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When reality crashes the Imagination: experiences of young Qurbojoog (foreign raised) Somalis in Somaliland

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ABSTRACT

When reality crashes the Imagination: experiences of young *Qurbojoog* (foreign raised) Somalis in Somaliland

Amina Musa

As the Somalis territories are re-building there is heightened migration of people returning. They are heavily involved –formally or informally in development in the region. In the case of Somaliland, it is a semi-autonomous state championed by the diaspora. This assignment centers the experiences of young diaspora Somalis raised abroad in Somaliland. This demographic has grown up in the shadows of the civil war is the first generation to not grow up in the Somali territories. To capture their experiences, I carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Hargeisa, Somaliland over the summer of 2015. For this study I argue that young Somalis in the diaspora have fluid notions of identity and cannot acclimate to rigid notions that limit their agency in Hargeisa. I illustrate how culture is a tool constructed and re-negotiated to assert claims to place.

Key words: Diaspora, Post-Conflict, Development, Identity, Cultural Difference, Somaliland

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Research Question	
Methodology	
Chapter 2	7
Background and Context	7
Literature Review	11
Theoretical Framework	14
Chapter 3	16
Findings	19
Chapter 4	26
Discussion	31
Conclusion	31
Bibliography	

Introduction

“When I was getting on the plane [to Hargeisa] I was thinking ‘Oh great, for the first time in my life I am going to be a local, because I have always been a foreigner wherever I was. Doesn’t matter if you have citizenship of the country- the concept that the you are actually from the country, you were born there or you have some lineage rights was completely foreign to me.” (Yasmin, 32, female, UK citizen)

I am sitting with Yasmin¹ in an eclectically bright and colorful café in Hargeisa. Nowhere else in the city is this bright unless it is donning the flag’s colors. There are English slogans written all over the walls and paintings on the ceilings. The latest rap (Drake) album plays through the speakers, as the noises of the coffee machines compete with his voice. “Home is where you are” is written right in front of us as she tells me about her journey to Hargeisa. for a second I forget we are even in Somaliland. I adjust my headscarf (hijab) and realize that I am still in Somaliland. I look at her headscarf resembling a bun and remember we are in a society where we can not even choose if we want to cover up. We are sitting in a corner so no one hears her honestly relay her experiences of being in this city, of her rejection of local Somali culture. If she did not own this café, I doubt we would even have a place to sit and talk. We are playing the part but know nothing around us is normal.

In the past few years, Somali immigrants are returning to their homelands since the protracted conflict began in the late 1980s. As the region maintains a certain measure of political stability, those coming back are taking an active role. Many adult men have taken up political office, opened businesses and are investing in the country. The young generation of Somalis

¹ All the names of participants in this study have been changed to protect their identity.

that were socialized primarily outside of the region are also returning. After the 2011 drought in the Horn of Africa, there was an increased trend of young Somalis coming together to help those affected. A year later there was an online campaign, Operation Restore Home² that aimed to bring one thousand young Somali professionals to Somalia to help rebuild the nation. Since then, there has been a subset of young Somalis that are utilizing the Internet to display their experiences in the homeland. They post harrowingly beautiful pictures of contemporary landscapes yet there was never much insight into their personal experiences after arriving. I set out this study to explore what story the pictures are not telling us.

I carried out this study to explore the experiences of young diaspora Somali “returnees” in Hargeisa. Using the term returnees does not indicate all research participants were born in the city. Rather it is drawing on ideologies surrounding dispersed peoples’ (diaspora) notion of having “roots in a place, which conflate and coincide with culture and territory” (Olsson and King 2008). The territory in this case becomes complicated because the Somali civil war has resulted in varying notions of Somali identity mitigated through various regions in the country. This assignment focuses on Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland, a semi-autonomous state, North of Somalia. While holding claims to a Somali ethnic identity, people living in Hargeisa have ascribed new notions of being in this city. Since the early 1990’s this state has enjoyed peace and development, with the diaspora’s investment. Yet scholars and Somalis marginalize young diaspora Somalis from the conversation. In a Hargeisa context, these youth are referred to as “*Qurbojoog*” which translates

² Worldwide Somali Students and Professionals is a non-governmental organization that has mobilized young Somalis to transfer their skills in the homeland; A reverse brain drain of sorts.

to” those who stay outside” but is colloquially used to mean diaspora. Diaspora in a local Hargeisa context is used to refer to people. I will use diaspora as a spatiality, or space outside of the motherland. This loaded term, “*Qurbojoog*” prescribes notions of mobility and privilege on to young returnees. This identity marker pushes *Qurbojoog* to the periphery of society, to delineate their ability to prosper in the city.

Research Question:

In this assignment, I aim to illustrate ways the young Somali diaspora are asserting their claims to territory while rejecting local culture. I will do this by exploring gendered experiences, communication barriers and community. I argue that young Somalis in the diaspora have fluid notions of identity and cannot acclimate to rigid notions that limit their agency in Hargeisa. While a study focusing on “*Qurbojoog*” Somali returnees, I will build upon counter diaspora migration literature. This study will illuminate the various ways culture is asserted and re-imagined to support claims to place.

For this study I carried out semi-structured interviews of 10 diaspora raised Somalis in Hargeisa between June and August 2015. I received IRB clearance for this project, committing to high a level of ethics. I interviewed six men and four women between the ages of 23-35. They were all of Somali ethnicity, one was mixed race. None of my participants were married at this time. Five of the participants were in their twenties, the other half was in their early thirties. This demographic captured people at different stages of their careers. Five were born in the Horn of Africa, four were born in the Gulf peninsula and one was born in North America. Six of the ten lived within the UK before coming to Somaliland and held UK passports. One held a Canadian passport, another a United States passport. Another participant held a Kuwaiti

with one holding a Somali passport. Six of the participants spoke Arabic and five lived in the Arab peninsula at some point in their lives. For the interviews though, conversations were conducted mainly in English mixed with some Somali. In capturing this population, in one location, Hargeisa, I was interested in how the variables in their life experiences spoke to the experience of young Somalis raised in the diaspora, going to Somaliland

For the sake of disclosure, this study is strongly guided by my positionality as a “*Qurbojoog*” or young diaspora female in Hargeisa. While the study was originally intended to follow notions of identity and development, I could not ignore how much being “diaspora” impacted my day-to-day life in Hargeisa. This study is strongly rooted in the experiences of other diaspora returnees as well. While many “returnees” recognize these differences, I was shocked by how much it was downplayed. This summer unfortunately, instances of strong push back to diaspora presence transpired and could not be ignored. This piece is not set up to be a devise tactic but a way to begin an honest conversation around the diaspora’s role in Somaliland.

The paper will look as follows: After the introduction, I will present the methodology section explaining my role as researcher in this study. After that, I will present a background on the history of the Somali diaspora’s relationship with the nation state. Then, will be theoretical framework. Next, I will present my findings. Thereafter, as a part of my discussion section, I will offer insight into future research. Last will be my conclusion.

Methodology

This study will use qualitative research methods to capture the experiences of *Qurbojoog* in Hargeisa. To truly garner a rich understanding of the experiences of young Somalis returnees in Somaliland, qualitative research methods, which allow the researcher to explore and understand is preferred. To gain insight into their experiences, I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews of young Somalis raised outside of the region. I use the term “young” in this paper utilizing the African Union’s definition of youth as between the ages of 15 and 35. Another key aspect in this study is participant observation. Throughout this study, my vantage point as an ‘insider’, or a member of the group I’m researching, really grounded a majority of this study. It allowed me to deconstruct the public and private spheres in how this “pilgrimage” experience was playing for the young Somali diaspora.

For this study, I was looking for people who were raised outside of the Horn of Africa who were in Hargeisa with the intent to capacity build. I was not looking only for Somalis with western citizenship, but initially that was the first group I had in mind. During my initial angst over finding research participants, I realized I was already meeting people who were involved in change. Many who came to the city even for holiday had an eventual goal to transfer their skills to building up the country. However, I wanted to interview those who were living and working in the city- who were for all intents and purposes residents in Hargeisa. While the diaspora summer culture allowed people to live in a bubble, those who I interviewed did not only exist in this diaspora space. Yet, through diaspora spaces- cafes, trips out of town, Is where I identified my participants. In these spaces, I was continuously meeting new people and visible diaspora became easy to spot. We would normally speak in English mixed with Somali and I would ask what they were

doing while in Hargeisa. If they were in the city to work or transfer their skills in some way, I would ask them what they were doing and then ask if I could interview them. Interviews were held at a commonly agreed upon place, many times cafes or work places. I recorded all the interviews on my cell phone, so it was not apparent that I was conducting a research study. For those I did not interview in person, I interviewed over the phone and recorded on my laptop. They were later transcribed in English and analyzed.

The field site for this study is Hargeisa, Somaliland. As the capital of the country it is the epicenter for diaspora movement in the summer. Friends come down together which really allows the various diaspora groups to be visible and contained. For this study, I met all 10 participants from June through August 2015 in Hargeisa. A majority of the research participants all were familiar with one another. I would ask everyone for anyone they knew from the diaspora who was working in the city in efforts to capture varied experiences of this population. I also existed to them as another diaspora returnee, while I briefed them on my research project, our personal relationship negated all formalities. There was a café run by a brother and sister duo from England that was the young diaspora hotspot. This space allowed me to view the relationship between young diaspora and Hargeisa differently. Here was a physical space where they were coming to every night to “exist” and meet other diaspora. If this entity had not faced so much backlash, I am not sure that many holiday makers would feel comfortable to vocalize on the contentions between locals and diaspora.

After landing in Hargeisa my relationship to this research project and Identity strongly changed. My interview questions were initially around notions of work, identity and development in Somaliland. However, after

arriving in Hargeisa, I was surprised how constricting local culture was for me as a female diaspora returnee. Everyone had an opinion of how I should dress and act that I could not distinguish between what was the norm and coercion. While my research questions were set up to interrogate their relationship to identity and relationship to Somaliland, I was fascinated with how others were fairing in the city. My interviews garnered insight into their earlier migration patterns, relationship to other Somalis and what they were doing in Hargeisa. Questions surrounding notions of belonging and comfort were a majority of my follow up questions. I also asked my participants what they would change or offer to Somaliland in the future.

Chapter 2

Background and Context

Somalis have always been a people marked by borders and migration. When Europeans came to Africa, the area that Somalis lived in was carved into five territories. These areas were Djibouti, British Somaliland, Eastern Ethiopia or the Ogaden, Italiana Somalia and Northern Frontier District (NFD) in North Western Kenya. During decolonization, British Somaliland gained independence on June 26, 1960. It joined with Italiana Somalia on July 1, 1960 to become the Federal Republic of Somalia. Since Somaliland has declared itself autonomous, contemporary scholars will speak of Somaliland as a separate entity (Hansen, Kleist, Abdille, Hammond). While those unfamiliar to the region's history will use 'Somalia' to speak of the region. The desire for a unified Somali state is reflected in the Somali flag- a white star with five points for each of the territories. This flag is symbolic in speaking to the Somali situation- five different histories and socializations yet still unified as one,

Somalis. Somalis would spend decades hoping this unification of the five territories would occur.

Somali societal organization through kinship has served as one of the greatest barriers to prosperity. Somali society is a tribal one, organized by kinship (clan) ties. Anthropologists refer to this form of organization as a segmentary lineage. It delineates everyone's connection and disconnection from one another. Relation is hierarchical- In other words there are varying levels of loyalties. In a Somali context this is broken down into "clan-families, clans, subclans, primarily lineages and *dia* (blood)-paying group" (Mohamed 2007). Adam (2008) has utilized various proverbs to illustrate this relationship- "*tolkaaiyo kabtaadaba wa lagu dhex jiraa*" which translates into rely on your clan's protection as you rely on your shoes (Adam, 112, 2008). Much of the early work on Somali clan structure are in a nomadic, pastoral context. The convergence of a nation state and politicized identity brought forth empowered notions of clan identity.

After independence, the young nation was rampant with corruption and nepotism (Ghalib 1995). Clan politics had outweighed desires for the nation state. During this time period there emerged a political elite of a large Northern clan family. Not many were happy with the state of affairs and in 1969 a young general, Maxamed Siad Barre, came in to power after a military coup. From 1969 onwards, this era of heightened nationalism promoted a Somali identity that rebuked kinship ties. While he attempted to build up the nation state, he suppressed any freedom of thought and action. He carried out a huge anti-tribalism campaign throughout the 1970's. He was aiming to promote a Somali identity that would be more powerful than kinship ties. However, as the political and economic situation deteriorated, he began to

face opposition from all sides. In efforts to hold power tightly he began to let go members of government that were not apart of his family. As opposition to his regime grew, Somalis began organizing rebel militias organized around clan lines (Adam 2008). The earliest clan family Barre's government sought to suppress were the Isaaq in the North. It was at this point that clan identity began to seriously threaten the Somali nation state.

The rhetoric around Somaliland is strongly anchored in the violence it faced in the 1980's. During the 1980's Barre's regime systematically oppressed the Northern main cities. There was a curfew placed on the cities limiting access to hospitals and economic prosperity (Ghalib 1995). Being that the previous administration's elite were of the Northern clan families, Barre suppressed any future opposition by taking it out on the civilians. This brutal opposition however only fed growing anger towards his regime. Educated elites from Northern clan families had politically mobilized in the diaspora under the guise, Somali Nationalist Movement (SNM). With branches in London and Ethiopia, members of the SNM were able to move into Somaliland from Ethiopia. Barre's regime in response to their mobilization bombed Hargeisa and Burco, large cities in Somaliland. With both cities nearly leveled, people fled any ways that they could. They fled from Northern Somalia to near by countries such as Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen. For those that were already in the diaspora, such as students or migrant workers in the Middle East, they looked on with horror as their families faced continuous oppression and violence. This heightened awareness to events in the country not only brought together these Somalis in the diaspora but they spent years advocating against the brutal acts of the military regime. Many in the early 1990's advocated for the recognition of the genocide and war crimes of those

in the military. This tremulous time kept both Somalis on the ground and in the diaspora tuned in and connected.

The Somali civil war has resulted in one of the greatest humanitarian disasters of the modern era. Dadaab refugee camp, in Kenya, hosts a large number of Somali refugees to this day. Set up in 1991 to host “90,000 it is now home to more than 463,000” (Abdi 2015) according to a 2012 UNHCR report. In 1991, it is estimated that over million Somalis fled the country (UNDP 2001). In a nation of only ten million these losses are drastic and have permanently impacted the Somali community. For Somalis who were able to be resettled³- they are in Europe, Canada , Australia and pockets of the United States. Many still are in Dadaab refugee camp with three generations of Somali refugees living in the camp. They are in a sort of limbo. For those who are living within Somali borders, with the fall of the Somali nation state the Somali passport does not offer any chance of mobility. For those living in Somaliland or Somalia, they are confined to life within the region. While those in the diaspora are constantly on the move, searching for better economic opportunities, those at home remain stuck.

The Somali diaspora community has created some ethnic nodes and recreated pieces of home in the Western world. The post 1991 mass exodus consisted of refugees who fled the Somali territories. The post-1991 Somalis refugees have resettled across Scandinavia, North America and have prominent communities in the Gulf countries. Some of the largest nodes of Somalis in London, UK, Toronto, Canada and Minneapolis/Twin Cities, USA (look to McGown, Abdi) have been researched. In work on Somali refugee

³ Abdi, Cawo M. In “Elusive Jannah” highlights how minimal resettlement to Western countries in her exhaustive study on Somali migration patterns.

communities, they are facing low socio-economic attainment with many living in areas with generous welfare benefits. These nodes have become a safe haven, a way for Somali immigrants to have their 'imagined community' or tight knit community. For young Somalis growing up these ethnic enclaves, they do not offer them cultural capital to make it in their host society and it seems to encapsulate their experience.

Literature Review

In order to make sense of the young Somali diaspora migration to Somaliland, it is necessary to deconstruct their experiences. Diaspora literature focusing on transnational practices, often center the first generation of immigrants. Yet their children, the second generation, are becoming the focus of contemporary scholarship. We have seen notions of home, belonging and identity teased out through studies on various ethnic groups (King and Christou 2009, Christou 2006, Koh 2015). This literature focuses on counter-diasporic migration, highlights tensions and presents notions of unbelonging and belonging.

In an increasingly globalized world, there are bits and pieces of varying cultures interacting with on another. Diaspora communities have existed in this puzzle as varying spatialities. While historically spoken of in regards to Jews, as a dispersed community, longing for a homeland, contemporary notions of diaspora have taken this a bit further. Bruneau writes that the term diaspora is at any point a "migration, minority, transnational community and territory movement" (Bruneau 2010). In highlighting the fluidity of the term, we see that it depends on the author/ or person's reference when utilizing it.

Early conceptualizations of diaspora's actions and existence were centered on this disconnect from their place of origin. Yet, contemporary

diaspora theorization is moving away from centering the homeland. For this study, I use Werbner's (2002) definition of a diaspora as "a transnational network of dispersed political subjects ...connected by ties of co-responsibility across the boundaries" (Werbner 121 2002) to understand my research population. Many scholars on diaspora populations have referred to their transnational practices as a way of understanding that they are involved in the homeland, host society and to other people in varying countries. In their work on transnational activities, Glick-Schiller et al. have illustrated the transnational practices of immigrants- often times they are considered more valuable abroad. They send money back home (remittances) and are still heavily involved in the political process without interfering- they highlighted this example with Haitian immigrants in New York. This conceptualization is necessary to understand why these actors are involved in transnational activities.

Counter diaspora migration

The importance in focusing on the second generation, foreign born or raised, returnees is to highlight how their notion of identity is constructed. First generation immigrants tend to have a personal stake or motivations in the future of their homeland. For the second generation, this is a learned process. In a study on second-generation Trinidadian returnees, Conway et al. (2008) highlights that it takes multiple trips to the country occur before they choose to resettle. These journeys strengthen diaspora's involvement in the homeland through "rekindling ties with family and friends...builds social capital, social obligations and familial bonds (Conway et al. 2008). In Christou's (2006) example she highlights the ways second-generation Greek-Americans deal with their identity after arriving in Greece. While expecting to fit in, they are confronted with notions of their 'American-ness' and are

rejected due to strong Anti-American sentiments. Along similar lines, Koh (2015) speaks of the experiences of second-generation Vietnamese returnees. Due to the political situation this is the first time Vietnamese are able to return and they are coming back to reconnect to their cultural identity.

While many second-generation returnees come for varying reasons, it is important to ask why they feel the need to come. King and Christou (2009) write “that the homeland return of the second generation should be seen not so much as a part of the new map of global mobility... but rather as an act of resistance against hypermobility and dislocation” (King and Christou 8 2009). This sentiment is echoed in the literature of “return migration” viewed as return to ancestral homeland. That is why when we speak of nation states now we “include as citizens those who live physically dispersed within the boundaries of many other states, but who remain socially, politically, culturally, and most economically loyal to the nation-state of their ancestors” (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994).

Somali returnees

When focusing on diaspora engagement with the motherland, in a Somali context, much of the literature has focused on the privileged position of the returnees. It is with that notion that we must view how the Somali diaspora is constructed and viewed. As I wrote earlier the term “Qurbojoog” is used in Somaliland referring to those of the diaspora. As Ali (2015) writes however, it is used to speak of those residing in the West who have a higher status and mobility. Abdille (2011) in his study of Somalis from the UK and Finland returning to Somaliland found that they face hostility. Mohamoud’s (2014) study of Western Somali diaspora returnees in Hargeisa, Garowe and Mogadishu speaks to how important Western citizenship is to Somali

returnees. This citizenship serves as a form of protection and this dis-connect, physical and literal, shapes the actions of those in the diaspora. On the other hand, Mursal (2014) speaks to the realities of Somali refugees in the Global South. Somalis in Cairo deny claims to being 'diaspora' because they do not hold the same privileges and securities as Somali with citizenship in the global North.

Researchers focusing on Somaliland diaspora engagement have noted the ways in which these transnational links are vital for the Somalis involved. They utilize the mobility and livelihood that comes with Western citizenship to effect change in the homeland. Hammond (2013) spoke of British Somalis with frequent migration to Somaliland as 'part-time diaspora'. However, based on Webner's definition, I still consider them diaspora actors. Hansen's study on 'revolving returnees' highlights that 'diaspora' is spoken of as the new tribalism- or social divide. Hoehne et al. (2011) also present how tensions between diaspora's arrival could be grounds for conflict. While emphasizing the agency of the diaspora returnees, there is little to no mention of the young generation's role. This is troubling and alarming as we look into the future of the Somali territories.

Theoretical Framework

The young Somali diaspora, have been largely socialized outside of the homeland. They are for all intents and purposes the first generation to be socialized outside of the country. Many who were born in Somalia, do not remember it and carry this Somali identity marker. They might not know what it means personally but have been fed various notions of this identity through family and the media for example. Appadurai takes this argument a bit further. He presents this notion of "imagined worlds" that he writes as

“multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and group spread around the globe” (Appadurai 1990). In a Somali context, this could result in varying notions of a Somali identity between an elder that grew up in a peaceful Somalia and a young refugee Somali child. In a general context he speaks of the various ways in which these cultural notions are shaped- ethnoscapes (person/positionality), mediascapes (media), techoscapes (technology), financescapes (finance) , ideoscapes (images). He uses the “scape” to demonstrate that these five ‘dimensions’ are fluid. With this breakdown, we realize that the way they have been taught about culture strongly influences how one perceives culture. For young diaspora Somalis, this is a key concept in understanding their experiences before arriving to the homeland.

In speaking about post-colonial social realities, Bhabha (1994) outlined the ways in which culture is a tool of power. In breaking down the concept of “cultural difference” and “hybridity” will allow us to see how this plays out. He defines culture as “an object of empirical knowledge”. Bhabha (1994) first establishes that every culture is produced in a moment of differentiation. He is looking to the example of colonizers and colonized to explain this. He states that cultural difference happens when there is articulation of culture as “knowledgeable, authoritative, adequate to the systems of cultural identification” (Bhabha 1994). In this he highlights two things- the need for a culture to serve as medium of power and that it is a created entity. He continues with cultural difference is “statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate, and authorize the production of fields of force”. In this case, he is illustrating how subversive culture exists as challenging the norm. While continuously staying within this binary, power is executed

through traditions still asserting cultural dominance. Ultimately, these notions of power keep re-creating themselves unless there is an articulation of cultural difference.

Bhabha (1994) builds up his argument that if cultural difference is used effectively to challenge dominant norms it gives ways to a “third space”. It allows us to move from “restrictive notions of cultural identity” to a fluid space. It is ultimately a way for populations to craft identities that do not exhibit notions of subjugation. Hybridity essentially becomes this third space that grows from the contentions of binaries. Contemporary scholars have understood hybridity as an “in-between” space. However, I understand this to be a bit further- this space is a way of being to create new notions of imagining themselves ultimately mirroring a new political reality. In this way, they are not dependent of former conceptualization of culture and identity.

Chapter 3

The participants for this study have grown up in different countries, speak multiple languages yet are still crafting their existence to find a piece of the world that equates to home. With that, many are coming to Somaliland in huge numbers. Somaliland, as an emerging post conflict state, is an area marked by migration. For both locals and those from the diaspora there are contentions over what it means to be Somali and who can define it. These contentions, highlighted by the participants, really bring a personal understanding to the Somali conflagration and who can really speak for ‘Somalis’. As Somaliland promotes a democratic state, these issues need an

avenue to be discussed. As more continue to come to Somaliland it is imperative to understand who is coming and for what reason.

Diaspora Migration Patterns in Somaliland

There are multiple semi-permanent migrations that mark diaspora returnees to Somali territories. Whereas diaspora returnees come expecting to be welcomed, they are often faced with hostility and wariness. While there are multiple migration patterns of Somalis, the main one amongst youth is *dhaqan celis*, (return to culture). This terminology is used to speak of young people whom have often gotten into trouble in their host society and are sent back to Somalia. Very often, they are involved in criminal activity and sent back as a last hope. They are the ones who have 'failed' in their host society and will not contribute to society in Somaliland. There are a lot of negative associations with this group and many times young diaspora who return are often called *dhaqan celis*, as a form of disparagement. This group is often targeted for bringing "*dhaqan xuun*" or a bad culture- basically bringing customs and mannerism that do not align with Islamic and Somali cultural norms. In an informal interview with a young Londoner, he mentioned that ten years before, every diaspora returnee would be called *dhaqan celis* as they walked down the street. That is how contained and minimal willing return was. With this group of forced returnees, they are at their parent's mercy for when they will return and they are literally stuck in the country/ region for an indefinite time. This group has overshadowed those that come with the intent to build to the country's development "with good intentions".

The next migration wave is the summertime/holiday makers. These summertime holiday makers stick out like a sore thumb, they are flashy, bold and spend every night at a different restaurant. The city in itself in a way

prepares for this- locals wear their nicest clothes hoping to attract a diaspora of the opposite sex with hopes of marrying these returnees and moving to whichever Western country the returnee comes from. For this group, generational differences play an important part. Many of the older generation enjoy the relaxation life in the country brings but are met with family burdens. Whereas the older generation who have lived in Somalia for a majority of their life have been able to assimilate back into society, the younger foreign raised diaspora has not been able to.

In a recent piece, *“Somalis returning to the motherland are finding their foreign ways out of favour”* Somali-British novelist, Nadifa Mohamed, highlights some of these contentions. She writes, “there are a growing number of complaints about the visitors: that gangs from Copenhagen are fighting gangs from other countries; that girls from Toronto are teaching local girls to dress and behave improperly” (Mohamed 2015). These notions are only imposed on young Somalis that are visiting for the summer. The imposition that negative social norms could only come from abroad also speaks to the current social fabric in Hargeisa. Anything that is local grown does not face such criticism. Although born in Hargeisa herself, Mohamed concludes her piece with, “I am one of those summer visitors and I see much that I identify with and much I don’t...but I hope the welcome I expect will be offered in the years to come” (Mohamed 2015). While Mohamed is hopeful for a welcome there are many that are coming back despite the unwelcome.

There also are a good number of skilled workers from the diaspora in the city. Diaspora returnees have lived abroad for the past twenty years and hold foreign passports but garner local respect. The president of Somaliland currently, H.E. Ahmed “Silyano” Mohamoud, is a British citizen and received

his higher education in England (Hammond 2013). They have set up business really filling in the gap of needed skills such as construction (Osman). The private sector has kept Somaliland afloat through this period of insecurity. Yet elder Somali men run most of these businesses. They are not taxed in Somaliland, increasing their revenue amidst poverty. They also are academics and international development workers. One of the biggest annual events is the Hargeisa International Book Fair. Run by a European-Somali team, with roots in Italy and England, the event promotes and celebrates an intellectual Somali cultural environment. These diaspora returnees are bridging the gap between Western standards of living and the potential for their home country but it is not done without contentions and push back (Mohamed 2015).

QurboJoog Experiences

The rebuilding of Hargeisa is not reflective of what was beforehand, but a post-1991 socio-cultural history. For those that left in the mass exodus or before, they are coming to a brand new landscape. They are also coming to new notions of Somali identity and societal expectations. The paradox of life in Hargeisa is the insistence of ascribing to local standards of Somali identity while the diaspora influence is rampant. Shops and restaurants are named after cities and countries with large Somali diaspora populations such as Toronto, Ohio and Scandinavia. While the diaspora's influence is evident throughout Hargeisa, their 'foreign' presence is not welcomed. This relationship has complicated how the participants view themselves and their relationship to Somali identity. Many of these contentions are highlighted throughout this paper and reinforce a unilateral notion of Somali identity in Hargeisa. The new notion of Somali identity in Hargeisa is so potent with post-war norms/ social fabric that young Somalis in the diaspora do not even

understand. In illustrating these contentions through communication barriers and gendered experiences, it will be evident how difficult it is for young diaspora Somalis to acclimate to life in Hargeisa.

Communication Barriers

Most of the research participants spoke Somali. Still, communication was one of the greatest barriers throughout everyone's time in Hargeisa. In this case, communication is not a matter of language, but socio-cultural barriers. To illustrate this, I will present perceptions of diaspora and locals. In highlighting this, I will then link this to how these notions give claims to what is acceptable. Below is how the research participants think diaspora are viewed.

"The reason why I think they categorize us Somalis in the diaspora as the same is 'cause they see us as less Somali than them. If we try to bring in any ideas they'll be like what are you doing with that idea- you came with it from where you are" (Deqa, 25, female, Canadian citizen)

"Diaspora means people consider them as fools, unaware of life, they underestimate them in all aspects of life...Which is very strange for me, seeing the world more than them, I feel we are more sharper than them; more clever than them, more expressive than them and even more social than them."
(Yaquub, 31, male, Somali citizen)

The quotes above conjure notions of diaspora identity in opposition to “Somali” identity. I was surprised when I arrived in Somaliland how heavy the conceptualization of ‘diaspora’ was. I had no idea what local societal norms were but I figured I could adapt; it would not be a problem. Yet my first couple days in Hargeisa consisted of being told what was expected of diaspora. Many times this was presents, medicines from the West and money. There were also expectations of diaspora Somalis to be completely different in every regard. For example, locals made assumptions that diaspora would not be able to speak the language or not abstain from food and drink during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month. These assumptions literally set up a barrier, preventing diaspora from acclimating to local society. The concept of diaspora is so heavy and valuable that many locals assert a refusal of diaspora to acculturate.

This difference between those who stayed and those who have recently arrived is exacerbated by the socio-political reality in Somaliland. Since the collapse of the Somali government, those who hold a Somali passport cannot travel past the region. Some fortunate, or financially well off families are able to send their children to Malaysia to study. Yaquub’s point around travel is hinting to this point. There are high levels of unemployment and many are desperate to get by. The prescribed notions of wealthy, mobile young diaspora further this divide between locals and young *Qurbojoog*.

Hassan, 31, is a young business owner who has been in Hargeisa for a couple years. He is always friendly, but also timid. His experience in Somaliland has gone from feeling as if he was home, to being harassed over how he runs his business, a cafe. He speaks more about the disconnect between diaspora and locals below.

*If you are not talking like them, if you are not swearing, if you're not like sticking your fingers in someone eyes, putting your shirt on like this and **(screams)** you are not really them. (Hassan, 31, male, UK citizen)*

He highlights the aggressive nature of communication that is apart of the social culture. His café business has become a main source of stress in his time there. As a diaspora mainstay, the café is continuously monitored and political members have come to reprimand them. He speaks more about this experience below.

*People are really biased- You have the truck people where in certain areas they sell drugs and alcohol ya know and blatantly smoking outside. You don't get the sheikhs complaining to them because they are locals, they will end up fighting them back (saying) **fuck you!,leave me alone why are you talking to me.** Seriously, but then when you get people like diaspora and do something completely different or doing shisha, I would love to do shisha but I know I would get in more trouble you know. So yeah it's easy for them to attack us than the actual locals (Hassan, 31, UK Citizen)*

Hassan's illustration of his experiences in Hargeisa denotes which characteristics are necessary to survive in Hargeisa. While he highlights that one must be aggressive, there seems to be a limit. The diaspora is marked by being diaspora and that negates any way of actually garnering respect. In a society that is very contained the diaspora is ridiculed and belittled because of their ignorance to local society.

There are notions of each group that one comes with and solidifies the divide between the two groups. There is also a coded language in "diaspora"

and “local” terminology. Their life experiences and value system are completely different from one another. Each group is attempting to validate their own lived experience, at the hand of the other. Both parties at play diminish the other and while there is room for understanding it seems harder to get to that point.

Gendered Experiences

Many diaspora returnees, expressed similar feelings of dis-belonging with the societal expectations of a ‘proper Somali’. With their lives heavily entrenched in their host societies, a trip to Somaliland was a breath of fresh air. Everyone touched on the peace of mind they felt while being there. However, there was a limit to this freedom. One of the main contentions highlighted for participants in this research study was gender expectations. Although male participants spoke of this more as an inconvenience, for women participants it literally circumscribed their day-to-day lives. It was also refreshing for some of the male participants to speak about realizing there was not a public space for women to hang out. While ‘coming back home’ is often a learning experience to reconnect with culture and your people, the gendered expectations of both sexes push young diaspora to acclimate to this prescribed role that limits their agency.

Every movement in the city is a calculated power negotiation. For example, towards the end of my trip my friends and I met up at the market one night. As we became comfortable with the city, they accompanied me as I bought some last minute dresses. This was one of the first times we came to the market without someone who lived in the city. My friend was not planning on being in the market and was dressed as if she was going to a restaurant. I was usually very conscious of how I dressed when I went to the market, being

a prime epic center of 'locals' and made sure to not stand out as much possible. She was wearing a leather jacket and tight dress. Not only did she get a lot of stares, a lot of comments were made her way. Young men often chastised her telling her to dress modestly. We ignored them and went about our business. The night continued to get worse when we walked down the road speaking and laughing loudly, and mimicking the normal culture for young men. We were being carefree and enjoying ourselves when a group of boys walked by and one threw some liquid on my friend. This small moment reinforced the barriers set on women, and whose responsibilities it was to ensure they stayed in line.

One of the only spaces where I saw women coming together in public, was the Hargeisa International Book Fair's Women of the World (WOW) Festival. WOW is a festival celebrating the achievements of women and is held internationally in over fifty countries. It was great to have public spaces to honor Somali women. There was a breakaway session which ended up being composed of young diaspora women, middle-aged Somali women and moderators from the Southbank Centre in London. In this safe setting, young Somali diaspora women were able to relay their experiences as female business owners and the hostility they faced in an honest way. As a researcher this was invaluable. Many female business owners spoke about having trouble doing basic things such as renting a house on their own. Men would not respect their own agency as a person and would only speak to their male next of kin. A simple issue such as renting a home as a single woman was an unnecessarily complicated process. In this space though, these women found a community, and were responded to with comfort and validation. They were

encouraged to keep fighting on. It was one of the only spaces I saw where there was not a dismissal or undermining of these woman's experiences.

Whereas women are usually at the margins of Somali society, men dominate all public spaces. Early on into my experiences in Hargeisa It was overwhelming to be completely surrounded by men. It took me a couple weeks to realize that not many women spent much time outside of their homes. Somali men have the freedom to roam around and do as they wish. In a time period where young Somali men are so heavily criminalized in the West, coming to Hargeisa and being treated like royalty encourages many to stay. Being a patriarchal society, men have to adhere to gender roles. For the male research participants, they spoke of adjusting to not picking up plates after eating and not ironing their clothes. These were inconveniences or normalities they were going to have forgo by living in Hargeisa. As they spoke further it also became apparent that many had to depend on another elder male family member to "succeed" in Hargeisa. With that in mind, it became apparent that young diaspora men as well were victim to prescribed agency.

In a Somali context many men are either politicians or business owners. For all of the male participants of this study, they fell into the businessman category.

Osman, 24 was no different, but his background was a bit unique from the other participants. I was so surprised to see another American willingly living in the city that I asked him a million questions upon meeting him. His family has a huge business in Hargeisa and he has spent most of his life in between Hargeisa and Northern California. He dressed as if he was still living in California- Dickies pants, button up shirt, and baseball cap, so I was

surprised when he said he had been in Hargeisa for years. He speaks more about his role at the hotel below.

They get to treat me like an adult here, I get to make decisions. It's like 200 employees here, I just tell 'em jump and they say how high. It feels good to pay so many people and have something good happen to their lives because of where they work. (Osman, 24, male, US Citizen)

His role at the hotel, that his family owned, was one of the only things keeping him there. He had not completed his secondary education and would have probably had to work odd jobs in California. He also highlights the way power is translated to respect in local standards. As a young adult in California he would never have reached a level of authority at his age. In his Hargeisa he was able to be a “boss” much sooner than he would have in the states.

However, not all in Hargeisa are able to immediately have such levels of success. Osman is lucky that he comes from a powerful family. He notes that all of his family members are engineers or in high corporate positions living across the world. For people like Yaquub, whose families are locally well connected but do not have transnational links -he does not have similar immediate attainment of status in Hargeisa. Yaquub at the present is thirty one years old, he recently got married and is looking to live permanently in Hargeisa. He grew up in Pakistan and says he was more comfortable there. He holds a Somali passport which limits where in the world he can go. After completing his Bachelor's of Science he came to Hargeisa at his father's insistence. At the moment he is working at pharmacy clinic as a qualified doctor. Although he had been in Hargeisa for a couple of years he still did not

feel comfortable there. He speaks about one of these instances that continue to mark him as diaspora.

“The other day I was traveling to a city outside of Hargeisa and the traffic warden stopped me. He asked me for my license and the registration of the car. I showed him that. He started asking me questions like where are you coming from etc. When I dealt with those questions, he said since I know you came from outside of the country, I can tell by your face, give me some money. So I told him that I don’t have that much money in my pocket and he said that is impossible, you came from outside of the country and you are trying to tell me your pocket is empty. So I gave him half a dollar (3000 shillings). And he said it is not enough since you came from outside of the country you should give me more so I gave him another 5000 shillings (total money equivalent to a dollar and some change) and then he opened the barrier and he let me cross. And behind me was the same person and he did not ask him a single question. It is really discomfoting.” (Yaquub, 30, Somali citizen)

In his interview, Yaquub highlights the realities of being a foreign raised Somali with out the privilege of a Western passport. The same demands and expectations are placed on him as a diaspora Somali but he is working and living in the city as a resident. He also highlights the belittling of diaspora that many of the participants in this study raised. In this experience, diaspora is viewed as a liability especially when you literally can not afford to be marked as one.

Through a gendered lens, experiences in the city become more complex. While diaspora comes with perceptions of power, gender really shifts who is in power. Women can not enjoy freedoms that they have become accustom to in the Western world. Others continuously police these young women’s bodies and actions. Diaspora young men can dress and act how they

wish but they also have to re-negotiate gender norms. Also, young diaspora men have to learn notions of responsibility as was illustrated in Yaquub's example. While the gendered experience plays out differently for men and women; agency and expectations of diaspora returnees are continuously controlled by others.

Chapter 4

Discussion: Diaspora bubble as a safe inclusive space

The diaspora groupings of young Somalis in Hargeisa sharply contrast with local cultural norms, and occur primarily during the summer months. These *Qurbojoog* are often breaking the rules of local norms simply by their presence. In a country and time period so tense and driven by social control, diaspora freely move around the city enjoying their 'holiday'. During the summer months, the diaspora are seen mainly at night. You can find them at the major restaurants before they all congregate at Cup of Art. Cup of Art is a café run by young diaspora Somalis from England. This establishment functions as a 'third space' in which diaspora are free to mingle, free from the judgment and scrutiny of the conservative local societal expectation.

The notion of 'third space' is reflected not only in the physical landscape of Cup of Art but in the clientele that patronizes this café. This café was a bona fide way to find other members of the diaspora. Jokingly I referred to it as the second immigration post- everyone who came to Hargeisa stopped by this café. Even if you showed up on your own, you would have a group of friends that you spent a majority of your time with. The groupings were clustered

around where the diaspora youth lived - all the British Somalis would hang out with each other, the Finnish girls, and the Arabic speaking youth were different bubbles of the communities you would see. While all in the café, however, they were all young Somalis who had grown up abroad making sense of their time in Hargeisa.

While physically in Hargeisa, within the confines of this establishment all diaspora participants were all temporarily transported to their localized norms. With those norms came a change from local culture. During the daytime, women would adhere to local conservative culture and be fully covered. During the night time, all youth dressed up in skirts, blouses but still maintained a level of conservativeness. By the end of the summer, diaspora women felt so comfortable that they dressed much differently. At the café, a girl came in wearing pants, which is completely unheard of among local women. While another girl walked in without wearing a hijab/head scarf. In a society that was heavily “Islamic” girls wearing pants or walking around with culturally inappropriate clothing was unexpected. Everyone attempted to play it cool but we were all shocked they were so bold. While anywhere else in the world that would have been acceptable, at that point we had already started to embody certain cultural norms. In a society heavily segregated across gender lines, the young diaspora did not subscribe to that at the café. Men and women sat by each other playing card games and talking about the day. This was their normal and they found a way to experience it, even in Hargeisa.

Through the café, expressions of uniqueness were celebrated. One of the co-owners, Yasmin, 32 speaks about the solace that her café has offered her and the diaspora that often come.

“In the four walls of Cup of Art, I’m sitting with like minded diaspora people who came from Europe or the Middle East or anywhere but here basically. I don’t feel detached. I don’t feel Somali either and I don’t feel like they are Somali either. So there’s an attachment between both of us because we are both not technically speaking Somali compared to these people here.” (Yasmin, 32, female, UK Citizen)

She set up this café as a space for people to enjoy themselves, with the intention of primarily catering to the Somali diaspora. As in its name, this café heavily promotes the arts. They held poetry nights in English, Arabic and Somali, covering most of the languages spoken by Somalis. Towards the end of the summer they also created an ‘Expression Wall’ allowing people to draw and tag their names on it. Towards mid-August, it was littered with names and postal codes or area codes of cities across the globe. Each person representing the area they called home. This café served as an outlet of expression and crafted a place in what felt like a constraining the city for young Somalis to do so.

II. Making meaning of the homeland experience

For young Somalis, being removed from the homeland ostracizes their conceptualization of being Somali; it is their desire to understand this identity that brings them there. This notion of the first generation largely removed has brought many to come to Somaliland. Many spoke of not being a “real” Somali and it was ultimately coming to the country that would teach them what it meant to be Somali. Many expressed ownership of being there, like they

belonged there. One participant expressed how happy his father is that he's there. *"He can not believe it. He said my son is so westernized I cannot believe he's going to live here. So he's really happy, he's really chuffed"*. Choosing to connect with their parent's motherland brings a connection between the two generations that have typically been very disconnected. Another participant spoke of this journey to the motherland as necessary to understand her parents and extended family. She stated it as something one was compelled to do and should do at least once. Likening to hajj, the holy pilgrimage for Muslims emphasizing that it was emotionally and financially expensive and could not continuously be done.

One of the common themes that quickly stuck out to me during this whole process, is how heavy the rhetoric around return and belonging truly is. Some did not exhibit a longing to the homeland before arrival yet after arriving they spoke of notions of belonging. This is important to highlight in trying to make sense of why the diaspora feels as if they have claims to a place. I will illustrate how this plays out in the example of Ahmed.

Ahmed was born in the Gulf countries and is 35 years of age. He has lived in England for the past couple years and now holds a U.K. passport. He says:

I don't want to come here when I'm 50 basically and live here. I haven't experienced childhood here, I haven't experienced my teenage years here so at least while I'm strong and semi-young, I want to experience the life here.

(Ahmed, male, 35, U.K. Citizen)

Although being a male makes his experience in Hargeisa less constricting, Ahmed exhibits a compulsion to being there. This notion of needing to be

connected to the ancestral homeland is again brought up. Ahmed and others have spent their childhood and teenage years in different countries. Although they are still relatively young they have lived in multiple countries and feel the need to come to Somaliland now that country has exhibited some peace.

This contentious experience of coming to the homeland is not unique to Somalis but an inevitable outcome of globalization and this era of mass migration. In literature on counter-diaspora returnees, it is clear that diaspora do not come with notions of cultural identity that equate to what is on the ground. The issue does not lie in the contradictory notions of culture and identity but how it is used. Many times people expressed disdain when their “otherness” is highlighted in a negative light. Christou (2006) illustrated this in her study of Greek-Americans in Greece dealing with an Anti-American attitude in the country. These examples really speak to Bhabha’s (1996) notion of cultural difference. I argue that hybridity should be celebrated as opposed to be a liability. As the counter-diaspora migration illustrates people will continuously be moving around yet will always be linked to the land of their ancestors.

While this paper is highlighting the contentions *Qurbojoog* face when arriving to Hargeisa, this is apart of a larger conversation. The Somali civil war has transformed how Somalis interact with one another. While there have been some studies on this legacy of violence, there have not been enough. Nor has there been any documented reconciliation process. For those arriving in Hargeisa they are instantly faced with a notion of Somali identity that is completely foreign to them. Nor are young diaspora given a chance to acclimate, being ascribed to notions of privileged and mobility. Yet every

participant spoke of his or her affinity for wanting to belong there. This notion of *Qurbojoog* is solidifying a divide in Hargeisa that many are not even aware of. This concept of “third space” allows young Somali diaspora returnees a space in Hargeisa that is welcoming.

Conclusion

For a majority of the participants in this study, while looking to establish roots in Somaliland, they are still in between two worlds. They have lived and hustled in Western countries and appreciate the solace (for some) that is afforded in Somaliland. Whereas Somaliland is still a work in progress, the societal climate does not make it a desirable permanent home for many. The post civil war Hargeisa is still reeling from the effects of the civil war. With that comes a lack of mobility, abject poverty and identity-based hostilities. The young diaspora are arriving with dreams of a grand homecoming, which is quickly shattered. Not only must local norms be respected but there seems to be insistent push on making sure that diaspora are acting the ‘right’ way. In carrying out this study, it is evident that young Somalis in the diaspora have fluid notions of identity and cannot acclimate to rigid notions that limit their agency in Hargeisa.

In carrying out this study, it is evident that the notion of ‘Qurbojoog’ placed on young Somali returnees is a stigmatizing marker that is ostracizing them from local society. Not only is it a stereotype but we see examples throughout this paper where this ‘difference’ has real implications. This could create tensions between diaspora involvement in Somaliland decades to come. With that said, it is necessary to discuss limitations of this study. Time must be highlighted. Also would have been helpful to add input of locals as to why ‘diaspora’ is such a defining marker. In remaining true my original

research interests I only formally interviewed those I considered ‘change agents’, it would be important to speak to more diaspora returnees of varying ages. In looking towards future research, it would be important to look towards gendered experiences looking at female and male returnees. A lot of the women in this study were very vocal, I included, about their contentions being in Hargeisa. It also would be imperative to look at the hierarchy of diaspora returnees- looking at the difference of Western and non-Western returnees (global south).

I started off this paper with Yasmin’s quote and I would like to end off with the remainder of her quote.

Yasmin, 32 was born in Hargeisa and her father worked In Barre’s government at one point. Their family left in 1987 before the situation in Hargeisa grew too violent. She grew up in the United Arab Emirates and then settled in the United Kingdom. She usually is smiling and dressed in brightly colored clothes. I always thought it was interesting how she tied up her hijab- in an intricate bun right at the front of her head. She is usually speaking English and greeting everyone by name encouraging them to enjoy themselves.

“The worst mistake that I could make was expecting that this was my country. And expecting that people will actually think I do belong or I have a right. The complete opposite happened, I am a foreigner here. In fact I am more of a foreigner here than I have been anywhere else in the world” (Yasmin, 32, female, UK citizen).

Yasmin’s experience of a disappointing homecoming is exacerbated by her personal experiences in Hargeisa, which I will not disclose here. However, she

highlights the nucleus of this homecoming journey experience for the Young Somali Diaspora. I, too and other female participants have had a similar experience. Many diaspora come expecting to be welcomed to a people and country they are unfamiliar with. Yet after their arrival their experiences are marked only by their difference and coercion. Young Somali returnees have created spaces for themselves to exist and are bringing changes to the city. Other young people seem to be receptive and hopefully continuous migration and interaction between the groups will offer all young Somalis a space to thrive in the city.

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