

Summer 2015

Creating a Somali Manhood: Navigating Race, Place, and Power in Seattle, WA

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CREATING SOMALI MANHOOD: NAVIGATING RACE, PLACE, AND POWER IN
SEATTLE, WA.

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Individual Studies
Anthropology

by

Saeed Yusuf Mohamed

August 2015

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

CREATING SOMALI MANHOOD: NAVIGATING RACE, PLACE, AND POWER IN SEATTLE, WA

by

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This research focuses on the production of social space by young Somali men who live in low-income communities in south Seattle, Washington. Through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, this study examines social interactions in key urban spaces. These spaces include the mosque, streets, a community center, and the soccer field. By focusing on how young Somali men interact and navigate social space, this study provides a gendered and ethnic perspective on how relationships of power and authority become spatialized in an urban context.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to dedicate my research to all of the young Somali men living across the greater Seattle area and throughout the world. Our stories are being heard today and in the future, my *oo walaalo ah* (brothers). I would like to thank my mother who supported me in every step of the way; as always you have been very sincere to me and for that I'm deeply grateful. I would also like to thank my father for his never-ending wisdom about life and religion. In addition, I would like to extend my gratitude to my *Abti* (uncle) Mohamed Ali Roble and my *Eeddo* (aunty) Mama Zahara for providing me with guidance, insight, and support needed to conduct this study. I want to acknowledge my thesis committee, who supported and advised me throughout this rigorous and enlightening period in academia. I would like to highlight the mentorship of my chair, Dr. Mark Auslander, for providing guidance and connection with the administration in the completion of my research. Like a Somali uncle, Dr. Auslander always insisted that I exceed my expectation of my self. I would also like to thank Dr. Jessica Hope Amason, for being patient and humble with me as I grappled with the key concepts of anthropology. Dr. Kathleen Barlow, thank you for supporting me in exploring concepts of gender and power, and guiding me through complex paperwork and the bureaucracy of the institution. Dr. Bobby Cummings, thank you for believing in me throughout this research and during my undergraduate and graduate studies; I will never forget the day you called me and told me that I needed to commit myself to graduate school. You are my true Somali Eeddo!

Lastly, I also want to extend a special and sincere appreciation to my mentors,
Drs. Keith Champagne and Charles Reasons, for mentoring me throughout my education.
Thank you, brothers for being there for me and advising me to “stay hungry.”

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION : RECOGNIZE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

On a cold, gloomy day in Seattle, I left school, heading for the community center to play soccer. I carried with me a bright red soccer ball as I walked towards the basketball gym. That's when I stumbled upon a group of boys. Like me, many were recent immigrants; they came from Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Vietnam. As soon as I stepped onto the playground, the boys bombarded me with eager energy; they stopped dribbling, their eyes fixating on me. Observing the soccer ball in my hand, one of the boys, positioning himself twelve inches away from my face, ordered me, "Recognize your environment." I wondered what he meant by those words. As I looked at him in confusion, he approached me threateningly and we glared at each other. He went for the ball in my hand, snatching and throwing it over the fence. It landed in a neighbor's backyard, where, Lala, a mean pit bull, lived. I stood still, keeping eye contact with the bully. All I heard in the background were the screams and shouts of other boys making fun of me and my soccer ball, saying, "Lala got a new chew toy!" Then the boy who threw my ball spoke to me in a harsh manner, "Where you from?" I told him that I came from Saudi Arabia but that I was originally from Somalia. He said, "No. That is not where you from. You are from the Yesler Terrace projects. You live in America now, bro." Then he walked over to me and grabbed a basketball; he put it in my hands. He mumbled at me to wait until the next pickup game so he could teach me how to play basketball.

What does this story tell us about how authority, space, and social identity operate in urban space for young Somali men growing up in Seattle? How does power work in this spatial setting for young Somali men? I learned a valuable lesson here: the basketball court is a space of control and liberation—where certain types of “play” are more tolerated than others. In other words, I was free to choose whether to play or not, but if I chose to play, then my choices would be limited. That very experience of picking up a basketball was liberating for me because it brought me new friends and a new form of play. However, it also resulted in the construction of a new social identity, one that draws upon and is bounded by the cultural capital of urban, African American youth culture. This new structure required me to follow the code of the neighborhood. Conversely, I also had a choice not to follow the code of the neighborhood.

Personal Investment

As a student of cultural anthropology, I learned that the researcher must be very open-minded and ready to evaluate himself as well as the culture under study. Growing up as an African American man of a Somali background in both areas of South and North Seattle, I bring certain assumptions to this particular study. For example, Islam is a guiding force in my life and it holds weight for many young Somali men in our community. Second, sports were an outlet that required one to be disciplined and committed, providing an opportunity to participate in a team sport that kept young Somali men out of trouble. Soccer and basketball have steadily grown to become primary sports partaken by Somali youths as a means to establish distinct spaces, for engagement, cohesion, and liberation. Lastly, Somali mothers are a profound influence on many of the young Somali men in our community. My Somali background, supplemented by the

theories of Foucault, Turner, Bourgois and Anderson, provided me with different lenses to examine and analyze how young Somali men navigate in these respective spaces such as the community, mosque, soccer field, and the role of Somali women in these spaces and places.

As an African Somali American man who has lived in the neighborhood, I bring an insider's knowledge to my study: (1) I understand the code and the values of the young Somali men living in Seattle, for I have been a resident in Seattle over nineteen years and I have adapted to the ways young Somali men navigate in the street. (2) I have also been a volunteer in many sporting events in which young Somali men participate. For example, two years ago during the summertime, I was given the task to referee basketball tournaments as well as soccer tournaments. This task gave me insight into how young Somali men conduct themselves in these spaces. (3) I also brought to this study my experience growing up in Seattle with the overwhelming support of older Somali women facilitating their sons' achievements in life. As a young black African Muslim man in the United States, my mother knew right away that I should stay away from certain places and groups of people who displayed aggressive and violent behavior towards other young men in the community. In addition, she warned and specifically instructed me to be diligent and vigilant in my behavior and actions towards the police. (4) Finally, what I also bring to this study is the easy access to the mosque and my positionality as a Muslim. Mosques are still a place of peace and solace. However, I also bring a critical and inquiring perspective to Islamic hierarchies in my community. I am aware that in the old pre-civil war, the emphasis of Somali masculinity was based on the production of the

patrilineal clan. For me, the goal of this study is to understand how young Somali men interact and navigate their relationships with family, women, the police, elders, and other young men within key social spaces.

Across the United States, low-income communities of color are characterized as oppressive spaces, particularly in Seattle where the metropolitan Seattle Police Department (SPD) has been recently reprimanded by the U.S. Department of Justice (2011:6) for their abuse of force. Police profiling of young black men in urban areas has become a prevalent issue in the U.S. media, following both Micheal Brown's and Trayvon Martin's murder. As a response, the hash tag #BlackLivesMatter was created in 2012 to raise awareness that black people's lives are being destroyed everyday at the hands of police and vigilantes.

Spaces of Control

When SPD officers patrol in south Seattle, they carry with them not only stereotypes and assumptions about the activities of young black men, but more specifically stereotypes about young Somali men. The Somali community in Seattle faces vicious stereotyping from the media and the government. Throughout the history of the United States, ethnic communities are poorly represented in the media with their constant negative images about the diaspora experience (Chait 2011). In particular, Somali communities have been targeted in the post-9/11 U.S., often categorized as dangerous or deviant. For instance, popular films, such as *Black Hawk Down*, depict Somalis as lawless and barbaric terrorists. The news media have also played a key role in promoting the negative stigmatization of Somalis from the Somali Civil war in the 1990s to the

more recent Westgate Mall attacks in Kenya by the Al-Shabab terrorist group. Indeed, the persistent image of young Somali masculinity in the Pacific Northwest is illustrated in the classic case of FBI entrapment of a twenty-one-year-old Somali American, Mohamed Mohamud, from Portland, Oregon. Mohamud was found guilty on terrorism charges and was sentenced to life in prison because he attempted to detonate a (non-existent) bomb supplied by the federal agents in downtown Portland during the Christmas parade. It would, therefore, be easy to assume that the urban, Somali context in the Seattle metropolitan area is overwhelmingly oppressive for young African American men, particularly of Somali descent. Yet, I argue this is not entirely the case.

Underlying this analysis is Michel Foucault's understanding of "capillary power," which moves in a "net like fashion that circulates throughout the social space" (McHoul and Grace 1997: 88-89). For example, re-telling the narrative of my experience in the basketball court allowed me to understand my power, which emerged in a web-like fashion, connecting to my race, ethnicity, and gender in that particular situation. This power provided me with the knowledge to not only be aware of the code of the neighborhood, but also be compelled to follow its rules and obligations. Furthermore, depending on the time and place, we see that young Somali men in south Seattle should not just be essentialized as oppressed, low-income, minority, urban youth. Instead, their power is reflected through the social spaces they occupy, which requires a deeper analysis. Using participant observation and semi-structured interviews, this study provides a gendered and ethnic understanding of urban spatial practice.

Problem Statement

In *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis paints a vivid picture of the oppressive spaces of Los Angeles. He analyzes the destruction of public space, the man-made barriers between the rich and the poor, and the use of police violence to control the city. Davis's argument approaches the structural oppression of Los Angeles from a macro-perspective, emphasizing urban planning and architecture. However, he does not offer a deeper analysis of racial, ethnic and gendered experience, which calls for a thorough use of the ethnographic method. My research attempts to fill this gap by looking at micro-ecologies of race, power, and resistance with respect to young Somali men living in Seattle, elucidating the intersections among race, class, ethnicity, and gender within urban spaces. I examine the key microenvironments that help create Somali manhood as young men navigate through these spaces.

These key spaces include the Somali Community Center, the streets, the Mosque, and the soccer field. These environments are highly meaningful sites of everyday social interaction among Somali young men. I pose the following the questions:

1. What are the social experiences of the Somali youth male hanging out in the streets?
2. What is the social experience of the Somali male attending the mosque in Seattle? What are the power relationships between the Imam and the youth? Who establishes the social norms of the Mosque?
3. What are the informal social experience of Somali youths when participating in soccer tournaments?

4. What are the established social experiences of the Somali youths volunteering in the community center? What are the power relationships between the Somali mothers and the youth?

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine young Somali American men's experiences in Seattle and their navigation of neighborhood spaces. Young Somali men—who are more broadly categorized as low-income, African American men—are presumed to be heading towards a life of crime leading to negative and harmful encounters with police or opposing street gangs. Members of the dominant society might think this would lead to disempowerment, but these young Somali American men, nevertheless, engage in the production of a street code that allows them to recapture some amount of spatial control. In addition to the police and other structures of power, subtle networks of power shape the young Somali men's experience in the urban environment and, consequently, the code of the streets. Respected Somali elders, as well as sisters, mothers, daughters, wives and/or girlfriends also contribute to the formation of an urban Somali street code in these neighborhoods.

Furthermore, not only am I seeking to understand the formation of the street code (Anderson 1999:68) but I am also examining the behavioral expectations of the mosque code, soccer field and community center codes. In order to answer the questions above, I have observed how these young Somali men establish their power and authority through their social interactions within these spaces. I pay particular attention to the diaspora experience and how it affects their family and loved ones living abroad in the midst of obtaining their short-term and long-term goals for financial security. I also take into

account gender relationships between the young Somali men and women living in both public and domestic spaces.

Outline

This thesis takes a thematic approach examining the social experience of young Somali men in south Seattle. Each chapter ties together theory and field note data to create an understanding of how young Somali men navigate in these spaces. I begin with the literature review explaining the theoretical framework I will be using in this thesis. Next, I move on to the study area and the methods section of the paper, explaining the type of study this research entails. The following is a summary of chapters 2 through 5:

Chapter II, *Women and the Work of Caring*, explores the challenges that Somali mothers face while protecting their son's from America's structural oppression. Chapter III, *On and Off the Field: Liberation and Constraint in Sport*, examines how young Somali men create a heterotopic space by participating in the annual Somali Soccer tournament. Chapter IV, *Beyond the Eyes of the Dominant: Social Drama and Unfixing the Gaze on the Seattle Street*, assesses how young Somali men are constantly navigating the gaze of the dominant society, police, and gangs. Chapter V, *Half Your Deen: The Centrality of Marriage in Somali American Islam* explores the relationship between the Imam and the young Somali men's role into adulthood in the context of Islamic marriage. Finally, I conclude by summarizing all the key elements of the thesis on how young Somali men are constantly creating fictive kinship rather than clan-based kinship.

Literature Review

Urban Subcultures and Symbolic Capital

My work builds on recent studies of urban poverty, structural violence, and symbolic meaning that shape urban experiences. Young American Somali men, are continually at risk, facing physical and verbal violence from structures of power. How these young men create their own symbolic capital in efforts to recapture their spatial areas and defend their manhood is at the heart of this research.

Anderson (1999:67) argues, that young men of color relate their identity to the street-code, which is formed from the violent reactions and negative encounters with police and with other urban youths. In communities of color that live in cities, the street code represents a survival mind set, which evolved into a subculture that requires youth to be aware of their surroundings in terms of constant potential for these violent reactions. This code also applies to my research as I observe young Somali men constructing and even enforcing this code for their network of groups to follow in order to survive in their respective neighborhoods. For example, in my study site, I conducted participant observation on the local soccer field where young Somali men play soccer. I observed some of these young men engaging in initiation rites to the soccer field, in which one of the young men is physically and verbally tormented by his friends in order to “toughen him up” and indoctrinate him into the code.

Anderson claims that “manhood and campaigning for respect” are consistent with the code of the street. For youths living in the inner city “manhood and campaigning for respect” can be used to pass judgment on other individuals that lack “street knowledge,” which can cause the individual to lose respect amongst peers if he fails to correctly

recognize his environment. If an individual does not know the code it could potentially cost him his life or his mental well-being. Furthermore, Anderson argues that “campaigning for respect,” challenges both the physiology and psychology of inner city youth.

For Somali youths living in Seattle this search for respect and manhood validates their positionality as part of the code, termed “keeping it real.” Anthropologist John Jackson (2005:12) examines this tension between “racial authenticity and racial sincerity,” while conducting an ethnographic study on “keeping it real,” in the streets of Harlem in New York City. Jackson notes how a person’s ethnic background is measured by how “real” he is racially (2005:13). In my research I seek to understand how young Somali men establish their ethnic authenticity through discourse on what it is really like to be a “real Somali” or an “Americanized Somali.” For example, in predominately Somali-owned stores, one might be disrespected or ridiculed for being a Somali individual who chooses to speak English rather than the Somali language. A young Somali man who chooses to speak in Somali will be praised as being a “real Somali.”

In a similar vein, cultural anthropologist Philippe Bourgois presents an urban ethnography of low-income Puerto Rican young men living in East Harlem. Bourgois (1987:5) claims that young inner city men desire respect in their search for manhood, but cannot achieve their manhood with dignity, due to structural oppression and violence. He further adds that the economic reconstructing of the industrial factories in East Harlem had led to major lay offs in the Puerto Rican community. Thus, these young men found themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty, where the only jobs available were low-wage positions in the white-collar service industry. Furthermore, these young men were faced

with racism from white female bosses who created a disrespectful work atmosphere. This racism created a “culture of resistance” for the young Puerto Rican men, who refused to work for the dominant society. These young men resorted to a drug-dealing lifestyle as a respectable occupation (1987:7). In addition, Bourgois reports in his study that in order to understand the dynamics of this “culture of resistance,” one should understand the history of the *Jíbaro* Puerto Ricans who moved to East Harlem during the mid-twentieth century. The *Jíbaro*, militant farmers living in the Puerto Rican highlands, were proud of their machismo in standing up to the social elites in Puerto Rico. Thus, this *Jíbaro* mentality allowed young Puerto Rican men to create their own cultural capital by resisting the dominant society’s values. The search for masculine identity for the young Somali men in Seattle must be contextualized by understanding the Somali experience—in particular, the struggles Somalis faced during the civil war and survival in the refugee camps. Given the recent civil war, the Somali American experience is quite different from the American Puerto Rican experience.

At the same time I also approach the continuous struggle for respect among inner-city youths of color on the streets, using the lens of Victor Turner’s concept of social drama. Turner developed the concept of social drama while observing the Ndembu people in the Northwestern region of Zambia, who were always involved in small-scale conflicts. Turner described the social drama as a four-stage series consisting of the following: (1) a breach of norms or initial disagreement, (2) the mounting crisis, (3) application of redressive mechanisms, and (4) reintegration or schism process (1957: 147). As we shall see, Turner’s model of the social drama helps illuminate the constant

small-scale conflicts that unfold among young Somali men, which sometimes lead to tragic, open violence.

Memory and the Making of A Somali Diaspora

The international Somali experience is a component of the global African Diaspora. I am interested in how Somalis create their “Somali Utopia” in a new country they call home. In particular, I want to understand how Somalis make sense of their space as they create strong sites of memory by engaging in movements of people and money to maintain kinship ties between their new home and Somalia.

Originally, the concept of “Diaspora” comes from the dispersal of the early Israelite kingdoms, a concept later used by the Greeks to describe how seeds were scattered or dispersed across the lands. In fact, the word “diaspora” is fundamentally patriarchal as it is etymologically connected to the word “sperm” in the Greek language (Helmreich 1992:243). Therefore, when “diaspora” is applied to human populations, it describes a people united by kinship, language, ethnicity, nationality, etc., but, nonetheless, spatially separated from each other, much like seeds carried far away by the wind. In anthropology the word “diaspora” has been used not only to describe people but also to explain how people make sense of their new homeland and what aspects of their new homeland remind them of home. In this review, I focus on three aspects of diaspora, ultimately relating these to ongoing practices within the Somali community of south Seattle. I begin by exploring diaspora as a series of back and forth connections. Lavie and Swedenburg (1996:14) claim that diaspora is deeper than experience of exile, referring to the “back home” connections through which migrants, asylum seekers, and

political exiles build a dual relationship through different social circuits that bring cultural ties from their mother country back to their country of settlement. To be a part of a diaspora is to be continuously within a symbolic “interzone,” or borderland wherein homogeneity is rendered nearly impossible—one cannot simply be a “Black man,” or a “Seattleite.” For example, in my research I am looking at how young Somali men fit in these spaces of culture, being Somali American, black, and hispanic Seattle.

Secondly, I am interested in how diaspora identities are formed, particularly through the creation of an imagined community through sites of memory. Nora (1989:1) argues that memory becomes a strong indicator of community; particularly when there are great changes that society faces, such as rupture or displacement. Nora (1989:7) explains that sites of memory are objects, rituals, or places where, “memory crystallizes and secretes itself.” Society becomes intrigued with sites of memory “at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists.” In other words, memory sites are caused by some kind of rupture with a set of traditions and habits associated with a long-gone way of life. Thus this rupture leaves a feeling of nostalgia and a desire to build a new identity in the new homeland.

Third, I want to understand diaspora communities as dynamic, ever-changing set of social relations. Hall (1990: 237) asserts that diaspora communities constantly change throughout time “as they produce themselves anew through transformation and difference,” in economic, political and social contexts. Somalis in the U.S. are a

“dispersed” people that embody the traditional meaning of “diaspora.” Somali Americans are part of the increasing African migration trend that started in the 1990s. This led to a major wave of Somali asylum seekers entering the United States during the early 1990’s, increasing dramatically to 56,000 in 2004. The Somali community in the United States has become the largest group of African refugees (Omar 2011:116). Due to the civil war, many Somalis living in the West have lost their loved ones or have been separated in other countries.

One of the ways that Somalis keep in touch with their loved ones is through a money-transferring agency called *Dahabshill*. In a recent *Al-Jazeera* news report, the CEO of Dahabshill, Abdirashid Duale, reported that his company attends to the Somalis living in the home country who are in need of financial assistance from their families living in the West. Following Mauss and Pichard (1967:11), I understand the social benefits of giving and receiving gifts as a form of reciprocal obligation that an individual gives in order to receive, in relation to, “a clan, household, association or marriage alliances.” In the act of giving money through Dahabshill, Somali Americans cement relations with their loved ones through intense social ties and obligations that span the Atlantic. Conversely, Somalis in the diaspora get access to their homeland connections through exchanging various gifts and currency. As a result, Dahabshill is a means through which Somali Americans can create their own symbolic capital providing for their families and through them receiving information from Somalia on political and social matters.

The Dahabshill money transferring companies are usually located in the heart of various Somali communities across the United States, in locally owned Somali

businesses, otherwise known as *suuq*. Sociologist Cawo Abdi (2006:100) states that these Somali businesses provide a sense of “psychological security” by creating their own community and thus, positioning their identity in respect to that of the dominant culture.

Connerton argues that in order to understand the formation of social memory, one must understand “the acts of transfer that make remembering in common possible” (1989:39). In the case of the Somali diaspora, Somalis shopping in the *suuq* are constantly seeing pictures of old, stately governmental buildings in Mogadishu as they once stood, rather than the pictures of bullet-ridden buildings in present-day Mogadishu. Connerton’s discussion is highly salient to my research, which documents how the Somali community in Seattle creates its own identity and spatial areas of recollection.

Somalis culturally identify first with their religion and secondly with their clan family. Omar conducted a comparative study of young Somali men living in America and Australia, reporting that, “most Somali young men living in the U.S. adopt a global Islamic identity that does not belong to a particular space, time and society” (Omar 2013:38). However, in my proposed research, I am somewhat skeptical about the idea of Somali Americans identifying with a “global Islamic identity.” I question this “global Islamic identity” because Somali communities in the United States are marginalized, and their interpretations of Islam might be different from a dominant Arab state discourse.

The Somali “Muslim” identity changes throughout time and must be understood through a contextualized diasporic experience in which the effects of global Muslim identity have had an effect on Somali Americans so that they feel a need to assert proper Islamic practice. Anthropologist JoAnn D’Alisera (2004: 59) examined Sierra Leonean American Muslims living in Washington D.C. She writes that Sierra Leonean religious

discourse in this diasporic context, which was different from the dominant Saudi incorporated style of *Wahhabism*, is based on a strict form of orthodox-style Islam. Furthermore, D'Alisera also asserts that the diversity of the Muslim community living in D.C. plays a key role in how Sierra Leonean Muslims reshape their religious identity, differentiating themselves from other Muslim ethnic groups. D'Alisera (2004:64) writes that the "encounter with other Muslim believers gives the Sierra Leoneans a heightened sense of how they are Muslim."

As a result the Sierra Leoneans have built an imaginary wall "between us and them" against other ethnic Muslim groups such as the Moroccans. Hence, from these stark differences based on race, class, language, and ethnicity, Sierra Leonean Muslims in D.C. create their own form of religious understanding and practice. In a recent Al-Jazeera opinion article, Zeba Khan (2015:1) points out the subtle and overt racism posed by Arab and South-Asian American Muslims who discriminate against black and African American Muslims. This overt racism by Arab and South-Asian Muslim Americans resulted in exodus of black or African descent groups of Muslim Americans from praying at their mosques. In a similar spirit, my research looks at Somali Americans founding their own mosque. Just like the Sierra Leonean community in D.C., Somali Americans also created their own form of religious understanding and practice.

Gender and Power in African Heritage

In most African societies women are the matrifocus, which means there is a high moral evaluation based on women's roles (James 1978:125). Wendy James argues that women have power to influence men's authority in their village. In a similar vein,

feminist anthropologist Michele Rosaldo draws on Max Weber to distinguish between “authority” and “power.” “ Authority, the legitimate right to issue orders, is associated with the male controlled public domain. Power, the capacity to influence action (often indirectly) may be exercised by women, but mainly in domestic or household spaces, outside of the public eye (Rosaldo 1974:21). This leads to the question of how power and authority work in terms of gender relations in Somali culture. In Somalia the lineage comes directly from your father’s main bloodline (Barnes & Boddy 1994:1). Janice Boddy and Virgina Lee Barnes documented the story of a Somali girl named Aman on her experiences growing up in a post-colonial Somalia. In Aman’s case she reported that although your father’s bloodline is the common patrilineal descent in the culture, Somalis acknowledge their matrilateral kin as well. In fact, as in many patrilineal societies in Africa, Somalia’s patrilineal political nobility rests upon women who make these maternal ties among their sons, daughters and distant cousins (1994:303). In other words, in a purely patrilineal relation there are matrilateral features present. For example when the sons of a polygynous father are quarreling over grazing rights the sons politically align themselves along their matrifocal paths (1994:301). Thus, in this setting Somali mothers have the power to influence what their son’s do because they have strong ties in their household. In my research I focus on the social productions of gender among Somali in Seattle by observing how the culture and traditional roles affect relationships among mothers, daughters, sons, wives husbands, fathers, girlfriends and even boyfriends in the diaspora.

Study Area

My study area was situated in Rainier Valley, a diverse neighborhood in Southeast Seattle (City of Seattle population 608,660). Rainier Valley is home to African Americans, East African and Southeast Asian immigrants, and Jewish Americans. I focus on the most concentrated areas of Somali Americans living in these communities. In each study area, I examined young Somali men between the ages of 18 and 25 years of age: These include but are not limited to the Somali community center, the street, the mosque, and the soccer field.

My research was anchored in the Somali Community center on Rainier Avenue as a resource center that provides social services programs including English as a second language (ESL) classes, naturalization and citizenship services, job training, interpreting services, youth leadership development programs, and cultural awareness programs. The Somali Community Center is also a place where young and old Somali people engage in their cultural practices, such as clan meetings. The community center is especially important for older Somali men because it resonates a deep nostalgic feeling of their homeland, making them feel safe and welcome. On the street scene of the Halal Markets on Rainier Avenue, young Somali men visit a local barbershop located inside the market. This was the first established Somali barbershop in South Seattle. All the barbers are either ex-gang members or what I call the young Imams—young men who aspire to become Imams who are seen as community youth leaders today. For young Somali men, the barbershop is a special place that allows them to express themselves free from the opinions of the elders and Imams of the mosque and the Somali Community Center. In addition to the street scene young Somali men usually go out in Emerald street which

approximately 8.2 miles from Rainier avenue. During nights, the whole stretch of Emerald Street looks like Times Square in New York City. There are thousands of people walking around in the area. Additionally, there were various groups of people coming in and out of local bars and restaurants in the area. Emerald street is predominately a white upper middle class neighborhood, however many young Somali men hang out around Emerald street engaging in the informal economy or just having a good time with their friends.

On Friday afternoons, observant Muslim Somali students leave class early to carpool with their friends to get to the mosque for Jumma or Friday prayer. The mosque, Masjid Al-Haq, located on Martin Luther King Jr. Way, is 2.2 miles from Cleveland High School. The Masjid's appearance looks run down, with a small parking lot. People place their shoes on the big white shelf lying just in front of the building. Most of those praying at the mosque are Somali males, dressed in long white *Khamis*, which hang down to their ankles. On nearby Martin Luther King Jr. Way intersecting Henderson Street is the Rainier Beach High school, which has a soccer field where young Somali men play in the annual Somali Soccer tournament.

Many of the Somali youths who play soccer at the Rainier Beach high school live in various housing projects in south Seattle, which are part of the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA). An average Somali family in these housing projects is six to eight members, all living in three-bedroom housing units. On a typical day you will see a group of Somali mothers with their hijabs, walking around in these housing projects in South Seattle and pushing babies in their strollers.

Methodology: Questions to be Answered

This study explores the social relationships young Somali men in south Seattle in their respective spaces such as: the mosque, the community center, the street and sporting events. These four research questions guided my research:

1. What are the social experiences of the Somali youth male hanging out in the streets?
2. What is the social experience of the Somali male attending the mosque in Seattle? What are the power relationships between the Imam and the youth? Who establishes the social norms of the Mosque?
3. What are the informal social norms of Somali youths when participating in the soccer tournaments?
4. What are the established social experience of the Somali youths volunteering in the community center? What are the power relationships between the Somali mothers and the youth?

Participant Observation Study

To address these research questions, I utilized participant observation to collect my ethnographic data. My goal was to understand the social experience of young Somali men living in south Seattle. The focus groups of my study were young Somali men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five years of age who regularly occupy in these spatial areas. According to Russell Bernard, the fieldworker can have three different roles 1) complete participant, 2) participant observer, and 3) complete observer (2011: 260). The first role involves the participant in applying “deception” by becoming a member of a group while conducting research. The second role involves the participant observers as members of the “insiders.” In this role the participant observers note their behavior and

record at the same time all the life around them (2011: 260). The third role involves the researcher following people and recording aspects of their behavior without any interaction (2011: 260). The style I employed in my participant observation study were all three roles. As participant observer, I employed this particular method in both the community center and the mosque. Personally, I had an advantage in these areas to collect rich ethnographic data: 1) I was from the area and 2) I had a prior established relationship with the Director of the Somali Community Center Mama Africa and Imam Ali from Masjid Al-Haq.

Thus, I received direct cooperation from both of them to conduct my research. I worked as a summer volunteer in the Community Center, where I was given certain tasks such as translating state and housing-related paperwork from English to Somali for mostly Somali older women. That's where I gained rich thick description on the social relations of the Somali Mothers organization in their fight to save young Somali men from becoming a "statistic," that is to say a victim of gun violence or incarceration. As for the Masjid Al-Haq not only Imam Ali received me with open arms but also I spent my time in the mosque in the holy Islamic month of Ramadan. At the times during the evening me and other young Somali men in the mosque were given the task by Imam Ali to feed the elders who come to worship and break their fast. That's where I gained an in-depth access to my ethnographic research data on the social relations between the young Somali men and the older Somali elders in the mosque space. From July 4th through September 10th, I utilized participant observation of young Somali young men living in South Seattle by observing their every day interactions in the community center and the mosque.

Other times during my research I would utilize a complete observer role in obtaining my ethnographic research by riding around with my friends from the area. For example during, the Somali Soccer tournament matches that were held in the month of August I would be taken by my friends from the mosque area as I observed their social interactions while watching the soccer match. Personally this form of data collection was simple and essential because I had already built trust amongst my friends. I just recorded their everyday interactions towards me as well as amongst themselves. Another area I employed as a complete observer's role was in the street scene of Seattle. Especially on the late night weekends I would be persuaded by my friends to drive them around in other areas of Seattle to meet with other friends in the area. However, these areas they wanted me to take them had a lot of Seattle police presence. By employing all three roles I had constantly move back and forth in my participant observation tactics. For instance, for in the first role I was not necessarily using "deception," tactics to collect data I was simply an insider in the community. The young men I was around were my friends I grew up with. Therefore, it was easy for me to collect data on the "codes," that young Somali men were displaying on the street.

Semi-Structured Interview

Bernard (2011:158) notes, "In situations where you won't get more than one chance to interview someone semi-structured is the best." This was really true for me in my study. I specifically conducted semi-structured interviews with the following individuals: Mohamed Ali Roble, a School Family Partnerships liaison for the Seattle Public School, and Farhiaya Omar, an instructional assistant for the Seattle Public School District. Their expertise was important from my research because they had over fifteen years of

experience working with Somali youth, in the Seattle School District. Their participation in my study provided vital information on issues impacting young Somali men in Seattle. After agreeing to participate, they met with me in the local Starbucks and responded to the interview questionnaire. All interviews with individuals representing the Seattle School District were voluntary and permission was given to me not to remain anonymous in the study.

Human subjects review paperwork were vetted through the Central Washington University Human Subjects Review Council Office, to ensure that I protected the anonymity of all participants in my study. I obtained a letter from the Human Subjects Review Council Office granting me permission to conduct the research study after procuring a letter of cooperation from the community representatives at the community center and the mosque. After acquiring letters of cooperation from the director of the Community Center and the Imam of Masjid Al-Haq, I filed them with Central Washington University. Subsequent to the completion and filing of the Human Subjects Review Council paperwork, I commenced the research study. Overall, this research was conducted over a two-month period, from July fourth, 2015, through September tenth, 2014. I maintained communication with my informants through phone calls and social media such as Snap Chat.

CHAPTER II

WOMEN AND THE WORK OF CARING

Hooyo (Mother)

*The world certainly
Would never have left night
Light not been found
People not have trekked.
To a start over the Hawd. Would not have flown
Like birds of prey.
To the moon in the clouds.
Not have sent rockets.
That appear like waves in the sky. Nor reached into space.
Oh Mother, you've guided
The servants of God
To where they are today.
With numbers I cannot
Calculate or count
the number of great people
you carried on your back
that you suckled
that you nourished
from your breast---* Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame 'Hadraawi'

This poem by Maxamed Ibraahim is dedicated to all of the Somali *Hooyo* out there in the world who are raising their sons into manhood. Personally, this poem gives me an understanding of the importance of mothers in our society. It reminds me of the days when my mother used to guide my brother and I around the neighborhood when we first immigrated to the United States. However, this poem does raise interesting questions about gender politics and identity; how has the role of motherhood progressed

within the Somali community? Over time, has the role of motherhood become more prominent within the Somali community? We should all be more conscious about poems that intersect with gender and identity issues. Somali mothers living in the diaspora face a particular challenge in raising their sons in America. They want to raise strong Somali sons ready to defend their lineage; however, Somali mothers face America's structural oppression such as racism, classism, Islamophobia, police brutality, and high unemployment rates. Thus, they find themselves, unexpectedly raising African American sons.

In this chapter I narrate my observations of how Somali mothers navigate the structural oppression in Seattle as they make a critical impact in the lives of their young Somali sons. Additionally, I will address the narratives in a case-by-case observation of Somali women dealing with issues such as housing, education and the criminal justice system. My primary data in this chapter are derived from my field research in the Somali Community Center, in which most of the leadership and the caregivers are women.

Community Center

I began conducting participant observation in the Somali Community Center, which changed my perspective about the realities of doing hands-on fieldwork. When I first arrived at the center, I couldn't help but feel welcomed in opened arms. The center's director whom I call "Mama Africa" was the person that dramatically changed my field experience by educating me more about my culture and our people's way of life. I knew Mama Africa since I was in seventh grade and yet she still has the same strength when I first met her. She welcomes every Somali person from various clans with utmost highest respect and honor. Nevertheless, people never take her kindness as a form of weakness.

In pre-civil war Somalia Mama Africa played for the Somali National Basketball team and later joined the military service to defend her country. She is strong, proud, resilient, and honorable woman. To this day Mama Africa still pushes me to finish my studies and become a role model for other young Somali men in Seattle.

The décor of the center is heavily centered on Somali culture, with Somali flags, baskets, and other Somali traditional drums. In other words, the Somali Community Center was a space of Somali identity and a place of resource for the Somali diaspora to seek out assistance. It could be thought of as the nomadic Somali hut called *Aqal*, an intricate cocoon-shaped huts made of straw, twigs, and branches built by traditional Somali nomadic women. In a sense, the community center was similar to the *Aqal* in that it symbolically represents the space in the center as womb, in which nurturing takes place (Arnoldi and Hardin 1996:96).

My field notes describe my first day of field research as a volunteer for the community center:

As soon as I entered the community center I met with Mama Africa who was dressed in a navy blue traditional Somali dress called “Diracc.” She was so excited to see me as she was telling me the days she used to tutor me as a kid when I was in middle school. Mama Africa was in her mid-fifties and she was so proud of me in making it this far in my education while staying out of trouble. She then proceeded to show me around my work station, at the front desk greeting Somali community members and possibly provide any kind of assistance such as resume building, tax information, and interpreting paperwork from the Department of Washington Social Health Services (DSHS). Mama Africa gave me some advice as she was wondering about my thoughts working with people who are desperate and in need of resources. She stated to me “Before you start to volunteer in this place my child how do feel about people yelling at your face if you cannot provide the services they need?” I simply told her that I had some experience dealing in that field during my time in school. While I was sitting in my workstation area I noticed the very same African map I saw in Uncle Mohamed’s phone card store behind the mosque. I asked Mama Africa why this map is hung in so many prominent places in our community? she walked over

behind me and started to pinpoint her exact city of birth in Somalia, which was the city of Jowhar.

Mama Africa: Look my child this is where I was born in Jowhar. At the time Somalia was beautiful and people were peaceful. (Smiling at me)

During my time in the community center, I saw numerous Somali American community members with different kinds of issues ranging from state-related paper work to school paperwork. At the center I noticed that majority of the Somalis who came in for assistance were women. A transformative moment in my fieldwork came when Mama Africa said, *“Before you start to volunteer in this place my child how do feel about people yelling at your face if you cannot provide the services they need?”* For me this was the greatest pieces of advice from a strong African woman who deals with people from different walks of life. When experiencing desperation people will get aggressive if their needs are not met. My time spent as a volunteer in the community center introduced me to how Somali mothers experience and navigate major sites of challenge as they see to nurture and protect their children. The Somali mothers are especially concerned with education, housing, and crime.

Advocating for Education

In the middle of August in the community center it was common for older Somali women to approach me, holding a packet from their sons’ schools, and asking me to interpret the reports about her child’s performance in his school. My encounters with the Somali mothers, reminded me of my mother, who in my adolescent days was very involved in my education, in a similar fashion Somali women are very much involved in their children’s education. At around the same time in mid-August I found out about a new Somali women’s movement called Somali Mothers. I decided to interview Farhiaya

Omar, a Somali youth counselor for the Seattle School District and one of the original members who had started the Somali Mothers Organization:

ME: What are the some of the things you do for the Somali mothers?

Ms. Omar: The things we do as Somali mothers is that we teach other Somali mothers about the rules and regulations that Seattle Schools put in place for our children. We also teach them to navigate the system. Like simple things, for example following up on your kid's work and being on time with parent-teacher meetings. Our goal is to have the mothers to be aware of their children's counselors, teachers and principals and have the time to have an open dialogue between the teachers and the school administrators about their children's education. This way the mothers will have an open mind about the school visit rather than being afraid in understanding the system that their kids are involved. Another issue I also notice is that the boys tend to hide their school grades from their mothers because they are afraid of their mother's reaction, which is not good saeed. So I educate the mothers in how to approach issues like that with children especially with their boys. One more thing to let you know also our target is usually middle school boys. We help their mothers organize simple things like getting their school supplies ready for them. Like binders, notebooks, rulers, pencils, pens and paper simple stuff you know what I mean. It is that kind of stuff that mothers can't afford so I take some money from my budget and get school supplies for these mothers who live in low-income housing.

In Bourgois' (1996:174) observation of young Puerto Rican men living in Spanish Harlem, he reported that public schools did not only provide the proper education the students needed but also educated them on how to be a better criminal. Therefore, these young men become an open target for New York Police and overall the criminal justice system. Clan elder Ali Roble, a School Liaison counselor for the Seattle Public Schools, reported to me in an interview about the different types of issues that prevent young Somali men from completing high school. These are the excerpts of the interview of elder Ali Roble:

ME: What's barrier of these Somali young men from obtaining higher GPA's?

Roble: The barriers are lack of resources starting with parenting, low-income housing issues, and other peer pressures from other youths which results in obtaining poor GPA's in their education. Also a major issue I noticed is discrimination.

ME: From who?

Roble: For example in my experience I noticed a lot of the Somali boys in the tenth grade, I REPEAT SAEED TENTH GRADE! They are faced with extreme forms of discrimination from police in their schools or in the street. The police detained them for long periods of time and unlawfully search them just because they live in a high crime area. But some of the Somali boys engage in criminal activity such as shoplifting especially the real young ones who are in middle school. As a result police harass these boys by throwing them in large numbers in Juvenile detention. It's quite sad because they are constantly being targeted when they are young and I cannot even tell you how many times I have translated their request to jail officials. Sometimes I see these young boys who grow up so fast by committing these petty theft crimes to make money for their mothers they are literally taking the role of a father's duty to provide at a very young age and which they are not doing a good job at it frankly.

Bourgois also addressed the gender-power relations in schools amongst young Puerto Rican men with their mothers and women teachers. For instance, one of the young men that Bourgois was interviewing had trouble adjusting to public school due to his teacher picking on him in class unnecessarily, which resulted in his hate for public school systems. Bourgois (1996:175) discusses two of the biggest gaps, "the cultural and generational gaps," which block the educational achievement of the young Puerto Rican men he was studying. This is the same observation I noticed in my interviews with elder Ali Roble and Mama Farhiaya Omar, in which both the American educational system and the Somali cultures are altered. In addition to the culture of the American school system the generational gap between the newly immigrated Somali mothers and the young Somali men create a rift in obtaining their education. This is due to the lack of the English language of the Somali parents, which discourages the parents to even attempt to engage with their young men and their high school education. This is especially true for the fathers of these Somali teens in which both counselors agreed in their interviews that Somali fathers are rarely involved in their son's U.S. educational system.

Housing

Rent hikes during 2014 posed great challenges for low-income renters in Seattle depended on public housing or public assistance. The rent hikes in Seattle were so extreme that it made it to the local Seattle news channel KIRO 7, according to Lee Stoll, a KIRO news correspondent who reported on the rent hikes, “In Seattle, rents rose 8-10 percent between 2012-2013 but are expected to level off this year. By law, landlords must give renters 60 days notice if the increase is ten percent or more. That’s the only say the city gets” (Stoll 2014:1). This meant that residents living in SHA, who are on rent vouchers, and other SHA programs would not be able to afford to live in their homes. This would potentially lead to a massive exodus of black/Somali and Asian groups, being pushed out of the city of Seattle to surrounding communities As all of this rent increase was getting media attention, something else was also occurring in my field site, particularly in the community center. As I recount in my field notes:

I arrived in the center at approximately 8:00am to help Mama Africa clean the computer lab in the back room of the center. As I was taking the old computers in the backroom of the center, I noticed a group of older Somali women at the center. There were a total of exactly nine women who were all wearing their long Jilbabs as they came into the center. When I came back inside I saw all nine women yelling at Mama Africa, ordering her to help them translate the paperwork from the Seattle Housing Authority rent hike. One of the women looked at me and told me in a depressed tone, “It’s over, our people are going to be sleeping in the streets, I can’t afford this rent increase, I have six kids and I am a single parent.” The women in the center looked extremely sad as one of their friends tried to console the other women by giving them a hug and telling to them to keep their heads up. At that very moment, I realized that the rent hike issue in Seattle housing was going to be very problematic in the future. The first thing I imagined in my mind was my mother, who was also living in low-income housing as she was being kicked from her home and sleeping on the streets. I couldn’t get the

image out of my mind I felt weak and helpless at the same time and I couldn't do anything.

Throughout my time in the community center Somali mothers were the leading force in a series of planned protest that were held in community halls against rent hikes. I clearly remember the day I left the community center and was on my way to catch the five o'clock PM subway back to my mother's place, it was that very moment when I saw a homeless elderly man selling the local newspaper called *Real Change*. As soon as I got close to him I noticed on the cover of the newspaper, which had a picture of an older Somali woman dressed in a burgundy colored hijab, with a caption that read "Faced with proposed rent hikes, SHA residents eye protest." I quickly grabbed the newspaper from the old man and paid him two dollars. As I was reading the article there is one quote that stood out to me which read, "Go out, wave a sign, say this is not fair," said Fadumo Isaq, 66, a Yesler Terrace resident. "We go outside and put up signs, the government will hear us. If we sit in our houses, nobody will care" (2014:6). This was exactly what the Somali mothers have done by mobilizing with Mama Africa in the community center at the same time taking it to the streets and protesting against the rent hikes in the city of Seattle.

Similar dynamics are evident in Philippe Bourgois' discussion of Puerto Rican women in East Harlem and their struggles to obtain an affordable housing through the New York Housing Authority. In my findings the Somali women were the main voice of housing issues as they would come day in and day out to the community center and discuss and even connect with other Somali mothers who might know a different housing units that are available within Seattle Housing.

Crime

Before I get into my field notes let me give my reader a background story. One month before the start of my field research the city of Seattle was facing a spree of gun violence. One victim was a young Somali man who was shot thirty times while sitting in entering his vehicle. Until this day his killers are still at large within the city of Seattle. While I was sitting in my computer station Mama Africa approached me as she told me to join with her in the meeting room and assist the mother of the young deceased man. Here is a passage in my field notes about my experience dealing with this situation:

On a hot Monday afternoon Mama Africa calls my name into the meeting room and tells me to assist these two older Somali women in translating a letter they wrote in Somali to English to the office of the mayor in the city of Seattle. At first, I gave my plea to Mama Africa telling her that I couldn't read and write thoroughly in the Somali language I can just speak it. She simply and calmly replied "You can do it my son don't worry, this is how you learn Somali." After hearing her words playing in my mind over and over again I entered the meeting room confidently to provide my assistance to the older Somali women. As I sat down in the chair facing the two women I proceeded to introduce myself to them and offered any assistance in any way I can provide for them. The women were dressed in a dark grey "Jilbab"(a long hijab), one of the women returned my greetings back at me but the other woman stayed silent and was looking down at the floor while holding a yellow piece of paper. At first the woman looked very depressed as she non-verbally handed me a letter she wrote in Somali to translate it for her in English. I turned and looked at her friend and stated in Somali "Auntie I am sorry but I cannot read Somali," she was shocked at the mere fact that I couldn't read Somali and she stated to me in a calm voice tone, "My son please don't embarrass us now you can read and write in English but not in Somali, what a shame." The other silent older Somali women who handed me the letter spoke to me in a sad tone of voice "Do you know my son Mohamed who got killed in international district my child?" As soon as the older Somali said that I knew exactly who was she was talking about. I told her that it would be easy for me to tell me verbally exactly what you wrote in Somali so I can write down in English. I immediately pulled up my notebook and started to take down on what she was telling me in Somali. As I was writing it in English, she was stating her plea to Seattle's mayor Ed Murray, that she couldn't live in the New Holly Housing projects anymore and that she demanded to be moved into a Section 8 housing away from the Somali community. She further added that she constantly sees an unidentified American model black car parked right outside her window with two to three young black males looking at every move she makes. Additionally, she stated that her son's killers were still not captured by the police. Although she believes that the police had clues to the suspects but they were not

captured and that the city of Seattle didn't bring any justice for her son's murderers. When I finished taking down the notes she stated to me in Somali that I spoke the Somali language well for young man who grew in the United States but I should also try to learn to read and write in Somali as well.

I was very inspired by the Somali mother who had lost her son due to gun violence. Mothers like her, who had strength and perseverance burning inside of her, are the reason why our young Somali men are strong.. In addition, I admired her bravery to tackle the issue head on by taking it all the way to the Mayor's office. As I remember this conversation I still feel the range of powerful emotions. I feel admiration for her bravery, at the same time I feel rage that was boiling in me like a hot tea kettle ready to blow steam at the injustice experienced by her son and the agony for her enduring sense of loss and violation. This strong woman has not only been denied justice, but she continues to demand that the authorities do their job. As she was speaking, there was moment where I wondered if my friends and I should seek out the perpetrators ourselves. I felt helpless and furious. Although at the time it was Ramadan, when all Muslims struggle to be pious and achieve a cleansed state of mind, I felt a wave of anger. As I finished my talk with the her I got up and quickly rushed to the bathroom and started to wash my face repeatedly; Mama Zahara asked me if I was okay and she could clearly see I was devastated.

In such moments, in all honesty, I wondered what, as an anthropologist, should be doing? What right did I have to hear such a terrible story? I have, on reflection, decided that the only thing I can do is bear witness to these stories of pain, and loss, and bravery. The chapters that follow are dedicated to this spirit, to honor the many stories I heard of the community's trials and triumphs. In so doing, I hope to honor the spirit and

bravery of the women of our community, who against all odds continue to nurture young males, and prepare them for full male adulthood in Somali America

We now look at the game of soccer and how it is a form of freedom expression for many young Somali men. The sport of soccer has many benefits for young Somali men in the diaspora, one of the main benefits of playing soccer is that it keeps young men out of trouble with law or even worse keep them from death at the hands of violent and aggressive individuals. The following chapter looks at the how young Somali men use soccer as an outlet during the annual Somali soccer tournament in Rainier Beach high school.

CHAPTER III

ON AND OFF THE FIELD: LIBERATION AND CONSTRAINT IN SPORTS

Athletics are a simultaneous matrix of liberation and structural constraint for Somali male youth in urban Seattle. Although the allure of playing soccer is extremely great for Somali men, sports are not a long-term strategy of upward economic mobility for the great majority of them. I analyze athletics on a local neighborhood participation level. I begin with an ethnographic account of local soccer games and tournaments run by Somali officials in South Seattle. I give particular attention to the unifying dimensions of sports in the Somali Diaspora, as athletics transcends clan divisions and binds together Bantu and non-Bantu Somalis. In addition, I employ Foucault's discussion on heterotopia, given that in my field site the soccer field creates a certain heterotopic space for young Somali men in the diaspora.

Opening vignette: Watching the annual Somali Soccer tournament

On a hot Friday afternoon, I met with my friend Jamal after I walked out of the Somali-owned barbershop behind the mosque as we chatted about the good times we used to have playing soccer in the field. About twenty feet away I saw two young Al-Jama team members who were going into a Somali Halal store. I was curious and I wanted to go in there as well. As soon as I stepped inside of the store, I noticed several members of team Al-Jama were having a meeting with their coach, who is also the barber. He was drawing team plays on the projector as the team members sat in their seats with an intense focus listening to their coach. After a couple of minutes the team members and the coach noticed my presence in the room, and the coach yelled at me in an aggressive tone, ordering me to leave the room. He later stated to me that I should go to the soccer field at Rainier Beach High School if I wanted to see their team play. As soon as Jamal and I arrived on the soccer field at Rainier Beach High School, we noticed a lot of police presence on the field and in the street area. I witnessed two Seattle police

SUV-cars that came inside the school entrance; inside the police car were the Deputy Mayor of Seattle Hyeok Kim accompanied by Assistant Chief of Seattle Police Carmen Best, Commander of the Criminal Investigations Bureau. Both city officials gave their opening address at the Somali Soccer tournament and urged individuals to be safe and have a good time. Next on to the podium, clan elder Ali Roble spoke in Somali and urged the youth not to fight but instead to resolve their differences in a responsible manner. Finally, Mama Africa, reiterating Ali Roble's message while speaking in Somali, urged the young men to be safe but also to be safe later in the nighttime.

The first match was team Ifitin vs. Al-Jama. I sat in the bleachers with my good friends Giraffe, Jamal, and Shorty. I saw both Sheik Ali and Sheik Ahmed walking up towards the bleachers as the Somali commentator told the crowd to give round of applause for our spiritual leaders. All of a sudden, the crowd gave a big round of applause to both Sheiks as they sat in the front row and rooted for their young Somali team. When the game started, Giraffe and I decided to grab some Somali tea and barbecue chicken at stands located behind the bleachers. When both of us got there got to the concession stand, there was a massive line of people wanting to buy snacks from the Somali-owned vendors of tea and other pastry edibles. We both decided to go further back by the entrance. We observed a lot of young Somali men joking around as they placed small bets on Team Ifitin against Al-Jama. Once the young men saw Giraffe, they approached him and gave the neighborhood handshake. All of a sudden, they started asking him, "Hey, bro, how much you going bet on Ifitin or are you one of those guys who are holy like Team Al-Jam?" They all started to laugh at Giraffe.

All of a sudden twenty minutes into the game, Team Al-Jama scored their first goal; the whole crowd started cheering and screaming, as well as the Somali soccer commentator, who was shouting, "GOOOOOOOAAAALLLLL," through the intercom. Giraffe saw six of his young Somali men from his neighborhood housing projects and stated to them "You know, my niggas, I got my money on these dudes for real; it's over for the defending champ; it is going to be 1-0 Al-Jama." After forty-five minutes into the game Ifitin player number seventeen scored two goals against Al-Jama. At that moment, I noticed the spectators around me kept talking about number seventeen, who was an exceptional player. There were rumors that he had walked on to the Seattle Sounders team but was eventually cut due to a knee injury during a practice match.

When the referee sounded the whistle for half-time, some of the players in Al-Jama started arguing against each other; one of the players pushed his own teammate. All of a sudden, both young men started fighting each other as other team members were holding them apart. As soon as the coach intervened, he ordered both of the youths to sit on the bench, yelling at them aggressively in Somali, "You guys are done; seriously, nobody is playing in second half. Both youths looked at their coach and shrugged his comments off as if it did not bother them at all. Once the second half started, the crowd chanted, "Al-Jama Bumuyaye (Kill them all)! Al-Jama Bumuyaye! Al-Jama Bumuyaye!" At the start of the second half, Team Ifitin scored another goal. The goal score was number seventeen, who ran towards the flag post and did a karate kick as his form of goal

celebration. That's when everybody in the crowd, both men and women (mostly men) who were supporting Team Ifitin, started drumming for their team. By the end of the match, the final score was 5-3. Ifitin had won the match as they moved onto the next round of the tournament. The Somali ethnic Bantus and other ethnic Somali fans started beating their drums as a form of celebration for Ifitin's first win in the tournament.

Sociologist Ramon Spaaij posits that participation in sports helps rebuild social networks eroded by war and displacement (2012:7). Spaaij's three-year ethnographic study examines social networks of young Somalis in Melbourne, Australia and the role of soccer tournaments in creating a fabric of social cohesion in the Somali community. He notes that the Somali community in Melbourne needed to establish a soccer tournament every summer as a way of responding to their marginalized spaces within the dominant Australian society. Spaaij also studied soccer as a form of social bond between various Somali clans. According to Spain, the Melbourne Somali community's use of soccer matches creates an internal cohesion among members of various clans (2012:8). He notes, too, that soccer provides the same kind of social bond between Somali clans living in the diaspora. Similar dynamics occurred in my field site, as Somalis in Seattle created what Foucault calls a "heterotopic space" (1984:3).

For Foucault, a heterotopia is a specific space that represents, contests and inverts wider spaces in society. In other words, a heterotopia is a physical space that simultaneously stands outside of and alongside of existing spaces (1984:3). For many young and old Somali men, the soccer field at Rainier Beach High School creates a real site that is outside of all other spaces in the dominant society. At the same time, the soccer field in Rainier Beach represents the Somali experience outside of other Seattle groups' experiences of soccer events.

This is emphatically not mainstream white soccer space. Foucault describes heterotopia through six different principles of spaces, including the following:

(1) “In the so-called primitive society there is a certain kind of heterotopia I would call crisis heterotopia”; (2) “The description of heterotopia is that society, as it is history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different way”; (3) “The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible”; (4) Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what can be termed heterochronies”; (5) “Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing”; and (6) “They [heterotopias] have a function in relation to all the space that remains” (1984:4-8).

In a world in which young black men are being gunned down by law enforcement and imprisoned for minor offenses, the soccer tournament is a space of freedom and joy that transcends many aspects of regular city space. Yet, this heterotopia is not entirely removed from the regular constraints of urban American life. The police keep the soccer field under close surveillance, and sometimes Brothers avoid the field due to high law enforcement presence. The field is a distinctly Somali heterotopia. While middle class white-dominated soccer fields are only devoted to playing, on the Somali soccer field, young Somali men engage in both formal and informal economic transactions. For example, young Somali men who sell food, drinks, and other Somali memorabilia are constantly soliciting their goods as if they owned their own Somali market. Thus, the field has become a *Suq* (Somali market). Side betting games are conducted in secret, particularly underneath the bleachers where police presence is limited. Thus, the soccer field is a hybrid space, in which sports and the informal street economy bleed into one another, as young Somali men create prestige and profit for themselves, on and off the field.

The field also illustrates Foucault's concept of the opened and closed nature of heterotopia (1984:7). The field brings all Somalis together from various clans and ethnic groups (Bantus and non-Bantus). In this sense the soccer field is "open". At the same time in the soccer space one would not find non-Somalis playing soccer in the area simply because they are not Somali. These heterotopic spaces bring in individuals from the Somali community in Seattle. These spaces are "closed" to non-Somalis.

In this compressed heterotopic space, a single moment can take on great significance. For Foucault (1984:7), heterotopic spaces are almost magically linked to one another. In my observations, every time player number seventeen touched the soccer ball with his feet, the fans stopped talking and focused all their attention on him. It was as if the fans were watching the great Brazilian soccer player Ronaldinho playing on the field. Our local heterotopic space opens up a doorway to the imagined meta-heterotopia of the World Cup.

Soccer players with the talent of number seventeen receive a certain kind of recognition and respect in the soccer space; thus, these players can navigate in and around different masculine spaces such as the streets and the mosque, but only in relation to other young Somali men. Does this recognition in the local neighborhood lead to increase of social opportunities in the wider field of mainstream society? Sadly, in most cases, the answer is no.

Gender and Class

I close the chapter with a brief thought on the gender and class politics of athletics

in contemporary Somali American society. During my observation of the soccer field, I didn't notice any Somali women present on the field at the time. Teresa Arendell, a researcher who is studying the modern motherhood in the globalized world, conducted research investigating the many factors in which motherhood has changed overtime (2006:9). Arendell (2006:11) notes that motherhood activities can range from various educational and leisure events such as soccer games, in which modern mothers are engaged with their children. However, in contrast to Arendell's findings, Somali mothers are not present at soccer matches in which their own sons are playing. Instead of creating support networks of soccer moms, as is common in the middle class suburban white experience, Somali mothers are instead behind the scenes providing food for their sons or washing their uniforms. While Mama Africa and other Somali mothers may leverage family connections in the community center to keep young men out of the streets and, consequently, out of jail, it strikes me that Somali fathers probably use soccer in a similar way. Playing league soccer, with "soccer moms" playing a significant role as a support network, is associated with general upward mobility in United States society. Regarding the Somali mothers' absence from the soccer space, I pose this question, which needs further research: "Why does this particular configuration of gender and class not happen in Somali America?"

The positive impact of sports for the Somali community includes reducing violence, bringing unity between different Somali clan groups, engendering respect among Somali men, and restoring hope for the community. However, sports have a negative impact on young Somali men—engendering in them the dream of a lucrative soccer career, which will lead, they believe, to the attainment of membership in the

middle class. Such dreams are unattainable for most Somali young men due to their socioeconomic status.

We now move onto the next chapter of this study exploring the world of the street, in which young Somali men exist. From navigating the informal social experience of soccer matches, young Somali men move onto the construction of their manhood on “Emerald Street” as they navigate the gaze of the dominant society, law enforcement, and other dangerous violent street gangs.

CHAPTER IV

BEYOND THE EYES OF THE DOMINANT: SOCIAL DRAMA AND UNFIXING
THE GAZE ON THE SEATTLE STREET

“I think I’m a natural-born leader. I know how to bow down to authority if it’s authority that I respect”--Tupac Shakur.

These were the words spoken by the late legendary rapper Tupac Shakur as he reminded us of the premise of respect: one must give respect first in order to receive respect. Although here is the catch, how does one give respect to authority that was structured to ensure your demise? This chapter paper draws on two literatures that are applied in my ethnographic data on the street-based experiences of low-income young men of color in Seattle. I draw on Foucault’s concept of the gaze, calling out to the methods of surveillance by the Seattle Police department along with the white-dominated city power structure as well as processes of self-surveillance by low-income young men of color. In addition, I also approach the continuous struggle for respect among-inner city youths of color on the streets through the lens of Victor Turner’s concept of the social drama.

I begin with a scene drawn from my field notes, on a location in Seattle I call “Emerald Street”:

At around 2:00am on a Sunday morning my friend Dope and I came out of the club as we got separated from the rest of the guys. The first thing I noticed outside of the club were a lot of gang members standing on the corner of Emerald Street. There were many young black men from African American background wearing bandanas that was hanging from their back pockets. In addition, there were numerous people standing around the area as some of the people were on their I-phones calling for Uber drivers to pick them up. The Uber drivers were young Somali men ranging from their mid-twenties to late thirties driving hybrid

Toyota Prius, as they were picking up their customers on Emerald Street.

ME: Yo! Dope lets look for the rest of the niggas. (we started to walk down on southbound on Emerald towards the shell gas station. The whole area was occupied with people celebrating Hempfest an annual convention of demonstrators advocating decriminalization of marijuana)

Dope: Yo! Them niggas over there at the gas station with Rocko!

Rocko: Saeed I need you to come with me real quick. (In an aggressive tone of voice. I noticed his t-shirt had a massive tear on his collar)

ME: My nigga what's wrong what happened (in a nervous tone of voice)

Rocko: these niggas tore my shirt and spit on my face when I came out of the club.

ME: For real bro what the fuck!

I noticed Beenie and Max-Million cocking their pistols and putting it up against their belts. I immediately saw my friend Yung Dolph who was smoking a joint and I had an idea to possibly defuse the situation. As soon as I turned to my right side I saw Rocko who was walking very fast in aggressive manner towards the local gangs on Emerald Street. As I was catching up to him I noticed that he placed himself leaning on a fire hydrant facing across the street towards local gangsters. While he was leaning up against the fire hydrant, he was giving the thousand-yard stare at the gangs across street waiting for the walk signal turn on so he can initiate the attack that he had planned. At this moment I noticed there were a lot of Seattle Police vans in the presence, I immediately took the marijuana joint from Yung Dolph and told him that I will I noticed there were a lot of Seattle police vans in the presence, I immediately took the marijuana joint from Yung Dolph and told him that I will give it back to him.

ME: Yung Dolph pass the dro! (slang for weed) my nigga I gotta do this for us my nigga. Yo Rocko hit this dro my nigga you drunk you need the weed to mellow you my nigga!

Rocko: NA! NA! NA! FUCK THAT NIGGA I AM GOIN MURK THESE NIGGAS BRO (yelling extremely loud at me). While Beenie and Max-Million are telling me to leave him alone and let him handle the business. That's when I noticed Max-Million take out his pistol as he was attempting to give it to Rocko. At that point, I started to get really nervous. I grabbed Rocko by his arm aggressively and started to yell at him. I immediately took the marijuana joint from Yung Dolph and told him that I will give it back to him.

ME: YOU FUCKED UP IN THE HEAD MY NIGGA. WHAT THE FUCK JUST HIT THIS DRO AND YOU WOULD BE GOOD. FUCK THOSE NIGGAS MY NIGGA I CAME TOO FAR TO END UP DEAD OR IN JAIL AND YOU DID TOO MY NIGGA. THINK ABOUT YOUR DAUGHTER MY NIGGA SHE ONLY THREE YEARS OLD YOU THINK SHE WANNA SEE HER DADDY'S BITCHASS IN JAIL OR IN SIX FEET IN THE GROUND HUH! ITS 20 OF THEM AND 10 OF US YOU THINK WE GOTTA CHANCE MY NIGGA. ANSWER ME MY

NIGGA. (I was breathing very hard at the same time having a stare down with Rocko)

Rocko: Alright ! bro let me hit that (he starts smoking the joint)

ME: GOOD THAT'S WHAT I AM TALKING ABOUT. YO! BEENIE PUT THE MOTHERFUCKIN THUMBER AWAY FOR REAL. THAT SHIT GETTING REAL OLD MAN. (Rocko comes over to me and gives me a big hug)

Rocko: Goodlooks my nigga I am glad you were in your right mindset. I appreciate you cuddy! (slang for family).

ME: Its all good bro.

The four stages of the social drama, described by Victor Turner, are in evidence here:

- (A) The first stage is the breach or disagreement violating idealized social norms. At approximately, two o'clock in the morning Dope and I came outside of the club as we were turning our heads—looking for the rest of the guys. We both noticed across the street from the club about twenty members of the local street gang throwing gang signs at us. Of course, Dope and I did not mind any attention towards them as we kept walking down on Emerald. On the spur of the moment, we both noticed Rocko approaching us aggressively with a tattered collar on his shirt. He later told us that, “these niggas tore my shirt and spit on my face when I came out of the club,” and in an aggressive tone of voice ordered both of us to follow him down on Emerald Street to confront the local gangs. This is where the breach occurs as Victor Turner points out, in which the mere fact that Rocko was disrespected violently by the street gang, meant that he could not be seen as equal amongst his social peers. To make matters worse, Rocko not confronting to the breach will not be tolerated amongst his peers, simply because it was against the street code. As Elijah Anderson (1999:67) points out inner city youths have a great deal of responsibility for navigating the social process of gaining respect. In fact, inner city young men of color need to affirm that very respect not only towards their peers but also in regard to their culprits. In this

case, the responsibility was heavily set on Rocko because he could not lose the respect and the dignity that he had among his peers and the overall society.

(B) The next stage is the mounting crisis, as the parties begin to breach and to square off against one another, in part because they anticipate how they will be viewed by others. Social Anthropologist Victor Turner proposes that in order for a crisis to occur there has to be a certain level of violation of norms. In this circumstance, the breach was the disrespect that was inflicted on Rocko (1957:147). This led Rocko to react negatively since he did not want the ramifications of being ridiculed by his social group. Victor Turner even pointed out this phenomenon in his own research while undertaking his fieldwork among the Ndembu people in the Northwestern region of Zambia. Turner observes and later reported that the main causes of crisis among the Ndembu people were small-scale conflicts, which were deeply embedded in gossip. In Rocko's case, he was troubled by the potential negative consequence of gossip from his own social group. Additionally, he was also worried about the news of gossip reaching in his own community, thus leaving him afraid. As a result, in his mind it was obligatory for him to confront the crisis by challenging the opposing street gang in a similar fashion or increased violent action to avoid the gossip and regain his respect.

Turner's discussion of the power of gossip can, I suggest this can, be understood though Foucault's concept of the gaze. The gaze, for Foucault, is decentered and all pervasive. Low income youth of color in urban Seattle are constantly mindful of others' perceptions of them — of how the mass media and the Police Department and other state agencies view them as dangerous and less than fully human. They are equally aware of a pervasive gaze by their peers: survival on the street depends on constantly assessing how

one is perceived by potential allies and rivals. “Respect” on the street is gained by accurately apprehending and playing with these overlapping structures of the gaze. Therefore, gossip can act as a form of gaze in a way that challenges their credibility among their friends, family and community.

(C) The third stage is the application of redressive mechanisms, in other words, healing the crisis that resulted from the breach. These mechanisms may be addressed in many ways ranges from a simple advice within the social group or to a formal legal and judiciary system (1957: 147). In this case, I gave advice towards Rocko to re-evaluate his decision and not to confront the street gangs. My redressive intervention was momentarily overcome by the mounting power of what Turner would call stage two, the mounting crisis; Rocko was further encouraged by Young Dolph and Max-Million to retaliate against the disrespect that was inflicted upon him. The mechanism that Young Dolph and Max-Million suggested at time was arming Rocko with hand guns and stating, “leave him alone and let him handle the business,” for the sole purpose of sending a stern message to me that the disrespect from the Bloods was intolerable. At that point I had an idea to address a different form of redressive mechanism, in which I saw an opportunity to de-escalate the situation. I noticed Yung Dolph smoking a marijuana joint, as was lawful in the city of Seattle, and I quickly grabbed the marijuana from Yung Dolph’s hand and encouraged Rocko to smoke the joint instead. From that point on Rocko took a few hits of the marijuana joint and suddenly calmed down from his rage. At the same time I utilized the small window of opportunity I had left: I took away the pistol from Rocko’s hands and returned it back to Beenie.

(D) The final stage, for Turner, is the reintegration or schism process. Either social

harmony is restored within the social group or chaos ensues. For a moment we teetered between the two poles. Rocko was well aware of the harsh reality that to confront the gang members would have resulted in more trials than triumph, but he was tempted to open fire. However, he finally allowed himself to attain a sense of healing and contentment by receiving advice from his friends and of course the remedies of the mind-altering Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) found in marijuana. Finally he signaled the successful restoration of social balance and social healing: after the whole ordeal he thanked me by stating, “Good looks! my nigga! I am glad you were in your right mindset. I appreciate you cuddy.”

In some instances, then, a social drama can be successfully resolved through redressive mechanisms; a social breach can be healed and out-and-out violent schisms can be avoided. Similarly, the gaze of the dominant can be refuted or turned aside. The expectation of the white power structure that young men of color are instinctively violent and self-destructive can be overturned. (To some extent I myself functioned as an agent of internal self-surveillance— working to restore a degree of social equilibrium.)

Having said that, the experience of young black men in urban America often is just the opposite. There are many cases in which locally produced repressive mechanisms do not fully function and in which social equilibrium cannot be restored. The dominant gaze is highly powerful and often cannot be turned aside.

Consider for example, a passage from my field notes, recorded a moment after the events with which this paper began. Just as Rocko had been settled down and thanked me for being in my “right mindset” this is what happened:

All of a sudden we all heard a loud high-pitched scream from a woman yelling, “OH MY GOD LET HIM GO LET HIM GO YOU KILLIN HIM STOP! STOP!”.

All of my friends and I crossed the street along with other people who were walking around in the area as we all witnessed the street gang beating up a young African American man to the pulp. Every time the young man would try to get up of the ground one member of the bloods gang would kick his head severely like a soccer ball. As we all stood there just watching the whole incident took place the young man's girlfriend helplessly tries to fend off the bloods from doing more damage to her boyfriend. I saw Beenie taping the whole incident on his i-phone. After five minutes of the whole ordeal Seattle police came to the scene, there were about eight Seattle police officers that came on site. The officers started to take out their Tasers and threatening to shoot at the bloods. The Bloods immediately responded to the officer's commands as they were facing against the wall with their hands up in the air.

In other words, the power of the dominant gaze continues to be exercised on the bodies and souls of young men of color. With that being said, not all social dramas can be resolved in a safe and careful manner as Victor Turner reminded us with his own research. The social world inhabited by black youth on the urban streets, as we have learned again and again from Ferguson to Brooklyn, remains highly volatile and unpredictable.

On Emerald Street the gaze of the dominant power structure disciplines the social actions of individual young men of color. Young men of color in particular black men in the area group together according to their race and other social cliques. On a typical night on Emerald Street, young Somali men are usually on high alert in their surroundings because they are the objects of overlapping gazes from the dominant society, from one another, and from their potential rivals, such as Southeast Asian and other African American youth gangs. All of my friends including myself are quick to notice the Seattle Police in the area as they keep driving back and forth around the street. Their gaze forced my hand to remind my friends that the police were always watching our actions on Emerald Street. The second gaze came up in my dealings with other young men of color

who pose a threat to me as well. In this instance in my field notes the local street gangs were the threat that posed for my friends. This is consistent with Foucault's claim that in modern society surveillance is an integrated, overlapping process that demands the co-participation of the dominant and the subordinate. The code of the street, in other words, is a form of panoptic power. As a result, the gaze from the gangs observing my informants and me created a tense of threat in the air. The gang members felt that other young African American men in their area would create a problem for their drug market, which creates intolerable competition. In order to be successful in the drug game the competition must be eliminated by any means. This is the mentality carried out by local gangs in Emerald Street.

The recent killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner reminded of us the unblinking gaze of the police upon young black bodies; thus creating a feeling of an open season on young black men. This in turn spawns a form of resistance towards the police gaze, triggering mutual surveillance among young men of color, who are increasingly attentive to the police by signaling police presence. In some cases, this dominant gaze can be temporarily redirected or defused. However, for most of my young black male friends and associates, the dominant gaze of power remains a basic fact of life— or, all too often, a basic fact of death.

In the next chapter, we turn to the pivotal transition through which young males are moved towards social adulthood in this community—the ceremony of the wedding, which also helps establish them as full members of the Islamic *Ummah* (community).

CHAPTER V

HALF YOUR DEEN: THE CENTRALITY OF MARRIAGE IN SOMALI AMERICAN ISLAM

This chapter explores the growing importance of the Muslim wedding ceremony and in how the Somali American community defines itself. In a social and cultural context, the elders worry increasingly about the impact of the dangerous subcultures of the streets, gangs, and drugs along with the corrosive impact of American secularism and materialism; Muslim marriage is conceived of as the most important shield against temptation and moral degeneration.

Islam provides hope and faith in times of struggle. Particularly, Somali Americans living in the Diaspora ascribe themselves to Islam to seek hope in spirituality as a means to cope with turbulences in their lives. I am a product of that very sentiment of hope; I always remember my mother, who left Somalia on the brink of civil war, telling me to be patient and invest my trust in “Allah,” for He will be the one to bring about hope. Can you imagine a nation of people that were displaced and disfranchised by the hands of greedy warlords and poverty? As a result, millions of Somalis disperse from their land, family, and community. Think of it as a planet out of orbit; the chaos in Somalia left the nation to be dependent upon the help of various western countries to begin their new lives.

As the Somali people began building their communities in their new adopted countries they realized there was a need for places of worship as well as places to pursue their cultural practices. For this chapter, I will focus my attention on social relations between Somalis *Waddad* (spiritual leaders) and young Somali men. I will concentrate on

the specific institution of marriage, which has emerged as the most important rite of passage for Somali men to move toward socially recognized adult manhood.

I begin with a scene drawn from my field notes, from a Masjid in south Seattle I call “Masjid Al-Haq”:

On a very warm Friday afternoon I was invited by Sheik Ahmed, co-imam of Masjid Al-Haq located in Martin Luther King Jr. way in south Seattle. He was invited to give the lecture for Friday prayer at the Somali Islamic school’s mosque. We drove in his 1985 Buick Somerset Coupe across the West Seattle Bridge to go over the new Islamic Somali School called Rahman Academy by Southpoint projects. As soon as we got there the first thing I noticed was that it didn’t appear to look like a mosque from outside, instead it was an old brick-layered church. As we started to walk around the mosque/church I noticed in the main front door of the church a marker tagging, which reads “Allah is 1.” The Sheik proceeded to show me the downstairs of the mosque in what appears to be an empty hall with carpets on the floor. The Sheik told me that they usually hold wedding/engagement ceremonies downstairs in the old church building and even sometimes hold women gatherings to do activities for the children such as Dhoogsi. Dhoogsi, is the Somali world for Islamic school for young children to learn the Quran’s teachings. Sheik Ahmed ordered me to go upstairs with him to the mosque, which had bright green, clean carpets on the floor and the walls were surrounded by glass church-design windows, showing the picture of Jesus on one of the glass windows, which was covered by some kind of black electrical tape. On these windows the Christian symbol of the cross was also covered by black electrical tape. I was so amazed by this because I have never seen a building that looks a church on the outside but upon entry the space is made into a mosque. I had asked the Sheik what happened to the big cross on top of the church, he stated that “Our committee had to fundraise \$5000 dollars just to rent a crane and with the help of my good friend brother Abdullah, he had to cut it down.” I was curious as to how long it took to cut that down and I found out that brother Abdullah was an older African American man from the South who had prior experience operating cranes, in which he took down the big white cross on top of the church. Upon entering the mosque I noticed the “Qibla” the direction in which a Muslim must face when praying had an upper deck that had an extremely large old pipe organ just laying there. Inside the mosque the Sheik approached a young Somali man to make the call of the prayer. As soon as the young man finished the call of the prayer there were various Muslims groups that were entering the mosque.

I would like to discuss of the Arabic word, “*Ummah*,” which means from a religious standpoint based on the Holy book Qur’an an establishment of human community to serve *Allah* (Frederick 1975:34). In essence, it as a formation of a nation state that has its allegiance to Allah. In the case of Somali Americans they are creating their Ummah by establishing a Mosque to practice Islam. However, in establishing religious institutions immigrants that migrate to the United States from Islamic nations have to adopt American norms and cultural values all while maintaining their cultural and Islamic values.

There are great difficulties in establishing an Ummah in United States and at the same time dealing with the current Ummah in Northeast Africa. Due to the globalization of Islam, according to Roy, the globalization of Islam means that Muslims living in the western world experience all of the problems of minority status. In other words, this globalized experience of Islam arises in a pluralistic context, where Islam is not the dominant religion and exists alongside other minority faiths. Thus globalized Islam strives to create new avenues of maintaining the Ummah in these challenging contexts. This is vastly different from the experience of being Muslim in Turkey, Indonesia, or Saudi Arabia.

My field research indicates that these challenges remain a heavy burden to the Imams and Sheiks who are facing different kinds of issues in maintaining the overall safety of young Somali men, especially, in the current times of racial and religious tensions against young Black Muslim men in America. In living in America young black bodies are in constant danger of being victimized by police, courts or even “black on black” (Somali on Somali) violence.

Consistent with Olivier Roy's (2004) discussion on globalized Islam it is important to note that Somali Americans feel a need to follow mainstream American traditional values, but also maintain their cultural practices, particularly their Islamic customs. An example of globalized Islam in the context of my field notes is the very idea that the Sheik wanted to establish a wedding ceremonial space within the new mosque/Islamic school. Most mosques in Islamic nations have no use for a nuptial ceremonies, even having the Islamic school in the compounds of a Masjid is unheard of in most major Islamic countries. In most basic Islamic traditions it is required for Muslims to practice their faith by any means, but when living in a society that is not your home, one would have to adapt to that country's norms and values. For example, in my field notes when the Sheik ordered the young man to make the call of prayer (*Athan*), it was done indoors of the mosque. Inversely, in most Islamic countries the *Athan* is heard within every household of town, village and city square through speakers attached to the minarets, or towers, of mosques. However, here in the United States, the call of prayer is heard within the compounds of the mosque. The importance of the call of prayer is to bring the congregation together according to the Islamic doctrine. In that sense, how can you bring the *Ummah* together into the masjid, if the call of prayer is heard exclusively within the walls of the masjid?

For every Muslim in America, the Friday prayer is obligatory to perform, if capable; it is the prayer that brings the local Muslim communities together. It is an opportunity for men, women, children and families to build strong bonds for one another. In various Islamic countries the mosque space is used for worshiping and, sadly, enough it is only a space for men. In contrast, in Masjids in America it is very common to see an

exclusive women's space in the mosque space during the Friday prayers. Similarly, Masjid Al-Haq possesses a space for the men and a separate space for the women, as the goal is to build a community to worship, learn, and build relationships

The Obligation of Marriage

While I was at the Somali Islamic School, Sheik Ahmed ordered me to go with him to the Masjid Al-Haq in south Seattle. Most of the congregants of this mosque are completely Somali people who are worshipping in the mosque space. The Sheik gathered some of his young favorite Qur'an students to have an important talk with them. The young Somali men ranged in between the ages of sixteen to twenty years old. The Sheik himself told me to sit alongside with the youth, as recounted in the following passage of my field notes:

That's when Sheik Ahmed approached me and told me that they he had three young men he wanted to introduce me to who were his best Qur'an students. The three young Somali men were in their late teens, and I personally knew their older brothers from back in the day. They were living nearby housing projects in Othello Street, down from the Rainier Valley. The Sheik sat down in a big brown chair and ordered us to be seated around him on the mosque floor. As the sheik was introducing me to the youth I could hear the Sound Transit Light Rail with its train bells ringing in the background driving past the mosque on Martin Luther King Street. While looking outside of the mosque window I noticed a group of Samoan and Somali teenagers who were popping off firecrackers across street in the Othello Light Rail station. The Sheik proceeded to tell the youth that I was doing my research on young Somali men living in south Seattle.

Sheik Ahmed: Hey guys Saeed wants to study you guys.

Mohamed: What's up Saeed

Ahmed: Sheeet! That's the truth. Hey Saeed if you trying to know about my life, I am trying to hoop and make it NBA bro! Can you cover that for me.

Khaleef: Me too bro I just want to hoop bro.

(in response to Ahmed) You're weak bro you can't hoop (Laughs really loud at Ahmed's face)

Ahmed: What do you mean bro you weak! (Raising his tone of voice)

ME: That's good bro you guys are dream chasers get it by any means.

Ahmed: I am trying to be better than LeBron James my guy!

ME: That's dope!

Sheik Ahmed: Guys you need to get married first, including you Saeed.
(All of the youth started to laugh)

Sheik Ahmed: Tell me who in here amongst you guys who are ready to get married to a Somali woman.

Ahmed: Sheik honestly her name is “Spalding” and her wedding ring is the NBA championship.

Sheik Ahmed: C’mon are you Serious! (Laughing really loud like a happy grandfather)

Mohamed: I am going to marry whomever but personally Somali girls are not the top pick.

Khaleef: Sheik Yusuf I am going to marry a white girl straight up.(smiling at the Sheik)

Sheik Ahmed: Waraya! Oh goodness gracious you guys are not serious (shaking his head in disbelief and laughing at the same time)

Khaleef: Saeed what about you bro

ME: Personally, I am going to marry whoever has good heart man. Truthfully, I don’t know bro and I think its cool, if you don’t know!

Khaleef: Fair enough. Say no more brother Saeed.

Sheik Ahmed: But guys she has to be Muslim but I prefer you guys marry an African woman.

Mohamed: I guess so uncle Ahmed. But marriage is too big for me though (looking down on the floor avoiding eye contact from Sheik Ahmed)

As indicated in Sheik Ahmed’s admonitions, a young man in his view must become married to be a good Muslim. I have frankly been puzzled by this, since this is not explicitly stated in the Holy Qur’an. Why has the idea developed in Somalia in exile, that a young man must be married to be a pious Muslim? The explanation I suggested rests in the changing social organization of the Somali community, as the clan structure has slowly disintegrated.

The famous *hadith*, attributed to the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him, “When a man marries he has fulfilled half of the *deen* (religion in Arabic); so let him fear Allah regarding the remaining half “ (Riaz 2003). The premise of the quote is to protect yourself against promiscuity and by being married you are forced to lower your gaze, this is the thinking from a religious standpoint. Every time I was in the Masjid I would constantly hear the elders telling me that I should get married. Of course, I would always

respectfully reply to the elders that I will, but that I am waiting until I am finished with school. Weddings and marriages are great hallmarks in the classical Somali culture; in fact they have become enormously significant within Somalis living in America. As stated in the above paragraph the Hadith that Prophet Muhammad attributed to marriage carries a strong signifier in motivating the Somali youths if not all Muslims across the United States to be married. This particular hadith is not only repeatedly cited in the mosque setting but it also retains a strong presence in various Islamic chat forums and Islamic blogs on marriages. Actually this hadith was never even mentioned as one of the five pillars of Islam, but yet it dictates the motives of both elders and youths alike in building pressure upon young people to fulfill marriage obligations. For example, Islamic blogs such as “Sisters Seeking Ilm,” which helps young or older Muslim women seek Islamic advice on various issues on Islamic womanhood. While researching further in the Islamic blog the first issue I stumbled upon was on blog post called, “Is Marriage half your Deen?” The post answered the posed titled blog by explaining some of the challenges in which marriage is seen as a way to fulfill one’s half-life to Allah and the other half serving their family (<http://imanbendjedidi.blogspot.com/2010/03/is-marriage-half-of-ones-deen.html>).

Linda Stone notes, “the use of marriage as a mechanism for alliance between groups may have been a brilliant human invention but arranging a marriage between groups is no easy task” (2006:203). This insight applies to the Somalis and the marriage systems. There is an interesting phenomenon occurring in the construction of a Muslim adult. In a largely secularized and non-religious society in which all of religious of life is compartmentalized, the focus of a righteous Muslim begins to shrink. For both Imams

and Sheiks this becomes their ultimate responsibility as both students of Islam and a duty for Islam to create the next generation of Muslims. Of course with the support from elders who have a substantive power within clan politics the Somali word for a religious spiritual leader is “*Waddad*,” and the clan elders hold that responsibility towards the Waddads to not only push the young men to get married but to also increase their patriline.

Once an individual is married then the second half of your spiritual responsibility would be to commit yourself to Allah in the public sphere. However, sometimes marriage is not enough of a substitute for solving problems that young Somali men face. You can clearly see the establishment of the social norms that are set by the elders or the local Imams. The very fact that my young Somali American friend avoided eye contact with the Waddad, a sign of respect in the Somali culture, tells me that Imams/Sheiks establish the norms in the mosque. Hence, when the Sheik reiterated his concern that the young men, including myself, should aspire to get married to a Somali woman, all of the young men looked down and closed out all joking matters as we responded to his questions.

Consider the following the story about my experience going to my friend Wavy Abdul’s wedding.

At approximately three o’clock pm I rode with Sheik Ahmed and his friend in his yellow taxi cab. Both men were dressed in their Khamis and had their Kufis on their heads. We parked in the Jumbo Hall Community center parking lot and as soon I got out of the car I saw many young Somali men standing outside of the center dressed in their Khamis.

As soon as I entered in the main hall area I saw some of my old friends who live in the projects. One of the young men waved at me and told me sit in the same table with them. There were about fifty large circular tables, which consisted of eight chairs per table. The whole hall was covered with beautiful decorated green and white drapes, which were hanging down from sidewalls of the hall. In addition, the tablecloths placed on the large circular tables had the same matching colors of the green and white drapes. There was also a large stage

with eight chairs, which was seated by the elders. On one right side of the chair the father of the groom was sitting next to his clan elders and the other left side of the chairs the bride's father was sitting alongside with his clan elder members. In front of the stage the young Somali men let other elders sit in front of the stage in other tables and the young men sat in the back, including me.

At around three thirty pm, one of the bride's representatives from her clan got up from his chair and spoke to the microphone. He introduced himself and welcomed everyone for coming at the wedding ceremony. He introduced a young Somali man named Jamal, who was under the apprenticeship of both Sheik Ali and Sheik Ahmed from Masjid Al-Haq. Jamal got up and walked to the podium and recited Surah Al-Fatah (the opening). He read it so beautifully that all of the people in the hall were praising him for reading it so wonderfully.. After Jamal was finished reciting the Qur'an Sheik Ali got up on the stage and ordered Wavy Abdul to bring his family clan terms in exchange of his bride to be.

Sheik Ali: (In Somali) Today is an important day for this young man and he shall be getting married. Marriage in Islam is very important for us and that it unifies our soul and that a Muslim man is never seen as whole Muslim in the eyes of Allah instead he is completing half of his Deen! (religion in Arabic). Unless he is married then he becomes a whole Muslim. Young man today you are getting married to Ayan what are your terms of bride wealth. (passes the microphone to Wavy Abdul)

Wavy Abdul: Hajj. I will take her for hajj as part of the dowry. (in a nervous tone of voice)

Sheik Ali: (looks at the father of the bride and his clan elders as he grabbed the microphone from Wavy Abdul) this is the offer that young man has made in exchange for you daughter. It is a very good offer and it's an offer only a true good Muslim should make. Do you accept the terms?

Father of the bride clan elder representative: Yes we do. It's a very good offer.

Sheik Ali: Barakuallahu Feek ya jama! (may the blessings of Allah be upon you) Salam Alakum wara mutallahai wa barkuti (Good day and may Allah bring you peace and blessings upon you all brothers).

As soon as the Sheik Ali finished his words he stated "Takbeer" three times. Immediately followed by everyone in the hall shouting out loudly in a synchronized fashion "ALLAHUAKABAR (god is great)".

Sheik Ali: Takbeer (in god's name)

All members in the wedding: ALLAHUAKABAR!

Sheik Ali: Takbeer

All members in the wedding: ALLAHUAKABAR!

Sheik Ali: Takbeer

All members in the wedding: ALLAHUAKABAR!

All of a sudden a family member from the bride's side of the family runs in front of the hall and goes to the door closer to our table. In there I can hear chatter of women behind the door as the young man was telling his family and his sister that the groom's family had accepted the terms of the bride wealth. After one minute later I heard the women screaming in a high-pitched ululations performed usually in wedding ceremonies. The ululations were about four to five minutes in a synchronized manner. Upon hearing the Ululations the young Somali man at the door immediately started to cover his ears as he placed himself between the women and the door entrance. I also noticed some of the older Somali men who were also covering their ears.

We can see in this modern wedding ceremony some continuations of traditional Somali culture. Marriage is still a vital to social reproduction. But the emphasis in America now is not on the wedding as a stepping-stone to the future of the clan or lineage, but rather on the wedding as creating a proper and pious Muslim couple. The new husband is celebrated from promising to take his new wife on the Haj to Mecca, in spite of the great expense involved. In time it is hoped, this couple will become a family with children, residing within a safe, moral, and Muslim household. This model of the family is actually an Americanized idea, consistent with the two generational ideal of the American nuclear family. Ironically and without most people consciously realizing it, Somali marriage has turned partly into a ritual of Americanization. The Muslim wedding has become the most important tool, in the eyes of the elder, for creating a Muslim adult male.

CHAPTER VI CONCLUSION

FROM CLANSHIP TO BROTHERHOOD

Classic social anthropological studies of Somalia emphasize the centrality of the patrilineal clan in the production of masculinity and the overall organization of society (Lewis 1980:10). What has happened to the clan in Somali America? What is the primary focus of junior male solidarity in South Seattle in the early 21st century?

It seems we have a gap or break in young Somali men's memory and knowledge about the clan system. The elders who were traumatized by the civil war don't necessarily talk about the chaos of the 1990s. Thus, deep-seated wounds were never healed. As a result young Somali men have developed new forms of social connection different from the ways of the clan system. Young Somali men are referring to each other through phrases like "bro," "my nigga," "cuddy," and "day ones." Thus, they strengthen tight bonds of fictive kinship, which hold more weight in their old clan system. For instance when a young man gets criticized by members of his father's lineage, the young man usually turns to his fictive kinship brothers or his "day ones," who will provide him emotional and at times financial support. In each chapter of this thesis we have seen that this new post-clan Somali-American way of fictive, which has positive and negative features.

Chapter II, Women and the Work of Caring, emphasizes that the Somali community center is a resource center for all Somalis living in Seattle. The community center prohibits any explicit signs of clan allegiance: no clan symbols are found

anywhere within it. The original role of women in the kinship and descent system has been altered. In the old system the woman left the clan of her father at marriage and entered the clan of her husband. Her prime responsibility was to raise proud sons and grandsons who were ready to defend their clan or lineage. But in America the mother's responsibility has doubled. She not only provides the work of caring for her sons but also she works twice as hard dealing with America's structural oppression such as racism, classism, Islamophobia, police brutality, limited economic prospects, and high unemployment rates ever-present in her fate. In other words, the mother tries to create a "safe space" for her sons. That is why it is important for Mama Africa to create a clan-free space for the community, where a clan-free space exists and where young people and old people can come together and celebrate. Mama Africa in particular does a phenomenal job in instilling pride and strength for young people, encouraging them to be successful in this country. To this day, Mama Africa still pushes me and other young people to be successful and to give back to the community.

Chapter III, On and Off the Field: Liberation and Constraint in Sports, we saw how young Somali men have established a range of spaces of sovereignty where they can attain a degree of liberation from the larger conditions that oppress them. On the field of sports, young Somali men dream of making it into American society. They can experience the thrilling flow of competition and harmony with teammates, outside of the dominant, racist gaze of white America. The young men play with one another for some bragging rights. Others play in hopes of getting noticed by European football clubs. The field of sport remains a great space of liberation and empowerment. As young men establish fictive brotherhood, soccer cuts across the old lines of the clan system and

allows all Somali ethnic and descent groups to come together, observing the beautiful game. Foucault's six principles of heterotopia, which help us understand the liberating hybrid space of the Somali Soccer tournament.

Chapter IV, "Beyond the Eyes of the Dominant: Unfixing the Gaze on the Seattle Street," explored the social dramas of life on the street. The absence of the old clan structure mixed with the oppressive structures of the dominant US society, leads young Somali men to band together and together in crews of different background in order to look out for one another on the street. In this chapter clan membership is really not that important on the street but surprisingly, the old clan values are being displayed such as the loyalties to one another and the warrior mentality. In this context, young men, in order to survive, must become skilled at negotiating social dramas on the street. Many become masterful at what Victor Turner called "redressive mechanisms" for avoiding open violence. When the chips are down, young Somalis must use humor, quick thinking, distractions, and straightforward speaking to calm things down and get them and their crew to a safe space. Although they cannot heal the sickness of American racism, Islamophobia and police violence, they can create their own space of independence from the dominant gaze and structural oppression.

Chapter V, Half Your Deen: The Centrality of Marriage in Somali American Islam, demonstrated that the function of marriage has altered. In pre-civil war Somalia, marriage existed to reproduce the patrilineal clan. Conversely, in America, marriage is not about the clan, but about reproducing the nuclear Muslim family. By taking his new bride to Hajj as a form of bride wealth, the young man reproduces new models for Muslim piety in America. Marriages are important, but cannot solve all the challenges

young Somali men face. Young men now face job scarcity, racism and anti-Islamic prejudice. On the very weekend I was concluding this thesis, our community lost another young Somali, just nineteen years old, to gun violence. I mourn him and all the young men we have lost. Being a pious, married member of the Mosque does not itself safeguard one from these many dangers. The road remains hard. Having said that, I have seen that my people are not a defeated people, and remain proud, resilient people in the face of social adversity and structural oppression.

I thus close my story with a tale of accomplishment. The next segment of this thesis looks at the ritual of a young Somali man who is being sworn in as the first Somali police officer in the city of Seattle.

CHAPTER VII

EPILOGUE:

AIR AFRICA'S POLICE GRADUATION

After I prayed *Jummah* (Friday prayer in Arabic) in Masjid Al-Haq, I borrowed my younger brother's car and was headed to the city of Burien WA, which was 30 minutes away from South Seattle, at the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission building. While driving to my destination I could not help but laugh at the idea that my good friend I grew up with in the same housing project was becoming a Seattle Police Officer. As I arrived in the parking lot, I noticed there were a lot of police vehicles present in the whole parking area. When I entered in the justice center there were police officers who were graduating from the academy.

The Somalis who came in support for Air Africa's graduation filled one side of the auditorium seating section. There were many young kids waving the Somali flag and I saw Mama Africa and she looked really happy and gave me big hug and stated, "This is big a step for our community I am so happy to see this I can't believe. I used to tutor this man when he was little boy." Sue Rahr, Director of Washington State Criminal Justice Training Center gave the opening address and was followed by her colleague, who later thanked all the police chiefs who were present in the audience. Sue Rahr came back to the podium and stated, "In this center we want our new officers to show empathy and be less military. In this case we are going to perform a new ritual, in which the family members who are present with us today get to pin the badge their sons and daughters." As soon as they called Air Africa's name an elderly Somali woman accompanied by a young Somali woman (his mother and his younger sister) walked down towards the stage

and pinned Officer Air Africa. He then gave his mother and his sister both hugs and turned his body in a military style as he walked towards the Seattle Police Chief O'Toole while saluting her. He then turned his body again in a military fashion and walked up the stage and stood firmly in line with fellow police officers. After the graduation was completed I decided to take pictures with my longtime friend and congratulate him at the same time for his hard work and dedication.

Air Africa: Saeed, big homie how you doing?

ME: Am good officer I know my rights now so don't arrest me (we both started to laugh)

Air Africa: I see you still got a sense of humor. Which is good, you need that.

ME: Air Africa! How does it feel now to be a complete Square?
(Pretending to be like a reporter as I am holding my pen as a form of a microphone)

Air Africa: Haha! Stop it man you're too much. Hey, when you done with school. I want to start playing ball with you like the old days when we were little boys. How you feel about that.

ME: That's coo wit me bro. Don't talk about it, lets make it happen.

Air Africa: lets make something happen then.

Mama Africa approached both of us and decided to take our picture. With a warm smile, she called out, "One, Two, Three. Say, "Future!"

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