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THE ROLE OF ISLAM IN CONCEPTIONS OF ENTITLEMENT TO PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE: A CASE STUDY OF SOMALI REFUGEES IN JOHANNESBURG

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Forced Migration Studies.

Johannesburg, 2005

ABSTRACT

This research report looks at Somali refugees' conceptions concerning entitlement to protection and assistance. It seeks to find out what Somali refugees' conceptions about assistance and protection are and on what they are primarily based. It explores how the personal and ideological beliefs of Somali refugees living in Johannesburg influence their expectations for receiving and extending assistance. Ethnographic methods, mainly, personal interviews and informal group discussions were used to find that, though Islam has a major role in the lives of Somali migrants and on their conceptions about assistance, religion is only one among many influencing factors on their conceptions. Daily lived experiences, pride, tribal affiliation, and conflict within the community equally impact Somali refugees' conceptions of entitlement to protection and assistance.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Forced Migration Studies in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

_____

Lidia Kiorkis

_____ day of _____, 2005.

PREFACE

My parents and I were born in Iraq and our ancestral line goes as far back as the ancient nation of the Assyrians. It is unfortunate that people today know of modern day Iraq merely by the headlines of media outlets across the world documenting the belligerence and brutality with which Iraq is associated. However, as a child growing up in America, I learned of a different Iraq and a different Arab world.

Though I was taught of such tragedies as the massacre of my people[1], with my great grandfather having lost his life defending his country against the invading forces of the Ottoman Empire in the early 1900s, I still developed a strong affinity for the region and its people. As a teenager, I had already started making plans to learn Arabic and travel to the Middle East. I desperately wanted to learn first-hand about the things I had only learned of in stories my parents told.

Despite the fact that many Assyrians have felt persecuted as members of a Christian ethnic minority living in Muslim-dominated Iraq, they have coexisted with Muslims and Arabs for centuries. My family has had fond memories of Iraq and its people, as they repeatedly reminded me of the kind neighbours and friends they regretfully left behind when immigrating to America in 1981.

It is out of this historical and social background that my own curiosity about Islam and its principles has grown. The nostalgia my parents have felt for their homeland is what initiated my travelling to Egypt to study Arabic and Islam, and where I also ended up doing volunteer work with African refugees. I have developed an appreciation and respect for the religion and have found a way to bridge the divide that exists between

[1] One-fourth of the Assyrian population was massacred under the Ottoman Empire before WWI.

many Muslims and Christians by delving deeper into the meanings and teachings of Islam, learning from it, and developing my own perceptions and ideas about it. This project is a manifestation of this bridge as much as it is a fusion of my interests in refugee studies and the Arab/Islamic world.

Thus, the impetus behind this work is largely due to the migrants I have come in contact with throughout different stages of my life. These migrants include my parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles that fled Iraq after the First Gulf War. The many African refugees I met and worked with in Cairo also inspired me to further pursue the study of migration. I would like to thank them along with the many Somali refugees that gave me their time and trust in telling me about their heartfelt experiences in South Africa, Somalia, and their journeys along the way. In turn, it has been of paramount importance to me to render their statements and testimonies as accurately and fairly as possible.

I would especially like to thank my supervisor Eliot Dickinson for his careful observations and for being sincere, straightforward, and scrupulous in his editing of my work. I am also grateful to my colleagues in the Forced Migration Programme at Wits University and the Director, Loren Landau, for their suggestions and guidance throughout the proposal writing stage. In addition, I would like to thank Abeda Bhamjee of the Wits Legal Centre who inspired me through a class lecture to take on this topic. Everyone I mentioned here has helped in some way or another give me new insights and perspectives with which to understand the causes and circumstances of displacement.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade Somalia, a predominantly Muslim country, has experienced a long-standing and violent civil war. Lack of an effective central government, famine, and drought are common causes of displacement for hundreds of thousands of Somalis (McMichael, 2002). South Africa is host to thousands of Somali refugees. The majority of Somalis living in Johannesburg are found in areas with a large Muslim population. This research was conducted in neighbourhoods in central Johannesburg where there are an estimated 500 Somali households (Mail and Guardian, 2000). Specifically, this research focuses on Islam and its impact on Somali refugees' conceptions about asylum and assistance.

There are many principles within Islam that relate to asylum, migration (*hijra*), and entitlements to protection from harm. This study explores the way that some of these principles are actualised and conceived within the Somali community in Johannesburg. Of particular interest to this research is the way that refugees conceive the act of giving and receiving assistance.

Presently, little information is available on the role of religious assistance to refugees in the Johannesburg area. Recently, however, the Forced Migration Studies Programme at the University of the Witwatersrand launched a survey as part of the Joburg Project (2003), which touched upon religious matters. I have used and adapted questions from that survey to help formulate the questions in the interviews I conducted.

I was surprised by some of the responses given in that survey which dealt with religion and, as a result, sought to explore them further.

According to the Joburg Project[2] survey data, for example, more than 75% of the Somalis who participated in the survey agreed that they had strong bonds to their ethnic and religious group, with more than 62% claiming that they would put their life at physical risk to defend their religion. However, an astonishing 78% of those who responded to these questions were not members of any mosque. Somalis, more than any other ethnic group in the survey, reflected the opinion that helping refugees should be of equal importance to the South African government as the provision of education.

Thus, my goal in this research was to use this data, in conjunction with my own fieldwork, to examine how religion influences the expectations of Somali refugees regarding assistance and protection. The Joburg project data revealed contradictions between religious practice and belief among Somalis, and I wanted to account for and understand these contradictions. The particular findings of the Joburg Project I have discussed here further impelled me to examine how religion and religious beliefs shape the local experiences of refugees.

The purpose of this research is to examine how religious faith has influenced the conceptions of entitlement to assistance and protection among Somali refugees in Johannesburg. It will explore the relationship between the Somali refugee community and the rest of the local Muslim community; i.e., the local mosques, Muslim organizations, and Muslim individuals and families in Johannesburg. Exploring this

[2] Methodology in the Joburg project consisted of the "snowball" interviewing method and random sampling. The sampling sites were small areas in selected neighbourhoods called enumerator areas (EAs). A total of almost 750 interviews were conducted with six migrant groups: Angolans, Burundians, Congolese (Republic of Congo and DRC), Ethiopians, and Somalis.

relationship will shed light on the ways Islam and the local Islamic community have helped shape Somali refugees' experiences and conceptions of entitlement to assistance and protection in South Africa. Examining the relationship between the Somali refugees and the Muslim community is vital to my research as it shows the degree to which affiliation with Islam has inspired and influenced Somali refugees' experiences locally. In addition, examining the relationship between the Somali refugee community and the local Muslim community is vital in revealing insights about the actual practice of extending assistance.

This research contributes to an evolving body of literature on the lived experience of refugees, and the role that religion plays in their lives. My aim is to insert the role of spirituality into this experience and look at the way in which refugees' local experiences shape and are shaped by belief. My theory is that Somali refugees have conceptions about migration and asylum, particularly protection and provision of assistance, based on Islamic ideology.

Ethnographic methods, such as personal interviews, group discussions, and participant observation were used to conduct this study, which may not adequately represent the experiences of all refugees, but contributes to an improved understanding of the role of religion and its importance in the lives of migrants. This study also contributes to a broad field of knowledge, including urban studies, sociology, and anthropology of religion, and raises other issues of importance for further research that can be of use to students and policy makers in the forced migration field.

Methodological Approach

This study is based on ethnographic and qualitative research, primarily information gathered through interviews and informal group discussions. Additionally, I enriched my understanding of Somali life in Johannesburg through participant observation that included spending time in the houses of Somali refugee families, as well as in other social settings. Preparing for and celebrating the end of the holy month of Ramadan was particularly rewarding, as it allowed me to get to know my interviewees more personally. On many occasions I was invited to break the fast[3] with different people, which not only allowed me to experience the ritual, but also gave me important insights into the dynamics of Somali relationships. For instance, partaking in the practices of Ramadan with a family also allowed me to observe the ways in which food is shared between families and neighbours and the way it is handed out to the poor.

Between September and November 2004, I conducted interviews with 15 Somali migrants[4] as well as with four representatives from leading charitable organizations in Johannesburg. The interviews with the Somalis were carried out in different places and under varying circumstances, which varied from my vehicle to a grocery shop in the local market and in the homes of the interviewees. In many instances I would be conducting an interview and neighbours, friends, or relatives would stop by and join in or listen to our conversation sprinkling remarks here and there. This would eventually lead to a

[3] The first meal of the day eaten after sunset during the entire month of Ramadan when Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset is called *Iftar,* which literally means to "break the fast."
[4] I use the word "migrants" in this case rather than the word "refugee" since the people I interviewed were composed of asylum seekers, refugees, and economic migrants. At other times, I refer more generally to people I met and interviewed as "refugees".

group discussion just after explaining who I was and why I cared to study the Somali community. It was common that they would show a liking towards me when I revealed my own personal background. Soon, many people within the community knew of my presence and recognized me driving around in their neighbourhoods accompanied by my Somali interpreter.

Interpreter and Interviews

The Somali-speaking interpreter that worked with me throughout the period of this research was more than just an interlocutor. She was well known by the community and respected since she worked with a local non-governmental organization (NGO) and had helped other refugees in the community. She not only facilitated access to the Somali individuals I interacted with, but helped ease the dynamics of the interview. People trusted me more and happily greeted her at the door when we arrived at their homes unexpectedly. They would facetiously make comments about her only visiting when in need of something rather than visiting as often as they would have liked.

She helped clarify and interpret more than just language. She was of the same cultural background as the people being interviewed and could easily pick up on double meanings in some of the responses the interviewees would make. If the respondents referred to family, she knew when they meant tribal family and when they meant their nuclear family, as the word was often used interchangeably.

Though she interjected at times with her own insightful comments and added here and there to the interviewees' comments and responses, she always made sure I knew it was her own opinion and not that of the respondent. She was careful in not swaying the

responses of the interviewees even if she personally disagreed with what they had to say. In our many talks and hours together shopping, cooking, and sitting in the car waiting for someone to arrive home for an interview, or having coffee in her living room, she and I talked about her own life and experiences. She would answer my questions about life in Somalia and some of her personal hardships, as well as the hardships of her friends and people I came to know as well. She would explain why she thinks some people's conceptions are as we had found, filling me in on details and information that circulated within the Somali community about local organizations and individuals. Her nine years of experience in South Africa gave her the ability to make such observations.

When the interviewees spoke either Arabic or English, I conducted the interviews by myself. However, when it was my interpreter's task to translate, she carefully listened to my questions and relayed them on to the interviewee. I am not certain that at every moment she made exact translations, but between the English sentences I made and her translated Somali, the timing seemed accurate and I was pleased with the precision of the responses I received in light of the questions asked. Aside from that, she had heard me ask similar questions each time and so she was already accustomed to asking many of the questions I had prepared. In addition, this was not her first experience translating. She showed an adequate command of the English language, enough to make me comfortable and confident with her for the type of work and research I was conducting. Apart from her assistance with translation, she easily helped bring me into the circle of Somalis and had intuition that was valuable to my study.

She often helped me decide on what to bring to the interviewees as a token of my appreciation for their participation. She also advised me on the procedure of interviewing

and told me not to set appointments, because people would view this as too formal and thus expect money or some form of compensation. Moreover, she explained that if we conducted interviews in too formal of a manner, they would be wary of who I really represented in doing this research. For the sake of keeping the interviews casual and open enough for the respondents to feel comfortable, I did not schedule appointments ahead of time, and I did not tape record our conversations. The time I had between translations gave me sufficient time to record responses. More importantly, the presence of an interpreter and the interjections with neighbours or friends coming through every few moments made tape recording interviews cumbersome and muddled. Taking notes and writing post-interview summaries made the interview simpler, more comfortable, and more effective.

Limitations

Though many students and researchers are warned of certain mishaps and drawbacks to research projects, each person has different limitations. The disadvantages of this study were: the lack of sufficient time to probe further into some of the issues this report touches upon, the use of an interpreter, and being asked for favours I was incapable of fulfilling.

Due to time constraints on the research project, I had to always make sure to stick to the main topic. This was at times difficult since this study utilizes ethnographic methods such as open and unstructured interviews. Although I had a number of prepared questions to ask, the conversations I had with respondents would at times stray from the topic of assistance. As much as I tried to bring us back to the subject matter I was most

interested in, it was difficult to do so while they told me poignant stories of their exodus from Somalia or their economic and family hardships in South Africa. Furthermore, I would have liked to live longer within the community to observe more closely the ways in which the new arrivals adjust and the processes in which they receive help from the community. In addition, keeping a special eye on the new arrivals over a longer period of time would have allowed for a comparison of their initial expectations and thoughts with their later observations after having experienced life in South Africa.

Another disadvantage is that I do not speak the native language of the people I interviewed. Many researchers would say the use of an interpreter might add to the imprecision of the results, responses, or data. Though I was self-assured and pleased with my interpreter, I must acknowledge the fact that there may be a possibility that not everything was translated precisely. However, out of the 15 structured interviews, more than half spoke fluent English and a few spoke Arabic, which allowed me to communicate directly with them and helped eliminate the possibility of inaccurate translation. Nevertheless, as previously stated, my interpreter was more than just a mouthpiece. She was an important intermediary that set the mood for the interviews and allowed for them to happen with her insider's vantage point and familiarity with the community. Therefore, she was more of an asset to this study than a disadvantage.

The biggest challenge, however, was requesting interviewees to speak about conceptions and experiences of receiving assistance. Though I explained to participants I was a student researcher and could not deliver any assistance, I personally felt guilty for not being able to help them. I never experienced any rudeness or an unwillingness to cooperate. On the contrary, they were generous with their time and enjoyed the

opportunity to speak to me about their thoughts and experiences. On occasion, I was asked for favours on which I could not deliver, which personally saddened me. Because I am American, and a student, many refugees and asylum seekers believed I could find ways through the Department of Home Affairs to expedite their applications for refugee status or get such status for those Somalis who had been rejected. It was especially difficult for me to tell them I was sorry and could not influence their status as refugees.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Religious Beliefs and Community

The reason why I chose to examine the relationship between the Somali refugees and the local Muslim community is because my main theory was that Somali refugees' conceptions are formed by religious beliefs. In my view, religious beliefs are not formed *a priori*; we are not born with them. An individual's religious ideology and belief system is to a great extent influenced by what one is taught in Mosque, what one learns by talking to other Muslims and sharing stories from the *Hadith* (documented life accounts and details of the Prophet Muhammad's life), what is taught through family and community values, and what is learned from reading and studying or memorizing prayers from the Qur'an.

This research looks at Somali refugees' religious beliefs and the way those religious beliefs affect their conceptions on entitlement to protection and assistance. I began this research with the idea that Islam is a way of life, much more than merely a religion, and so it affects every aspect of one's life. I believed that the refugees themselves would rely on religious explanations to express how they felt and thought about receiving and giving assistance. This is strongly based on my argument that religion has a major impact on an individual's thinking and ways of conceiving the world. I would agree with the Durkheimian theory that an individual's way of conceiving the world can very well be traced to his mode of social life and social

circumstances. If this is the case, empirical life and local experience is very much relevant to the way our conceptions are formed and influenced.

Emile Durkheim, pioneer and father of Modern Sociology, argued that religion is an eminently collective thing (1915/1964). He argued that conceptions of time and space, for example, within a particular society and at a particular time in history are derived from specific social and cultural contexts:

> It is a confused mass of many cults, varying according to the locality, the temples, the generations, the dynasties, the invasions, etc. Popular superstitions are there confused with the purest dogmas. Neither the thought nor the activity of the religion is evenly distributed among the believers; according to the men, the environment and the circumstances, the beliefs as well as the rites are thought of in different ways (ibid.:5).

Thus, our empirical world has much to do with our understandings of concepts of the world as does our own *apriori* subjectivities. This also accounts for the relationship between belief and practice. In other words, though religious beliefs can be taught over generations in one way (principle), the changes our community undergoes due to technology, economics, and the mergers of different people through population movements greatly alters religious dogma, thereby causing different practices.

His theory further stated that religion binds men together, as testament to the roots and origins of the word religion itself. He believed that religion is a unified system of beliefs and that it is communal rather than individual. His theoretical conjecture applies wholly to Islam and its tradition, as Muslims are part of a collective community referred to, theoretically that is, as the *umma*. According to Shami Seteney (1996), "Islam, as an analytical category, can only be employed with reference to a historically constituted discursive tradition, rather than to a geographical entity, a social structure or a collection

of beliefs and practices" (1996:15). I would argue, however, that Islam, as practiced by diverse communities in different parts of the world, is even more significant for discourses on identity, cultural boundaries, and social politics. The Somali refugees in this study offer an important perspective since *umma*, what Seteney Shami calls a "civilizational unity", does not apply to all communities irrespective of certain cultural or social realities. This is why Islam cannot be looked at solely in its historical and discursive tradition. Changes and varying Islamic practices should also be reflective of the religion.

If religion is being examined in the forced migration discourse, a primary concern should be local meanings and subjective understandings and practices of the religion. Religion must be examined with consideration of local contexts and the social environment. There is a considerable amount of literature on the idea of community between Muslims across borders, but the following statement encapsulates the predominant idea about Muslims and the *umma*:

> The sense of community is very much alive among Muslims today. It cuts across regional, national and linguistic barriers to create a great brotherhood that stretches from the shores of the Atlantic to Morocco to the Philippines (Adams in Shami, 1996:15).

For the purposes of my own research, I disagree with this pluralistic vision of Muslim society and its overriding power to connect people across continents. Though I agree with Durkheim's principal idea that religion is important in society and is in essence a construction of society, as discussed in his *Sociology of Knowledge* and *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, I do not agree that it is a "binding force" or "glue," at least not without considering other factors of importance. Cultural, national and ethnic

differences sometimes play an overriding factor in delineation and discrimination, regardless of religion. I would agree with Darrin Hanson's argument in his pioneering essay *Community, Society and Religion: A Theoretical Look at Civil Religion*, that to establish religion is a binding force or the "glue" that keeps a community together, one would have to show that individuals removed from their community still feel a religious bond to others who share the same religious convictions, e.g. Somalis and their relationship to Muslims in South Africa.

Concepts and Conceptualisation

David Turton, a leading Anthropologist in the field of refugee studies, has discussed conceptualisation and the power it has to implicate the ways in which we act:

> When we talk about conceptualising something we are talking about constructing it as an object of knowledge, not about describing something which is already out there. A concept is a mental representation which stands for, or represents something in the external world… We need concepts in order to think about the world, to make sense of it, to interpret it and to act in relation to it (2003:2).

As far as the social and cultural aspect of our mental representation is concerned:

> There must be some sharing of conceptual maps in order to make common understanding and collective action possible. And there must be linguistic sharing-a sharing of linguistic practices. I suppose it's unlikely that any two individuals will have identical conceptual maps-- make exactly the same sense of the world-- but there must be some overlap. This is part of what we mean when we talk about people belonging to the same culture, whether institutional or national. We mean, or assume, that they share a broadly similar conceptual map, that they make sense of the world in a broadly similar way… Meaning then, is not something which is fixed, given out there in nature: it is the result of our social and cultural conventions-we make it, construct it (Turton, 2003:3).

Though Turton directs this discussion mainly at the ways in which hosts use harmful metaphorical language about refugees and migrants, it can be useful in

understanding the ways in which people within a community conceive certain ideas and concepts, whether abstract or concrete. He points out the importance of culture and society in affecting the ways its members understand the world.

Summerfield (1999a; 1999b), a prominent figure in the medical and refugee studies fields, has drawn attention to the fact that social factors, and events such as war, shake the foundations of culture and destabilize norms and value systems of a society. Furthermore, he argues that, in many instances, the goal of contemporary warfare is to break down the social fabric of society and that the humanitarian assistance regime should firstly aim to re-establish the social structure before anything else (ibid.; Ager, 1997). With the example of the Yugoslavian situation, he explains:

> Even concepts generally thought of as relatively fixed, like ethnic identity, have a capacity for fluidity that war may particularly mobilize. During the years of the then Yugoslavia, its citizens did not routinely feel that their bottom-line identification was as "Serb" or "Croat" or "Bosnian Muslim". There were other identities, based on occupation or political affiliation or other role, which were more relevant to daily life than ethnicity (1999a:122).

Forced migrants' experiences of war and violence are further intensified by displacement:

> Normal psychological support, in the form of extended family, friends, elders, and religious figures, may have deteriorated along with the community's social structures, such as schools, religious institutions, and medical facilities. This loss of familiarity in routine and trust in leadership is exacerbated by estrangement following migration (Maynard 1997:206).

This is particularly worth noting not only because it highlights the importance of the religious community in helping refugees socially reconstruct their lives in the host country, but in the case of Somali refugees, many of their values, beliefs and conceptions may also be impacted by war and the experience of displacement. Social factors heavily

impact our ideas and thoughts even if they are founded on religious principles or beliefs. For example, Celia McMichael's experience in working with Somalis living in Australia showed that for some, "the rupturing impact of war and exile has led them to place increased importance on their religious faith. During times of emotional distress, Islam is brought to the forefront of lives" (McMichael, 2002:185). Nevertheless, this is just one example and Somali communities in different parts of the globe have different experiences as varying social environments provide for diverse manifestations of religious practice and beliefs.

Religion and Forced Migration Studies

Despite the fact that religion is a factor in mass movements of migrants, and is cited as grounds for persecution under the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees[5] and its 1967 Protocol, religion and spirituality are for the most part absent in the discourse on forced displacement. There is a huge gap between understanding the importance of religion in the lives of migrants and the ways in which humanitarian aid and assistance to refugees is devised and provided, especially in the social service sector.

Religion and spirituality are intrinsic components of many cultures and lives of refugees (DeVoe, 2002; Gilbert, 2004; Gozdziak, 2002; McMichael, 2002; Summerfield 1999a). Not only do they provide for coping strategies in many different ways in the

[5] The Geneva Convention is the principal legal document protecting refugee rights. The following is the definition of a refugee as outlined in the Convention: "As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." Source: UNHCR (1996). *Text of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol*. Retrieved February 11, 2005, from http://www.unhcr.org/

various stages of displacement, but they also help in providing for the cultural networks that shape the support communities (Harrell-Bond, 1999; Mamgain, 2003).

The role of the church as a key figure in the assistance to refugees has been widely dealt with in the discussion revolving around humanitarian aid and assistance to refugees, especially for resettlement of refugees to third countries and assistance to refugees in rural areas (Ferris, 1989; Sol, 1982; Zetter, 1999). However, the spiritual effects of the Church's efforts and its role as an institution in the lives of refugees after receiving aid are highly overlooked (Gozdziak, 2002). Religious institutions may help on one level in providing tangible assistance to refugees, and in turn might also provide for spiritual and religious support. In fact, relief coming from church or religious bodies may further help to strengthen already entrenched convictions or help to revive weakened spiritual faith. If this indeed occurs, a direct connection can be made between religious institutions and the personal and ideological beliefs of the refugee community. My own research illuminates the role of Muslim religious institutions and charitable organizations in the lives of Somali refugees in an urban setting. It discusses the relationship Somali refugees have formed with their own religious community, and helps explain some of their personal conceptions of entitlement to protection and assistance in relation to religious networks and communities in Johannesburg.

CHAPTER THREE: MIGRATION IN ISLAM

The importance of religion in the lives of migrants

Religion is not only significant in helping to develop emotional and mental coping strategies for dealing with the problems of displacement, but also in helping to build a strong social and communal network that helps migrants establish their lives in a new and different living environment (Gozdziak, 2002; Gozdziak and Shandy, 2002; Ferris, 1989; Harrell-Bond 1999; Zetter 1999). Much of the social science literature related to my study deals predominantly with resettled refugees and the ways in which Islam has been applied differently according to the particular local contexts of their new locations (DeVoe, 2002; Gozdziak, 2002; McMichael, 2002). This study focuses on the ways in which Somalis have used Islam to help shape their lives in Johannesburg, and the ways it has helped shaped their migration experiences.

The general and recurring argument from the literature on religion and suffering from displacement suggests that many refugees find comfort and healing power in religion (Gozdziak, 2002; Honwana 2001; McMichael, 2002). However, much of the evidence is based on context-specific cases. This may mean that spirituality and religious faith may change or be interpreted differently by the same communities in a different environment, geographical location, or at different points in time.

Religious practice and ritual is part of the daily life of Muslim worshippers. I was interested to find out whether or not Somali refugees' religious practices were interrupted

by their relocation since forced migration can often pose difficulties for religious practice depending on the relocation community (Westermeyer, 1989:17).

As a result, Somali refugees' current and past experiences and practices of Islam will often have an impact on the ways they interpret and understand Islamic principles relating to assistance and protection. Furthermore, an understanding of current practices of Islam will help explain the dynamics of the ties between the Somali community and the local Muslim community in Johannesburg.

For example, many of the Somali women I spoke to do not regularly attend any mosques, and could not even tell me of a mosque that had a private section for women. When I asked them if they attended mosque, many responded that women do not go to mosque. I was told that, besides not allowing women into the mosques in South Africa, they had to attend to their children, take care of their homes, and so did not have the time to go to mosque, even if it were allowed.[6] Perhaps this is why more than 78% of the respondents in the Joburg Project survey responded that they were not members of any mosque. If most of the people in that survey consisted of women, there would be a high percentage responding with a negative to the question of attending mosque. More importantly, the concept of "membership" does not even exist in the Islamic context.

According to Sara Jassim[*], Director of a leading charitable organization in Johannesburg, there is no such thing as a member:

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[6] Some women told me that they had only been to Mosque for Ramadan services during the *Eid* Celebration, the culmination of the fasting month. However, many complained that the Mosques do not allow women, and the one or two that do have very limited space with no microphone to hear the prayers and service. There is in fact only one Mosque in central Johannesburg that I learned of which had special prayer areas for women. Aside from that, a local Shi'ite Mosque allowed women, and a member of that Mosque corroborated what the Somali women told me, pointing out how the practice of Islam in Johannesburg is skewed and not in accordance with Islam, which encourages women in prayer.

[*] All the names of the Somalis and NGO staff members I have interviewed have been altered for considerations of anonymity and security.

> The mosque is open because it's the house of *Allah*, so it's free for anybody to go in and do their worship. There is no membership in a *masjid,* the only people who would be members are the ones that's [sic.] running the *masjid*. That's taking care, maintaining the *masjid*…but we don't have memberships (personal communication, October 25th, 2004).

Accordingly, when I asked the Somalis if they were members, they did not quite understand the concept. I asked if they attended a mosque regularly, and many did not. Many of the men explained that if it was time for prayer, the closest mosque was where they stopped to pray. When I asked one refugee woman what would happen if someone in the community died, for example, she explained that everyone in the community collects a little bit of money to help the family of the deceased pay for the burial rituals. She said that they do not get a tombstone or coffin, but rather have a special ritual where the body is cleansed and wrapped in white cloth and then buried in the earth.

Islamic Principles Regarding Migration

Islamic doctrines encourage all sorts of movement and travel, the most notable and salient being the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), an obligation of all Muslims who have the financial means to do it. Other forms of travel include *ziyara*, the visit to local or regional shrines; *rihla*, travel in search of knowledge or pleasure, and *hijra,* the obligation to migrate from lands of persecution (Elmadmad, 1991).

This study explores the ways in which the refugees themselves interpret and understand Islamic principles related to migration and the ways the understanding of these principles have influenced their relationships with their community and other refugees. Perspectives on the issue of granting and extending assistance and protection to those who seek it were explored while discussing Islamic principles on providing

assistance to those in need, including the principles of what one Muslim scholar in South Africa noted as "Islamic Economy," which stipulates what each Muslim must give as *zakkat*, *saddaqa*, and *lillahi*, different forms of alms. According to his explanation, there is a known right in Islam for those who have the means to give to those who find themselves in a strange land, even if they were not needy in their homeland, which can be understood as a refugee or forced migrant. However, as the scholar rightly asserted, "unfortunately not all of the rich pay and if it doesn't go through the right channel it doesn't get to the right person" (personal communication, Nov. 2nd, 2004).

Giving assistance to those in need, including migrants, is just one part of many concepts and principles within Arab-Islamic history that deal with migration and asylum. The pre-Islamic Arab concepts of *al istijara,* (the search for the neighbourhood, also a metaphor referring to the request for protection or shelter), and *ijara* (the granting or extension of protection to the person seeking it) are of particular significance to this study. These principles pre-dated the Islamic era and are the continuance of Judeo-Christian ideas of 'kindness to one's neighbour' and the basis for subsequent Islamic laws and principles on asylum.

The concepts of *istijara* and *ijara* are very old concepts dating as far back to pre-Islamic Arab times. These concepts that were practiced in every-day life followed Arab traditions of hospitality, honour (*muruwah*), and morality (Arnaout, 1997; Elmadmad, 1991; Elmadmad, 1998). From the custom of welcoming guests with kindness (*husn addiyafa*) derived the obligation of all tribes to grant asylum and protection to any person who asked for it, whatever the reasons of his/her flight. In accordance with this bond created between the guest and the family affording and extending protection, all members

of the family were obliged to protect and defend him/her (Arnaout, 1997; Elmadmad, 1991).

Food sharing became a sort of agreement between the refugee and the family who offered him/her food. Protecting guests gave rise to other more formal traditions such as community/neighbourhood cooking. While conducting my research, I was reminded of such traditions as I sat with other Somalis to break the fast during Ramadan, where around 15 people gathered on the floor to share a meal that newly arrived refugees had prepared as a task they had been given in exchange for shelter. These traditions were derived from the humanitarian values of the Arab society drawing on principles of faithfulness, courage, honesty, and neighbourliness (ibid.). According to Elmadmad (1991),

> Many verses of the Quraan deal with asylum. The Prophet and his successor (khulafa) stressed the need to grant protection and to have humanitarian attitudes toward aliens. A study of the Quraan and some practices in the Islamic community shows that asylum in Islam (1) comprises both the concept of religious and territorial asylum; (2) is the duty of both the State and the individual; (3) is a right of the persecuted who should be granted asylum; and (4) is a limited protection both in time and scope (470).

With the coming of Islam in the 7th century, these principles were further developed and sustained. The sacred Islamic text, the Shariah, calls upon every Muslim, as part of the principle of *al aman* (safeguard), to grant asylum and protection to any stranger seeking refuge in Islamic territory (*Dar-al-Islam*), even an idolater fleeing persecution (Arnaout, 1997). The Qur'an[7] says, "If an idolater seeks asylum with you,

[7] It can be argued that the Qur'an cannot be used or referred to as an academic source. However, the influential historical and ideological impact with which it provides for and guides Muslims cannot be dismissed. While in the secular Western world, religion and state are separated, it is impractical for a Muslim society. The teachings of the Qur'an and *Hadith* dictate and hold the basis for every aspect of Muslim life, from sexual behaviour to economics.

give him protection so that he may hear the Word of Allah, and then convey him to safety" (Qur'an in Arnaout, 1997:6).

Providing asylum is a duty of the Muslim individual, since providing protection to asylum seekers is a way of disseminating Islamic faith. In fact, the Muslim era starts not with the Prophet Muhammad's birth or the date when he received the message from God, but with the date of his migration known as the *hijra* (Elmadmad, 1991; Elmadmad, 1998; Hourani, 1991:17). According to one scholar's interpretation, because the prophet Mohammed and some of his closest companions were themselves migrants, a Muslim must provide shelter, equal rights, and means for life to anyone seeking refuge. This is because Christians also provided protection and shelter to the prophet and others escaping persecution due to their beliefs and dissemination of Islamic principles (personal communication, Nov. 2nd, 2004).

Religious Persecution, *Hijra*, and the Extension of *Aman*

The Qur'an clearly acknowledges those who flee for religious reasons. For example, the following verse relates to the experiences of "those who for the sake of the faith suffered the worst persecution at the hands of the pagans of Mecca and at last fled their home in utter helplessness, first to Abyssinia and later to Madina" (*Ayatullah* Yazdi and Ali, 2002:856).

> And those who migrate in (the cause of) God after they are oppressed, certainly We will give them good (recompense) in this world; and certainly the reward in the hereafter is much greater, if they only know (this), those who endured patiently and on their Lord (only) do they rely…. Then verily thy Lord unto those who migrate after they are persecuted, then they struggle hard (*fight for God's cause*) and exercised patience; verily, thy Lord, after that is Oft-forgiving, the Most Merciful (Qur'an, 16:41-42, 110).

According to Elmadmad (1991), Muslims who seek asylum to safeguard their faith and lives are honoured because even oppression cannot justify sins committed against persecutors. This is further illustrated in a passage referring to those living in an environment of persecution. The Qur'an explains how angels responded to those experiencing persecution by stating:

> Was not the earth of Allah vast enough for you to emigrate? It is they whose refuge is Hell. What a bad fate! But as for those men, women and children who are weak and have neither the strength nor the means to escape. It may be hoped that Allah will pardon them. Allah is Compassionate, Forgiving. He who emigrates in the way of Allah, will find many places of refuge in the land and abundant means of livelihood. He who leaves his home, emigrating for the sake of Allah and His Messenger and is then overtaken by death, shall surely be rewarded by Allah… (Qur'an in Behechti and Bâhonar, 1990:236).

The Qur'an makes exception only for those who are physically paralyzed, in captivity, or very sick or feeble, but those experiencing persecution must keep in mind that they will emigrate or proceed with *hijra* whenever it becomes possible.

Hijra in Arabic means "to abandon", "to break ties with someone" or to "migrate" and this notion is linked with a kind of obligation to flee. This is similar to forced migration or seeking asylum due to lack of protection. The concept of *hijra* is often discussed primarily with reference to the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D.:

> When the Prophet of Islam found that his companions were under pressure, first he ordered a limited number of them to migrate to Ethiopia. At last by making contacts with the people of Medina and taking firm undertakings from them he secretly made the atmosphere of that city favourable to him and got ready to migrate to it. All worldly goods and family relations were sacrificed for the cause of faith, for the promotion of goal and for the continuation of struggle. With the emigration, for the holy Prophet and his loyal companions a new epoch in the

> history of the Muslims began. We know how effective this big step of emigration to Medina was in the expansion of the Islamic movement (ibid.:236-237).

The Arabic and Islamic concepts of *hijra* and *lujuu*, migration in search of refuge and protection, are known today in migration discourse as forced migration and asylum. These concepts include rights and obligations of both migrants and receiving communities and states. Asylum in Islam is the duty of both the state and the individual. Islamic doctrine advocates that a persecuted person is obligated to flee persecution and injustice. All Muslims are encouraged and obliged to perform *al hijra*:

> Those who believed and left their homes (*Hajaru*) and strove with their wealth and their lives for the cause of Allah, and those who took them in and helped them, these are the protecting friends of one another. And those who believed but did not leave their homes, you have no bond with them till they leave their homes (Qur'an 8:72 in Elmadmad 1991: 471).

The Qur'an takes the issue of staying amongst persecutors further by making it quite clear to followers that fleeing is necessary when the element of persecution is present. For example, consider the following verse:

> Make sure to emigrate and not to stay among the infidels, because to stay among them constitutes an insult to the religion of Islam, an elevation of the word of the infidelity over the word of Allah. God, indeed, had not ordered the fight but to make the word of God superior, and the word of infidels the inferior. Take care not to sojourn or not to enter under the protection (*dhimmah*) of an infidel as long as it is possible. You must know that he who sojourns among the infidels - although he can leave - has no share in Islam, since the Prophet (prayer of God and his salute on him) says: "I consider myself rid of any Muslim who sojourns among the polytheists". He does not recognize in him the qualities of a Muslim (Abu-Sahlieh, n.d.).

Sami A. Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh, Legal Advisor for Arab and Islamic Law at the Swiss Institute of Comparative Law, interprets this message:

> These two verses urge each Muslim living in an infidel country to leave it and join the Muslim community, unless he is unable. The purpose of this migration was to protect them from persecution, to weaken the infidel community and to participate in the effort of war of the new community. Therefore the Koran uses together the terms: those who believe, and those who emigrate and strive in the way of Allah (ibid.).

These verses are old and relevant to a specific context and era; however, their presence in the Qur'an makes it applicable in any situation where Muslims are being persecuted. Nevertheless, each line in every chapter is open for interpretation. Thus, one could argue that Somali refugees living in South Africa, though among Muslims in South Africa, should not stay among infidels. However, they are not being persecuted but rather provided for with shelter and protection.

Additionally, for those who have enough to give to those in need, including the migrants in search of religious safety, the Qur'an states:

> And let not those with bounties [wealth and the means] among you swear against giving to their kindred, to the poor, and the emigrants in the way of God, and they should pardon and turn away (*overlook*); What! Love ye not that God should forgive you? And God is Oft-forgiving, All Merciful (Qur'an, 24:22).

Though this verse is written in the chapter *An-Nur* (the light), which deals mainly with those involved in slander and scandals, it warns against their conduct in such affairs but also warns against the abrogation of the duty to help those in need, including the emigrants.

Any guest that does not pose a threat is entitled to asylum, assistance, and protection, as practiced during the time of the prophet. Islamic law further developed the concept of protection and safeguard of the foreigner, which already existed in pre-Islamic

Arab society. It widened and strengthened the sacred custom of offering protection and security. The absolute right to asylum in the old Bedouin customs lasted only three days, after which the guest had to leave the hospitality of the tent and camp, but Islam extended it to one year (Arnaout, 1997).

The granting of *al aman,* as explained by Elmadmad (1991), can be made in any language and can be manifested in different ways. No protected person could be attacked after asylum is granted. In addition, his or her life, property, honour, and freedom of consciousness was to be safeguarded and protected throughout the duration of the *aman*. This follows the pre-Islamic principle of honour to the guest, (*ikram al daif*), where the guest is treated with all respect-- an addition to the principle of welcoming of and kindness to guests (*husn addiyafa*). According to Khadija Elmadmad (1991):

> Traditions of Arab hospitality in the *Jahiliya* dictated respect for and protection of the guest, who should not be handed over to an adversary regardless of the cost to the host. A stranger was almost sacred in Arabia, especially if he came to seek help against injustice and oppression or the hard nature of the desert. Even an enemy was granted protection and hospitality (467-468).

The guest (asylum-seeker) also enjoyed certain rights, such as the right to partake in commercial activity and to marry a protected person (*musta'mina)*. According to Ghassan Maarouf Arnaout:

> the concept of the *aman* meets, in the spirit of Muslim law, two fundamental concerns. In the first place, it is a matter of guaranteeing in the immediate future to the *musta'man*, the stranger placed under protection by a Muslim, a refuge which can put him, his family and his goods out of all danger. This right of asylum cannot, in any circumstances be challenged. It is a sacred right. In no case might the asylum-seeker be refused access or admission to the territory of the country where he has requested refuge. Furthermore, he could not be sent back to his country of origin… It could be said that Islam was the first to adopt the principle of *non-refoulement* and the rule of the non-extradition of persons having committed political offences (1997:7).

Modern Islamic Laws and Principles

In more current Islamic Jurisdiction, similar leverage and freedom is given to those seeking asylum. For example, in conformity with Islamic Shariah Law, the Declaration of Human Rights in Islam, Paragraph 1, of Article 14 states: "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution" and Paragraph 2 states, "This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations" (Jafari, 1999:171-172). This obviously reflects not only universal laws on human rights, but also the earliest practices and traditions of extending assistance and protection to those seeking refuge. Furthermore, Paragraph A of Article 1 states:

> Life is a God-given gift and the right to life is guaranteed to every human being. It is the duty of individuals, societies and states to protect this right from any violation of life and from factors that disrupt its natural continuation, such as diseases, natural and human disasters. It is prohibited to take away life except for a Shariah-prescribed reason (ibid.).

These declarations express the idea that it is the duty of Muslims as individuals and as a community to help protect the rights and lives of human beings from persecution and life-threatening situations. Many would argue that this contradicts many modern day realities in the Islamic or Arab world.

Though many Arab states have declared in their constitutions that they are Islamic States, few of the twenty-one member countries of the Arab League are signatories to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (Elmadmad, 1991). As Elmadmad rightly points out:

> little reference is made in the laws and practices of the States to the Islamic Law of asylum and reception of foreigners who seek protection and refuge. A few Arab constitutions mention vaguely the right to asylum or forbid expulsion or extradition of refugees and asylum-seekers. Article 35 of the 1979 Somali Constitution, for example, allows the State discretion to grant 'political asylum' or to expel any person who 'has taken refuge in the Somali Democratic Republic', if there is an extradition treaty between Somalia and the State requesting the extradition (1991:466-467).

Thus, it is quite clear that there exists a contradiction between what Islamic laws and principles on migration stipulate and the practical application of the laws. However, this issue is quite complex and continually changing and well beyond the scope of this research. The importance of this incongruity between practice and theory, however, lies in the fact that Islam has, theoretically, from its earliest days taken on an expansive and quite lenient position on accepting and extending assistance to migrants, or what can be understood today as asylum seekers and refugees.

The relevance of the contradiction between principle and practice to this study is that almost all of the Somali refugees I spoke to defined in one way or another this symbiotic relationship being played out in Johannesburg within the Muslim community where they live. According to many of the testimonies and responses of Somali refugees, this rift exists not only on a state level, but also within the urban settings of their location; a topic I will return to in a later chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCEPTIONS OF GIVING AND RECEIVING

Responsibility for Giving Assistance and Protection

Many of the Somalis I came into contact with had little or no formal education, and little knowledge of Islam and its principles. Many did not read Arabic script. However, when I mentioned the principle of *aman*, the idea behind this principle was instinctive to them. I usually explained to them briefly what it means, and though many did not know of it formally, they explained it as they have learned from the practice of giving alms to the needy.

An elderly disabled Somali man explained, "Islam teaches that a widow, an orphan, the disabled, and the *hajir* should always be helped" (Personal communication, Oct. 11th, 2004). He came to South Africa in part because he thought the medical infrastructure would be to his benefit, and he believed his disability alone would lead to rights and assistance. The government, he said, should be responsible for taking care of its refugees. But another woman, resident of South Africa for many years and part-time employee of an NGO, explained that South Africa could not afford to provide for all refugees considering the economic conditions of its own citizens. She went on further to say that even local NGO's should not extend assistance to all refugees:

> If I was the one behind, the one looking at applications, I wouldn't give help to everyone. There are eight million immigrants[8] [sic.]; South Africa would have

[8] This is the figure that the respondent gave. However, according to the UNHCR statistics, at the end of 2003, there were a total of 110,643 people of concern to UNHCR in South Africa, even though the number of total immigrants may be much higher. The statistics UNHCR published includes: refugees, asylum seekers, and others of concern. Source: 2003 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, Publish date: June 15, 2004. (Available online at: http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/statistics.

> nothing left if it gave help to everybody. There are people in rural areas who don't even have shelter, money to send their children to school, anything; they are very poor. I would only give help to disabled, old people, women and children (Personal communication, Oct. 18th, 2004).

A younger Somali man, twenty-eight years of age, Hassan, explained in his perfect English that though Islam teaches to give to those in need, it can evolve into a more complex situation of dependence. When asked about the importance of assistance from religious organizations and its role, he replied:

> I don't want people to become dependent. Once handouts start, they become dependent. How about the migrants that are flooding the residents of a country? What could be done then? You see, once the Somalis came, they were challenged; they found ways to take care of themselves. Also, some people may abuse the system of helping…but at least the Muslim organizations are helping 10% of the need [sic.], but what about UNHCR stepping in, they have a responsibility to help if the government doesn't (Personal communication, Oct. 29th, 2004).

When he first arrived in South Africa with other boys his age, he slept in the streets for many nights. He and friends decided at one moment to ask different mosques in the area if it were possible to take shelter inside, but they were refused: "The mosques in Somalia are public. Here they have their own income, a Board of Governors… it's run like a business."

When asked about the responsibility of giving assistance many replied that the government should be the main provider of assistance. Seldom did any of the refugees talk about their reliance on the community and other refugees for support or material assistance. A young woman who lives with two other Somali women and their children casually talked about her situation as we sat together drinking cups of sweet black coffee.

"Everyone worry [sic.] about his own problem", she explained, "everyone find a way to take care of himself" (Personal communication, Oct. 8th, 2004).

Refugees as a Source of Help

Although many of the refugees I spoke to discussed how it was mainly the government's duty to provide assistance to refugees, I did not visit one Somali home or meet one person that lived solely within a nuclear family. The support given from one Somali family to another is what sustains this community. They did not tell me that they believe refugees should help refugees. Some said that each family has its own burdens. Yet when I entered the home of Saudia, I met seven other refugees that were living in the same home. Similarly, when I first arrived in the home of a Somali acquaintance, two other Somali women refugees, each with baby in hand, came to greet me. And yet they are modest in their ways of explaining how and in what ability they can help each other. One refugee woman, having been here nine long years explained:

> I've had lots of experience in this country. I've slept on the street…The JRS,[9] the government and the UNHCR are not really helping the refugees. The refugees are helping each other and themselves. The refugees here help each other, that's our culture to help each other, from deep down in your heart you feel like helping someone when they are in need…Apart from the small help of the church or the NGO's, it was very difficult with xenophobia, for all refugees no matter where you are from. The government gives us only a paper and the blue sky (Personal communication, Oct. 27th, 2004).

Another woman stressed that other refugees do not help each other like Somalis help each other. When I asked if they helped other refugees and Somalis because they felt obligated religiously, almost every single respondent claimed that it was rather a cultural

[9] Jesuit Refugee Services, an international non-governmental Catholic organization that serves refugees. It is also an implementing partner of the UNHCR.

issue.[10] Akram, for example, a father of two and husband, wanted to make it clear to me why he accepted newly arrived refugees in his home, seven of them.

> It's how we do things, it's our tradition and culture. We are brothers. Even if we have to sleep on the floor, no problem. My grandfather and great grandfather were the same way. We must help one another. Today I help someone and maybe tomorrow I will need his help (Personal communication, Oct. 20, 2004).

Basim, a young Somali refugee now selling imported *nargeelas*[11] arrived in South Africa in 2001. His words echoed Akram's statement: "Most Somali people help each other so I never went to ask for help from any local organization." He depended heavily on the help of his brothers and the network he had already established. But even for those who do not have anyone in South Africa, family and the clan-family still play a major role in assisting Somali refugees. In the case of one man I met, remittances across continents were sent each month in order for him to survive the first few months of his new life in Johannesburg. His family members and friends in Europe helped him pay rent and buy food until he managed to find a consistent way to generate income by selling groceries in a local market.

Similar to Basim's experience, Abdullah, only twenty years old when he arrived in Johannesburg, made a living out of collecting and selling cardboard boxes. He first came to buy medicine and antibiotics to help build his pharmacy in Somalia, but he was cheated by his business partners back home and soon realized he had to seek help and find some way of surviving in South Africa. He explained:

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[10] While I was not making a distinction between religion and culture or thought the interviewees did not understand they were basically one and the same thing, many of the interviewees made it a point to make the distinction. It occurred to me later that perhaps this was being done, and emphatically, to stress their national identities. This idea is further elaborated on in the conclusion.

[11] Also known as a *hubbly-bubbly* or *Sheesha*, it is an Eastern style instrument used to smoke fruit flavoured tobacco.

> We don't get help from NGOs…we are Somalian, even if he [a refugee] doesn't got nothing, [sic.] we'll try to help, you cannot look away from someone who needs help. At least to sleep, we will help someone [sic.] (Personal communication, Oct. 29th, 2004).

But when I asked if he would help people of other tribes, as he was of the Hawiya tribe, he said he would direct that person to people of his or her tribe. He would even give transport money to get that refugee to people to members of that particular tribe. "They [the refugees] help each other but by tribe," he said. "They ask you when you arrive, which tribe are you? And then they direct you to that group." In a similar tone, Hassan explained what happens when a newly arrived refugee gets to Johannesburg, "If anyone [sic.] man of my tribe comes, they will bring him here to my home" (Personal communication, Oct. 29th, 2004).

Somali Social Structure: Tribal Issues and Personality

The Somali social structure can be described in terms of kinship to a certain family of clans. In Somalia, a clan is a large group of people believed to be descendants of a common male ancestor whose name is also the name of the clan. Several clans constitute a clan-family, and each clan is divided into a number of lineages. A clan-family, also referred to as tribe, is a group of clans, which believe to be ultimately linked through descent of a common ancestor (FAS, 1969). The six major clan-families or tribes are: Darod, Hawiya, Isaaq, Dir, Digil, and Rahanwein, all of which are patrilineal descent groups originating from the two main brothers of the traditional genealogical line, Sab and Samaale.[12]

[12] See Appendix 2 for an outline of Somali genealogy.

In her book *Somali Nationalism* (1963), Saadia Touval explains that an important aspect concerning Somali society is their belief in common ancestry. She explicates on the origins of the people of Somalia:

> The traditional genealogies of Somali tribes trace their origins to the Quraysh, the lineage of the Prophet Mohamed. The claim reflects the historical contact with Arabia and with Islam. Most probably small groups of Arab immigrants settled among the Somalis and intermarried with them. It is not surprising that the Somalis, being Moslem, developed a tradition of having descended from these immigrants, and ultimately, from the Prophet himself (1963:15).

However, equally powerful is the segmentation of the Somali people. Nuruddin Farah, a prolific writer of Somali descent discusses in his book *Yesterday, Tomorrow: Voices from the Somali Diaspora*, the tensions involved in clan divisions. He describes the situation this way:

> many of our people link the events which led to the civil war to the Somalis' ill-founded loyalty to the clan, a wraparound concept, perhaps one of the most abused tropes in our vocabulary. The clan is seen as both the evil common denominator and an explicator of all actions, good or bad, as well as an indispensable form of social organization (2000:14).

My own personal observations in Johannesburg have led me to believe that, though tribal affiliation within the Somali community greatly affects identity, unifying factors such as religion and nationality play a much stronger role in helping them demarcate themselves from the host population. This is most likely due to being in exile together and sharing the same hardships. Furthermore, tribal segmentation only became a much stronger dividing marker when Siad Barre's 22-year dictatorship came to an end after he had used clan differences as a political tool to further pull apart the social composition of Somalia (Summerfield 1999).

The scenario of tribal affiliation being downplayed in Johannesburg may be illustrated by the following example: one woman pointed out on one occasion that many Somalis in Johannesburg were of the tribe that killed her father. Still, she maintained friendly relations with many people of that particular tribe even though she expressed sadness and felt compelled to tell me of her tragic loss. She said that in Johannesburg things are different and that she could no longer be angry with individuals that did not personally attack her family. This line of thinking is probably why in South Africa it was possible for her to marry someone of a different tribe even though that would not have been acceptable in Somalia.

Ethnic differences do not exist amongst the different Somali tribes. This may help in explaining why, for example:

> Culturally, there is much cohesion among the Somali people, distinguishing them from their neighbouring tribes. They differ from their neighbours in their religion, their language, and to some extent in their customs and way of life (Touval, 1963:20).

This fact of social life helps to unravel the dynamics in the relationship between the Somali community and their host population, and why they prefer to live amongst other Somalis rather than to blend in with the larger community. When I asked one Somali man why he thought this happens, he answered, "we are born Muslims, we are taught differently about Islam. As refugees, we cannot live alone, but because we are of the same religion, we trust each other, we live together and among each other."

The issue of trust came up in our conversations time and time again. One woman, Kamila, in her well-spoken Egyptian dialect openly talked about why Somalis are not integrated and accepted:

> Indian culture here is very different in that it is hard to accept others. There are very many races here. It was even hard for us to understand all of them when we first came. In Somalia, we are all the same even if we have different tribes. They don't trust each other here. It is not easy for them to befriend us and trust us. They are the ones scared of us, even if we are black or Muslims, though I consider myself more as an Arab (Personal communication, Nov. 15th, 2004).

Thus, according to this woman, it is not that Somalis do not make an effort to integrate, but rather a question of acceptance by the locals. Many Somalis claimed the local Muslim population had their own circles of trust, which were hard to break or penetrate, thereby making it hard for Somalis to befriend or get close to members of their host community.

Local Community and Somali Refugees

I asked many of the Somalis if they were happy living amongst other people of the same religion, a question also in the Joburg Survey, and many of them responded "yes" to me, with almost 50% of the respondents saying "yes" in the survey. This is due, I believe, mostly to the fact that Somalis live within close distances of each other and in the same vicinity, with many sharing rooms in one house. Thus, the feeling of closeness is rather a result of being amongst other Somalis and not necessarily a result of being with other Muslims.

One woman who had previously worked with the Somali community through a local Muslim agency had this to say when I asked her what she knew about the Somali community:

> I find that some of the Somalis are very arrogant, maybe because they come from a hostile war zone and I think that that has made them very sceptical of their way of life and they feel that they have been downtrodden in their own country and then they [sic.] coming to another country, and they don't need to be abused in any way so they build up this aggressiveness…. They ask for food and clothing

> and when you give them used clothing they're not very happy taking second-hand clothing…irrespective of them being refugees in the country…there are a few that will take but not all and if they do take it they give it to people in the streets (Personal communication, Oct. 25th, 2004).

When asked why she thinks they come and live amongst other Somalis or "cluster" as she referred to it, she said,

> I think it's because they prefer being in their own sort of environment, so what they do is build their own environment amongst their own people. You will also find that when the women come in they don't marry out, they will marry in their own community, so I find that the Somali people are very close knitted. They care for each other, but unfortunately they still have to come to us and other people for assistance. They need that (Personal communication, Oct. 25th, 2004).

When I asked her why she thought the Somalis were a close-knit community in Johannesburg, she replied that it was due to cultural differences between Somalis and South Africans and also that their Islamic practice is different even though some Somalis enter the mosques for prayer (*salaah)*. She explained that the South African Muslim community has been generous, welcoming, and "open-heartedly" giving to the refugees. However, whatever hostility or negative reaction they may be receiving may be due to their segregation from the wider community and their failure to intermingle with other South Africans. The major problem being that they as Somalis would rather be branded as an Arab or Somali but not a black South African.

The following excerpt also helps to explain the reasons why many of the Somalis tend to cluster, preferring to live amongst other Somalis:

> The fact that the Somalis are of one race and differ racially from some of their neighbors also tends to foster a sense of unity among them. Indeed the Somalis can be termed race conscious and affected by a sense of racial superiority, directed mainly toward Negroid Africans. This attitude stems probably from the fact that when the Somali tribes migrated southward, they encountered many Negroid agricultural communities which became subject to the conquering Somali

> tribes. Furthermore, Somalis were slave owners until the early part of this century [19th], and their slaves were generally Negroid people…the tribal barriers remain; but the sense of Islamic unity is nevertheless pervasive (Touval, 1963:24-25).

One would have to have knowledge of this social composition and identity component to understand the ways in which many Somalis have chosen to live in exile. To locals, conglomeration of a community may mean they are isolating themselves, thereby drawing boundaries between themselves and others. For example, the last remarks that a South African Muslim and local NGO Director made to me as I left her office were:

> I hope that the Somali people that is [sic.] living in our country accept our country and our people and not lie about their way of life because here, every house that a Somali is living in belongs to a Muslim. So how can they say that they not helping? Every single house you gonna [sic.] walk into around Johannesburg is rented from an Indian, and a Muslim Indian. It's not rented from a white or any other, but from an Indian Muslim… but they are very ungrateful people I must say, I must stress they're very ungrateful. You can help them and it doesn't matter, it's your duty, you're supposed to help us. We are refugees in your country and it's your duty to assist us. They tell you that (Personal communication, October 25th, 2004).

And yet other Somalis have personal experiences that shape the way in which they conceive their notions about the host population and their lives away from their homeland. For example, Nadia, a Somali refugee awaiting her fate to move to England after having lived in South Africa for seven years, painted a different picture about what life is like in the Muslim-dominated area where she lives. She has considered South Africa somewhat of an intermediate place in the last few years, from where she seeks to move on to another country, possibly because of her having been a victim of crime more than once. She seemed delighted to have been given the chance to complain about life in Johannesburg and her relationship with South Africans: "You think you in Somalia; we run from one war and come to another, what is this?" she asked me. She unhappily pointed out her scarring from the bullet wounds she suffered in Somalia as she described

to me how the danger she feels in the streets of Johannesburg reminds her of the unbearably painful violence she experienced in Somalia. Aside from that, the economics of her living situation made it even more difficult to continue life in Johannesburg.

She said that the South Africans not only charged too much for rent, but that they questioned whether the Somalis were Muslims. She explained that the South African Muslims tended to view themselves as more "true" Muslims. She continued to tell me about her experience in a hospital where a Muslim nurse interrogated her about her name, doubting her being a Muslim from Somalia as she meticulously commented on her skin colour and looks as if she even were lying about being from another African country. To the nurse it was hardly possible that, though Nadia was darker in skin complexion, she still had hair texture that was similar to her own, and not particularly course or characteristic of a black African. Still, Nadia seemed to be more frustrated when I asked her about the process of acquiring assistance as a refugee.

She had two small children, led a very modest lifestyle from what I gathered from her home and belongings, and so I asked her why she had not been to any of the charitable organizations to request assistance. She said that she had heard of many people who had requested assistance and not received any. Moreover, they had come back crying from the place where they solicited assistance, humiliated after having waited for so long. She claimed that the local Muslim charitable organizations receive plenty of funding from abroad, mainly Saudia Arabia, but did not distribute it fairly. "They should give honestly," she said, "not for video camera and their own use, for other things like buying homes and cars" (Personal communication, Oct. 27th, 2004). She

believed that many leaders of the organizations use funding to prop up their own lives, misusing the money that should be allocated to those in need.

I heard similar comments from many of the other refugees I met throughout the course of this research. One man who worked for an NGO in Somalia and who currently helps other refugees with translation and interpretation when necessary, said the following about the local community and their help:

> We are Muslims, and they are Muslims. They receive *zakkat*[13] from wealthy people, why do they say, "no, we are helping too many people, we cannot help you"…they must give assistance and they must encourage refugees who want to do good. I could have started my studies by now and would have a job. Life is too hard here. We have no travel document, and there is no welfare at all (Personal Communication, Nov. 19th, 2004).

In another instance, an outspoken young Somali woman said that though women and children should be the first given assistance, she herself, a young mother, did not want anything from the local Muslim organizations. "The people who work for these organizations will treat you like a beggar. We had people who begged in our country, but even them we treated with respect. Our faith is stronger. When someone is feeling bad we feel what he or she is feeling" (Personal communication, Nov. 19th, 2004).

There is a definite tension between the local South African Muslims and the Somali refugees on a personal and organizational level. I confirmed this while accompanying three Somali women to a well-known Muslim charitable organization that distributes food to Muslims as *zakkat* (alms) during the holy month of Ramadan[14]. When we first arrived at the locale, there were hundreds of people waiting in line with tickets in

[13] *Zakkat* is one of the types of alms Muslims must give to other poor Muslims. It is one of the five pillars of Islam.

[14] People receiving food, including South Africans, must prove that they are practicing Muslims prior to receiving a food-ration card, possibly by showing a certificate of change of faith, or verbally reciting verses from the Qur'an.

hand to receive food parcels. There was also a police car and one officer present to keep order and for purposes of intimidation, threatening those who badly behaved. The ladies I was with immediately joined the formation of other women in line especially for Somalis, also referred to as the "Mogadishu" line by the staff helping with the food distribution. The line for South Africans was considerably longer than that of the Somalis, and this was pointed out to the Somali women waiting in line more than once. According to a South African Muslim woman in charge, there was one instance of a Somali woman being arrested, apparently because she spat at someone in the South African line. Consequently, all food parcels to Somalis were stopped for more than 40 minutes and many people were threatened with not receiving any food and getting their tickets withdrawn. The Somalis were treated especially harsh.

The woman in charge showed a lot of hostility towards the Somalis in line, scrutinizing them with a careful eye and waiting for a moment to blame one of them for bad behaviour. All the while, I could not seem to understand why they had been separated. One person claimed that the Sheikh who organized this food distribution favoured the Somalis and so every year they received food quicker than anyone else. Many of the South Africans coming from all over the city, including Soweto, had arrived to form a line since five in the morning the previous day. This instance demonstrated why the Somalis ultimately were viewed by many of the people there that day as unfavourable and demanding.

Saudia, also in South Africa many years, explained the way in which she received assistance from a local Muslim charitable organization. She said that it was not until Ramadan and long after she had arrived and tried to continually get help from them that

the organization did finally help her. She said that it was her neighbour who discovered one day that she did not have much food to cook for breaking of the fast (*iftar*). After a neighbourly conversation with congenial Saudia, he asked that she visit him at the organization where he worked in order to provide her with some form of assistance. It was his connection that gave her the chance to get some money and school fees for her son Zahir. She said she had continually been there to seek help and they had turned her away many times. Both she and another woman who later joined our conversation explained that the reason for Saudia's refusal of assistance was due to another Somali man who works there as a translator and interpreter. According to them, he prohibits many people from receiving assistance if he has qualms with them or does not like the tribe of the applicant. They continued by saying that this employee has a lot of influence on this organization's decision to provide assistance. According to my respondents, he favours people from his own tribe and is able to secure help even for bogus applicants who do not need the help, like a woman relative of his who owns a business selling gold.

Even though one of the women I spoke to had a different experience and did in fact receive assistance in a timely manner, she agreed with what Saudia said, adding to her comments when possible. They both continued to tell me how they had sought help from yet another Muslim organization and that they believe that that particular organization did not help them because it only provides help to citizens of South Africa. Furthermore, according to them, Somalis would just not get any help even if they helped refugees, as they are part of the most "least preferred" class of migrants. They explained how bad the Somali situation is, considering that many have neither gotten nor get

protection from the Department of Home Affairs, especially those who have arrived after the year 2000.

Expectations vs. Reality

With her baby in arm and in broken English, a young Somali woman discussed how she never received any assistance in South Africa. She told me that when it came to assistance, being a Somali posed a problem not only for the person receiving assistance but also for members of the same tribe. She explained that if people from one particular tribe were helped, problems of finger pointing and accusations of nepotism would occur. This, she said, she would try to avoid at all costs, even if she did need help to buy milk formula for her baby and clothes for herself. However, nobody helped her along the way getting to South Africa, so she was not surprised that she did not receive any assistance and did not expect to get any help.

Many of the people I spoke to had no idea what was awaiting them on the South African side upon leaving Somalia. Many arrived at the dawn of South Africa's new democracy, with expectations that refugees fleeing persecution would gladly be welcomed in a hospitable environment. They did not know of local structures and South African society, but believed the government would expeditiously and without doubt protect them. Aliyah, having lived in South Africa for nine years and somewhat of a leader in the Somali community, had this to say:

> We didn't have any idea, we didn't know if they were rich or poor or if they had any organizations that help here. We just hoped that the ANC or the UNHCR might help us. When we came to this side, life was different, life was hard. We received shelter and food from a small Muslim community in Nelspruit, of about twenty people. They even gave us shelter to come to Johannesburg, that was my

> plan; my dream was to come to Johannesburg… When we were new to this city, they helped uplift us (Personal Communication, Oct. 27th, 2004).

Others told me that they knew there was a large Muslim community and had hoped for their support. Ibrahim, for example, a refugee of seven years said:

> I knew the history of South Africa. I knew that there were Muslim refugees that had come from Malawi, Tanzania, and that there were already many here from India. I was expecting to get some help from them, but that didn't happen in my case. As brothers, we must look to see how each of us is living, to help each other. But the older people and the poor, they need the most help. Not like me, I take care of myself by working (Personal communication, Nov. 15th, 2004).

It was not uncommon for the male respondents to tell me that they had not sought assistance. It seemed to be somewhat of an embarrassment to admit to having needed material assistance. Many of them asserted that assistance should be preserved for women and children since men could find alternative ways to manage.

On the other hand, many other Somalis told me they had no expectations of receiving any kind of material assistance upon arrival to South Africa, but that it was considered necessary. This was reflected in one man's statement:

> I think the Somali refugees should have the priority of receiving assistance. We don't have someone to show our problems to the community, like a leader. Our country is destroyed by tribal problems and we really do need help (Personal Communication, Oct. 29th, 2004).

This man finds the lack of leadership and tribal segmentation within his own community a stumbling block to actually acquiring the assistance needed within the community. Still others felt the Somali situation was not as bleak.

Aliyah, for example, has worked for a charitable organization for a few years. As we sat and talked in her home, she confidently told me that the reality of the assistance situation in Johannesburg is really much better than the way it is portrayed by the Somali

community. Aside from being fatigued from fasting the entire day, Aliyah spoke perfect English, and she was insightful and open. According to one source, Aliyah collected food from the NGO for the needy within the Somali community, but was allegedly selling it instead of distributing it at no cost and this was happening because the NGO she worked for did not pay her a salary. One woman claimed she had also visited Aliyah to collect food, and when she was told it would cost her, she refused to pay for "expired" food. On the other hand, Aliyah believed that the reality was that Muslim organizations help extensively. According to her, many of the organizations pay school fees, hospital fees, and they distribute food and clothing on a regular basis, for anybody that is needy.

One Islamic NGO employee explained that assistance is given only to needy Muslims. Assistance in form of food parcels and school fees are given to children of needy families. When I asked her how they determined a person was needy, she explained that after an application was filled out, a home visitor would be sent out to the home to make observations regarding the economic status of the family. When I asked her specifically about assistance to refugees, she explained:

> You can just tell by the way they dress, they really look very poor. We know that he or she is a foreigner, usually they speak a foreign language or they have refugee papers. They must have proof they are refugees. They are the ones in need (Personal telephone communication, Nov. 19th, 2004).

She told me that assistance is only given to Muslims and this is determined by the dressing code and country of origin, but also, individuals are asked to recite prayers from the Qur'an to confirm their Muslim religion. Usually assistance is given for one year or until that family has another form or source of income to sustain themselves.

Length of Assistance

When I asked Aliyah about how long she thought assistance from local NGOs or governments should be given she replied:

> A person must stand on his or her own feet. In our culture, even in our religion, it's not good to beg. It will take anywhere from six months to 1 year to know how to get from one place to another and to know people. You must know everything through hardship (Personal Communication, Oct. 27th, 2004).

Similarly, when I spoke to Abdi about receiving material assistance from any of the local charitable organizations, he laughed with embarrassment. He remembered and told me about one Friday when he had gone to collect bread and milk from a local Muslim charitable organization but that he felt awful. He stressed that food and other assistance should be left for the women. He said:

> If you are a man, it's not good to go and beg. I hate to be under someone…the way I see myself, I'm not a knowledge person, but a refugee cannot be a refugee his or her whole life. When a person became a refugee, all this has a time to finish. A person can be a refugee one-year maximum (Personal Communication, Oct. 29th, 2004).

This type of statement was common from the Somali men. I was often told that women and children are "most in need" and that though the Somali community in general needs more attention, the men can often find ways to take care of themselves. This reflected, in my opinion, a certain degree of male pride. Though young men were also in need of material assistance, many were too embarrassed to say they had sought assistance from a charitable organization or wanted to seek help.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

I began this research with the assumption that Islam and teachings of Islam play a central role in Somali refugees' conceptions of entitlement to protection and assistance. This case study reveals that Islam plays an important role, but it also points out that other factors such as daily-lived experiences, tribal issues, and conflict within the community also play a major role in shaping the way refugees conceive of entitlements to protection and assistance.

Islam is indeed a very important element in the lives of the Somali refugees. It is both a cultural tradition and a marker of their identities as Somalis. It was a part of every aspect of their social lives, such as their modest way of dressing and their continuous usage of formal Islamic greetings and sayings, such as "peace be upon you" (Salaamu Alaykum). Similarly, Islam seemed to be the main source for the refugees' rationale and way of thinking of life in general and an influencing factor for the ways they conceived entitlement to protection and assistance in particular. However, other factors related to economic hardship, tribal divisions, and daily lived experiences in South Africa equally affect the conceptions of Somali refugees regarding protection and assistance. This did not come as a surprise as life in exile forces migrants to seek varying sources and strategies for survival and economic livelihood. Hence, even though religion can be important to a refugee, the harsh reality of being a refugee gives way to new experiences that help form and influence ideas and conceptions on assistance and protection.

Islam is negotiated when it comes to thinking about the process of giving and receiving aid. In other words, when convenient, many of the refugees would rely on Islam when it came to receiving assistance from local Muslim charitable organizations. Many of the refugees I interviewed would assert that it was the right of the refugee under Islam to seek food, shelter and other forms of assistance for their survival and well-being. In a sense, relying on Islam for the justification of receiving goods also seemed to take away from the vulnerability they might feel as the receiver in the dynamic of the gift giving or provision of charity (Harrell-Bond, 1999). I was frequently told that it is an obligation of the Muslim charities to help those in need and thus refugees had every right to collect aid.

My initial theory was that Somali refugees would heavily rely on the Islamic principles and theory, which I have outlined in this report to explain their personal understandings and interpretations of entitlement to protection and assistance. Though Islam plays an important part in influencing their actions and perceptions about assistance, it was just as important as other factors. Lack of knowledge of Islamic theory and principles related to migration, daily-lived experiences, rumours, and tribal issues took precedence in influencing the ways in which they conceive the matter of assistance.

Some of the Somalis I spoke with responded that culture and tradition rather than religion are what inspired them to help other refugees. It was difficult for me to fathom why they were making an obvious distinction between religion and culture since religion is an integral part of culture. Furthermore, for a society that has adopted Islam and Islamic practice since the latter Middle Ages, it is quite complex and nearly impossible to delineate between culture and Islamic tradition. They are intimately intertwined. One

would need to understand more fully an individual's upbringing and socialization to separate culture and custom from Islamic influence. Nevertheless, it is imperative to keep in mind that one of the Five Pillars of Islam, the fundamental principles of Islam, is to give a percentage of one's wealth to the poor. Thus, though it is difficult to say where the "Muslim mind" starts and where it ends, the refugees' conceptions of giving assistance can very well be based on this basic principle. Perhaps to separate themselves from the rest of the Muslims in South Africa, many of these Somalis strictly emphasised their culture and ideas of hospitality to underscore their willingness to help others in need, contrary to the actions of the other Muslims in Johannesburg.

Receiving Assistance

Ultimately, the Somali refugees' conceptions about receiving assistance from other Muslims were conveniently based more on religious principle than the actual amount of assistance that was given. For example, many respondents frequently referred to the basis of alms giving and the Muslim idea of helping and protecting other Muslims as a justification for why refugees should receive help from the Muslims in their community. However, when discussing the giving of assistance or provision of goods to refugees, the Somali refugees relied on Somali culture and traditions of hospitality to explain why Somalis helped each other and other refugees. Moreover, as far as the government of South Africa and intergovernmental agencies were concerned, many of the Somali refugees believed international law compelled governments and the UNHCR, for example, to be responsible for protecting refugees.

Tribal Issues

Many people I talked to knew of charitable Muslim agencies in the community that offered assistance to people in need. However, I heard time and time again beliefs that certain tribes dominate certain agencies through acts of favouritism and nepotism. According to many accounts, the employees that work for the agencies as interpreters and translators prevent people of certain tribes from receiving any food aid and other forms of assistance. Furthermore, the individuals designated as leaders of the community failed to deliver to the Somalis who needed the aid. Instead they sold and profited from goods that were meant to be used for aid.

Coordination and Leadership

There is a lack of coordination between the local organisations and a strong leadership or representative body within the Somali community. The few leaders that do exist within the community are not people entrusted by fellow Somalis, but rather by the organizations themselves.[15] The organizations in the community have little or no communication with refugees apart from the instances when refugees seek help directly from them. There are few links between the organizations and appropriate representation within the refugee community to discuss needs, problems, and concerns. The lack of coordination and leadership also leads to increased misinformation and the creation of rumours which influence the way people perceive the aid organisations.

[15] Currently, there is a small group of local women who have been called to convene meetings and to inform the JRS and UNHCR about the community's needs and workings. However, the group is newly in place and not always efficient and well known.

Misinformation, Myths and Rumours

The problems of misinformation and the spreading of rumours are rampant. If one Somali refugee might have sought assistance from one particular agency and did not receive any help or was humiliated, many others would refuse to go there or have exaggerated the situation. The question of whom an agency helps and why it helps is commonly distorted. If an organization turns someone away claiming that it cannot help pay a refugee child's school fees, for example, the Somalis refugees might believe it is because they are not of the preferred nationality or race. Thus, the labelling of that agency will be: "the one that only helps South African converted Muslims," or "the one that only helps people from DRC." Such comments were common when I asked many of the Somali refugees about different Muslim organizations in Johannesburg and other NGOs in the city. Furthermore, the problem of rumours and misinformation greatly affects newly arrived refugees. They are often given misleading information and are then dissuaded from going to an agency or local organization for assistance or direction to another agency.

The Importance of Assistance in the Urban Setting

An important conclusion of this study strengthens what others (Ferris, 1989; Harrell-Bond, 1986) have emphasised, namely that Churches, Mosques, local charitable organizations, and other agencies should be, and in some cases are, crucial in helping refugees integrate and become economically self-sufficient. Especially since who points many African refugees find themselves in protracted situations and need aid programmes

that help them become integrated in their country of asylum (Harrell-Bond, 1986; Jacobsen, 2001).

Many income generation projects have helped refugees get started in a new country. It is as important to refugees in urban settings as those living in refugee camps to receive assistance, such as access to healthcare, proper schooling and employment, which can be very difficult to obtain in a new city. Most irregular movement, such as moving from one country to another after applying for refugee status, is caused by the inability to secure food, shelter, proper schooling for children and a variety of other things that sustain their livelihoods. In discussing the role of churches in providing assistance, Elizabeth Ferris (1989) has explained how inadequate material assistance can lead to insecure legal and physical protection in urban settings as in the case of Chilean refugees that returned to a dangerous Chile after not being able to survive economically in Argentina. Her example illustrates the significance of material assistance and the need for local religious and grass roots humanitarian agencies. This is especially true when the UNHCR or the government, depending on their respective roles and agreements, are overloaded or do not officially recognise the asylum-seekers as refugees.

Somalis continue to arrive everyday. Just a few weeks before the conclusion of this research, I was informed that busloads of Somalis had arrived. This is not to say that some religious organisations are not active in the provision of aid assistance. For example, the South African Council of Churches was the principal organization in the late 1980's and 90's that helped Mozambicans who were not recognized by the South African government. They provided food and other goods necessary for relief and development among refugees. Additionally, help was provided for local resettlement,

education, medical care, legal aid, language training, vocational training, and self-reliance programs after consulting with the refugees as part of their idea that the Christian community must have an awareness of refugees and adopt a positive attitude towards them (Sol, 1982).

"Positive Attitude" and Support

A recurring reaction from many Somalis is that the negative attitude of organizations and local Muslims towards refugees is palpable and a major cause of tension in the community. Moreover, a lack of bonding and a complete lack of social support from their host community helps bolster the "clustering" of Somalis and their inability to properly integrate into their South African host population. Most Somalis in Johannesburg live in Muslim areas, yet the lack of integration between the refugee community and the Muslims in the area causes frustration and resentment on both sides of the fence. Experiences of humiliation further intensify this resentment and frustration. This is especially upsetting within the Somali community where social ties and networks are important elements in community life, as it is in many communities. Vertovec persuasively makes the argument of the importance of social networks:

> It is often pointed out that for migrants, social networks are crucial for finding jobs and accommodations, circulating goods and services, as well as for psychological support and continuous social and economic information. Social networks often channel migrants into or through specific places and occupations. Local labour markets can become linked through specific networks of interpersonal and organizational ties surrounding migrants (Vertovec, 2003:650).

During the course of my research and writing, this study grew to incorporate and emphasize the symbiotic relationship between the Muslim organizations, local

communities, and Somali refugees as well as the Islamic influence on the personal conceptions of the Somali refugees. This is mostly because I have realized that their conceptions are based largely on their personal experiences living in South Africa and on their experiences of having sought assistance. My assumption when taking on this research was that religious beliefs play the most important role in giving assistance to other refugees and expecting assistance in return. However, lived experiences of having sought assistance and having been rejected, for instance, has more of an impact on the way refugees conceive entitlement to assistance. For example, mothers often claimed that only single mothers should receive assistance, and students claimed they should be first in line to receive school fees since their futures lay ahead of them. In addition, misinformation and social relationships have had a huge impact on the way Somali refugees have formed their ideas about assistance. If one Somali has had a bad experience with another South African Muslim in the community, he/she was more likely to tell me that the agencies helping refugees are unfair, inefficient, and scandalous and cannot be trusted.

Misinformation and rumours have caused many Somalis to believe that certain agencies in the community are biased, possibly only giving aid to people of certain nationalities. This will not only influence their views about the host community or a particular agency, but they may later come to conclusions that refugees coming from that particular country of origin are really not in need but rather favoured thereby causing tension between different refugee populations.

Thus, yes, Islam has a major role in the lives of Somalis and on their conceptions about assistance. However, other factors such as personal experiences of hardship and

rejection, pride and humiliation, and tribal and community conflict also greatly influence Somali refugees' conceptions about entitlement to protection and assistance. Islam in theory is generous to the refugee, and this is why it influences the way Somali refugees conceive of assistance. However, there will always be a great divide between the theoretical religion and the way it is practiced. Differing social, political, and cultural factors in varying points of time and space will always affect the way a religion is practiced.

I believe that as my interpreter and many others I came to know leave the shores of South Africa to find new, more permanent homes, where their children will one day speak as their native language the language of that country, these problems will not reoccur. I do believe that many of the issues and conflicts pointed out in this report are due to the insecurities of life in exile and in a country in which one has not psychologically determined to stay.

I hope to hear one day from my Somali acquaintances in Australia and England that their lives have changed drastically from the days I had known them in South Africa. That their problems have changed from that of material insecurity and conflict with the host community to worrying about retirement funds and choosing suitable partners for their children. One thing is certain though, the longing to return to a peaceful Somalia will always be there and they will continually remember it as they run into complications of life outside their own country. They may always seek to live and interact with other Somalis, as they will continue to miss their ancestral homeland.

Appendix 1

(Questions that were explored in the unstructured interviews--Some of these questions have been adapted from the Johannesburg Project survey):

Do you think religious organizations help refugees?

Do you think they should help refugees?

Before you came to South Africa, did you hope or expect the local mosques or Muslim organizations to help you?

Had you heard of any such help?

Have you ever provided money or other assistance to other refugees?

Have you ever provided money or material assistance to a mosque or religious group?

Are you happy to live amongst other people of the same country of origin?

Are you happy to live amongst others who share the same religious beliefs?

Do you think South Africa should grant asylum seekers protection? Why?

Do you feel a strong bond to your religious background?

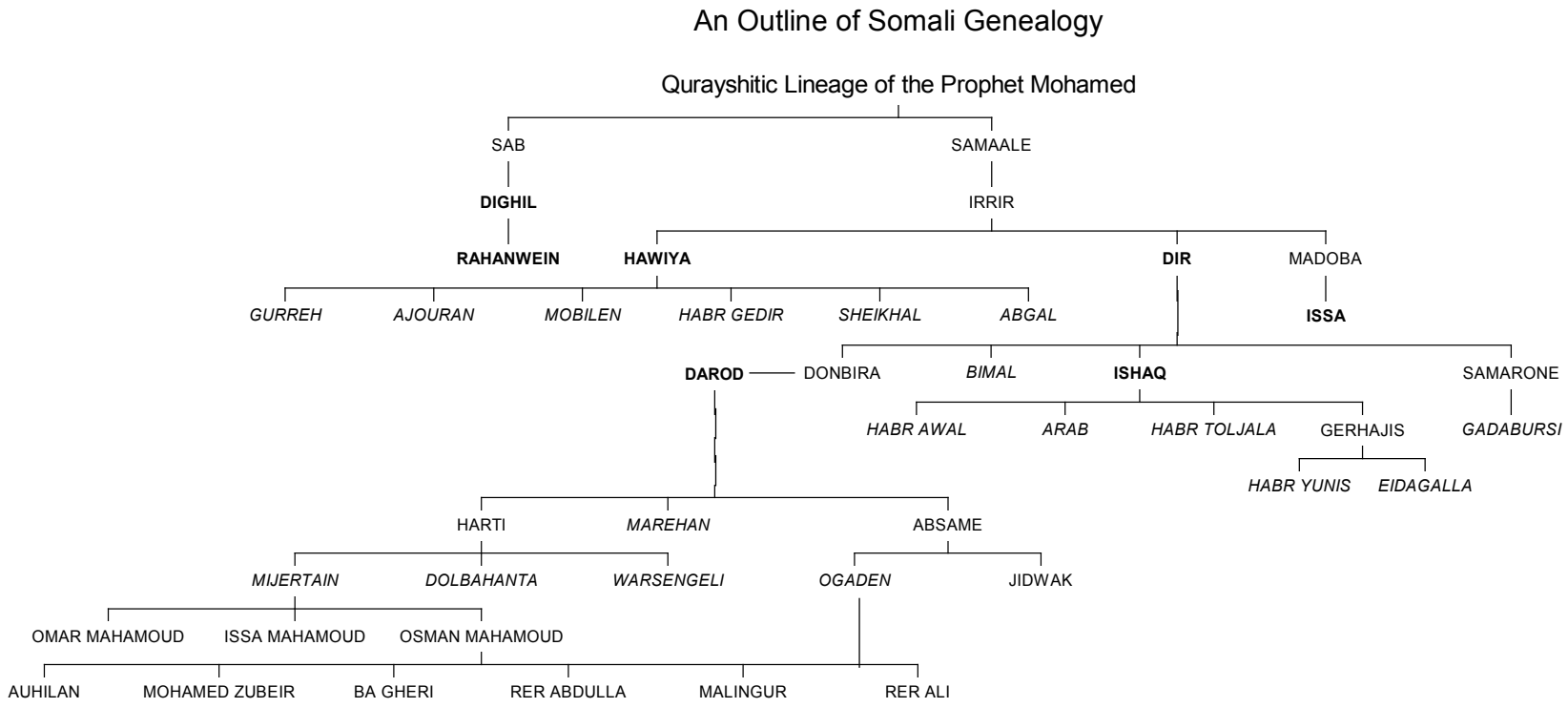
Are you a member of a mosque or religious group?

When was the last time you contacted a religious leader?

When was the last time you went to Mosque?

Source: Joburg Project Survey, *Forced Displacement, Survival, and the Politics of Space.* Wits University.

Appendix 2



Names in bold represent the principal Somali tribes, and names in italic represent their most important divisions.

Source: Touval, S. (1963) *Somali nationalism: International politics and the drive for unity in the Horn of Africa*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Appendix 3

Glossary of Terms

aman- safeguard

daif- guest

dar al Islam- land of Islam

dhimma- protected person

hajir-a migrant

hijra- migration

husn addiyafa- kindness to guests

igra- sanctuary

ijara- extension of protection

ikram al daif- honor to the guest

istijara- search of the neighbourhood/protection

lujuu- asylum

masjid- mosque

muruwah- honor

musta'man- He or she who has been granted *aman* or safety

rihla- a journey or trip

saddaqa- alms to non-Muslims

salaah- prayer

zakkat- alms given to needy Muslims as one of the obligations and five pillars of Islam.

ziyara- a visit

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