marrying her to a man chosen for her. Many marriages are arranged between families and sometimes they became the only way for a young girl to survive or get out of Somalia as was the case of Saynab, whose first marriage was arranged and formalised between her family in Somalia and her husband-to-be in Johannesburg, before she embarked in the long journey that brought her to South Africa, where she arrived already as a married women even if she had never seen her husband.

There are also some situations in which the young woman is married against her will.[33] This happens especially in Somalia, where the imposition of an unwanted marriage

[33] This is normally referred as "forced marriage" but I intentionally avoid this term due to the existing contestations about it (Chantler et al., 2009).

comes not only from the girl's family but by pressure of Al-Shabaab members, who threat families to give them their daughters as wives or they would kill everyone. This was the case of Asha, now living in Johannesburg, after having to leave with her family overnight after a jihadist come asking for her hand.

However, according to respondents in both cities, more women are rebelling now against an unwanted marriage. As Hibo in Nairobi explains:

> It doesn't happen in Nairobi. Most of the girls who live in Nairobi are more exposed, they see the cosmopolitan life. A friend of mine Anisa, when she finished 8th grade, her father just told her you're getting married, so the day of the wedding, she accepted, but the night of the wedding, she ran away, she still hasn't come back, she's been away from the family till today for seven years (Hibo, Nairobi).

Hibo's words highlight how the cosmopolitan experience of being exposed to other realities makes women more aware of other kinds of possibilities than a marriage they do not want. At the same time the access to the Qur'anic teachings gives women arguments, once again, to contest a practice they don't always agree with. As Fadumo explains:

> Islam gives the lady the right to choose. The father has a right but he cannot force her to marry. That is what Islam teaches. If your father brings someone to marry, you have the right to say: "No father, that's not the man I want", people talk a lot, *bla, bla, bla* but Islam gives a woman all the rights… (Fdumo, Johannesburg).

Even if arranged or not, the involvement of the whole family is a norm when choosing who the woman should marry. This scenario can generate a situation where the woman, wanting to marry a man that their family doesn't approve, decides on an agreed elopement with the man she has chosen, a practice also quite common among young Somali women.

Deccah, whose husband was her own choice, related how difficult the agreement on her marriage was. Her father was very proud of her; he had always supported her education and even sent her to Italy to complete her PhD. In her time there, she met a Somali man;

they felt in love and wanted to get married but Deccah's father opposed it on the grounds that he was a Somali from Ethiopia that nobody in the family knew about. The fact that he was working as a construction worker didn't help either. It took several months until he was convinced by other male members of the family and all the details in his family had been checked. During this long process, Mohammed, her now husband, proposed to elope in case her father didn't finally agree to their marriage. But she didn't agree to it, as she explained:

> Mohammed proposed to elope if my father didn't agree to our marriage but I said no because I couldn't offend my father. I really respect him and I didn't want to fail him on this and he appreciates me a lot and if I did something like that he would have taken it as a betrayal. Once the girl has run away with the boy, she must stay with him. The parents cannot do anything because they don't know what has happened between the two of them (Deccah, Nairobi).

What Deccah really means is that after eloping, the family cannot ensure anymore the girl's virginity so they cannot try to marry her again. This has direct implications not only in the bridewealth the parents could receive but also in the honour of the entire family. The parents and elders of the family will be pointed out by the community as unable to ensure their young girl's virginity. Somali women's virginity is highly valued and must be ensured at all cost – hence the extreme measure of infibulation is taken, as discussed in the previous chapter. But it is not only the family that values women's virginity, women themselves think of it as a form of self-respect, as the next extract illustrates:

> All young women had a high idea of their own value. A Mohammedan virgin cannot marry beneath her, such a thing would call down the gravest blame upon her family. A man may marry beneath him... and young Somalis have been known to take Masai wives. [I also heard this in some interviews with women in Mayfair]... The girls asked me if it could be true what they had heard, that some nation in Europe gave away their maidens to their husbands for nothing. They have even told that, but they could not possible realize the idea, that there was one tribe so depraved as to pay the bridegroom to marry the bride. Fie and shame on such parents, and on girls who gave themselves up to such treatment. Where was their self-respect, where their respect for woman, or for virginity? If they themselves had had

> this misfortune to be born into that tribe, the girls told me, they would have vowed to go into their grave unmarried **(**Blixen 1937).

This quote, from Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*, describes one of the observations she made among the Somali women staying at the farm – Farah's wife and relatives. Here young women express how virginity is very much linked to the respect and value of a woman that should never marry "beneath her". And as a respondent for this research in Nairobi declared once, "Men can marry whoever they want, but it is not the same with us". Blixen's observation about Somali men marrying masai women was something I also heard in a couple of interviews for this research, as something happening "in the past" and if a Somali man nowadays decides to marry any non-Somali woman, no one in the community sees a problem with it, as long as the woman converts to Islam. The women described by Blixen see with horror "those European tribes" who do not value women as they should, giving them to anyone for nothing or even "paying" someone to marry them. Somali women nowadays, still have a high view of their own value, so who does make an ideal husband for them?

The ideal husband: Who to marry and who not marry

All women interviewed in both cities described an ideal husband as someone who:

> Respects, treats me as a woman, takes care of me properly (Fadumo, Johannesburg).

> First he must be Muslim, second he must be my choice, and third he must be educated. Because business can finish anytime, this is not our country, sometimes with the xenophobia they take all your shop, it's nothing, but when you are educated, your education cannot be finished. Anywhere you go, you can get a job (Aanlam, Johannesburg).

> Somebody responsible, educated; someone who has a brand name for himself, somebody who's known. Somebody who will support me, like, to better my life. Yeah, somebody who is educated, is hard working and works (Sareedo, Nairobi).

Respectful, educated and someone who can provide a "better life" are the attributes normally sought in an ideal husband. Many women also strongly argued that they could marry anyone, as long he is Muslim, and some of them do, as Saynab actually did – even if that means facing criticism from the entire community in Mayfair.

However in everyday practice, a Somali man is normally preferred and sought, not only by the women but by their entire family. So even if the claims of religion above culture are constant in women's narratives and discourses, when it comes to choosing a husband to marry things become different. Arguments such as better understanding, "same, language, and same culture" are then claimed. As this discussion with two women in Nairobi shows:

> Nereida: For you, is it important to marry a Somali?
> Amina: Yes because it makes things easier.
> Hibo: Because of my Muslim culture and my traditions.
> N: Do you have to marry a Somali or can it be any Muslim?
> H: It depends on you but I personally think that we have a strong culture, and it's easier for you not to deal with all your family, cos they'll be in your business. If you married a white guy: *Oh! Is he Muslim?* Those questions will come up a lot. Also because of your culture, there are some things that are normal to you that are not normal to us.
> A: My sister's daughter, she's married to an Arab from Qatar. They always have issues and problems.
> H: Yes, especially with Arabs… If you are African, they call us black slaves.
> A: We're always inferior.
> H: Arabs are the worst race. They're the worst cos they're racist.
> A: They're worse than South Africans, I think, you have no rights when you live in an Arab country.
>
> (Amina and Hibo, Nairobi).

After constant claims to prove how "religion always comes first", here it can be clearly seen how arguments defending a "strong culture" are made to defend the preference of marrying a Somali man.

They also expose the racial stereotypes existing both among Somalis and Arabs, and how the fact of being Muslim doesn't act as a unifying factor in this regard. On the contrary, racial, national, cultural and even linguistic differences are claimed to defend a vernacular practice that has his "hidden" reasons behind.

Moreover these quotes also highlights how the "racial" distinctiveness Somali claim completely disappears when they find themselves in another context where they are considered as any other black African, as discussed in chapter 3, something these women find extremely offensive. But actually what really lies behind these "racial" differences is a more complex scenario of class, economic status and cultural differences.

I asked Deccah why there was this insistence in Somali woman to marry a Somali man:

> Deccah: My sister in the US… She is getting married there but my parents don't want to know about her at all, they are not even asking for the bride wealth. Why? Because she is crazy, mad, she always had boyfriends, a Moroccan, a Puerto Rican … My parents had nightmares that she was never going to get a Somali husband. It is the nightmare of any Somali family…
> Nereida: Why is so important to have a Somali husband?
> Deccah: It is not the family, it's the community, what people are going to say? It is always very difficult to make decision in Somali families because that decision doesn't depend on you. Those who tell you that is not a problem to marry a Muslim, they are lying… Try to have one in your family; let's see what they say… (Deccah, Nairobi)

Deccah's words clearly explain the implications of virginity for the demands for bride wealth; when there seems to be doubt about a woman's virginity, no bride wealth can be asked. Moreover, her words also highlight the enormous pressure from the community to marry a Somali and again the power that rumours and gossip play in controlling women's actions in the community.

However what also lies behind this, and normally not explicitly said, is that the inheritance of the clan is a patrilineal line:

> The children, inherit everything for the man, even his children cannot become part of parliament because the children would have two cultures.

> And that's not good because they will say my mom's from that country so we want this country to be like that country… so they are avoiding that confusion between the two countries (Xareedo, Nairobi).

What Xareedo is insinuating but not clearly saying is that those children, without a Somali father, thereafter without a clan to belong to, will have no place among the Somali genealogies; they will become outcasts. Even in the case of Saynab, who married a Lebanese with the consent of her family and didn't care about the criticism she was facing in her daily life in Mayfair, she made sure of not getting pregnant from him the time their marriage lasted. As Yuval-Davis explains:

> In different religious and customary laws, the membership of a child in a national collectivity might depend exclusively on the father's membership, the mother's membership, or it might be open for dual or voluntary choice membership. The inclusion of the collectivity is far from being only a biological issue. There are always rules and regulations governing the cases where children are born to "mixed parenthood" would be part of the collectivity and cases where they would not (Yuval-Davis 1993, 629).

In the case of Somalis, this membership only comes from the father, and that is the real reason for Somali women, and the entire community, preferring to marry only Somali men, to ensure the clan membership of their descendants, even if this explanation was never given to me directly by any woman, as they always looked to present an image of themselves and Somalia as much separated from the clan as possible. Moreover, the fact that a Somali husband is always preferred is way to ensure the continuity of Somaliness based on a common origin and a "pure" national culture.

The wedding and the *Todoba*

After a husband has been chosen and the families have agreed the preparations for the wedding begin. They can take months. Firstly a house needs to be found and furniture bought. A big venue is rented, food is ordered and a DJ and a photographer are booked for the big occasion. Meanwhile the bride will start to think about the type of dress she is going to wear. It can be a Western white drees, a traditional Somali *gutiino*[34] or a mix

[34] Traditional wrap dress (Akou 2011, 127).

that incorporate elements of both. The female guests normally wear transparent and colourful *diracs* and many will uncover or "open" their hair for the special occasion, though many other woman, especially in Johannesburg, still prefer to wear their *burqa* for this occasion.

The families must also decide if they prefer a traditional wedding ceremony, in which both men and woman can attend or a religious one, where only the bride and woman attend after the marriage has been formalised at the mosque between the father of the bride and the groom who is also not allowed to attend the celebration and will be waiting for the bride with some members of his family and close friends at his new house. These kind of religious weddings are becoming a trend in Nairobi, as Fatuma explains:

> The weddings only with women, without the groom and male guests are now a fashion among the Somali community in Nairobi. People are becoming more religious. Religion is more important now because in our original Somali culture that separation doesn't exist. We dance together, men and women (Fatuma, Nairobi).

Another example of the Islamic revival taking place among the Somali community there that showcases existing tensions between vernacular and religious practices.

Somali weddings always run late; if the wedding is supposed to start at 19:00, you can be sure it won't begin until 21:00 or even 22:00. Guests start to come around one hour after the indicated time and they sit down around tables, women one side, and if men are also invited, on the other side. At the front there is always a stage, decorated with white satins and colourful flowers. In the centre, 4 chairs, if the wedding is a mixed one: for the bride and groom and their bridesmaid and best man, if not, only the bride and her bridesmaids.

Whatever outfits the bride has chosen, she has certainly spent the last 48 hours getting ready for the occasion. Firstly an elaborate henna design is made in her arms and hands, legs and feet, stomach, upper chest and back. The designs are more elaborate that the ones normally done for other occasion such as Eid, and normally include white colouring inside the black and brown designs and some little brilliant stickers are added.

A whole day is needed to complete this intricate work. The next day she will also spend at the beauty salon, whitening her skin, applying make-up, doing her hair and finally getting dresses. When she is finally ready, she will leave directly from the salon to the wedding venue, which can be a Chinese restaurant in Nairobi's CBD or an Indian venue in Fordsburg, Johannesburg.

Once she finally arrives, she and her court take a seat at the stage, people stand and clap and the music starts to get louder. People dance below the stage to the rhythms of Somali "electro pop" and some guest start to go up the stage to greet the couple.

During the wedding, if it's a mixed one, men and women dance together. After food is served, there is more dancing. The bride and their court don't eat, drink or dance; they just sit and observe the crowd dancing and singing. Sometimes if they dance, it is at the end, before they leave followed by the closest guests who accompany them to their new house, where they would take more pictures and finally eat.

Most times, one or several women also sing traditional *baraanburs* to the couple, in some occasions accompanied by a drum. This a kind of poetry that only women sing and that is repeated one week later in the *Todoba* ceremony, only attended by women, who bring presents to the bride and sing to her, that again will be sitting in a small stage, wearing this time a *gutiino* and her full body covered again with henna. In the past, if the family had some money, they would commission a woman poet that will do *baraanburs* customised for the occasion, with verses or lyrics that specifically refer to the bride and groom, her family and clan. Nowadays these chants are normally "already made" and repeated occasion after occasion, praising the deeds and achievements of the clans involved.

As one woman sings, one or two others play the drums and the guests dance and sing in a circle until the rhythm changes with the drums becoming stronger. Women take turns, moving into the centre of the circle, and dances covering her head with a scarf as she turns around herself. The *Todoba* is one of the vernacular Somali ceremonies that is celebrated all around the world to praise the newly married woman and the loss of her virginity.

After the marriage, children are expected soon, and women are questioned if some months later they are not already expecting. However, many marriages don't last long and divorce is quite high among Somali women in Nairobi and especially in Johannesburg.

Divorce and life afterwards

Divorce is allowed in Islam. According to one respondent in Nairobi, even if among Somalis divorced women are less valued, as they are not virgins any more, and the bridewealth for them will always be less or non-existent, in Islam, divorced women should be highly regarded as the first person to convert to Islam was Khadija, a divorcee that married the Prophet Mohamed.

Even if a lot of expectations are set towards the married life, soon afterwards many women start to find marriage "stressful" and get divorced a bit later, normally without any desire of re-marrying again, as Awa plainly surmises in the following short exchange with me:

> Nereida: And after you divorced, didn't you marry again?
> Awa: No.
> N: Why?
> A: I don't want.
> N: Why?
> A: Because it's too much problem. I don't want a confused man again.
>
> (Awa, Johannesburg)

The main problems behind the failure of the marriage are various but normally have to do with: men not supporting the family, lack of respect from the husband to his wife and in some cases even violent behaviour towards her. As one respondent in Johannesburg explained:

> You are supposed to respect your husband and he is supposed to respect you but most Somali men don't respect women. They treat women badly, like trash, like you are nothing, that you cannot do anything. There are misunderstandings, you are supposed to respect your husband, and he is

> supposed to respect you. But they change the respect into power, like "you cannot do anything without me". That's why you see so much divorce among Somalis (Amina, Johannesburg).

Women in Johannesburg also constantly complained about how much Somali men changed outside Somalia, as many of them became irresponsible chewing *khat* or *miraa* the whole day. This is a recreational social drug with amphetamine effects traditionally chewed in the Horn of Africa during weekends or special occasions. However in the last decades it has become a drug consumed by most Somali men on a daily basis inside and outside Somalia. It is cultivated mostly in Kenya, where the drug is legal and transported quickly to Somali and all around the world as it has to be consumed when the leaves are still fresh. Some women also chew it but this is always done in private spaces and under plenty of secrecy, as it is not honourable for a woman doing so.

Some of the consequences of this addiction are that men invest all the money on it and stop providing for their families. At the same time, they spend their evenings and nights chewing with their friends and their days at home sleeping and doing nothing. "So all he does is jump on you, get you pregnant, you give birth to baby and then you have to send the child away to your parents. It's a cycle", a respondent declared in Nairobi, where this conflict with men and *miraa* also happens often. However, here, the pressure of the family nearby mitigates its effects. In Johannesburg most women complain how not having their families nearby to intervene and set the conflict make things much more difficult, generating feelings of insecurity, isolation and vulnerability among women.

Other women pointed out to the early age of their marriages and the way Somali women are changing as the main causes for divorce as the next dialogue with two women in Nairobi reflects:

> Nereida; Somalis divorce quite easily, don't they?
> Ambro: They do, because they get married for all the wrong reasons, they marry very young. Nowadays, young girls get married very young and get divorced. I think when you are at the age below 25, you have a fairy tale. You have a different perspective but now when you are above the age of 25, you're grown. Like me and her, we've been divorced.
> Khadija: We got married very young. I was 21.

A: I was 20. And it hardly works out, when you're young like that. We normally think it's okay to get married young and sometimes it is. For some people it works out. If it's for the right reasons. If you get married for puppy love, it never works out.

K: It's also about the culture, our parents got married young and they lasted more than we did, they lasted.

A: My dad was 30 and my mum was 14.

K: They're still married. It was the culture there; it was a mind-set they had. But now we come and see these men are taking us for granted, we could have gone to school but we gave up that life.

A: And you know Somali women are evolving, they want careers, they want school, they want everything, they want to work. And the way the Somali man is raised is: your wife doesn't work, she doesn't do anything and you provide everything. So there's some kind of conflict that comes from there. Cos the woman wants to become independent and the man wants to provide. You know? So they clash.

N: Do you think that's the main cause for divorce? That you want to do things and your husband doesn't want.

A: Exactly, if you get married with that understanding to begin with, then that's okay, cos you two understand each other but when you start changing how you think while you're married and you want to do other things that you didn't agree to, for example if you get marry and after two years you say, *I don't want to have children*, it's going to bring problems. Or saying, *I want to start a career*, and maybe he was thinking you're going to be a stays-at-home mum. So it brings some kind of conflict. And Somalis don't normally talk about what they want, they just get married. Not before. They normally don't. Everything is yes, yes, yes, yes, yes… And when you marry, everything changes. It changes in the first week.

(Ambro and Khadija, Nairobi).

Ambro and Khadija blame their young age at the time of marriage as one of the main reasons for the failure of their marriages, as they didn't know what they really wanted and probably got married because of the family and community pressure. They also point out how Somali women are "evolving" faster than the patriarchal society they belong to. So even if gender roles and relations are changing among Somalis, women still have to deal with strong patriarchal precepts that are not changing as quickly,

showcasing how the circulation of power is a process that can take a while to fully transform societies.

After divorce, women tend to struggle to make a living especially in Johannesburg where most men won't support their wives and children so the only chances for women are re-marrying again or finding work to support themselves and their kids. As one woman related:

> Somali men support the children after divorce when they are in Somalia because all the families are there but here they don't. In Somalia the families are there and they pay, here some do and others don't (Amaan, Johannesburg).

Here again, the role of the family is of great importance to settle the disagreements among the couple. The lack of direct family ties in Johannesburg result in women really struggling to make a living if they divorce their husband:

> If I marry here and then I get divorce, life is difficult, life it's difficult here. If you have a child you cannot work. Most Somali men, when you get divorce they don't help you with the child, they don't give you support and if you have a child you cannot work and you don't have your family, it's difficult (Waris, Johannesburg).

This results in many women having to send their children back to Somalia for her families to look after them, as was the case of Saynab, as if they find a job they are unable to take care of the child at home. The community in many cases also supports a divorced woman and remarrying another man can also be an option but as one participant expressed: "men are not going to look after you if you already have children with another man".

All the cases discussed here showcase how women renegotiate vernacular practices in relation to marriage, a life-changing event in the life of any Somali woman, exposing the complex relationship of the individual with respect to the collective they belong to. Some women just follow what is expected of them as virtuous Somali women, others contest these expectations using Islamic arguments to discontinue certain factors or practices they don't agree with and others just completely rebel, even if that means rejection from their family and community. The same woman may behave differently

depending on the situation she finds herself. And it is actually the decisions they take that transforms the practices and *habitus* of the Somali diaspora living in Nairobi and Johannesburg.

Conclusion

Along this chapter I have showed how migration has affected the gender roles, relations and practices among Somali women living in Nairobi and Johannesburg.

I opened up the chapter with Saynab´s story, a case study that illustrates many of the situations Somali woman face in Johannesburg and Nairobi: arranged marriage, youth motherhood, failed marriage and divorce, work, study and leave in search of a better life somewhere else.

The internal conflict and the mass migration it has generated has had an effect in the gender roles, relations and practices among Somalis, as it is normally the case observed in studies on gender and migration. This has given Somali women more agency and decision making power. They now negotiate between different sets of cultural and religious practices that inform their actions, instead of following the discourses imposed by a patriarchal society.

The war and migration has also made many Somali women go from the private sphere to the public one, which has made them generate a political identity in which they question kind of Somali and Muslim women they are.

However, even if transformation has occurred, gender relations and practices among Somalis, are still very much regulated by Islamic and vernacular precepts: Sexual relations before marriage are forbidden; virginity is still highly valued, as the vernacular practice of infibulation ensures to protect and briedewealth should be paid.

Marriage, even if it has different meanings for Somali women, becomes a pivotal event in the life of any young woman and choosing the right husband is a process in which the entire family gets involved.

The politics surrounding marriage and who makes an ideal husband showcases how in this regard vernacular beliefs are normally favoured instead of Islamic ones,

contradicting the claims made in previous chapter that religion is always above all. The majority of women prefer to marry a Somali man, even if according to Islam, they could marry any Muslim. There is a lot of external pressure from the family and the community for them to marry a Somali man and the main – unspoken- reason behind this is that the clan affiliation is only transmitted by the father. Moreover marrying Somali men is also a way to ensure the continuation of collective identity.

Marriage among Somalis is a pillar for clan and national identity, and that why in this case a vernacular approach is normally favoured in detriment of the Islamic precept of being able to marry any Muslim. Some women contests this practice, a Saynab did, but they are still minority and in the majority of cases strongly criticised by their families or communities for doing so.

The importance of women choosing to marry a Somali man, instead of an Arab or any other Muslim, reinforces the idea of women as transmitters of national culture and identity, by making the choice to marry a Somali man, women are re-ensuring the cultural and national unity and continuity, at the same time that ensuring a place for their children in the Somali clan system.

Choosing a right husband, the marriage process, the wedding, the *Todoba*, and the way divorce takes place among Somalis in Nairobi and Johannesburg become translocal practices that are reproduced, negotiated or transformed according to the individual situations women find themselves in the two contexts.

This showcases how identity is a complex dialogical process between individual experiences in relation to a specific context. The experiences Saynab and other Somali women had in Nairobi and Johannesburg, were justified using either vernacular or Islamic identifications, depending of the needs they had at that particular moment in order to explain themselves as Somalis and as Muslims.

Moreover, the dialogical process of identity is a multi-layered one, as it is not only the relation of the individual to context that is dialogical but also the relation of the individual to a collective, and how those collective identities interact with others in relation to a specific place and time.

We cannot forget, either, that identity is also dialogical in the sense of whom identity claims are addressed to. In this case, Somali Muslim women were explaining

themselves to me, a “Western”, white non-Muslim, however the actions and practices I observed were directed to other Somalis. For them, and for the reasons stated in previous chapter, it was more important to be seen by me as good Muslims rather than just Somalis, but among themselves this distinction is not that important and what matters are other things, such as the perpetuation of certain cultural practices or the importance of the clan.

However, in all the cases presented here, there is also a widespread desire of women improving their lives, either if that is trough migration, marriage or divorce, their aim is to become part of a better reality in which they can have a “normal life” and in which they belong to the “ new world order” (Ferguson 2006). Here the role of a cosmopolitanism from below informed by the politics of hope (Appadarai 2013) become as important as vernacular and religious practices in regard to decision making and the constructions of individual and collective identities.

I argue that the decisions women take are all informed by a set of identifications with the different discourses, narratives and practices taking place in the translocal spaces of Easleight and Mayfair, in which vernacular and Islamic practices keep a constant dialogue with the cosmopolitan imagination, ruled by the politics of hope.

Conclusion

> *You've got to tell the world how to treat you. If the world tells you how you are going to be treated, you are in trouble*
>
> – James Baldwin

Days before leaving South Africa to the US, searching for a "better life" – where she finally arrived after much distress – Saynab's Instagram account flooded with motivational messages. While some of these messages were anonymous, many could be attributed to authors such as Carl Jung, James Baldwin and Martin Luther King, who shared this space with Snoopy or Lady Gaga. Here I transcribe some from Saynab's Instagram account:

> If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward. Martin Luther King.
>
> Making changes can feel scary but not as scary as feeling stuck in a place where you don't belong. Assertiveness for Earth Angels.
>
> You can't fall if you don't climb but there is not joy in living your whole life on the ground.
>
> Everything you ever wanted is in the other side of fear.
>
> Become friends with people who aren't your age. Hang up with people whose first language isn't the same as yours. Get to know someone who doesn't come from your social class. This is how you see the world. This is how you grow.

As mentioned, this is a common practice among young Somalis to upload these kinds of messages on regular bases but the frequency increases in crucial moments of their lives,

such as before migration. These quotes, shared by many people from all around the world, become in this context a source of strength to make a life-changing decision that entails plenty of risks. They are a direct expression of the desire of improvement, of becoming part of the "new world order" (Ferguson 2006). They become a virtual collective shared space that connect the Somali diaspora wherever they are and that speak directly to "the politics of hope" and their cosmopolitan aspirations, to their dreams and desires of starting afresh in another place where life can be better.

Moreover these motivational quotes normally appear accompanied by two other kind of messages and images: on the one hand, religious messages praising Allah and being a good Muslim and on the other, cultural nostalgic images of a lost Somalia that no longer exists: women in their traditional dresses with the "open" hair, camels, traditional nomadic huts, Mogadishu in the 1960s etc.

These posts in the virtual space provide a direct access to the subjectivities of the Somali diaspora, to their values, identifications and desires. Appadurai describes imagination as a social practice (1996) and in the case of Somalis, imagination plays a very important role in constructing a collective identity: the religious messages showcase the connection with Islam and strengthen the image of being a "good Muslim"; the cultural posts generate a sense of belonging to an ancestral home and place of origin; and the desire of belonging to a new world order is expressed in the motivational quotes shared in the same space.

It is a characteristic of diasporic communities to construct a narrative that looks forward and backward at the same time (Braziel and Manner 2003) and the virtual space provides a place for Somalis where these narratives are constructed and shared by a collective that is spread all around the world. The cultural post, embedded with nostalgia, look back to a bright past of Somalia, before the war and conflict began, almost seeking to reconstruct a nation that is no longer in the virtual space, without the state but through the collective imagination. The motivational quotes look forward, building desires and aspirations for an even brighter future. Both are idealistic representations of a mythical past and a promising future, products of the collective imagination of the Somali diaspora.

I have chosen to open every chapter of this thesis with one of these quotes as I believe they summarise – "in a popular way" – several of the arguments made in this study: the

feeling of Somaliness is constructed outside a physical territory and exist independently of the nation-state; the practice of Islam is praised and pursued, and intrinsically linked to Somaliness; and they also showcase a cosmopolitanism from below expressed in the desires and hopes of belonging to the "new world order", truly believing that is possible. The fact that these messages and images appear together in the same virtual space also denotes certain cosmopolitanism, as vernacular and religious representations cohabit together with Western motivational quotes.

Along these pages, I have explored the different dynamics surrounding the construction of Somaliness in the two contexts of Nairobi and Johannesburg, two interconnected cities for Somalis. I have described these contexts in relation to the meaning they have for them, using the metaphors of Nairobi as a port and Johannesburg as an island, in order to understand the diasporic experience Somalis have in them.

Both cities are transitional places for Somalis on their way to somewhere else. However, in Nairobi, due to the bigger population residing there – integrated by refugees, Somali-Kenyans and diaspora returnees – and the historical and geographical links with Somalia, Somalis develop greater feelings of belonging than in Johannesburg, where isolation and alienation seem to be the more widespread collective feeling.

Nairobi is also experienced by Somalis as more cosmopolitan than Johannesburg; questioning the generalised assumption that the South African city is the epitome of modernity and cosmopolitanism in the African continent.

However in both places, Somaliness seems to be constructed around a sense of unity based on: a common place of origin and mythical past, a common language, religion and "culture", implemented in the everyday life by the *habitus* of cultural and religious practices. There is also a narrative of the nation being constructed among Somalis all over the world and in the virtual space. And it is important for Somalis in the diaspora to transmit this sense of unity. One of the most repeated statements during the interviews in both cities was: "One language, one culture, one religion", emphasising in this way not only a sense of unity but also the desires of overcoming the clanship divisions that have torn down Somalia for decades.

The clan has actually been one of the most unspoken elements in this research. All the women I talked to insisted in showing a unified vision of Somalia, sustained by national

identification and religions claims. Somalis are very aware of all the disgrace and "bad press" the clanship disputes for power have caused and keep causing in the country, and they constantly try in their narratives to present a more positive image. We cannot forget either that all these claims were addressed to me, a non-Somali, so their desire to be seen as a good Somali, above clanship divisions and disputes, was very important to them. Islam has also paid a key role in unifying Somalis and overcoming clan divisions.

However, the construction of Somaliness in both places is slightly different, as Somalis in Nairobi are more exposed to cosmopolitanism; due to the relationship they have with the city, the fact that Eastleigh is a point of constant transit and an important commercial hub not only in the life of Nairobi but across the Somali diaspora all around the world, and the presence of Somalis belonging different class and backgrounds. Here the construction of the self follows more neo-liberal and postmodern patterns, open to different kinds of identifications and with some women even recognising the fluidity and multiplicity of their identities. However in Johannesburg, the Somali population is much smaller and integrated mostly by refugees and asylum seekers belonging to a lower class. The isolated situation most Somalis find, make them use Somaliness as a way of resilience and demarcating difference, resulting in certain vernacular and religious practices being strengthened.

The different findings of this research in Nairobi and Johannesburg highlight parallels with the two Hutu refugee communities studied by Malkki in Kigoma and Mishamo refugee camp. The refugees in Kigoma were creating a "lively cosmopolitanism" in opposition to the ones at the refugee camp, where a heroised narrative of the nation was being constructed and became the main source of identifications. Even if Mayfair is not a refugee camp, the isolation Somalis find in it and the lack of links to the rest of the city, make it an enclosed area where vernacular and religious practices get strengthened and become the main source of collective identifications. Meanwhile, the "openness" of Nairobi together with the cohabitation of Somalis coming from differ backgrounds allows more cosmopolitan ways of being to emerge.

Yet, in both cities, the creation of the "little Mogadishus" of Eastleigh and Mayfair, generates a particular translocal situation in which collective identity, through the repetition of cultural and religious practices, is able to transform the urban space. At the same time, the implementation of these practices makes these places to be connected

between them, to the lost homeland in Somalia and to any other place in the world Somalis inhabit these days. Translocality also allows understanding identity formations process that are deterritorialised and actually take place across boundaries. The power of translocality can be noticed, not only in the physical transformation of both neighbourhoods but also regarding other immaterial practices such as rumours, that among Somalis are also able to migrate transitionally, having an effect in people's reputation and being able to control certain behaviours that are sought in order to be considered as a virtuous Somali and Muslim.

Somaliness cannot be understood without Islam, as they are deeply interlinked, making it sometimes difficult to distinguish what is an Islamic practice and what is a vernacular one. However Somali women, in the daily lives, distinguish and constantly negotiate between different sets of religious or vernacular practices to support the arguments they want to make or the decision they take about their life. When a tension arises between vernacular and Islamic beliefs the Islamic one is normally favoured, and this operated in the same way in both of the contexts studied. The fact that women are accessing and interpreting the Qur´an by themselves gives them arguments to contest certain vernacular practices they want to discontinue such as female circumcision. Islam is considered by most Somalis not only as a religion to believe in but also as a way of life. I have approached the relation Somalis keep with Islam, building on Asad's view of Islam as a discursive tradition, a conglomerate of historical narratives transcending time and space to which Somali women engage with in a dialogical way, negotiating the Islamic precepts in their daily lives, and adapting them to the particular circumstances they find themselves.

Being a Muslim also entitles Somali to belong to the *umma*, the great community of Muslims all around the world. In this sense, the feeling of belonging to a collective has a double side for Somalis, as their Somaliness is used to claim cultural and ethnic membership among Somalis and their Islamic religion ensures them a place in the *umma*, that can be seen as another supra-structure of modernity and an alternative form of Western cosmopolitanism, where particular cultural identifications mitigate in favour of a collective Muslim identity that expands all around the world.

It was very important for the Somali women I talked to be seen as "good" Muslims. Being a virtuous Muslim ensured them a respectable place in the *umma*. Moreover,

being perceived as a "good" Muslim was important for them in order to overcome the negative representation of Muslims as terrorists and the political implications this may have for their identities and everyday lives.

Finally, the situation of forced migration Somalis have faced in the last decades, have transformed gender roles and practices, giving women more agency and decision-making power in a society traditionally very patriarchal. However, gender relations and practices among Somalis, are still very regulated by Islamic and vernacular precepts. Marriage is still a pivotal event in any Somali women's life, with the majority of women preferring to marry a Somali man. In this regard the vernacular approach is preferred, even if some women also contest this practice, instead of the Islamic one, normally favoured in any other situation. By choosing to marry a Somali man women are re-ensuring the cultural and national unity and continuity, at the same time that ensuring a place for their children in the Somali clan system. The way women follow, negotiate or reject the politics surrounding marriage and who makes and ideal husband, showcases how their subjectivities are informed by both vernacular and religious beliefs. Moreover, the desire to improve their lives informs women decisions as much as vernacular and Islamic practices, showcasing the tension between them and the contradictions that sometimes exists between what women say and what they actually do. The way women fulfil their desires of improvement can be through marriage but moreover through migration.

Even if forced migration is a relatively new situation for Somalis, they have always been a "culture of migration" (Horst 2006b) based on a nomadic past. Since the 1990s Somali movements have taken a larger dimension, in numbers, due to the conflict and famine situation found in the country but also in scope, with Somali "nomads" transcending national boundaries.

The fact that the Somali diaspora is nowadays spread all around the world has contributed to the creation of an "imaginary community", which Somalis deeply identify with. Collective identity is here deterritorialised, taking place in the imagination of Somalis all around the world, reflected in the virtual worlds of Facebook and Instagram and implemented with vernacular and religious practices in their everyday life.

To understand Somaliness nowadays we have to take into account how the "portability of national identity" (Sassen 1998) and "a long distance nationalism" (Anderson 1992) have generated a strong sense of belonging to an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983), that actually precedes the creation of the nation-state and prevails after the collapse of it.

Stuart Hall declares that, "without a sense of national identification the modern subject would experience a deep sense of subjective loss" (1992, 291). In the case of the Somali diaspora the national identifications are based on the repetition – and transformation – of vernacular and religious practices that take place independently of the boundaries imposed by the nation-state. National identity doesn't need a functional nation-state to exist; it needs people that identify with a patriotic sentiment or feeling. In the case of Somalis, a sense of belonging is not attached to a territorial nation-state but to the abstraction and practice of Somaliness that is performed in different places around the world, at the same time as a narrative of the nation is constructed in the virtual spaces of Facebook and Instagram.

Cultural, religious and gender practices are reproduced and transformed across transnational boundaries. It is the *habitus* generated by the reproduction and transformation of these practices which keeps a strong sense of belonging to a bigger group going, a group that is also repeating those actions and ways of living across the world, adapting them to the particular contexts they inhabit. Thereafter, the feelings of belonging to a community are based on a *habitu*s of cultural and religious practices and on a strong sense of being connected, not in the national identity discourses generated by the nation-state.

In the case of Somalis, the vernacular, local and "traditional" keeps a constant dialogue with the cosmopolitan, global and postmodern, resulting in hybrid identities that are able to navigate different worlds maintaining a distinctive "trademark". This is also a dialogue between past, the lost idealised homeland and future cosmopolitan aspirations.

Somalis seem to be able to be anywhere in the world without losing their collective identity, which is implemented and actually strengthened by the repetition of certain practices and discourses. Therefore, the strong sense of Somaliness resides not within the boundaries of a nation-state but in a translocal sense of being connected, expressed through repetition and transformation of distinctive sets of practices and beliefs.

Somaliness is contained in the cultural and religious practices of each Somali anywhere in the world, not within the boundaries of a nation-state.

Therefore, national and collective identities do not need a physical territory to exit nowadays. The supra structures of modernity such as transnationalism, cosmopolitanism or translocality constitute bigger entities than the state, creating supra-national identities based in other kinds of identifications with a group, in which cultural and religious practices play a key role in connecting people across borders. In today's world the feelings of belonging to a collective transcend territorial boundaries because they are the product of a collective imagination.

However, this assertion is based on my study of the Somalia diaspora at the being of the 21st century, where transnationalism and translocality are much more spread than before and where the internet and social media plays a very important role in bringing together distant persons and places. Could the same be applied to older established diaspora such as Jews or Africans in the Americas? Has the collective identity of people without a fixed territory to refer to always taken place in the collective imagination? Or is this the result of the transnational and deeply interconnected global world we live today? These are questions to be answered.

In nowadays neo-liberal world these questions around identity seem a futile exercise that only takes place in the Humanities departments of universities around the world. However, a sense of collective identity and belonging to something bigger than oneself becomes a very powerful force that should be taken into account to understand the dynamics taking place at ground level that politicians and international agendas normally overlook. Why is collective identity still important nowadays? Why do collective identities still matter in the multicultural global world we live today?

They matter precisely because of globalisation or multiculturalism are not a unification of cultures, but a meeting place of different cultures and collective identities regulated by power relations.

It cannot be forgotten that identity is always dialogical. We cannot become ourselves without "the other". Our identity is what emerges from the dialogue we keep with the world. What we are or what we are not is always stablished in relation to others. And in the global postcolonial world we live, even if defined as multicultural, Western

identities are still hegemonic. And Somalis, as other groups of people in the non-Western world sometimes try to resist the imposition of those identities.

Appadurai describes culture as "a pervasive dimension of human discourse that exploits difference to generate diverse conceptions of group identity" (1996, 13). This idea of "culture as difference" carries with it a heuristic connotation, in the sense that it helps us generate meaning about other groups of people and ways of being, but it also carries with it the danger of making us fall into stereotypes. Stereotypes are a reductionist and simplistic way to look at the other; they make certain characteristics fixed and unchangeable, when the identity of a person or a group of people keeps changing and adapting to certain contexts. It is fluid and performative. Stereotyping happens because there is not a "personal, concrete familiarity of the other" (Hurst 1995, 6). Hence the insistence of Somali women in being perceived as "good" Muslims, to prove to the world, and especially the Western world, that they are not terrorists, a stereotype normally associated with Muslims since 9/11.

In the modern world of globalisation and mass migration, stereotyping is still very present, as the misrepresentation of Somalis, Africans or Muslims normally get in the global imagination are based on the stereotypical images created about them, emerging from a lack of direct contact and interaction with them and their worlds.

Even if we can only define ourselves in relation to others, we can also feel threaten by others that we do not have "personal, concrete familiarity", creating in this way imaginary and real boundaries to keep the others far from us.

Even if we have multicultural cities and the world is seen as a global village this is a world still divided between those who can move freely and those who cannot, between those who have a full membership to the new world order (Ferguson 2006), and those who are forbidden that inclusion because they come from somewhere else and they are believed to be a threat.

Collective identity is normally strengthened as response to it, as a way of resistance, the more traumas or difficulties collective encounters, the more sense of collective identity will generate. Collective identities, from people not included in the new world order, become a powerful tool of resilience and opposition to Western values as young Muslims joining ISIS or Al-Shabaab prove.

The desire to belong to the new world order applies not only to individuals but to entire collectivities that want their voices to be heard and to be included in the dialogues taking place in the world, at the same time that this desire of inclusion becomes one of the most powerful engines of migration that no barrier, border or migration policy will be ever able to stop.

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