CARRYING CULTURE: TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF SOMALIA AMONG WOMEN IN THE DIASPORA

By

Suban Ahmed Nur Cooley

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ABSTRACT

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This project works to take a transnational Black feminist and cultural rhetorics approach to blend an interdisciplinary culmination of theories and concepts on the impact of migration and displacement on Somali women, their identity, and the carrying of culture. It is a multi-location geographic comparative study between Kenya, Italy, and Australia, investigating how Hamilton's "communities of consciousness" are manifested in the temporal and spatial constructions of Somalia displayed among women in the diaspora. As Hamilton expressed, "The geographical displacement of people is a complex social process not just a physical movement ... [and] must be conceptualized as contributing to the definition of what people were, what they are, and what they may become" (emphasis orig. 397). Using the Somali diaspora as an example of a people who were, are, and are still becoming, this research works to empower and embolden the value and strength of women's knowledges in consistently supporting the continuation of varied cultural practices among the African Diaspora.

The dissertation toggles between these central themes to answer two main questions: 1) How Somali culture and identity is rhetorically reconstructed among women in the diaspora, and 2) How practices of Somali culture manifest and become materialized in the physical spaces women in the diaspora construct in their homes.

This dissertation is dedicated to all the women in the African/Black diasporas who carried our cultures for us to feel rooted in who we are, no matter where. This is also for those of us in the African/Black diasporas who yearn for an Africa we cannot know.

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Somali. It is at the core of who I am. The seed of a cultural identity I am deeply familiar with, planted by the people who raised me and reminded me of its value. I spent most of my life outside of Somalia, familiar with the cultural customs, moral and ethical values, and conceptual notions attached to being a member of this community only through my connection to the elders I have known and the knowledges they have passed on. In the absence of a rootedness to my homeland, my sense of Somali belonging has only flourished in relation to the stories and memories of those who lived it, and the connections I have to them. As Thomas King expressed in "The Truth About Stories," the truth about them is that they are all we are (62). We are all but made of story. Some are ours, our experiences, memories, moments, identities. And some of our stories are the stories of others. It is through this very understanding—of how the stories of others are often the seeds of our own telling—that I came to this project.

"To whom do I owe the woman I have become?" - Audre Lorde.

My research inquiry and curiosity about the ways Somali women have carried our culture with and within them into the diaspora was born on a visit to my parent's home in 2017. Walking into their new home for the first time, I was taken aback by how familiar it was to me, even though everything in the house was mostly new. It was then that I was hit with the realization that this space was somehow a betokening of Somalia. Though this house was new to them and to me, it felt familiar because of the ways my mother had infused/imposed/engaged with her cultural memory of Somalia to construct and mold the space. Not only were visual markers of Somaliness present, there were also sensory and experiential elements available: smells, tastes, conversations in our mother tongue. I was

floored by the richness and continuity of the practice of Somaliness exemplified by my hooyo[1]. Physically, we were in Australia — but inside this home was a temporal and spatial construction of Somalia built to carry culture into future generations. She sowed the seeds of Somaliness and watered them for us so we would know who we were, even if we were no longer in Somalia. And so I asked myself, how many women of the Somali diaspora across the globe are enacting a similar sense of Somaliness?

Dhaqankeena[2]

This project works to take a transnational Black feminist and cultural rhetorics approach to blend an interdisciplinary culmination of theories and concepts on the impact of migration and displacement on Somali women, their identity, and the carrying of culture. I toggle between these central themes to answer two main questions: 1) How Somali culture and identity is rhetorically reconstructed among women in the diaspora, and 2) How practices of Somali culture manifest and become materialized in the physical spaces women in the diaspora construct in their homes.

In this introduction, I explain the need for this research using the perspectives and stories of Somali women I know and love, working responsibly to fuse together the connections I can make through my own positionality as someone who belongs to the community I research and write about.

[1] Mother.
[2] Our customs and traditions.

Yaa tahay? Who am I to speak on this?

Being a diasporic woman from Somalia means being connected to my work and community through words like "war" and "torn." What I do is not work. What I do is not research. What I do is speak to others using the languages we in the diaspora know to convey our sense of belonging. What I do is listen. bell hooks said

> Often when the radical voice speaks about domination we are speaking to those who dominate. Their presence changes the nature and direction of our words: Language is also a place of struggle … We are wedded in language, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle. Dare I speak to oppressed and oppressor in the same voice? Dare I speak to you in a language that will move beyond the boundaries of domination -- a language that will not bind you, fence you in, or hold you? Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance (204).

Doing work within a marginalized community I identify with and belong to, I feel ethically committed to the stories I am given, beyond academic expectations. Reconciliation and renewal work are part of my decolonial scholarly actions, supporting the growth of research surrounding Somalia and Somali women, while using our own voices to speak to and broaden the scholarship available from Black women and about Black women.

In "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own," Jacqueline Jones Royster examines the importance of gaining subjectivity as Black women scholars, explaining that "Adopting subjectivity as a defining value, therefore, is instructive. However, the

multidimensionality of the instruction also reveals the need for a shift in paradigms, a need that I find especially evident with regard to the notion of "voice," as a central manifestation of subjectivity" (30). In "Feminist Scholarship: Ethical Issues," hooks discusses the importance of positionality, identity, and belonging when conducting research as a Black feminist. She explains how when we write about groups that we do not belong to, we run the risk of objectifying their practices because the writer is speaking/writing/researching on behalf of the group, usually because the writer has the power to do so via the Western colonial construct. As such, it upholds white supremacy in order to legitimize any focus on writings about marginalized groups. Marginalized groups then become the object of research, not the subjects who are creating scholarly work and writing about their own communities. As I do work in this body, writing about a group I belong to, I work to resist in the way "Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story." (81) Therefore, as Royster would hope, I am making sure the first voice I hear is my own.

As someone who identifies as Black, African, Muslim, woman, Somali, refugee/immigrant, I understand the importance of subjectivity in academia and the value of my voice. In "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," Lorde urges us to consider when Black women are speaking up or staying silent, due to the ways colonial narratives have made them either highly visible or completely invisibilized through the flattening capacities of racism and sexism placed on their bodies. What is keeping us quiet when we do not speak up? As I work to add to the growing body of work by Black women and women of color, Lorde's speech helps me reflect on the varied knowledges and stories

held inside women of color, and the responsibility we have to speak into and through our research and writing.

Though my intent is to continue to be as reflexive as possible when conducting research, I am reminded by Giampapa (2016) that "part of becoming a reflexive and critical researcher, one must unpack and strip away researcher beliefs, values and experiences that construct the ways in which we define our points of departure – that is, the questions we pose and the analytical lens we take. Working from emancipatory, critical approaches to research, Cameron et al. (1992: 5) state: 'Researchers cannot help being socially located persons. We inevitably bring our biographies and our subjectivities to every stage of the research process and this influences the questions we ask and the ways in which we try to find answers.'"

Engaging in research as a Black feminist rhetorician positions me to think about reciprocity, respect, collaboration, and community in the work beyond what I write, collect, and distribute for consumption. I work to speak in a language outside of the place of struggle, doing work centered in recovery and reconciliation, in the hopes of reuniting and renewing our understandings and experiences as Somali women in the diaspora. Lorde encourages Black women to speak freely as a way to begin to understand our lives, while also becoming accountable for each other as bodies that continue to be marginalized and othered. Lorde asserts, "I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood" (40). The message then, is that to stay silent hurts us more in the long run— the more voices we have as women of color representing us in academia, the better.

My words and the words of others gifted to me through collaboration with members of my community are, as hooks emphasizes, "… not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance" (204). So today, I will honor my community with the cultural rhetorics practice of language and story as resistance and reconciliation.

So, who are the Somali diaspora?

The existing Western narrative of the Somali people is one filled with tropes of civil war, hunger, and terrorism. Being a woman of the Somali diaspora, I am very much concerned with how women from this community navigate and negotiate identity to express and proclaim who they are (or how they see themselves) within their communities – to some degree, because I am a member of this diaspora myself.

In "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse" Kim Butler explains that most diaspora scholars agree upon three basic features of a diaspora:

1. After dispersal, there must be a minimum of two destinations.
2. There must be some relationship to an actual or imagined homeland.
3. There must be self-awareness of the group's identity.

Butler adds "a fourth distinguishing feature of diaspora, involving the temporal–historical dimension: its existence over at least two generations … Diasporas are multi-generational: they combine the individual migration experience with the collective history of group dispersal and regenesis of communities abroad. Frameworks for diasporan study need to incorporate both" (192).

To define the term diaspora, I use Furusa et. al's concept of Diaspora – a dynamic process; one that aims to explain the actions of people of "African, Asian, and Latin American descent who have been forcibly or voluntarily dispersed throughout the world"

(1). The authors also accept the term's complexities – its cultural dynamism involving "substantive intercultural exchanges between peoples from different ethnic groups. It frequently requires the reconstitution or reconstruction of a culture and society by peoples uprooted from homes that borrow and adopt new cultural elements as the plaster to patch up the fissures in their cultural foundation" (3).

I personally see these fissures in cultural foundations as an opening and opportunity for diasporic individuals to interpret and understand the world and its complexities through their lived experiences; one that does not reside solely in a particular culture, place, or space – but blends them in ways that enable for the existence of a diasporic orientation – and I am interested to see how Somali women display these multiple elements of identity.

Stuart Hall further develops the concept of diaspora and allows for some fluidity to exist around diasporic identity production. Unlike the fissures aforementioned, Hall explains that there are at least two different ways of thinking about cultural identity and diaspora, and both are situated in the post- and de-colonial experience. The first, Hall argues, can be witnessed in the unity found in the imagined 'cultural identity,' a sense of oneness and connectivity to an overarching identity as positioned by your identifying culture. According to Hall, this 'oneness' in our cultural identities is a reflection of the collective, "the common historical experiences shared and cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history" (223).

In effect – and in connection to my work – this explains my identifying as Black, as woman, as pan-African, as Somali. Cultural codes and ways that exist as an expression and

connection to a particular culture or way of being. Hall (1990) believes this conception of cultural collectivity has played a critical role in "all the post-colonial struggles which have so profoundly reshaped our world," and can be attributed to my ability to write this today.

Hall's other way of thinking about cultural identity is more directly connected to my diasporic experience. "Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture" (225). Here, Hall speaks to the fissures mentioned by Furusa et. al. and how stories can hold the weight and history of communities in ways that are both damaging and restorative. In the case of the Somali community, established clan and tribal narratives were weapons used in the civil war – and these same problematic narratives often spill over into diaspora communities abroad.

As someone whose work is centered around the idea of diasporas as a term to define a way of being/identity, I was also intrigued and interested in the definitions Gabriel Sheffer had given in “The Historical, Cultural, Social, and Political Backgrounds of Ethno-National Diasporas” to determine the categorical approaches to the word itself and its use in the social sciences: old/historical, modern, and incipient.

Old/historical diasporas, in this particular text, had come to be applied specifically to “the dispersed ethno-national-religious Greek and especially to the Jewish diasporic entities” (438). As scholars continued to examine the term, they understood its value and use beyond the communities for which it had been previously applied -- as the word and its use became popular beyond the scholarly realm, and in social and political contexts. Historical migrations and movements of other communities have also been delineated using the term old/historical diasporas, like the Indians, Chinese, and Africans, who “have

maintained their facial and physical marks, which, on the one hand, distinguish them from other ethnic groups in their hostlands, a factor that in certain cases creates tensions and conflicts … and on the other hand, these features encourage comradeship and cooperation between diasporans who belong to the same entity" (439).

I cannot help but think of the old/historical diasporas situated here in the United States, from the African populations connected to the Transatlantic slave trade, as well as the displaced indigenous communities across the continent due to their contact with modern diasporas. As I work to acknowledge spatiality as a process that invokes various histories and memories, I draw attention to the space in which I do this research — here at Michigan State University — occupying the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary Lands of the Anishinaabeg – Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. As I work to talk about the complexities of global Black diaspora communities, I would also be remiss to move forward without acknowledging the histories of those connected to the Transatlantic Slave Trade in this space — the relations we form in this country are built upon the violent history of relations that were occupied, moved, and removed — and this colonial impact is interwoven into the fabric of this nation, this space, and this moment.

Modern diasporas, in my opinion, have not been aptly named. They should be called settler/colonial diasporas as their movements engage in the control and occupation of spaces already inhabited by other communities and populations, shaping the colonial world as we know it. Modern diasporas "began with the European discovery of the Americas and later of continents and countries," who essentially were moving to "help in conquering and colonizing more territories and to settle and control them." (440).

Although they use the term "diaspora" to engage in this era of diasporisms' connection to their colonial roots—this is not the case for all modern diaspora communities—as some come to occupy and settle within a space so insidiously, that the nativism of that community *is* the modern diaspora – like being white American/Australian/New Zealander/Canadian, and so forth. Some modern diasporas (for example, former British, Spanish, and French colonies) may be thought of, or regarded as being "from" their colonial origin, with strong connections to both language and culture (The English and Dutch South Africans are an example). Either way, I personally see the use of the term "diaspora" to be inappropriate for this group of movers, perhaps due to my own positionality and place as a member of what might be considered an incipient diaspora.

Sheffer explains that incipient diasporas can be distinguished from the aforementioned diasporas due to "the various aspects of their adaptation to their new position in their hostlands, their integration there, and their continuous relations and contacts with their homelands" (442). What I might argue here is that this level of connectivity could possibly be found among all of the diaspora groups and should not be the defining factor for this emerging diasporic group.

Furthermore, with incipient diasporas, "reasonable integration and simultaneous wish to remain connected to their homeland, is the main inclination of many first and second generations of these immigrants" (442). But who is to say this is not a desire of old/historical diasporas? Especially when considering those displaced on their own lands, or removed by force? Incipient diasporas are essentially a culmination of the capacity for groups to engage in migratory movements, while still maintaining connections to their

homelands in meaningful ways. Not all diasporic communities are in a place or have the privilege to do that – because of the ways in which they have come to *be* diasporic.

Though diasporic connections are said to be mythical or symbolic in nature, one cannot deny their capacity for supporting connections and improving the state of the communities within hostlands. As Sheffer so eloquently states, "To maintain and promote such affinities, constant contacts among the diasporas' elites and activist grassroots groups are avowedly preserved. Such ongoing contacts have cultural, social, economic, and political significance for the diasporans, for their hostlands, for their homelands, for other diasporic communities of the same origin, and for other interested and involved actors." (P. 436). On November 20, 2018, Somali workers in Minneapolis, Minnesota who worked for Amazon were able to "force" Amazon to make adjustments to the increasing expectations and diminishing work conditions for Somalis at their Minneapolis warehouse/factory. As the New York Times article "Somali Workers in Minnesota Force Amazon to Negotiate" explains:

> Ms. Mohamed and scores of East African colleagues, many of them, like her, born in Somalia, responded in an unusual way for Amazon workers: They organized to complain. Now, tied together by a close cultural connection and empowered by a tight labor market, they appear to be the first known group in the United States to get Amazon management to negotiate.
>
> After modest protests over the summer, the workers have had two private meetings with management in recent months. Labor organizers and researchers said they were not aware of Amazon coming to the table

previously in the United States amid pressure from workers, even for private discussions.

Amazon has not met with union groups, ever — and yet the Somali community managed to facilitate a meeting through their organizing at the community level to make change" (Weise, "Somali Workers in Minnesota Force Amazon to Negotiate"). Though symbolic and powerful, there is nothing mythical about the very real and substantive capacities of these connections among diasporic communities and their ability to strengthen and support each other.

Who are the women of the Somali diaspora?

"How come you don't wear the hijab, sister?" I was 16 years old when a fellow young (albeit, hijabed) Somali asked me this question as we hung out at a recreational facility in the inner-city suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. I was also in jeans: two rebellious-seeming displays of resistance to following Islamic law — an intrinsic element of *Soomaalinimo*, which "means *Somaliness* or being a Somali. However, [Somali participants] often talked about it in very distinct terms. It was described as a positive identity rooted in the moral values associated with being Somali" (71, Al-Sharmani, Kusow and Bjork). I was not an anomaly at the time. Many young Somali women were opting not to don the hijab as more diasporic parents bestowed their daughters with the most powerful freedom that comes with living in the secular West: the freedom of choice. However, the pressures placed on Somali women to wear traditional dress tends to occur in larger Somali diaspora populations like in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In Heather Marie Akou's article, "Nationalism Without a Nation: Understanding the Dress of Somali Women in Minneapolis" Akou discusses how Somali women in the Minneapolis area have chosen to stick to wearing

traditional dress as a way to express their cultural heritage and connections to the practice of Islam. The article also details the history of Somalis and the community's "long history of connecting dress with nationalism" (50). I believe this visible rhetorical performance of the Somali identity is made possible because of the size of the Somali population in this particular city. With one of the largest Somali diaspora populations outside of Somalia residing in Minneapolis after the war in 1991, Somalis have worked to maintain a semblance of *Soomalinimo*[3] within their new home communities. "For Somali refugees, a strong sense of collective identity—projected through clothing—is almost all they have left of their nation" (53). Akou adds that Somalis have a long history of interacting with other cultures, from East African trading practices through to colonization, and dress has been "absolutely central in shaping their political and cultural identity in the course of these interactions" (Akou 61). In the diaspora, to dress Somali is to dress Muslim, to some degree.

"Well, at least you speak Somali super well, which is better than I can do," the young hijabed woman added. At once, I understood the myriad of responsibilities placed upon many women in diaspora, migrant, and displaced communities; They are responsible for carrying a culture, for keeping it alive. "As such, women have played, and continue to play, an enormously influential role in the developing Somali sense of self and identity." (Berns-McGown, 236). How women perform identity in their homes, the rhetorical choices they make in regard to what they keep (or choose to forget) about Somali culture, has an effect on future generations. There is power found in how Somali women retell/recreate the stories of our communities in order to understand our cultural connection to Somalia,

[3] A sense of Somaliness.

while considering the nuances of identity for those who grow up as migrants and refugees outside of Somalia.

As Kristin Langellier explains in "Performing Somali Identity in the Diaspora," for women in the diasporic Somali community, identity formation is an embodied and situated dialogue that is enwrapped by Western discourses about refugees, Somalis, and Muslims: As Langellier explains:

> "It is a story already underway, one we enter in the middle as it were, a story entrenched in emotional and political minefields of negative symbols, including the US military misadventure of 1993 depicted in the film Black Hawk Down. Recent and recurrent media images of Somalia feature starving women and children, the violence and lawlessness of the continuing civil war, and piracy in international waters off the Somali coast – all subject to mobilization within global narratives about terrorism after September 11, 2001." (Langellier, 2010)

Somali women traverse between the manifestations of how/who others perceive them to be, against how/who they are choosing to self-identify as amid the varied narratives and expectations either available to them or placed upon their bodies. As such, "identity as an unfolding performative accomplishment challenges static and essentialized notions of differences and thus joins postmodern trends that emphasize hybridized, transnational, in-between, and other 'third space' conceptualizations." (Langellier, 2010).

Once displaced, Somali women who migrate to the West have to contend with the complexities of identity which emerge for them as they struggle to maintain a semblance of nationalism, the unspoken responsibility of cultural continuity, and their own self-identity;

all this while also navigating trauma histories and the newness of assimilation in geographic communities outside of Somalia – and the impact all of this has on identity formation.

To support the multiplicity of a Somali woman's identity in the diaspora, Hodan Mohamed takes scholarly liberty to add a third consciousness to W.E.B. DuBois concept of double-consciousness, adding woman and Muslim to create and/or explain the enaction of a triple-consciousness experienced by Somali women activists of the Canadian diaspora. In this article, Mohamed aims to connect these intersections of developing diaspora identities to contest the "conventional sociological definition of Blackness as a non-divergent and monolithic identity" (9). Mohamed's interviews also reveal the ways in which being Muslim has impacted their identities, as these women "bear the additional burden of having to cope with anti-Muslim sentiments from mainstream society and anti-Black racism within the Muslim community" (25).

As such, Mohamed argues, Somali women in the Canadian diaspora offer a unique perspective about Western host countries "that is divergent from the conception of a depoliticized or inadequately problematized 'multicultural' society" (25). The Somali women activists also discuss how they do not have the luxury to separate these identities from one another as it is a culmination of their lived experiences in the West, where things that may not have mattered prior are at the forefront representing how they are perceived. As Mohamed explains, "this triple consciousness Somali women experience … is about reconciling one's multiple identities as Black Muslim woman in a settler colonial land that is constantly questioning their sense of belonging if not humanity" (9).

To understand how Somali women perform identity through structured relations of power with changing subject positions, one must understand the history of the community. Living within a rigidly patrilineal society, Somali women and girls have been traditionally assigned a status inferior to men, who take the dominant roles in society, religion, and politics. Lidwien Kapteijns (1991) explains in *Women's Voices in a Man's World* that gender relations in Somalia are patriarchal, with an idealized image of men as the heads of the household, anchored in Islamic gender prescriptions.

These prescriptions, though challenged by changing gender dynamics in the West, do not change the expectations placed upon women's presentations of their Somali, Muslim identities. As such, they are also enwrapped in gendered and cultural expectations of Somali identity performance which is separate and different from those imposed on them by the countries they are working to assimilate to. For example, displacement and resettlement practices of the Somali community have resulted in an increase of women becoming the main breadwinners and becoming more politically involved and engaged among the diaspora. This gendered power shift has also led to women's increased participation in reconciliation activities, both at home, and within the diaspora (Pickering, 2011). These reconciliation activities include involvement in community-building, peace talks and conversations among clans within the diaspora, and building a stronger cohesion of Pan-Somali identity. Berns-McGown also notes, "In the West, silence on women's economic contributions increased [the Somali] community's heightened religiosity since the conflict, with Islamic discourses embedded in the male breadwinner–female homemaker binary gaining more dominance" (234). Essentially, as Somali women gained

more power within the diaspora, the expectations of Somali nationalism and Soomalinimo became more of an imposition on their practices in the West.

Back on the tumultuous geographic home front, Somali women have had a role to play in post-civil war reconstruction (Merrill, 2016) and reconciliation efforts, while also improving healthcare, social engagement, and community-development in regions of Somalia and in the West. Literature also highlighted how women are now even common among pastoralists in Somalia – raising livestock for food, transport, trade, etc. (Marshall et al, 2016), which was not the case prior to the collapse.

Women in the diaspora are also considering repatriation – some also making moves to become a political voice for their home country, like Fadumo Diyab, running for president of Somalia. Not enough literature exists comparing the two decisions: opting for illegal border-crossing or staying in a volatile, war-torn country. Literature also highlights how there are increased risks of abduction, sexual violence (with or without male presence), starvation, thirst and fatalities, overcrowding, and rationing of food and water over a long journey across the desert – not even considering the pending journey across the sea, and treatment of Somalis in Libya (Gardner and El Bushra 172). All of this risk to end up in the West, as some would say, where Somali refugees will face racism, be criminalized, and be vilified for their Islamic cultural background. What is also known to be high in diasporic Somali women are rates of depressive and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms directly connected to the trauma and loss histories experienced from displacement (Gardner and El Bushra, 83).

As a researcher, I share all of this to situate and historicize the complexities bound within the identity of a Somali woman, and how displacement and migration play a role in

the ways they rhetorically perform identity in the diaspora. Alongside all of the aforementioned realities, I feel as though I cannot continue without engaging in some level of reflexivity and connection to this work. These are choices that my own family has had to make, and so beyond my position as a researcher, I am well aware of the complexities of the Somali identity and the impact of war and migration on the Somali community, and at the individual level.

To be Somali in the diaspora is to remember Somalia

While ruminating on plans for my dissertation one week, I talked to my parents on the phone and shared my research idea with them. As I wrestled with this remembering of culture as a practice of rhetorical identity performance among the Somali community as a whole, my father reminded me of the nature of our culture. "Don't forget Suban, Somalis are nomadic and pastoral beings. We were not a community that could afford to stay put, even before the war because of the nature of the landscape we were in between drought and haboob, we were always carrying our culture with us. We were constantly rebuilding and looking for greener pastures, even if only to find more desert." Haboob is an Arabic word used to describe a blasting/drifting that happens and causes an intense, devastating dust storm in places like Sudan and Somalia. Nomadic Somalis then, have consistently relocated in order to survive. They are familiar with reconstruction and the carrying of culture, similar to what the diaspora is doing today.

My mother, who was cooking in the kitchen, laughed on speaker phone, "Subaneey! That's a question we're all in the midst of working through in the diaspora. We're all just living as Somalis the way we know, not asking how." I asked my mother to flesh this out a bit more for me, to help me separate the rhetorical making of Somali women's identity from

the expectations and consequential moving towards or distancing from Somaliness that can often take place. My mother explained, “It is more important to act Somali outside of Somalia than it is inside of Somalia. In Somalia, we were all just living our lives, never thinking much about what it means to be Somali. As for being or acting Somali? This is what we do now, outside of Somalia — together as a community. This is how we remember.”

In her article “A changing sense of Somaliness: Somali women in London and Toronto,” Gail Hopkins expresses how this plays out as a rhetorical performance of Somali identity through a collective way of being: “Somali women, for example, can diverge only so far from established notions of Somaliness if they are to be considered as remaining within the group. Breton sees immigration as a source of cultural-symbolic transformation in addition to a ‘process of reconstruction’. Such a transformation and reconstruction of Somaliness has the potential to produce nuanced characteristics amongst Somalis in different parts of the diaspora” (525). As such, the characteristics of Somaliness can differ among the diaspora, and Hopkins explains that Somali refugees/migrants then have to learn what it means to *be* Somali in differing locations in order to fit in with their community. At the individual level, women in the diaspora have a choice to either perform a certain way of being Somali in a new host community, or separate themselves from Soomalinimo, “Identity may therefore be reduced to a signifying practice performed to achieve required or desired levels of cohesion with other Somalis or indeed not performed in order to create separation, distance and difference” (Hopkins 525).

I sat with this for days, trying to flesh out in the aforementioned examples, the nuanced realities of what it means to “be” a Somali woman in the diaspora and the contentions and contradictions that come with this embodied experience, and the impact of

migration and displacement on these identities. I think now, I understand in a way, that to act Somali is to do it within a collective, as a way to carry the culture with us. As Ahmed explains in "Home and away: Narratives of migration and estrangement," "The very failure of individual memory is compensated for by collective memory, and the writing of the history of a nation, in which the subject can allow herself to fit in by being assigned a place in a forgotten past" (330).

Carrying culture

Soomalinimo as a practice of identity is the remembering and particularities connected to rebuilding *an idea* of a nation, in the case of Somalia, with its pluralities and patriarchal problems, or to forget it and rebuild what that looks like; which each diasporic Somali community has done differently. As Moore et. al. explain in *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference* "One of the most profound imaginations of a natural environment of belonging has been, of course, the nation" (35).

For displaced communities like the Somali diaspora, this natural environment of belonging to the nation is made evident in their recreation of Somaliness as a collective within the host countries they now reside in or call home. And most of the time, the women are at the center of both remembering and reconstructing this imagined Somaliness. This is why my multi-location geographic comparative study investigates how Ruth Simms Hamilton's "communities of consciousness" are manifested in the temporal and spatial constructions of Somalia displayed among women in the diaspora.

As Hamilton expressed, "The geographical displacement of people is a complex *social* process not just a physical movement … [and] must be conceptualized as contributing to the definition of what people were, what they are, and what they may

become" (emphasis orig. 397). Using the Somali diaspora as an example of a people who were, are, and are still becoming, this dissertation will work to empower and embolden the value and strength of women's knowledges in consistently supporting the continuation of varied cultural practices among the African Diaspora.

Using a mixed methods approach, I will engage in participant observations, in-depth interviews, and semi-structured interviews within three geographic locations of importance to the Somali diaspora and my own experience as a member of it: Italy (the colonizer of Somalia), Kenya (the geographic neighbor of Somalia), and Australia (the personal connection – where my family migrated due to the impending war). I will also engage in the collection and documentation of Somali women's living spaces using photography, audio, and film to collect and share findings at the community level (through an exhibition open to the public).

The objectives of this study are to: 1) Examine and document how practices of Somali culture manifest and become materialized in the physical spaces Somali women construct in their homes; 2) Specifically consider how Somali women and homes come to represent Somalia through the "*cumulative* and *shared* endeavours" (emphasis orig. Hamilton, 404) that carry the temporal into the spatial; 3) Consider the engagement of Hamilton's "communities of consciousness" through Somali women and their capacity to construct an archival/material sense of cultural continuity of Somalia in their individual communities.

Ahmed also said, "It is hence the act of forgetting that allows the subject to identify with a history, to find out, to discover, what one has already lost: here, what is already lost is the phantastic 'we' of a nation, city and house" (330). And so, as individuals, what is

practiced as a Somali identity will often differ in connection to the justifications of the collective memory of a nation state, a moral underpinning connected to Islam, and a way of being which is rooted in a sense of Somali history through the memories of those that lived it. To be Somali in the diaspora is to remember Somalia through the eyes of those who lived it before the war. As Sara Ahmed expressed in *Queer Phenomenology,* being of the diaspora is "the lived experience of facing at least two directions: toward a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not home yet" (10). And so I embark on trying to understand what facing two directions can do to the place that is not home yet, and to the people who do not recall the home that has been lost.

Chapter 2: Methodologies and Methods

Shah iyo Sheeko: Tea and Stories
A Black Feminist and Cultural Rhetorics Methodological Approach

> "To whom do I owe the power behind my voice, what strength I have become, yeasting up like sudden blood from under the bruised skin's blister?"
> Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography*, 3

> "Understanding the content and epistemology of Black women's ideas as specialized knowledge requires attending to the context from which those ideas emerge. While produced by individuals, Black feminist thought as situated knowledge is embedded in the communities in which African-American women find ourselves."
>
> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* 545

As a Black African woman researcher and rhetorician, my Black feminist thought and praxis is deeply rooted in the communities in which I find myself. What has guided me to understand my personal and professional positionality sit mainly in two locations:

1. A consciousness connected to my cultural knowledge and embodied experiences as a Black woman living and being in the West, and the constructions, revelations, and limitations connected to that experience.
2. A consciousness connected to my cultural knowledge and upbringing as a Black diasporic woman with strong roots and connections to an African home country — Somalia — and the complicated ways my Black feminist position has been impacted by this.

As Patricia Hill Collins expresses above, we must know the communities we are embedded in and the ways in which they impact, contextualize, and affect the work we do. Being who I am while conducting work with women elders of my community, I must acknowledge the ways my cultural background, position as a researcher, race, gender, and

personal relationships with some of my Auntie participants inform the way I conduct my research. Inherently, it is both a privilege and a problem to be situated where I am and to do this work. The power dynamics at play between myself and my Aunties is twofold:

1. They are the cultural knowledge bearers of my community, and I am privileged to be in a position where there is a trust formed between us through our relationality. I am within the generation that my Somali Auntie elders work to pass knowledge through. I learn from them.
2. As a researcher, I am in a position where I work to gain from what they share with me. I have a responsibility to them in my work, but in the end, I am the one who is left with the power to determine what knowledge is passed through me. I also come to them not just as a niece wanting to learn from my elders, but as a researcher with the cultural capital of the university as an institution, gaining me respect in their eyes — which can sometimes be intimidating for them.

Beyond the ethics of research, it is my responsibility to listen to my Aunties and learn what they know. Through this, we are bound and connected by the relational accountability Indigenous researcher Shawn Wilson speaks of in his book *Research Is Ceremony*: "What is more important and meaningful is fulfilling a role and obligations in the research relationship—that is, being accountable to your relations. The researcher is therefore a part of his or her research and inseparable from that research" (77). Thus, in this chapter, I am working to tell you stories about how I have come to understand the value of the work I do. I do this by building a mixed methods, yet qualitative methodological research design which places Black feminism and Cultural Rhetorics at the

center of my inquiry in order to position my work as one that engages in a deep praxis of care initiated by and for the Black women who worked with me, both theoretically and culturally. I am proud of where I am able to stand in this work and have chosen to focus on its potential as abundant in the work of rhetoric and composition.

Shaah iyo Sheeko — Tea and Story

A Black Feminist/Cultural Rhetorics Methodological Framework

Every Somali Auntie I interviewed would offer us tea and feed us. Every single one. It was apparent that this community act of ceremonial care (through the hospitality and sharing of a cup of tea and some eats) would become a part of my research methodology. As the tea was poured, we sipped slowly and let the stories flow between us. There was something powerful about the practice. Communal, customary, and expected. As I considered the care they took of me, I became aware of the methodological framework being built between us. The tea had become a symbol of the praxis of Black women's care for one another, the story time was the practice of orality and community remembering within Somali culture. And so, my Shah iyo Sheeko methodology was born.

> **Sheeko sheeko:** *Safiya's apartment is in a budding neighborhood in Nairobi called Kilimani. A guard greets us out front, apprehensive to let us past the gates and into the premises with our taxi. He has us call Safiya to confirm that we are her guests and we oblige. He lets us in. We take the elevator to her floor and ring the doorbell. Safiya opens the door wide, adjusting the scarf draped across her shoulders and does not wait another moment to embrace me like I am one of her own. This is the first time we are meeting. When I step into the hallway I am hit with a profound scent of memory and I*

cannot help but feel homesick for my home, my mother. Safiya's house at this hour smells like any Somali home would. It is late afternoon, right before affur/iftar and the kitchen is awhirl with action as we prepare to break fast for Ramadan. On the dining table sits a bottle of cold water, shaah: warm spiced tea, freshly squeezed fruit juice medley consisting mostly of watermelon, spicy vegetable soup, dates, sambuusi, and chapati. These are just supplies to nourish you before dinner itself, which is still being prepared. The aromas of what is to come intermingle with the smell of uunsi and cadar. We will eat with our hands: "A noticeable custom among Somalis is the practice of eating food with the hands. Somalis believe that the Prophet Mohamed blessed the habit of eating with one's hands. Therefore, eating solid and semisolid foods with the hand is common among Somalis …" (Diriye Abdullahi, 116-117).

It is a sacred time to be conducting research among the Somali community. Ramadan is a season of quiet introspection, reflection, and community engagement. However, breaking the fast is also part of the aforementioned practice, connecting with family and friends as a culmination of respect and reciprocity for food and for the privilege of gathering together. Some of my favorite memories growing up were spent in the kitchen for affur/iftar during Ramadan. Food in my community is ceremonial. There is a Somali proverb: Cunto cun iyo cun ayey ku wanaagsan tahay. *Food is most beneficial and good when it is shared.*

Shaah/Tea: A Black Women's Praxis of Care

It is a common Somali cultural custom to serve spiced black tea (infused with fresh cardamom, cloves, cinnamon, and ginger) to guests and visitors when they arrive at your home, usually accompanied by well-known Somali sweets like xalwo, sisin, and buskut[4]. Women, having been traditionally confined to particular parts of the home—often away from wherever the men plan to congregate—have their own sitting spaces where they get together to participate in "shaah iyo sheeko," a time for tea and stories. During this time, they talk about their shared struggles, personal and community needs, and connect with one another as they converse about their lives. Shaah iyo sheeko has come to represent my fused methodological practices, considering Black women's praxis of care, alongside the cultural rhetorics and Indigenous methodology of story.

The tea represents the many ways that Black women across the African diaspora historically, theoretically, and culturally have taken it upon themselves to nurture, to preserve, and to heal Black communities across the globe. In the article "Inheriting Patricia Hill Collins's Black Feminist Epistemology," Kristie Dotson explains how accessing Collins's research and epistemological frames as a Black feminist graduate student did more than support her work and give her a strong foundation to build from; Dotson described it as "a balm" on her soul.

> *Black Feminist Thought* gave me hope. Dramatic as that may sound, it is also true. From its insistence that black women of all walks of life and class positions were, are and can be intellectuals; to its highlighting that knowledge economies are engines for oppression; to its boldness in constructing a black feminist epistemology,

[4] Somali treats and cookies.

> Collins's book became one of my epistemological cornerstones. It made all the difference in the world to me and once that difference was made, it could not be unmade. From Collins, I inherit more than a starting point. I inherit a head start, a baton passed so that I may begin my journey, as a black feminist epistemologist, with more distance travelled, more tools prepared, and more work to do (Dotson, 2322).

I too, feel privileged to be in a particular moment and position in history where I am fortunate to inherit existing epistemological and theoretical frames from Black women scholars like Collins, Audre Lorde, Dotson, bell hooks, Ruth Simms Hamilton, Filomina Steady, and many more. Their work has nurtured and supported me as I conjure up and combine the methodologies and methods I know I need for my own research. With a deep praxis of care, the aforementioned Black women scholars (and scores of other Black women scholars and mentors) have lifted me into my work by allowing for me to build upon the support of their existing scholarship. They are my foundations, and for that I am grateful and thankful.

Collins reminds Black women scholars like me that we are agents of knowledge, giving us the tools to make the claims and progressions we need. In this section, I introduce you to Collin's' four Black feminist epistemological dimensions, as they were central to the development of my research paradigm and data collection practices: lived experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue, the ethic of personal accountability, and the ethic of caring (266). Below, I will accompany my use of each of Collin's' Black feminist dimensions with a story:

- ***Lived experience as a criterion of meaning***: *I am 35 before I hear the sound of the adhan[5] permeating through the streets of a city again. I am 35 and I cry openly because so much of this place reminds me of Mogadishu. I am filled with the nostalgia of having lost a home and a country I will never know as intimately as my parents, but I feel enough. I am part of the generation who has lived to know a part of what we have lost.*

  "This distinction between knowledge and wisdom, and the use of experience as the cutting edge dividing them, has been key to Black women's survival. In the context of intersecting oppressions, the distinction is essential. Knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate" (257). Being that I am a Black woman scholar, it is essential that my knowledge is bolstered by the wisdom that comes from my lived experiences. An intrinsic capacity to epistemologically align what I know with what I have seen, heard, and felt, allows for me to engage in the type of scholarship that removes the hierarchical approach existing in Western academe; to know is also to experience. My lived experience as a diasporic Somali woman who understands and remembers Somalia benefits me when listening to the stories and memories shared by my Aunties.

- **The use of dialogue**: *For some of my Aunties, their distance from Somalia is further than mine. They left when they were young and their sentiments towards our country feel the same as my own. We have nostalgia for a moment in time and an ideological/idealistic Somalia more than we do a real place that was tearing long*

[5] Islamic call to prayer.

before the war. We talk about Lido Beach, gender-mixed shows and gatherings in public places, buying ice cream and driving with the windows down and our hair out, hijab free. They are simple things, but our dialogues and conversations link us to the same place at different times. Our dialogue links us to a Mogadishu we know and love, mystified by the time we have spent away. For other Aunties, Muqdisho[6] is a present reality, alive in ways that keep you on your toes. It is not the Mogadishu of our combined memories, but a place they know and experience with its visible fissures. Together, we work out what we knew *about Somalia alongside what we* know *about Somalia.*

"For Black women new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals and are usually developed through dialogues with other members of a community" (260). It is our connectedness that is essential in validating our shared knowledges, rather than focusing on our generational separation. The simple act of sitting with my Aunties to share tea and stories together enables us to connect and converse about our culture to discover more about the way Soomalinimo is formed in the diaspora. By asking each other questions and being in dialogue, we are making connections that would otherwise not be possible.

- ***The ethic of personal accountability****: "Auntie[7], please don't add what we just talked about to your research. Now we are just talking, yes?" I cannot tell you how often the recording was turned off when in dialogue with my Aunties. I had the most intimate*

[6] Somali spelling of Mogadishu.

[7] In my culture, a relative will often address someone with their own title. For example, a mother can call their child "mother" as an endearment.

and enriching conversations and yet I knew they were for our ears and nothing more. They often told me about deeply private life stories, shared their traumas and losses—through laughter—they divulged the many ways life had changed for them outside of Somalia. In these moments, I learned so much and yet knew this was not information I could use in my research. I had a responsibility to listen and learn, and nothing more. And so I listened.

My ethics of personal responsibility is rooted in my connection to my community in a way that is relational and enhances my capacity for research. When Western[8] scholars write about Somalia, there seem to be two outcomes:

- Scholarship built on a fascination often bordering on fetishization (Somali Studies scholars like Virgil*[9], who even have the audacity to choose a tribe they claim to belong to!). A scholar 'becoming Somali' to the point where they claim to know more than a Somali. Here is where western epistemologies have failed in academia—oft giving the rank of 'expert' to people who do not have the capacity to truly know a community via the dimensions existing in the kind of epistemologies I use today.
- Scholarship focused on Somali loss, trauma, clan cleansing, terrorism, piracy, *insert negative cultural connotations and presumed delineations of Somalia here*. Though some of the scholarship in this vein of Somali Studies is of value in acknowledging the realities of our community, it seems to inherently

[8] Mostly white cis males.

[9] Markus Hoehne, well known in the Somali Studies community and also known for arguing with Somali scholars about their capacity and ability to engage in academic work/rigor: https://africasacountry.com/2015/03/can-the-somali-speak-cadaanstudies/.

support existing tropes about Somalis in the media, building on a negative central focus and point of interest.

Even though I am personally held accountable to my community, whatever claims I make as a result of the work I do in my research is also not free from scrutiny in Black feminist epistemologies. As Collins expressed, "Assessment of an individual's knowledge claims simultaneously evaluate an individual's character, values, and ethics. Within this logic, many African Americans reject prevailing beliefs that probing into an individual's personal viewpoint is outside the boundaries of discussion" (265). These ethical concerns, conversations, and connections are enabled by the aforementioned dimensions of shared experiences, open dialogue, and accountability to a community you are expected to be accountable for with your knowledge claims.

- ***The ethics of caring****: I am immersed as I travel to each new place I have known in my past for my research (Kenya, Australia, Italy); either as a home, or in the case of Italy, as a place where family now resides.*
    - *I drive by my old home in Nairobi and marvel at the lush greenness of the landscape. I had always thought the colors of Kenya in my memory were enhanced over time by my nostalgia for the place, but this is a lie. It is a place that is strikingly rich with color, from the banana leaves to the bougainvillea vines draping residential gates. Here, I am Somali in the most African of ways. I am a neighbor, a threat, a history one can see in my features.*

- *In Australia, I am always home. To gather and collect data, have conversations with Aunties, or just be here, is like any other day in my collective past memories. There is a different richness I find during my time here. I know from experience what it is like to be Somali here, even if from a varied generational context. I was younger, and so I was able to assimilate differently than my Aunties … but I was still different here. This is the country where I grew up, formed my identity as a member of the diaspora, and learned about who I was as a Black woman from Somalia. These experiences and memories all play into my work and my exploration of Soomaalinimo as a researcher in the present day.*
- *Traversing through northern Italy, I can see how taxing it would be on a Somali woman to live in a community where your differences are more visible. When my Auntie steps out of her apartment to greet me, the Italian countryside in the background is a jarring view. She has lived here for many years and now feels like she belongs because people know her, but she talks about living in other cities, and how hard it was to be both Black and Muslim. She eventually bought a home in the UK just to be closer to other Somalis and be in community with them. My parents did the same thing when we were children, moving us to a larger city with a known Somali population so we could know our culture better.*

Collins explains that the ethics of caring has three interrelated components:

- "the emphasis placed on individual uniqueness. Rooted in a tradition of African humanism, each individual is thought to be a unique expression of a common spirit, power, or energy inherent in all life.
- the appropriateness of emotions in dialogues. Emotion indicates that a speaker believes in the validity of an argument.
- developing the capacity for empathy." (263)

  My decision to use autoethnography and participant observation as tools to support my research are my translation of an ethics of caring, where I have intentionally chosen to position myself and my experiences in the field as an emotive and experiential response. My cultural position enriches the research, while my genealogy, history, and positionality allow me to do this particular work without having to take time to learn about Somali culture, language, and its customs. My knowledge of my community and my insertion of participation as an individual in this work are an enactment of care.

This importance placed in Black feminist epistemology on "individual uniqueness, personal expressiveness, and empathy," (264) has also supported me in framing my discussion surrounding the memories of my Aunties, alongside my own — as a way to practice an ethic of caring "Rooted in a tradition of African humanism [which allows] each individual ... to be a unique expression of a common spirit, power, or energy inherent in all life" (264)

Here, I also draw from the work of Ruth Simms Hamilton who asked, "Are there a broad set of experiences which link *diverse* communities of the African Diaspora, temporally and spatially?" (emphasis orig. 393). This question is at the crux of my work

with women in the Somali diaspora. Hamilton believed the African Diaspora was connected via an "active site of cultural and political action and struggle" as Black bodies remain racialized in a Western context where "being defined as an inferior race and in racial terms is pertinent to the people formation process" (404). Through linkages and networks, Black diaspora knowledge and information is "transmitted and circulated within, between, and across communities of the diaspora. This entails further reflection on the people who carry knowledge and information" (405). Considering this, I have, like many other scholars of matrifocal communities, presumed that women are often the carriers of culture, and I believe that such is the case for the Somali community.

As Hamilton expressed, "The geographical displacement of people is a complex social process not just a physical movement … [and] must be conceptualized as contributing to the definition of what people were, what they are, and what they may become" (emphasis orig. 397). Using the Somali diaspora as an example of a people who were, are, and are still becoming, my dissertation research has worked to empower and embolden the value and strength of women's knowledges in consistently supporting the continuation of varied cultural practices among the African Diaspora.

I will use Hamilton's concept of "communities of consciousness" to engage in the spatial and temporal remembering that Somali women engage in when constructing spaces that reflect Somalia "in an ongoing quest for human dignity and collective self-actualization" through the "*cumulative* and *shared* endeavors to make themselves the kind of people they would imagine themselves capable of being," prior to being displaced (emphasis orig. 404).

Collins's four Black feminist epistemological dimensions and Hamilton's communities of consciousness are frameworks I have leaned into as I do this work, enabling me to create, compile, and collaborate in ways that consider the community I am working with from a place of radical relationality. As Filomena Steady explained, "Black female theorists have produced new ways of examining women-centered theories that take into account the racial dimensions and thereby have enriched the revisionist project of the academy" (3). My inclusion of these dimensions and theories from Black feminism are an intentional choice to de-center Western ontological practices that often assume and pronounce these methodologies from communities of color (Indigenous scholars, Black women scholars, etc.) as less valid. Therefore, I maintain my focus on Black women's praxis of care, alongside the cultural rhetorics and Indigenous practices of orality and community remembering as another methodological frame for my research.

Sheeko/Story: The Cultural Rhetorics Practice of Orality and Community Remembering

Sheeko sheeko: As someone interested in the power of story in research, Thomas King's *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* is an example of how to use story to speak directly to the nuances involved in the fraught but inescapable relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Not only does the text begin with a powerful creation story, but it ends with a reminder of the value we find in keeping cultures alive through its peoples (literally and figuratively) – in speaking about Native Americans, King also writes about the importance of cultural continuity, "who will sing for us? Who will dance for us? Who will remind us of our relationship to the earth? Who will tell our stories?" (151). As I

work to tell the stories of women in the Somali diaspora, the power of story equips me with the relationally valuable tools I aim to explain the importance of working within and beyond colonial spaces to share what keeps a community and its stories alive.

As Ngugi wa Thiong'o discusses in *Decolonising The Mind*, oral storytelling on the African continent has been an essentially communal and participatory experience, with people congregating together to listen and participate in stories and accounts of past deeds, the wisdom gained from them, beliefs, morals, myths, and more (1986). For Somalis, orality is how we are orientated to the world. As Ahmed says in *Queer Phenomenology* "To be orientated is … to be turned toward certain objects, those that help us find our way. These are the objects we recognize, so that when we face them we know which way we are facing" (1). Oral stories the objects Somalis use to know which way they are facing, even when they find themselves displaced or in unfamiliar settings; and the act of storytelling is what supports their reorientation to a way of knowing, being, and sharing history.

The practice of Somali storytelling is very much oral, community-driven, and experiential in nature. Orality is a communication practice that relies more on trust, relationships, and memory. Whether it be over a cup of tea, during play among children, in our kitchens, or in other spaces of community, most traditional African societies participate in an exchange of formal and informal storytelling as a continued interactive oral performance. This is an essential part of traditional African communal life, connecting the important training of a culture's specific art of orality as part of its indigenous education—somewhat of an induction or initiation into a becoming of the culture. Through the songs,

stories, and proverbs told in communal spaces, these methods are a way to gain wisdom and insight into a community's meaning-making practices and what they value.

For Somali women, oral storytelling practices have been an outlet for communicating their realities while also acting as a way to pass on traditions in the community. As Safia Aidid wrote in "Women in Somalia":

> As a predominantly oral culture, oral poetry has had an important social function in the everyday lives of Somalis, as a pedagogical tool for communication, consciousness-raising, and preserving history. Women composed and performed a distinct genre of poetry known as buraanbur, which provided a socially acceptable means through which a woman could protest or lament about her condition. Buraanbur poetry, lullabies (hobeeyo), and work songs (hoyal) often dealt with frustrations associated with traditionally female domains such as housework and childrearing (6).

To add, Somalia did not have an official written orthography until October of 1972. Though attempts had been made earlier, John William Johnson's article, "Orality, literacy, and Somali poetry" explains: "In the decades before and after independence, the choice of an orthography for Somali was a volatile religious and political issue, rather than a mere academic problem of adopting or inventing a script suitable for this Cushitic language. Over twenty different writing systems, some Latin-based, some Arabic-based, and some based on scripts especially invented for Somali, were argued and debated over for twenty-five years before a government in Somalia finally felt powerful enough to implement one of them" (120). The Latin-based Somali orthography adopted in 1972 was a decision of the

Maxamed Siyad Barre regime; the same regime that would lead Somalia into its ongoing civil war.

In order to enact orality and storytelling as a community-driven experience, I engage in an interactive "call-and-response" performance of storying throughout this dissertation. Call and response forms of storying, found ostensibly everywhere on the African continent and its diaspora communities, entail a caller (or storyteller) who "raises the song," and then an awaited community cry is expected from those who respond. In Somalia, we engage with this call-and-response practice through a storyteller who "calls" out the story in lines—and an audience or chorus that then "responds" during pauses and intervals, or when directed by the storyteller.

This call and response practice is so embedded in the cultural framework that mothers will often begin their bedtime stories with a call: "*Sheeko sheeko!*" which essentially is the Somali word for story/narrative/tales. Then the child will respond, saying: "*sheeko xariir*"—In this particular moment, I struggle to translate the exact meaning. *Xariir* is the Somali word used to describe the feeling of silk on your skin. The words used in the response from the child demonstrates the value of the story shared, and its meaningfulness, both from the participatory engagement with it, and from the potential wisdom gained from it. Though I cannot find many texts that speak to the act of call and response beyond its traditional roots (and a mention of its contemporary use and influence in music) – the act itself is an enriching experience of memorization and community storying that can be learned from as a practice, and so I engage with it as a central part of my dissertation methodology.

To understand the deep-rooted respect gained through the performativity of story in Somalia, Andrzejewski describes the influential nature and capacity of a poet in Somali society: "Somalis often say that a good poet can sow peace and also hatred: he can win friendship by praise and appreciation, deepen an existing feud, or lead to a new one. In the pastoral interior, poets often act as spokesmen for their clans in disputes, and one can even find interclan treaties in poetic form; it is not unusual for a poet to rise to the rank of a clan leader, if he is not one already" (6). As such, story is how I aim to sow the seeds of my own telling at this moment.

As a Black, African, Muslim, woman, Somali, immigrant, I understand the importance of subjectivity in academia and the value of my voice. Storytelling has become a way for scholars like me to create essential and decolonial works by choosing the margin as a space of radical openness. As hooks expressed in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990), there is power found in working from the margins where we can "make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance—as a location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination" (209). There is an intentionality in taking ownership of your position in the margins, in order to do what you do best the way you do it best, rather than conforming to the expectations of the center.

In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith acknowledges the impact of imperialism as a framing for global indigenous cultures and their experiences, and how storytelling has become a method of expression: "Indigenous peoples, as an international

group have had to challenge, understand and have a shared language for talking about the history, the sociology, the psychology and the politics of imperialism and colonialism as a epic story telling of huge devastation, painful struggle and persistent survival" (19). Story, then, has become my method for this critical response to domination. A way to make sense of the world, using my cultural lenses as a Black Somali woman to walk within it, I am also intentional in acknowledging story as a cultural rhetorics frame for my dissertation because of the seamless way it lends itself to connecting both the valuing of cultural knowledges as a meaning-making practice, and its relationality and support of storytelling practices as inherent within scholarship. In "Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics" Powell et. al. explain their consistent use of the word 'story' in indigenous scholarship, highlighting its importance as a cultural rhetorics methodology. For me, working to build a methodology driven by cultural rhetorics is to understand how "the practice of story is integral to doing cultural rhetorics … if you're not practicing story, you're doing it wrong" (Powell et. al, Scene I, Act 2). Story in rhetoric and writing is how we are able to make sense of what we do as decolonial scholars, positioning ourselves in the margins to strengthen ourselves within a site/space of resistance.

Indigenous scholar Kathleen Absolon expresses, "stories are oral landmarks that are passed from one generation to the next. They contain knowledge of histories, traditions, events and life experiences" (137). Oral histories and the practice of autoethnography have become my tools for engaging in this practice, strengthening the conversations I have with my Aunties and my research methods by engaging in participant observation to also share what I see and experience. As a Somali woman, my positionality and identity allow for my story to sit alongside the stories of my Aunties, creating a space for mutual care and trust

— knowing that I, too, am in the work. This epistemological approach allows for me to curate a new ontological specificity in which a discussion of experiences can be visualized between generations.

As a Black feminist rhetorician, I accept the deep ways in which we are informed through the knowledge and power of story as a mechanism to do important work. Cultural rhetorics, imprinted in its naming, is also inherently informed by the cultural. This framework then, will be built to support the field as a relational exchange of knowledge from Somali culture and its rhetorical contributions directly from an individual who identifies with, and belongs to this community. As such, I will work to emphasize "rhetorics as always-already cultural and cultures as persistently rhetorical" (Powell et. al., Scene I, Act 2).

These constellated methodological frameworks in my dissertation project aim to support the field of rhetoric and composition in gaining knowledge about Somali women's ways of making meaning as a practice of cultural rhetorics, in order to collectively transform us in a new location from which we can make sense of the world. With this knowledge in mind, I have adopted a Black women's praxis of care and cultural rhetorics methodology when conducting my research, which entails using methods in my work that nurture, preserve, and heal.

Mixed Methods Design, Analysis, and Data Collection

In "Home and away: Narratives of migration and estrangement", Ahmed works to complicate how we have come to understand the concept of "home" by conflating it with the notion of being "away" from it—both conceptually and physically—and how identity and experience can implicate our use and understanding of these terms by considering

them for those who have experienced estrangement, displacement, or a migration from home/homes. Using a transnational lens, Ahmed does this by analyzing the reconfiguration that occurs when reflecting on "what it means to be at home, to inhabit a particular place ... call[ing] us to question the relationship between identity, belonging and home" (332).

As I work to look at the ways in which Somali women use their home spaces to create an archive and experiential way to remember the nostalgia of a prewar Somalia, I will use a mixed methods approach, allowing for me to deconstruct the patterns at play in both identity, nationality, and the displayed memory of a prewar Somali space (in this case, my Aunties' home spaces). Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods also allows for me to analyze how this practice is a collective remembering of "generational acts of story-telling about prior histories of movement and dislocation" (342).

For my research, the focus is heavily on qualitative data, due to my cultural rhetorics and Black feminist approaches mentioned earlier. However, I also chose to utilize free listing as a way to ensure that cultural systems of terms such as "identity," "culture," and "home" do in fact manifest among women in the Somali diaspora. As such, qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed methods) were included based on benefits expressed by Bernard (2011) and DeVault (1999), who were in agreement that a mixed methods approach to research can enrich results and the study, making it more robust, especially considering that the answers to research questions can result in being multilayered in ways that require more robust methods of data collection.

- ***Participant observations:*** As a researcher, getting acclimated and becoming familiar with the environments, cities, and homes of my participants in Italy, Kenya,

and Australia prior to starting interviews and focus groups is crucial for generating thorough research. Participant observations would involve:

  - Performing informal interviews
  - Field-note taking of space and environment (observing Nairobi, Carmignano Di Brenta and Melbourne)
  - Visiting neighborhoods, religious venues, community centers, and other spaces used by members of the Somali diaspora in that particular city.

- ***Unstructured and semi-structured interviewing***: The initial phase of interviewing will focus on unstructured and semi structured interviews (Bernard, 209-10). My reasoning for planning these in-depth, open-ended interviews will be to gain a broad understanding of the relevant topics and terminology, and to discover the right questions to ask. I will most certainly encourage my participants to express themselves in their own terms and to determine the pace of the interview. I conducted six unstructured interviews with a purposeful sample selected to maximize heterogeneity (I describe my Aunties as a collective intentionally, due to my chosen methodologies). All interviews were recorded with the permission of each participant. The unstructured interviews focused on broad sets of questions about diaspora identity, Somalia, culture, and space.
- ***Home interviews/Oral histories***: For the sake of better understanding how women from the Somali diaspora across the globe understand and recreate Somalia in their homes, I believe oral histories best supported me in covering a broad geographic range and provided me with a stronger understanding of the impact of migration and geography on their responses. I was able to meet them inside my site of

analysis: their home spaces. Here, I was able to conduct visual (photos and videos of their home spaces), and sensory (an experiential engagement of the senses) methods to use for my research and data collection methods. I was also enacting an ethics of caring by engaging in a collective sharing of memories and experiences with my Aunties while interviewing them at home in an informal and flexible setting. I also intentionally worked around their schedules, moving interviews to times and dates that worked best for all of them.

- ***Free Listing***: To determine categories that define 'Somalia', 'home', 'identity' and other words/concepts possibly relevant to women of the Somali diaspora, I collected free lists of emic concepts and categories that assist me in defining 'Somalia' and 'home' in the context of women in the Somali diaspora. Free listing requires the researcher to ask a sample of participants to "name all the X's" there are in a given domain. The goal of free listing is to identify and define the salient items in a domain, so that the future and subsequent data collected can be framed in appropriate terms. Admittedly, this was a relatively new experience in methods of data collection for me, as someone who tends to place more focus on qualitative methods in research. Though I interviewed four Aunties, I collected free lists from about 8 to 10 of them, as 20 or 30 is technically deemed a sufficient sample size for most domains (Weller and Romney 1988). This would be a larger sample than my in-depth interview and oral history group, in order to look for emic cultural concepts from a larger sample to determine the systemic culture patterns that are associated with 'culture' and 'home' in women from the Somali diaspora. As Romney stated in Culture as consensus: A theory of culture and informant accuracy, "The size

of the cultural information pool virtually dictates that knowledge be distributed and shared […] Each systemic culture pattern may be thought of as having an associated semantic domain that provides a way of classifying and talking about the elements in the culture pattern. A semantic domain may be defined as an organized set of words (or unitary lexemes), all on the same level of contrast, that jointly refer to a single conceptual sphere, e.g., a systemic culture pattern. The words in a semantic domain derive their meaning, in part, from their position in a mutually interdependent system reflecting the way in which a given language classifies the relevant conceptual sphere." (Romney et al, 1986). Being that I am concerned with the meaning of the terms 'culture' and 'home' to a specific cultural group— in a contextual, conceptual, and textual/identifiable sense—it makes sense to determine whether a systemic culture pattern emerges. Also, knowing that my sample size would not be a random sampling, I am working to ensure that my sampling will have a fuller range of cultural knowledge connected to the diasporic Somali woman's experience. In order to improve validity, my participants will be selected deliberately to maximize heterogeneity in most elements, except for perhaps geographic location (which in turn impacts their ideas of 'home' and 'culture').

Constellating the Aunties as a Community of Consciousness

Why call them my Aunties? I call them my Aunties because as elders of my community, I hold them all in high esteem and respect. It is how I address them face to face, and so it shall remain this way in a research context.

Who are my Aunties? I wanted to hear from the women elders in the Somali community who had experienced Somalia firsthand in their youth and through parts of

adulthood, yet had also spent enough time abroad as members of the diaspora to be reminiscent of particular moments in the country's history and memory with some distance. As such, all my Aunties were: 1) born in Somalia, 2) over the age of 65, 3) have mixed lineages and ethnicities within the Somali context, 4) have children, 5) have spent more than 25 years abroad (pre and post the civil war), 6) still have family in Somalia, 7) have returned or envision returning to Somalia.

As a way to engage in my methodological practices, I describe all of my Aunties in my dissertation as one collective community of consciousness. Rather than name them all, I give their stories some distance from the personal by allowing them to become one person in a collective storytelling of Somalia and its cultures and customs through one title: Auntie. This way, their stories are somewhat anonymized to a broader audience. My aunties were kind enough to let me into their homes, feed me, and share memories and cultural ideologies they both hold dear, sometimes even sharing memories they work hard not to think about. I understand that in my listening, I am also engaging in the rhetorics of relationality being that I am giving credit where credit has been due in a patriarchal community that often ignores the power its women wield in carrying cultures and customs into future generations. I not only listen to them as experts, I believe them to be the experts.

How did I find/recruit my Aunties? Being a member of the Somali diaspora, I had established my research networks in the geographic locations (Italy, Kenya, and Australia) at varying points in my life and throughout my doctoral program using snowball sampling; which involved contacting individuals that knew Somali Aunties in these geographic areas who were able to provide contact information (telephone numbers, email addresses, etc.)

in order for me to set up appointments, meeting times, locations, and dates to conduct interviews and document their living spaces. At first, I was able to secure 12 Aunties to interview at the three locations. Three or four Aunties were willing to support me with oral histories, the rest gave me access to their living spaces and supported other aforementioned data collection methods. Some Aunties also sent me pictures of their living spaces in order for me to begin observing and comparing the spatial constructions of Somalia within their homes.

Sheeko Xariir: Data Analysis

Assessment of the temporal and spatial: In the first page of Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, she expresses that our orientation toward certain objects can help us find our way, and that it is these objects that "we recognize, so that when we face them we know which way we are facing." As such, I engage in this research to explore the ways objects in Somali home spaces allow for a reorientation/remembering for women in the Somali diaspora. I also work through the collection of images and my own sensory experiences within these home spaces to understand how Ahmed would consider the queer orientation of Somali women's lived experiences as "a way of inhabiting the world by giving "support" to those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place." Ahmed also explains how migration is "the lived experience of facing at least two directions: toward a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not home yet." This directly connects to the practices I aim to review and analyze in the following chapters, connecting the lost home to a place that is not home yet.

Exhibition: I want to briefly address the multimedia, multi-genre approaches I aim to take to support my research and accessibility goals of the work of this dissertation. As I

collect audio, video, photography, and various field notes at the three geographic sites of my dissertation, I will work to recreate the aesthetic of a Somali home space displayed as part of an exhibition alongside videos and images from the various geographic sites and home spaces of my Aunties. I will use the exhibition as an experiential presentation of findings from the ways diasporic women's practices of Somali culture become materialized in home spaces and in the cultural knowledges they pass on to future generations. In the following data chapters, I will explain what I have determined as the connecting variables of the visual, physical, and sensory in the spatial setting of a Somali living room. The goal of the exhibition then is to be able to recreate and explain the rhetorical implications of the choices made by Somali women via this exhibition. In this exhibition, I will also include narrative, aural and visual elements, and possibly smells to support the work of my dissertation.

Through the temporal and spatial remembrance practices of Soomaalinimo, women of the diaspora are exploring ways to be who they are in their Somaliness, while engaging as members of a diaspora. In the next two chapters, I flesh out the temporal ways my Aunties rhetorically construct Somalia in the diaspora and the ways an unforgettable past has shaped/is shaping the future of the diaspora at large. In order to do that, I have examined:

1) the ways my Aunties talk about their nostalgia for prewar Somalia and what impact this memorializing has on their experiences of Somaliness in the diaspora.

2) who they have become because of migration and displacement, and what life in diaspora looks like for them in the varying geographic locales.

3) their Somaliness and how it is practiced and passed on by them.

I will then analyze the visual and sensory elements I observed and experienced at my Aunties' homes. This way, I can discuss how Somaliness manifests in each home through a semi-conscious rhetorical construction of the Somali home space and the objects and senses engaged to denote this experience.

Chapter 3
The Land of Milk and Myrrh: How Women Use Memory and Space to Reconstruct Somalia in the Diaspora

Due to the eruption of the civil war after the nation state officially collapsed in 1991, the Somali diasporic memory has relied on collectivity to rebuild what was lost. "The very failure of individual memory is compensated for by collective memory, and the writing of the history of a nation, in which the subject can allow herself to fit in by being assigned a place in a forgotten past" (Ahmed, 1999). The deep-seated memorialization of elements and experiences connected to prewar Somalia lie at the center of this writing of a nation, which has very much been how the Aunties I interviewed have assigned themselves a place in a forgotten past.

Lidwien Kapteijns and Maryan Muuse Boqor clearly identify the ways the war has impacted women at home and across the diaspora:

> To be Somali in this era of civil war and communal violence is hard and heart-rending. In the diaspora, many people, especially women, fight the bitterness in their hearts with the memories of earlier solidarity and try to repair the social fabric through innumerable and never-ending small acts of kindness and mutual support … Although women, generally speaking, played a different and less destructive role in the civil war than men, no one — man, woman, insider or outsider — has remained untouched by what we know, or think we know, about the civil war (105).

Though some of the Aunties I interviewed left Somalia long before the war, they too, carry the culture with them and continue working to rebuild it from what they know and have experienced of Somalia.

In her article, "Black diaspora feminism and writing: memories, storytelling, and the narrative world as sites of resistance," Hua Anh describes a feminist anti-colonial cultural project exploring critical writings by Black diaspora women writers in order "to understand how language and the narrative world are used as a political tool to generate agency for the subjugated" (186). For this dissertation project, I was interested in the ways Somali women are intentionally or subconsciously remembering Somalia, using not only their home spaces, but the futurity of following generations to do a similar thing; creating a narrative world through their lineage as a tool to survive the subjugation of colonization and displacement. Anh looks specifically at how Black diaspora women writers use "storytelling, critical theorizing, and remembrance practices to comprehend, resist, transform, and heal from patriarchy, racism, colonization, and the history of slavery, to explore uncharted journeys" (187). I am interested in how memory and nostalgia serve elder diaspora Somali women in their storytelling and remembrance practices and how they take shape in the construction of Somali culture and identity outside of the nation. Anh also touches on the importance of the protests that occur with the use of creative, political, and intellectual weapons such as writing, language, and the spoken word—weapons Black women continue to use to fight back against their assumed and constructed invisibility, powerlessness, and voicelessness. Lorde urged women of color to speak freely as a way to begin to understand our lives, while also becoming accountable for each other as bodies that continue to be marginalized and othered. Lorde asserts, “I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood” (40). The message then, is that to stay silent hurts us more in the long run. In interviewing my elder Aunties, I am

understanding just how valuable their work has been in the Somali diaspora across the globe. They have spoken, made verbal and shared Somali culture through their memories and storytelling, food practices, the songs, the passing on of our mother tongue—they have sown the seeds of Somaliness in the future of the diaspora, rooting us in something so we do not feel a complete sense of loss from the war, or a disconnect from our troubled homeland.

Nostalgia for prewar Somalia and the impact of memorializing experiences of Somaliness in the diaspora

In conducting the free listing technique with 8-10 Aunties over the phone, I was able to build a small sampling to create a cultural domain analysis. I did this to better determine what first comes to mind for Somali women over the age of 65 in the diaspora when asked about Somali identity and culture, and to discuss their nostalgia for the country. I asked the following two questions and requested for them to tell me a list of words that come to mind:

1. What do you miss about Somalia?
2. What words come to mind when you think of Somali culture and identity?

Though best practice for free listing calls for a group of at least 20 for a cultural domain analysis sampling, I was still able to see correlations in their answers that suggest how this group had similar emotions and ideals connected to the domains of identity and nostalgia.

What do you miss about Somalia?	What words come to mind when you think of Somali culture and identity?
People - 10	Language - 10
Language - 9	Cooking - 10
Weather - 9	Religion - 9
Everything - 8	Stories - 8
Ocean - 8	Singing - 8
Food - 7	Poetry - 7

Table 1. Free listing sample of Somali culture, identity, and nostalgia

Of the 10 Aunties who participated in the free listing exercise, every single one expressed how they missed being close to their family and friends in Somalia. One of the ramifications of war and displacement is that families are separated as they seek asylum in varying countries at varying times. Though families maintain ties, many of my Aunties would pause and continue to discuss how nostalgic they were for a time when they could just walk over to their sister's house or be in the same neighborhood as their friends. I do not recall the year, but I remember my mother being reunited with a friend from school who moved to Melbourne. They had not seen each other in over 20 years and are inseparable to this day. In relation to missing their language, I saw this correlation in my interviews as well, as some of my Aunties discussed why language was something to miss in the diaspora:

> **Auntie:** *My ears, they miss that language when you are walking in the street, people speaking enough Somali. Whenever you travel you don't hear of Somali. So Somali is the thing that I really missed most and the people, looking around me and seeing familiar faces and feeling at home where nobody stares at you, where you are not a foreigner, you are not different. That's what I miss most.*

The free listing helped support some of the things my Aunties also conveyed as I interviewed them and I added the table as a way to serve as a small layer of what will show up thematically throughout this chapter. The above quote is from My habo (Auntie) in Italy. She is one of the Aunties I personally know and love. We are not related, but we have a history together as writers and have been in community with each other for some time. We met at a Somali storytelling workshop hosted by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in 2014. There were about 30 Somali creatives selected from all over the world: writers, journalists, documentary filmmakers, photographers, artists, and poets. They put us all together in a mansion in the middle of nowhere in Wales to sit and brainstorm through the traumas and stereotypes plaguing our community; imploring us to work together to help tell better stories about Somalis and Somalia. While sitting in the solace of the reality of the stories told about Somalis and Somalia across the globe, we became a small family — my Auntie was an elder whose work we already knew and respected. She was a mentor to us all.

My Auntie is the well-known Italian author Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, who has given me permission to use her name and her creative work in my research, which I plan to do. It is helpful for me to name her here only because her work and the conversations we have had together are a beautiful way to engage in an analysis of how nostalgia and memory is an act of survivance for women in the Somali diaspora. In "Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians *Use* Writing" Indigenous rhetorician Malea Powell explains what survivance is: "the language of survivance (survival + resistance)" (400).

Auntie Shirin resides in a small town about an hour and a half north of Venice called Carmignano di Brenta. She left Somalia long before the war as a young mother and over the

years has become a well-known writer in Italy and across the Somali diaspora—her poetry and prose usually concerning Somalia, memories of her time there, and what it means to be Muslim and Somali outside of the homeland. She learned how to speak Italian in Somalia which was common during that time frame due to its colonial connection to the country and the language lingering in Somalia's education systems. In her memoir *Far From Mogadishu* (1994), Auntie Shirin reflects on our country's rich and complex history and the weight it bears due to all of the conflict:

> *Somalia. The Egyptians baptized you 'Land of the Gods', and the Queen of Sheba loved your incense and your myrrh. In 1333 Ibn Battuta, in his travels, described Mogadishu as a large city, rich with trade. There, fabrics were woven and then exported to Egypt and other countries.*
>
> *Somalia, land of poets. Sufis and Saints departed from your shores to spread the word of Allah, until Vassco de Gama destroyed every last one of your sultanates, burning all that he could not take away with him.*
>
> *Somalia, land of conquest. From that time on, no more trade. Your terrorized people fled inland. The European colonizers came and raped the land, sowing the seed of future horrors. After independence, dictatorships—puppet governments that are convenient for the superpowers.*
>
> *Somalia, my land. Now you have exploded; you could not go any longer! You no longer respect anything: not tradition, religion, or tribes … Men no longer distinguish between brothers, sisters, children. With their Kalashnikovs in hand they feel like gods. They rob, pillage, rape and kill. They impair their senses with drugs. You have neither*

mother nor father anymore. You have no compassion for anything. You destroy your people, the future and the past.

To love and know Somalia is to live in acceptance of the confluence between its rich heritage and culture, alongside the realities of the violence of its war, tribalism, and death. Auntie Shirin's writing is a poetic and blatant exposure of both sides of our country, and she writes it from a place that longs for Somalia in the past. As she expressed solemnly when we talked, **"**My home is Xamar but it is only something in my mind." Auntie Shirin is fully aware that the Somalia she once knew and loved is longer a place that exists in physical form.

Life for women in the Somali diaspora in varying geographic locales

Having conversations about prewar Somalia with women who grew into womanhood in prewar Somalia can give you a glimpse of an understanding of the intrusive nature of both war and displacement on cultural continuity. "For many [...] the paths of displacement are violent journeys. Likewise, the shifting of an identity is arguably violent. That is to say, displacement is a jolt to one's sense of self—a jolt to one's identity. If we think of displacement not in terms of moving from one place to another, which suggests a journey that ends, but rather in terms of transition, displacement then becomes a temporal space where identities are in metonymic relation to one another'' (Katrina Powell, 302). The jolt most expressed by my Aunties was the realization that outside of Somalia they were no longer in a nation that would understand them as Somali in its essence, but rather, they would be essentialized as what Somali would come to mean in the West: a war-torn Black/African Muslim nation facing famine, drought, violence, and terrorism.

Auntie Shirin remembers the exact day she left Somalia.

Auntie: *I left Somalia on the 20th of October, 1971. We left for political reasons. When after the new government of Siad Barre, all the Italian and the foreigner offices were nationalized. My husband was working in Fiat, so there was no work permit for him. He could stay, although he was born and raised in Somalia and Mogadishu, we had to leave because he was an Italian citizen and we left for that reason. When I left Somalia, I left with only two suitcases and my little girl. She was two months old so we didn't take a lot too much. The only thing I took was pictures, albums, photos of my family, of my mom. In fact that is the photo of my mom and dad and when I was a child* [points to image]*that is the only thing that I took from Somalia. But when my mom came, she was bringing artifacts from Somalia with her and when I was traveling I was always buying things. And yes, I brought some Alindi with me. Yeah, that was wearing it at home. It was a Guntiino of material of Alindi and Dirac, all those things that I could carry in my suitcase but not big items.*

Outside of Somalia, elements of my Aunties' identities that were previously unnamed and hardly considered by them as unique in their home country (race, cultural background, religion, for example) came to the forefront as they experienced being othered by these elements of their identity. This othering is what causes a jolt to one's identity, alongside the loss of a homeland they envisioned as a site of possible return — which is now lost after the war. In an endeavor to name and make up for what has been lost post war, the creation of an imagined homeland becomes a substitution for the loss of an actual homeland, resulting in the melancholia of migranthood Ahmed expresses in *The Promise of Happiness*. The migrant experience — especially for those that are culturally identifiable as other in a Western context — may increase their attachment to an imagined homeland, "The figure of

the melancholic migrant appears as the one who refuses to participate in the national game. Suffering becomes a way of holding on to a lost object." How one imagines or constructs themselves to be ideal, is then threatened by the "experience of racism" in their host country (142-143).

> **Auntie:** *In fact for me, the skin color was never a problem. Only when I came to Italy I discovered my skin because people were looking at us and staring at us and I didn't know why. And that was because of you are different. But for me I was not different. Italy before, the people were good hearted and they were very curious to know just where you're from and it was different. But now they don't want to know even where are you from? They want you to go back home. Just go back home. For them we've become many, we're invading and this is the politics. But still, people have changed a lot. I've never had any racist remarks or nothing in Italy before maybe because I speak the language very well … but after wearing the hijab I've noticed a big difference. People think you don't speak the language also. They think you are backwards or every day there is this … undoing. You have to explain, okay, if I'm wearing a headscarf, it doesn't mean that I have covered my brains, my brain still functions. No, really. So it's different now. Italy has changed a lot. I have many Italian friends who are fantastic and I get along with them. Really there is no problem. But the media and when you are walking in a street, you feel this, you feel people staring at you or people saying something, why they don't go back home or why she's wearing this?*

Auntie Shirin explains this phenomenon of the melancholic migrant as one who cannot be their ideal self in her adopted home country due to Italy's changing perceptions when she exclaims, "It doesn't mean I have covered my brains [when I wear the hijab], my

brain still functions." The most overwhelming jolt to identity for most of my Aunties who live outside of Somalia was the experience of being othered for their race and their religion. Ifrah Magan explains this common experience for displaced Africans after interviewing Somali refugees in Chicago. **"**The majority of participants in this study reported facing discrimination due to race, gender, and ethnic and religious differences. Some described direct experiences of discrimination, both subtle and overt, while others related incidents told to them by fellow Somalis. In particular, participants spoke about their lived experiences as being Muslim and Black" (180). Being Muslim and Black within Somalia means something completely different than being Muslim and Black outside of it. It is clear, beyond racialized experiences of difference, that in her donning of the hijab, Auntie Shirin also noted a change in the way people have treated her.

What is also present in her response is the migration shifts occurring in the country, as more Africans from refugee communities end up in Italy as a point-place to seek refuge, asylum, and access into Europe. Semprebon and Pelacani discuss a growing anti-immigrant sentiment specific to northern Italy, as this region has become a pathway for displaced communities from the Middle East, North and East Africa to travel through to reach other parts of Europe:

> In the most recent years [2017], some mayors in provincial localities have openly supported the extreme-right movement "Verona ai Veronesi" (Verona to the Veronese) and its protests against reception. Verona is located in the north-eastern Italian region of Veneto and is not a town of first arrival. Migrants mostly arrive here through the dispersal system operating in Italy, while some of them arrive autonomously, while transiting through the country. In fact, Verona is located at the

> intersection of several important transport routes: the main train station functions as an interchange for railway traffic from Bologna to Brenner, from Venice to Milan and west to Ventimiglia. It is also connected to Quadrante Europa, one of the largest freight terminals in Italy (in terms of volume) (26-27).

For Auntie Shirin, she has the privilege of time and years spent in her community to know the language well, and have developed relationships in her very small town. Her experience is not the same as some other newly resettled Black and Muslim migrants. As the geographic locations change, so do the narratives my Aunties share about their experiences in the countries they now reside. For one of my Aunties based in Nairobi, her experience with rising racism seems to be the main reason for relocating from France to Kenya.

> **Auntie:** *France is the worst. When I went to a store from the hotel I was staying at, I said to myself today I want to buy a cake. A French lady cut in front of me where I was standing in the line. When she walked in front of me she said [speaking French] "Black people are everywhere." Okay, I said to the lady. She didn't know that I could understand her. I said to the lady serving the food [speaking French] the lady looked at me. She was listening to me speak French and realized I knew what she had said before. I said give me two of the long breads. She didn't know I could understand. So look at that. This is why I came here. Do you want the truth? I came here to Nairobi because of this reason.*

My Auntie shares this experience she had in the early '90s to highlight her family's return to the continent. She left Somalia in 1968 after her mother died and spent most of her time in French speaking countries like France and Belgium. She is a direct relative of

my father and has fond memories of the two of them prior to moving abroad. They both lost a parent around the same time:

> **Auntie:** *Listen to me, Auntie. Your father and I have lost a mother and a father — rajay[10] and agoon[11]. If people don't support you or take care of you, we would not have made it. Isn't this true? My brother and I were waiting for your father. Before I left Somalia, your father would come and stay with us. Our aunts on both sides are both of our aunts, both have raised us. That means he is two times my brother.*

My Auntie determined in 1996 that it would be better for her family to relocate to Nairobi, Kenya, for the sake of her children and proximity to family and the homelands of both her and her husband, who is Sudanese. She expressed several other moments of painful racialization at the hands of the people from countries she had grown to know and love, expressing sadness, even, at her desire to leave.

> **Auntie:** *Our culture taught us. Our culture — you are a different generation. We were taught that when someone is older than us if they have something or are carrying something, we were told to take it for them, carry it for them. Do you understand? We watched out for each other. So auntie, as people began to get further away from one another we became those who only like their individual lives — they were only worried about their problems.*

Here, my Auntie shares two moments of difference. The first is a fear that future generations of diasporic Somalis will become less community oriented as they spend more time learning and assimilating to Western countries that prize individualism over community. The second identifiable fear that arises when she speaks to me is that future

[10] The Somali term used to describe a child who loses their mother.
[11] The Somali term used to describe a child who loses their father.

generations of Somalis will also lose the morals and ethics rooted in the communal care that many Africans thrive upon and need for survival. This is why she chose to move back to Africa while her children were still young.

For my other Auntie in Nairobi, she was actually travelling in Europe when the war broke out in Somalia and remembers having to work to upheave the rest of her family from afar.

> **Auntie:** *In many ways ehhh [long pause] — well the problem is when you just happen to be in somewhere without having decided to be there. Well you know, it changes a lot. I never thought I'd leave Somalia Mogadishu and live somewhere else, but I been forced to do that after the civil war happened in Mogadishu. I had completely to change my style of life, the way I was thinking, the way I was planning. And not only my life but the life of my children so that had an impact on my change.*

She relocated to the United Kingdom with her three daughters, who still reside there now. Auntie has fond memories of her time in the U.K., believing that if there were a home outside of Somalia, the U.K. would be the closest. However, her socialization capacities in Nairobi are deeper.

> **Auntie:** *I am connected with Somali people here. I have friends. I have, you know, I spend time with them. Many of the people who I knew, some of them, they are here so I enjoy it. I don't feel isolated and usually I'm a very social person. Sometimes we have parties, sometimes we come together, sometimes we have shaah or what you call Somali tea so that's the way.*

Another common experience for aging Somalis is a desire to return and be proximal to the homeland. In Nairobi, you have the benefit of being geographically close to Somalia while

also being in a country with a large population of Somalis. I experienced this with my own parents when they sold their home in Australia in 2018 to try and move back to Africa, splitting time between Garowe, Nairobi, and Melbourne. For Auntie Shirin, this meant building community in another European country with a large diasporic hub.

> **Auntie:** *What I really, really miss about Somalia is the people and the language because the language is the thing that I miss. My ears, they miss that language when you are walking in the street, people speaking enough Somali. Whenever you travel you don't hear of Somali. So Somali is the thing that I really missed most and the people, looking around me and seeing familiar faces and feeling at home where nobody stares at you, where you are not a foreigner, you are not different. That's what I miss most.*

In Italy, the Somali diaspora population is small and dispersed throughout the country with no central hubs to experience the space as much of a diasporic geography. When Shirin's daughter relocated to Birmingham in the United Kingdom in 2010, Shirin also bought a home there to be near her daughter and be in proximity to a large community of Somalis, which she quickly connected with. As Blunt and Valley put it "Rather than view the home as a fixed, bounded and confining location, geographies of home traverse scales from the domestic to the global in both material and symbolic ways" (3). For Shirin, access to Somalia exists in the experience of Somaliness in a larger pocket of the diaspora. She feels more at home in Birmingham because she can connect with and blend with other Somalis in the community, which she was never able to do in Italy.

> **Auntie:** *First of all you are always a foreigner. If you are in a country like me, I'm an Italian citizen, I've been here for almost 50 years but still am regarded as a foreigner*

when they see me. So your Soomaalinimo is in you and at home you are Somali. When you are outside you are Somali, you are always a Somali and your Soomaalinimo is the way you behave in your home also. Your prayers, the way you cook, the way you respect your own neighbors, even if they're foreigners, at the end they are neighbors, sheeko sheeko, you are used to it. You have to make friends, you have to offer tea when they come and in a way they come to know your culture also through you, they come to know the taste of the Somali Chai with heel iyo qarfo and there is sugar, Bur, the Sambuusi. All this, it's part of your Soomalinimo showing to your neighbors and to your friends.

Shirin loves the community of friends she has made in Italy over the 50 year span she has called it home. She has, however, found herself more connected to her culture and her Somaliness in Birmingham, because she is no longer isolated from other Somalis. Therefore, Shirin can better experience how home is collectively imagined by the Somali community at large as they rebuild a sense of what was lost to them after the war. They are no longer in Somalia, but they are engaging in a remembering of Somalia as an imagined community — a term coined by political scientist, Benedict Anderson, in his 1983 text on nationalism. "'Imagined communities' come to be attached to imagined places, as displaced peoples cluster around remembered or imagined homelands, places, or communities"(Gupta and Ferguson, 10–11).

In the diaspora, there are places around the globe that have become, as Kusow and Bjork put it, "epicenters of Somali cultural production and the articulation of tension and conflict that characterize the Somali diaspora around the globe" (2). The most well-known epicenters of Somali cultural production are Toronto, London, and Minneapolis — but the

diaspora quite literally spans the globe. For Auntie Shirin, Birmingham offered her access to this cultural production, enabling her to connect with other Somalis in the community, shop at stores owned by Somalis, and attend Somali-centered events — which was not available to her in Italy.

For my Aunties in Australia, there are a multitude of similarities displayed when compared with what was experienced by my Aunties in Italy and Kenya. Though the Somali community in Australia is not a large one, it is well connected. I know this from my own experience growing up as a member of the Australian-Somali diaspora. Though Italy today has a well-established and growing migrant presence, very few of them are being granted citizenship due to having *jus sanguinis* (the right of blood) determine someone's acquisition of citizenship, rather than opting to adopt *jus soli* (the right of birth and naturalization) principles for granting citizenship, explained below by Katherine Nessler:

> There are two fundamental principles by which countries grant citizenship: *jus sanguinis* (the right of blood) and *jus soli* (the right of birth). In countries that recognize *jus sanguinis* citizenship, children are granted the citizenship of their parents, regardless of birthplace. Countries that recognize *jus soli* citizenship grant citizenship based on place of birth [...] *Jus soli*, or birthright citizenship, is only recognized in thirty other countries. Recently, there has been a sweeping trend of abolishing birthright citizenship. Of developed nations, only the United States and Canada still grant citizenship automatically without major qualifications. France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom all recognize birthright citizenship in exceptionally narrow circumstances subject to specific qualifications. All the while, many developed countries that do not recognize

birthright citizenship are facing population crises and declining labor markets (215).

For this reason, my Somali Aunties in Australia seem to talk about their experiences in a slightly more positive light, perhaps because they had the capacity to become citizens of Australia via naturalization, which provided them with the opportunities and rights of equity that are granted to the local population.

> **Auntie:** *I came to Australia with my three daughters. It was just us. But thankfully here, we have had many opportunities and we have been surrounded by the Somali community where we live. There are many of us, so I don't have to feel alone in my community. And outside of my home, my apartment? I am dressed different, my skin is different. I am an old lady, but I smile and they smile back. This country has been kind to me. Even if my children haven't had the same experiences.*

Both the Aunties I interviewed from Australia reside in Melbourne, which is the second largest hub of Somalis in the country (Sydney being the largest). The first Auntie is a widower who lives in the suburb of Carlton in a high-rise public housing apartment complexes, where many Somalis who relocated to Australia after the war were placed in subsidized government housing. As Fincher expressed in her article "Is High-rise Housing Innovative? Developers' Contradictory Narratives of High-rise Housing in Melbourne", though high-rise housing development has grown in popularity in more recent years ('90s and '00s), "high-rise housing in Melbourne had been for low-income, public housing tenants and had been much maligned" (327). Jamieson and Jacobs (1996) further discuss the ways that high-rise public housing development has increased marginalization and social polarization in Australia, as migrant and refugee communities then settle and

connect to one another, rather than disperse across and between communities, growing to know others in their new locations.

> **Auntie:** *Carlton is nice because so many other Africans and Somalis live here and we all know each other and look out for each other. Of course, sometimes people think less of you because you live in low-income housing, but I don't care. I love being able to live near other Somalis and others who look like me and have similar cultures.*

For my other Auntie in Australia, her experience is a little different. She left Somalia in 1988. While still tumultuous, the war had not fully begun yet, and with her husband being an economist for the United Nations, they were granted a Skilled Independent Visa (better known as the skilled migrant visa), the goal of it being to attract foreign nationals with skills Australia could benefit from if they opt to migrate to Australia. Her transition into the country was much smoother than that of a refugee escaping the war, and her family resettled in Canberra, the capital of the country.

> **Auntie**: *When we came to Australia we had excellent neighbors. Next door to our house was a lady called Deidre, I don't remember her surname, but she immediately, when she saw our kids and the way I was dressing, she knocked at the door and she said, how can we help you? And we do it. And then when we told them that we worked for the United Nations, both myself and my husband, she started working with us to write applications on how to write the Australian way because we knew the international world and how the applications were written, but we didn't know about in Australia there is a selection criteria and it's extensive and harrowing experience. So we had … we had about 2,000 applications and we used to call the "rejection" criteria instead of "selection" because we never got a job.*

Eventually, both my Auntie and her husband secured jobs at government agencies in Canberra and stayed there until the late 1990s, opting to relocate to Melbourne for the sake of themselves and their children having some proximity to a Somali community, which there was not much of in Canberra.

> **Auntie:** *I've just come back from Somalia, by the way. I've spent three months in my country and a lot of things have gone wrong. Australia is now my home. I currently live in Melbourne and I have extended family here. I have [a large amount of family who resettled in Melbourne after the war]. My children have grown up there. I have everything I associate with love and passion, I have made it in Australia because my children grew up there, went to university, met all their friends. My husband and I had a loving and beautiful life in Australia. So now I call Australia home.*

My Auntie who started off in Melbourne, however, faced the challenges of having to raise and provide for her children by herself, while not having the privilege of an accredited education abroad to build from when arriving in Australia. She put herself through community college and worked tirelessly to support her children, with the help and support from the greater Somali community when needed for things such as childcare and financial support from mutual aid groups known as ROSCAs, explained in the North York Mirror article, “Banking while Black: The business of exclusion”:

> ROSCAs are mutual aid groups. They're informal institutions where members self-organize, decide on the rules and make regular fixed contributions to a fund that is given in whole or in part to each member in turn. ROSCAs are an important way of organizing people and resources locally - and co-operatively. Although ROSCAs is an academic term, it is the official name for these systems that are very much localized.

> ROSCAs are known worldwide in various cultural vernaculars like "Susu" in Ghana, St. Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada; "Esusu" in Nigeria; "Ayuuto" and "Hagbad" in Somalia; "Equub" in Ethiopia and Eritrea; "Box-hand" in Guyana and Antigua; "Partner" in Jamaica; "Restourne" in DR Congo and "Sol" in Haiti. These many names depict the same phenomenon - people sharing money through cooperation. It is also about self-help and love - neighbours helping each other.

Though we often talk about diasporas being imagined communities, there are very real manifestations of communal support amongst refugee and emigre communities — especially for Black communities — often experiencing barriers through the oppressive systemic makeup of the host countries in which they have resettled. This has led to systems of community care within each diaspora, allowing for progress to happen for their communities in unique ways, like creating their own financial systems outside of banks.

> **Auntie:** *Auntie, look. Ayuuto gave me a chance to save money and build something for my children. A bank would never give me a loan. Thankfully, our communities have made system that help us move forward and make our lives better here. I am very grateful for that. Also, what would I do without my community? I pray with them, eat with them, raise my kids with them. We are together like we should be — even if it isn't in Somalia anymore.*

As my Auntie's story expresses, the need for proximity to others who share a cultural background akin to your own is also a matter of survivance. Here, imagined communities create a microcosm of support and survival within a larger community. "Conversely yet relatedly, the rhetorical strategies used by the displaced to speak back to those narratives include nostalgia, a particular sense of home, belonging, citizenry, and the

right of return" (Powell, 302). Both Aunties, however, have expressed a sense of belonging in the broader Australian context — for example, they speaks fondly of exchanges in their daily life with other Australians, and of their relationships with Australian coworkers, etc. — their connection to others in their own diaspora community is necessitated by the support given through the collective community "remembering" of Somalia — noted poetically as they pray, eat, and raise their children together. As Wise similarly expressed in "Hope and Belonging in a Multicultural Suburb" there are growing opportunities for hopeful sense of joy and belonging between and within these microcosmic communities across Australia, and beyond, in other host countries: ''So for me then, joyful hope requires a sense of community, but its conditions of possibility are a sense of belonging, trust and security of the outward looking kind, the kind that gives us a sense of belonging and safety from which we can embrace the world and other people in that joyful, hopeful, sense" (Wise, 178).

Carrying culture by passing it on - generational explorations of practicing Soomalinimo

Though war has torn them from the country and homes they have known, first generation diasporic Somali women have engaged in a remembering that has solidified a semblance of cultural continuity among diaspora communities across the globe. Not only is the continuation of cultural practice in the diaspora a desire, it is viewed by the generations carrying the culture as a necessity. For them, there is a before: ways of doing things and being (Somaliness) that must not be forgotten.

In discussing Somalia with my Aunties, I realized just how rooted in memory all of my research has been; In my own memory of Somalia and in their reconstructions of it as

the ones responsible for teaching us what it means to be Somali in the diaspora. As I review my conversations with them for analysis and revisit pictures of our time together, I realize my fieldwork is situated in memory. In the diaspora, there is a nostalgia for a moment within a place that no longer exists today. The ripple effects of our nation's conflict can be felt in the diaspora, too, as "the war has rocked, and in places cracked, the foundations of [Somali] society" (Gardner and El Bushra, xi).

The Somalia my Aunties knew and loved is gone and no longer exists. As my friend Mohamed Farah eloquently put it, "It was eaten by war on one end, and time on the other." Being Somali, however, that is something that cannot be taken from them:

> **Auntie:** *Being Somali is being myself. It's natural for me because I was born and brought up in Mogadishu. So it's not something that I have to pretend to be or it comes natural. It's being me.*
>
> **Auntie:** *Being Somali means everything to me because that's my identity despite I'm having now another nationality. I never felt that.*
>
> **Auntie:** *Being Somali is everything. Being Somali is the dress I wear every day. As probably we know that human beings are made of layers of personalities like the onion has peels. So the ultimate crunchy layer of the onion is what the dress of the onion looks like. And that's my Somaliness. I love being a woman in Somalia, and I love the generosity, the hospitality of the Somali people everywhere. And I love everything and anything about being a Somali.*

To be Somali is to be themselves, which is why elder Somali women pour their memories and cultural knowledge practices into future generations in the diaspora; to ensure this shared rootedness to a cultural identity — regardless of where you are in the

world — from Kenya to Australia. “Women have played, and continue to play, an enormously influential role in the developing Somali sense of self and identity.” (Berns-McGown, 236).

> **Sheeko Sheeko:** *Every other Sunday, my mother and I would drive over to the Fyshwick Fresh Food Markets in Canberra to buy the freshest produce and to shop at the specialty grocery stores for ingredients she needed to show us how to cook* real *food. Our cart was always the most colorful: tamarind, cardamom, cloves, fresh cilantro and coriander seeds, turmeric, cloves, saffron, bulk bags of lentils, basmati and jasmine rice, fresh fruits and vegetables, and meat cuts (chicken, beef, lamb, goat) from the Halal butcher. In Australia in the 1990s, these were not items readily available at Woolworths or Coles. And my mother would be sure to take us and explain what each of the ingredients were special for in their use in Somali cooking. Upon return, my hooyo would set up in the kitchen and make us her sous chefs, explaining to us the intricacies of each recipe as we chopped and she cooked. Not a single recipe has ever been written down and yet we all know in some manner, how to cook Somali food.*

Somali women in the diaspora are the linkages and networks of knowledge and information, as Hamilton expressed, who have “transmitted and circulated within, between, and across communities of the diaspora. This entails further reflection on the people who carry knowledge and information” (405). Upon reflection, it is through sharing Somali culture and tradition through future generations that Somali women transmit and circulate knowledges. Children are told stories, are spoken to in their mother tongue, are taught how to cook, clean, and present themselves as Somali by watching their mothers, grandmother, and aunties.

> In a culturally, socially, and religiously alien environment, after the turmoil of the civil war, Somali women and mother's everyday routines such as preparing food, keeping the house and taking care of small children, have probably helped women to create a sense of continuity, order and control in the middle of otherwise chaotic experiences and uncertainty. Daily acts, linked with religious observance, daily prayers and religious sacred times have helped them build a home in the diaspora that creates bridges between the past, the present and future (Tiilikainen, 212).

In their daily acts, they preserve and transmit a culture. My Aunties were all explicit in sharing these practices with their children. Just like my own mother, they fueled a rootedness and belonging to a culture otherwise unseen and unknown, especially for those who have never been to Somalia. The act of remembering Somalia is not simply for personal survivance — though this plays a role — but for the collective survivance of the knowledges of a community dispersed across the globe.

Chapter 4
Ku Soo Dhawoow Aqalkaan Udgoon. Welcome to This Fragrant Home
Experiencing the Spatial as Diasporic

The embodied experience of walking into a Somali home as a member of the diaspora is the acknowledgment of a deep embodied understanding of the ways the home space has been rhetorically shaped by Somali women to engage in remembering Somalia. To explain this rhetorical shaping, I entertain Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of rhizomes and assemblages to consider the "dimensions of multiplicity" existing within a home space and how displacement and migration have expanded the connections we are able to make in relation to the objects found in my Aunties' homes, and the experiential lines that can be drawn between and within their varying home spaces and geographies. "An assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections. There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines" (8).

To elicit this remembering of Somalia, women engage in collective assemblages of "Somaliness" through temporal and spatial constructions, drawing diasporic and cultural lines while collectively connecting fragments of Somalia to one another through objects, experiences, and memories. In doing so, one can witness the way "the collective assemblage is always like the murmur from which [they] take [their] proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or not, from which [they] draw [their] voice" (84). The constellation of voices then, is the cultural voice of Somalia which travels within them and permeates through them into the spaces, places, and people they connect with. What I have worked to determine through my research is to understand how much of this is intentional

and how much of this enactment of Soomaalinimo is rooted in the collective temporal and spatial memories my Aunties carried with them, reconstructing elements of the Somalia they knew and loved.

What was it about these homes that felt so similar and familiar to me? How do you work to explain the way a home can feel like a culture or community? What is it about a space that reflects an experiential knowing for those who belong to this community, and an experiential difference for those outside of it? In *Material Cultures, Migrations, and Identities: What the Eye Cannot See*, Anna Pechurina explains that "recent research into migrant and diasporic communities can be linked to a particular traditional image of home or the existing national aesthetics that migrants tend to reproduce, conform to, or integrate into accepted styles of homemaking in the receiving country" (30). A migrant home, then, can have lingering remnants of a country once known — which is the case in my Aunties' homes. And much of this is determined through experiencing a heightened sensory and visual awareness of the permutations of a culture when entering a home; and a realization of the importance of the materiality of things as objects take on meaning. According to Pechurina, this materiality of things is what supports displaced refugee and migrant communities in the reconstructions of a sense of home(lands), through objects which help to transform the space into one identifiable as a space belonging to an "other" culture when compared to the insides of homes of the local population of a host country. "By looking at the individual meanings of home and the way they are actually lived and practised by people, researchers are also able to grasp how broader cultural norms, practices, and stereotypes can be represented in a domestic space. Ultimately, a migrant home can be defined as a composition of 'variable meanings' that reflect the relationships and activities

associated with home in its different stages" (Pechurina, 30). What's also been determined in more contemporary studies of homes and material culture are the "feelings" and "practices" that people develop for objects in their possession, which are considered to be equally important dimensions of the home as 'place', 'space', and 'physical environment' (Smart, 162). For this reason "home is therefore tied to memory, to relationships, and to events" (163). By navigating the above questions while experiencing my Aunties' homes, I have determined that for Somali women, there is a semiconscious act of rhetorical making which has more deeply been initiated by migration and displacement.

One of the ways this rhetorical making is actualized in the home space is through objects that become symbolic outside of Somalia, due to the way displacement and migration have created a jolt to one's sense of self (as discussed in the previous chapter) thrusting them into a world where they experience who they are culturally as something foreign from the norm of their new geographic home position. Turkle (2007) conceptualized that things carry material and symbolic value, evoking remembrance, nostalgia, and other emotions connected to personal feeling. Beyond an objects' usage and its materiality, these possessions gain more value and meaning when contextualized through personal feelings and experiences. "Objects that people decide to keep when they move places are more special, since they become invested with the identities of their owners and so embody personal memories and family history. At the same time, it has been noted that, along with personal components of identity, material possessions can acquire additional 'cultural' or 'diasporic' qualities, thus acting as visible representations and manifestations of migrants' relationships and attachments to their home culture" (Pechurina, 35). This was indeed the case in my Aunties' homes as every house felt familiar

in a way that made me nostalgic for my own family home through the representations and manifestations of our home culture. Beyond the familiarity, there were common objects found in each home that signified and symbolized Soomaalinimo. I have decided to focus on two spatial lines/themes that connect Somaliness to the diaspora home space:

1. uunsi/incense and the idin/dabqaad (incense and the incense holder),
2. the sali/prayer rug and the way women dress that signals a Somaliness in the diaspora.

I found these elements as most spatially and sensorially present in the home spaces of all the Somali Aunties I had the pleasure of interviewing, and I am certain I would find them in many more homes were I to interview more Aunties. In the following sections, I will discuss the significance these particular objects have in the construction of Somaliness in the diaspora, and how their commonality in each home space highlights how Somali women engage in Hamilton's "communities of consciousness" when constructing spaces that reflect Somalia "in an ongoing quest for human dignity and collective self-actualization" through the "*cumulative* and *shared* endeavors to make themselves the kind of people they would imagine themselves capable of being," prior to being displaced (emphasis orig. 404).

Uunsi and the dabqaad: incense and the fire carrier

The first sensory and visual element to stand out in all of my Aunties homes throughout the world was the presence of uunsi/incense and the dabqaad/incense burner that holds the coals that burn it.

Auntie: *Xataa hadii aad guriga dhan dhaqday, hadii uunsi la shidin, gurigii nadiif ma'ahan. Even if you washed the whole house, if you did not burn incense, the house is not clean.*

Auntie: *A clean house with no uunsi is not clean. Not only is it believed to purify the air, it reminds us of where we came from. It reminds us of who we are. We are Somali.*

I have always loved the literal translation of dabqaad, which means the fire raiser. Even though I have found new ways to burn my incense, I too, have this artifactual object in my home. The dabqaad is made of a "white mineral of hydrous magnesium silicate" called Meerschaum, which is used in Somalia to carve objects like incense burners, kitchen stoves, and sometimes as art relief (Diriye Abdullahi, 2001). Though the traditional meerschaum dabqaad has been replaced by electric ones in the diaspora, it is still used and is an object you will find in the home of a Somali woman, especially one who is older than 65 years of age. It is symbolic, as it is connected to a longstanding practice in the Somali community, whether you were nomadic, pastoral, or city dwelling back in the homeland. The practice of burning uunsi and its proximity to Somali womanhood can be noted in women's use of it in daily life, and on many special occasions. In *Divine Fertility: The Continuity in Transformation of an Ideology of Sacred Kinship in Northeast Africa*, Somali archaeologist Sada Mire explains how traditionally, a Somali girl is often introduced to the practice of incense burning on her wedding day:

> The girl stands above an incense burner that is placed on the ground and puts on her wedding clothes. In this way, both her own skin and her dress are exposed to, and absorb, the aromatic smoke. A girl's first use of incense is intended to be on her wedding night and she will continue to use it for the rest of her married life ... Smoke

has a purifying importance. Incense is a ritual aroma which is used to bring blessings by attracting angels into a ritual sphere. In houses and mosques, incense is used to purify the sacred ritual space. People also use the smoke from incense to purify themselves ... (75).

In the diaspora, incense for women has come to represent a rhetorical making of Soomaalinimo, the ritual itself becoming common practice as a subconscious way to regain a closer connection to the culture. “In the evenings, Somali households burn incense or uunsie as a way to harmonise the home environment. In ways such as these, everyday cultural habits reveal a deeper concept of community, harmony and peace” (Mire, 157). Uunsi throughout the diaspora is a cultural homemaking practice which has become synonymous with a sense of Somaliness across generations, supporting the dimensions of multiplicity attached to the collective assemblages and lines drawn — to Somalia itself, its history, culture, and traditions — by the women who maintain its practice, regardless of geographic locale.

Figure 1. Image of video still of wall of carbon monoxide detectors with batteries removed from part of Nadia Faragaab’s Kronologies installation in 2001. Australia.

Australian Somali artist Nadia Faragaab had a poignant installation as part of her Kronologies exhibition which premiered in 2011. It was simple: a wall of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors left open and hanging—almost levitating, in fact—off the wall with all their batteries taken out.

As a Somali experiencing this exhibition, you would understand the implications and the message Faragaab was sending without explanation. It would be clear to members of the diaspora that she was paying homage to the practice of burning incense, and how Somalis in Western host countries navigate the smoke detectors by removing the batteries while burning coal in order to then burn uunsi/incense, which would create a fragrant smoke that took over the home. In the video provided by Blak Dot Gallery, Faragaab even states as much: "It is something that every Somali person will understand, especially in the diaspora. There's the uunsi, which is the incense that is very common in every Somali household. And of course in every house, especially in Western countries, you have smoke alarms. This installation is not one I had to explain to a Somali. They were like "we get it!" It wasn't abstract or anything" (Blak Dot Gallery, 2011). Somali homes of the diaspora have a smell of uunsi almost always lingering inside them due to the rate at which it is burned to keep the house smelling aromatic and familiar.

> **Auntie:** *"We have incense burning equipment ... for the burning of incense, which is [mainly made up of] frankincense—but Somalis have modernized the frankincense. They added perfumes and stuff, so we call it uunsi. And that's burned in my house all the time, and anybody who knows me or has any connection with me, knows what uunsi is.*

Figure 2. Dabqaad/Idin The Fire Carrier in Shirin's home in Carmignano di Brenta – Italy 2019.

Uunsi is an experiential and sensory-based practice: women burn it after cleaning their homes, incense themselves before social gatherings and events, burn it when guests are coming over — the practice of burning uunsi invokes nostalgia for all Somalis, not just for those who remember a Somalia of the past — it is also nostalgic for Somalis in the diaspora who grew up around this smell and liken it to what Somalia represents to them through the women in their lives. In my own home, it was a practice that was passed on. My mother even makes homemade incense, combining well-known fragrances from the middle east like *Al Bukhoor* with elements she refuses to share until we can make homemade incense together. It is a deeply rooted practice of the Somali diaspora and was present in every home in which I conducted interviews, from Kenya, to Italy, to Australia.

Figure 3. Dabqaad/Idin The Fire Carrier - mainly used to burn coal for burning incense/uunsi. Nairobi, Kenya 2019.

My curiosity was driven by the ways this particular artifact (the dabqaad), and the practice of burning uunsi have seemed to survive and thrive in the Somali diaspora, transmitted from generation to generation. "Though many cultures of the globe practice the burning of incense for various cultural reasons, Somalia has been the "world's principal source of the incense resins of frankincense and myrrh. It was known to Ancient Egypt and the Land of Aromatics." (Baltimore Sun, 1969).

> **Auntie:** *Uunsi in Somali culture is second nature. We don't think about it, we just burn it as part of our lives. I challenge you to find a Somali woman my age who doesn't burn uunsi.*

In Hadjiyanni's article, "Aesthetics in displacement - Hmong, Somalia and Mexican home-making practices in Minnesota," the researchers noted the way that "long corridors

were punctuated by the smells of the burning uunsi[12], an incense made of sugar, perfume and spices, notifying us, the researchers, that we were about to enter a unit occupied by Somali. When asked how her home shows this is the home of a Somali, a woman said: 'The smell. We use something called unsi to refresh the house (she showed us the machine used to burn the unsi). When you pass by apartments and you smell this, you know it is Somali people living there'" (543-544).

Figure 4. Auntie Shirin waving the smoke of the incense toward her at her home in Carmignano di Brenta, Italy 2019.

[12] The spelling of uunsi can differ in scholarship, depending on familiarity with the word. I have chosen to spell it the way I have seen it most commonly spelled within the Somali community.

Auntie: *Incense isn't something we even think about. It is such an ingrained part of our practice, you cannot separate a Somali woman from her uunsi. We use it to feel and smell beautiful and distinguish ourselves from the rest of the world. I could smell a Somali woman in another aisle at the shopping center, that's how ingrained it is as a practice. My mother did it, my mother's mother did it, and I guarantee my great grandmother did it too. My daughters even practice it. It's just who we are.*

And my Auntie is right. A quick search for the hashtag #uunsi online will even give you a glimpse of the way this fragrant practice has physically and metaphorically permeated the Somali diaspora and remained a mainstay for and between many generations. The Somali indigeneity of the materials within uunsi also work to explain why Somalia itself has been known as some of the following names: "In the beginning was the land, which has been called many things: Punt, Land of the Barbaroi, Terra Aromatica (Land of Aromatic Plants), Regio Cinnamafore (Land of the Cinnamon), Land of Milk and Myrrh, Land of the Somalis." (Diriye Abdullahi, 2001). Some of these names are clearly historically problematic, and others synonymous with what the region provided, some of them connected to the many practices that Somali women have also carried into the diaspora. Beyond the burning of uunsi, Somali women have also carried food, language, and religion into the diaspora with them. In the next section I will discuss how Somali women practice an aesthetic of religiosity as a way to maintain and construct elements of Soomaalinimo in the diaspora.

Islamic objects as aesthetic and a rhetorical performativity of religiosity

Somalis of the modern day cannot recall a Somaliness that is not deeply influenced by the Islamic religious tradition which is known to have touched Somali shores shortly after Muslims in Mecca were advised by the Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) to go to Abyssinia (an Ethiopian empire of its day which included Eritrea) to escape persecution (Netton, 2011). Being a predominantly Muslim community, a large portion of our culture and identity as Somalis is shaped by the teachings and practices of Islam. Furthermore, as Somalis resettled or migrated to countries where Islam was no longer the majority, a feeling of rootlessness had deepened in the community, increasing practices and connections that were comprehensibly Islamic as another way to fight assimilation and maintain more control of their identities as Somalis in the West. Two of the ways Islamic elements were visible in my Aunties' homes: the way Islamic religiosity has manifested for older women in the diaspora through the way they dress, and the presence of a prayer rug/sali in each of the homes.

Figure 5. *Auntie Shirin in Mogadishu, Somalia. 1970s.*

My Aunties all have an elegant way of maintaining traditional styles of Somali dress and incorporating this with Islamic veiling practices. Cawo Abdi explains how many diasporic Somali women wear new, more modest forms of dress "but one still sees some wearing the old *dirac* or *guntiino* in conservative versions. These are no longer made of transparent material, and a thick shawl completely covering the head and shoulders is worn over them" (193). My Aunties are all Somali women over the age of 65. All of them wore some form of a hijab, and they all still favored to wear a soft over-the-shoulder type shawl called garbasaar as a vibrant way to express a nod to their Somaliness.

In comparison, pictures of them in their youth in Mogadishu boast wardrobes and hairstyles hailing a fashionable community unhindered by conservative Islam— they shared images of themselves in their teens and 20's wearing miniskirts, long dresses with short sleeves, shorts, dirac, and more.

> **Auntie:** *In Somalia back then, things were different. We could dress however we liked. Wear hijab, or not. We were not as frightened of each other. And for those of us who left, we were forced into a new culture that could influence us in a way that we lose ourselves and our Soomaalinimo.*
>
> **Auntie:** *As young women back in Somalia in those days* [60s and 70s], *we were fashionable, Auntie! We wore whatever women were wearing in Europe. Dresses, miniskirts, scarves, glasses. Masha'Allah, we were a beautiful fashionable group. But things changed in Somalia and outside of Somalia, too. Things became tense in the '80s. We became more focused on modesty in dress, somehow. I'm not like that with my*

girls, but the community is. They can't dress like we did without judgement. I don't care, but the community sometimes judges. Life is different here.

My Auntie admits that expectations for Somali women to dress modestly has increased; that young Somali women of the diaspora who dress like she did in the '60s, '70s, and early '80s in Mogadishu would most certainly feel some backlash or judgment from the community. A Somali sociologist, Abdi speaks to this rise in modesty and veiling practices in the Somali community right before the war, expressing how it became mandatory in the late 1980s with the rise of influence from conservative Islamists—and as a way to combat the increasing threat of sexual violence brought on by the civil war (Abdi, 2007). Abdi does state however, that more freedoms are granted to Somali women of the diaspora and their daughters to wear what they please, but not without community scrutiny, depending on where you live and how connected you are to the Somali community within your location, as Berns-McGown expressed (2007). Abdi also highlights that this mandatory donning of the hijab in the Somali diaspora was an indication of increased scrutiny and regulation of women's bodies and behavior that was not the norm in the past. It was also then adopted by Somali women as a way to disrupt cultural hegemony in the West, by making visible their Muslim identity.

Figure 6. Somali woman in a dirac in Mogadishu (now resides in Australia). Somalia. 1987.

As Brah stated in “Non-Binarized Identities of Similarity and Difference”:

> “Identity is not an already given thing but rather it is a process. It is not something fixed that we carry around with ourselves like a piece of luggage. Rather, it is constituted and changes with changing contexts. It is articulated and expressed through identifications within and across different discourses. To have a sense of being, say, Muslim is therefore different when confronted with non-Muslims than with friends and family. This sense of self will vary depending on whether the non-Muslims are friendly or hostile.”

In this same text, Brah also explains how even though there could be cultural conflict within a particular Muslim community, this conflict is less likely to have an impact on one’s identity in the same manner as when there is a majority (non-Muslims) who may be antagonistic to them as Muslims (a minority). So the way one shapes an identity as Muslim (in the West) depends on whether the attitudes of the receiving community/country are friendly or hostile towards them. As noted by Leet-Otley, “for some Muslim women living in the West, veiling is a counter-hegemonic act – a desire to assert their Muslim identity in an often-hostile Judeo-Christian land” (43).

Figure 7. Auntie in her garden in Nairobi, Kenya. 2019.

As I also expressed in the introduction, Akou explains how Somali women in the Minneapolis area have opted to maintian wearing traditional dress as a way to express their cultural heritage and connections to the practice of Islam. The article also details the history of Somalis and the community's "long history of connecting dress with nationalism" (50). As expressed, in Minneapolis, this visible rhetorical performance of Somali identity is made possible because of the size of the Somali population in this particular city as it is one of the largest Somali diaspora populations outside of Somalia. Yet, for a particular generation, this is what they do to maintain a semblance of Soomalinimo within their new home communities, wherever that may be—as is evidenced by my Aunties and the similarities in their dress across varying geographic locales, some with minimal proximity to Somali communities. Akou added that Somalis have a long history of interacting with other cultures, from East African trading practices through to colonization, and dress has been "absolutely central in shaping their political and cultural identity in the course of these interactions" (Akou 61). In the diaspora, to dress Somali is to dress Muslim, and the two have become intertwined.

Figure 8. Auntie in her garden in Italy. 2019.

Auntie: *Habo, I dress like this because I am an old lady now [laughs]. It is what we all wear and what we are comfortable in. Our garbasaars and our hijabs and hats or whatever. We are Muslim and proud of it, no matter where we are. We are not afraid of the way people will treat us because of how we dress. Allah will protect us.*

My aunties all admit that the Somali people have been changed by the war, and that migration and displacement has initiated a rhetorical inquiry of our own culture and identity in new geographic and cultural contexts. Migrant communities work to understand who they are under this new scrutiny of identity in a new space — things made visible to them about themselves — that were not visible to them in their homelands. In *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed explains, "To become estranged from the familiar is thus to have it revealed to you. The familiar is disclosed in the revelation of your estrangement. You learn to see yourself as you are seen by those who can inhabit the familiar, because they can recede into its form" (86).

Auntie: [The last time I saw my father alive, before I left him in Somalia]my father said I made dua [prayer] for you. He said cover yourself with your scarf. After he made many many duas and said that wherever you go, let [the scarf] become your country.

Women of the Somali diaspora are then made to work hard to present and preserve a sense of Somaliness — which Islam has now become centripetal to — both across the diaspora and in the homeland.

Sheeko Sheeko: *I am about seven the first time I recall learning to pray on a sali/prayer rug, and I am reciting the Quran in a language I do not even know how to speak. My mother is praying beside me, and I am intently following her lead as I learn*

to make space for the embodied and meditative form that is Islamic prayer. We have many salis in our home. My mother's is beautiful in the way it is worn, frayed, and imprinted from overuse, remembering her folded knees and the shape of her hands and forehead. We have a special one to give to guests to use when they are visiting. In all of my years, I have not entered a Somali home that did not have a prayer rug.

Every single one of my Aunties had a well-used prayer rug/sali lying around in their homes when I visited with them. To the Somali, the sali is an object of utmost importance, as it is in many Muslim communities. We are oriented to the sali for its purpose to perform the ritual of prayer/salaat. As Ahmed expresses in *Queer Phenomenology*:

> It is not just that the object tends toward something, where the tendency supports an action, but that the shape of the object is itself shaped by the work for which it is intended [...] The object is not just material, although it is material: the object is matter given some form or another where the form 'intends' toward something (46-47).

Figure 9. Prayer rug in Somali home in Italy. 2019.

Here, I speak to the act of finding the Qiblah by positioning the sali during salaat to face the direction of the Ka'bah in the Sacred Mosque in Mecca. "A *sajjada* (a Muslim prayer rug), a small mat placed on the ground during individual prayer. Purity and cleanliness are of fundamental importance in Islamic tradition and sajjada is one element that protects Muslim worshipers from coming into contact with dirt, while standing or prostrating on a sajjada in the direction of qhiblah (towards Mecca) during daily salat (prayers)" (Rokhgar, 248-249).

The sali then — beyond its use — becomes an object that "intends towards" Mecca, also gaining symbolism in Muslim communities as a signifier of the presence of religious performativity, in respect to devoutness. For the Somali community, the absence of a sali can be as symbolic as its presence.

Figure 10. Prayer rug in Somali home in Kenya. 2019.

My Aunties are not ones to have a sali and not use it, but I admit, the sali in my own home is embarrassingly lacking distress. That means something about the way religiosity as a practice can vary among generations, which I hope to flesh out more in future work.

> **Auntie:** The sali is symbolic. It's always got the direction of Mecca, the picture of the Ka'bah. It's not absolutely necessary [to use], so long as what you're praying on is pure and clean, it's ok. But, it's a tradition. We've been doing it for years, from generations. It's also polite to give your guests a clean space to pray, a sali and a clean attire (covering for prayer).
>
> **Auntie:** Where there is a sali, that means people are praying.
>
> **Auntie:** Habo, there is nothing special and everything special about the sali. I say it is nothing special because it is just part of our daily lives. This is not a decoration. It is what we use to pray. Look at mine, it's old. I need a new one [laughs].

In their own words, my Aunties have explained the sali for its inherent value, but also for what it can symbolize in its absence. A home without a prayer rug, is like a young woman without a veil, a rootlessness to the centripetal pull of Islam in Somali culture. As Decimo so adequately explains:

> In the case of Somali women [...]the social and symbolic capital with which they materialize and give meaning to their continuity in dispersion prevents them from achieving—creatively yet painfully—their own "iconoclastic" culture of the diaspora. Multiple and systemic constraints act against them: [...]the morally restraining values of continuity of which themselves are the bearers, the sentiments of nostalgia and loss with which they are burdened, and the social obligations of solidarity and reciprocal social control to which they are subject. (113)

With this carrying of culture comes the solemn realization that Somali women of the diaspora cannot choose for themselves who they can become as they are tethered to the profound obligations they carry —to Somalia— to sow the seeds of our culture, our morals and ethics, and our ways of being within Soomaalinimo. They are to live not only as themselves, but as manifestations of what was lost to us as a community, culture, and country.

Chapter 5: Conclusion
Sheeko Xariir: A Story Made of Silk

Aqoon la'aan waa iftiin la'aan.
The absence of knowledge is the absence of light.
Somali Proverb

Ayeeyo |Grandmother

Hooyo | Mother

Habaryar, Eedo | Aunties

Somali women of the first generation are the ones who bear the load and pressure of continuing cultural practices and empowering a sense of Somaliness upon future generations in the diaspora. Without being asked and most certainly without any credit, elder Somali women of the diaspora have carried the culture and traditions of a broken nation across the globe. What we know about being Somali in the diaspora, we know because of the work that elder women in our community have put into remembering and reconstructing through the temporal and spatial, to ensure we are not disconnected from our sense of Somaliness. Elder women have carved Soomaalinimo out of the fibers they wore on their backs on their journey out of one trauma, and into another; fueling continuity, growth, and support for a traumatized diaspora. And after all this, Somali women's contributions to our history, culture, and traditions have consistently been erased and silenced in our community and within scholarship (Jama, 1991; Hassan, 1995; Hashi, 2016; Kapteijns and Boqor, 2009). When they are spoken of in the archives, there is no mention of their participation in cultural making beyond their roles as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters (Lewis, 1955; Jama, 1994; Jama, H. A., 2005); which are all roles that

encapsulate the labor of intergenerational knowledge distribution and growth, particularly in African communities. It is this absence of acknowledging the contributions Somali women have made to history and culture in scholarship that has fueled my own impetus for doing this research.

The purpose of this study was to more deeply explore through oral history how five Somali women of a particular generation embody and construct a remaking of Somalia in the diaspora. I worked to do this by spending more time observing their spaces, sharing cups of tea and meals with them, and sitting together to talk about the memories they have of Somalia before the war. In order to do this, I built "shaah iyo sheeko: tea and story" to represent my fused methodological practices, considering Black women's praxis of care, alongside the cultural rhetorics and Indigenous methodology of story. The tea represents the many ways that Black women across the African diaspora historically, theoretically, and culturally have taken it upon themselves to nurture, to preserve, and to heal Black communities across the globe.

The story represents time spent sitting with my Aunties to listen to their lives and gain wisdom, while practicing elements of autoethnography in my work to engage in the Somali practice of sheeko sheeko (interactive storytelling). As a Somali woman, my positionality and identity allow for my story to sit alongside the stories of my Aunties, creating a space for mutual care and trust — knowing that I, too, am in the work. As expressed, this epistemological approach allows for me to curate a new ontological specificity in which a discussion of experiences can be visualized between generations. Much of the knowledge I bring to my research comes from my own lived experience as someone who knows what it feels like to be displaced, and in turn, acknowledge the ways

you then learn —or at least attempt—to hold space for a culture or heritage, in whatever ways make sense for self-definition and identity.

My inclusion of theoretical and methodological frames from Black feminism and cultural rhetorics are an intentional choice to de-center Western ontological practices that often assume and pronounce these methodologies from communities of color (Indigenous scholars, Black women scholars, etc.) as less valid. Therefore, I maintained my focus on Black women's praxis of care, alongside the cultural rhetorics and Indigenous practices of orality and community remembering as another methodological frame for my research.

The absence of knowledge is the absence of light

The first major finding of my research is that Somali women of the first generation —my Aunties— are motivated by an unexpressed cultural obligation to ensure there is an intergenerational understanding of Somaliness. There is a fear that future generations of diasporic Somalis will forget their roots as they become acclimated to being away from the homeland. There is also a fear of an assimilation to Western individualism, making future generations less community minded, which in turn hurts those in the homeland (possibility of less remittances to support those in need back in Somalia, lost ties to those remaining in country, etc.). Another identifiable motivation that arose when speaking to my Aunties is a fear that future generations of Somalis will also lose the moral and ethical roots embedded in the communal care that many Africans thrive upon and need for survival. As such, they become the bridge that connects the diaspora to Somalia by maintaining everyday routines and practices that invoke Somaliness, its ethics and values, and cultures and traditions; it is found in the way their homes smell, the foods they cook and teach their children to make, the language they speak at home, the religious practices they maintain. Within the walls of

a Somali home lie layers of labor and love as women reconstruct a sensory and material version of what they knew to be Somalia.

> **Auntie:** *What would I do without my community? I pray with them, eat with them, raise my kids with them. We are together like we should be — even if it isn't in Somalia anymore.*

Soomaalinimo is also present when in community with each other — as was expressed in my Aunties' desire to be in closer proximity to other Somalis, sometimes even choosing to move to geographic locations known as epicenters of Somali cultural production. In these communities, the diaspora experience is not centralized in the home space and has moved into the broader community. One can shop at Somali malls, eat at Somali restaurants, attend religious ceremonies and events at Somali mosques, and so on. The immigrant experience can be an isolating one for those in the first generation, as they are the ones who experience the jolt to identity which makes them aware of all the ways their cultures and practices differ from that of the dominant society to which they migrate. My Aunties all expressed a realization that outside of Somalia they were no longer in a nation that would understand them as Somali in its essence, but rather, they would be essentialized as what Somali would come to mean in the West: a war-torn Black/African Muslim nation facing famine, drought, violence, and terrorism. At home, however, they are able to construct a place that engages Somaliness and provides them with some peace and comfort. They can be themselves.

> **Sheeko Sheeko:** *In January of 2018, we celebrated my son's birthday in Melbourne. My mother was happy to have him nearby for a birthday and called upon all of her friends and our family to get together to throw a barbecue for him. In true Somali*

Auntie fashion, they pulled all the stops for my 8-year-old son who was "home" with them from America. There were prime cuts of meat and sausages from the halal butcher, an assortment of salads, a cake, and more. They sat together and sang songs all afternoon, including singing him the Somali happy birthday song. As we sat together and ate, they kept singing, and as I watched the children run around and play to the backdrop of their melodies, I was overjoyed and honored to be in their presence. I understood in that moment, how much of our culture lies within them, and how naturally they disseminate that knowledge upon future generations. They do it just by living.

Figure 11. My child's birthday party in Melbourne, Australia. 2018.

Af jooga looma adeego.

"You shouldn't speak for one who's present"

I was moved in that moment to build a way of looking at the experiences of Somalis through a gendered lens, to understand more appropriately, the contributions made. As Hawa Mire explained, "This by no means is a new theorization— in 1995 three Somali

women writers theorize "early Somali nomad feminists expressed their protests with the means at their disposal—poetry, work songs, children's lullabies—and tried to change things by addressing both men and women" (35). While the contributions and resistances of Somali women to the maintenance and formation of a nation-state and the preservation of Somaliness in the diaspora cannot be understated, it is important to consider which Somali women's contributions are considered of value. The only place where the earlier 1995 definition of Somali feminisms stumbles is in its reification of a homogenous definition of Somali women, thereby erasing the particularity of Somali women's experiences in particular clans and ethnic groups, and the difference between those who were city-dwellers and pastoralists or nomads. This work is harder to flesh out in the diaspora, considering that snowball sampling limits my capacity to interview Aunties from varying pockets of the Somali community. What my work begins to do is highlight Somali women's work in the diaspora, without jumping into the complexities of our culture and which women's voices might be heard over others. I reiterate here that I had the honor of listening to the oral histories of five Somali Aunties, and it is from their perspectives that I work to tell a story. In future, my goal is to interview many more Somali Aunties with differing experiences and memories of Mogadishu. I hope to flesh this out more in future work as I do not want, as Mire added:

> The presumption of a uniform Somali women's experience [to begin] to be regarded as the norm disregarding the complexity of the multitude of intersections that make up a myriad of experiences in a Somali context. In fact, what is regularly left out is the clan hierarchies that inform Somali hegemonic practices that work to

> create stark economic disparities for women which further challenge the ability to mix as freely as has been claimed (35).

I do not want to join the ranks of Somali scholars (Ingriis and Hoehne, 2013; McMichael, 2002; Gardner & Bushra, 2004; Hopkins, 2010) Mire mentioned that have made assumptions about Somali women as one group, homogenized in a presumed display of uniformity. Though engagements in motherhood and supporting Soomalinimo in the diaspora may look the same for all groups of Somali women in this context, it is important not to render Somali women's experience within the community (via ostracization, economic instability, or other) invisible — especially in remembering Somalia — in the particular moment in which a new history has the chance to be written about and for Somali women, without "creat[ing] an ongoing generational silencing that propagates itself" as Mire warns could happen (35).

Far qoraxda ma qariso

"A finger does not hide the sun"

Soomaalinimo is a strong sense of connectivity to the memories, morals and ethics, and cultural and traditional practices carried into the diaspora by these very Aunties I have had the honor to spend time with, in research and community. Though the practice of Soomalinimo is changing as younger Somalis make shifts in the diaspora, it is through the communities of consciousness carried by the women of this generation that we have a semblance of Soomalinimo to begin with. However, As Al-Sharmani expressed,

> Somali refugees and emigres engage in distinct daily acts of constructing and articulating a collective Somali identity (Soomaalinimo).

> Yet, their articulations of this identity are neither uniform nor free from tensions. At play in the processes of the contestations and articulation of this diasporic Soomaalinimo are both local identities that have been shaped by the individual and group histories in the homeland as well as new identities that have been formed by [participants'] distinct diasporic experiences. The language in which this diasporic Somali identity is imagined, and the daily practices in which it is experienced and contested, are quite distinct. In other words, a new kind of a Somali nation is being imagined and created by diasporic Somalis (92).

For future generations, the culture carrying seems to manifest and reconstruct in varying ways, and that's where I hope to engage in my future cultural and digital scholarship. My work with the elder Somali women in the diasporic community, however, has allowed for me to foreground and give credit to the foremothers of the culture, while giving our community a place from which to name Soomalinimo in order to retell/recreate what that means for future generations. In my future work I plan to flesh out this articulation of Soomalinimo within social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok to look at how Soomalinimo is being reconstructed and formed by distinct diasporic experiences, specifically those who identify with a Somaliness that might be considered in the margins of our culture (ex-Muslim, queer, anything Other in relation to an identified sense of Somaliness). Somalis on the margins are using these digital spaces to build visibility and community, while connecting with one another across the globe to contest — through digital composing — the patriarchal, misogynist, and religious elements that are often problematically adopted through practices of Soomalinimo. There is also much to

explore in cultural digital rhetorics work regarding how various generations in the Somali community are using social media tools to engage and connect across the globe.

I am specifically interested in the ways that digital media tools work in Somali communities as transnational communicative tools for community-making and preservation — which calls for digital literacy practices and technological accessibility. For example: What's App is how I get daily affirmations from my mother (often in Arabic, of course) in Australia, and how *many* of my Aunties forward me gifs and videos, as we remain in contact. It is also how I connected with all of the Aunties in my research. What's App, in relation to accessibility, is also how I call and text my father who is currently working in Mogadishu. It is how I stay connected to my family and friends still in Somalia and other diaspora communities — and I know this is true for many in the diaspora. It has been an honor to center the experiences of our ayeeyos, hooyos, eedos, and habaryars. In order to research Soomalinimo, I had to give credit where credit was due before moving forward. However, I continue into my future digital and cultural rhetorics work with much excitement to explore the ways in which digital tools are helping shape and support new networks and literacies for diaspora communities like the Somali — and I hope to see what that means for the future of this newly displaced diaspora culture.

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