Performing Bantu: Narrative Constructions of Identity in Diaspora

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ABSTRACT

This research asks the question of how three young adults construct identity while living in diaspora. The subjects came to the United States as a part of the Somali Bantu resettlement in 2004. The study begins with a trajectory analysis of the people now known as Somali Bantu, beginning with their forced migration to Somalia and the various factors shaping their status in the country. The analysis continues through the period of displacement in the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps of Kenya and includes an examination of how bureaucratic labeling as refugees, and the public rhetoric of mainstream media further shaped the story of the Somali Bantu. Each of these moments through the refugee trajectory are foundational to the self-representations emerging in diaspora. Using autoethnographic and portraiture methodologies, the author analyzes the subjects' discursive practices associated with cultural sustainability, as well as deployment of social media in rejecting and resisting social and cultural influences that threaten the integrity of Somali Bantu identity in the United States. The dissertation also situates the subjects within the broader Somali Bantu diaspora in the United States and Europe as they create home through a Somali Bantu aesthetic, form mutual assistance associations, construct mediascapes for global information flow, and build a transnational movement that aims to end the suffering of Wagosha people in Somalia. Overall, the research demonstrates the discursivity of identity, showing how a particular group reconstitutes itself through engagements with multiple and often disparate cultures, traditions, languages, and histories.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This research asks the question of how three young adults construct identity while living in diaspora. The subjects of the research came to the United States as a part of the Somali Bantu resettlement in 2004. The research begins with an historical overview of the people now known as Somali Bantu that includes their forced migration to Somalia and their status as second class citizens in the country through their flight to Kenyan refugee camps in the 1990's and eventual resettlement to the United States as people of humanitarian concern. The author analyzes the subjects' cultural practices and their use of social media to understand how they are creating Somali Bantu identity while living in the United States. The author also analyzes the broader Somali Bantu diaspora to understand how they are creating home, forming community, communicating across distances, and connecting to the emerging Wagosha movement in Somalia. Overall, the research shows how group identity is influenced by engagements with multiple and often disparate cultures, traditions, languages, and histories.

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Dedicated to Khadija

Table of Contents

Preface

This dissertation is a project about identity, or, perhaps more accurately, identities. The subjects of the research are a Somali Bantu family who came to the United States on refugee status. I met the family a day or two after they arrived in country and maintained communications with them since then. The impact of building and sustaining a relationship with this particular group of people has been a powerful one for me. Moreover, it is through this relationship that I came to do research and in-depth study on forced migration, diaspora, and the refugee.

I suppose I could say that this dissertation is, on one level, a project about my own identities. Specifically, the decisions surrounding my research question and my approach to the chosen methodology—in addition to my relationship with the research subjects—tie to my sense of self and purpose.

In other places, I have written about one of my early memories, a formative one, where I am sitting at my Nonna's kitchen table watching as she says her daily prayers. She was an immigrant who came to the United States as a little girl. According to family lore, she leaned over the rail of the ship to watch the waves below and nearly toppled into the ocean. She kept a stack of prayer cards, many obtained from funerals, as well as rosary that she recited daily during a break from her chores. She also donated to the Maryknoll missions and in exchange received their monthly magazine—a pocket-sized bulletin with photographs and missioner tales from places like Tanzania, Guatemala, and Cambodia. Often, the magazine covers showed children, and these were my favorites. I was curious about their lives, and I was grateful that their lives were not mine. Later, as a second grade student at Catholic elementary school, we collected

coins for overseas missions. When the collection total was high enough, Sr. Mary held a vote on

a Christian name for the pagan baby our coins "adopted." Of course, there was no actual baby on

the other end of our donations. Rather, it was the idea of a third-world baby saved by first-world

charity that was produced through this innocent activity.

Thus, my foray into research on forced migration, diaspora, and the refugee begins at this

ground floor of charity. Charity was my apparatus for performing the human: doing good, caring

for others, abandoning the self through altruism.

Except, we never wholly abandon the self.

Performing the human was a conscious act that brought its own rewards: esteem, self-

worth, admiration by others. Sometimes the rewards of doing good was an actual award—a prize

for outstanding service or a photograph in the local newspaper. More often, the reward was the

feeling that God blessed me to do something important. I was naïve and unguarded, as well as

pretty--although I did not think of myself as physically attractive back then—and my openness

often brought attention from vulnerable people who attached themselves to me. I felt singled out

by their attentions (and sometimes burdened), which confirmed my sense of purpose: to serve.

The more I performed the human, the more it reinforced my identity as a good person.

Indeed—not only a good person, but also a better person, as in better than other people,

especially those who chose not to serve and pursued lucrative paths in life. This dimension of

my self-identity followed me from my Catholic girlhood all the way into my adult life and long

after I had left Catholicism behind. I was a professional working in higher education with two

children and more than 15 years of work experience when the opportunity to work with Somali

Bantu refugees presented itself.

My youthful feelings of blessedness had long diminished. While I remained a person who was optimistic and hopeful, I often felt sad and angry, and unable to express either. I continued to serve now as a mother, wife and administrator, creating experiences for other people: my family, students, without tending to that young girl who felt loved by doing good.

And perhaps it is this last point that made my interactions with the Somali Bantu—more precisely the Muse family—so compelling. When I was with them, I felt loved. I do not mean this in a sentimental way. I use the word "love" in a moral sense, and by morality, I refer to the fullness of being. There was the chance to serve, yes, but there was also the chance to extend hospitality, to expand our community to include people who had survived a difficult journey. I admit that my initial response included a voyeuristic curiosity, but this curiosity gave way to relationship—with the family as well as with the other volunteers who helped the Somali Bantu make a home in Blacksburg.

As I grew increasingly involved with the lives of the Muse family and the other Somali Bantu living in Blacksburg, I became interested in learning their story as a people. I read whatever I could find on the Somali Bantu—and at that time, not much was written. I also read more about refugees and resettlement in general. When the Blacksburg Somali Bantu left for Milwaukee and Columbus, I redirected my enthusiasm toward developing a service-learning program based in apartment complexes in Roanoke where large numbers of Somali Bantu and other East African refugees lived. I wrote grants and raised funds to hire an on-site coordinator, organized vehicles to transport students to Roanoke, purchased programming materials, linked the project to academic courses in order to recruit student volunteers, and, whenever possible, sought new connections between the refugee community and the university, such as urban farming at the Catawba Sustainability Center. For several years, the refugee project was the

centerpiece of my work. We set up citizenship education classes, assisted in the formation of the Roanoke Somali Bantu Association, organized a summer program for children with exchange students from Tec de Monterrey, supported a refugee soccer team, and brought Dan Van Lehman and Omar Emo in as keynote speakers for a service-learning conference. The project received a Governor's Award for university service, and was frequently the feature of university news stories about student engagement.

Despite its newsworthiness, the university did not contribute financially to the refugee project. Eventually, the grant money ran out. I remember the day when I received the call that a particular foundation decided not to fund our project. It was the last of several promising funding options to foreclose. I wept in my office. I had no idea how we would sustain the project into the second half of the year.

I restructured the project for efficiency and it continued for three more years. However, I had other challenges to face at this time. Among them was my own status in the university. The university investment in and branding around student engagement benefited from my 18 years of service as the first Director of Service-Learning, but my credentials were insufficient for a higher leadership role. In the end, my professional service did not reap a reward. Instead, I witnessed my own erasure as men were appointed to positions above mine, earning 30% more in salary.

My decision to pursue the academic study of forced migration, diaspora, and the refugee was thus a pragmatic one. If I wanted to progress in my career in higher education, I needed to acquire a Ph.D. My efforts with refugee resettlement presented me with a content area for which I had a deep intellectual interest. My initial scholarly inquiries emerged from my service work— my first paper was about constructing participatory evaluation processes for marginalized learning communities. However, doctoral work provided a forum to examine refugeity from a

different lens than that of the volunteer or service provider. It gave me theoretical tools and language to think critically about my own role in relationship to the refugee as both an abstract and as actual communities that interacted with my own. I began to reflect on my efforts as both a volunteer and program coordinator: How were we—as white emissaries of the West—experienced by the families? Did we burden them with our cultural brokering, imposing on them expectations of how they were supposed to live, eat, dress, and *be*? Were our gestures of helpfulness merely perpetuating unequal relations?

Around this time—as I was concluding my work in service-learning and taking academic course work—the Muse family returned to my life. Nur and Miriam were now teenagers (and Isha a more assured young woman in her twenties) with Facebook accounts that enabled us to communicate with greater ease and frequency. Through the social media platform, I observed as they expressed, tested, confirmed, and performed the layers of their identities—as gendered, Black, Muslim, Bantu, African, and diasporic. This fascinating process of observation and participation, since I could join in this imaginative play when I wished to do so, clarified how I wanted to engage as a researcher with the topics of forced migration, diaspora, and the refugee.

I cannot be dispassionate as a scholar, at least on these topics. I have a lived connection based in my initial relationship as resettlement volunteer, and what being a volunteer signified in my personal identity, and how my ideas of service are expressed, tested, confirmed, and rejected over time. Thus, when I write about narrative constructions of identity, I theorize about Somali Bantu performativity from the position of own performative trajectory that, in 2004, intersected with that of the Muse family. I suppose that it is on the point of discursivity that this dissertation makes its most important contribution. We are in continual circulation and collision, and through it continually reconstitute ideas of who we are, what we believe, and where we belong.

Chapter One
Introduction

This research examines how three young adults who came to the United States as a part

of the Somali Bantu refugee resettlement construct identity while living in diaspora. The young

adults at the center of this project—Nur, Mariam, and Isha—are members of the Muse family[1],

who arrived in the United States in 2004 as a part of a mass resettlement of Somali Bantu. I

interacted closely with the Muse family during their first year in the country, until they relocated

to a larger city. In the subsequent years, I maintained loose contact through occasional phone

calls or letters. In the spring 2011, I received a friend request on Facebook:

> *hey michele add me as a friend plzz is me mariam but dont tell nur i have a fb ok love add*
>
> *me plzzz.*

Mariam, a child when she arrived in the country, had become a teenager. She used an

invented name (*HalimatoohardtoforgiveMary*) and photos of Janet Jackson for her Facebook

picture. She was deliberately concealing her identity in the social network, yet also constructing

a self that could roam freely through the deterritorialized space of the Internet. After accepting

Mariam's friend request, I observed that other young Somali Bantu females were adopting

similar strategies of invented names and biographies and celebrity profile pictures. They were

engaging with one another and even with the young men from whom they concealed themselves

through these imaginative, constructed selves. Were these social media profiles expressions of

resistance to the gendered restrictions of their cultural landscape? Were these simply forms of

amusement that reflected the larger processes of individual and collective identity development?

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[1] The family chose to use their given names rather than a pseudonym.

How does it matter that these young people were simultaneously consuming and constructing socially-mediated culture through transnational identities that situated them as both American teenagers and the children of African refugees?

The purpose of my research is to address questions like these that probe the formation of transnational identities prompted by forced migration and third country resettlement. I am interested in how individuals such as Mariam negotiate the tensions of carrying forward traditions and norms that define group membership while simultaneously engaging with the opportunities, materialities, and expectations of their new locale. The availability of social media as a tool in these cultural negotiations adds a layer of complexity worth probing in depth. Social media is a creative and productive space that situates the rising generation beyond the influence of cultural norms and restrictions imposed by community elders. Yet, it is also a space where those very cultural norms marking Somali Bantu identity are tested, performed, confirmed, and reconstituted. Appadurai writes that "electronic media and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of the imagination. Together, they create specific irregularities because both viewers and images are in simultaneous circulation." (Appadurai1996, 4) Thus, as my research will show, social media serves Somali Bantu youth as a container for shared memories, a catalyst for imaginative play, and a site for establishing social and political positionality.

While the younger Somali Bantu are constructing identity in diaspora, their elders are engaged in their own negotiations: specifically, of how memories of displacement, and the narration of these memories drive an imagined, collective future. At a meeting of the Somali Bantu Association of Roanoke in 2010, younger men interpreted the stories of the elders from

Maay Maay and Zigula to English. Sixty-five year old Mohamed somberly described the cruelty

the Bantu faced as subsistence farmers in a society where they had no representation and no

protection under the law. He wept as he rolled up the sleeve of his jacket to show a burn

inflicted by Somalis looting his farmland. Another, Osman, frail and nearly blind, said that when

civil war drove them from Somalia "the egg broke"—nothing would ever be the same. In his

mind he was no longer a slave, even though the future that lay ahead was precarious. The elders

remarked that their time had passed—everything now would be for their children. The children

of the Somali Bantu would acquire the education and freedom withheld from them as they faced

marginalization, discrimination, and violence in Somalia. The young people in the room listen

quietly, absorbing both the Maay Maay and Zigula versions, and the English interpretation. As

the elders pass along their narrative to the youth through oral testimony and ceremonial practice,

they entrust to the diaspora generation a history that awaits fulfillment in a new geopolitical

place.

Intersecting Narratives

The narrative constructions of identity in diaspora are very particular to a group's shared

story of displacement. For the purposes of this research, I am interested in the story of the people

now known as the Somali Bantu. In 2000 the United States Department of State agreed to accept

12,000 Somali Bantu refugees for resettlement in the United States. According to a 2003 fact

sheet prepared by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, the Somali Bantu refugees

under consideration for admission had languished in refugee camps along the Somali-Kenyan

border for up to ten years. They had been a persecuted minority in Somalia, lacking the usual

rights and protections afforded Somali citizens. Returning to Somalia was not an option, nor was

it feasible for them to be integrated into Kenya or their ancestral homelands of Tanzania and

Mozambique from where they had been captured by Arab slave traders in the 19th century. The Department of State contracted with ten voluntary agencies to handle the reception and placement of the Somali Bantu in fifty cities and towns across the country.

Roanoke, Virginia, was one of the resettlement cities targeted to receive Somali Bantu families, with the first group arriving in 2003. At the time, I was working at a university in Southwest Virginia directing community-learning programs for undergraduates. The influx of Somali Bantu refugees in the United States would require local agencies to draw upon volunteers who would assist the newcomers with integration into their new society. For this reason, I was contacted to be a part of the local volunteer team preparing for their arrival.

Initially, I joined the resettlement team as a liaison to the university who would identify community service opportunities for college students to work with the families. My involvement deepened soon after I learned more about the Somali Bantu. An email circulated to the resettlement team indicated that the Somali Bantu were mostly illiterate since they were denied education, and because of their marginalized status were unfamiliar with the standard conveniences of Western society, such as telephones and toilets. They were, according to a *New York Times* article by R. Swarns "the most oppressed people on the plane." (March 10, 2003)

Illiteracy. Social marginalization. The absence of plumbing. These words stood out to me in high relief, triggering a new level of interest in an otherwise standard project request. At the time, I did not pause to reflect critically on why this brief introduction to the Somali Bantu was so compelling to me. In retrospect, I attribute my heightened interest to several sources: the discourse of Catholic social thought that continued to frame my moral life even though I no longer affiliated with the Catholic Church; an exoticization of the primitive so aptly captured in the image of the toilet that fascinated me and, in this voyeuristic curiosity a longing to possess;

4

and the opportunity for self-valorization wrapped in the cloak of charity and cultural brokering. We create the selves we want to be through the relationships we choose. I was choosing to be a mentor to a Somali Bantu family.

Hence one critical framework informing this research is autoethnography. Autoethnography is defined as "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political." (Ellis 2004:xix) I situate this research in my relationship with the Muse family that began only two days after they arrived in the United States. My observations and analyses of their lives in diaspora is made through the lens of relationship—a relationship that began as a mentor who intervened as a force of acculturation, acting at the behest of the state who delegated the work of resettlement to voluntary associations inspired by a narrative of American goodwill. The relationship has since evolved, and been informed by what I learned from and about this family as they created home in the United States. As an autoethnographer, I continually interrogate my methods and intentions, in order to make visible my frames of reference and to discern how my position in this project shapes its outcomes. Furthermore, autoethnographic methods combined with archival research and portraiture methodology, to be discussed more fully in chapters two and three, provide insights into the overall questions addressed by this project about diasporic identity more broadly and Somali Bantu identity more specifically.

The Muse family arrived in September 2004: the mother, Khadija, and her three children, Nur, Mariam, and Muse who were ten, eight, and six years old respectively. Khadija's fifteen year older daughter Isha would arrive with her husband, Abdirahman, and their infant, Mohammed, several months later. I visited the garden apartment where they were placed accompanied by my children, Michael and Vincent, with a bucket of Roma tomatoes in hand.

5

Mariam was skipping across the stones of the sidewalk chanting, "Bantu America, Bantu America." Little Mariam, only eight years old, still wearing the emblematic UNHCR headscarf given to her to wear on the airplane ride from Nairobi to Philadelphia and then to Roanoke where a crowd of white volunteers met her family, a sign held aloft with the word "*Karibu!*"—Welcome in Swahili—the closest language to her native tongue of Maay that they could attempt—but not a language that she or her mother or brothers understood.

The golden scarf with the bold, blue letters—UNHCR—marked Mariam as a refugee, but also as a Muslim. Their language, accessible only through the Somali interpreters who were not wholly trusted by the adult Bantus, reinforced their position as foreigners. Yet her whimsical chant of "Bantu America" foretold an imagined future of belonging. Mariam was happy to be in America. She shook her head when asked if she missed Africa. For her, Africa was Kenya and the refugee camps marked by the presence of violence, hunger, deprivation, harsh climates.

The relationships between the Muse and other Blacksburg Somali Bantu families, and the legion of volunteers that came forward to help them was fraught with both affection and paternalism. Each family was assigned a "Super Mom"—a title we gave those individuals assuming primary responsibility for negotiating day-to-day life with the families: setting up households, enrolling the children in schools, making doctor appointments, figuring out transportation to English classes, communicating with teachers and landlords—a seemingly endless list of tasks. We also imposed a lot of work upon ourselves in our efforts to make the Somali Bantu into Americans: When a volunteer saw Sitey (a Somali Bantu from another family) shopping with her baby tied to her back, she purchased a second-hand baby backpack. Sitey wore the awkward contraption once to satisfy the donor, and then stowed it on the top shelf of her closet where it remained, unused. Similarly, Mariam's delight at a neighbor's American

Girl doll launched a deluge of correspondence of how to find an affordable facsimile with the appropriate skin tone.

After a year, all of the Somali Bantu families left Blacksburg, opting to move to Milwaukee where other family members resided and sizeable Somali Bantu and Muslim communities were in place. Years later, Nur and Isha would say that the volunteers "were like mother and father to us, but we need to do these things for ourselves." The sentiments expressed are of critical importance to this research project. The refugee trajectory continues not with assimilation into the new society, although adaptation to new social and cultural norms may occur, but with the construction of a transformed narrative identity whereby the newcomers "do for themselves," situated as a distinct group--a diaspora community—within the dominant culture.

Significance of Proposed Research

Through authoethnographic and portraiture methodologies, this research will complicate current thinking about Somali Bantu identity specifically and diasporic identity more generally by addressing current conversations in refugee and diaspora studies about identity construction, creating "home" spaces, and negotiating dominant discourses about what it means to *be* Somali Bantu.

The literature of refugee studies is replete with analyses of representation, and how the construction of the refugee identity is linked to political and social subjectivity. The case of the Somali Bantu offers an intriguing example of how a particular group figures in to a broader literature. Little was known about the Somali Bantu prior to their bid for resettlement, yet their presence in the United States and among the populations of people formally recognized as

refugees is notable. They have been compared to the Hmong of Southeast Asia who first came to the United States in the 1970's. Both have a history of marginalization and oppression that preceded a resettlement process made more difficult by language and cultural barriers. (Smith, 2011) The level of intervention required to facilitate the transition from refugee bare life (Agamben, 1995) to a late stage capitalist society was typically insufficient. Thus, the Somali Bantu—like the Hmong before them—were essentialized as the perennial clients, reliant upon the state for their subsistence and resistant to assimilation. Much of the research that has emerged about the Somali Bantu in the United States has studied the Somali Bantu as clients of social institutions. In these studies, the Somali Bantu are situated in the position of Otherness, outside of the mainstream of society, dependent upon state and private assistance to remediate their conditions. Nevertheless, this body of research has proven valuable in re-locating the dysfunctions of resettlement away from the Somali Bantu and onto the institutional systems that serve them. Yda Smith's qualitative study of 11 Somali Bantu adults and 11 refugee resettlement workers in Salt Lake City demonstrated the negative influence of neoliberal economic policies that standardized services for newcomers, assuming the feasibility of self-sufficiency within a short period, without considering the unique barriers faced by different populations.(2012) Other researchers investigated the deficit perspectives and resulting micro-aggressions by public school teachers toward Somali Bantu school children and their parents, (Roxas 2010, Roy Roxas 2011, Sekhon 2008) effectiveness in health care provision, particularly to women and the elderly, (Gurnah, et.al.2011, Upvall, et al. 2008, Shamalla-Hannah 2006, Deckys, Springer 2013) and the social and cultural benefits of agricultural initiatives in relation to economic goals. (Smith 2011) The studies generally addressed the deficit-perspective that educational and social service agencies brought to their encounters with the Somali Bantu, and called for service professionals

to approach their client groups with cultural sensitivity and heightened awareness of the circumstances from which they came.

Research emerging from the social service fields focus on service delivery and therefore give less attention to Somali Bantu as social actors with perspective and imagination. For this reason, the work of emerging scholars, Marwa Ghazali and Sandra Grady, offer methodological departures using ethnography to engage with Somali Bantu. Ghazali's work focuses on the residual effects of historical trauma in resettlement. She argues that Somali Bantu in the United States are situated in a "geography of suffering" whereby they and others whose socio-political status is uncertain silently accept living on the margins of society. Their lived and embodied experience of displacement, pathologized as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and the traumatic memories of bodily violence and loss are internalized as a dislike of their own skin color and hair texture. (2010, 2011) Ghazali's theorizing of displacement and suffering is reflective of those Somali Bantu who came to adulthood in Somalia and experienced the racialized discrimination of the Somali majority. Ghazali's research is an important contribution to the growing literature on historical trauma; however, her findings are not reflective of the broader Somali Bantu diaspora that includes the youth and young adults raised in the refugee camps. The youth and young adult generations were able to access schooling and learn some English and Swahili in the camps, thereby better positioning them to benefit from the new opportunities that resettlement provided. The seismic differences between the lived experiences of older Somali Bantu whose identities are deeply embedded in the Jubba Valley, and the younger who identify home in Africa as both Kenya and Somalia has produced tensions within the community. Dan Van Lehman, co-founder of the Somali Bantu Project at Portland State University observed from his interactions with diaspora communities across the United States that the Somali Bantu are like two distinct

9

communities, with the elders attempting to maintain the traditions and languages of their lives in the Jubba Valley and resisting the adaptations made by the youth in resettlement. (Personal conversation, 2011)

Sandra Grady provides greater insight into the lived experiences of younger Somali Bantu through her ethnography of Somali Bantu teenagers living in the American Midwest. Grady studied the coping mechanisms and cultural tools used by youth to navigate a new society beyond their disrupted childhoods. (2015) For Grady, the disruption of forced migration extends beyond displacement and geographic relocation to include the loss of rituals and traditions that have historically inscribed group membership. (91:2015) Grady explores how the teenagers construct identity in the absence of traditional rites of passage such as female circumcision, banned in the United States, and analyzes how the in-between period of adolescence has replaced the traditional rites of passage. Extended participation in school and extra-curriculars, culminating in graduation (itself a rite of passage), prepares the youth for adulthood in the United States.

But what happens during adolescence that makes it ripe for the development of diasporic consciousness? How do the Somali Bantu simultaneously sustain their cultural identity and create that identity in their new location as they acquire United States citizenship and bear children who are American citizens? How does community reconstitute itself as the younger generations, subject to the values of American institutions and the influences of media, assume greater authority and control over the collective narrative? How does the diaspora generation of Somali Bantu build upon the received narrative of their elders to construct transnational identities that cohere who they are, where they are from, and to what they aspire? On this point, my research is informed by internarrative identity theory, (Maan 2010) which shifts the meaning-

making process out of the linear, temporal story-telling mode in order to accommodate the disruptions and re-associations that mark the refugee trajectory.

Throughout my research, I consider how individuals act within the particular constraints of their social-political contexts. Narrative constructions of identity, whether they be through words or bodily acts, are expressions of subjectivation. My thinking here is informed by the work of postcolonial feminists Nita Kumar (1994), Saba Mahmood (2005), and Chandra Mohanty (2004) who examine the ways that women reinstate power to their lives in circumstances that may be simultaneously oppressive or delimiting. The postcolonial feminist lens is therefore critical in translating forms of narrative construction that occur beyond speech or text.

I elaborate on the key theories framing this research in the second chapter of the dissertation, Disrupting the Narrative: Theoretical Frameworks for Analyzing Identity in Diaspora. In addition to internarrative identity theory and postcolonial feminism, I discuss performativity in relation to refugee identity, the social production of historical memory, diasporic consciousness, and the deforming of the nation. Chapter two also provides an overview of the scholarly sources consulted throughout the research process, thereby demonstrating how this particular project builds upon work already completed in the areas of study, as well as how the existing literature has informed the questions that guide the project. The theoretical framework and literature review chapter is followed by a discussion and rationale for the methodologies guiding this research: standpoint theory, autoethnography, and portraiture, an arts-based research method that is similar to ethnography. This chapter, Presenting Performative Identities through Autoethnographic and Portraiture Methodologies, also outlines the methods I use to interact with the participants, collect data, analyze content, and document

observations and reflections. Chapter four, Interrogating Popular Narratives of the People Now Known as Somali Bantu, provides the historical context of the Somali Bantu people beginning with their displacement from homelands to Somalia and through to their quest for resettlement in the Kenyan refugee camps. This chapter examines how race, religion, and status factored in to their positionality at various points in the migratory trajectory. This chapter also analyzes the rhetorical context of the Somali Bantu people, focusing predominantly on their application for resettlement and perceptions / receptions by various publics. The chapter analyzes how various media outlets framed the Somali Bantu as they prepared for United States resettlement, and during their first years in their new country.

Chapters five through seven examine the concepts of cultural sustainability, resistance, and transformation through portraits of the subjects as individuals connected through familial bonds and as members of a diaspora community. Isha, Nur, and Mariam have eight half-brothers and sisters, both living and deceased, however they each share the same mother and father. (A younger brother, Muse, also shares the same mother and father. He figures less prominently in this study.)

Isha arrived in the country at the age of 15 with her husband and their infant son. They went on to have four more children in the United States. Because her husband's English proficiency was more advanced than most Somali Bantu, he quickly assumed leadership status within the Milwaukee Somali Bantu community. He became a sheik, earned a Bachelor's degree, gained citizenship, and acquired a remodeled three-bedroom home through Habitat for Humanity. Eventually, he took a second wife in a sharia marriage, maintaining households with this woman and Isha. This arrangement continued, unhappily for Isha, until she was able to convince a male family member to intervene as arbiter, enabling her to obtain a divorce from her

husband. She now has exclusive care of their five children and works full-time. At one time, she looked forward to the youngest of her five children starting school so that she could earn a GED and perhaps a college degree. However, the economic and time demands of raising a family as a single mother are making this goal prohibitive. She receives marriage proposals from men all over the world. To date, she refuses their gestures. She is open to new relationships but will only consider someone who is Muslim (regardless of race), unmarried, and prepared to include her children as a part of his family.

Nur is in his early twenties. He is the first in his family to graduate from high school, and attends classes at Milwaukee Technical College towards an occupational therapy degree. However, his true interest is history and film, and intends to one day pursue degrees in these areas. He and several of his friends formed Ban2island records, which produces original music, dance and comedy videos. They upload the videos to YouTube making them viewable by Somali Bantus across the United States, as well as in Somalia and Kenyan refugee camps. On Facebook and among friends, he uses the name Aw Ali, the name given by his parents a year after his birth in order to dispel the specter of a deceased older sibling, whose name was also Nur. He is deliberate in asserting a Bantu identity through cultural productions that serve not only to entertain, but also to shape a collective identity that transcends territorial boundaries. Aw Ali's Facebook posts valorize Blackness and advance Muslim values. He has entered a love marriage with a young woman, Iqra, who initially came to know him while watching his videos.

Mariam is twenty years old. She is married to a young man chosen for her by the family. She informed the man prior to their marriage that she planned to go to college, however those plans were delayed when she gave birth to a baby girl during her senior year of high school. She has since begun her first semester of college. Despite her progressive ideas, she is steeped in the

cultural and religious traditions of the Bantu. She deactivated her Facebook account in preparation for marriage, and then rejoined soon after marrying. However, her presence in the social media is veiled in piety, with representations of herself as the modest, loving wife and mother.

Chapter five, Constructing Identity through Cultural Sustainability and Social Reproduction, begins with a narration of the days leading up to Mariam's wedding. The portrait of the family preparing for a wedding demonstrates the practices of sustaining cultural identity in a foreign locale. Women as "bearers of the nation" (Yuval-Davis, 1997) have a central role in this process insofar as they are responsible for embodying the moral standards for being Somali Bantu. Whereas the men enforce the ideology of what is appropriate in terms of ritual, law, and behavior, the women reproduce the culture through food, dress, social interaction, performance of cultural practices, and transmission of these practices to their children. The wedding, then, is a critical site of cultural sustainability and social reproduction insofar as it marks and celebrates participation in a collective.

Chapter six, Rejecting and Resisting in the Construction of Diasporic Identity, explores public negations of social practices and behaviors expressed on Facebook by Isha, Mariam, and Nur. The negations addressed in the chapter are twofold. Rejecting commentary is directed inward and calls out behaviors such as gossiping, skin bleaching, and idleness that undermine the Somali Bantu community. Sometimes, the commentary disapproves the persistence of the behavior. Often, the commentary exhorts the show of ethnic pride and warns against squandering the opportunities available through resettlement.   Resisting commentary, however, is directed outward regarding social change and foreign policy within the United States that conflict with Somali Bantu religious beliefs. Specifically, vitriolic resistance to the passage of the Marriage

14

Equality act revealed a desire to separate the Somali Bantu community from an American society that had "too much acceptance."

Chapter seven, Transforming Community through Narrative Identity, explores new cultural productions that signal a Somali Bantu future. These transformations include both the public and private expressions of identity. Public expressions, such as those evident in the proliferation of Bantu-owned media broadcast on YouTube channels, and the emergence of the Wagosha movement in the United States, demonstrate a surge of confidence within the community to assert a cultural and political presence. Private expressions are evident as well. The home is the site for a Somali Bantu aesthetic wherein the realm of intimate relationships forms and transforms. Women are speaking with greater self-advocacy in terms of acquiring education, choosing partners, and parenting their children. While the younger generation is emboldened by their visions for the future, they nonetheless face many challenges directly related to the oppression Gosha people faced while in Somalia, as well as their forced displacement and protracted stay in refugee camps.

In the final chapter, I reflect on the meaning of home in diaspora for Somali Bantu in the present moment—specifically, an historical moment marked by the election of Donald Trump and the resurgence of white nationalism and xenophobia that targets Muslims in particular. Much of the Somali Bantu's tenure in the United States coincided with the eight years of the Obama administration. Even as the Somali Bantu rejected legislation granting rights and protections to LGBTQ citizens, they still accepted and benefited from the multicultural and progressive climate flourishing under Obama's leadership. I speak to the questions of how diasporic experiences contribute to a narrative of identity, and how this narrative of identity serves the Somali Bantu as they negotiate their future during a period of devolving personal security.

This dissertation advances the critical understanding and application of feminist research methodologies that are qualitative and dialogic. The manner by which I approach ethnographic fieldwork attempts to reverse the embedded colonial history whereby the researchers' translation of the "Other" effectively silences the language of the subject and establishes the researcher's interpretation as "the privileged referent." (Mann 2007:414) By using feminist, dialogic, and experimental methodologies, I seek to be rooted in a theoretical perspective that opens a creative space for the participants' narrative voice.

Relevance to ASPECT's Scholarly Mission

This dissertation is in partial fulfillment of requirements for the doctorate in Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought (ASPECT). My research is relevant to ASPECT's scholarly mission insofar as it theorizes the subject matter through the interdisciplinary lens of social and cultural theories. While preparing this proposal, I read broadly, drawing upon studies from anthropology, communications, history, geography, legal studies, and sociology. Additionally, I sought out cultural artifacts such as literature, music, film, blogs, newspaper articles, and social media that contributed to the discourses surrounding the Somali Bantu narratives, both mythico-historical and diasporic constructions, even though many of these artifacts fall outside the traditional canon of theory. Consistent with the ASPECT mission, this research offers a theoretical engagement with some of the most compelling issues of our times, namely: forced migration, mass displacement of populations, and the socio-cultural subjectivity of diasporic communities. This engagement also deploys innovative methodologies for conducting research and in the process calls forth new modes of knowledge construction.

Chapter Two

Disrupting the Narrative: Theoretical Frameworks for Analyzing Identity in Diaspora

This research begins ten years after the Muse family relocated from Blacksburg to Milwaukee. I focus my study on three young adults from a particular family who came to the United States as a part of the Somali Bantu refugee resettlement. My research questions ask how the young adults have constructed identity while living in diaspora. The sociologist Mary Waters writes that when arriving as a stranger in a new country, "the immigrant must decide how he or she self-identifies, and the people in the host society must decide how they will categorize or identify the immigrant." (2001:44) As Waters indicates, the process is a dynamic one, ever shifting, as peoples' lives intersect, demographics change, and individuals choose or reject symbols or behaviors to define themselves. The young adults in this study were, by American definition, children and adolescents when they arrived in this country. The challenge of self-identification that Waters references occurred within a social matrix whereby influences of culture and tradition coexisted and often competed with public education, television media, and interactions with American society—represented first through the bodies of white volunteers. Their secondary migration to Milwaukee signaled a conscious decision by their families to relocate to a space and place that permitted them to be Somali Bantu—however that may be realized.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the theoretical framework from which I address my research question of how narratives of identity are constructed in the Somali Bantu diaspora. Because this study focuses on a trajectory analysis of identity, several theoretical frames, in combination, inform this study, among them: postcolonial feminism and theories of identity, internarrative identity theory, performativity, and hybridity. As the Muse family has negotiated

17

space, American-ness, and resettlement, the performative aspects of their identities have

challenged dominant discourses of Somali Bantu. Therefore, the theory of performativity--"that

reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains"—

influences this study. (Butler, 1993, p. 2) Even as the Muse family and other Somali Bantu

integrate themselves into the society and culture of the United States, they likewise construct

identity narratives that distinguish them as a distinct group, apart from yet in conversation with

dominant society. Thus, this research addresses the broader question of what the particularities

of Somali Bantu hybridity are. My use of the term hybridity, influenced by Homi Bhabha (1994),

refers to a counter-narrative that emerges when formerly colonized people construct new ways of

being that are neither an imitation of their former colonizers, nor an essentialized version of their

prior selves. While it is not my intention to make claims about subjectivities emerging from the

Somali Bantu diaspora, I do engage in imaginative theoretical play about the multivalent

possibilities evident therein. This approach addresses broader disciplinary questions in refugee

and diaspora studies such as representations, oppositional narratives, cultural expressions and

productions, and identities beyond the nation-state.

Situating the Self

I begin my discussion of the theories informing this work by situating myself as a

feminist researcher. For me, to be a feminist researcher requires an intellectual commitment to

articulate my positionality in relation to the topic of inquiry so that I can make explicit any biases

that I may bring to the project. As a Western feminist raised during the Vatican II era and

educated in the United States during the second wave of feminism, I am deeply embedded in

mainstream liberal feminism, which over time has been enlarged by engagement with

intersectional theory. (Hill Collins, 2004) As I have interrogated the subtleties of my own

identities, I have managed the tensions of pursuing personal autonomy and desire with fulfilling the demands of ethnicity, social class, domesticity, and religion, including the valorization of Whiteness that was common among Italian-Americans during the mid-twentieth century. (Sciorra, 2003)

Catholicism figured prominently in shaping my worldview. In particular, the emergence of Latin American liberation theologies cultivated a preferential option for the poor and an awareness of structural violence. (Gutierrez 1973)   This awareness prompted a moral imperative to work for social justice, although it was not always clear to me how this work was enacted beyond the gestures of charity.   The systems that produced oppression seemed intractable, and my efforts and knowledge so puny. Thus, I was also impacted by philosopher and theologian, Sharon Welch, who proposed a feminist theology of liberation based in communicative ethics— we cannot be moral alone—that directly addressed the "cultured despair" of the white middle class who wanted to do good, but lacked the imagination or material urgency to intervene in the crises of our times. (2000) While I personally was informed by the theoretical structures of feminist liberation theology, I was also embedded in a lived experience that simultaneously benefitted from Whiteness, yet grappled with the competing interests of tradition, culture, and personal autonomy.

These powerful influences marked my worldview when I met the Somali Bantu for the first time. They were, in my view, the downtrodden, oppressed by the structural violence of racialized politics and colonization. I was positioned to respond to their plight from a moral ground of hospitality and care. My initial encounters with the Somali Bantu situated me as the First World emissary, and they as the Third World beneficiaries. However, over time, the constructs of our respective positions fell away to be replaced by more complex and mutual

relationships. This shift in relationship likewise marked a shift in my research interests. I

decided against writing a story of people who were victims, but instead to write about people

with resilience, vision, and community.   I foreground my discussion of the theoretical

framework on constructing narrative in diaspora in order to emphasize the necessity of turning to

postcolonial feminist thought. In doing so, I commit to a theoretical method that privileges the

voice and perspective of the subject, and recognizes the fully human dimensions of lived

experience.

Postcolonial Feminism

For the purposes of this research, I draw upon postcolonial critiques of Western feminism

in shaping how I analyze Somali Bantu aspirations throughout the forced migration trajectory.

This will be particularly important in regard to the younger female participants whose

performance of Bantu identity must be considered in relation to an American youth culture

where female bodies are routinely objectified and sexualized in the media.

Postcolonial and decolonizing feminist approaches to identity and narrative provide

critical insights into the lived experiences of refugees in general, and refugee women in

particular. I begin by outlining the major arguments that define postcolonial and decolonizing

feminisms, drawing principally from the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty. (2003, 2004) I

demonstrate how postcolonial feminism, emerging from the broader field of postcolonial theory

that interrogates the lingering effects of colonial and imperial rule, challenges the limits of

mainstream feminist theorizing emerging from the Western academy and proposes an alternative

methodology for responding to the recolonizing effects of 21st century globalization, and

religion\ideological fundamentalism.   Informed by the postcolonial feminist view, I then turn to

a discussion of identity through the refugee trajectory. Using a framework of intersectionality, I

investigate the particular ways that refugeeism impacts women and girls. I draw upon the work of Nira Yuval-Davis to demonstrate that women who are refugees continue to perform their role as "bearers of the collective" despite the upheaval of migration. (1997) I likewise draw upon the work of Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed who takes a dialogical approach in addressing the discourses surrounding identity and agency for women who are refugees. (2008)

Postcolonial feminism arose as a critique of mainstream feminist theorizing in developed countries, particularly the liberal and radical feminist streams of thought that emphasized women's rights and equality with men (liberal) and a global sisterhood of shared oppression (radical). Postcolonial feminism asserts that the idea of Woman as a singular category of analysis is reflective of a hegemonic discourse that posits White, Western experiences as the normative referent. This universalizing of women's lived experiences suppresses the subjectivity of women whose historical and material realities exist outside of a world system dominated by the West, thereby creating what Mohanty calls the "Third World difference." (2004:19) The Third World difference is built around the assumption of women as an "already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic, or racial location, or contradictions" and the uncritical deployment of frames of analysis that "prove" women's oppression as a group. (2004:21-22) Mohanty argues that as a result of this analytic framework:

> [The] average Third World woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her
> feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "Third World" (read:
> ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.).
> This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as
> educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the
> freedom to make their own decisions. (2004:22)

21

Mohanty's analysis of the Third World woman as a composite of stereotypes[2] is illustrative of the Orientalizing gaze. Orientalism is a system of representations whereby the idea of the East is reflected back against that of the West as inferior, alien, and exotic. According to Edward Said (1978), the formation of the Orient is a colonizing process premised upon exteriority; that what is known about the so-called Orient is governed by the interests of those producing the discourse in order to control and manage the "Other". Accordingly, the Orient cannot represent itself, and therefore requires a representative from the West for its articulation. Mohanty demonstrates the persistence of orientalism in the way that feminist theorists use empirical indicators of well-being to make far-reaching generalizations about the condition of women in developing countries, without sufficiently understanding the social, political, and cultural contexts in which they are based.

The universalism embedded in Western feminist methodology is problematic for Third World women. The analytical leap that imbricates cultural practices such as veiling with oppression, and interprets social reproduction and women's labor practices outside of their specific locales further delimits certain groups of women as always already oppressed, poor, victimized, subject to male violence and more. This historically reductive approach situates all Third World women as powerless regardless of the material and economic circumstances of their lives. (2004:23) Mohanty urges a shift of focus from an identity politic where gender is a superordinate category, toward a focus on materiality that considers the simultaneity of oppressions and the rule of a hegemonic state in circumscribing how people live their lives. (2004:52)

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[2] My use of the term "stereotype" is based in Stuart Hall's discussion of it as that which "reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes difference" in order to maintain differential boundaries and reinforce existing power relations. Stuart Hall (1997). *Representation, Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, pp. 238-9.

Postcolonial feminism calls for recognition of the signifying practices that render Third

World women as subjects. Saba Mahmood (2005) offers an important contribution on this point

with her idea of embodied agency. Mahmood's ethnographic analysis of the female practitioners

of Da'wa or women's mosque movement, prompted by the uneasy relationship between

feminism and religion--particularly Islam, raised the question of why women would choose to

involve themselves in socioreligious movements that furthered their subordination. Mahmood's

inquiry begins with an interrogation of the subject of and desire for freedom embedded in

Western secular-liberal philosophical traditions as universal and transferable to the Islamic

context. The prevailing discourse on autonomy fails to account for the emotional, embodied, and

embedded character of people. As Mahmood shows through her stories of Da'wa practitioners,

the subject is produced through, and because of, her relationship to a particular community. The

adoption of practices and virtues that give public expression to the communal structures of belief

and feeling are what actualize the self. Thus, embodied agency is distinct from forms of

autonomy that eschew tradition in the cultivation of the individual. Mahmood's adaption of an

Aristotelian view that ethical acts are good only if they achieve their goals in a prescribed

behavioral form, posits that bodily acts are critical markers in the embodiment of agency.

Postcolonial feminism shares insights and methodologies with other streams of feminist

theorizing including Black, Chicana, Indigenous, and Third World, transnational and global.

Their similarities converge around the requirement that an analysis of oppression include the

intersectional effects of race, nation, ethnicity, culture, class, and potentially other categories

such as ability or citizenship, and that feminist theorizing lead to collective action. Mohanty

describes her work as decolonizing because it demands an "active withdrawal of consent and

resistance to structures of psychic and social domination." (2004:7) She and others working from

23

this theoretical position call for the formation of strategic coalitions that are based in a shared, "oppositional *political* relation to sexist, racist, and imperialist structures." (2003:7) This position emphasizes the "common context of struggle" rather than potentially homogeneous and essentialist race or gender identifications. (2003:7)

A Feminist Analysis of Forced Migration and Identity

Among the "common contexts of struggle" that mobilizes decolonizing work are the political, economic, and environmental crises displacing more than 50 million people worldwide. I use intersectionality as the interpretive framework for understanding identity crises faced by women who are refugees. Using an intersectional approach accounts for the interplay of socially and culturally constructed categories such as race, class, and gender in shaping and institutionalizing oppression and inequality. Added to this are elements of national identity, attachment to place, and traumatic events. I draw heavily upon prior research I have completed on the effects of refugee camp conditions on women, using data from field reports and annual UNHCR reports and policy papers. Likewise, I demonstrate how women who are refugees continue to perform their role as "bearers of the collective" despite the upheaval of migration and their increased vulnerability to gender-based violence. (Yuval-Davis 1997) The legal, bureaucratic identity of "refugee" exists in tension with the multi-layered and multi-faceted identities of individuals who find themselves in that legal category. (Hajdukowski-Ahmed 2008:1-23)

Until 1990 when the United Nations High Commission on Refugees issued its Policy on Refugee Women, there was undifferentiated treatment of men, women, elders, adolescents, and children. The concept of who was a refugee was based on the image of the political dissident or person fleeing political torture, both of which are categories typically associated with men's

activities in the public realm. The gender-specific persecutions endured by women in both the

public and private realms went unrecognized within this framework, essentially rendering them

both invisible and unprotected. Further, the Convention did not recognize women—as women—

as members of a "particular social group" deserving protection by international law. Women,

relegated to the private realm with no political voice, had to rely upon the male heads of

household to make claims on their behalf and on behalf of the children. Frequently, women and

children seeking asylum in refugee camps were not even registered on an individual basis,

thereby eliminating any accountability for their care and protection beyond the sphere of the

family.

The Policy on Refugee Women aimed to reverse these conditions by implementing

gender mainstreaming principles at all levels of program and project development. 'Gender

mainstreaming' was defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1997 as 'a

strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension

of...the policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and

men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.' The concept mandated that equality be

achieved, horizontally and vertically—through programmatic opportunities that are geared to

women, as well as through educational outreach that alters gender relations. The objectives for

achieving gender equality included empowering women through programs that enhanced

literacy, promoted participatory action, and taught marketable skills, as well as working with

men to reduce tensions and find solutions that are respectful of the survivor's dignity. The 1990

policy was preceded by four general 'conclusions" in 1985, 1987, 1988, and 1989 relating

specifically to refugee women and urging greater awareness of their particular protection needs.

Yuval-Davis writes that identities are "specific forms of cultural narratives which constitute commonalities and differences between self and others, interpreting their social positioning in more or less stable ways." (1997: 43) Political upheaval, civil violence, environmental disasters, and economic crises disrupt the conditions that stabilize identities. Women who are refugees must negotiate three distinct moments of identity disruption, beginning with the moment of flight when they and their families are forced out of their homes and communities. They must negotiate again during encampment when they are forced into a liminal space where human rights and security are seriously abridged and resolutions for the future are ambiguous; as well as during resolution, whether it be through repatriation, local integration, or third-country resettlement. Whichever resolution occurs will reconstitute their identities as members of a new society. In every moment, constructions of themselves as individuals as well as members of social groups shift meaning.

Hajdukowksi-Ahmed applies a dialogical approach to her consideration of identities through the forced migration trajectory. She defines dialogism as:

> …a philosophy of communication that maps the discursive territory of difference. It is a process of interlocution between distinct and competing voices. Dialogism is the space where differences between self and the other do not collapse when they meet but remains separate and embodied. In this space, all voices are heard in an historical context, shaped by factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, location, culture, sexuality, ability, race, and ethnicity that are at play within power relationships. It is also imbued with an ethics of recognition of the other, and an ethics of answerability because each subject is viewed as unique, invested with historical agency and responsibility, and as such, transforms and is transformed. (Hajdukowski-Ahmed 2008:31)

The dialogical lens views identity in the forced migration context as "a continuous and relational process rather than a fixed construct and is thus well suited to the task of understanding those whose lives have been radically transformed by trauma, upheaval, and resettlement." (2008:29) Hence, before their trajectory of flight and encampment, refugees were people—men and women--with distinct identities shaped by their particular experience of home. They were members of families and social groups, contributors to their communities, citizens of a polis, and practitioners of defined religious or political belief systems. They were situated in physical locations and concrete, material realities from which they derived meaning and sustenance. These associations defined who they were, as individuals and as members of social, political, religious, and cultural groups that situated them within particular worldviews. Across these groups existed another system of meaning, specifically the realm of family and intimate relations that are gendered and historically constituted. Paradigms for masculinity and femininity were derived, in part, from the context in which men and women lived and were reinforced or challenged by the larger socio-cultural systems in which they lived.

Theorizing subjectivity through the forced migration trajectory must begin with this recognition of prior identity. One of the most poignant messages related to identity expressed at a 1985 weekend workshop organized by the Canadian Working Group on Refugee Women (WGRW), was from a participant who said, "Consider us not as what we are now but as we were. Consider us as we can become our potential as individuals enabling others" (Hajdukowksi -Ahmed, Khanlou, Moussa, 2008, 4). Similarly, women in refugee camps near Belgrade implored facilitators with the *I Remember*3 project to recognize that they were once "modern

3 The "I Remember" project is a collection of 32 stories by women living in and near refugee camps in Belgrade. A purpose of the collection, translated into Slavic, English, Italian, and Spanish, is to rebuild a sense of privacy and respectability to women. For this reason, the project deliberately avoided discussion of rape as a way of directly

27

women." (Zarkovic, Radmila Manojlovic, Editor, and Fran Peavey, 1996, 2) Both statements inferred feelings of deep shame associated with the loss of integrity and status derived from prior identities, yet also called forth possibilities not yet apparent in their current conditions. The pleas were a reminder to policymakers and aid workers to redirect the discourse surrounding refugees away from pity, and toward a respect for inherent capacities that existed prior to and were manifest through (and despite) forced migration.

The same capacities that organized women's lives prior to migration are engaged during flight and encampment. Yuval-Davis states that women are the "bearers of the collective" whose work re/produces nations biologically, culturally, and symbolically (1997:2, 26). Despite the extraordinary hardships of the refugee trajectory, women continue to fulfill social and cultural roles that are vital to caring for their children, the elderly and the infirm. They collect firewood despite the danger of sexual assault, and prepare meals out of meager rations. Post-genocide memoirs depict female figures intervening briefly in the lives of young refugee men, providing them with temporary protection within their family circle, as well as offering food and makeshift medical care. The Burundian medical student, Deogratias, whose story of flight and resettlement is told in Tracy Kidder's *Strength in What Remains*, was helped across the border by a nameless and displaced Hutu woman who declared that being "a woman and a mother" was her *ubwoko*, her ethnicity. (Kidder 2009:127) Thus, women continue the work of nation-building and community preservation through the privatized domain of social reproduction even when

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countering media accounts of the war that provided the names, ages, and locales of victims of systematic sexual violence. Instead, narratives asked women to address the question of who are we now? This included sharing stories of leaving home.

displaced; yet, their voices and efforts are generally subordinated to an instrumental function while men's stories are foregrounded. (Yuvall-Davis, 1997, 78-84)

Appealing to prior identities is a critical acknowledgement of the integrity of women who are refugees. Yet, prior identities also inform standpoint insofar as every person forced to migrate does so because of a distinct political event, to which they relate in distinct ways. Refugees from Somalia, for instance, include individuals affiliated with particular clans and ideological perspectives that must now seek safety from retribution. The refugees also include individuals who have no firm ideological preference but are fleeing a failed government system, as well as persecuted minorities such as the Somali Bantu who now face increased vulnerability in the midst of civil unrest. Each group of individuals has their own political imaginary that underlies their migration. Whereas some Somali maintain nationalist feelings and hope to repatriate to their country when civil conflicts are resolved, the Bantu have no desire to return to a state that systematically oppressed and relegated them to the lowest rungs of society. Within these crises of political disruption and displacement, the reconstruction of identity is an unfinished project, subject to a continual and relational process of social interaction. (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008, 32-4) The circumstances that force people to become refugees also takes from them a large measure of control over their destiny, which is given over to political decision makers, development planners, and international aid agencies. On one level, this loss of control estranges individuals and collectives from meaningful identity markers. On another, it disrupts patterns of interaction that were delimiting. Thus, while displacement fractures prior identities, the fracturing also opens the way for new possibilities, especially for women whose roles were overly proscribed and subordinated. This latter point is discussed further in the section on diaspora and hybridity.

Performativity and the Refugee

How does one integrate the refugee identity imposed upon individuals forced to migrate with that of their imagined and collective sense of self? At what point does the individual shed "the refugee skin" as a part of moving into a diasporic consciousness? (Schmuki, February 1998) Is this passage from refugee through liminality in any way marked? In this section, I want to address the notion of performativity in relationship to the refugee identity, specifically, what it means to "perform refugee" as a means of negotiating the liminality of displacement, even when doing so places prior identities at risk.

Performativity is a conceptual term referring to language and gestures that constitute the realities that they intend to represent. In discussions of identity, performativity replaces the notion of essence, which presumes a self that is fixed, stable, and discoverable. In this respect, performativity differs from performance, which is an action executed to represent something that already exists on its own terms—such as a character in a play. According to Judith Butler performativity is "the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains." (1993:2)

In order to understand performativity and the refugee, it is useful to review four prevailing discourses of the refugee. These discourses, outlined below, are refugee as legal category, bare life, undesireable, and grateful. My intention is to demonstrate the interconnectedness of each of these discourses, as well as to reveal how each are discursively constructed in relation to the nation-state.

The late twentieth / twenty-first century refugee is an invention of the state, created out of eruptions of conflict that force collectives of people to cross international boundaries in pursuit of safety and protection. The proliferation of human migrations occurring worldwide,

combined with the proliferation of categories for describing them, extends the definition of displacement beyond the figure of the (typically male) political exile. Now, the plight of the political exile, generally seen as a solitary figure, exists alongside mass movements of people, many of whom "committed no acts…and never dreamed of having any radical opinion." (Limbu 2009:268; Arendt 1996:110) Edward Said writes:

> Although it is true that anyone prevented from returning home is an exile, some distinctions can be made between exiles, refugees, expatriates, and emigres. Exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider. Refugees, on the other hand, are a creation of the twentieth-century state. The word 'refugee' has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas 'exile' carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality. (2000:144)

The exile's condition is a cost of exercising his political autonomy. Through his banishment and solitary existence, the exile produces an oppositional identity in relation to the state. The exiled journalist, for example, flees his country under threat of death or persecution because he wrote critically about his government. His exile as a journalist corresponds to his behavior as a political actor who speaks and writes despite the prohibitions he refuses to acknowledge. Thus, his speech acts as a journalist constitute him as a political actor, which also result in his exile. Yet, in his exile, his political activism is further produced.

Refugees, however, are not choosing flight out of the same position of political agency. To use Said's word, they are "innocent." Their loss of home, rights, and protections occur in the midst of near or impending violence. The decision to leave may be the only option available if

they hope to sustain some semblance of their prior lives. Their flight reconstitutes their political positionality from members of communities to a "large herd of bewildered people" whose loss of home, land, and membership rights results in their utter dependency on the state.

Thus the first discourse of the refugee is that of legal category. The refugee as a distinct form of displaced person is someone who, at minimum, has crossed an international border out of a well-founded fear of persecution or death in search of asylum. The border-crosser may be an exile (to follow through with the example of the critical journalist) who makes an appeal for refugee status; however, increasingly, those crossing borders are predominantly families with children and elders4. Managing and responding to the urgent needs of this massive influx becomes an issue of international concern. What responsibilities do neighboring nations have to forced migrants? How far are these obligations extended? How are determinations made as to who is deserving of hospitality, and who must be turned away or forced underground to become border transgressors?

The 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is a "status and rights based instrument" that is underpinned by a number of "fundamental principles, most notably non-discrimination, non-penalization and non-refoulement." (Convention and Protocol, UNHCR) The 1967 Protocol that gave the Convention universal coverage, expanded the scope beyond Europe and the post-World War II events. The Convention establishes basic minimum standards for the treatment of refugees, and guarantees recognition of their basic human rights. In order to appeal to these rights and protections when outside of their country of nationality, asylum seekers must articulate a persuasive case for themselves and their families.

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4 Based on the UNHCR Statistical Yearbook for 2012, 48% of all refugees were female and 46% were children. Data was not available on the percentages of elder or disabled refugees.

Thus, being labelled a refugee requires more than displacement and border crossing. The asylum seeker must prove that she is legitimately at risk of persecution.   Given the sheer mass of applicants, the procedures for establishing this proof and gaining recognition is a lengthy, cumbersome, and often treacherous process. The criteria for determining what constitutes persecution is imprecise and often narrowly defined. Asylum seekers often resort to subterfuge in order to construct narratives that are coherent, rational, and documented, even though the actual lived experiences of displacement are rarely coherent, rational or documented. (Boehmer/Shuman 2008: 253-257) In order to acquire the legal status of refugee, the person must become refugee according to the bureaucratic processes that control the refugee label. These processes involve stereotyping, conformity, designation, and identity disaggregation for the purposes of aligning refugees with their assumed needs. (Zetter1991) This prescriptive process is a transactional one whereby the applicant (and family) is reduced into "formal sets of compartmentalized data…a sort of individuation and alienation of a [person] from a large part of his being. (Schaffer 1977:32, Zetter 1991:44) The story, upon which the application for refugee status so heavily relies, is reduced to the bureaucratic dictates of 'case.' (Zetter 1991:47)

The refugee as legal category is foundational for the second discourse of the refugee, which is that of bare life. The bare life discourse begins with the refugee's requirement for international assistance based on her "abstract nakedness" of having lost everything except for her humanity, "armed only with a ration card and an agency number." (Arendt 1966:299; Said 2009:139; Limbu 2009: 265-6) The fate of the refugee who has lost everything, both materially and politically, now fuses with the sovereignty of the state. (Agamben 1995) The refugee and state exist in an inverse equation. The totalizing identity of refugee signifying dependency and

33

passivity is held in check by the determinative power of the State, who decides which lives are permissible and worthy of claims to citizenship, and which are justifiably extinguishable.

Bare life refugees are under the biopower of the state upon whom they are fully dependent for life provisions. The concept of biopower was developed by Michel Foucault to describe the means by which States regulate their subjects through "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations." (1978:140) As a technology of power deployed in the management of people as a group, biopower is justified as the protection of human life. Foucault's construction of biopower as a strategy of power that deploys literal control over bodies is applicable to the management of the modern day refugee camp, especially in nations where refugee policy requires that all refugees be contained in camps until a resolution to their status is made. Whereas the definition of 'refugee' established in the Convention reflected the universalistic aim of 'protecting' the stateless, the State's application of asylum policies along with the UNHCR's management of camps evolved into a function of control that accompanied that of protection, and very often dominated it. Thus, policies of assistance simultaneously functioned to restrict and discipline the displaced, and to protect local populations from them. (Agier 2011:12)

Thus, the bare life refugee discourse converges with that of the undesireable refugee whose hulking presence threatens to drain resources, overload local infrastructures, and raise security concerns in the towns where they are placed. (Zetter 2012) This negatively constructed discourse views refugees and other displaced persons as a risk, and conflates the refugee problem with other political concerns such as immigration and the fear of terrorism:

When issues regarding refugees become entangled with concerns about immigration in general, 'hydrophobic' metaphors—trickles, flows, streams, waves, and tides—yield to

military and violent ones: *The Immigration Invasion, the Path to National Suicide: An Essay on Immigration and Multiculturalism, The Immigration Time Bomb, The New Ethnic Mobs*, or more delicately, *Peaceful Invasions*. (Daniel 2002: 272-3; Limbu 2009:268)

This discursive production of national fear is instrumental in advancing national interests by controlling how assistance and protections are leveraged to either promote or undermine ideological objectives. (Loescher 1996) Similarly, the policing and criminalizing of people who have "no rights to have rights" is a racialized practice that overwhelmingly targets individuals of Asian, African, and Middle Eastern origins. (Arendt 1996, Limbu 2009:265; Agiers 2011:18) Thus, the undesireable refugee is forced to the margins of society, relying upon underground economies for survival, or sequestered in refugee camps located at a distance from urban centers.

The discourse of the undesireable is countered by another prevailing discourse, which is that of the refugee as grateful. This discourse, fostered by humanitarian impulses, figures the refugee as an object of rescue and victim of prior circumstances who is actively seeking a better life through her pursuit of education and employment. (Stiemel 2010:231-2; Rajaram 2002) This discourse plays out on both the international and local levels. Media sources are replete with human interest stories that offer an emotional, personal angle to the story of a refugee. According to research on representations of refugees in the United States news, these stories tend to privilege a victim framework that allows readers to resonate personally with the subjects, and to highlight the experiences of violence, repression, and family deaths. (Stieme 2010) The grim details of the stories are balanced by inspirational testimonies of how they are building a better life through employment, education, and stable family life. A subtext across stories is the power

of the American Dream, and by extension, the exceptionalism of liberal democracy that makes this reversal of fortunes possible. (Stiemel 2010)

The discourse of the grateful refugee suggests a happy resolution to the trauma of displacement. However, its deployment is not wholly without guile. The gratefulness for freedom underlying these human interest stories is contingent upon the West asserting itself through their participation in war, with freedom as "the idiom through which liberal empire acts as an arbiter for *all* humanity." (Nguyen 2012:Loc 156/3861) Thus, the gift of freedom places the recipient of the gift in an enduring debt to the liberal empire. This debt of gratefulness is embodied in the person of Madalenna Lai who fled the Communist takeover of Vietnam in 1975, and years later mortgages her home so that she can create a float that reads "Thank You America and the World" for the 113th annual Rose Parade. (Nguyen 2012)

Each of the discourses summarized here implicate people who find themselves in situations of refugeity. Because these conversations are controlled by the state, people who are displaced must determine how to situate themselves favorably in relation to each. The manner in which they situate and engage with each of these discourses figures in to the performance of refugee.

If we apply this definition to the refugee discourse, it is apparent how *being* a refugee is produced from the requirements established by each discourse. The bureaucratic system of labelling who is a refugee creates conditions that necessitate conformity to the regulations of that label. Recognition of personhood—the right to have rights—thereby is acquired, at least in part, through formal recognition of the status that enables those rights. Similarly, the nongovernmental and humanitarian organizations that provide assistance to those with refugee status do so on the basis of refugees' needs accorded as bare life. The repetition of standing in the queue to receive food rations reinforces the utter dependency that marks the condition of bare

life, to which the refugee is beholden in order to continue receiving basic provisions. The performance of the undesireable is reinforced through illegal acts necessitated by exclusion from the social and political community; or through self-imposed invisibility necessitated by inhospitable environments. Conversely, the performance of the grateful is prompted by the debt of freedom that elicits expressions of gratitude, patriotism, and material consumption in exchange for inclusion in the liberal empire.

Performing refugee can also enact resistance to these prevailing discourses, thereby producing new forms of subjectivity and agency. What are the alternatives for performing refugee beyond the legal, bare life, undesireable, and grateful categories? In order to answer this question, I turn to Ajit Maan's theory of internarrative identity as a methodology for people whose lives are marked by various disjunctures.

Internarrative Identity

Ajit Maan (2010) develops her theory of internarrative identity in response to the postcolonial subject who brings a polyphonic voice to her narration. Maan's theory extends the work of Paul Ricoeur's narrative identity grounded in an Aristotelian *muthos* privileging unity and cohesion in constituting narratives. Maan argues that this classical conception of "plot" be expanded to include other structural forms that allow narrators to tell their stories in a variety of ways and thereby maximize agency. By way of introduction to her work, she writes:

> Narrative conflict, the conflict of competing "truths" of one's life, is a familiar problem for most of us. How does one describe one's life in a way that is unified and complete when there are competing versions of the events of a life? What if one no longer associates oneself with one's past actions? How can one's autobiography encompass all

that one is when there is a feeling of having lived many lives, in various places, with many beginnings and multiple endings? The challenge is even more daunting for those who experience the conflict of cultures, languages, and conceptual systems, in the telling of their life stories. (2010:xi)

Maan agrees with Ricoeur's basic ideas about narrative identity: that our actions make sense only in the context of our stories, that we re-create ourselves through the stories we tell, and that narrative is a way to give meaning to or appropriate the involuntary—meaning those incidents that happen despite our designated life plan. (xx) However, Maan departs with Ricoeur on his use of emplotment as the principle that brings narratives into coherence. This approach, she maintains, is limiting insofar as it marginalizes alternative voices that do not fit a logical progression of events.

In Riceour's hermeneutic of the self, there are two senses of identity: the identity as *idem*, which is a characteristic sameness over time or 'character'; and identity as *ipse*, which is the intentional commitment to remain the same over time in spite of changing circumstances or 'promise'. Self as 'promise' conveys the decision to honor commitments even when these commitments are challenged by the circumstances of time. Narrative identity emerges out of the tension of *idem* (character) and *ipse* (promise). Narrative unity offers a way to cohere the voluntary and involuntary events of life, while upholding the ethical intents of the moral self. Adherence to classical narrative form thus privileges the plot as that which "configures discordant life into a concordant structure." (Ricoeur 1991:73; Maan 2010:12)

According to Maan, narrative identity is Ricoeur's solution to the unstable, postmodern subject, connecting the modernist notion of the stable self with the self that is produced through speech acts that establish intention or ethical subjectivity. However, Ricoeur makes no provision

for experiential rupture beyond the recommendation that the story be about the rupture. To do so would mean disciplining the story to fit emplotment, and to thereby synthesize or eliminate other stories that may also be meaningful, but are incompatible with the structure. Maan also contends that Ricoeur does not adequately theorize that which is "unsayable." Her claim is that "the incapacity to tell a story may well be the result of the requirement to tell the story in a certain way." (2010:17)

Maan then examines the work of four theorists, Gayatri Spivak, Nita Kumar, Judith Butler, and Rosi Braidotti, each of whom present alternative subjectivities that are critical of the notion of the unity of the subject posited in classical Western constructions. These theorists, whose ideas are summarized below, contribute to Maan's development of internarrative identity.

Spivak's construction of the postcolonial subject begins with the unlearning of authoritarian fictions of the self. Unlearning is followed by deconstruction, whereby the production of truths that authorized the fictive self are interrogated, and elements of place/space/culture are contextualized in identity. This process denaturalizes the mechanisms that stage experience according to authoritarian modes, and makes possible a decolonized autobiography that resists canonic norms. (2012:18-20)

Butler's performative subjectivity is interested in the "regulatory practices" that constitute identity. Similar to Spivak, Butler asks, "To what extent is unity a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience?" (Butler 1990:16, Maan 2010:20) If identity is an effect of power relations with particular legitimizing and exclusionary aims, the central question is: who are among the excluded and how is exclusion maintained? Identity is "fictive" insofar as it is produced through repetitive practices and discourses. Identity does not exist as a thing unto itself. Identity is performance because it is produced and re-produced "by the

regulatory practices of coherence." Thus, subversive signifying practices are political because they de-regulate in their refusing to be determined by existing identity discourses. (2012:20-22)

Both Spivak and Butler look behind the curtain, so to speak, to reveal the artificiality of the unified subject as a natural phenomenon. Both are concerned with deconstructing regulatory practices that expose the authoritarian production of self. For them, and for Maan, the primary narrative concerns are the undoing of the fictive self and the transcending of pre-determined identity categories. (Maan 2007:411)

Kumar's anticolonial subaltern subject raises the question of how women construct identities using "subversive discourses, deviant practices, hidden uses of symbol" when living within repressive systems. Using empirical data from her fieldwork in India, she looks at the ways that women reinstate power to their daily lives. Agency is asserted through co-construction of the self, existing within the fault line of authoritarian influences. (2012:22-24)

Braidotti's figuration of the nomadic subject references the instability and arbitrariness of identities. Nomadism resists assimilation into dominant ways of representing the self and instead draws upon elements of inter-disciplinarity; deliberate de-contextualization; deconstruction and re-association; mixing of the academic and lyrical voice; collective theorization, and "dethroning the philosophizing I." (Braidotti 1994:35, Maan 2012:25) In nomadic subjectivity, consciousness emerges from multiple layers of experience rather than from a sameness that persists over time. (2012:24-25)

Both Kumar and Braidotti examine strategies for subverting and resisting traditional ways of knowing the self, as well as contribute techniques for representational subversion. These strategies and techniques are engaged in the internarrative process.

How then does the internarrative identity make meaning out of experiences? In the Ricoeurian system, the meaning-making process is temporal, located in the linear, logical progression of events. In Maan's system, the process shifts from the temporal to the spatial. Place matters. The person who lives in multiple locations and cultures and subsequently speaks in multiple voices to interpret these experiences, derives meaning from the re-associations between places, perceptions, and engagements. Perceptions of the self may be altered across locations, and may exist in a contradictory tension. Meaning is not fixed, but continually reworked. Thus, internarrativity allows the person to ask, "In what sense am I the same person I was years ago, in different places?" (2010:46)

For internarrative identity the notion of sameness is differentiated as sameness with *others* rather than sameness through individuation. This communal dimension of the collective subject is discovered through narrative and the dialectic of embodied and self-representational acts. (2010:51) The body replaces the idea of character in the Ricoeurian equation. The body remains constant through both the temporal and spatial discontinuities, and houses all of the narratives of the postcolonial / nomadic life. (2012:57) The performance of identity through bodily acts is critically relevant to understanding narrative constructions of identity for Somali Bantu in diaspora. The embodied expressions of narrative are gendered so that men are more likely to give language to their story, while women are more likely to demonstrate narrative identity through daily practices. Thus, internarrative identity makes women's contributions to the collective narrative both visible and vital.

Mythico-History

The construction of narrative identity is a discursive process that occurs throughout the migratory trajectory, braiding together history, memory, mortality and morality with the disruption of displacement and, in the event of diaspora, replacement into a new space and place. Liisa Malkki's study of Hutu refugees demonstrates how place influences the narrative identity and performance of refugee among Hutu refugees who fled the 1972 "selective genocide" in Burundi and sought asylum in Tanzania. Her text, *Purity and Exile, Violence, Memory and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, is "an ethnography of processes and interconnections" that sets forth an investigation of displacement and deterritorialization, and their impacts on the collective construction of nation-ness and national identity. (1995:1) Her study reveals that this formulation is anything but linear or formulaic; rather, it is fraught with complexity, imagination, and pragmatism.

Malkki shows how place matters. Her informants, based in two very different locales--the Mishamo refugee camp and the town of Kigoma—demonstrate how their insertion in either location factored considerably in the way they talked about their experiences. She begins by surveying the historical context that preceded the 1972 conflict, describing Burundian society as an extremely hierarchical one, comprised of a three-tiered caste pyramid of dominant Tutsi pastoralists, majority Hutu agriculturalists, and politically marginalized Twa forest dwellers. The influx of European missionaries and explorers, and then German and Belgian rulers in the late 19th century, capitalized on the existing hierarchical structure to enforce their governance, which further polarized Tutsi-Hutu relations. After independence from colonial rule in 1962, Hutu efforts to challenge the governing structure provoked violence. These uprisings eventually led to the selected genocide of 1972 targeting Hutu intellectuals and elite for extermination. Over

one hundred thousand were brutally massacred, and several hundred thousand more fled the country.

The historical context was the foundation for an emergent mythico-history-- "a subversive recasting and reinterpretation of [the past] in fundamentally moral terms," (1995:54) which Malkki outlines in depth. The mythico-history of exile presents the Hutu's ordering of their world. It is clustered around a set of themes beginning with foundational myths of the beginnings of the people now known as Hutu, and including stories of the deceptive infiltration of the Tutsi, the systematic oppression of Hutu people, the dubious benevolence of the colonizers, and the memories of atrocities—all of which discursively narrate the "standard versions" of Hutu consciousness. Significantly, the mythic-historical panels Malkki facilitated were derived from Mishamo-based refugees only. Malkki makes the case that the restrictive environment of the refugee camp was the grounds for elaborating a mythico-history and shaping a "single, collective identity" that provided meaning, purpose and moral strength in the midst of their suffering.

The mythico-history that "heroized" the Hutu identity of the Mishamo camp refugees had no evident place in the stories of the Kigoma town refugees. Instead, Malkki found that this group of informants resisted categorization in favor of social integration. Overall, the Kigoma group was more cosmopolitan and integrated into an ethnically diverse society, preferring recognition as "citizens" over that of "refugees", which for many was a stigmatized status. Issues of identity were handled strategically through practices such as naturalization and intermarriage, and the adoption of alternative labels such as immigrant, *Muha*, and Muslim. Consequently, the Kigoma Hutu were more circumspect about the possibility or desirability of eventually repatriating to Burundi. Perhaps because their movements and identities were more fluid—some

43

even made short trips across the border to Burundi—they were more firmly rooted in the pragmatics of establishing their lives in the present. Unlike the Mishamo group, they did not hold a grand vision for an imagined future of Hutu redemption.

Each group sought to narrate their experiences of displacement in significantly different ways that were relevant to their particular circumstances. Malkki observed that in the camp, refugeeness was at once "a protective legal status and a politico-moral condition, mythico-historically elaborated." (1995:158) However, this label of refugee was not useful to the Kigoma Hutu who did not access the protective or material aid provided by international organizations. When they did discuss their experiences as refugees, it was against a temporal backdrop of "the early years" of displacement, which were marked by extreme poverty and social exclusion (1995:158-9). It is useful to note that while both groups experienced the interruptive event of displacement, their narratives used different methodological forms. The Kigoma Hutu accounts more closely matched the Riceourian model of temporally-situated emplotment, whereas the camp-bound Mishamo Hutu matched the spatial re-associations of Maan's internarrative identity.

The mythico-history of the Somali Bantu aligns with that of the Mishamo Hutu whose status and identity are elaborated to fit a particular, liminal politico-moral condition. Having lived in the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps of Kenya for more than a dozen years and facing an uncertain future beyond the camps, the Somali Bantu formulated a collective story out of the diverse threads of lived experience. Chapter fours examies in greater depth the collective story of the Somali Bantu as it emerged within the camps, circulated among elders, and was transmitted to younger generations as well as humanitarian organizations, mainstream media, and Western volunteers.

Memory

The Somali Bantu leveraged their history of suffering and marginalization to gain

recognition as a people of common history and circumstance, and ultimately to receive a coveted

priority status by the United States Department of State. This called for them to speak the

violence they endured often in humiliating silence for many years in order to distinguish

themselves from the ethnic Somalis. Maan noted that some events are "unsayable" even though

their impacts are resounding. How are the unsayable events of violence incorporated into

narrative identities? How do the stories, reports, testimonies and rumors told about such

violence constitute individual and collective subjectivities?

These questions are the centerpiece of Gyanendra Pandey's book, *Remembering

Partition- Violence, Nationalism and History in India.* (2001) Pandey studies the rupture of

violence that occurred during the 1947 Partition and Independence of the Indian subcontinent

and the place of memory in the interest of national unity. Pandey describes unprecedented

incidents of violence provoked by the suddenness of Partition and the demarcation of territory by

religious loyalties (Hindu/Sikh and Muslim). The character of the violence itself, specifically the

pogroms involving the abduction, humiliation, and systematic rape of women and girls, is worthy

of its own examination. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I will highlight the patterns of

articulation, justification, and rationalization of violence imbricated in the shaping of Indian-

Pakistani futures.

At various points throughout the book, Pandey argues that Partition historiography was

aimed at justifying the outbreaks of violence as illegitimate and disorganized events that were

against the fundamentals of Indian tradition and history. These outbreaks of violence, typically

described as "riots" unleashed by rogue groups who rejected Indian unity in order to assert their

own self-interested claims, glossed over the influence of colonialism and its relationship to politics, thereby absolving the State of any role in fomenting the discontent between the Hindu majority and the growing Muslim population. Pandey's discussion of Gandhi's moral influence in the midst of Partition shows that the violence in fact was not reducible to chaotic outbreaks, and that Gandhi's call for peaceful co-existence of all peoples regardless of religion, delivered in some of the most troubled regions, served to quell the bloodshed and foster efforts toward reconstruction and reconciliation.

An intriguing theme throughout the book was the frequent reference to the requirements of *forgetting* in the interest of unity. Memory as a device of history, specifically the memory of the "truth" of Partition and Independence, is bound up with memories of suffering and dislocation. The admonition to forget—to locate the site of violence as "out there"—is a way of constituting community over and against the very forces that threaten its cohesion. Pandy writes:

> Violence happens—and can only happen—at the boundaries of community. It marks those boundaries. It is the denial of any violence 'in our midst', the attribution of harmony *within* and the consignment of violence to the *outside* that establishes 'community.' (2001:82)

Forgetting, then, ensures a fragile peace that makes the reconstruction of community possible. Can community sustain itself on a brittle, wishful narrative that sidesteps the full memory of how it came to be? How might expression of the full memory of suffering and shame strenthen community, state and nation? These are open questions for any narration of interruptive events in relation to identity.

Veena Das presents another interpretation of unsayable stories that emerged as a point of discussion in Pandy's book. Her work, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (2006), presents a compelling analysis of collective / extreme violence and its penetration in the "recesses of the ordinary". Drawing upon her anthropological engagement with families affected by the 1947 Partition as well as the 1984 massacre of Sikhs after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, Das gives a historically situated examination of the lived experiences of people connected by familial bonds problematized by the spectral of violence that touched their lives. Her handling of the topic introduced new categories for thinking about the intersection of violence, suffering, social / political relations, sexuality, and subjectivities. As such, her analysis makes an important contribution to the body of literature on women, war, and displacement.

The story of violence—the "facts" or "truth" of *what happened*--may not be languaged in family narratives, but is nonetheless expressed through the rituals and transgressions played out in everyday life, including the elaborate work of mourning that is a part of women's realm. These expressions are what make the everyday inhabitable in the shadow of what is unspeakable, and in so doing make visible "the suffering of women in the national discourse." Das' discussion of the incursion of violence through time and into the everyday has parallels with the body of work on historical trauma that persists across generations, handing on an unarticulated pain[5]. However, Das describes this incursion of the violent past as a "poisonous knowledge" that can be engaged only through a knowing by suffering. (2006:75) The connection of violence to

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[5] Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Braveheart conceptualized historical trauma in the 1980's as a way of theorizing the collective challenges faced by First Nation people. Central to the theory of historical trauma is the psychic wounding passed on generationally. See http://historicaltrauma.com/.

subjectivity is apparent in how the memory of past events shape individual/collective agency in the present.

The research of Malkki, Pandey, and Das show how the interruptive event of displacement are narrated and performed in two distinct socio-cultural and political contexts. Each made the connections between specific historical events, experiences of violence, and methodologies of narration that informed the performance of refugee as subject. While each performance of refugee identity was based in a particular context and therefore regulated / constrained by that context, each constituted a desired future: citizenship through refusal of the refugee label; eventual redemption through a national cosmology; and national unity through silence and mourning practices. Each performative discourse was contingent upon memory of the past, and the re-membering of self into "a historical and spatial trajectory." (LaCroix & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013:685)

What is the role of memory in the performance of identity? How is memory of the past reconstructed in the present, where we possess knowledge not available in moment of the experience? (King 2000:2) My discussion of memory as a device for performing and narrating refugee identity treats memory work as a re-transcription of events that occurred in the past that are constructed and interpreted through the lens of subsequent experience. (King 2000:17) This approach to memory is consistent with the Maan's methodology of internarrative identity whereby self is constituted through the narrative re-association of locations and cultures and relations.

Diaspora and Hybridity

Throughout, I have described this research as a trajectory analysis of identity construction. My deployment of the term *trajectory* is intentional. Migratory identities form in

the creative tension of here and there, local and global, through roots and routes. (Gilroy 1993:3)

Movement, both spatial and temporal, contributes to the destabilizing of rooted identities associated with particular locales. Likewise, the routes through which the movement of migration occurs constitutes and complicates. Settlement brings conflicting experiences of relief and stress related to integration into a new sociopolitical location and system of meaning, and the opportunity to reconstitute self, family, and community in a new locale. While the moments of migration and encampment contributed to the altering of traditional gender roles, identity construed itself within recognizable social and cultural frames. The process and actuality of resettlement in diaspora radically resituates the social and culture frame to a new geographical place.

What is diaspora and how do I deploy the term in my analysis of the Somali Bantu experience? The term derives from the Greek verb, *diaspeirō,* or "I scatter", and typically denotes the wide dispersal and displacement of people claiming a shared national identity across lands that are not their own. Classical notions of diaspora, constructed from the normative model of the Jews' expulsion from Judea, and similarly applied to the Greek and Armenian cases signifies "collective trauma, a banishment, where one dreamed of home but lived in exile". (Cohen, 1997, p. ix) In 1991, William Safran established a framework for identifying a diaspora, elaborating on common features that differentiate it from other forms of migration. For Safran, diasporas are

> "Expatriate minority communities" that are dispersed from an original "center" to at least
>
> two "peripheral" places; that maintain a "memory, visions, or myth about their original
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> homeland"; that believe they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their
>
> host country"; that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is

right; that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland; and of which the group's consciousness and solidarity are "importantly defined" by this continuing relationship with the homeland. (Safran 1991, pp.83-84 in Clifford, 1994, pp. 304-5)

Safran's comparative approach emphasizes a group's relationship with a homeland that centers the experiences of loss, longing, memory and persistent connection associated with displacement.

Robin Cohen (1997) extends Safran's six conditions, adding that diasporic migration may also be compelled by alternative phenomena other than banishment, such as overpopulation, poverty, or political repression. (p. 27) He goes on to provide examples of five "types" of diasporas categorized as victim/refugee, imperial/colonial, labour/service, trade/business/ professional, and cultural/ hybrid/postmodern, thereby recognizing the diversity of experiences among transnational communities that identifies themselves as diasporas. (pp. xi-xii, 177) Additionally, Cohen adds that diasporas can be productive, enabling a cultural flowering. This appropriation of Safran's comparative framework shifts the diaspora discourse away from a limited forced removal-eventual return definition. According to Cohen's typology, the Somali Bantu represent a victim/refugee diaspora marked by political upheaval that forced them out of their homes. The subsequent "scattering" was facilitated by third country resettlement to majority White, Christian nations where the Somali Bantu would always already be people of difference.

However, the Somali Bantu trajectory departs from the classical definitions of diaspora is some fundamentals ways. Specifically, the notion of homeland is a contentious one for the Somali Bantu. Memories are marked by stories of oppression, humiliation, and second-class citizenship—of never belonging to the nation despite their attachments to particular places.

Thus, the desire is not to return to the homeland of Somalia, but to find a place that is home. "Home" includes a persistent connection to place—the Jubba Valley where relatives continue to live amidst suffering and deprivation—as well as an imaginary—the idea of Africa and the construction of Somali Bantu peoplehood.

Thus, the notion of diaspora is not limited to a symbolic homeland. Clifford argues that "contemporary diasporic practices cannot be reduced to epiphenomena of the nation-state or global capitalism. [Diaspora discourse] is loose in the world, for reasons having to do with decolonization, increased immigration, global communications, and transport—a whole range of phenomena that encourage multi-locale attachments, dwelling, and traveling within and across nations." (Clifford, 1994, pp. 302, 306) Thus, my engagement with the language of diaspora follows the work of theorists who approach diaspora as a process for belonging, rather than as a descriptive tool for geopolitical configurations. (Kalra, Kaur, Hutnyk 2005) This approach claims that national affiliation and connection to place hold less significance. Instead, diaspora is a form of consciousness that is aware of difference and is therefore productive of cultural forms that serve to bond communities. (Hall 1990; Clifford 1994; Gilroy, 1987,1991; Brah 1996) Here, "deforming the nation" creates a stance that is ripe for resistance and social praxis among communities with multiple sites of belonging. (2005:30) The term, diaspora, "is a signifier, not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement." (Clifford, 1994, p. 308)

The circumstances of the Somali Bantu resonate well with this deformation of nation given their loss of heritage through enslavement, their tenuous relationship with Somalia, and the opportunities presented to them through third country resettlement.   Paul Gilroy's (1995) discussion on the salience of "routes" in the formation of transnational identities is particularly

relevant to a trajectory analysis of the Somali Bantu as a people living in diaspora across the United States and Europe. "Somali Bantu" is not a nationality rooted in space and place alone, but rather a discursive identity formed through the routes of forced migration. (This assertion is clarified in chapter four when I discuss the emergence of the term, Somali Bantu, as an ethnonym that coheres an otherwise diverse group of minorities.)

Appadurai writes, "diasporic public spheres…are the crucibles of a postnational political order. The engines of their discourse are mass media (both interactive and expressive) and the movement of refugees, activists, students, and laborers." (Appadurai, 1996, p. 22) Theorization of diasporic consciousness examines the imagination as social practice: a form of work and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. (p. 31) Appadurai's analysis of global cultural flows, described as "scapes" -- ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscape--signify the rupture of the land-bound nation-state and the fluidity of the typical markers of the nation-state. (p. 33) As people migrate through tourism, displacement, exploration, and globalization, so do their ideas, resources, products, inventions, and narratives.

The task of creating home in diaspora is often women's project. Janet Bauer's (2009) research on Iranian "refugee" women in the diaspora examines the varied role of place, community, and politics among Middle Eastern women who are reconstructing community in Western cultures. Her research demonstrates that the evolution of private and public roles in relation to new social worlds is not a linear process. In fact, for some women, the diaspora presents opportunity for greater education and civic participation than was available to them under the Islamic Republic. However, they are also subject to the idealization of their homeland within the Iranian community, and particularly with male family members who seek to recreate

through traditional practices the so-called home culture. Women and girls are tasked with safeguarding the culture and traditions of the homeland, and this new expectation places greater restrictions on their movement and pursuit of new opportunities now available to them. Concerns over becoming "too [Western]" define the resettlement experience as families seek to preserve and sustain cultural identities while integrating into new society. How women are represented both within their home communities and to groups beyond is particularly critical in maintaining group identity.

While the image of journey is at the heart of diaspora, it is the circumstances of travel and the forms of relationality associated with these circumstances that matter. (Brah 1996: 182-3) Avtar Brah writes, "multiple journeys may configure into one journey via a confluence of narratives as it is lived and relived, produced, reproduced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory. It is within this confluence of narrativity that 'diasporic community' is differently imagined under different historical circumstances." (1996:183) Thus, diaspora is a process of multi-locationality that crosses cultural and psychic boundaries, as well as those that are geographic. (1996:194) Crossing boundaries recalls the traumas of separation and dislocation, yet it also imagines sites of hope and new beginnings emerging from the re-membering of dispossession. (1996:193) Similarly, Ajit Maan proposes that the kind of disjunctures that occur through migratory trajectories invites "narrative authority." (2007:416) She writes that:

> Those who exist outside dominant cultural traditions, conceptual systems and languages, are also alienated from authoritarian constructions of selfhood. They are alienated from socially constructed internal coherence and free from a synthetically unified identity

based on homogenization. From this perspective one's subject position in the margins is

something to celebrate. (2007:416)

The diasporic consciousness is one that has access to multiple conceptual systems, languages and

ontologies, implying not a lack or loss but an abundance. (2007:416) My research begins at these

sites of hope and abundance. I am interested in how the rising adults of the Somali Bantu

community are "performing Bantu" in the United States, and, in the process constructing

identities that are simultaneously Somali, Bantu, American, Black, Muslim, and African. With

each of these identifications, there are oppositional performances that refuse the conditions of

subalternity: second-class citizenship, minority status, the denial of education and economic

opportunity, the withholding of basic human rights and protection. Similarly, there are the

signatory performances that celebrate their differences marking them as a people, the traditions

that tie them to their history and home, and the new experiences that shape the futures they

imagine for themselves. Throughout is the braiding of joy and loss and commitment to live a life

that was once not possible.

Chapter Three

Presenting Performative Identities through Autoethnographic and Portraiture Methodologies

When the Somali Bantu families arrived in the United States, they chose to deliberately

pose themselves for photographs. We volunteers turned our camera lenses on them. They

gestured that we pause while they readied themselves. Khadija adjusted her headscarf and white

eyelet blouse, and then fixed the camera with a stern expression as if it were her adversary,

concealing from view her usual congenial smile. Abdirahman sat in the driver's seat of

someone's vehicle, one hand on the steering wheel, the other cradling a cell phone to his ear.

Isha grins widely in front of my open dining room cabinet, the china glittering behind her in the

afternoon sun. They were actively constructing the images that represented their new

circumstances in the United States, images that circulated back to family and friends from whom

they were separated. These images contrasted their visa photos that classified them as

refugees—head shots with blank expressions, situated in front of impersonal screens, or worse.

In Isha's visa photograph her head is bare. Behind her is a pattern of crosses. Officials at

Catholic Charities required that she remove her headscarf for the photograph, an action that was

against her cultural beliefs, but she had to acquiesce in order to gain passage. She pointed to the

background, "Look at all of those crosses."

I open my discussion of research methodologies with these anecdotes to emphasize the

importance placed on privileging participants' self-representations. Because this project

examines individual identity formation together with the trajectory of refugee identity, the

methodologies used for this project are informed by feminist research epistemologies, in

particular standpoint theory. (Harding 1993; Hartstock 1983; Hill Collins 1986; Smith 1974)

Standpoint Theory posits that knowledge is socially situated; that people historically left out of the production of knowledge are best situated to speak about and raise questions related to their own experiences. Any analysis of power should begin with the knowledge and experiences of those who have been marginalized. Within this framework, intersectionality, the study of how social and culturally constructed forms of oppression interact and reinforce each other, is foundational to determining standpoints. My rationale for employing standpoint theory is that relevant and genuine data is best obtained from those who have lived the experience. Storytelling and personal narratives are important in this process. Story functions as a strategy for making sense of experience and describing human or cultural phenomena, in a way that is distinct from scientific modes of explanation. Storytelling is a means by which people theorize about their experiences. The practice of storytelling is particularly important among people who are culturally marginalized and therefore operating outside of the dominant discourse so that meaning is discovered and invested in the exchange that occurs. (Polletta 2006, Stone Mediatore 2003)

Positionality, both that of the researcher and of the subject, informs how a story is told and which aspects are given emphasis in the narrative. Likewise, the interpretive process occurs in relation to pre-existing discourses and master narratives so that the construction of narrative is often a subversive act. As stated in chapter two, this chapter elaborates on critical autoethnography as an innovative feminist approach to understanding narrative constructions of identity. The first half of the chapter discusses critical autoethnography as a qualitative methodology emerging from the postmodern condition. A discussion of portraiture, an arts-based methodology that blends aestheticism with social science inquiry and empiricism, follows.

The chapter concludes with a description of the methods used to collect the data needed to create the portraits illustrating the research question

Autoethnography

What is autoethnography? Perhaps the best definition is the simplest, offered by Carolyn Ellis in the preface of her methodological novel, *The Ethnographic I*. She writes, "Autoethnography is research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political." (2004: xix) Foremost among the characteristics of the autoethnographer is that she be a storyteller who communicates in a way that shows, rather than tells, the ideas she wants to convey. However, the storyteller is also a researcher with a particular research question or problem. In that regard, she uses literary methods to turn "the ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto), while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography, looking at the larger context wherein self-experiences occur." (Denzin 1997 in Boylorn/ Orbe 2013:17) Autoethnography uses reflexivity to problematize the researcher's position and gaze, thereby going beyond narration of the self in order to "critique[s] the situatedness of self and others in social context." (Spry 2001: 710 in Denzin 2009: 205) Autoethnographic forms are varied, so there is no precise definition that encompasses all of the research that fits itself under this descriptor. The earliest works of autoethnography were cultural level studies of groups of which the researcher was a participant,[6] or were extensions of traditional ethnography projects

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[6] According to Ellis, the term "autoethnography" has been in circulation for about 25 years. She traces an early use of the word by anthropologist, Karl Heider, in his 1975 article, "What do people do? Dani auto-ethnography," when referring to the way that his research subjects talked about their own group. Heider provided two meanings to the 'auto' prefix. The first was autochthonous because if reflected the people's own account. The second was automatic because it represented "the simplest routine-eliciting technique available" (From Heider 1975:3 in "Autoethnography, the Sociological through the Personal" by Natalia Ruiz-Junco and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz). However, David Hayano is typically credited as the term's originator based upon his cultural level study of professional poker players. Hayano, himself a professional card player, extended Heider's use of the term to portray the researcher as an insider, and recognized the position of the researcher as part of the "knowledge-making

wherein the researcher reflected separately on his involvement and interactions. By the 1990's autoethnography reached a fuller expression that experimented with new forms of writing and research practices and, in the process, marked a significant departure from conventional ethnography. Researchers such as Carolyn Ellis, widely recognized as the leading proponent of autoethnography, along with Arthur Bochner, Tami Spry, Laurel Richardson, Ronald Pelias, Norm Denzin, and others have expanded the definitional boundaries of autoethnography. The term includes critical autobiography, personal narratives, narratives of the self, self-ethnography, ethnodrama, and more. Common features of autoethnography are its accessibility to a broad audience (rather than limited to an audience of specialists), its evocative prose, its grounding in the personal experience of the research, and self-reflexivity whereby experiences, emotions, reactions, and so forth are interrogated and explored from a stance of vulnerability. Ellis writes that autoethnography is "usually written in first person voice" with "concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness. These features appear in relational and institutional stories affected by history and social structures, which themselves are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts, and language." (2004:38) While research methods such as interviewing, note taking, coding, participant observation, and so forth remain important devices in the research process (depending upon the project), it is the subjective disposition of the researcher that is distinctive. Consider this definition of autoethnography by Stacy Homan Jones:

> Autoethnography is a blurred genre…a response to the call…it is setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections between life and art…making a text

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relation" when eliciting information from others (Junco/Vidal-Ortiz 2011:195-6). See Hayano's book, *Poker Faces, The Life and Work of Professional Card Players,* 1983.

present…refusing categorization…believing that words matter and writing toward the moment when the point of creating autoethnographic texts is to change the world. (2005: 765 in Denzin 2009: 206)

Holman Jones' definition is useful in probing the porous boundaries of autoethnography that destabilize the more rigidly proscribed methodologies that have dominated social science research. The "blurred genre" of autoethnography is reflected in the range of writing and performance practices that are brought into play for the purpose of "responding to the call / setting a scene / telling a story / weaving connections" particularly for the elusive, silenced, or marginalized experiences that are the frequent subjects of autoethnographic work. These writing and performing practices, whether they be poetry, film, drama, visual arts, literary narrative, or song, make the text present on a visceral level. The reader comprehends, learns, and *feels* the knowledge. Immanence is important. The voice of the researcher is at the center of the knowledge-production process, and in the process dismantles the distancing categories of researcher, informant, reader and audience. The researcher becomes the subject / informant, as well as the recipient / audience of the text (insofar as the process of writing is itself a performance or enactment of inquiry). Similarly, the reader and audience is constitutive of the text insofar as the autoethnography anticipates and invites a response, even as the nature of their response cannot be predicted by the researcher. (Junco/Vidal-Ortiz 2011:202)

The evocative form of autoethnography has been described by Ronald Pelias as "a methodology of the heart." (2004: 171 in Denzin 2009:209) It opposes the "authorial, omnipotent voice" of sociological realism that attempts to generalize and represent people's stories "using selected snippets of fieldwork data." (Ellis 2004:29) Instead, autoethnography takes a descriptive, literary approach that is rooted in an epistemology of emotion that calls forth

multiple perspectives of social realities, and seeks "resonance with" rather than representation of others. (Denzin 1997:228 in Anderson; Pelias)

However, not all researchers who claim the methodology of autoethnography align themselves with the evocative style of writing. Leon Anderson argues for another form of autoethnography that modifies the emotional presence of the researcher in the narrative, in order to develop theoretical explanations for the phenomena under study. This form, which he calls analytic autoethnography, is grounded in self-experience, yet extends the research inquiry beyond his involvement in it. According to Anderson, the five key features of an analytic autoethnographer include full membership in a research group or setting; adoption of analytic reflexivity; a visible narrative presence in the written text; engagement with informants beyond the self; and a commitment to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena. (2006: 373-374) A compelling example of a project that demonstrates analytic authoethnography is Shahram Khosravi's *'Illegal' Traveller, An Autoethnography of Borders* (2011). Khosravi draws upon his own story of passage from Iran into Europe, in addition to ethnographic fieldwork with other undocumented migrants between 2004 and 2008, to illuminate border narratives of migrants identified as "illegal." While his own experience informs his examination of border transgression and invests the text with a deep sense of urgency for the rights of forced migrants, his primary objective is to reveal the human and emotional dimension of border politics and the impact of state policies on excluded bodies. Khosravi emphasizes that his book is not an autobiography, but "an ethnography of borders" that reveals the nature of borders and border politics. (2011:5) Autoethnography fits within this framework as a device for contextualizing accounts of "the experience of migrant

illegality" and to explore abstract concepts of "policy and law and translate them into cultural terms grounded in everyday life." (2011:5)

Even as autoethnography remains open to creative possibilities in its use and expression, it is nonetheless accountable to a set of research standards. Laurel Richardson uses the four criteria of substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, and impact to review the quality of autoethnographic work. (2005: 964) In order to be a substantive contribution, the work must be grounded in a theoretical perspective that furthers knowledge and understanding of social and cultural life. Its theoretical grounding ensures that the work is not mere novelty, but is based in a rigorously developed system of thought. Similarly, the work must have aesthetic merit apart from its theoretical objectives, and in this regard engage the reader or audience holistically. Taken together, the "hinged" lenses of theory and aesthetics, the "push and pull between and among analysis and evocation, personal experience and larger social, cultural, and political concerns," enables the reader and audience to engage more deeply in the meaning extracted from the work. (Adams/Hobard 2008: 374) Evidence of the researcher's reflexivity is crucial because it demonstrates self-awareness throughout the research process, as well as commitment to questioning assumptions. Reflexivity demystifies the position of the researcher insofar as it requires her to interrogate the self, and, then, to incorporate the process of critical self-examination into the work. Finally, the criteria of impact means that the work catalyzes new questions, actions, or commitments. The autoethnographer avoids making truth-claims that could be universalized. Instead, she seeks verisimilitude--a bringing closer to the truth--that prompts the reader and audience to respond personally to the text, and to discover newfound resources for their own lives. (Ellis 2004: 124)

Autoethnography and the Postmodern Moment

Autoethnography emerged from the development of qualitative research methodologies during the twentieth century that challenged the dominance of positivist research methodologies in the academy. The traditional research paradigms that were quantitatively oriented and focused on asserting facts, verifying truths, and formulating generalized theories, came under critique as severely limited in their capacity to observe and interpret the messy terrain of human and social processes in the world. (Ellis/Adams/Bochner 2011) These methods of inquiry privileged certain ways of knowing, and in that privileging reified truth claims that were in fact partial and situated within dominant (White, male, Western) worldviews. Consequently, other ways of knowing and interpreting phenomena were ignored, invalidated, or regarded as frivolous in relation to the serious work of positivist scientists.

The rise of qualitative methodologies as legitimate modes of knowledge production for multiple disciplines, fields, and subject matters occurred "in a complex historical field that crosscuts at least eight historical moments." [7] (2008:3-4) These moments, corresponding to social and philosophical moods influenced by historical events, began with the belief that qualitative methods could be used to observe the world objectively. The earliest ethnographers conducting fieldwork were committed to objectivism and valorized dominant colonial paradigms as the standard against which all interpretations are made. Typically, researchers represented their subjects as timeless and exotic curiosities, untouched by progress or the march of history. (2008: 20-1) In the postwar years, new interpretive theories such as critical theory, phenomenology, and

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[7] The eight historical moments are described (and dated) by Denzin as: the Traditional Period (1900-1950); the Modernist Phase (1950-1970); Blurred Genres (1970-1986); the Crisis of Representation (1986-1990); the Postmodern (1990-1995); the Postexperimental (1995-2000); the Methodologically Contested (2000-2004); and the Fractured Future (2005-present). In Denzin 2008: 3, 18-28.

feminism influenced ethnographers who applied these theories to give voice to the disenfranchised. This modernist phase sought out causal narratives, supported by statistical data that could definitively explain social phenomena. (2008:22) By the 1970's, qualitative researchers had gained footing within the academy and had a range of theories and strategies at hand. A significant development during this time was the work of Clifford Geertz. Geertz, recognizing the blurring of boundaries between the humanities and social sciences, called for "thick description" of cultural observations in order to make sense of the context in its own right, apart from the view of the observer. (2008:24)

A "crisis of representation" marked the mid-1980's through the 1990's. Following on the insights of Geertz, researchers began calling into question the race, class, and gender relations between themselves and their subjects. The authority of the researcher as a voice for others was brought under greater scrutiny thereby prompting greater reflexivity. Issues of validity, reliability, and objectivity were problematized. (2008:25) The crisis of representation brought into question a key assumption of qualitative research: that it was possible to directly capture lived experience through a textual depiction. If direct representation was now impossible, how then should qualitative research be interpreted and evaluated? These questions, embedded in the discourse of postmodernism, generated a period of experimental writing that included autoethnography (2008:26-27):

The postmodern period of experimental ethnographic writing struggled to make sense of these crises. New ways of composing ethnography were explored (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). Theories were read as tales from the field. Writers struggled with different ways to represent the "Other," although they were now joined by new representational concerns. (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000) Epistemologies from previously silenced groups emerged to offer

63

solutions to these problems. The concept of the aloof observer was abandoned. More action, participatory, and activist-oriented research was on the horizon. The search for grand narratives was being replaced by more local, small-scale theories fitted to specific problems and specific situations. (2008:27)

Experimentation in ethnographic forms continued to gain momentum, presenting new ways of expressing lived experience that included "literary, poetic, autobiographical, multivoiced, conversational, critical, visual, performative and co-constructed representations." (2008:27) These efforts continue today.

Autoethnographers writing in the postmodern moment demonstrate renewed value for the use of stories as effective devices for interpreting complex phenomena, exploring identity politics, and imagining futures that reflect their desire for social justice. Subsequently, these researchers brought new dispositions to the research process, including greater sensitivity to and ethical concern for the impact of their work on the populations and communities with which they engage. They have influenced colleagues trained in traditional research using quantitative methods to reconsider their approaches. Mark Orbe writes in the introduction of his co-edited book *Critical Autoethnography, Intersecting Cultural Identities in Everyday Life* that his adoption of critical autoethnography occurred after recognizing the problematic social effects of research occuring in his field of intercultural communications.[8] The social science methodologies he learned in his discipline sought to establish correlations between specific concepts and particular groups, and to make generalizable statements about the statistical data it generated. While the method was solid, the results created flat narratives that reproduced common

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[8] Orbe and Boylorn are among the first use the term "critical" in relation to autoethnography to reflect their intersectional approach.

stereotypes. (Boylorn/Orbe, 2014:14) It became apparent to him that his research on cultural diversity was better served using layered narratives that emphasized connective themes rather than made broad, essentialist claims.

Laurel Richardson writes about the postmodernist context of doubt: "No method has a privileged status. But a postmodernist position does allow us to know 'something' without claiming to know everything. Having a partial, local, and historical knowledge is still knowing." (2005: 961) She advocates for poststructuralism as a kind of postmodernism linking "language, subjectivity, social organization, and power…Language does not 'reflect' social reality but rather produces meaning and creates social reality." From this view, any story, history, or performance is one of several competing discourses that give meaning and organization to lived phenomena. At this juncture, it is worth examining in greater depth the act of writing in the production of autoethnographic texts. Writing for autoethnography is more than a functional transmission of thought to paper. Instead, it is a method of inquiry where the researcher is the instrument, and her writing voice is the means by which content is simultaneously conveyed and constituted. (Richardson 2005:960) Social scientific and literary writing were once clearly demarcated; the former was concerned with representing that which was factual and true, and the latter effecting emotion and imagination. This binary has since been undone, so that all writing is narrative: mediated by the teller and shot through with her particular voice. The act of writing is itself a method of collecting data through the forms of language not accounted for in textbooks or field notes. These unanticipated bits of data--"dream data, sensual data, emotional data, response data, and memory date"—are rhizomatic. (St. Pierre 2005: 970) They are fortuitous insights that could not have happened without the practice of writing. Yet, writing, language, meaning, and interpretation exist in tension with one another. Each are partial and situated within particular

worlds. Thus "the central imaginary for 'validity' for postmodernist texts… is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionalities, and angles of approach…What we see depends upon our angle of repose." (Richardson 2005:963) Crystallization deconstructs the notion of a fixed truth, or even a finite set of possible truths. The crystal refracts, rather than reflects, offering a view that is complex, satisfying, and continuously transforming.

Autoethnography in Refugee and Diaspora Studies

Autoethnography, with its emphases on context, voice, and relationship, offers much to my chosen areas of research in Refugee and Diaspora Studies. Autoethnography provides a venue for researcher and subject to co-create narratives that are embedded in particular conditions and locales. There is a growing body of work among scholars with transnational identities whose theorizing about displacement or diaspora is crafted in literary forms. Peter Run recounts fleeing from South Sudan, demonstrating how the details of individual life stories served as "units within the collective experience." The experiential details spoke back to both the desubjectivation of the refugee experience, and the victim representations prevailing in refugee discourse.(2012) Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe illustrates the fluidity and complexity of racialized identities for people like herself who claim multiple nationalities and affiliations.(2003) R. Radhakrishana draws upon his experiences as a member of the Indian diaspora in the United States, and as the father of an American-born child to problematizes the concept of hybrid identities. He argues that ethnicity is in a constant state of flux, shaped by context-specific circumstances as well as emotional investments in an imagined "authentic" past. (2003) Amal Treacher (2000) writes about the emotional complexities of growing up in a mixed-heritage,

multilingual family that was disrupted by an acrimonious divorce that led to displacement and a long-term disconnection from one half of her family of origin. Avtar Brah begins *Cartographies of Diaspora, Contesting Identities* with her "political biography" stating that it is a "disruptive device." Through her own interpretive retelling she is produced as a member of an "imagined community that collectively re-memories itself through narration. (1996: 10) In each of these instances (and many others not accounted for here) the use of personal narrative serves to disambiguate the realities of migration and globalized identities emerging in diaspora, and provide emotional content to the theory.

For my purposes, I am using autoethnography in combination with portraiture to study narrative constructions of identity among the young adults in a Somali Bantu family in Milwaukee. The project proposes to be a collaborative endeavor wherein I co-construct meaning emerging from the performative practices in which the family engages. By "performative practices" I am referring to the activities and behaviors that convey and constitute Bantu identity. Examples of performative practices include how they use social media to express their opinions on current events, how they communicate cultural identity through music, clothing, and social interactions, and how they sustain and / or reconstruct traditions at milestone events. My role as observer and researcher is carried out dialogically, meaning that I am entering these contexts based upon my prior relationship with the family and have already engaged with these practices from the position of friendship. However, the autoethnographic piece requires that I trouble what I mean by "friendship" especially in view of my social and political position in relation to theirs. I am not a "friend" to Isha, Nur, or Mariam in the same way that I am a "friend" to someone in my ASPECT cohort, or another parent whose child plays soccer, or the people with whom I share confidences. My friendship with this family began when I chose to enter their

lives as a volunteer—a helping relationship that is nonetheless constructed around a power inequity. The interpretative context brought to this project is made through multiple prisms: that of the volunteer who intervened as a force of acculturation, acting at the behest of the state who delegates the work of resettlement to voluntary associations inspired by a narrative of American goodwill; that of the friend who has come to know the participants as individuals with distinct desires and histories; and that of the researcher who is looking for a good story, yet also wants to make a difference. On one level, I will always want to "do for" Isha, Nur, and Mariam; however, I have enjoyed the growing reciprocity that has occurred over the years. This reciprocity has assumed new dimensions as we interacted on this research project. Therefore, autoethnography is the most salient methodology to make explicit the interconnections and shifting relationships that are a part of life in diaspora.

Cary writes in her article "Always Already Colonizer / Colonized" that our research should shift emphasis "away from the study of the victim to an analysis of the messy terrain the history of colonization left behind that we are all embedded in." (2004:70) My authorial role in this project is risky, both for me and for them: in writing about this family (in English), am I colonizing their narrative? Authoethnography provides an opportunity to work through this dilemma. How was I situated ten years ago when I made the decision to mentor a Somali Bantu family? How was that decision racialized (by tropes of primitive Africans) and gendered (by fantasies of maternal caregiving)? How deeply ingrained was the discourse of Catholic charity that framed my moral life as a younger person, that has since been abandoned? What motivated me to stay involved with this family, even after they left Blacksburg? Conversely, what motivated them to stay involved with me? Most significantly, why do I love *this particular family*?

Responding to these questions extends beyond the confessional. According to a June 2014 U.N. report, there are an estimated 50 million displaced people in the world, the highest it's been since the post-World War II era. Seventy thousand (refugees) arrived in the United States in 2013. The scope of migration at this point in history resonates at all levels of society, affecting the economy, education, policy, and more. Annually, upwards of 70,000 people arrive in the United States and are inserted into unfamiliar communities where they begin the homing process, usually with the assistance of volunteers who are often white, middle class, and either Christian or Jewish. How do we meet one another across our social, cultural, and political differences? For those who choose to engage (or resist) the inflow of newcomers, how do we denaturalize the assumptions we carry into these relationships? These questions have both personal and societal implications. My personal engagement with a particular refugee family has awakened me to the movements of people occurring daily across the globe. My account of what this has signified for me is a single story, but it nonetheless offers a partial view of the transnational futures complicating notions of home and nation in the twenty-first century. Thus, I do not write about my encounter with refugees, although reflection on this prompts the interrogation on positionality; nor do I claim to write from an objective or disengaged stance. Instead, I write myself into the portrait of the Muse family because it is through the inter-subjective engagement of a particular volunteer and a particular refugee family that an alternative narrative forms. Nita Kumar states, "to speak in an alternative voice is already to assert subjectivity and to be active in the creation of one's own world." (1994) The portrait of diasporic identity reflects /refracts the intersubjective engagement with identities, individuals, and cultural phenomena encountered through the Somali Bantu trajectory.

The Reflective Lens of Portraiture

Portraiture methodology is a form of inquiry and documentation pioneered by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot that combines "systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor" in order to "capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences." (1997: 3) Portraiture emerged in the seventies and eighties as one of several Arts-Based Research methodologies that tap into the artistic process as a primary mode of inquiry, creating various forms of art as a way to collect data, conduct analysis, and/or represent social science research. (Leavy 2009) The use of portraiture, with its combination of qualitative research and the techniques of narrative fiction (Canhmann-Taylor & Siegesmund 2008) is most evident in the field of Education, Lawrence-Lightfoot's disciplinary home. Portraiture is used by other researchers as a pedagogical tool for teaching research methodology (Gaztambide-Fernandez, et al. 2011); as a means for stimulating reform and problem solving in educational leadership (Hackman 2002); as a respectful method for studying the academic potential of children with disabilities (Sauer 2012); and to produce counter-narratives about African women leaders. (Ngunjiri 2007) Portraiture is also used to inform design research insofar as it reveals creative processes (Goldtjein, Wright), and to gain insight into caregiving practices in the medical field. (Ajita, et al. 2010)

Portraiture provides the means for analyzing the social situation from which the subjects perform their identity. Lawrence-Lightfoot states "in the particular resides the general." (1997:14) However, my intention is not to make generalizable claims of broad application to the Somali Bantu. Rather, by creating the portrait of the Muse family a decade after their

70

resettlement in the United States, I want to both document and discover how each member actively participated in constructing a diasporic narrative identity through their experiences as refugees of special humanitarian concern to the United States, and through their interactions with unfamiliar cultures and materialities. The intention is for this portrait to reflect back new understandings and insights that challenge and enlarge the stories told about them, as well as engage the participants in shaping these narratives. Lawrence-Lightfoot writes that portraits are not literal translations, as if looking in a mirror, but are "probing, layered, and interpretive," expressing as well the perspective of the artist, and the relationship of the artist to the subject. (2005:5) Thus, a successful portrait is one that introduces a perspective not considered before, but now drawn forth through the research process. (2005:6,12)

Portraiture relies upon the elaboration of context as vital in decoding meaning around and in collaboration with the subjects. Lawrence Lightfoot describes five ways that portraiture employs context, beginning with the detailed description of the physical environment in which the encounter between artist and subject occur. Portraiture also employs context through descriptions of historical context, discussion of evident symbols and metaphors of significance in the locale, observations of how subjects inhabit the place, and description of how the researcher herself moves within the space / place in relation to the subject. The deliberate attention given to the physical, material, and historical context in framing the portrait counters traditional, positivist forms that strive for an unadulterated setting free of distortions. Here, context matters. The portrait amplifies the voice of the subject, thereby communicating "a meaning that can have an effect on the understandings, attitudes, and actions of its viewers." (Bloom 2003, 877)

Similarly, the voice of the researcher is amplified rather than minimized while collecting and interpreting data. The researcher uses her voice as a witness and interpreter, taking

71

advantage of her status as a "stranger" in order to call forth alternative perspectives and make

sense of the data in new ways. Yet, the voice of the researcher is also preoccupied with the

assumptions that she brings to the work of witness and interpretation. Her lens of experience,

embedded as it is in her particular life history and social positionality, can enhance the trust of

the reader.

Relationship is at the heart of research conducted through the portraiture methodology.

The continual process of "navigating intimacy" includes an active negotiation of boundaries, yet

is dedicated as well to a search for goodness (141) and empathic regard (146). This joyful

approach reinforces my decision to write a story of resilience and strength that counters the

refugee discourses described in chapter two, and particularly the rhetoric of Somali Bantu

primitivism that I touch upon in chapter four.

The following passage from her book, *I've Known Rivers*, provides insight into the range

of emotions and roles in which Lawrence-Lightfoot engaged as a researcher:

As I listen to these   extraordinary women and men tell their life stories, I play many

roles. I am a mirror that reflects back their pain, their fears, and their victories. I am also

the inquirer who asks the sometimes difficult questions, who searches for evidence and

patterns. I am the companion on the journey, bringing my own story to the encounter,

making possible an interpretive collaboration. I am the audience who listens, laughs,

weeps, and applauds. I am the spider woman spinning their tales. Occasionally, I am a

therapist who offers catharsis, support, and challenge, and who keeps track of emotional

mine fields. Most absorbing to me is the role of human archeologist who uncovers the

layers of make and inhibition in search of a more authentic representation of life

experience. Throughout, I must also play stage manager, coordinating the intersection of three plays—the storyteller's, the narrator's, and the reader's—inviting you to add your voice to the drama. (12, 139)

Lawrence-Lightfoot's metaphor of the reflective glass bears similarities to Richardson's discussion of autoethnography as crystallization. However, whereas Richardson emphasizes the refractive qualities of the crystal that offers a partial view determined by one's position of repose, portraiture "raises a reflective glass" that "aims to take a view of the whole." (3, 36) Portraiture is a process of interpretive description that emerges from the co-constructive dialogues of subject and producer, and producer and perceiver. (29) The dialogical construction of meaning is a critical context for appreciating how the narrative is both aesthetically and systematically constituted as a reflection of essential truth—a point for which portraiture has been critiqued.

Fenwick English's critical appraisal of Lawrence-Lightfoot's portraiture methodology argues that in attempting to capture the "essence" of the subject, the portraitist makes an assertion of a stable truth. He asks what right the portraitist / researcher has "to situate, center, label, and fix in the tinctured hues of verbal descriptive prose" a claim of what is real and beyond reproach. Further, he maintains that authority for production of the final portrait is in the hands of the researcher, despite claims to co-construction. In the end, the resulting portrait is something "transcendent," presenting itself as the final commentary that is beyond reproach.

English's appraisal is both a valid and cautionary one; however, I read Lawrence-Lightfoot differently. I interpreted her use of the term "essence" to refer to a holistic portrayal that offered a thick description of the varied strands of experience, context, and history that produced the subject—which is not present in a reductive narrative. The portrait invites us to *see*

more than the two-dimensional marks on a page may suggest. Thus, in view of English's caution against creating a master narrative, I use portraiture methodology to reveal a fleeting moment within a broader, deeper, and continually shifting reality that eludes capture in a totalizing image.

Portraiture Methods

I began this research with a collection of anecdotes from my own lived experience of engaging with the Muse family as a volunteer and friend. I recognized within these anecdotes a dynamic narrative of life in diaspora. In order to bring coherence to these fragments of stories, I employed a variety of methods that included individual and family interviews, dialogic observation, and content analysis to conduct the research. The interviews were conducted either by phone or in person, although I frequently asked clarifying questions through Facebook instant messaging. The interviews were structured informally, with questions derived from data acquired through observation and content analysis.

Prior to and throughout the interviews, I conducted content analysis of social media used by the participants, specifically their Facebook pages. Each of the informants maintained active Facebook accounts for at least five years. I viewed and documented Facebook postings regularly as a way of systematically recording observations and reflections on social media. Social media provided an uncensored although highly constructed platform for observing how the young adult generation of Somali Bantu were representing themselves to one another through status updates, cell phone photographs, profile details, and content shares. Because Facebook offers a site for self-invention, it was therefore a rich repository for examining questions of cultural production and diasporic identity: How did the young adults perform Somali-Bantu or Bantu-American identity? What were some of the cultural influences they chose or rejected? Was there evidence

of new cultural forms emerging from this generation? How were these representations circulating among Somali Bantu communities—both in the United States and in the camps? In these instances, the "performative" was evident in how the participants used Facebook in ways that were "overtly self-conscious" in their interaction with audiences beyond the self, who then co-contributed to meaning. (Powell, p. 136)

The interviews and content analysis occurred within an ongoing process of dialogic observation. Dialogic observation is a term I created to describe dynamic reflection, inquiry, and interrogation of meaning through ongoing experiences in a particular context. The construction of the portrait relies upon "a shared intersubjectivity" necessary to reach an understanding across the gulf of difference between my social position and that of the Somali Bantu families. (Tedlock 1991, 70) In order to contextualize my research I referred back to earlier periods in my twelve-year association with the Muse family for the purposes of dialogic observation. These periods included: September 2004 – November 2005, immediately following their arrival in the United States until the day they departed for Milwaukee; October 2009 when I attended a conference in Milwaukee and stayed in the home of Isha and Abdirahman for three days; and from 2009-2014 through Facebook communication. For these periods, I drew upon memory, reflections written during those time periods9, and archival material such as photographs, articles in the *New River Valley Current* and *News Messenger*, and over 2,000 pieces of e-mail correspondence between volunteers.

The current research began in late summer 2014 when I returned to Milwaukee for the wedding of Mariam, which coincided with the start of formal collection of data for this project.

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9 "Finally a Place to Call Home" + unpublished papers from Women's Studies course: "Creating Home" (2011) and "Third Space Subjectivities: How Khadija and Her Daughters Interpret Somali Bantu Identity in the United States" (2011).

The visit included three and a half days of full immersion in a significant family and cultural event, documented in 125 photographs and ten pages of journaling. Subsequent to this, I maintained regular documentation of Facebook postings and derived interview questions from my observations. In October 2015 I traveled again to Milwaukee for the explicit purpose of conducting interviews, mapping out a family genealogy, and photographing the participants in their homes. I was in Milwaukee again in October 2016 for other purposes and had a chance to spend an evening with Nur and Iqra who treated me to dinner at an Ethiopian restaurant and then showed me apartments they wanted to rent.

In addition to interviews with the primary participants, I regularly reviewed the "Somali Bantu on Facebook" page, which covered a range of topics from charitable appeals on behalf of Somali Bantu living in refugee camps and news about the accomplishments of Somali Bantu youth, to updates on the Wagosha Movement in Somalia. In the process of doing this research, I acquired several Somali Bantu friends on Facebook, some of whom I had met in person and several others who friended me through my association with Mariam or Nur. I did not study their Facebook pages carefully, however having a broader circle of Somali Bantu Facebook friends enlarged my view of Somali Bantu performativity.

Ethical Concerns

Autoethnography and portraiture invite vulnerability, both that of the researcher whose writing comes forth from a space of reflexivity and openness, as well as that of the reader and audience who resonate with the text. Yet those made vulnerable through authoethnography and portraiture include other people—friends, family members, or colleagues--who appear in the story and are identifiable based on their relationship with the author. Because they have a

personal relationship with the author, what once were intimate details could become research data. Do these individuals have a voice in determining how they are represented or what details about their lives are shared? What responsibility do autoethnographers have to intimate others implicated in their stories?

Carolyn Ellis has addressed the issue of relational ethics extensively throughout her career. Her ethical concerns are prompted by her own experiences as a young researcher whose book, *Fisher Folk*, was poorly received by the Chesapeake fishing communities that were its subject. [10] The residents claimed that the confidences shared occurred under the assumption of friendship, and that she had deceived them in how she chose to portray them. Ellis sought to rectify the problem with the communities, and has since committed herself to thinking through issues of relationship and responsibility in ethnography and autoethnography.

Relational ethics, which Ellis calls for in autoethnography, is different from the procedural ethics mandated by Institutional Review Boards. Procedural ethics, by design, ensure that research subjects have given informed consent to participate in projects, and that their privacy and bodily integrity are protected in the process. (Guillemin & Gillam 2004 in Ellis 2007:4) Relational ethics is also distinct from situational ethics put in place to guide behavior in the field. (Guillemin & Gillam, 4) Relational ethics is doing what is necessary to be "true to one's character and responsible for one's actions and their consequences on others." (Slattery & Rapp 2003:55 in Ellis 2007:4) It is built upon the values of mutual respect, dignity, and

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[10] There is controversy regarding the book's reception in the fishing communities. Some accounts say that Ellis' former professor, the person who introduced her to the communities, deliberately inflamed residents by reading excerpts that described them as overweight, illiterate, poorly dressed, and having a fishy odor. Ellis wrote an article apologizing for any deception on her part and has since mended relations with many of the residents.

connectedness between researcher and the individuals and communities they study (Lincoln 1995:287 in Ellis 2007:4), especially when there is the potential for exploitation.

In comparison to the clearly articulated protocols of the procedural and situational, relational ethics is more accurately a morality that establishes normative, guiding values rather than codifies right or wrong action. Consequently, relational ethics is embedded in the process of reflexivity. This relational morality operationalized in the story surrounding Ellis' article, "Maternal Connections," offers a valuable example for its application. The article tells Ellis' story of caring for her aging mother while she was in the hospital. The piece, composed as a part of Ellis' ongoing work around the topic of illness, was a loving tribute to the mother/child relationship; however, it included descriptions of her mother's body and bodily functions. Ellis was concerned that these details, which were important to the story, would offend her mother's sensibilities. Consequently, she chose to not share the piece with her mother even after she had it published, rationalizing that her mother's response to the bodily descriptions would override her ability to see the more important and positive message of the story. Over the years, she was challenged by students and colleagues about her decision; and, she herself often felt that not sharing it was ethically suspect. Eventually, another opportunity for care giving arose:

> This time, because of the agony I had experienced not telling her about "Maternal Connections," I knew I could not publish anything that I didn't okay with her first. So I read the new story to her and then framed the final published story of caregiving with a description of my experience of reading what I had written to my mother. My purpose of this layered account was to address the intricacies of what it means to inform and do ethical research on intimate others. (2007:18)

Even with the new story and her reading of it, Ellis admitted to leaving out certain things, such as the stoop of her mother's back, the bunion on her foot, the collection of a stool sample. Could she claim that she shared it if she didn't read everything? For Ellis, the decision to spare her mother's embarrassment by leaving out certain parts while sharing the larger story pointed to the "gray areas between revealing and concealing." (2007:19)

Each autoethnography requires its own process of ethical reflexivity. For my research with the Somali Bantu family, I regularly asked myself how I would determine the information that was off limits. Interviewing Nur and accessing his perspectives through social media were straightforward. He was eager to put into words his thoughts, beliefs, and experiences. This was not necessarily the case for Isha and Mariam. Were the private messaging exchanges I had with Isha when she was negotiating an altered relationship with her husband confidential? Were the conversations I had with Mariam on the eve before her wedding, secluded in her darkened bedroom while the pre-marital activities were underway downstairs, private ones? Do I decide in advance that certain topics that prevail upon her modesty remain closed—even if these topics are not secret? It is easy to assume that neither Mariam nor Isha are likely to read my research, and to therefore bypass the co-constructive piece of having them respond to what's written. I recognize how easy it is to allow the porous boundaries of researcher and friend to remain unexamined, so that I can remain the sole author of what was shared. But these stories are not my exclusive property as the researcher. My narrative is constructed within a larger social and political landscape that intersects with the narratives of others. Ellis writes "I have to live the experience of doing research with intimate others, think it through, improvise, write and rewrite, anticipate and feel its consequences." (2007:23) Throughout this moral reflection, there is the balancing of subjective and professional interests with the values of friendship and the

achievement of verisimilitude. Some stories can remain untold or be told differently in order to preserve relationships. Some stories must be told without permission because there is too much at stake to remain silent.

The Performative Potential of Autoethnography

This chapter demonstrates the contributions of autoethnography to the production of knowledge in the academy and beyond. Specifically, through autoethnography we have a methodology that gives entrance to ways of knowing and being that were previously inaccessible or deemed unsuitable for serious consideration. A significant body of autoethnographic work grapples with liminality, the ambiguous dimensions of lived experience that evade neat categorization—negotiating identities, coping with illness, restoring troubled relationships, finding meaning in loss. Exploring these liminal spaces hold tremendous potential for improving human relations and social conditions. The accessibility and evocative prose of autoethnography makes it an inclusive practice. The audience is broadened beyond the academy, enabling more people to gain resonance with the stories and be prompted to tell their own stories—sometimes for the first time. Sometimes the stories stimulate new conversations, actions, and behaviors. When this happens, research becomes political.

Chapter Four
Interrogating Popular Narratives of the People Now Known as Somali Bantu

"They Treated Us Like Oxen"

I met Isha and her husband the morning after they arrived in Blacksburg. I knocked on their apartment door and her husband, Abdirahman answered. He was a tall, slender man of twenty-eight with a small, round head like a nut. He gripped a sarong around his waist, his face still damp from a shower. He introduced himself formally and then ushered me into the apartment as if he had been waiting for an audience to whom he could tell his story.

Abdirahman was 12 years old when the violence of the civil war reached his family's village. Until then, they lived quietly as subsistence farmers in Jilib, a fertile area lush with mango trees in the lower Jubba Valley region of southern Somalia. The Bantu homesteads were separate from those of the dominant Somali, however the groups came in frequent contact in the marketplace where the groups negotiated trades and purchases for their goods. The Bantu were accustomed to the humiliating treatment they received from the dominant Somalis who uttered pejoratives (*Addoon*! *Habash!*)[11] and held their noses when passing by, and refused to pay fair market value for the produce the Bantu sold. Sometimes, they would yoke heavy loads onto the shoulders of Bantu men, joking that they needn't tire their donkeys.

 "They treated us like oxen," Abdirahman said.

During times of famine, Somali ranchers allowed their cattle to graze on Bantu crops. Abdirahman was severely beaten by a Somali man after attempting to chase a cow from their

[11] *Addoon* means slave. *Habash* means pagan.

garden. When his father found Abdirahman lying on the ground with a broken leg, he cried. But through his tears his father advised that they should forget what happened.

"Even if they did something you cannot take revenge."

The indignities that marked their daily existence reached unbearable proportions as the civil war spread. Abdirahman's family had heard that Kenya was offering refuge and had begun making plans to travel there for refuge. And then they were visited by a group of soldiers in the night. The soldiers demanded food and money. When the family was unable to produce anything, they tortured his father by tying him up and laying a burning plastic tarp over his body. When his mother attempted to escape into the bush, she was captured and raped repeatedly over several hours. In Abdirahman's memory, she was violated by "hundreds of men" while his father lay helpless. An uncle attempted to defy the soldiers.

"We have nothing. If you want, shoot me."

After this terrible night of violence that left his uncle dead, the family fled. They knew little about Kenya except that it was located somewhere to the west. They walked for 11 days, foraging for fruit when they could, sometimes going hungry for days. At times, he said, their thirst was so powerful that they drank their own urine. Once they reached the Kenyan border town of Liboi, they were detained by security officers who demanded to see identity papers. When the officers realized they were refugees, they provided transport to a camp in Dadaab.

After registering and settling in Dadaab, Abdirahman attended the Iftin Primary school and dedicated himself to learning English and acquiring whatever education he could. Education beyond the primary level was largely unavailable to Bantu children in the rural villages of the lower Jubba Valley. Thus, he continued his education throughout his adolescence and eventually received a certificate from the Al-Fathi Medical Center Technical School after completing a

82

course of study in mental health. The certification allowed him to give injections and offer other

forms of medical assistance as a Medical Technologist with the International Rescue Committee,

which had an operative in Dadaab. The job provided him with a bicycle and modest incentive

pay that enabled him to supplement the yellow maize that constituted the foodstuff of his

extended family.

Before meeting Abdirahman I had acquired most of my knowledge about the Somali

Bantu through a culture profile prepared by the Cultural Orientation Resource Center for service

providers and volunteers assisting the Somali Bantu during their resettlement. The profile was

comprehensive in its coverage of Somali Bantu history and culture. However, Abdirahman's

story communicated a pathos that was absent from the report. We talked for several hours that

day, pausing a while to eat a lunch of boiled chicken and greens cooked by Khadija who was

visibly happy to be reunited with her daughter and family. She rubbed her infant grandson's

round, bald head with baby oil until it glistened. Isha meanwhile explored the three rooms of

their apartment. She deferred to Abdirahman even though she could read and speak English

herself.   Quietly, she emptied a travel bag filled with biscuits from the processing center in

Nairobi. She would not have known that their cupboards were filled with pasta, rice, canned

vegetables, and peanut butter in anticipation of their arrival. In the afternoon, a reporter from a

local newspaper visited and Abdirahman repeated his story to her.[12]

We--the volunteers--were relieved when Abdirahman and his family finally arrived in

Blacksburg. His fluency in English cleared the way for easier communication with all of the

families. Abdirahman said that Khadija cried when they reunited at the airport—it was so hard

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[12]I supplemented my memory of Abdirahman's story with details from the article, "Bantus find welcome home," by Julianna Doerzaph for the December 4th, 2004 edition of the *News Messenger*.

not having anyone who understood her, and she claimed that the Somali case workers misinterpreted her words. Abdirahman would become the voice for the whole Muse family in the coming months, negotiating with social services, employers, doctors, landlords and volunteers on their behalf and eventually making unilateral decisions that affected the entire family.

I begin the chapter with Abdirahman's first-hand account of moving through the refugee trajectory to personalize the documented and oral history of the collective Somali Bantu experience. His story was the first told to me directly, thereby connecting me to the stories told across families about a common historical experience that binds a group of people to a common identity now known as Somali Bantu. Contemporary Bantu identity has evolved significantly through the refugee trajectory thereby demonstrating how group identity is both discursive and performative. This chapter analyzes this trajectory to demonstrate the discursive nature of group identity and to interrogate the connections between the history of oppression and the preservation of culture, with the performance of identity in diaspora. To quote Stuart Hall: dispersed groups such as the Somali Bantu "bear upon them the traces of the particular cultures, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped. The difference is that they are not and will never be unified in the old sense because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belonging at one and the same time to several 'homes.'" (1990, 310) While Somali Bantu identity has been continually transformed by engagements with multiple and often disparate cultures, traditions, languages, and histories throughout the refugee trajectory, it has also been *lived* through these engagements. Now that the Somali Bantu have permanent residence and, increasingly, naturalized citizenship status in the United States, their collective identity will express through cultural productions and practices that shape the Bantu

people and the broader African diaspora in the United States, as well as the American society where they reside.

The trajectory analysis in this chapter begins by summarizing the documented history of the people now known as Somali Bantu, beginning with their forced migration to Somalia and the various factors shaping their status in the country. The analysis continues through the period of displacement, flight, and human warehousing in the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps of Kenya. The second half of the chapter examines how bureaucratic labeling as refugees and public rhetoric of mainstream media further shaped the story of the Somali Bantu. Each of these moments through the refugee trajectory are foundational to the self-representations that emerge in diaspora.

People of the Forest

When the Bantu fled Somalia, they left behind a world organized around a mythology of a homogenous nation characterized by a common Arabic ancestry, a shared culture of nomadism, and a single Somali language. (Eno M. , The Bantu-Jareer Somalis, Unearthing Apartheid in th Horn of Africa, 2008)[13] Within this society, the Bantu were second-class citizens marked by distinctive Negroid features and subordinate status within the prevailing clan-based system that organized Somali society. Their ancestry has been traced to six different tribes—the Magindo, Makua, Manyasa, Yao, Zalamo, and Ziguapa, each of which had its own systems of language, belief, ritual practice, and family structure. Sources indicate that there were 900,000 Bantu people living throughout Somalia, some of whom had been in the country for hundreds of years

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[13]Eno's important revisionist research provides empirical evidence that unmasks the mythology of homogeneity that had prevailed among selected Orientalist and Somali scholars, as well as in the formula narrative of the Somali people. Eno argues that the belief of a homogenous society has been deployed to justify oppression of Jareer/Bantu peoples.

and self-identified as Somali.[14] The particular subset of Bantu people whose movements are

traced in this chapter were reportedly captured by the Sultan of Zanzibar and other Arab slave

traders from their homelands in Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania at the turn of the 18th

century and brought forcibly to Somalia to work on plantations along the Jubba and Shabbelle

rivers. Collectively, they were known in Somalia as *Mushungulis,* a word that has multiple

implied meanings including worker, foreigner, and slave. (Menkhaus, 2010) Various sources

also refer to the people now known as the Somali Bantu as *Gosha* (Besteman, 1999)*, Zigula*

(Dechlich, 2000)*,* or *Jareer.* (Eno M. , The Bantu-Jareer Somalis, Unearthing Apartheid in th

Horn of Africa, 2008)

In the 1840's, the first fugitive slaves began settling in the lower Jubba Valley. The first

settlers were the Zegua from Tanzania who escaped after a few years of enslavement and

occupied the largely uninhabited area as refuge. The nomadic Somalis tended to avoid the

densely forested area, describing it as *Gosha,* or "unhealthy forest" because of its infestation of

tsetse flies, which endangered the pastoralists' livestock. However, to the Zegua, the fertile land

bordering the river was a site for reclaiming their identity, autonomy, and self-sufficiency

through agricultural sustainability. (Besteman 1999, 60-1) They began clearing land, establishing

small-scale farms, fortifying their villages to protect themselves from invasion, and "creating

village based forms of authority, mediation, and negotiation." (109) From 1865-1895 the Zegua

were joined by 20,000 other fugitive or manumitted slaves who likewise sought refuge and

established their own villages and farmlands. Collectively, they forged an "independent

Goshaland" bound by a common East African ethnic identity but otherwise distinct in terms of

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[14] Historical data is drawn from the following sources: Besteman, Translating Race Across Time and Space: The Construction of Somali Bantu Ethnicity 2012; M. Eno, The Bantu-Jareer Somalis: Unearthing Apartheid in the Horn of Africa 2008; Menkhaus, The Question of Ethnicity in Somali Studies: The Case of Somali Bantu Identity 2010.

cultural practices, language, and internal governance. (Menkhaus 1989:127 in Besteman 64, 65)

Knowledge of the language of their ancestors was of particular importance to the settlers because

it served as a reminder of their 'free origin' prior to their capture into slavery. (Dechlich, 1995)

The *Mushunguli* transformed the Jubba Valley into a site of productivity that successfully

accommodated multiple social identities. However, this independent Goshaland underwent

significant changes with settlement trends occurring after 1895. The influx of former slaves

arriving in the lower and middle Jubba Valley after 1895 were distanced from their cultures of

origin. Because they had been stolen into slavery as children, their memory of the languages,

rituals, and cultural practices of their homeland had diminished. Out of necessity for survival, the

new arrivals were "Somalized." They had forged stronger affiliation with the Somali clans in

which they were raised and many practiced Islam, albeit a more liberal form that retained

elements of the animist and indigenous beliefs held prior to their capture into slavery. They

spoke a Cushitic dialect, Maay Maay, which eventually replaced the Swahili and Bantu

languages spoken across the villages of independent Goshaland.

The colonial occupation of the Jubba Valley by the Italians and British during the late

1890's likewise altered the space from one of independence and sustainability to that of

racialized economic and agricultural exploitation. The British colonial administration, in an

initiative of pacification aimed at the Ogaadeen Somalis, collected munitions from the villages,

leaving them unfortified—a move that would later contribute to their vulnerability during the

civil war. (Besteman, 1999, p. 68) The Italian colonial administration, despite their abolition of

slavery in 1890, conscripted the *Mushunguli* to work on Italian-owned plantations, and

expropriated their land without compensation. Both British and Italian colonists regarded the

Somalis as racially superior to the *Mushunguli* and through their policies and actions further

reinforced the perception of each group as distinct and unequal. (122) According to Catherine

Besteman:

> While upholding the perception of Somalis as distinct from and superior to the European
>
> construct of "black Africans", both British and Italian colonial administrators placed the
>
> Jubba valley population in the latter category. Colonial discourse described the Jubba
>
> valley as occupied by a distinct group of inferior races, collectively identified as the
>
> *WaGosha* by the British and the *WaGoscia* by the Italians. (Besteman, 1999, p. 120)

Thus, the term *Gosha*, originally an inoffensive term for the people of the forest, evolved into a

categorizing label for designating a territorialized and "subjugated racialized ethnic group."

(Besteman 1999, 156) Dominant Somali and colonists each depended upon and exploited the

labor and agricultural productivity of the *Mushunguli / Gosha*, and restricted their access to

education, economic development, and political representation. Later, nationalists would forcibly

conscript them for military service during the Somalia-Ethiopia conflict, thereby claiming *Gosha*

bodies for the cause of the state while simultaneously marginalizing them. Even after Siyad

Barre's nationalist campaign of scientific socialism in the late 1970's outlawed references to

ethnic distinctions and formal relationships based on social inequality, the lived experience of the

Mushunguli / Gosha remained one of subordination. In fact, the legislated homogeneity

heightened the awareness of difference and rendered the *Mushunguli / Gosha* experiences of

discrimination as undiscussable. (p. 128) Some *Mushunguli / Gosha* attempted to leverage the

discourse of a Somali democratic ethos to their benefit, however, "rituals of subordination"

performed in the daily confrontations between *Mushunguli / Gosha* and Somalis—the verbal and

physical abuse, the false charges for petty offenses, the allowances granted to pastoralists'

transgressions--maintained their status as second class citizens. (Scott 1990 in Besteman 1999,

125) According to Menkhaus, by the late 1980s most [Bantu] communities in Somalia "found themselves weaker, poorer, and worse off than at any time in history." (Menkhaus, 2010, p. 90)

Bantu-Jareer

The Jubba Valley evolved into a place of subjugated "otherness" within the national space, propped up by notions of race, ethnicity, and status constructed by the dominant Somalis and reinforced by colonialist policies. (Besteman, 1999, p. 133) According to Eno, Somali society was organized around the categories of *Jileec* (soft hair) and *Jareer* (hard hair)—terms that were not merely descriptive, but rather implied deep cultural significance that situated the two groups as mutually exclusive from one another. (Eno M. , The Bantu-Jareer Somalis, Unearthing Apartheid in th Horn of Africa, 2008) The *Jileec*'s softer hair texture, narrow nose, slim body frame, and lighter complexion was the embodiment of the dominant Somali's presumed nobility rooted in an Arabic ancestry whose lineage traced back to Mohammed the Prophet of Islam. (Besteman, 1999, p. 97) Conversely, the *Jareer*'s kinky or coiled hair, broader nose, bulkier body frame, and darker complexion were evidence of their impure ancestry, low social status, and questionable religious integrity.   These physical characteristics were deployed to single out and unite the Bantu-Jareer as a group of ex-slaves who were bereft of a history or lineage. The conflation of Negroid physical characteristics with an ignoble heritage of enslavement was applied to all Bantu people living in Somalia, including indigenous groups whose origins were traced to the Shungwaya kingdom of the 12th century.(94)   Formulaic narratives of Somali identity, beginning with ancestral myths that were later reconstituted with the introduction of Islam to the region, operated to reinforce social boundaries that delimited who belonged and who was outside of the boundaries of Somaliness. (Kusow, 2015, p. 410) In these narratives the principal ancestor emigrated from east of the Red Sea, married a local

woman, and from this union laid the foundation of the modern Somali identity, which is Muslim and predominantly Arab based on the father's lineage. These narratives, initially circulated through oral tradition and retained in social memory, produced and perpetuated social and racial stratification on cultural, institutional, organizational, and personal levels. (409, 413)   Embedded in the grand narrative of Somali superiority and lineage is the justification for privileges and advantages they claimed for themselves: (Eno M. A., 2014, p. 98)

> [T]he Bantu Jareer community does not have the claim to Arab ancestry as the Somalis do. They are ethnically Africans and considered all as descendants of slave ancestors who do not have physical resemblances to claim Somaliness. Based on these accounts of disqualification, the Bantu Jareer are considered as a community inferior in status and therefore ethnically lower than the Somali proper. These dissimilarities are sufficient reasons to determine the Bantu Jareer as degradable people unequal to Somalis. (Kusow, 2015, pp. 416-7)

Researchers such as Besteman (1996, 1999), Eno (2008) and Menkhaus (2010) have asserted that longstanding relations of domination and subordination around class, race, land and labor foreshadowed the violence and devolution of the Somali state after 1991. The prevailing narrative claims that Somali society collapsed under the weight of corruption and clan warfare. And, while these are indeed factors that contributed to the failed state, there was as well the weight of institutionalized prejudice that allowed Somali groups to obtain weapons from Somali militias, circumvent United Nations peacekeeping efforts to provide relief to people in the riverine areas, and rob Jubba farmers of food. Kenneth Menkhaus, who was among the peacekeepers, witnessed how the *Mushunguli / Gosha* were violently targeted and observed that Somali indifference was due to the deep seated belief that *Jareer* were not a part of their society:

"The virtual holocaust visited upon low-status groups such as the Jareer in 1991 and 1992 was not just a tragic result of warlords and young gunmen run amok; it was also the result of conscious decisions by clan elders and militia leaders over who lived and who died, an 'allocation of pain' which reflected the ethics and logic of the existing social order in crisis, and which betrayed the fact that low status members of the clan simply did not matter enough to live." (2010, p. 99)

Somali formula narratives included stigmatization of Somalis who were deemed lower-caste based on their occupations or weak affiliation to Islam. However, the institutionalized prejudice directed toward the Bantu-Jareer centered on inferences of slave identity and African descent. Since the 1990's additional epitaphs have emerged that stigmatize Bantu-Jareer based on their vulnerability through the civil war. They are *looma-ooye*--kinless people with no one to mourn them; *looma-aare* --impotent to avenge the murder of their relatives; and *reer-baari*--people who are tamed and tolerant of their subjugation. (Eno M. A., 2014, p. 111)

Counter Narratives and the Somali Bantu Ethnonym

Mushunguli marginalization cultivated a critical consciousness necessary for their survival. This consciousness was apparent in the oral testimonies of Bantu elders who conveyed an astonishingly consistent collective narrative of social suffering and opposition to the dominant ideologies of Somali society. The story of collective memory and historical interpretation underscored the refusal of the Bantu to construct themselves as a subjugated group. Prior to 1991, there was no perceived common identity among the *Mushunguli / Gosha,* and certainly no desire to form a group identity based on their slave ancestry.[15] (Besteman, 2012, pp. 289-9)

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[15]According to Bestemen's research in the lower Jubba in the 1980's attempts to discuss slavery were met with reticence.

Instead, the "Gosha people used their history to reclaim agency—their rightful membership standing in clans of their choosing, their freedom from subjugation within those clans, their economic independence as farmers and producers, their standing as free and equal citizens." (Besteman, 1999, p. 146) The themes of equality, dignity, self-reliance and pride paralleled Siyad Barre's rhetoric of scientific socialism. Their resistance strategy was focused not on overturning the social order through armed revolution, but rather from working within the existing structures and culture to win acknowledgement of their humanity and their agency. They used the tools available to them: official rhetoric, hegemonic forms of social organization such as gender, kinship, and family, as well as private forms of resistance contained in poetry, magic, and song. In doing so, they inhabited "the enormous gray area between domination and collusion, a confused space of imagined alternatives, public acquiescence, and private rage." (Besteman, 1999, p. 133)

Mushunguli / *Gosha* never resigned themselves to a subordinate status, but their marginalization nonetheless factored into their collective consciousness. The widespread violence against *Jareer* after 1990 precipitated a growing political consciousness. (Besteman, 2012, p. 292) Fleeing Somalia meant that the *Mushunguli* relinquished their marginalized identities for that of refugee. When they arrived in the refugee camps, they were profoundly impacted by the sight of Kenyans who shared their physical features and spoke Kiswahili holding positions of leadership. According to Francesca Declich, "suddenly, these Zigula who had never travelled outside Somalia experienced the difference of being considered human beings equal to others." (2010, p. 176)   While conditions in the refugee camps were extraordinarily difficult and they continued to face abuse from Somali refugees, encampment nonetheless marked a transition toward a better life and validation of their humanity.

Somalis had been migrating to Kenya to escape famine, warfare, and civil unrest since the late 1970's. Until 1990, they were able to enter the country and settle freely, and find employment on their own. After 1990 when more than 400,000 Somalis crossed into the country fleeing violence and social upheaval, Kenyan refugee policy was forced to change. Camps such as Dadaab were constructed to receive and contain the enormous influx of Somalis (and other refugees) into the country. Camp officials and humanitarian aid workers processing entrants were perplexed by the *Mushunguli / Gosha* who claimed Somalia as their country of origin. These refugees were distinctly different in appearance than the other Somalis and were typically unable to identify a clear tribal or clan identity. Thus, the entrants were designated as "Somali Bantu"—a term that had not previously been used as an identifier.[16] From that point forward, the Jubba Valley farmers self-identified as Somali Bantu, despite their cultural diversity. This new ethnonym would prove useful in constructing a Somali Bantu narrative that was distinct from that of the other refugees in Dadaab, and raised their international profile as a people of special concern.

The refugee camp functioned as a "frontier area" that created a positive ethnic identity distinguished by shared cultural characteristics. (Declich, 2010) Camp officials observed that the Bantu were ready to speak out about the abuses they endured once they were treated respectfully by Kenyan police, aid workers, and other Africans they met in the camp. (Van Lehman, 2003, p. 14) This newfound confidence opened up options for the Bantu people. The need to gain recognition in a society that was structured against them was no longer essential. Many vowed that they would never return to Somalia, even if conflicts were resolved. Some considered returning to Tanzania or Mozambique where their ancestors were buried. Approximately 5,000-

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[16]Omar Eno told Besteman in an interview that the Bantu identifier was used in Somalia among Somali minorities and educated Jareer in Mogadishu in the early 1990's at the recommendation of a South African UNOSOM officer who heard about their deplorable treatment. The term would serve to highlight their concerns as a minority group. See Besteman 2012.

10,000 in fact returned to Tanzania, with 3,000 granted formal asylum. For others, having the opportunity to articulate their plight to an international audience presented unforetold avenues for freedom and a future for their children. Whereas their strategy in Somalia had focused on integration, in the refugee camp under the ethnonym of Somali Bantu they could construct a narrative around their history of oppression as a source of cohesion and solidarity.

The Somali Bantu continued to experience oppression in the refugee camps. They occupied the most menial positions and continued to be subject to the taunts and abuse of their Somali neighbors. As recognition of the Somali Bantu plight gained traction, it prompted outrage among the Somali refugees who declared that the Bantu's claims of mistreatment in Somalia and their assertion of a distinct ethnicity were fraudulent, that Somalians were united under a single identity. The level of threat against the Bantu escalated when they were selected for resettlement in the United States on P2 status as a group of special humanitarian concern. In a "dramatic reversal of identity claims" everyone wanted to be Somali Bantu. (Besteman, 2012, p. 290) Corruption and subterfuge followed as some Somalis attempted to pass themselves as Bantu by stealing ID cards, purchasing identities, bribing families to include names as family members, and disguising themselves in shabby clothing in order to appear poor. Interviewers relied upon "essentialized notions of racial difference" in an attempt to authenticate identity in the reverification process, studying the shape and sizes of noses and hands, and using the pencil test to distinguish hair texture17. (2012, p. 295) Consequently, some who had legitimate claim to the Somali Bantu identity were rejected, while others who lied or cheated were included on the list for resettlement.

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17 The pencil test, as a measure of racial identification, involves placing a pencil into the hair of the subject. If the pencil falls out the person is identified as having the soft hair associated with whiteness or—in this case—with *jileec*.

One consistent measure of verification was the "narrative of victimization" that was a

required part of the interview process. Somali Bantus learned to narrate personal stories of abuse

and attack by Somali militias, and repeated these stories at various points in the resettlement

interview process. (2012, p. 296) This repetition of a narrative of victimization was, as much as

anything, core to the production of Somali Bantu identity.

Gendered Narratives

Much of the information shared about the Somali Bantu is from the stories told by men.

According to Dechlich, the gendering of the Bantu story was affected at least in part by the

provision of international humanitarian aid that emphasized the authority of male elders while

ignoring the female elders. (Dechlich, 2000) In fact, women held significant positions within

their communities—positions that were rendered powerless through the refugee trajectory and

the intervention of Western models for community governance. However, "a female historical

discourse continued to be expressed offstage" through oral sources that were not codified into

texts but were nonetheless passed along through ritual songs. (Dechlich, 1995, p. 94) Ritualized

narratives expressed through drumming, songs, and dances were transmitted through matrilineal

mviko membership—a kind of kinship grouping—that were often secret and therefore unlikely to

be shared outside of the group. (1995, pp. 106-7)

Women also contributed to the Somali Bantu narrative through their silence. In the

gendered telling of stories about war violence and displacement, men testified to their survival of

torture and indignity as a means for constructing a mythico-history of overcoming oppression.

For women, the violence of war violated the most intimate boundaries of their bodies, thereby

producing a profound vulnerability that they chose to not express publicly or to deny. (Dechlich,

2001) Indeed, it was the inscription of war on the bodies of women that was the decisive factor

prompting many families to leave their homes in the Jubba Valley in search of refuge outside of Somalia.

Isha's family fled in 1992. They boarded a truck packed full with desperate people wanting to escape the increasing violence spreading across the region. Her recollections of life in Somalia are faint, but can be distilled to one vivid memory from when her home was looted by bandits. She was four years old. She, her mother and an older sister huddled in fear, witnessing the pillaging of their home, knowing they could do nothing to prevent the devastation. The consequences of speaking out were rape or death. Isha recalls that the prevalence of violence and the awareness of their vulnerability was so pervasive that Gosha families hid their teenage daughters when the sun began to set in order to protect them from rape, and some women covered themselves in feces before bed in order to repel potential rapists.

They traveled to Dadaab refugee camp on the border of Somalia and Kenya. In 1993, Isha began Eleys Primary School in Dadaab and attended for eight years, achieving Class Five status, a remarkable feat considering that girls were not given priority in receiving formal education. During this time, her family grew. Her siblings, Nur, Miriam, and Muse were each born in the refugee camp.

And then, in 2001, her father died. Her mother, Khadija, tried earning extra income for the family by making mats out of plastic bags scavenged from the dump. But the location of the dump was very dangerous and once Khadija was beaten by a man. Soon after, Isha was removed from school so that she could work for a Somali family in a different section of the camp, earning 700 Kenyan schillings a month (the approximate equivalent of seven U.S. dollars). Because of its distance from her home, she was required to live with the family for most of the week.

The Somali family was not sympathetic. Isha, only 12 years old, had to be available at all hours for whatever worked needed done, beginning with breakfast of chai and injera in the morning. She would then go to the market to buy food, prepare the meals, collect water during the brief periods when the pump was working, sweep the floors, and wash clothes by hand. The children of the family worsened the cruel working conditions by deliberately creating messes that she would need to clean up. She wanted to leave the job, but the family threatened to withhold her earnings if she visited her family.

"We are always the poor ones," she said.

Isha did leave. She found a job with another Somali family located closer to her mother and siblings so she was able to sleep at home. She earned less money—400 schillings—but the loss of income was compensated by the family's kindness. They gave her clothes and let her buy food for her family on credit. They encouraged her to continue her lessons, so she studied by gas lamp in the evening. She worked for this family until she married in March 2003 at the age of thirteen.

Isha's age at marriage was unusually young. Most Bantu girls marry between the ages of 16-18 years. However, Isha was promised to Abdirahman by her father when she was merely nine years old. The promise was made as a gesture of appreciation for Abdirahman's assistance to the family, and possibly, aware of his diminishing health, as a means to secure his family's future. It is likely that Khadija's circumstances as a widow accelerated the date of marriage. Abdirahman's earnings were enough to support the whole family, supplementing the meager food rations of yellow maize with vegetables.

Shortly after Isha's marriage, the extended family learned that their application for resettlement to the United States was accepted. They were among the 11,860 Somali Bantu

transferred from Dadaab to Kakuma refugee camp for the formal interviews and resettlement orientation. The journey to Kakuma lasted three days.

Kakuma was safer for the Somali Bantu, but life there was very hard. Water was scarce. Snakes and scorpions threatened. They received a modest food allocation, but had no firewood to prepare the food. They would sell a portion of their food to the Turkana who were native to the area, and the Turkana would bring the firewood. This plan worked for a while, but it reduced the already insufficient resources the family received from the UNHCR. So, Khadija set out on her own to find firewood. It was a difficult task and on multiple occasions she fainted from the heat.

Isha became pregnant with Mohamed within months of marrying. When the time came to deliver, she labored for seven days without pain reliever. The midwife on hand was not very helpful and eventually another woman came and broke the water. The baby was born several hours later in the afternoon with a yellowish complexion and little pimples around his eyes and ears. The elders attempted to use traditional methods to heal the infant, but to no effect. Finally, Isha and Mohamed were taken to the hospital for seven days where Mohammed was treated for the jaundice and milia, both very common conditions for newborns. Afterward, she stayed in her mother's house for forty days as was the custom for first-time mothers.

In 2004, Khadija left for the United States with Nur, Miriam, and Muse. Isha became ill with malaria and was confined to a hospital bed. Abdirahman panicked. Their interview with the International Office for Migration was coming up. If they missed the appointment because she was in the hospital, they might have to wait several months or possibly even a year to get another appointment. He went to the hospital, removed Isha's IV and brought her to the IOM interview. They completed the interview with Isha in a groggy state, and she was then returned to the hospital. Several weeks later, they were called to go to Nairobi for nine days where they

would complete a final interview and then prepare for their flight to the United States.

People of Humanitarian Concern

The Refugee Act of 1980 opened the doors to the United States for refugees from Africa. This signaled a shift in United States refugee policy from one driven by foreign policy interests and anti-Communism ideology toward a more humanitarian selection policy. (Boas, 2007, p. 2) By the end of the Cold War, the number of refugee claims from Communist nations was reduced. The US was able to accommodate more refugees from other nations. At this same time, nongovernmental organizations were raising international attention to protracted refugee problems in Africa and the demands these problems placed on host countries such as Kenya. Additionally, the Congressional Black Caucus made a case for increasing the number of entrants from Africa. Thus, policy makers were prompted to search for large, self-contained groups that would fit the P2 status, thereby making US refugee policy into a "true rescue program." (7) The two groups chosen were the so-called Lost Boys of Sudan and the Somali Bantu.

Because the United States agreed to accept the Somali Bantu en masse, their refugee status morphed into a totalizing identity. The influx of approximately 13,000 Somali Bantu across the country not only catalyzed significant demographic changes in these communities, but also occasioned public concern about their impact on social service and public education systems. Some of these concerns were spurious, reflecting xenophobic and anti-Muslim attitudes. However, some of the objections were rooted in legitimate concerns about resource capacity, economic conditions, and the dearth of employment opportunities for a largely unskilled, undereducated, mostly non-English speaking workforce.   The considerable media relations surrounding the arrival of the Bantu sought to counter negative receptions with public interest stories; however, these same stories fostered the grand narrative of romantic primitivism.

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"The Most Oppressed People on the Planet"

Articles about Somali Bantu resettlement first appeared in American newspapers around 2001, shortly after the Department of State made its decision in 1999 to declare the Bantu a persecuted group eligible for possible entry into the country.   The events of September 11th delayed the processing of refugees, establishing additional security measures that prolonged the already bureaucratic procedures in place for refugee determination. Individuals of Arab or Muslim affiliation were especially scrutinized. However, the International Office of Migration (IOM), the intergovernmental agency responsible for migration management, had already begun to transport the Somali Bantu from Dadaab to Kakuma where they would undergo medical examinations and cultural orientation in preparation for their migration to the United States. They had nowhere else to go, since most Somali Bantu rejected any consideration of repatriating to Somalia, and were not approved for resettlement in their ancestral homelands of Mozambique or Tanzania.

In December 2001, a New York Times article by Mark Lacey entitled, "Somali Bantu, trapped in Kenya, seek a home," presented the Somali Bantu as a subjugated group with an oppositional identity who, despite their birthright, distinguished themselves from the lighter skinned Somalis of Arab ancestry. These Somalis were the dominant class that systematically denied their full inclusion in society and leveled human rights abuses against them. Whereas the "true" Somalis might sympathize with the ideology of Osama bin Laden, they argued, the Bantu were aligned with the United States as victims of terrorism. Lacey's article was an unusual predecessor to the flood of journalistic interest that would surround the Somali Bantu once they began arriving in the United States. Lacey's article made no commentary about the Bantu's suitability for resettlement in an industrialized society, nor did it use any language that may have

described them as primitive (as later articles would do). Instead, it aligned the Somali Bantu with the United States against the enemies of the State (Islamic terrorists and Somalis), in a move that prepared the ground for the largest resettlement of a single group from Africa.

By June of 2002, the movement of refugees toward the United States was well underway. Whereas Lacey's article framed the Somali Bantu as politically engaged agents in pursuit of a better future, subsequent articles emphasized their tragic past as "the most oppressed people on the planet" who had been "abused, beaten, and downtrodden."[18] A New York Times article identified them as "Africa's Lost Tribe"[19]—a label that persisted across subsequent stories. Others led with anecdotes about the Somali Bantu's wonderment of Western abundance with bewildered adults encountering modern appliances: A man attempted to use a coin-operated washing machine but did not understand that he needed to push the Start button in order for it to work. (National Geographic, 2003) An elder claimed that he and his wife were afraid of their oven and dishwasher because they had never seen such things in their lives. (The New York Times, 2003) A father, panicked by what he thought was the fire alarm sounding in his building and unable to figure out the double locks on their door, trapped his family in their apartment for five days until their caseworker let herself in with a key. (USA Today, 2006)

Almost every article reviewed in national and regional papers referenced the novelty of doorknobs, and flush toilets, and light switches to the Bantu as signifiers of their backwardness. According to one reporter, "Many Bantus don't know how to turn a doorknob, use a pencil, boil water or brush their teeth--let alone read, write or speak English." (The Seattle Times, 2004)

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[18] Paul A. Barra, "People of Lost Somali Bantu Tribe to Settle in South Carolina," *The Catholic Miscellany*, March 1, 2003.
[19] Rachel Swarns, "Africa's Lost Tribe Discovers American Way," *New York Times*, March 10, 2003.

Another stated, "Most have never ridden in a car, flushed a toilet or flicked on electric lights."

(Atlantic Constitution Journal, 2004) These references were accompanied by remarks from

resettlement workers predicting a steep learning curve. One agency director even remarked that

his staff was "expecting people who were practically non-functioning" but observed that the

families in their care seemed to be learning very quickly. (Pittsburgh Post Gazette, 2003) As a

whole, the stories called forth a romantic primitivism of a simple people who arrived in a

promised land of comfort, convenience, and material plenty with the modest goal of living in

peace.

Much of the news about the Somali Bantu was derived from two sources: A report by

International Office of Migration (IOM) official, Sasha Chanoff, and the cultural orientation

manual, *The Somali Bantu: Their History and Culture*, written by UNHCR field officer, Daniel

Van Lehmann, and Somali Bantu historian and scholar, Omar Eno. Both documents were

written for American audiences in anticipation of the cultural challenges facing both Bantu and

their receiving communities during resettlement.

The Cultural Orientation manual was designed primarily for service providers and

volunteers who would assist the Bantu refugees in transitioning to their new communities. It was

structured around several short chapters discussing land, people, history, religion, daily life and

values, language and literacy, education, and cross cultural challenges.   The chapter on cross

cultural challenges addressed key areas requiring attention such as housing, work and finances,

health care, mental health, education, learning English, communication styles, special needs of

women, and relationships between Bantu and other Somalis. Several African history scholars,

IOM staff, and Bantu elders vetted and/or contributed to information in the manual prior to its

publication. Even though the manual was not written for wholesale consumption, it became a

primary source for the general public to learn about the Somali Bantu. The statement that

"electricity, flush toilets, telephones, and kitchen and laundry appliances are all foreign to most

Bantu refugees," which circulated through multiple media sources, was taken from this

document. According to Van Lehman, the statement was not in their original iteration of the

manual but was added after their editor "demanded" that it be included.[20/21]

Sasha Chanoff's[22] article appeared in the Immigration and Refugee Services of

America newsletter, *Refugee Reports*, when the movement of the Somali Bantu through the

resettlement verification process was underway. The article began with a brief but

comprehensive history of the particular segment of Bantu populations in Somalia that were

identified for resettlement, and followed them through their reapplication for asylum in the

United States after plans for resettlement in Mozambique were rescinded. Chanoff inserted his

observations throughout the article's narration, which included resettlement interviews, a home

visit, departure preparations, and cultural orientation classes. The report conveyed the depth of

understanding and knowledge that Chanoff brought to his work with the IOM; however, it also

communicated his posture toward the Bantu as subalterns. He described encountering a mass of

Somali Bantu outside the interview site at Dadaab, waiting complacently while "runny nosed"

children with "spindly legs" played quietly alongside their parents. The poverty and desolation

of the Dagahaley camp where they lived was an "in your face reality" replete with "ragged

masses" of children, dust, and blistering heat. His assessments of household life concluded with

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[20] Personal e-mail correspondence, Dan Van Lehmann, January 7, 2011.
[21] Van Lehmann and Omar Eno directed the National Somali Bantu project based at Portland State University. They have worked closely with Somali Bantu leaders and elders to establish mutual assistance organizations in almost every city where they are located. They are the leading spokespersons for Somali Bantu concerns in the United States, and are recognized by many Bantu as the people who brought their case to the attention of the UNHCR.
[22] Chanoff has since founded an organization, RefugePoint-A Lifeline for Forgotten Refugees, which operates in the United States and throughout Africa on rescue projects. The organization's advisors include celebrities such as Danny Glover and Susan Sarandon.

statements: "Everything about an American kitchen will be alien" or "They would not recognize 99 percent of the food in American supermarkets." Chanoff pondered the question of where to begin with orienting the Somali Bantu when there was so many new things for them to learn: "Where does one begin with people who have never held a pen or read a sign, who have no support network in the United States, and have no previous information about life in the United States?" His questions, while rhetorically framed to reflect the enormity of the task ahead, nonetheless situated the Bantu as a bounded culture whose dispositions, values, and attitudes made them potentially untrainable.

An oft-repeated quote (which I have been unable to trace to its original source) cited Chanoff as saying, "Do not assume they can open a door just because it has a doorknob." Conservative, anti-immigration pundits manipulated the doorknob to fit their polemics. An article in Middle American News spuriously links this statement removed from its context with a diatribe against misguided liberal elite who will subsidize the "transplanted tribesmen" who are not far removed from the Stone Age with U.S. taxpayer dollars. This article, and others like it in VDare.Com and Refugee Resettlement Watch, framed the Bantu not only as primitives, but also as dangerous exotics whose cultural and religious practices---specifically, polygamy, female circumcision, and residuals of animist beliefs--were strange and potentially threatening to the majority white, Christian population. The vitriol of the articles and bulletin board posts amplified cultural differences and questioned the value of the Somali Bantu to their new communities.

Van Lehmann pointed to the IOM and early Western press reports as perpetrating notions of the Somali Bantu as primitive providing fodder to anti-immigration sentiments.[23] "I

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[23] Personal e-mail correspondence, Dan Van Lehmann, January 7, 2011.

worked in the Kenyan refugee camps for two years, and the Bantu obeyed the rules more than any other group in the camps," Lehmann indicated. "Some did electrical work, some mechanical work, some were drivers. To suggest that they are somehow out of the caves is demeaning and does a tremendous disservice" (The McGill Report, July 23, 2003). In fact, the biggest challenge the Somali Bantu would face in resettlement had less to do with the technologies of progress, but instead "learning how to navigate a modern society where families are dispersed and society is maintained not by patriarchs and tribal elders, but rather through impersonal institutions like schools, courts, hospitals, and social service agencies." (Omar Eno in The McGill Report, July 23, 2003) Others predicted that their transition would be made more difficult by neoliberal policies governing the management of refugee resettlement that required full integration within eight months, regardless of the refugee's prior circumstances.

Identity in Diaspora

More than a dozen years have passed since the Somali Bantu arrived in the United States. A Google search of "Somali Bantu Resettlement" now pulls up web links for Bantu-led mutual assistance associations that have formed across the country. Somali Bantu music is highlighted on the Vermont Folk Life Center website on New Neighbors Music Project. Several Somali Bantu channels on social media sites provide news in Maay Maay and Zigua. Other broadcasting and media outlets feature small-scale productions of Somali Bantu music videos, weddings, and vlogs.

The Somali Bantu are no longer the so-called lost tribe, but are now very much on a cultural map of their own making. Earlier concerns of skeptics, who wondered how the Bantu would achieve self-sufficiency in a post-industrial world, appear to be unfounded. Shortly after they arrived, the Bantu acquired and mastered the technologies of progress that marked life in the

United States: cell phones, computers, Internet access, satellite cable, social networking sites. They also demonstrated the capacity to hold in tension the religious and cultural modernities that confronted them as a people. Yet, the Somali Bantu remain invested in sustaining their cultural and religious values and practices.

Paul Gilroy writes that the scattering of peoples due to war, oppression, enslavement, or economic migration creates an "inevitable opening of their culture" whereby "new possibilities for understanding identity" beyond place and nation emerge, making way for "new bases for social solidarity"—oftentimes facilitated by twenty-first century technologies. (Gilroy, 1997, p. 304) What does the Somali Bantu identity mean to those who claim it? In the refugee camps, the identity emerged as a way to claim a political voice based in a shared experience of victimization. As victims who were later described as the most oppressed people on the planet, their narrative better situated them within a resettlement country that regarded itself as the grand protector, who received the Somali Bantu as a persecuted group worthy of rescue. However, the United States has yet to fully reckon with its own racist history, which is now further complicated with anti-Islamic and anti-immigration attitudes. The Somali Bantu view the United States as a site of equality, where "black and white" live together. How does this fit with their lived experience as a community multiply minoritized—racially, religiously, culturally, and economically? The Somali Bantu trajectory enters a new chapter in diaspora. Identity constructions emerging from this tension of marginalization and acceptance will be revealing. How do Somali Bantu construct and perform identity in diaspora? It is at this point that I turn my attention to the young adults of the Muse family—Isha, Nur, and Mariam.

Chapter Five

Constructing Identity through Cultural Sustainability and Social Reproduction

Culture, broadly defined, is the expression of a shared commonality that bonds

individuals as a group. Cultural identity is thus the enunciation of the self through modes of

representation that both express shared culture as well as signify its continual production within

the discourse of history. (Hall, 1993) As demonstrated in chapter four, the Somali Bantu

trajectory was one of continuous dispersion marked by the tension of resistance to and collusion

with dominant narratives of difference, belonging, and worth. (Besteman) Encampment and

resettlement disrupted this liminality insofar as it offered a chance for cohesion and solidarity

around a social-political subjectivity. For people like the Somali Bantu who are living in

diaspora, constructing identity is mingled with the work of cultural sustainability[24] and social

reproduction. The daily habits of making a life and reproducing the social connect the past with a

future. However, these habits are flexible and responsive to the demands of the present and the

groups' collective aspirations for the future. Culture is *lived*, therefore it is dynamic.

For the Somali Bantu, the work of cultural sustainability and social reproduction are most

fully realized through the bodies of women. Whereas men occupy the public face of the

community, it is the women who embody and carry out the practices and habits signifying

culture. Among Somali Bantu living in the United States, a wedding celebration is a critical site

of cultural sustainability and social reproduction. In addition to being an occasion for

celebration, the wedding is an important rite of passage marking the continuation of cultural

identity through the reproduction of family and the larger community. Men and women both

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[24] My definition of cultural sustainability is borrowed from the World Commission on Environment and
Development for the United Nations General Assembly (1987), whereby sustainability is "meeting the needs of the
present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

participate in the contracting, planning, and celebrating of the wedding. However, women's role is of particular cultural significance: they are the ones who orchestrate the production of the wedding through the preparations of food, clothing, and hospitality, as well as the preparation of the bride for her new role as wife and mother. The bride is the center of the celebration upon whose body the expressive culture is manifest, maintained, and carried forward.

This chapter narrates the occasion of Mariam's wedding. The portrait of Mariam's wedding presents one view of how a diasporic community is constructing identity through the continuation and adaptation of signifying cultural practices. The beauty preparations, the extended celebrations, the public processions, the gathering of Somali Bantu from afar, and the circulation of wedding videos months after the event discursively shape community in a way that reaches back and forward simultaneously. The wedding celebration is thus performative insofar as it constitutes Somali Bantu-ness. Yet, the wedding celebration is not fixed in its form or its acceptance among participants. As I will show, the wedding celebration as it is realized in diaspora is also a point of tension between generations that reveal shifting values, expectations, and authorities within the community. Traditional weddings connected to arranged marriage have reflected the authority of the parents and elders, overriding the preferences and desires of the young adults. Yet, the young adults are more resistant to their parents' authority. There are complaints that weddings are too extravagant, that they generate gossip and hurt feelings. Further, there is growing awareness among younger Somali Bantu that the early marriage of girls may be at odds with broader aspirations for the collective community. However, even as younger adults problematize the wedding celebration, its importance as a cultural marker remains central to the Somali Bantu diaspora. Unlike the wedding practices in the United States, the Somali Bantu wedding is not exclusive to the individuals marrying. Rather, the wedding is a social

108

reproduction of both a new family and the diasporic community as a whole. The event belongs to everyone.

The Somali Bantu Wedding

The Somali Bantu wedding functions as a celebration of identity whereby group identity "asserts itself in collective performance, in repeated and formalized collective action that manages to conflate individual feeling with collective participation." (Noyes 2003, 29-30 in Grady 114) According to Sandra Grady whose research examined adolescence among resettled Somali Bantu, there are two significant themes emerging from their wedding celebrations: the public acknowledgement of passage into adulthood, and the performance of the community's expressive culture in the midst of resettlement. (Grady, 2015)

The wedding as a public acknowledgement of passage into adulthood assumes a particular importance within the Somali Bantu diaspora and the cultural disruptions experienced by youth catalyzed by third country resettlement. In Somalia and Kenya, girls were engaged to marry between the ages of 14 and 16 years. Boys of this same age were already working on their family farms. However, the extended adolescence typical of American youth requires that both males and females spend more years in school. They are subject to labor laws and educational credentialing that limit their ability to acquire full-time employment and financial independence—a status signifying adulthood for males. Further, the traditional rites of passage marking adulthood for females—specifically, genital modification—is forbidden in the United States. In the absence of the traditional rites of passage and immersed in a more regulated social sphere, staying in school and earning a high school diploma emerge as alternative rites of passage that usher young people toward adulthood and subsequent practices of social reproduction. However, the current generation of Somali Bantu adolescents must negotiate the

cultural expectations of their parents and elders with those of their new society. Even with the

opportunities that compulsory education makes available, young women continue to be selected

for marriage while they are still early in their high school careers. The system of contracting

with the family of the young woman continues to be the standard for Somali Bantu. These

cultural negotiations place stress on youth. For young women, there is the pressure of being

selected and the foreclosure of opportunities that might be otherwise available to them as

unmarried women. For young men, there is the pressure of achieving financial independence, the

long-term success of which relies upon acquiring an education. And all of this occurs in the

midst of a highly materialized and sexualized youth-centered culture that Somali Bantu

adolescents and young adults must negotiate in tension with traditional practices and

expectations. Grady suggests that the adaptation of elements of the U.S. wedding practices,

might be a way of resolving "some of the ambivalence many young people increasingly feel

toward this life passage." (Grady, 2015, p. 122)

Despite young peoples' changing attitudes toward weddings, the wedding remains a core

social event for Somali Bantu of all ages that upholds the emotional structures of community in

diaspora. The Somali Bantu wedding is a multi-day event marked by a convergence of friends

and family, the collective preparation of food by elder women, and the elaborate beauty

preparations by younger women. Men join in the celebration by transporting and socializing with

guests from out of town and handling the transactional elements between the families. Most

important among these transactions is the *nikka*, or the matrimonial contract. Because most

Somali Bantu practice a liberal form of Islam, they follow the conditions of a valid Islamic

marriage, which requires the signature of the bridegroom and a male relative or guardian of the

bride, as well as an agreed upon dowry, or gift of wealth from the bridegroom's family to the

family of the bride.[25] Once the *nikka* is complete, the wedding celebration is held. The actual presentation of the bride and groom as a couple has a limited ritual structure beyond their circling the room with their attendants in the midst of the community. Some of the young couples adopt Western practices such as white dresses, tuxedos and tiered wedding cakes along with dancing to popular music, creating what Grady calls a "patchwork" that "reinforces and constructs the dual nature of both assemblage and social boundedness of Somali Bantu identity practice demonstrated in everyday life." (Grady, 2015, p. 132)

The wedding celebration functions as a mechanism of memory, or—more specifically— "postmemory," the inter /transgenerational transmission of memory and the identifications forged within familial space. (Kim, 2007, p. 340) Through the phenomena of postmemory, "remembering manifests the presence of the absent world, not just the experience of the prior self." (p. 343) This is reinforced by Grady's observations that "the wedding ritual, while a contract between two individuals, seemed more important as an arrangement with the larger community, an event in which everybody had a sense of ownership." (Grady, 2015, p. 125)

The communal focus of the Somali Bantu wedding celebration is enhanced by the emergence of the wedding video. While video recordings of special events like weddings are fairly common across cultures, it is the function of the Somali Bantu wedding video as an object of expressive culture that is remarkable. The wedding celebration, shared and circulated through videotape or You Tube, is a means for engaging the wider Somali Bantu community and extended family located in other parts of the country and, indeed, the world. Thus, Somali Bantu who are unable to travel or who are living in the refugee camps can participate. The videos are a

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[25] According to Islamic custom, the bride is not required to be present however her verbal agreement to the union is required.

source of entertainment that are viewed long after the event and are available on YouTube for general consumption. They are representative of more than the particular event; rather, they communicate the significance of the wedding as a mechanism for the reproduction of culture. (Hall, 1993) Families will view weddings of couples they have not met personally, and Somali Bantu videographers announce on their social media sites when new wedding videos are uploaded.[26]

The production of wedding videos that document the event with overlays of traditional Somali music, graphics, and animations has become a cottage industry within the broader Somali Bantu community. A typical wedding video[27] will open with a lavish animation that includes the name of the video production company followed by the names of the couple, the date of the celebration, and the city where the celebration took place. The animations of hearts, flowers, or digital butterflies are superimposed over still shots of the couple and guests of the wedding. Sometimes, the stills float across a romantic backdrop of the ocean or a waterfall. After the introduction, the video switches to the actual celebration, often beginning with the couple's procession around the room—the bride and groom holding hands, arms stiffly at their sides, wearing somber expressions, followed by the wedding attendants. For the remainder of the video, the camera is stationary, its lens fixed on the dance floor. Apart from the opening montage of graphics, animations, and still photographs, the videographer imposes no narrative or editorial view. The camera is invisible to the celebration so that everyone carries on with dancing and socializing, and the viewer is simply there, another participant in the event.

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[26] Videos typically have several thousand views—evidence of their broad circulation as a source of entertainment and cultural practice. One video, "Hawa Wedding" by Thu Ho had 55,913 views.

[27] I viewed approximately 25 videos on YouTube produced by Wadajiir Boyz, Siidow 12 Films, Romance Studio, Dadow Studio Center, and Iftin Video Recording among others. My description here is a composite of these many productions.

The wedding video digitizes the sustainability and reproduction of culture. Coded into the production are messages about community, circulated in "phenomenal form" and translated into societal structures. (Hall, 1993) The wedding video thus captures and formalizes the wedding celebration, which makes visible and present the community in diaspora. This particular function of the digital device as means for cohering the diasporic community is demonstrated in other venues as well. Catherine Besteman writes movingly about sharing a slide show of photographs taken while doing ethnographic research in Banta (middle Jubba Valley) during the 1980's to refugees of this region who were now living in Lewiston, Maine. She recounted that the 100-plus participants who came to view the slides responded with emotion at seeing family members who have since grown into adults or died and the farms and villages they left behind. They would often call out in recognition, and requested that the slides be shown again and again. (Besteman, 2016, pp. 20-28) Later, when she interviewed an elder visiting Lewiston for a wedding about his experience during the war, "his cell phone rang constantly with calls from his relatives from Lewiston, Hartford, Springfield, and even Kenya, who wanted to add their memories" to the conversation. (p. 48) Conversely, when the Mayor of Lewiston publicly complained about the behavior of immigrants who were on their phones during a graduation ceremony, he failed to recognize that the phone calls made to relatives as far away as Somalia and Kenya were in fact modes of extended participation in what was a remarkable achievement. (p. 278)

This chapter attempts to fix a lens onto a Somali Bantu wedding in order to show how identity is performative. Unlike a video camera that merely records what passes in front of it, my view of the celebration is colored by my multiple positions as friend, guest, and outsider to the event. My position as a friend grants me a sympathetic view insofar as I have an emotional

investment in the event. Therefore, how I choose to describe what I see and experience is shaped by a disposition of care. My position as a guest grants me a partial view insofar as I am there participating, even though I do not fully understand the significance of everything that is happening. Finally, my position as an outsider grants me a level of detachment that enables me to bring a view of difference. Therefore, how I choose to analyze and interpret is influenced by my chosen theoretical framework as well as by my prior experiences of marriage and wedding celebrations—most significantly, the Italian-American wedding. Like the Somali Bantu wedding, the Italian-American wedding is a staging of cultural and religious values that signifies group integrity in a foreign locale. Unlike the Somali Bantu wedding, the Italian-American wedding emphasizes familial structures rather than communal, with the mothers (and the Blessed Mother Mary) assuming a place of honor in the celebration.[28] These prior experiences provide me with a point of comparison, yet it also connects me back to my position as friend and the emotional structures that shape personal investment, participation, and analysis.

Mariam's Engagement and Marriage

Mariam was approximately 15 years old when she was engaged to marry. She sent me a text informing me that she now had a phone, and that she had news.[29] But she was evasive about her news—perhaps she thought I wouldn't approve. I urged her to share. She was getting married. I replied that I was happy for her and asked how she felt about it. Mariam said that she was happy--now. She liked him, but at first she wasn't interested. She tells me that I had met the young man briefly when I visited a year before, and I recalled a young man with a small, nut-

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[28] Further, at this point in time—several generations after mass migration--the Italian-American wedding is now thoroughly branded as an American invention. Time will tell how the Somali Bantu wedding evolves and adapts.
[29] According to Grady, once a contract for marriage is arranged, the young man gives his bride-to-be a cell phone that is used to secure a connection between them. (35-6)

shaped head like Abdirahman. He was a cousin of Abdirahman who, in the absence of Mariam's father, handled arrangements between the families.

Will you come to my wedding? she asked.

Of course! I replied. How soon will it be?

Not for a few years.[30]

After this particular text correspondence and on through to the year of her wedding date, Mariam's presence on Facebook evolved.[31] The photos of celebrities and invented names that concealed her identity were removed, to be replaced by photographs, mostly selfies, taken with her friends. Mariam's lived experience as expressed through her social media showed her in a new terrain: she was making the transition to adulthood. She presented herself now as desirable (albeit within the bounds of modesty required of her religion): in one photo she describes herself as "looking cute" on her way to school. She wore make up and posed provocatively beneath her modest gown and hijab, a hip thrust out and lips pursed. She created and posted digital postcards with photos of herself and of her fiancé pasted over a background of hearts.

And then, months before the actual wedding, she announced that she was deactivating her account and disappeared from Facebook altogether. Her prior whimsy on social media was replaced by a self-imposed purdah. Later, I asked her about why she removed herself from social media during this timeframe. She paused, as if reluctant to answer. She then said that there was a

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[30] The preceding paragraph is a reconstruction of the text messaging exchange. I no longer have the phone that I used at that time and had not saved my personal data.

[31] Media served as a venue for young women to experiment with self-presentation prior to their impending identity shift. Grady reported that she, as well as some of the school teachers, were shown photographs taken on their cell phones of the girls posing as American teenagers with their heads uncovered, heavily made up, and wearing Western clothes. This experimentation seemed to be limited to girls who were engaged to be married.

lot of negativity on Facebook at that time, including some profanity. She wanted to separate

herself from it.32

The Wedding

Mariam's marriage and wedding celebration took place during the first weekend of

August 2014 soon after Ramadan ended. I arrived in Milwaukee in early evening and sent a text

asking if I could visit for a while, but didn't receive a reply. Figuring that she might be involved

in wedding preparations and not paying attention to her phone, I decided to drive over to the

house anyway. I arrived in front of the garden apartment where Mariam lived with her mother,

Khadija, and her brothers, Nur and Muse. The front door was standing open and a woman

holding a child stood on the stoop with several other small children gathered around her. I didn't

recognize any of the faces peering back at me. I approached in greeting, asking if Mariam or

Khadija were at home. The woman gestured for me to go inside.

The front room of Khadija's apartment was emptied of furniture and the floor covered

with blankets. Several women sat on the floor watching a video of a wedding on a 42-inch flat

screen television. One of the women was holding an infant who appeared to be only a few

weeks old. From the living room I could see Khadija in the kitchen with four other women,

busily preparing food for the coming festivities. A plump woman stirred a large pot of rice;

another turned sliced onions and green peppers sautéing in oil. Others sat on the floor, their legs

stretched out in front of them, kneading dough or forming the dough into small cakes with their

hands. The sultry heat of August mingled with the steam of cooking food raised the temperature

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32 Her desire to separate herself from gossip may have had as much to do with her observance of Ramadan, which
took place from June 29th-July 28th that year.

of the room by twenty degrees. I stood in the kitchen doorway watching until Khadija turned around and noticed me.

"Khadija!"

"Moochel!"

We embraced. Khadija is not much older than I. She has remained slender through the years, even though most Somali Bantu women of her age are stocky with full hips and round cheeks. She spoke with animation to the women around her. I recognized the word "Virginia" and understood that she was explaining who I was to the others. They nodded in recognition. Khadija and I greeted each other with smiles, neither of us able to understand the other's language, yet communicating as best we could with the few words we had. I recognized the words "Mary Carol" -- she wanted to know if one of the other volunteers from ten-plus years ago would be coming to the wedding too. I pantomimed asking if I could help to cook. Khadija replied "yes," although I knew her answer was not in response to my question but an acknowledgement of the preparations that were underway. She led me back to the front room to sit, and brought me, first, a bottle of water. Then she returned with a plate of cookies and jellied sweets, and then again with a cup and pitcher of hot beverage.

"Moochel, coffee." She poured what appeared to be a warm spiced cider. She sat on a crate in front of me with her own cup, grinning broadly. She pointed to different women, introducing me to some of Mariam's other sisters who have come to town for the wedding. I knew that Khadija had older daughters that lived elsewhere. I learn that two of the women were half-sisters, sharing the same father as Mariam but different mothers. The woman holding the

infant said that the child was not hers, but her daughter's baby. The daughter, wearing a gold

hijab that read "Peace, Love, Somalia," entered the room soon after.

"Mariam is at a friend's house getting her henna." She said that when I am finished with

my food she will take me to where Mariam is.

A tiny girl of four wearing leggings and a Hello Kitty shirt passes through the living

room, reaching her hand out to the plate of cookies. I hand one to her and then recognize the

child as Fawzia, Isha's youngest; she was still a baby the last time I saw her. Two other children

sidled in front of me—a boy of about five wearing a t-shirt and shorts and a girl of seven in a

long skirt, her hair in braids with pink beads. The boy spoke softly—I couldn't catch all of what

he was saying. He named his brothers—Muhamed and Hassan—and I realized that these were

also Isha's children. They crouched next to me:

"I remember you brought Muhammed a ball. And you brought me a doll," said Ralia.

"Do you have any prizes for us?" asks Hamza.

"What kind of prize do you want?" I replid.

"A bike," said Ralia.

"Do you have a lot of things at your house?" Hamza inquired. "How do you get your

things?"

The young woman in the gold hijab returned and I followed her through the back door of

the apartment and across the courtyard to another home where the door was open. A pink

bicycle leaned against the wall and a pair of four-inch blue platform shoes lay on the front stoop.

Just inside the door were several younger women sitting on chairs. One of the young women

dashed outside—it was Mariam. She was wearing a sari and a head scarf, her face covered in a greenish cream—pimple cream, she said. We go inside where she sat down again while Noorda resumed work on the henna.

Noorda was a friendly woman with a wide smile and ready laugh. She wore a leopard skin hijab and a full dress. She was a henna artist who provided this service to women for holidays such as Eid and celebrations like weddings. She hennaed the bridesmaids the day before. When I arrived, she had already spent two hours on Mariam's arms, drawing the design and adding red ink as highlights. One of Mariam's five wedding dresses was strapless so she asked that a necklace of henna circle her chest and shoulders as well.

While I was there, Nur and Muse and their cousin, Abdi, arrived through the kitchen. Abdi was wearing a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee t-shirt and I asked if he was attending school there. "September 2nd" he replied, to study architecture. Nur said that he would begin college in the fall as well, at the community college to study Health Sciences.

Nur was clearly the dominant personality among the young men. While he spoke, a group of younger boys stood around quietly. His younger brother, Muse, easily six feet tall with the stocky build of a football player, sat quietly. I asked him what was new and he smiled happily, but was unable to think of anything to say. Eventually, the boys departed. Noorda's husband came by with styrofoam containers of nachos for everyone to eat. Mariam laughed that she was naked (actually, just her shoulders are bare) so we held up a scarf to protect her modesty while the husband passed through the kitchen.

I stayed with the young women until almost 11:30 p.m. before returning to Khadija's house. Before leaving, Noorda quickly inked a chain of flowers and swirls from my left pointer

119

finger to my elbow. We passed through Khadija's kitchen where the older women were now sitting on the floor applying henna paste they made themselves to their feet and hands. The older women forego the intricate designs that Noorda drew and simply painted the bottoms of their feet, and drew plain circles of orange on their hands. One of the women noticed my hennaed arm. They were amused but pleased to see a white woman in American clothes participating in the beauty preparations. Isha was there. She introduced me to another of Khadija's older daughters. Khadija gestured to me, speaking to the woman.

"She is telling her how nice you are," said Isha.

"Thank you for helping my family," the woman said to me.

Isha and I go into the living room where eight or nine small children were stretched out asleep on the floor. She had just gotten off work at a bakery. Because she was employed in a food industry, she was unable to be hennaed—it wasn't allowed. However, she was granted two days of leave for the wedding. She said that she would be up all night. "Too much!" she commented, although she was clearly dedicated to the preparations. We sat in the living room and she asked if I wanted to watch television. Her phone was networked to the television through blue tooth, and we scrolled through a series of videos—five minute snippets of Somali Bantu weddings and music videos by a Kenyan hip hop artists and an English language television show from Nigeria. When it was almost 2 a.m. I said that I had to go.

The following day I arrived at Khadija's house close to noon. The skies were overcast, so fewer people were outside. I saw a tall, slender man with a small, round head entering the front door. It was Abdirahman, Isha's estranged husband. He closed the front door behind him,

so I headed toward the back door—but Khadija saw me through the window and called out for me to come.

I entered, removing my shoes. Abdirahman approached me, surprised.

"When did you arrive? I received no emails or phone calls that you were coming? Why are you not staying at the house?"

"I arrived last night. I communicated with Mariam. I am staying at a hotel because I know there are so many guests coming to town."

He nodded in agreement, and then asked if I wanted to eat. He had Khadija bring a plate of bread and a bowl of goat liver in gravy. I asked about his life: he was serving as a Sheik to help the community, but received no pay for his efforts since they were not strong enough yet to pay him. He was taking some time off school, but did not say where he was working. He was helping to transport people who were arriving from Utah, Kentucky, Ohio, and beyond who had come to Milwaukee for the wedding. He pointed to an old woman sitting in the corner of the room.

"This is our grandma. She is the oldest person in our family." The woman was surrounded by flat packages of dresses. "We give a dress to everyone who comes to help prepare for the wedding. We will give you one, too."

After eating, Abdirahman tells Khadija that I will help and rebukes her protests by saying, "No, she is not a guest. She is family-this is her house."

I headed toward the kitchen where I sat with Batula, another Somali Bantu woman who lived in Blacksburg, to shuck corn. Batula was rolling out dough and slicing it into small

portions for baking. Batula asked about Jennifer, a volunteer who assisted Batula's family.

They hadn't seen or heard from her for years. I replied that I didn't know for sure if Jennifer was

still in Blacksburg, but I thought I saw her around town a few years ago. We gossiped a bit

about Abdirahman's second wife.

"Isha was pissed off!" Batula said.

The woman, in fact was there in the kitchen with us. Noorda had said the night before

that she was a pretty woman with light skin. The woman wore a hijab that covered her head and

neck, and her dress seemed to be made out of a better material than the lightweight cotton that

most of the women wore. Her face was made up to accentuate her features that appeared to be

more Arabic than Bantu—the aquiline nose and oval shape of face—but she spoke Maay Maay

with the other women. Mariam told me later that the woman is mixed—ethnic Somali and

Bantu.

I knew that Batula's husband, Abdikadir, had a second wife as well. He divorced the

other woman in order to come to the United States, however he visited her and their children

regularly in Kentucky.33 I asked Batula if she was pissed off that Abdikadir had a second wife

and she shrugged and says no. That is the way it was in Africa. The problem with Abdirahman's

situation was that he took a second wife while living in the United States.

When all of the corn was shucked, I returned to the living room. Mariam came

downstairs from her bedroom where she had been in seclusion all morning. She hadn't slept

much even though the application of henna on her feet and lower legs lasted until 5 a.m. She

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33 In order to be approved for resettlement, men in polygamous marriages are required to choose one wife over
another. This requirement, another disruption to Somali Bantu cultural practices, created a resettlement situation
that separated families and produced a high number of impoverished women-headed households.

was so bored and wished she didn't have to stay inside—but that was the expectation for the bride to be. She surfed through Netflix trying to find something for us to watch. So many shows had partial nudity in them, which would be particularly inappropriate with grandma and numerous small children in the living room. She turned to a channel that opened with a scene of a man and a woman kissing, and immediately turned it off. We eventually settled on a police drama, Lincoln Heights, but no one really watched with all of the activity in the house. Eventually we went upstairs to her bedroom where it was cooler: a small room with pale blue tapestries on the walls and unopened packages of bedding hanging in an open closet—wedding presents from her mother and sister.

Mariam was having a religious wedding. I knew this from a flyer that Nur posted to Facebook announcing the wedding. I did not know what a religious wedding entailed, however the announcement provided some clues to its strictly gendered arrangement. It read:

> This is official Invitation to Join us for food and psalms to celebrate S. and Mariam Mad Muse's Wedding.
>
> **Please Respect our Conditions, Rules, or Policies:**
>
> 1. Parents Should Supervise their Children.
>
> 2. Boys and Girls <u>SHOULD NOT</u> Interact one another.
>
> 3. Boys and Girls <u>SHOULD NOT</u> sit together.
>
> 4. Girls <u>Should wear their Veils (Hijab)</u> before entrance.
>
> 5. No unneccesary Movement after entrance.

A clip art cartoon of a large-nosed man with a bow tie singing into a microphone decorated the top of the flyer. The juxtaposition of the cartoon with the strict rules for gender behavior was

comical, but also unsettling. A night of sitting solemnly reciting prayers in Arabic did not sound very festive to me. I asked Mariam how she felt about having a religious wedding. Was it Abdirahman's idea? She replied that it was her choice to have a religious wedding, adding that it was also the request of her in-laws. She wanted to please her husband's family. She was eager to leave her mother's house so that she could "have a voice" in the decisions affecting her life. She was looking forward to moving in to her new home, newly remodeled by Habitat for Humanity. She wanted some American appliances, like a waffle maker, but (she gestured to the closet where the wedding gifts were stored) the women in the family got her those "old African tin pots."

We passed the time talking about her wedding night and intimate matters of becoming a wife. She would not use birth control because it was against their religion, however she wanted to wait a while before getting pregnant. Somali Bantu had too many children, she said. Several of her friends from school who married early and had children right away eventually discontinued their education. Mariam wanted to go to college. Mariam recognized the traditional practices that could potentially disadvantage her as a young woman living in the United States, yet she was also bound to these traditional practices and found meaning in them.

Mariam was growing restless. The light was dimming outside, and there were no lamps in her room. Isha borrowed her phone so that she could listen to music while cooking. Mariam wanted her phone back so that she could find out where her bridesmaids were so that they could take her to Noorda's where she would shower and sleep for the night. Eventually, one of her bridesmaid's, Habiba, arrived. The room was now dark. Downstairs, the elders were chanting. The girls handed me a dress and head scarf that I put on for this moment. I stood in the stairwell looking over the front room.   Twenty or thirty women, mostly older, were in a circle singing and

124

swaying their bodies. Neither young woman was able to explain the meaning of the words being

sung. It was the practice of gathering in this circle and singing together that signified the

moment.

A young man entered with a 24-pack of bottled water. He looked at me standing there on

the stairs in the gown and lopsided head scarf and asked if I was Muslim. After a while I went

back upstairs while the activities of people coming and going continued. Mariam wanted to eat,

but she didn't want "that nasty food" that was being made downstairs: rice, chicken, cookies.

She wanted nachos.

We heard some commotion as if an argument was breaking out. Mariam was upset--she

went into the stairwell to eavesdrop on what was happening. She and Habiba complained to one

another about the old ways that stirred up arguments, and how they would rather have a simple

wedding. We found out what happened: the in-laws arrived with the required gift of gold but

the amount they brought was five grams less than what was agreed upon by the families. Soon

thereafter, there was more commotion coming from behind the house. We looked out the

window to see a tow truck in the parking lot. A white neighbor was outside yelling at a police

officer and some of the older women. Family members were gathered around. Abdirahman

came out from a house across the parking lot to find out what was happening. Apparently

someone made a complaint (not the neighbor who yelled that she wasn't the one to call). The

police officer and tow truck eventually backed out of the lot, while the family members—just

moments ago distressed, were now chuckling with one another.

The day had grown long—it was dark outside. Mariam was anxious to have her

bridesmaids with her, and none of them seemed able to get there. I offered to drive to get some

of the girls. "I don't want to bother you," Mariam murmured. What else did I have to do?

Habiba and I drove to get Malyun and Asha and Makai. After I dropped them off, I left for the evening.

The following day I went directly to Noorda's where Mariam spent the night with the bridesmaids. She was happy, dressed in a red hijab and a sheer black dress. No, she hadn't slept. They spent the night talking until the early hours.

The schedule of the day was unclear to me. The *nikka* (engagement) was to be at noon, but Mariam was not a part of this. There was also a time when the family opened the gifts, but again Mariam did not participate. Over at Khadija's house there was a crush of activity and I noticed that mostly the elders congregated there. Isha passed back and forth between the homes, the stress of the day growing evident on her face. Someone brought styrofoam containers of basmati rice, fried chicken, and chunks of goat. I was hungry and with my hands ate all of the chicken and goat from one container, along with some of the rice. A little boy, Omar, fell asleep in a heap on the floor near my feet. Noorda's baby toddled around, lifting a fancy shoe and then stepping his tiny foot inside it. The girls glided around the house, fixing their makeup, trying on clothes, touching up their henna. They mixed a facial of honey and other ingredients and slathered it on Mariam's face. They said it would make her face glow. Mid-afternoon, Suzanne and her daughter, Isabel, arrived. Suzanne was another resettlement volunteer. She lived in the neighborhood adjacent to the Muse family when they first arrived in Blacksburg. Isabel and Mariam were close in age and played together many years ago as little girls.

We asked Mariam about her wedding dress and she said that she would change into five different dresses throughout the evening. Each dress had accompanying veils and gold jewelry, some of which her in-laws gave for her wedding.

The beauty preparations constituted the majority of the day. At 5 p.m. Mariam had a make-up appointment at the mall. Suzanne, Isabel, and I drove over with Mariam, Noorda, and Hawiwa. Mariam was meticulously made up with false eyelashes and a spray of gold powder on her lids. Noorda and Hawiwa had their eyebrows shaped. Back at the house, the woman began dressing before the limousine arrived. I slipped on the eggshell blue dress with the sequins that spelled out "Love Somalia" that I was given the day before. Like most of the dresses worn by the women, it was a square pattern, sewn up the sides with openings for the arms. I used a belt to gather it up around my waist, so that it didn't drag on the floor. Many of the girls tucked their dresses into the waistband of their leggings or simply grabbed a bunch in their hands as they walked. I reapplied my makeup and put on a pair of heavy gold earrings. I clipped my bangs back off my face so that Habiba could wrap the matching blue scarf around my head, a flicker of amusement in her eyes. My hair was slippery and my forehead flat, so it was hard to keep the head wrap in place.

Mariam came out in the first dress of the evening. She was beautiful in a peacock blue scarf with a yellow flower pinned to the side. Her outfit, both elegant and modest, covered her entire body except for her hands and face. The skirt was full with gold leaf designs against cerulean blue, a wide white belt cinching her waist. The bodice was black, draped by the blue of her headscarf. In the midst of the rich colors and heavy perfumes, Suzanne commented that she felt drab.

A white limousine pulled into the cul-de-sac of the apartments. The bridesmaids lined up, surrounding Mariam. They were wearing matching dresses and scarves—two in all black with vivid orange, yellow, and red geometric designs, the others in satiny ochre green with gold leaf designs. Younger women wore artificial buns underneath their veils, creating a fashionable

bustle. They processed slowly down the sidewalk and across the yard, waving small crocheted flags and ululating. The young married women, Noorda and Isha, flanked either end of the procession. Despite the festivities, the young women were somber. Mariam's eyes were downcast. I had been told that the subdued expressions were intended to ward off jealousies that might arise from onlookers witnessing the joy. Even so, Suzanne, Isabel, and I beamed with happiness, looking plain-faced and pale in our headscarves and gowns. We walked alongside the procession—along with a stream of small children. Neighbors who were not Somali Bantu came outside to watch and some called out congratulations.

We followed the limousine to the Catholic Church where the wedding was being held. It would be several hours before the festivities actually started. The church hall was set up with round tables for eight, covered in white table and chair cloths with red bows. Long tables for the wedding party were placed at the front of the room, with high-backed chairs for the bride and groom. A crucifix that was hanging on the wall was removed. After two hours, we entered and found a table toward the back on the women's side of the room. Despite the mandate that men and women sit separately, the guests mingled freely with one another. Most of the women wore gold jewelry and sumptuous hijabs threaded in gold and silver. The young men, on the other hand, dressed casually in jeans, backward ball caps, and untucked shirts. Apart from the groomsmen, Nur was the only young man dressed formally in a fitted suit a bright pink shirt and black bow tie. Younger girls giggled with admiration when they saw him, and one boldly whispered that she was a fan of his music.

Sheiks led the procession with tambourines, drums and chanting. The wedding party follows, and then the older women. I scanned the procession for Khadija. Even though she was the mother of the bride, she held no esteemed spot. She was nearly indistinguishable from the

rest of the crowd that moved languidly forward chanting, ululating, and slowly waving the crocheted flags. Now, the room was full. I was moved by the emotion of the procession and seeing Mariam with her young husband, surrounded by friends, family, and the extended Bantu community.

Joyous chanting, singing, and dancing filled the evening. Suzanne and I remain toward the back of the room, unsure of what is appropriate for us. Fowzyyia has fallen asleep and we take turns holding her. Abdi approaches and asks if we are enjoying ourselves. He admonishes us for not mingling, and leads us to the dance floor. The Sheiks sit cross-legged on a stage singing and drumming. Guests circle the floor, swaying to the rhythms. Mariam slips her arm through the crook of her husband's. An elder woman moves to the center of a dance circle, her hips rocking slowly, and then raises her arm to release a cascade of dollar bills in front of the young couple. A new song began and the men came forward, and little Hassan informs us that we have to leave because this dance was just for men and boys.

At various intervals throughout the evening, the bridesmaids escorted Mariam out of the room. They processed somberly through the crowd, and then returned shortly thereafter in new outfits: Blue and white dresses that looked like Somali flags; a brilliant yellow gown with a fiery red hijab. We did not stay long enough to see Mariam's fifth dress—it was after 3 a.m.—but the guests continued to celebrate for several more hours.

We slept late the next day and drove to Khadija's house for noon. A group had already assembled on her front stoop. Inside, Khadija was sitting on the living room floor with another woman. An older woman in Western clothes was in the kitchen cleaning. I asked if it was okay

to walk on the freshly mopped floor. The woman replied yes, and I noted that she had an American accent.

"Are you a friend from the mosque?" I asked.

"No, I'm not Muslim. I'm a neighbor that lives over there." She pointed vaguely across the basketball court behind the apartment. "I knew these kids when they were little all the way up to their weddings. When they first moved in some people were being rude to them. I say that we are all the same."

The neighbor's name was Margaret. She had mopped the kitchen floor and scrubbed the stove. The cauldrons that cooked the rice and chicken were now soaking. Food was put away, trash bundled. I took a bag over to the dumpster piled high with garbage and tossed it to the top. I offered to help but she refused my offer saying that she was almost finished. Later when I passed by the kitchen I saw her supervising a young Somali Bantu woman while she emptied the refrigerator.

Batula came through living room balancing a bottle of oil on her head. She asked me to visit her house. I visited Batula's home where she promptly fell asleep on the floor while her daughter served me a large plate of fried corn and her husband lectured me on the differences between Somali Bantu and American Blacks. (I did not attempt to dispute his statements, many of which were based on stereotypes.) Afterward I drove to Isha's where Suzanne and Isabel were eating pizza with Isha's out-of-town sister and her unruly children. Isha needed to go to Mariam's house but first had to purchase food that she could prepare for the new couple during their first week of marriage.   While we shopped in the grocery section of Walmart, she talked about the stressful demands of the wedding celebration. As the older sister, she had additional

responsibilities that included purchasing household gifts, cooking for the couple during the "honeymoon" period, and instructing Mariam on marital hygiene. This was in addition to the work she already had as the primary caregiver of her five children and sole wage earner for her large family. Abdirahman's absence placed additional burdens on her capacity to perform these roles. He contributed little to the household beyond paying the mortgage on the house, yet wanted to claim the children as his tax deductions. Isha felt alone in her predicament—she couldn't rely upon her mother to intervene in the way that her deceased father may have done.

Mariam's in-laws furnished her home. The décor was similar to that of many Somali Bantu homes—occupied by a large entertainment center with a large flat-screen television and a sectional couch. Ornate tea-sets with small cups decorated the shelves of the entertainment center. Mariam decided against the typical Somali sectional couch that most homes had—stiff backed chairs that hugged the edges of the room. Instead, she opted for a softer-cushioned couch and love seat set—similar in size and seating, but distinctly American. Upstairs in their bedroom, the couple had an enormous four-poster bed with a highboy. A laptop sat open on the bed—a gift from Isha to her sister. Mariam was tired and happy. She was now a married woman with her own house and her own things. Through her marriage she has enlarged the Somali Bantu community; yet, in doing so, she was more fully the subject of her own life.

One Year Later

When I visited again in October 2015, Mariam had passed through several important milestones: she was a wife, mother, and a high school graduate. In a few months she would enroll in college. Earlier in the year she resumed her presence on social media, using the forum to represent herself as the pious and devoted wife. Her posts were almost exclusively dedicated to religious exhortations or expressions of affection for her husband. In the few photographs she

shared, she was with her husband or youngest niece, dressed elegantly in brightly colored hijabs and dresses, heavy gold jewelry, her eyes carefully made up to emphasize their almond shape. In one photograph, she and her husband appeared to be dancing: he was in a half bow before her, holding her hand. She was barefoot, one foot before the other, her hip thrust in mid-sway. They looked at one another with delight. She wrote, "Oh how much I love u Salah Omar Ahmed."

Several months prior to my October visit, I had received a Facebook message with the photo of a newborn infant: "Thats ma daughter." I asked if she was teasing me, but, no the baby had been born a few days earlier. Mariam was recovering at her mother's house for 45 days, which was customary for first-time mothers. Despite her stated plan to wait a while before having children so that she could pursue her college education, the baby was conceived soon after she married.   She graduated a month later from Clara Mohammed school, a Muslim school that served many of the Somali Bantu children. Her situation as a young, married mother in high school was not unprecedented. Even though schoolwork was hard toward the end of her pregnancy because she felt tired and heavy (she used the word "lazy"), and, she sometimes had to miss school for doctor's appointments, she graduated on time.   In a photograph of the event, she is posed with family, her mortarboard perched atop her hijab like a beret.

Mariam enjoyed married life. She had more freedom to do what she wanted to do without her mother telling her "no". Mariam lifted Aisha to her shoulder and patted her back while she described how she would be different than her parents were with her. She wanted to be a parent who was involved with her children. She couldn't talk to her mother about things like school. Andso many Somali Bantu parents used fear and physical punishment to control their children.

Mariam decided that weddings were "overrated," a waste of time and money, even though she herself was drawn in to the materialism of it (as evidenced by her five wedding

dresses that she changed into throughout the celebration). Mariam stated that the big wedding

with all of its trappings was influenced by their living in the United States. Sometimes, she said,

young women wore the white, Western wedding dress and had their shoulders bare and their hair

loose and uncovered. This behavior deviated from the religious dimensions of the wedding. She

posted on her Facebook page:

> There so many of us Bantu in the USA if we could come together and rise money to build
>
> a big beautiful *masjid* but we are to busy wasting our money on wedding and other
>
> pointless stuff that won't do nothing for you in this *dunya* but if we build a *masjid*
>
> imagine everytime some prays there the amount of reward you can get ......(October 14,
>
> 2015)[34]

Months later, Mariam posted, "I chose Islam over culture" (April 6, 2016)—a statement that

further complicated the meaning of Somali Bantu identity in diaspora and the signifying practice

of the wedding celebration as a means of cultural sustainability and social reproduction. Yet, I

had noticed over the years of my association with the Muse family that doing Somali Bantu was

ever more closely entwined with doing Islam.[35]

Mariam's experiences as described here represent one view of the Somali Bantu wedding as

a source of cultural sustainability and social reproduction. When she spoke about her decisions

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[34] *Dunya* is an Arabic word for the temporal world. *Masjid* is a mosque.

   [35] The confluence of Bantu and Islam was most apparent to me in how women dressed. When I first met
Khadija in 2005 she was wearing a garment tied over one shoulder, the other shoulder bare, with a head scarf that
tucked behind her ears and covered her hair, leaving her neck exposed—an outfit that was common among women
living throughout the Jubba Valley. After moving to Milwaukee, the outfit evolved: the head scarf was replaced by a
veil that covered head and shoulders, and eventually a hijab that allowed only the face to show. Likewise, women's
dresses covered their shoulders and often their arms as well. In one of his few Facebook posts, Abdirahman shared
photographs of Arabic abayas with the admonishment that women cover their beauty according to the Quran.

related to marriage, from the engagement to this particular young man to the kind of wedding that was planned, there were hints of submission to the authority of tradition. Yet, marriage also signaled for Mariam the path to adulthood and, with it, a "voice" of her own. However, "voice" in this context should not be confused with a Western, liberal feminist perspective of the autonomous self. Mayanthi Fernando, who studied how Muslim French women reconciled dominant secular interpretations of autonomy and religious authority with their constitution of self as religious subjects, argues that notions of autonomy and obligation are not framed as a relationship of opposition in the imaginations of younger Muslim women in diaspora. Rather, these notions are "inextricably linked." (Fernando, 2010, pp. 26-8) Similarly, Mariam's "voice" is the Bantu-Muslim voice grounded in her lived experience of growing up as a first generation Somali Bantu in the United States. Marriage, marked by the wedding celebration, was the chance to further construct Somali Bantu identity. For Mariam, this identity needed to include the advantages available to other young women in the United States—namely, the chance to pursue education—as well as be defined by Islam. As Mariam's story demonstrates, Islamic precepts are vital to distinguishing the Somali Bantu experience in the United States, to sustaining its values in the midst of United States materialism and individualism.

However, the confluence of wedding and marriage are complex. Despite the importance of the wedding celebration, as evidenced by the proliferation of wedding videos as cultural objects, there is nonetheless a plurality of experiences embedded in the rituals surrounding marriage. Mariam's cousin, Malyun, was engaged to be married during the summer of 2015. Her mother, Binto, asked if I would be coming, the kind of open invitation that is extended broadly to the Somali Bantu community and friends. (I did not attend.) When the time for her wedding came to

be, I searched their Facebook pages for photographs. Instead, I noted some strongly worded

statements.

"Fuck u all b****** live in Milwaukee," Isha wrote. "Every wedding they have to say

something uff I hate Bantu people." (July 30, 2015)36

And on that same day from Nur, "Im so sick of these *ojee masunguli* shit. I'm Mexican from

now on."37

I inquired about these messages. Isha told me that problems arose with Malyun's wedding

celebration. Preparations were underway for a wedding similar to Mariam's; however,

Abdirahman decided at the last minute that there wouldn't be a party. Instead, he would give a

lecture. Malyun said that she would not go to the wedding hall if he was giving a lecture—and

in fact followed through with her protest.   Because Isha was the adult woman in charge of the

bride, she was blamed for "messing up" the wedding when Malyun did not appear. The old men

and women changed the story to say that she was jealous of Abdirahman's new wife, and that

was why she interfered with the plans made by the sheik. Of course, this wasn't the actual story.

Rather, Abdirahman used the wedding to further his own agenda and to gain recognition.

According to Isha, Abdirahman's public face covered the realities of his personal life—that he

was often quick-tempered and failed to meet his obligations to his first wife and children. As

this example demonstrates, the wedding celebration often becomes a site for magnifying the

fissures within the community, a topic discussed in more depth in chapter six.

While Malyun refused to participate in a wedding celebration that was appropriated for

other purposes, Nur chose to forego a wedding entirely. Despite his enthusiasm at Mariam's

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36 This posting has since been removed.

37 *Ojee*, typically spelled *oggi* in the literature, is a pejorative term used against Somali Bantu in Somalia, derived from the Italian word for "today." *Masunguli* refers here to *Mushunguli* (see chapter four).

wedding celebration, Nur entered into a love marriage that he contracted with the bride herself. The young woman, Iqra, was a more recent immigrant. They met after she arrived in the United States and grew fond of one another. Eventually, they engaged. They spent time together. When I visited in 2015, Iqra sat on the floor at Nur's feet, her arm draped over this knees—a physical intimacy that was uncharacteristic of the more closely monitored arranged engagements between other young Somali Bantu men and women.

Isha's attitudes reflect this. She tells me that Somali Bantu young people marry early because they can't date before marriage. They get married early, which then diminishes their ability to complete their education. Isha thinks it would be better if young adults got engaged and spent time getting to know each other while they finished school, and saved marriage and children for later. What she likes about American relationships is the long engagement and courtship that precedes marriage when the couple get to know one another well (and opens the space for leaving the relationship if the couple prove to be incompatible). This was not the case for her own marriage, which her father arranged when she was still a little girl.

Isha's attitudes about intimate relationships also reveal the constraints faced by young women within the existing system that privileges men. Isha acknowledges that her religion permits men to have more than one wife; however, the decision to take a second wife should be made only under certain conditions (where the first wife is unable to fulfill marital obligations), and both wives should be treated equally. What occurs, however, it that men take second wives "to have fun." Drawing upon her own experience, the husband's attention gravitates to the new love interest, along with all of the family resources. Yet, women are unable to initiate a divorce unless their family intercedes on their behalf. Fortunately, Isha was able to convince an uncle to arrange a meeting to negotiate a divorce. Tensions remain, especially since they co-own the

136

house where Isha lives. Abdirahman has since moved to Green Bay, but refuses to allow Isha to bring another man into her home. Isha ignores Abdirahman's threat, but has stated that she is only interested now in a man who is single. Her first priority is her children.

Isha is not without suitors. Numerous men have expressed interest in her through Facebook, and some have asked that she come to live with them. Many of these men already have wives, which is a signal to Isha to discontinue the relationship. She would be back in the same situation that she just left. What she wants is to position herself to improve her English proficiency so that she can work towards a college degree and obtain employment in social work. Thus, she is cautious about entering another relationship with someone who will want more children. Isha has five children already and she is still young—only 26—so she has many more years of fertility ahead of her. She says that it is usually the guys who want children soon after marrying. However, the women are the ones that do the caring work. "Somali Bantu regard having children as a gift from God", she states, but the financial realities of caring for a large family in the United States are significant. Thus, many women take birth control, often without their husband's knowledge.

Complicated losses and gains

Young women in diaspora are re-negotiating cultural identity within their new context, availing themselves of the liberal aspects of United States culture while simultaneously reshaping dimensions of the culture carried with them. (Vatsa, 2016) However, the meaning and significance of cultural practices nonetheless are sustained as critical markers of identity. The Somali Bantu were required to restructure their lives in some fundamental ways when they came to the United States. They dissolved polygamous marriages and extended family households in order to fit the nuclear family model; abandoned communal rites of passage and traditional

137

healing practices in exchange for compulsory schooling and institutionalized medicine; altered

child rearing and disciplinary practices and handed over their systems of mutual support and

conflict resolution to bureaucratic authorities. In view of these cultural losses that accompanied

resettlement, and the consequential disempowerment of older, non-English speaking and non-

literate Somali Bantu, the value of practices such as the wedding celebration expand in

importance. Even as the younger generation interrogate aspects of cultural practice where change

might benefit the larger community, the event remains core to community life.

Chapter Six

Rejecting and Resisting in the Construction of Diasporic Identity

The work of sustaining culture in the construction of identity combines with practices of

public negations that establish a code of behavior for the community, as well as differentiates the

community from other influences that threaten its cultural integrity. As indicated in chapter five,

the work of cultural sustainability produces a framework for collective identity in the midst of

change, especially when change prompted by displacement and resettlement to a new locale

required that certain cultural practices be abandoned or modified.   In this chapter, I explore

forms of rejection and resistance expressed through social media by members of the Muse

family.   Rejecting commentary is defined here as commentary that is directed internally and

calls out behaviors such as gossiping, skin bleaching, and idleness that undermine the Somali

Bantu community. Sometimes, the commentary is expressed as anger and disgust at the

persistence of the behavior. Often, it is made as an exhortation to show ethnic pride and avoid

squandering the opportunities available through resettlement.   Resisting commentary is defined

here as commentary that responds to current events, social change and foreign policy within the

United States that are in conflict with Somali Bantu systems of belief. Together, rejecting and

resisting commentary function to sustain cultural integrity in the midst of multiculturalism and

dominant ideologies. Additionally, the commentary as a whole creates a performative discourse

of the diaspora community that negotiates the terrain of adaptation and assimilation.

Mediascapes

I situate the discussion of rejecting and resisting commentary within a broader reflection

of how social media creates a new landscape—a mediascape—through which diasporic

individuals author the self and by extension imagine community. Appadurai writes that "electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of the imagination." (1996, p. 4) Groups and ideas are in "simultaneous circulation" in realms that transcend the fixity of place and space. Thus, even as groups like the Somali Bantu appeal to traditional practices to sustain cultural identity in a foreign land, even as they experiment with modernities introduced in their new locales, there is also the incursion of ideas and images from electronic media that "provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general, agency." (1996, p. 7) In different modes, narrative is constructed through humor, nostalgic imagery, chain messaging, and political commentary on the social media platform that is democratic and open source, yet directed inward to a community that is dispersed across nations.

Rejecting and resisting commentary occurs within discourses that situate Nur, Mariam, and Isha in relation to Somali Bantu history and culture. For the Muse family and their immediate circle of friends, social media commentary is gendered: Mariam and Isha reveal the private voice of social reproduction; Nur demonstrates the public-political voice that speaks to social-political identities associated with being Somali Bantu, African, and Black. As a whole, their commentaries construct collective, yet highly personal, narratives of life in diaspora for a generation in-between—born in Somalia and Kenya, while coming of age in the United States.

I asked each of them at different times how they learned their history. Isha, whose story of flight was recounted in chapter four, recalls moments from the refugee trajectory that form the basis of the Somali Bantu narrative. She uses Facebook as a way of showing the story of who she is. She likes history, and she does miss her country. She frequently posts pictures that remind her of the life she lived in Kenya and Somalia: bunches of green bananas, a kettle on an open

fire, people working in a field. They are poignant memories that recall the emotions of home

and homeland, yet also trigger reminders of the terrible suffering so many of her people continue

to face because they either have chosen to remain in Somalia or have not been approved for

resettlement.

"When I see people (refugees) on television, I feel their pain," she says. Yet, there are

also the tensions and contradictions of the diasporic self in relation to the homeland. Several

years prior, when she was still married, cradling her youngest child who was then less than a

year old, Isha expressed the dissonance of seeing televised images from conflict zones in Africa.

"That was us?" she laughed, unable to reconcile the images of extreme poverty that characterized

her prior identity as refugee with the life she now lived in a comfortable home with plenty of

food, warm clothing, and a security system installed by her husband—a luxury that signaled both

material well-being and the vestiges of insecurity caused by forced migration.

Isha's manner of narrative construction through images of life in Kenya and Somalia

reflect the structures of feeling underlying both place and people. This is consistent with other

enactments of women's nation-building activities. The images reflect the habits, relations and

ordinariness of daily life: mangoes lying on a blanket at the market, a woman carrying a child on

her back, women braiding another's hair, and so forth. They are not political or nationalist

images; instead, they create an emotional structure of space, place, and belonging.

Yet, these are not merely nostalgic images. When Isha describes life in Kenya and

Somalia, her memories are marked by the knowledge of those who continue to toil under

oppressive regimes. In Somalia, she says, people have to be self-reliant. There is no form of

government support, no benefits for people who are struggling, no protections from widespread

hunger and helplessness against dominant groups that behave lawlessly. The systems of mutual

support that sustained life were thereby essential to their formation as a people. These systems of mutual support were carried with the Somali Bantu to the United States and are integral to their cultural sustainability.

One way that Isha maintains connection and thus affirms identity in diaspora is to alternate the language she uses when posting on Facebook. I had noticed that at least half of her posts were written in Maay Maay and it caused me to wonder if certain messages were intended for the Somali Bantu community only. When I asked her about this, she offered a very pragmatic response:

"I do this so I don't lose the language. We need to learn how to spell and write accurately in our first languages. When we use English all of the time, we begin to forget how to spell in Maay Maay and Somali. Other friends on Facebook—Mexican, Ethiopian, Somali— they write in their native language so I do the same."

Isha likes to post pictures and memes that are amusing as a form of entertainment. Facebook is one of her outlets for pleasure since her daily life is demanding with working and caring for her five children without sufficient support from their father. As a woman in a very traditional culture, she lives in a restricted space. Being an unmarried woman now makes her vulnerable to gossip regardless of her scruples. She frequently changes her profile name as way to conceal her identity and protect her reputation in the cyber sphere.[38] Despite the pressures that lie close to the surface, Isha maintains a sense of humor as a way of coping and resisting depression over circumstances in her life.

Isha's thoughtful bridging of multiple home spaces and her emotional connection to those suffering in Somalia and in refugee camps differed from Mariam who had little memory of

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[38] I am doubtful about the effectiveness of this strategy, however that is the explanation that Isha gave for using pseudonyms on Facebook. She continues to post her image, often very attractive ones where her face is made up.

142

Kenya, and minimal knowledge of the Somali Bantu story. When I asked how she learned about her people, she shrugged. She revealed little curiosity for the history, although her posts over time occasionally appealed to a broad "African" identity. When she was about 15 years old, she and her younger brother, Muse, recorded a song with Bant2Island about "Mama Africa" with mournful lyrics that expressed a longing to be buried in African soil. In other instances, she stereotypes her behavior—such as going barefoot outside—as "African"—a superficial assertion that is usually made in jest, but that nonetheless plays with this dimension of her identity. A friend (who is also Somali Bantu) comments underneath a whimsical photo of Mariam and her husband: "wear some shoes, but looking cute may allah protect yall from the evil eyes." Mariam writes back "I am from Africa I don't wear shoes and thx and ameen sirrr" to which the friend replies "lol." (April 23, 2016)

As discussed in chapter five, Mariam defines her cultural identity through her religiosity, which is manifest even in the light-hearted exchange with her friend. Her religiosity is ever more evident in the way she uses Facebook as a platform for religious exhortations, teachings, and moral commentary on the value of religion in daily life. Occasionally, her religious postings are in the form of chain messages: "Send these 5 names of ALLAH to 11 Muslims, believe me your biggest problem will be solved." (January 29, 2015) or "Sorry to ask you this question, but is ALLAH really first in your life? If yes, then stop what you are doing now and send this message to 12 people." (January 7, 2015) As a whole, these posts function to form identities built around shared and affirmed social beliefs. Krystal D'Costa, an anthropologist who writes about digital constructions of identity, states that even chain posts "become a way to help author self" insofar as the chain messages request feedback from friends and "allow the community to weigh in to confirm or dispute the feedback they've been given." (D'Costa, February 2014) Within Mariam's

circle of friends, the posting chains confirm the religious dimension of their shared identity in a

secular, Christian-dominant, post-9/11 society that is frequently inhospitable to visible

representations of Islamic religiosity.

Whereas Mariam's expressions of piety seem at first glance to be private ones, they

actually speak back to negative or inaccurate representations of Islam as a violent religion that is

oppressive to women. She claims: "There's no other religion that honour's women more than

Islam." (1/8/2015) She follows this statement with a series of posts praising women's place in

Islamic society. Included among the posts is one that challenges Western perceptions that

Muslim women cover against their will:

> You think I'm oppressed and I'm under compulsion to wear niqab by my father, husband,
>
> brothers will but let me tell you that I am fighting against all of them just to be able to
>
> wear freely
>
> Niqab is my free choice
>
> Niqab is my freedom
>
> Niqab is my ornament
>
> Niqab is my garment[39] (1/8/2015)

The statement is a powerful one that exemplifies the "embodied agency" theorized by Saba

Mahmood whereby the self is actualized through the practice of piety. In Mariam's case, this

practice assumes socio-political import because it occurs in a space and place that valorizes both

the hyper-sexualization and commodification of women's bodies, as well as subjects Muslim

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[39] I suspect that the post is not Mariam's own words based on the grammar and vocabulary, as well as the reference to her father who died when she was very young. Further, Mariam wears the hijab and not the niqab, which includes a face veil.

women to an Orientalist gaze (Mohanty) as a means of advancing its own political agenda. This particular post was one of several assertions of Muslim women's piety made on January 8th, 2015, one day after the attack on the French satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo,* by Islamic extremists who were angered by the magazine's cartoon depictions of the Prophet Mohammed. There is no evidence indicating that this event, which generated the international declaration, *Je Suis Charlie*, in any way motivated Mariam's flurry of posts. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of Mariam's assertions with the event in France (where the headscarf has since been banned) are worth noting.

The digital narratives constructed by Isha and Mariam generally reflect a more personal and subtle assertion of collective identity. Yet, their expressions are consistent with the more public, politicized expressions that are the hallmark of Nur's digital identity. Nur's use of Facebook as a platform for constructing collective identity reflects confidence in his voice and in his self-appointed position as a thought leader within the Bantu community. The term—thought leader—is my language, not his. However, the term aptly describes how he regards his efforts within the community, whether it be through cultural productions of music and comedy, outreach programs for younger children and youth[40], or inquiries into Somali Bantu history.

I asked Nur how he learned the story of the people now known as Somali Bantu. Nur told me that in 2013, he and some of his friends were curious about their history, the Somali civil war, and the reasons for why they were not living in their own country. He remembered hearing his uncles and brother-in-law talk about Somali Bantu history, but it didn't make as much sense

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[40] I do not explore Nur's volunteer work in this paper, however at Mariam's wedding he told me that he and his friends were providing afterschool tutoring for younger Somali Bantu youth. Milwaukee, he said, didn't have as good of volunteers as Blacksburg, so they wanted to offer something themselves to help their younger peers. The need for this outreach was important. The Somali Bantu community in Ohio was experiencing delinquency and drug use among their younger teens. This threat to community integrity motivated Nur and his friends to respond locally.

to him then as a young boy. Now that he was becoming a man, he wanted to clarify the questions about his people—who they were, where they are from, why they are in their current circumstances. He and some friends approached an "old lady" in Milwaukee named Aziza whose talk "opened [his] mind," creating more questions that led to a deeper and enduring interest in African and Black American history. They decided to make a documentary so that they could learn more about their history, and could convey this knowledge to other Somali Bantu youth as well. The documentary never materialized, however Nur found other means to "wake up" his peers, especially those whose behaviors were out of line with their culture.

Rejecting

Nur announces on his Facebook feed that a new video is posted. I click on the video link which takes me to a YouTube channel for Bant2Island. The video opens with Nur and his friends dressed in traditional women's clothing—the long, square dresses and scarves draped over their heads, their faces made up with lipstick and eye shadow. These are the "Bantu Moms," a popular storyline for Bant2Island. Here, the women load into a van and drive to the local grocery store. They speak in falsetto voices, mincing through the store, shopping baskets hooked on the crook of their arms. The language of the video is Maay Maay, but Nur explains to me that it depicts the tendency of the older women to spend a long time walking through the store, to leave with only a case of water. The comments below the video are replete with emoticons of laughter and remarks of how familiar the scenario is to anyone who has driven their mothers or aunts to the store.

The Bantu Moms videos are one example of how Nur uses music and comedy to attract people's attention and engage them in a dialogue. He doesn't want to preach he says, so he uses popular media to make music and comedy about love, family, or whatever is happening in the

Bantu community as a way to convey lessons. "The country we are living in is not our country" Nur states, therefore he wants to give something to the Bantu people that they can view and listen to that is their own. His goal is to strengthen the community by reminding them of how they act and making them think.

The topic of gossip and its negative effects within the Somali Bantu community are a frequent topic on social media. Older women are especially indicted in this practice. According to research, gossip has a social function as both a source of social knowledge and as a means for evaluating and enforcing proper codes of behavior. (Foster, 2004, p. 84) Within this context, gossip contributes to group solidarity insofar as it continually reestablishes communal norms. Abrahams writes that "culture in general depends on repetition of norms and mores in many forms, both formal and informal, to maintain its hold on members. Gossip is arguably the most common form because it requires no special skill to produce, as do storytelling and singing, for instance." (Abrahams, 1970, in Foster, 2004, p. 86) This informal transmission of knowledge is illustrated well in the post:

> I don't know why bantu people be wondering how everyone knows about their business , when they are the first once that put it out there. Something happens in the family, the auntie calls and the mom tells her what happened, then your auntie calls her friend and tells her about it, than the friend calls her friends and they edit the story add some lies to make it interesting and they put it out there.....just like that you be wondering who did it....who was there ? (ND)

Rejection posts such as these reflect a speaking back to some of the informal means for solidifying communal norms. While the older women who are typically regarded as the main culprits of harmful gossip are non-literate and therefore do not use social media, they are able to

watch videos. Thus, Nur's comedy skits about the Bantu moms are a way to reflect back to the older women in his culture some of the behaviors that are bad: gossiping and competing over the size of gifts given at weddings.

While the skits are amusing to the younger generation of Somali Bantu who recognize the behaviors in their own mothers, they do overlook the travails older women have faced and continue to face now that they are displaced into a foreign culture and stripped of any authority and standing, reliant upon their children. For older women, gossiping is a way to claim standing within the community and to garner control over otherwise "unknown forces" while validating a status quo that is familiar to them. (Foster, 2004, p. 88) Rejection of older women's gossip, especially when this gossip is folded into the genre of comedy, reflects as well the younger generation's distancing from the social practices that are maintained by older women who have very limited English language proficiency. This is best encapsulated in a comment that Abdirahman made to Khadija--impatient that she continued to rely upon traditional healers when she was suffering from a serious health condition-- "we are in modern times now." These women embody a dimension of identity that does not fit with life in diaspora, even as they recognize that the country where they live is "not their own." Gossip speech is performative of pre-modernity and thus diminishes community in a space and place where solidarity is ever more critical for identity and cultural sustainability. This rejection of older women's[41] gossip is a contrast to the respect show to the elder woman, Aziza, for her historical memory of the Somali Bantu people. Speech rooted in memory is connective and thereby productive of collective identity.

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[41] Men gossip as well, however Nur's rejections are directed primarily toward older women.

Whereas rejection of gossip targets primarily the elders and, specifically, female elders, rejection of the cultural appropriation of urban Black culture and liberal American values targets the younger generations. When Nur posts provocative questions on his Facebook page, he does so as a trigger for his peers to "think about who they are, where they are from, and why they are here." Many of the younger people who came to the United States as children are losing their proficiency in Maay Maay and are absorbing liberal American or African-American behaviors. This annoys him. Nur fears that if this kind of behavior continues among the younger generation of Somali Bantu, then the Bantu culture will "go away."

> I don't sag my pants, I'm real African. I'm not these type guys who commercialize their butt. Ant nothing loose on me. Bantu boys in America this ant your style find y'all own. That shit is sick. (April 18, 2016)

Most of his peers respond to posts like these with laughter emoticons. They are amused by his use of humor and mild vulgarity to make a point. Some of the posts generate replies. Through these mediated discussions, Nur wants to show the value of being Somali Bantu and African. While acting American is not a bad thing (Nur concedes that it's good to blend in and get along), young Somali Bantu need to remember their own people and culture. The sagging pants are immodest and not reflective of Bantu values. Nur elaborates that the Bantu are a respectful people. When they see their elders, they greet them and shake their hands. This is in contrast to his attitudes toward Black American who, according to Nur's observations, have no respect of elders. Young people interact with elders "like all are the same age." He doesn't want the younger generation to follow this way.

Nur is careful to distinguish Somali Bantu from the Black Americans by emphasizing their connection to the African continent. His attitudes reflect broader societal stereotypes of Black Americans as lazy and shiftless, a point that I will discuss further later in the chapter. However, Nur also valorizes Blackness and makes a point to call out colorism among his peers. He writes: "That [skin bleaching] means you hate yourself. Doing this brings disgrace to your people." (ND) Practices like skin bleaching are evidence of what happens when people don't know their history and consequently draw their values from the dominant culture rather than from their own:

> The face light but the neck dark, the Arms are light but the legs are dark blue and the feet nails look like they been kicked out heaven.....when y'all gon stop bleaching 🐪🐪🐪🐪🐪 (April 11, 2016)

Similarly, Somali Bantu youth who claim to have Asian or European ancestry betray their heritage by pretending to be something they aren't:

> Now I love my Bantu people but some of them must really think I'm stupid.when your nose so big that the people around you can't breathe cuz ur wide ass nose keep sucking all the air, you gon stand there talking about you half Arabic or your grandfather was an Arab. You must forgot what a mirror look like when your hair so kinky you break 15 combs a day, talking about your mother was half Italian when your husband got more hair than you. Y'all must really think I'm dumb talking bout your light-skinned cuz your son's wife is Indian, how does that give an Indian blood????? 👀. (ND)

Nur frames his message in comedic form as a way of reflecting back the silliness of these pretensions within the community, evoking laughter as a corrective to this behavior. (Hoy, 8-12-2010) The comedy riff, combined with alternative posts, reclaims the stigmatized *jareer* features (broad nose, tightly coiled hair, dark skin) from its long history of cultural colonization, and replaces it with a call for cultural integrity:

> So Be proud to be African be proud to be black, why does it always have to be mixed with something for it to be beautiful. #proud Africans stand up. (May 12, 1:12 am)

Resisting

Among the younger generations of Somali Bantu, Facebook and YouTube have emerged as platforms for constructing the social and sustaining culture in a new time and space. They are safe spaces outside of the mainstream for defining and performing identities, a counter-public for diasporic communities marginalized by race, culture, ethnicity, language and religion. (Parham, 2005, p. 353) As an auto/ethnographer, I have been able to use social media to observe how younger Somali Bantu represent themselves *to themselves*. In addition to following posts that reflected internal negotiations about the performance of Somali Bantu identity, I was also privy to posts that shared insight into the diasporic condition. Specifically, these posts revealed the negotiations of living in a "country that is not our own" where the dominant values manifest in state and federal governance conflict with cultural and religious beliefs that are core to Bantu identity. These negotiations are most apparent in what I call "resisting" posts that speak out against same sex marriage legislation, the candidacy of Donald Trump as the Republican presidential nominee, and spectacles of national mourning that reveal the selective empathy of United States patriotism.

151

In June 2015, two remarkable events occurred, almost simultaneously. The Supreme

Court had just legalized gay marriage nationwide, and a self-radicalized White nationalist, Dylan

Roof, massacred nine Black churchgoers in Charlotte, South Carolina. The latter event prompted

several southern states to remove the Confederate flag from their public buildings. Like many

others, I posted as my Facebook cover a picture that showed the Confederate flag replaced by the

Pride flag. Soon thereafter, I read the following on Nur's page:

> Whoever supporting gay marriage or who ever is gay please unfriend me now! ....and
>
> who ever has that rainbow flag...uffff that nasty fruit looking flag. subhanAllah...men 4
>
> women, women 4 men. Other than that i dont know u. (6/29/2015)

His post alarms me. I fear a loss resulting from our divergent positions on this topic. Of course, I

was aware that the Somali Bantu regarded homosexuality as an aberration and would not be in

favor of same sex marriage. Yet, I was curious about how they would regard this major change

in social relations in the United States, especially in light of recent posts about belonging:

> I miss home! Africa! (Fist symbol) Somalia (Star symbol) Kenya (can't identify symbol)
>
> Where do me belong? (6/22/2015)
>
> and
>
> If yall really wana be gangsters and be in gangs to just waste time and promote violence
>
> where there is peace than why dont yall go to somalia and fight al- shabaab from ur
>
> people… Man up! Just look at whats happening in ur country n how ur people are
>
> suffering, n look at how foolish yall are acting here. If that doesnt boil ur blood than your
>
> veins are empty. Dis is Some weak shit! #Stop the nonsense, we got long way to go.
>
> (6/14/2015)

I wondered if the legalization of same sex marriage would further estrange Nur and other Somali Bantu from the country in which they now lived. "I'm not gana raise my kids here" he writes (6/28/2015) to which other followers agreed. "Too much acceptance here [United States]."

Several months later, I asked Nur about his attitudes toward the passage of same sex marriage laws based upon the vitriolic posts he made earlier in the summer. He seemed a little uneasy by the request, but nonetheless shared his thoughts without reservation. Nur claimed that he didn't have any strong hatred toward gay people and would not discriminate if he encountered them. However, he disagreed with the fact of two men together. This was wrong in his world view. Man was created for woman, and woman for man. He had been approached by men on more than one occasion, encounters that he found both humorous and bewildering. I point out that he has a kind of "metrosexual" appearance, and this could be why gay men approached him. What is that, he asks. Is it bad? I try to explain that "metrosexual" refers to a male, urban look— slender, groomed, slim-fit clothing, styled hair—that is also the stereotypical appearance of a gay man. He ponders this briefly, his brow slightly furrowed, before returning to the conversation.

Nur tells me that he debated the issue of same sex relationships in his diversity class at college. He disagreed with the American Psychological Association conclusion that sexual orientation is fluid, or that a person is born gay. Nur holds a pathological view of homosexuality—that something must have happened to the person when he was young that profoundly impacted him. For example, molestation of a boy by a man can trigger homosexual feelings because certain parts of the body, when touched, respond. Thus, a person is socialized into being gay and this socialization occurs through some kind of abuse. Nur's beliefs about homosexuality were tied to his understanding of what it meant to be a man: someone who takes care of family, protects women, and acts as a role model for younger children. He asserted that

153

homosexuality didn't exist in Somalia--an assertion that is untrue, but nonetheless demonstrated the binary sex and gender roles governing men and women in his culture.

I asked how he thought the same sex legislation affected Somali Bantu in the United States. He said that we (the older and young adult generation) knew better about what was appropriate for men and women, but the children who were born here have no sense of their heritage. Thus, they are more readily influenced by the dominant culture and the standards of that culture will become normalized to them. This comment led to a tangent with Nur and Isha commenting on how these changes are already happening—teenagers are calling the police on their parents when they are unhappy with the discipline they receive. The children's manipulation of the dominant culture to benefit their immediate desires signals the need for guidance from elders. According to Nur and Isha, the American culture accepts everything and this is a problem. It's all about "be what you want to be." The people here are very spoiled--they feel like they have such big problems, but compared to the rest of the world where survival in the midst of hunger, warfare, and imminent violence are paramount, problems such as sexual orientation seem inconsequential:

"Gay marriage is something for people who have no problems," Nur maintains.

Clearly, Nur's conceptualization of what constitutes a "problem" is embedded in the collective Somali Bantu refugee experience of subordination, displacement, and oppression. The reality, though, is that LGBTQ people in Somalia must conceal their identities out of personal safety, or else face imprisonment or execution42. It is in the United States at this particular moment in history that sexual identities can be openly explored—a social change that Nur

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42 According to LGBTnet that monitors sexual orientation and gender identity in developing countries, information on conditions for LGBT people in Somalia is scarce. However, same sex relationships are illegal and are punishable by imprisonment or death. See http://www.lgbtnet.dk/countries/africa/somalia.

regards as frivolous in much the same way that "tattoos, cornrows and earrings on men, and sagging pants that show everything" are perceived as frivolous distractions from responsible behavior. Responsible behavior is thus the mark of Somali Bantu masculinity: adherence to cultural and religious mores, caring for a family, and financially supporting a household.

Nur's attitudes about American culture are shaped by his observations of African-Americans living in his immediate environs. When he looks around the apartment complex where he lives, he sees young men with "tattoos, cornrows, and sagging pants that show everything" who do not appear to be employed. This reinforces what was told to them during orientation in the refugee camps: that Black Americans were lazy and thieving and to watch out for them. I point out the parallels between the African-American experience and the Somali Bantu experience in Somalia. I ask him: If I were attending an orientation for living in Somalia, who would the dominant Somalis say were the "bad guys" in their culture? Nur conceded, pointing to himself.

Despite this small breakthrough in understanding, Nur and others in his family and the broader Somali Bantu community (and, indeed, most people in general), continue to cling to their stereotypes as truths. In the case of the Muse family, these stereotypes function to differentiate the Somali Bantu who are disadvantaged in the United States racial hierarchy by the color their skin, from Black Americans who are always already marked as second-class citizens.

Race and social positionality figure powerfully in the Somali Bantu experience, often in contradictory ways. Even as Nur concedes that the messages he received as a newcomer to the United States reflected the subordination of Blacks / African-Americans, he and other Somali Bantu nonetheless persisted in their acceptance of these stereotypes. Further, they were vigilant

in differentiating themselves as Africans from Black Americans, as evidenced by the rejecting speech previously discussed. Yet, Nur was acutely aware that he and other Somali Bantu lived in Black bodies and to be Black in American society—regardless of cultural or religious heritage—was to be vulnerable. This awareness of Black vulnerability was heightened by the rise of Donald Trump in the political arena and his potential impact on the lived experience of all people with Black and Brown skin:

if donald trump win im gana bleach myself.....(December 15, 2015)

Trump's brash statements about the deportation of undocumented Mexicans and Muslims further touched on the tenuous sense of belonging felt in the United States:

Donald said he got them boats ready. first day in office, he gon give out free chains. To those who love jewelry. This is yall dream come true. Sing along= Tell da world we coming home, let the rain wash away all the boats of yesterday I know my village awaits I remember those refugee gates ..☺☺☺☺☺☺ I'm done. (September 30, 2016)

Months later he writes:

Donald tramp said he gon start with the Bantus in Wedgewood (Ohio) I have a lot family there oh Allah please protect them. (March 4, 2016)

The prospect of deportation prompted a lot of joking and commentary, and through the humor a growing awareness of the hypocrisies in the American democratic system. A Somali Bantu female replied to a deportation post: "I wanna see him [Donald Trump] sending us back home cuz first of all american people thinks they own america but really they didn't they stole it form the native people" (September 30, 2015). Nur comments on a photo of Trump kissing a Black

156

baby, "Okay I'm still not voting for you... that baby dies after that kiss" (March 5, 2016), to which friends reply that Trump is insincere, pandering for the Black vote when in fact he hates Blacks and Muslims.

And the Somali Bantu will participate in voting. Many have acquired citizenship, even though they continue to perceive themselves as living in a country that is not their own. This in-betweenness is captured in another of Nur's Trump-related posts where he refers to the burn scars on his forehead (from a traditional Bantu healing practice that occurred during his infancy) as emblematic of his outsider status:

> I went to vote today but the lady at the front disk told me that I can't vote cuz I had too many burnt mark on my forehead due to that we can't trust u cuz we don't know if this is ur real face. I was trying to vote for Hillary or that Adam senders guy whatever his name is but since she pissed me off Ama vote for Donald in private. (April 1, 2016)

The incident is a fictitious one—he was not turned away from voting—however, his humorous commentary drew connections between a culturally distinctive physical feature and his authenticity as a citizen with voting rights. Yet, as his final statement indicates, the Somali Bantu are emerging as a political force with a collective voice whose vote can make a difference, a point explored further in chapter seven.

The candidacy of Donald Trump heightened awareness among Somali Bantu of the Black, Muslim, and immigrant body; however it was the spectacles of international mourning prompted by incidents of Islamic extremism that brought attention to the selective empathy of Western nations. Prior to the November 13th ISIL attack in Paris, Nur had posted statements critical of the suffering Africa discourse:

157

this is how the rest of the world view us Africans....naked people living in huts, hungry

sick children, Africans are good at spear-throwing, they hunt lions, all Africans look

alike, Africa is a violent place, they are animals, Africa is a continent full of disease!...so

many misconceptions made on us. but we still proud! (February 11, 2015)

He also posted memes decrying Islamophobia, and the reduction of African / African-American

history to stories of slavery so that its histories of progress and development were forgotten.

However, it was in the aftermath of the November 13th ISIL attack, when social media was flush

with posts in solidarity with Paris and many adopted the Parisian flag filter for their profile

picture, that Nur made his most compelling statement:

I guess african lives don't matter.

#more people die of poverty, violence, hunger and terrorist attacks in my continent, half

of the kakuma refugee camp had been flooded with water. People have nowhere to sleep.

But no body made a flag for kenya to show support. But I still prey [sic] for Paris and to

those who lost their lives may Allah keep their souls at peace. (November 14, 2015)

Other Somali Bantu post in reply:

"Fuk Paris my boy how come they didn't talk about Mecca when all the people die,"

and

"Finally first status that isn't riding the bandwagon. Muslims die everyday in Middle East

no one showing solidarity on fb but an ancient in France gain millions of support. I don't

understand this world and the people in it."

These young adults whose introduction to this country occurred through the bodies of white volunteers, aptly observed the selective empathy of the country that was now their home, and did so by adapting the language of the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States. Which lives matter? Which lives are grievable?[43] The outpouring of emotion for Paris, compared to the dearth of awareness or recognition of conflicts occurring throughout the Global South, especially those affecting Muslims, is a harsh reminder of how unevenly human life is valued…The insecurity and imminent danger of terrorism is incompatible with ideas about iconic places like Paris. However, for places like Beirut, Baghdad, and Yola, Nigeria, each struck by terrorism within the same span of time, [44] violence and upheaval are regarded as natural occurrences in places that are regarded as always already unstable and, thus, unliveable. (Deramo, 2016)

The posts in reply to Nur's compelling statement of how African lives must not matter to the West, likewise reveal how religion—specifically Islam—is racialized in the United States. Their observations about which international tragedies evoke mass response recognize that the killing of Muslim civilians is either overlooked or reported as a footnote to stories on Islamic terrorism. This oversite further reinforces the estrangement between Somali Bantu for whom Islam is a core component of identity, and the country in which they now live and make their home.

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[43] "Grievable lives" is the central concept of Judith Butler's book, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*
[44] An estimated 44 terrorist attacks occurred during the month of November 2015. The attack on Paris claimed the highest number of deaths (137) and injuries (368). However, in late October a bombing in Sinai, Egypt claimed 224 lives. Earlier in the month, a suicide bombing in Ankara, Turkey resulted in 102 deaths and 538 injuries. The incidents in Sinai and Ankara did not generate a similar response from Western countries event though the number of deaths and injuries were greater. Source: "List of Terrorist Incidents, 2015" at Wikipedia, retrieved 11/30/15.

Yet, even as young Somali Bantu critique the country in which they now live, they also express gratitude for the opportunities afforded to them—namely, the opportunity to acquire an education. Nur writes "I remember wen I didn't even have sandals. My mission in life is to give back to those in need @ Daybah," (5/5/2015) to which his friends reply that they had hard times in Africa, but they are doing better now. He photographs a letter from the Dean of the School of Health Sciences congratulating him for making the Dean's List and posts it, writing:

"I guess I been working hard…u might not know I actually take education very serious and many other things. I juz fool around to keep my mind fresh lol…U know its not just me these days I think we all as bantus are doing good in the education field and I hope we can continue to do so. we got alot to prove so I hope we all can be inspired by each other." (3/4/2015)

His statement—we got a lot to prove—reminds his peers that the Somali Bantu identity continues to be a stigmatized one, burdened with the legacies of servitude, marginalization, displacement, and refugeity. Yet, this desire to prove themselves as a people is owed not to the host country but to the continent of Africa: "I think African teens should use their education to better their continent." (5/12/2015) Further, those who squander their opportunities should reconsider the cost of doing so:

If yall really wana be gangsters and be in gangs to just waste time and promote violence where there is peace than why dont yall go to somalia and fight al- shabaab from ur people…Just look at whats happening in ur country n how ur people are suffering, n look at how foolish yall are acting here. If that doesnt boil ur blood than your veins are empty. Dis is Some weak shit! #Stop the nonsense, we got long way to go. Still love you all. We gotta change! (6/14/2015)

Thus, in this post and throughout the resisting commentary, Nur subverts the discourse of the grateful refugee whose gift of freedom places them in an enduring debt to the liberal empire. (Nguyen) According to these commentaries, this generation of Somali Bantu will never belong to the United States, despite acquisition of citizenship status and any material advancement attained through higher education. Instead, their enduring debt is to the people who remain behind in Kakuma, Dadaab, and the Jubba Valley.

Confirmation and Circulation

This chapter demonstrates how young adults construct identity in diaspora, specifically through rejecting and resisting commentary that reinforce behavioral and moral codes that signify membership. Social media is instrumental in this construction. The delivery of the commentary and the responses the commentaries evoke are performative insofar as they establish a discourse internally directed, confirmed through response and symbol, and repeated through the viral circulation of information. The social media platform was particularly valuable to me as a researcher insofar as it was a venue for observing and documenting the performative process, which was both collaborative and fluid. I closely followed Nur as a thought leader among his peers. However, his ideas and expressions were not isolated ones. He spoke from within a community with a shared history and values even while his speech emerged from the new circumstances facing that community and its tensions of negotiating change while sustaining identity. Likewise, the posts made by Isha and Mariam occurred from that same nexus of negotiating and sustaining, even though their expressions tended to be more personal ones.

The manner by which the commentary on internal community concerns was framed and communicated revealed something about the community that would have been unavailable to me if I were physically present, posing questions formed from my positionality. I had access to

these interactions because of my "Facebook friend" status. However, as a Facebook friend, I

remained invisible unless I chose to insert myself into the communication threads. Usually, I

refrained from doing this, especially on the posts that I identified as rejecting or resisting. As

someone outside of the community, I was not privy to the kind of gossip that circulated, usually

in the native language of Maay Maay, and how that gossip affected its subjects. As a White

person, I was unaware of the impact of colorism, the practices of bleaching or the extent to

which it occurred. While I was aware of general bias against young Black men who wore

sagging pants and cornrows, I was surprised to see this bias asserted so baldly among Somali

Bantu. It is unlikely that some of these topics would have come up if I were in full control of the

conversation.

It is unlikely, as well, that the conversations around national and international issues

would have received meaningful attention from me without social media serving as a site for

public deliberation. The resisting commentaries were particularly fascinating because they

provided a level of insight into what it meant to live in diaspora, impacted by policies and

political trends. I was able to observe how the passage of certain laws, the ascendance of certain

personalities, and the national response to certain international tragedies facilitated the

performance of identity. Resisting trends that were at odds with deeply held values was another

facet of cultural sustainability.

What is the future of the Somali Bantu diaspora? How is the community transforming

itself through the process of sustaining culture and negotiating change? How do the lives of Isha,

Nur, and Mariam fit within a broader picture of the Somali Bantu diaspora in the United States?

In the next chapter, I explore cultural productions that advance the Somali Bantu trajectory

toward an imagined future of freedom, prosperity, and social-political recognition. Included in

this exploration is the role of social media that is Somali Bantu owned and managed as a means for communicating news and information, and how these far-reaching news sources are bringing the Somali Bantu into a common narrative. It also brings us back to Somalia where the Wagosha Movement is gaining international attention and seeking retribution for the injustices faced by people of the Jubba Valley, including those now known as Somali Bantu.

Chapter Seven

Transforming Community through Narrative Identity

A critical component of cultural sustainability is the intentional process of negotiating difference and change. Often, this process hinges on expressions of rejection and resistance to norms, behaviors, and attitudes that threaten cultural integrity. These expressions reflect diasporic consciousness insofar as they differentiate the group from that which it is not, and thereby reinforce who it is they are. This is a discursive, dynamic process that never actually settles on a final, collective definition. Instead, the process itself—Bantu performativity—is continuous.

The speech acts and practices narrating diasporic consciousness extend beyond ephemeral gestures and utterances. Rather, they result in cultural productions that contribute to identity transformations. I use the term transformation to emphasize the continuity of change. What it means to be Bantu is subject to ongoing negotiation as the individuals who identify themselves as such travel through time, space, and place, encountering ideas, individuals, opportunities, and more that put identity to the test. Yet, being Bantu remains core to the collective identity, even as this collective identity reconstitutes itself. On the one hand, this process of identity transformation is a common one across our lived experiences. It is not necessarily unique to people living in diaspora. However, what I did find remarkable in my 12 years of interaction with the Somali Bantu in the United States was the rapidity with which these transformations occurred. As stated elsewhere in this paper, the Somali Bantu were among the most culturally dissimilar groups to arrive in the United States in recent history. In addition to language, religion, and cultural differences, the Somali Bantu *lived* differently. They were subsistence farmers who organized their lives around familial networks of support, with limited

access to modern technologies and conveniences and minimal educational opportunities. Yet they were making new homes in mid-size cities in a bureaucratized, technology-driven, late capitalist nation. Despite predictions that they would encounter an impossibly steep learning curve and a neoliberal environment that limited resettlement support to a mere nine months, the Somali Bantu found the means to express, construct, and advance cultural identity.

The Somali Bantu adapted to their new society with the support of volunteers from faith-based and not-for-profit organizations who connected them with health, social service, and educational resources. Some Somali Bantu eventually assimilated into their new society: one of the few Somali Bantu men remaining in Roanoke earned a medical technician certification, married a Liberian woman, and assumed a middle class lifestyle that included beach vacations and fur coats for his little girl. For most, though, resettlement provided the means to construct Somali Bantu culture from the detritus of displacement. Whereas third country resettlement scattered families across the country, secondary migration reunited extended families into locales where they could recreate "villages" (Dyer, April 29, 2016) reproducing some of the structures of internal governance and restoring celebratory practices such as the wedding that were important to their cohesion as a people. This chapter looks broadly at the Somali Bantu process of homing that includes the assertion of a Somali aesthetic, the reconstitution of internal community structures, and the deployment of mass communications that connected these diasporic villages to one another, to the refugee camps where family members remained, and to the Gosha homeland. These transformations include public expressions of identity that are evident in the proliferation of Bantu-owned media broadcast on YouTube channels, and the emergence of the Wagosha movement, as well as private expressions that manifest in intimate relationships: women speaking with greater self-advocacy in terms of acquiring education,

choosing partners, and parenting their children. While the younger generation is emboldened by their visions for the future, they nonetheless face many challenges that directly relate to the oppression Gosha people faced while in Somalia, as well as their forced displacement and protracted stay in refugee camps.

Making Home through a Somali Bantu Aesthetic

One of the first tasks of local resettlement volunteers preparing for the arrival of a refugee family is organizing their living space. The volunteers raise funds and collect donations to furnish an apartment suitable for the family. When I joined the resettlement group in Blacksburg, we had lists of items to procure that included, inexplicably, muffin tins and roasting pans. After the families moved into their apartments, we oriented them to their new appliances, and acquired additional items we thought they needed or that they requested. (In one instance, Abdirahman asked multiple volunteers and members of the Masjid for a portable stereo, resulting in enough stereos for every room of his apartment.) Because of the extensive coverage in local newspapers, people in the community frequently contacted the resettlement volunteers because they wanted to do something for the families such as purchase bicycles for the children or donate winter coats and sweaters. Over their first nine months in the United States, the families acquired an unmanageable amount of clothing in all sizes, boxes of pasta and rice, battered kitchen chairs, small appliances, blankets, toys and more. We were surprised, then, that they kept very few of the things they had acquired when they moved to Milwaukee. Of course, the vehicles transporting them had limited space. Nevertheless, we speculated that the ease with which they abandoned their material possessions was indicative of their refugee status.

We were mostly wrong on that point.

Several years after they settled in Milwaukee, I had an opportunity to visit the families while I was attending a conference in the city. The plan was to stay with Isha and Abdirahman in their new home, and then visit Khadija and Batula for meals. When I entered Isha and Abdirahman's home, I was ushered into a diasporic space that constructed place through the small details of living—taste, smell, mannerisms—that persisted and transformed the place of dislocation. This space was distinctly different from their apartments in Blacksburg, assembled by volunteers out of second hand furniture. A spectacular black upholstered sectional couch with scalloped seat back that stretched around the three walls of the room occupied the living room. They had traveled to a Somali market in Minnesota to make the purchase, and then loaded the sections into their van for the trip home. Tapestries draped the walls of the living room, and the ceiling had a canopy with tasseled edges. A large black and gold needlepoint of Mecca hung on one wall alongside a prayer clock that marked the five calls to prayer in Arabic. On another wall, Isha pinned up studio portraits of the younger children, somber faced, circled by a string of colored lights.

The homes of the other Bantu families were similarly decorated: the spectacular couch, the draped walls, the canopied ceiling. In every home large screen televisions occupied center stage, flanked by ornate teapots with matching cups, gold-leafed goblets, and silk flowers. The other rooms may have been sparsely furnished and utilitarian, but the main living area had a distinct aesthetic that was both splendid and vividly colorful. The décor of the main living areas, acquired primarily from Somali businesses, included the wall tapestries with Asian-inspired floral patterns and calligraphy. Thus, every Somali Bantu residence represented a space and place removed from the urban neighborhood or public housing environs where they were situated.

The Somali aesthetic cultivated home-space among Somali Bantu. However, that home-space was not isolated from the communities in which they lived. Khadija's apartment where Nur and Mariam lived before they married was in a complex with a high percentage of Somali Bantu tenants. Families moved freely between one another's homes, without the formality of invitation, so that the entire landscape of the complex assumed the appearance of a Somali village. Thus, the aesthetic of home-space embodied the "strong ties" of community relations, of people claiming common space to share time, reciprocate care, and pool resources. (Dyer 2016, p. 34) Ervin Dyer observed through his ethnographic study of Somali Bantu in Pittsburgh public housing that the Somali Bantu also reached beyond the strong ties of family and kin to build what he calls "weak ties"[45] with public housing neighbors and white volunteers in order to accrue the social capital needed to have a place in the broader community. (35)

Forming Community through Mutual Assistance Organizations

One of the most significant ways that the Somali Bantu leveraged their "weak ties" to neighbors and volunteers was in the formation of mutual assistance groups. These groups, driven primarily by older men who held positions of esteem within their communities and continued to be recognized as leaders, reconstituted structures of community governance. These older men tapped younger adults with English proficiency who could serve as language brokers with resettlement volunteers, who then could connect the Somali Bantu with necessary services and opportunities. Many of these groups pursued and gained not-for-profit status that enabled them to receive financial and in-kind donations for their work.

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[45] Dyer's conceptual framework draws upon Mark Granovetter's (1973) theory of the "strength of weak ties." Granovetter argues that connections established through acquaintances transmit higher levels of novel information because aquaintances travel in different networks than those with whom we have strong relationships. The novel information received through weak ties contributes significantly to our social embeddedness.

The mutual assistance groups served the community in several ways. First, they strengthened a network of support independent of the volunteers needed to help the community adapt—people who could drive, who could interpret at doctor's appointments or with public school teachers. Second, the groups were instrumental in identifying the kind of support they needed from volunteers beyond the community. Often, the group's members worked alongside the volunteers in delivering the programs and in doing so emerged as community leaders available for consultation by local school and city governance. Most importantly, though, the mutual assistance groups reproduced community structures that Somali Bantu had relied upon throughout their trajectory from Somalia and Kenya to the United States.

Soon after he settled in Milwaukee, Abdirahman assumed a leadership role in the Bantu American Friendship Association (BAFA). BAFA was similar in mission to other Somali Bantu community associations forming across the country: to assist the Somali Bantu refugee community in their transition to a new society. The services initially offered addressed immediate concerns such as language interpretation, transportation to medical or social service appointments, completion of applications, and assistance in finding housing or employment. The associations likewise collaborated with volunteers to offer more complex programming related to adult language learning, afterschool tutoring, citizenship exam preparation, and financial literacy. Community farming initiatives were popular, giving older community members a chance to do familiar, meaningful work and occasionally to earn some income when they sold their produce at farmer's markets. Refugee soccer teams were also common, providing a recreational option that connected Somali Bantu youth and young men with other refugee communities.

Similar initiatives occurred in Roanoke where I participated in some of the early meetings of volunteers and elders who wanted to create a system for community self-help. One

of the initial concerns raised by the elders was finding places to have funerals and weddings. These places needed to be large enough to accommodate the whole community and tolerant of multi-day celebrations. The group also collected dues in order to have a treasury: when a Somali Bantu child died, the elders gave the family cash both as comfort as well as to cover the costs of burial. The group made lists of individuals who could provide transportation or offer interpretation. Some with higher English proficiency became tutors or helped run citizenship education classes. They also convened with their American volunteers to discuss issues resulting from cultural difference: A Somali Bantu woman slapped a neighbor's child and an onlooker reported her for child abuse. Community elders tried to intervene on her behalf, but the court refused their offer to handle the problem internally, therefore the elders gathered with volunteers to discuss cultural expectations around child rearing. Unfortunately, the disciplinary suggestions offered by the middle-class volunteers—time outs or withholding privileges—were of limited benefit to Somali Bantu households. However, the meeting reinforced the value of the community support structure for providing children with guidelines for behavior. Thus, while the content of the community meetings tended toward practical solutions for negotiating a new culture, the underlying mission was preserving cultural integrity.

Some of the Somali Bantu organizations across the United States initiated projects that sustained cultural knowledge. The Somali Bantu Community Association of Maine formed a Kasheekee Telling Room "to pass on our cultural traditions, dances, and arts through storytelling." There, youth and young adults interview and film their elders, thereby preserving the histories of Somali Bantu elders who survived war, famine, and displacement. Similarly, the Somali Bantu Community Association of Vermont supports several traditional music projects including a drumming band that is available to perform for private or public functions. Somali

Bantu in Maryland collaborated with the American Friends Service Committee and the Center for Digital Storytelling to produce 11 short films narrating personal stories of flight and displacement.

Nur and his friends started Ban2Island when they were in middle school, initially as a way for the boys to help each other in school. They didn't have tutors like when they were in Blacksburg, and some of the children were struggling. What began as a tutoring and outreach program then expanded to include dance and music and comedy skits. They traveled to other cities to perform at weddings. Bantu living in Kakuma and Dadaab downloaded YouTube videos of their performances and sold them for a small profit in the camps. As discussed in chapter six, the creative products of Ban2Island sustained and extended Somali Bantu culture as a counter response to the problems of gangs and drug use faced by youth in other resettlement cities.

In 2007, the Tucson and San Antonio groups collaborated to address issues around assimilation. This meeting prompted an annual convention of Somali Bantu organizations from across the country to address topics such as education, parenting children in Western society, and civic engagement. (Davis, 2010) The National Somali Bantu Project, funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement and based on Portland State University, likewise assembled community leaders. The Project, founded and directed by Van Lehman and Omar Eno whose work with the Somali Bantu in the refugee camps brought their plight to international attention, served as a clearinghouse for community-based efforts nationwide as well as a research repository for academic work by and about the Somali Bantu.[46] These efforts at reaching beyond the local

[46] It is difficult to track the activity of the national conventions since they do not have a central organizing body. Efforts appear to be initiated by the larger, more organized and well-resourced groups in San Diego, Vermont, and Houston. Originally, the National Somali Bantu Project was a site for collecting information on activities; however,

reflect the formalization of a diasporic consciousness—the desire to sustain the integrity of culture and construct a national identity out of the shared trajectory of marginalization, displacement, and resettlement.

Constructing Global Culture through Mediascapes

Diasporic consciousness is further constituted through the various mediascapes produced by Somali Bantu. The mutual assistance association and community organization websites were the first mediascapes constructed by Somali Bantu. However, these sites tended to be static forums typically maintained by volunteers or social service organizations as a support to the community. Frequently, the sites became inactive if a volunteer moved on or the organization was unable to pay the web hosting fees. As Facebook grew in popularity, it provided a more dynamic option that individual community members could control, with no cost to the organization, using any kind of electronic device. Further, Facebook allowed individuals to construct their own profiles so that expressions of Bantu life and culture broadened beyond that of the community leaders, thereby creating a richer palette of perspectives and experiences speaking to and about Somali Bantu life. Significantly, the new mediascapes represented the rising generation of Somali Bantu whose lived experiences were concentrated in the United States and whose memories of refugeity occurred while they were children.

Facebook and You Tube both provided platforms for Somali Bantu news sources, the most robust being the Somali Bantu channel based out of Vermont. As of December 2016, the channel had 3,890 followers from across the world. The stories and video broadcasts deliver

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when I attempted to visit the project in December 2016 it seemed to have disappeared from the Portland University site.

172

content in Maay Maay, however, a third of all Facebook posts are in English. The content of the stories amplifies the concerns of diaspora: financial appeals for people who are suffering in the refugee camps; exhortations about voting in American elections and educating girls; and updates on the political climate in the Jubba Valley. The flow of stories, information, and images across national boundaries--from Kakuma and Dadaab to Somalia to third country resettlement cities around the world--exemplifies what Appadurai describes as "global cultural processes" whereby "people, place, and heritage lose all semblance of isomorphism." (Appadurai, 1996, p. 46) Cultural forms and ideas are altered. However, the disjuncture does not sever the relatedness. Consider these examples.

On May 29th the Somali Bantu Channel recognized a young woman, Fatuma Saladi Omar, who was a recent graduate of New York Utica Community College with a diploma certifying her to teach Kindergarten through Fifth grades. After honoring the young woman for her accomplishment, the author used the image of Fatuma in her cap and gown to convey the following:

> "Because we are always having Somali Bantu adolescents that get married all the time. And in some week in the US there are about 20 wedding every week. While the number of Somali Bantu people graduating from college is about 15 a year. So what message we are trying to put out is that if you learn and achieve a career you will make it big for your family, yourself, and Your somali bantu community."

The author of the post makes an important appeal to the community: to value education as vital to the development of the Somali Bantu in the United States, including the education of girls. However, achieving the kind of outcomes desired through education means making a choice that requires elders to shift their priorities in a culturally significant way. Specifically, traditional

173

beliefs surrounding marriage must become flexible to allow for further education that extends into adulthood.

Messages about education are reinforced by images from Somalia that show land that has been stolen from Bantu people, as well as images from the refugee camps that show people suffering from untreated medical conditions. Often, these images are uncensored. One photograph shows child soldiers carrying weapons—assault rifles and machetes. (April 2, 2016) Another shows a post-suicidal man collapsed on his knees, his neck broken and head tilted in the noose.(July 10, 2016) Thus, education is not only an individual accomplishment, but is critical for the future of the nation. Another post on the Somali Bantu channel exhorts:

> We are writing you this message to tell you that all Somali Bantus need to come together to fight for Somali Bantu rights in Somali. Especially on going intelligent boys and girls who are growing up to becoming amazing human beings. We are especially saying this to the growing up boys and girls because they are the ones who have and are adapting to this country the most and they are the future of this nation and they are the ones who can do most in life. So they need to share their knowledge and put it to good use by helping their people be aware that Somali Bantus in their own country don't have rights and that they need to stand up and get back their rights. (December 24, 2015)

The extended post concludes with a request than anyone interested in participating in the fight for Somali Bantu rights contact them immediately.

Media advocacy for education both reflects and catalyzes transformations occurring in private relationships. Around the time of Mariam's graduation, her cousin Malyun posted the following on her site: "you prove everyone wrong n I have don't stop dreaming Aunty you have a

174

bright future ahead of you."(ND) I asked Mariam what Malyun meant when she wrote about

proving everyone wrong. Mariam responded that, around the time of Mariam's graduation,

Abdirahman said in direct reference to Mariam that African girls won't go to college once they

get pregnant. Mariam's feelings were hurt. She was saddened because she felt that he didn't

have faith in her, and because he was gossiping about her to others in the community.

Mariam elaborated that life was different now that education was an expectation for all

children and not only boys. If they were still in Somalia or Kenya, it was likely that she would

have been expected to focus on her place as a mother and not pursue additional education. Now,

however, she did not feel the pressure to accept her place as mother and homemaker as her only

option. In America young men and women are expected to graduate from high school and

continue on to college despite their decisions to marry and start a family. In Mariam's view,

Abdirahman felt that African women were less capable, and that he felt superior to others in the

community because of his knowledge of English.

But *would* the expectations be different for Mariam if she were in Kenya or Somalia at

this point in time? Because, just as images travel from Kenya and Somalia to the United States

and other third country resettlement nations and thereby evoke a moral response, so too do the

images travel from the diaspora back to Kenya and Somalia. What response does a photograph of

Fatuma Salati Omar wearing her cap and gown at a college graduation in New York evoke from

girls of a similar age living in Kenya and Somalia? How is the image read from the perspective

of their respective cultural circumstances? I am speculating on the transfer of meaning through

these global circuits, however my observations have led me to believe that the values assigned to

education are not unique to the diaspora. Rather, the broad scale accessibility of education in the

United States is what raises the value of education for Somali Bantu.

According to survey research, 98.5% of Somali Bantu living in the diaspora regions cited the denial of education as the greatest of the abuses they suffered while in Somalia. (Eno M. , 2008, pp. 267-9) Additionally, my own inquiries revealed that the construction of schools for Somali Bantu children in the refugee camp had an immediate and positive effect on the community. Mahdi, a Somali Bantu community leader in Roanoke, recalled that after construction of the Iftin Primary School in the Hagadera camp where Bantu were based "a change had been developed. Some of the children were so excited about these schools they start to speak English, they were out of the dark." (Personal communication, 2006) The poetics of this statement demonstrated the impact of instituting education for the Bantu people. The analogy of darkness with lack of education, and the reception of education as leaving darkness behind, was illustrative of how the Bantu regarded their changing social conditions. Schooling marked an entrance into the mainstream of society. Further, the close linkage of schooling with English proficiency indicates the emergence of a political imaginary whereby the Bantu move toward engaged citizenship.

Building a Transnational Movement

Once again, I refer to the statement by Appadurai that there is "growing evidence that the consumption of the mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general, *agency*." (1996) Increased literacy throughout the Somali Bantu diaspora enabled their use of media platforms to resist and engage on a global scale. These "network publics" established online spaces for interactivity, transcending the conditions of time and space. (Parham, 2005, p. 353) This transnational engagement is most evident in the role of Bantu throughout the diaspora in supporting the Wagosha Movement in Somalia. I first learned

about the movement for Bantu rights through the Somali Bantu channel. The post featured a

photograph of older Somali Bantu men and women holding signs written in English:

Stop Killing Jareer Weyne

Somali Bantu Speak Up

We Are Humans Not Halflings

No Justice No Peace for Somali Bantu in Somalia

They gathered outside of the United Nations in New York City, demanding that action be taken

against Al-Shabaab for war crimes against the Bantu and other marginalized groups in Somalia.

The image was striking—first, to see elders gathered in political action, but also to learn that in

Somalia people of the Jubba Valley had organized themselves to challenge the lawlessness

affecting their lives. According to Eng Yarow Sharef Aden who chairs the Wagosha Movement

of Somalia for Justice, Equality, Freedom and Development, the Movement represents the Bantu

Swahili speaking people in Jubbaland—a group comprised of many tribes victimized by repeated

massacres of Somali governments and, most recently, Al Shabab and the clan administration led

by Warlord Ahmed Madobe. Aden, who lives in Cardiff, South Wales, was among a group of

Somali Bantu participating in a conference in Mogadishu in 2004 that led to the formation of the

Wagosha Movement.[47] The faction has since launched a military wing in 2008 in order to

"defend the poor and innocent Wagosha people in Jubbaland" from land grabbing, the

conscription of child soldiers, and bloodshed. (Personal correspondence, January 7, 2017) In

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[47] An email from Aden on January 5, 2017, identifies the 2004 Mogadishu conference as the formation date. A subsequent email on January 7, 2017, written as a longer narrative, states "the faction was founded in 2002 as [a] political wing." I use the 20042 date because it corresponds with a conference hosted by the Center for Research and Dialogue in Mogadishu on July 3-4th.

addition to bringing attention to the state-sanctioned genocide and ethnic cleansing of the

Wagosha Bantu people, the Movement wants to raise awareness that the actual number of Bantu

people in Somalia is far higher than portrayed by the Somali clans that benefit from the nation's

4.5 power sharing system.[48]

Aden's base in the United Kingdom provides him a broader reach for building

international awareness of the plight of the Wagosha people. He has senior officials operating

inside Somalia, as well as committees organized throughout the diaspora in East Africa, the

United States, and Europe. This dispersement of movement activists enables the transfer of

information through multiple channels to broader audiences. For example, a United Nations

monitoring report that includes an annex on the situation of the Bantu/Wagosha community in

Al-Shabaab held areas of Lower and Middle Juba interviewed relatives resettled in the United

States and Europe since it was not possible to conduct interviews with individuals living in the

area. Thus, the "diaspora factor" plays a significant role in providing a voice for peace and

recovery efforts in Somalia, far beyond the provision of remittances. Through tele-

communications, relatives can speak directly to one another thereby reducing misinformation

and gossip among clans, as well as media censoring. The first-hand accounts of continuing

conflicts and insecurities become authoritative data sources for the diaspora community, now

positioned to speak broadly, with greater personal security, to broader audiences. In its report on

building a sustainable peace in Somalia, the Centre for Research & Dialogue describes the

positive influences of Western resettlement that has a beneficial impact on the diaspora factor:

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[48] The 4.5 power sharing system is constructed to rotate power among the four majority clans in Somalia.
The ".5" represents minority groups whose share of power is half that of a single clan. Critics describe it
as a divisive system that does not fulfill its pretensions of equity. See Mohamed A. Eno and Omar Eno,
"Intellectualism and Ethnocentrism: Mukhtar and the 4.5 Factor" (2011) in Bildhaan: An International
Journal of Somali Studies, 9, 13.

"Diaspora Somalis learn firsthand the principles of democracy, freedom of expression, tolerance, principles of good governance, and respect for the rule of law." (July 2004, p. 32) This influence is evident in an appeal for justice issued by the Somali Bantu Leading Council as a part of their September 2015 protest at the United Nations, wherein they quote Martin Luther King, Jr.:

> We appeal to all countries whom belief law and order, justice and fairness, coexistence communities and transparency governance to work with our people to ensure that current authorities fulfill their promises of equal treatment to their citizens particularly Somali Bantu and eradicate tribalism, Favouritism, nepotism, and etc. We are asking for Human rights organizations not to overlook or humble appeal but consider it seriously and cooperate with our people who are the real victims of the Somali Civil war and help our leaders to stop violence against Somali Bantu because 'INJUSTICE ANYWHERE IS A THREAT TO JUSTICE EVERYWHERE.'

The inclusion of the quote, written in all capital letters, seals the argument for why democratic nations should attend to the concerns of a marginalized minority in a country where U.S. geopolitical interests have waned.

Creating Ideas

Nur shares the photograph of the Wagosha protest on his Facebook page, adding the message:

> Share this please. This is serious. My people are dying being killed for nothing. Our lands are being taken from us. Our kids are being kidnapped and forced into child soldiers. Help us share this picture so the world can see our struggle too.
>
> We are Somali Bantu. Don't just like and ignore, please. Thank you. (September 3, 2016)

Nur wants to make a difference. A year earlier, he messaged me on Facebook to ask if there are organizations or programs that better the lives of Africans because he wants to get involved with that kind of stuff. He remembers when "I didn't even have sandals" so his mission is to give back to those in need. He posts on Facebook, "What is your idea to better Africa?" (5/12/2015) His major in college--health science--is a pragmatic choice that will provide financial security. He says to me that many Somali Bantu are beginning to graduate from college, but they are getting jobs as doctors or business people. That's good, but he wants to be more than a professional.

"I want to create ideas."

His expression and voice are wistful. He recognized that even as Somali Bantu pursue higher education, they remain tied to the economic realities of caring for elders and raising children in a fast-paced culture with an extraordinarily high cost of living. It is difficult to earn a degree while working full time and raising a family. It takes longer than anticipated. It is physically demanding. Nevertheless, he wants more. He wants to participate in the construction of knowledge and culture. In fact, he is already doing so. His music, skits, and even his Facebook commentary positions him as a thought leader whose ideas shape what it means to be Somali Bantu. Already, his ideas are a part of the global cultural flow, traveling across borders to be viewed in Internet cafes in places as remote as Kakuma and as conflicted as Kismayo.

Nur's yearning for knowledge and his strong desire to create, teach, and influence reflects a broader aspiration within and across the Somali Bantu community. The people now known as Somali Bantu have always had poets, storytellers, visionaries, and healers among them, idea-makers who created meaning, knowledge, and culture. Despite their denial of formal education,

180

the idea-makers in their communities gave oral expression to the collective sufferings and aspirations of Bantu Jareer people. (Eno M. & Eno O., 2014) The knowledge and culture retained in the social memory of elders is at risk as the older generations pass and the younger generations acquire information from new sources. Further, life in diaspora demands alternative ways of thinking, communicating, and knowing. Who will produce the ideas that are needed to distinguish the Somali Bantu at this point in history? The privileged position of being a maker of ideas and meaning (as their primary life work) remains out of reach for many.

I receive a text from Mahdi, formerly of Roanoke: "Did you hear Dr. Omar Eno passed away in Italy? A big loss to Somali Bantu community." (December 1, 2016)

Omar Eno, a Somali Bantu scholar, one of the first to receive a Ph.D. who, with his brother Mohamud, upended Somali Studies by writing the Bantu Jareer into history. He was instrumental in securing resettlement for 14,000 Somali Bantu, a process that involved interviewing thousands of men and women. More recently, he was among a group of scholars who founded Atlas University, a university for minorities, in Mogadishu.

The Somali Bantu Channel announces that a hero has died. The feed fills with acknowledgements, mostly in Maay Maay praising Eno's life and legacy. A young man named Bilal writes, "This is the biggest lost for the bantu community can't afford. It encourages me to keep pursuing my doctoral degree." (December 2, 2016)

Who are the young men and women who will fill the space that Omar Eno left? Who will be among the idea-makers for the diaspora generation? How will their ideas contribute to the narrative of Somali Bantu identity? These questions remain open. In the meantime, the march of history continues.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: Making a Home in a Country That is not Yours

In the early hours of November 9th I am awakened by the ping of an incoming text message. It is from Nur, sent moments after Hilary Clinton conceded to Donald Trump:

> Hello michele looks like we are going back home to kakuma lol. khadija is worried she wants to know if he is really sending us back? She even voted today. this is messed up i still cant believe its real.

I agree. It is messed up. I reply to Nur that Khadija can't be deported because she is a citizen. But, he still has questions: What about the green card and the refugees that haven't got it yet? Nur misplaced his green card and his wife, Iqra, does not yet have one. He has not yet raised the money to apply for citizenship, and he is unsure about the process for doing so. It is easy to forget that he is only 22 years old. I reply with three long messages that attempt to nuance some of the demagoguery that he and other Somali Bantu have been hearing and describe the system of checks and balances that limit the power of the president. But I also admit that my greater concern is the vigilantism that Trump's careless rhetoric has normalized.

> Later that day, Mariam posts to her Facebook: "The devil is building his kingdom." A friend reacts, "LOL wait til he sends you back home" to which Mariam replies "I don't care as long as he sends me and my family bck peacefully." (November 9th, 2016)

Back home. I reflect on the weight of this statement—that they are not in their own country, even with citizenship and green cards. As long as they continue to feel vulnerable, at risk of deportation and violence, how can they believe that they are home?

A week later Nur writes:

> The black race is so weak it pains my heart. Just look at the size of Europe than look at
> Africa. I don't think any other race on earth let them selfs be enslaved like we did. We are
> the original people but yet Most of us have someone's religion, culture, and tradition. Its
> sad when you are ashamed to show your hair so you wear someone els hair as a weave,
> hate your own color to the point you bleach. Today almost everything we do is the white
> men's way. What is the black men's way? You can't send a gorilla to school to learn how
> to be a polar bear. I respect all races I just believe that no one should forget their original
> way....Just random thoughts. (November 17, 2016)

A thoughtful, analytical exchange follows:

> Its kinda hard to undo thousands of years of systematic manipulation within a few years.
> Good people from all races are trying to crack the lock of immortality that been placed on
> our world but that will take generations all we can do is take day by day and pass the good to
> the younger generation to increase the number of people of good intentions without
> discriminating. (November 17th, 2016)

> But that kind of self love self awareness begins at home. Treating the young boys the duty to
> protect their women and honor their woman and the same goes with the woman. Just my two
> cents. (November 17th, 2016)

> Couldn't agree more. Basic education starts at home but now days knowledge of the parents
> in our communities are limited which means at childhood children miss out on the teachings

of moral principals which leads to dangerous path. For instance look at our very own Bantu community. The future looks very dangerous may Allah help us. (November 17th, 2016)

The problem with our community is that nobody is taught their heritage. When many of them came here they started adopting other cultures (ex. African American /American culture) completely forgetting about their culture and their language. The parents did not come here for u to be going to jail or gang banging so u can waste your time. And that problem is sometimes can be placed on their parents because they didn't instal those morals in them in a young age. (November 17th, 2016))

There are no emoticons, no "kkkk" signaling laughter. The sense of gravity permeating the thread is palpable. Whereas one line of post-election rhetoric assures that we'll be fine, the Somali Bantu (as well as other international and marginalized populations) recognize a reality that majority White-Christian Americans have taken for granted: Things can indeed take a terrible turn. On January 20th, the ritual of the peaceful transfer of power is performed as outgoing President Obama greets the newly inaugurated President Trump on the steps of the White House. And then, mere weeks after assuming office, Trump issues an Executive Order banning travel from seven Muslim-majority countries, Somalia among them. Protests ensue across the country. In Blacksburg, approximately 1,000 of us gather on Henderson Lawn to declare that refugees are welcome. Abdirahaman sees photographs and videos of the demonstration on Facebook and writes: "I stand with my first City Blacksburg protesting. Although my physical appearance is away, but my intention and spirit is with you." (January 30, 2017)

Not everyone "will be fine."

As I draw this project to a conclusion, I am pensive. I remember Mariam as a little girl who had just arrived in the country and her chant of Bantu America. I remember Abdirahman's wishful words as he coveted a motorcycle passing by that he wanted to try everything that the country had to offer. I recall just one year ago as Khadija proudly posed with her certificate of naturalization, a remarkable feat for a single mother who is non-literate with only the most basic grasp of the English language. These memories, once so hopeful, are now tarnished by the specter of insecurity ushered in with a new presidential administration that threatens to deport immigrants and establish a Muslim registry. To quote Nur's Facebook friend: "The future looks very dangerous may Allah help us."

When I began this project, I was interested in how identity was constructed in diaspora. I knew the story of the Somali Bantu would change just as it had evolved across the trajectory of the Gosha / Jareer / Bantu migrations. Initially, I seized on Mariam's chant of "Bantu America"—that this group would become hyphenated Americans in a process similar to that of my own family that passed from being Calabrian, people of the *mezzo giorno*, to being Italian-American and now, for my children, simply American. However, as I spent time with the Muse family after they left Blacksburg, grew out of childhood and into adulthood, immersed in the "little Bantu" of Milwaukee, I discovered that their process would not be a simple assimilation. Race, religion, and refugeity each conspire to complicate the process. Certainly, I never imagined that they would be in a space and place where the prospects of deportation after a dozen years of living here would ever cross their minds.

As the American Bantus wait to see what happens in the coming months, the Somali

Bantu living in Dadaab face the possibility of refoulement. Kenya wants to shut down the

Dadaab refugee camp, which they claim has become a breeding ground for terrorists. A young

Somali Bantu woman makes a petition to Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban-ki Moon

on Change.org:

> The Republic of Kenya has given Somali Refugee's, in the Dadaab Refugee camps, 6
>
> months to flee to Somalia. It includes the Somali Bantus, and they Mostly live along the
>
> Juba & Shabelle river. This territory is now being ruled by the Al -Shabaab who are a
>
> Militant group in Somali. Because of the Al -Shabaab there is no place for these refugee's
>
> to call home anymore. These refugee's have suffered from Starvation, Rape, and
>
> Homelessness during the Civil war in Somalia. They have been facing these tragedies up
>
> to this day. Many Somali Bantus have died because there is lack of medical supplies &
>
> food. The Somali government never shows any effort into bringing this topic to the media
>
> or to the United Nations. Somali Bantus need to be resettled into a place where there is
>
> humanity & peace, clearly Somali isn't that place. I can relate to this topic, because I
>
> myself have a relative who is a part of these refugee's who are suffering in Somalia.

I sign the petition and share it on my Facebook page so that others might add their digital

signatures. I realize that Somali Bantu refugee resettlement is an unfinished story. Perhaps from

my vantage point—that of the volunteer who remembers their first weeks in the country, who has

enjoyed hearing the news of marriages and new babies and high school graduations, resettlement

has successfully completed. From the vantage point of those most intimately touched by the

Somali Bantu trajectory, this is not the case. What happens to the young petitioner's relatives

that live along the Jubba and Shabelle rivers? Will Abdirahman ever see his aging father who

remains in Kakuma after having his resettlement denied just hours before he was due to fly out

of Nairobi in 2004? Will "Mr. Yaam" who Facebook messages me regularly from Somalia

where he remains stuck with no job, no wife, and no education ever find a clear path of whether

to leave or stay? Being Somali Bantu includes the specter of insecurity in places that are not their

own. Yet, out of that insecurity emerges the cultural forms that sustain them as a people: the

networks of mutual support, the production of the social through weddings and mediascapes, and

the making of meaning hewn from the critical practices of rejecting and resisting.

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Appendix A
Informed Consent Statement

Michele C. Deramo
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech
"Performing Bantu: Narrative Constructions of Identity in Diaspora"

Part I: Information Sheet

<u>Introduction</u>

I am doing research on the Somali Bantu who resettled in the United States since 2003. In addition to the historical research, I want to feature the experiences of your family in coming to this country and adapting to a new society. I will ask you to share your thoughts about race, religion, and male-female interactions as a part of this research. You will have full control over what you share with me. You may retract your statements at any time during the research.

This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them of me.

<u>Purpose of the research</u>

The purpose of this research is to study how one family is preserving Somali Bantu culture while they adapt to life in the United States. In addition to looking at artifacts—things you make such as food or music—I will also look at your relationships with one another, your neighbors, the larger Somali Bantu community, and the larger community in general.

<u>Type of Research Intervention</u>

This research will involve your participation through informal interviews that take place in person and over Skype. Some of the questions will ask you to clarify things that you posted on your Facebook pages. Some of the questions will ask for your opinions or beliefs about social identity in the United States.

<u>Participant Selection</u>

I am interesting in writing about your family because we met shortly after you arrived in the United States. Because we have a personal relationship that spans approximately ten years, I believe there is potential to learn more about your experiences and your relationships beyond the Somali Bantu community.\

<u>Voluntary Participation</u>

It is your choice as to whether or not you want to participate in this project. If you do choose to participate, you can determine if you want to me to use your real name, or if you want to choose a pseudonym. If any one person in the family wants to keep their real name private, then I will use pseudonyms for the entire family. If you choose to participate, you will also decide whether or not you want to read and give feedback on the portrait before it is submitted as a final paper..

<u>Risks</u>

There is little to no risk in your participation. You do not have to answer any question or take part in any discussion or interview if you feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable.

<u>Benefits</u>

You benefit from the chance to contribute to the public knowledge and history about the Somali Bantu in the United States, and to share your family's stories.

<u>Sharing the Results</u>

The information you share will be attributed to you in the research paper. The paper will be shared at conferences and possibly in academic publications. There is the possibility that the research paper will be revised for general distribution. You will be kept informed of any distribution or publication of this research.

<u>Right to Refuse or Withdraw</u>

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so. You may stop participating in the interviews at any time. I will give you an opportunity at the end of the interview/discussion to review your remarks, and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those, if you do not agree with my notes or if I did not understand you correctly.)

<u>Who to Contact</u>

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact me at Michele Deramo, 540-231-8596 or 540-234-4089 or deramo@vt.edu.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by Virginia Tech Institutional Research Board, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm.

Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have read the foregoing information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study

Name of Participant (please print)	
Signature	
Date	

☐   By checking this box, I give permission to the researcher to include information from interviews conducted between 2009-2013.

A copy of this ICF has been provided to the participant.

Name of Researcher (please print)	
Signature	
Date	

July 18, 2014

Hello Isha, Nur, and Mariam,

Thanks for working with me on my writing project. The work I am doing is for my doctoral dissertation. Ever since I met your family, I have been interested in learning more about the Somali Bantu people— your history, culture, lifestyle, and more. I have read everything I can find that has been written about the Somali Bantu and have learned a great deal. Because I like writing stories, I decided to write my dissertation as a "portrait" of your family. I will focus on the three of you, although I included an informed consent for Muse to sign since I may interview him as well. I know Khadija does not like to be interviewed or taped. Her story is important, but I will need to rely on each of you to share with me what she wants to tell about her life in Somalia, Kenya, and the United States.

I want each of you to give me feedback on what I write. Included with this letter is the cover page of the dissertation and a short summary of the proposed chapters. You may want to change how I've written the chapter summary about you. Remember—I am describing my observations. However, you can correct my observations if you think I've interpreted something in the wrong way.

I will continue to share my writing with you throughout this process (which—I warn you—is a long one). A lot of what you read will be very academic and probably not very interesting. This is typical for a doctoral dissertation. Once I pass—I can rewrite the book in a way that is interesting to people who are not college professors. Even so, the chapters that focus on you will be more interesting—and are the heart of the project.

Now, let me explain how the dissertation process works. In August, I will be "defending" my proposal. This means that my professors will tell me if my project is worthwhile, makes sense, and strong enough to go forward. They give me a list of books that I should be reading that supports my research, and helps me prepare for my preliminary exams. I take the exams probably in November. I am most nervous about the exams because they are very challenging and tiresome to complete. However, once I pass my exams I can start writing. Once I start writing I will be contacting each of you A LOT with questions.

Please let me know if you have questions about any part of this project. And I thank you for allowing me to write about you and to share your stories with others.