EXPRESSIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF CONTESTED IDENTITIES:

Generation 1.5 Somalis in Metropolitan Melbourne

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Abstract

Most Somalis aged between 18 and 30 living in Melbourne were born either in Somalia or en route to another country. These generation 1.5ers are described as being ‘caught in the middle’ of two cultures, and occupy contested identities — in the family sphere (competing parental and peer group expectations as well as fluctuating cultural norms), the public sphere (being raised in an environment where there is widespread distrust of Muslims and people who are visibly different), and the sphere of religious belief (many note tension between their faith and the expectations of mainstream Australians). Through interviews, focus groups, participant observation, community member profiles, and field notes, I investigated the question of how these young Somalis living in Melbourne express their identity. It became clear that young Somalis express their identities in a myriad of complex and contested ways. I found that this occurs in a complicated space where there are multiple competing social forces, as well as a deep engagement with Islam. The respondents negotiated this space with an acute awareness of how their identities are represented. This was not an abstract awareness, but one which permeated everyday interactions.

Muslim communities across the globe are no strangers to hyperbolic representation, and Somalis have been characterized as violent in both academic literature and the popular media. Many reasons have been given to justify this characterization, from the harsh environment of Somalia, the nomadic tendencies of the Somalis, and perhaps most importantly, the strong clan system. The second question investigated was how this portrayal of Somalis as violent in both the academic literature and the popular media compares with their actual expression of identity. Even though I did not set out to dispel myths about this particular population, I found that their identity expression was vastly different to common representations of them: this generation of Somalis seems no more likely to engage in violent behaviour than the average Australian of the same age. However, when violence does occur, it is subject to much more scrutiny than when it occurs in a mainstream setting.

The aim of this thesis is to shed new light on the nuances of the expression of identity in this group. It is hoped that policy makers, educators, community developers and academics take the findings detailed in this thesis to better inform future decisions and actions in this sphere.
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INTRODUCTION

Somalia is a country with a troubled recent political history. After being colonized in the late 19th century by Italy and Britain, the formal colonial regions joined forces to create the Independent Somali Republic in 1960. Power was seized in 1969 by Mohamed Siyad Barre, who founded the Somali Democratic Republic. His rule lasted until 1991, when he was overthrown and civil war broke out. After the eruption of war, a wave of refugees fled the country. They have settled in many parts of the world, most notably in Sweden and greater Scandinavia, Minnesota in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. There is a small but significant population in Australia (almost exclusively in Melbourne and Sydney).

I have been interested in the Somali community in Melbourne since 2010, when I started tutoring Community Development at Victoria University in Footscray. There were a number of Somali Australian students in my classes over two years, and I was struck by the fact that many of them were studying community development with the explicit aim of working in their community to improve the circumstances of Somalis living in Melbourne. They were generally very studious, and often took up my offers of extra assistance outside class time. Then, when I started studying Arabic at the University of Melbourne in 2011, I met more students, this time as peers. Again, I noted how hard they worked at their studies, and I met up with some Somali Australian friends for regular study sessions. I began to pay more attention to the way Somalia was represented in the mainstream media and noticed that the commonly available images of Somalia did not tally with my friends and students and the way they represented themselves. I wanted to know more about why this was the case.

Some of the young Somalis I met with had been born outside Somalia, and many had never been there at all. These scattered Somali young people are part of a much broader Somali youth living abroad, sharing common experiences of flight and resettlement. My study focuses on generation 1.5 Somali Australians living in Melbourne. The term generation 1.5 refers to individuals who were born in one country and have resided in another country from their late childhood or early teen years. This means they have cultural understanding of both their country of birth and the place they now call home. The respondents told me they have been raised to have pride in their Somali heritage, despite the negative perception of Somalia in the broader community. As generation 1.5ers, born in one place but raised in another, they are often ‘caught in the middle’
of two cultures. Practically, this entails translating things for their parents on a daily basis, or making appointments and navigating bureaucracy as their parents have difficulty understanding the way Australian systems work and many lack the ability to make themselves understood beyond the very basic English they have learnt since arrival. However, this straddling of cultures also has many abstract and emotional facets, which I sought to uncover.

I argue that young Somali Australians in Melbourne occupy very contested identities. In the family sphere, they are members of generation 1.5 and have to battle with competing parental and peer group expectations, and fluctuating cultural norms. In the religious sphere, many note tension between their faith and the expectations of mainstream Australians. In the public sphere, they have been raised in an environment where there is widespread and increasing distrust of Muslims and people who are visibly different.

While the term ‘hybridity’ has become popular over the last two decades or so in social theory, cultural theory and post-colonial studies as a method of capturing the multiplicities of culture and ethnicity, I have chosen not to use this term. I believe it recognises that cultures are not homogenous and that identity is at least partly built on difference, which is a crucial idea in this thesis. However the term is currently used ‘to register (positively) the ways in which identity formation, especially for diasporic populations, draws on and combines different elements to create something new’. There is a large array of scholarly work on the intricacies of hybridity, which is too complex to include in this thesis, so I have avoided the term. I also prefer to use the term ‘contested identities’ because I believe hybridity is too often seen as an inherently positive celebration of fluidity and multiplicity. Noble and Taber maintain that hybridity overstates the agency of social actors at the expense of the determining force of social relations, which is an accurate description of the respondents’ attempts to create and inhabit their identities. The term ‘contested identities’ better reflects the situation of young Somali generation 1.5ers in Melbourne, who sometimes struggle with expressing the different facets of their identities across the many spheres of life where they face conflicting expectations.

While the size of the Somali community in Melbourne is not large compared to other Somali communities (especially in the United States, for example), there has been substantial media focus on Horn of Africa populations in Melbourne, and indeed on the Somali community in particular. Within the community I found there were mixed reactions to the media scrutiny. For

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1 I discuss the concept of generation 1.5 further in section two. Briefly, a member of generation 1.5 has immigrated to a new place or country before their teen years. This means they bring characteristics from their country of birth, but they also have formative experience in their new home, thus placing them ‘half way’ between first and second generation migrants.


example, one Somali community leader told me he did not mind the media focus because it drew attention to the Somalis in Melbourne, which in turn could highlight the work that the many community organisations do. He hoped this might also lead to social, multicultural, educational programs being developed and targeted at the Somali community. However, many of the young respondents felt very differently. They believed they were targeted unfairly by the media and indeed were profoundly affected by their representation in the media.

The very public concern with Islam and its connection to terrorism was something they reported to colour mainstream perceptions of them and their families. Personally, I am fascinated by how these individuals construct and maintain a dynamic identity to be able to satisfy the competing needs of their families, peer groups, professional networks and colleagues and mainstream Australian counterparts. Muslims across the globe are no strangers to hyperbolic representation, but Somalis in particular have often been characterized as violent in both academic and popular contexts. Many reasons have been given to justify this characterization, from the harsh environment of Somalia, the nomadic tendencies of the Somalis, and perhaps most importantly, the strong clan system. Within this context, how do generation 1.5 Somalis living in Melbourne express their identity? How does this expression compare with the portrayal of generation 1.5 Somalis given in the academic literature and the popular media?

This thesis attempts to address these two interrelated questions. By interviewing generation 1.5 Somalis living in Melbourne, as well as some community leaders, it became clear that young Somalis express their identities in a myriad of complex and potentially contested ways. And this identity expression is in conflict with the way that they are portrayed elsewhere. The aim of this thesis is to shed new light on the nuances of the expression of contested identities in this group. It is hoped that policy makers, educators, community developers and academics take the findings detailed in this thesis to better inform future decisions and actions in this sphere.


Somali identity in Melbourne — a contested space

I have always been fascinated by not only the multiple identities individuals and groups inhabit over space and time, but also the stories people tell about themselves to reinforce those identities. I think this is an especially interesting question in a country like Australia, which has been built on migration. The migration story in Australia is a living story, and it is in constant flux. Many cultures and worldviews jostle side-by-side in Melbourne and the expression and intersection of this cultural manifestation is captivating and sometimes tense to observe and take part in. In some ways, this is a generic story. People who arrive and settle in another place are often confronted with disadvantage, misunderstandings, and a struggle to have their own cultural practices widely accepted.

I had a personal interest in the migration story in Australia, as a granddaughter of European refugees post-World War II, and I have often found it surprising to see the way that members of my own family consider newly-arrived refugees who are victims of different conflicts. It sometimes seems they have forgotten that they were largely welcomed into Australia and that they settled and, with support, were able to contribute to Australian society over many decades. Anecdotally, I have noted a consistent attitude of fear towards new waves of refugees, and mistrust about their motives within my grandparents’ peer group. In my own life, an opportunity arose to meet with and gain a greater understanding of a particular community in Melbourne — Somalis who fled their homeland after the outbreak of civil war in 1991. The resulting thesis is a fusion of my own interests in the identity of migrants and refugees in Australia, and my personal connections with some young Somali Australians through work and study. This has allowed me to examine their identity expression in the context of the broader migration story in Australia and to better understand how the very particular circumstances which affect them are representative of what I consider to be much more widely experienced issues.

The people I met with were young adults like myself. Indeed, this time of life is well known for being a period where individuals go through great changes in their conceptions of self and the way in which they express this to others. However, their stories have an added layer of complexity because they are at the forefront of managing and negotiating identities that come from different places — geographical, cultural and perhaps imagined.

One thing that struck me very early on in my research (and indeed, prior to my research officially commencing) was just how contested the question of identity appeared to be for generation 1.5 Somalis. Prior to outlining my theoretical and methodological considerations (and well before any findings), I want to set the scene by presenting several separate isolated comments. These quotes all stemmed from individual interviews with a generation 1.5 Somali women, discussing moments when they felt like they really belonged in Australia, like they ‘felt at home’.
Amal: Once I got over not knowing English, my primary school years up to year 7 or 8, I didn’t feel any different. You know, even with my scarf, I didn’t pay any attention to it at all. It was just in high school when I felt myself growing apart from my parents and I couldn’t speak to them. And later, in year 12, people started looking, and making comments.

INTERVIEW / 21.01.2014

Amal implicitly covers a vast array of issues. The forging of her identity, conceiving of herself against the difference of her parents, the importance of language as a normalising discursive structure, the ‘look’ of others who started to see her in terms of ideological categories and the power relations in such moves. Everything here centres on the theme of identity and just how challenged this space is for Amal.

Sumaya: Australia has the same values as I have, Islamically and culturally. It’s universal values. So I don’t feel like I don’t belong. It’s my home. I don’t think I’ll ever go back to Somalia. I know there are people who dream of going back, but I’ll never go back there, I don’t think it would be safe to live there. This is my home; my grandchildren are going to be born here. So I feel that my identity is Australian.

INTERVIEW / 05.05.2013

Sumaya is defiant in stating that she feels Australian. This is an example of a member of generation 1.5 who protests that she feels Australian through and through. However, she is not claiming that she is Australian. She also presents her identity against the backdrop of the harsh reality that for reasons of personal safety, she could not return to Somalia, even if she wanted to.

Muna: The first time I went to Malaysia, a taxi driver asked me and I told him I’m Australian. That was the first thing that came out of my mouth, I didn’t really think about it. It just came out. And he said ‘You’re not Australian, you’re not white.’ And I thought... ‘No, I’m not white, but I’m still Australian.’ But I didn’t say it out loud. I was thinking it, but I didn’t say it. As soon as he said, ‘You’re not Australian’, I jumped and said, ‘Oh, I’m Somali’. But in my mind, I’m not Australian, but I feel Australian and I belong to Australia, but the second thing that came out was I’m Somali, even though I don’t really believe that. But when I felt at home and felt Australia was my home was when I came back [from travel] and thought ‘this is where I belong.’

INTERVIEW / 03.02.2014
Muna’s story again highlights how contested the question of identity is, both for members of generation 1.5, and in terms of others individuals’ projections of categories of identity. She explicitly states that she is ‘not Australian’, but that she ‘feels Australian’, thus drawing a distinction between these two aspects of her identity.

These comments were among many that had a story to tell about Somali generation 1.5 identity in Melbourne. The way in which this group creates, maintains and expresses identity was one of the things that I felt most personally drawn to in setting out on this research project.

**Contemporary Islamic issues and the Australian context**

While it is certainly a topic of interest, it’s almost absurd to ask ‘What are contemporary Islamic issues?’ Any reasonable answer must be extensive, complex and detailed to be able to touch on the pertinent subjects. Nonetheless, many forms of media are consistently reporting on Muslims and Islam. These reports are overwhelmingly negative. Some recurrent themes are: Islamic radicalization and the threat of terrorism; an Islamic war against the West; civil wars in a number of Muslim majority countries and the associated displacement that has occurred — refugee camps with tents as far as the eye can see, women and children bearing arms to protect their meagre possessions as they flee and the emptiness of towns that have been ransacked and looted.

There is a constant debate around democratization in the Islamic world. Some commentators believe the process is underway, especially with the Arab Spring of 2011-12. Still others mourn that this revolution was stifled and not able to reach its potential. Whatever the answer, there has been a violent backlash in many Muslim majority countries, and with the birth of Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) movement, it seems that in some quarters, a Western war has yet again been declared on Islam.

Writing for the EU, Ehteshami highlights the complexity surrounding Islam today:

> The Muslim world, comprising some 50 sovereign states and large minorities in many other countries, is a well-integrated and integral part of the modern world of states. It does, however, also contain a complex and intricate web of relations and forces which it periodically unleashes on the rest of the international system.8

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Perhaps unintentionally, Ehteshami himself falls prey to the common tendency to perceive Islam as something ‘other’, a monolithic religion that will ‘unleash’ its forces on an unsuspecting West. Ehteshami goes on to state that any notion of legitimate contemporary Islamic issues is often overtaken by a radical minority: ‘I am often struck by how defensive the Muslim states are and how difficult they seem to find the struggle to defend their own interests. Little room is left for forging a concerted effort to defend what are regarded to be legitimate Muslim interests’.

It is difficult to imagine what exactly are legitimate Muslim interests, as these will vary from region to region and between countries and different ethnic groups. However, the perception that a radical minority often takes over the stage and drowns out other interests is a common one.

Contemporary Islamic issues are covered at length in this thesis. Threads are woven throughout and these issues will be returned to a number of times. However, a broad-brush definition that does not appreciate the turbulent, convoluted and multifarious facets of Islam today would only be counterproductive. Rather, a narrowing of the focus of Islamic issues in the Global South and, indeed, the Australian context will be helpful in setting the scene for this research.

Muslims in Australia (and arguably those who are refugees even more so) are subjected to a very high level of media scrutiny and reporting. This scrutiny produces much shallow and simplistic reportage, with many ‘sound-bite characterizations’ of Muslims. Over the last decade, there has been an almost hysterical awareness of ‘boat people’ and fears about terrorism, which have been actively linked not only by unscrupulous media outlets, but also by the general press and by government ministers. Issues surrounding terrorism, radicalised Islamic youth, and concerns regarding Muslim assimilation seem to be on an ever-revolving news cycle. These issues are at the forefront of Australian politics and foreign policy and whenever things seem to have settled down, the merry-go-round comes full circle, recently resulting in new anti-terrorism laws and the prospect of banning the burqa in Federal Parliament.

It is often forgotten in Australia that there is a largely peaceful Muslim world at our doorstep. Many of our closest neighbours are Islamic countries, or have significant numbers of Muslim inhabitants. Esposito explains:

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Islam is the second largest of the world’s religions. The 1.3 billion Muslims of the world are spread across more than fifty-six Muslim majority countries and in a matter of decades have become a significant presence in Europe and America, where Islam is the second and third largest religion, respectively. Despite its global profile, Islam in the popular imagination—and often in the media—still tends to be disproportionately identified with the Arab world or the Middle East. Yet, in fact, the vast majority of Muslims are in Asia and Africa.

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9 Ibid.
Australia is firmly located in the Global South, although it sometimes appears that we struggle with this notion. Although around 75% of Australia’s foreign aid budget is spent in Asia and the Pacific, it has been argued that our media reportage and common self-perception are somewhat Eurocentric.

Muslims have been in Australia since the 1800s, the first arrivals being Afghan camel drivers who worked in the vast and arid deserts inland. The Ghan railway from Adelaide to Darwin is named in their honour. Many of these Asians (almost always called ‘Afghans’, despite their varied origins) settled around Alice Springs and in areas of the Northern Territory. The first mosque in Australia was built at Maree in South Australia in 1861. Under the White Australia policy, non-European Muslim migrants were denied entry in the early 20th century. However, Muslims of European descent were permitted to enter the country. Interestingly, this manifestly unjust social policy made a distinction between different sorts of Muslims based on ethnic grounds. This saw a wave of Albanian Muslims arrive (the first Albanian mosque was built in Shepparton, Victoria in 1960, which is now a regional hub for Sudanese migrants).

In the post-war years, the Australian government took the view that greater immigration would be beneficial for Australia. Under the catchphrase ‘Populate or Perish!’, it accepted millions of migrants and displaced persons from Europe. A policy of multiculturalism was adopted in the 1970s, and the White Australia restrictions were finally reversed. This significantly broadened the criteria for which types of migrants would be permitted and consequently, there was an influx of migrants who had not been previously permitted entry to Australia. This included Lebanese Muslims (and Lebanese Christians), and Muslims from Africa, South East and Central Asia and from the Middle East. I do not suggest that Somalis are the same as Lebanese or those other Muslim arrivals. Indeed, they have different cultures and languages. But I do situate the recent arrival of Somalis in the context of the history of Islam in Australia.

In the late 1970s, the first Vietnamese ‘boat people’ began to arrive in Australia. They were fleeing the war in their homeland and their arrival coincided with a period of social change and upheaval in Australia. There was much popular opposition to the Vietnam war, and the refugees

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11 Usha Mahajani, "Is Australia a Part of Asia?," *The Australian Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1964); Fergus Hanson, "The Lowy Institute Poll 2010," (Australia: Lowy Institute, 2010).
were allowed to stay. Since then, there have been successive waves of sea-borne refugees, from China, Chile and most recently from Sri Lanka, Africa and the Middle East. It has only been in more recent years that significant numbers of Muslim refugees have begun to attempt the risky passage to Australia by boat. This has been a direct response to the conflict that has plagued countries like Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan for the last decade. After the September 11, 2001 attacks in America, the security of Australian borders became linked to terrorism (although boat arrivals were not linked to terrorist attacks in any way previously). The then Defence Minister Peter Reith warned that unauthorised arrival by boat could be ‘a pipeline for terrorists to come in and use your country as a staging post for terrorist activities’. While the vast majority of asylum seekers arrive in Australia by plane rather than boat (between 2000 and 2010, more than 95% of asylum seekers arrived in Australia by plane), this equation of boat people with terrorism has also been linked to Islam.

Although the Muslim population of Australia is holding steady at around 2%, it receives a statistically disproportionate amount of media attention. Some of this attention is positive, but most of it is negative. Writing in The Australian, Greg Sheridan describes Muslim migration as a ‘huge, unregulated Islamic inflow’. He believes that ‘this boatpeople phenomenon is essentially a determined Muslim immigration’.

In August 2014, the Prime Minister announced a raft of new counter-terrorism measures, which included:

- More than $600 million in additional funding over the next four years for agencies involved in counter-terrorism activity … This funding responds to reduced agency expenditure on counter-terrorism since 2009 and supports new programmes to bolster monitoring and disruption activities in Australia and overseas;
- Further legislative measures (in addition to those currently before Parliament) to toughen our national security laws. Together, these changes will strengthen our ability to arrest, monitor,
investigate and prosecute returning foreign fighters, prevent extremists departing and broaden the criteria for terrorist organisations to include those that encourage terrorist acts.\(^{24}\)

Some Australian Muslims have reported being victimised in their homes and neighbourhoods with the recent developments regarding Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL).\(^{25}\) In Melbourne’s South East, a terror suspect was shot dead by police on September 23, 2014. He was a Melbourne teenager who arrived from Afghanistan with his family in the mid 2000s. He had had his passport revoked the previous month by ASIO due to security concerns.\(^{26}\) A week later, on September 30, there were raids across Melbourne in a joint anti-terrorism operation conducted by the Federal Police, Victoria Police and the FBI. One man was charged with funding a terrorist organisation.\(^{27}\) It seems that there is mounting social, political and cultural tension between Muslim Australians and Non-Muslim Australians.

The importance of understanding Islam as a force for configuring identities

This thesis is concerned with the expression of generation 1.5 Somali Muslim identity in Melbourne and the conditions under which this identity is formed. It is also interested in the relationships between externally constructed representations of Somalis and the way in which they construct their identities themselves. In recent years, many studies have been undertaken into various aspects of Islam in the Australian and indeed wider Western contexts. A common theme of these studies has been media coverage.\(^{28}\) Another area of interest is the relationship between Australian democracy and Islam,\(^{29}\) and of course, terrorism.\(^{30}\) While considerable academic efforts have been directed to revealing the homogenisation of Muslim identity in dominant discourse, I believe there is a need for more scholarship that examines specific ethnic and cultural Muslim communities. This will help to

\(^{25}\) Mariam Veiszadeh, "Muslim women scared to go outdoors in climate of hate," The Age, October 11, 2014
\(^{26}\) Steve Lillibuen, "Numan Haider: from teenager to terror suspect," The Age, September 25, 2014 2014
avoid the continued homogenisation of Muslim identity, and contribute to a greater understanding of the richness and depth of cultural and religious practice.

Over the past decade an extensive compendium of literature has been compiled from many intellectual spheres regarding Islamic identity. A significant portion of this research seeks to examine young Muslims born and raised in western contexts, the types of identities they exhibit, and the many and varied influences on their identity construction and manifestation. What these studies have shown most clearly is that there is a plethora of possible ways of ‘being Muslim’ and also that there is no one cohesive Muslim identity with which academics and social commentators may engage.

Much of the extant literature concerning Muslims living among a broader non-Muslims majority is focused in some way on issues surrounding the concept of identity. In a study of young British Muslim women, Claire Dwyer states that it is important to understand the many subject positions young Muslims occupy as well as the ‘extent to which their everyday lives are constituted in and through matrices of power embedded in intersecting discourses and material practices’. While this is necessarily true of subjects in a society, Dwyer highlights the magnitude of this for young Muslims compared with other groups. This was very strongly supported by my research.

One important aspect of identity for generation 1.5ers is that, as a result of rapidly developing technology, and the effects of globalisation, there has been a weakening of ‘all the modes of controlling difference premised on territoriality’. There are myriad ways to stay connected, even with a country that has been in political turmoil for more than two decades. Somalis in Australia can contact friends and family in Somalia using various forms of technology and can fly back home if desired (although they monitor the stability of the country carefully and are constrained by financial positions). Perhaps equally importantly, they can access international and local news in a language of their choice and can communicate their own news and information to members of their community, in Australia, in Somalia and living elsewhere around the world.

The ease of transnational communications has allowed young Somalis to create their identities in Australia, but with some reinforcement from Somalia and Somalis elsewhere. It provides them with a direct line to the prevalent cultural, social and religious ideals in Somalia, despite the thousands of kilometres that separate their new home from their old home. There are many blogs and forums dedicated to young people’s experience of Somali life outside Somalia.

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32 Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane I. Smith, Muslim Minorities in the West: Visible and Invisible (California: Altamira Press, 2002).
This is a relatively new phenomenon in the refugee experience, as in the past some refugees might go for years or even decades without any communication from their birth country. This technology was also often discussed in interviews and focus groups.

Islam is often discussed as a political and religious phenomenon, but it is, of course, also a social phenomenon. The outward expression of Islam in society is deeply embedded in the actions of its practitioners. In the current complex politico-social context, it is imperative to understand why and how people are configuring who they are in relation to Islam to better address the issues raised. I chose to examine the combination of factors that contribute to young Somali identity in Melbourne. Beginning with their circumstances in Somalia (family, clan, wealth and political position). I then asked questions about their journey to Australia (motive, mode of transport, duration and stops along the way). Finally, I investigated their settlement in Australia and their experience of living in two distinct areas of metropolitan Melbourne (Heidelberg West/Preston and North Melbourne/Flemington).

The research question can be separated into the following two inter-related issues:

(i) How do generation 1.5 Somalis living in Melbourne aged between 18 and 30 express their identity?

(ii) How does this compare with the representation of generation 1.5 Australian Somalis in both the academic literature and the popular media?

Structure of the thesis

Aside from the introduction and conclusion, this thesis is divided into four main sections. I am certainly not the first person to think about questions of identity for young adults, issues facing refugees, more particularly the way that power and violence affect them, and how misrepresentation of minority groups occurs and is subsequently proliferated. Accordingly, the first section covers the theoretical terrain, providing a grounding in theories I believe are most relevant to generation 1.5 Somalis in Melbourne.

Firstly I cover some salient points of theories of identity. Drawing on a number of scholars, my core argument is that individuals may inhabit numerous, dynamic and fluid identities. Examination of the literature points to the many attributes of identity, and the immense importance that the political notion of power has in the construction and expression of identity. I also cover issues surrounding the conceptualisation of identity, power, discourse and ideology. Next, another important theoretical notion — that of social capital — is discussed. I then look at theoretical conceptions of violence, drawing a distinction between overt and covert violence. Finally, I outline the way in which these notions connect with the actors in question: Generation 1.5 Somali Australians in Melbourne today.
The second section shifts the focus away from the theoretical knowledge necessary to understand such complex issues, and discusses a methodological framework for doing so. These methodological considerations include an outline of critical narrative inquiry and the importance of critique in ethnographic research. I also detail my experience in obtaining ethics approval and discuss the limitations of the study. Next I discuss the process and logistics surrounding the fieldwork; my methods of interaction with the respondents (participant observation, community member profiles, focus groups, interviews and field notes); and conclude by providing some personal reflections on the process.

The third section seeks to contextualise both Somalia and the Somali people living in Melbourne in order to locate my research questions. I detail specific historical and political circumstances and demographic information about the community in Melbourne, in order to prepare the reader to be able to more fully understand and appreciate the specificities of the empirical data to come. Accordingly, I begin by examining the ‘official’ version of Somali history, and then take a closer look at some contested issues. I look in detail at some of the violence and conflict that has occurred since independence was achieved in 1960 (in Somalia and connected with Somalis living abroad). I also examine the ways in which violence is often attributed to Somalis both in Somalia and abroad by tracing how such representations have been constructed over centuries, and the ways in which Somalis are represented and misrepresented in terms of violence today. Next I focus on those who have left Somalia, and re-settled in Australia. I contextualise the Somali migration story by discussing the broader phenomenon of migration to Australia. What follows is some demographic information regarding Somalis in Melbourne. This information helps to situate the specific findings from my study.

Finally, section four comprises three chapters, which detail the findings of the study. The first chapter deals with overt violence that has recently taken place in Somalia and the way it has been interpreted by the respondents. I discuss events and situations that have affected Somalis in Melbourne, reflect on these, and examine whether or not they are covert forms of violence. Next I turn to the descriptions (in their own words) of violence that have affected generation 1.5 Somalis in Melbourne, and finally examine the idea of ‘radicalisation’ and the way in which generation 1.5 Somalis conceptualise it.

The second findings chapter focuses on Islam as part of the lived experience of my participants, and the way that they think of the clan system. I draw a distinction between the ways the respondents engage with Islam in a very practical sense (observing dietary requirements, daily prayers, regular worship) and the way that their knowledge of the clan system, while quite sophisticated, is mostly theoretical, and not part of every day practice.

The final findings chapter firstly deals with the nature of the contested identities occupied by generation 1.5 Somalis in Melbourne, by highlighting the multiple (and often competing) facets that influence the configurations of identity expression. Next I discuss the value of education in the
Somali community and the perspectives of generation 1.5 on the importance of education. Education is something that is prized by the Somali Australian community, and consequently carries a great deal of expectation. Lastly, I discuss the place of women in the Somali community, and how this adds another compounding factor to the contested sphere that informs generation 1.5 expressions of identity.

In the conclusion of the thesis, I offer my own concluding reflections and recommend some further avenues of research.
I THE THEORETICAL TERRAIN

Framing of identities: power, social capital and violence

Introduction

This section examines the salient points of some theories of identity. Drawing on a number of scholars, my core argument is that individuals may inhabit numerous, dynamic and fluid identities. This is in direct response to the notion that there is a stable and unified self that can be “discovered” through introspection. Examination of the literature points to the many attributes of identity, and the immense importance that the political notion of power has in the construction and expression of identity. Understanding various forms of power and their social manifestations, I argue, is central to understanding social influences on generation 1.5 Somali identity. The section thus covers important theoretical terrain for the research: issues sounding the conceptualisation of identity, power, discourse and ideology. Next, another important theoretical notion — that of social capital — is discussed. Another key theme of this thesis is that of violence — the ways in which it is understood and attributed to certain groups or individuals. Finally, I outline the way in which these notions connect with the actors in question: Generation 1.5 Somali Australians in Melbourne today.

In this section, I cover a number of theoretical ideas that may, at first glance, seem slightly disparate. However, these ideas have all been selected in order to present a coherent and connected picture. As will become clear, I posit that at the centre of my schema, an individual inhabits a world constituted by complex and multifaceted identities. These can be broken accordingly into situational, social and personal identities, each with their own potentially granular categories. A level out from the centre, there is a world of social capital, which is effectively the operationalisation of a further conceptual level — that of a Foucauldian network of power relations, which permeate and filter through to the social capital level. Power, discourse and ideology are expressed through concrete examples in terms of social capital. My aim is that all of this becomes clearer throughout the section as I discuss this schema.
Conceptualising identity in the Islamic context

Scholars have been challenging and problematising the notion that individuals have one fixed and immutable identity for many decades now. Identity theories have traced an interesting trajectory over the centuries — from the pre-enlightenment notion that identity was conferred by external (moral) authorities, to the post-enlightenment idea that the identity was more personal and internal, and finally to the commonly accepted idea today that identity is, in many senses, socially constructed.¹ There is also the extra tension between the identity an individual wishes to inhabit and express, and the identity, that is imposed, allowed, or conferred on that individual by others.

In my own reading, I found John Hewitt’s work a useful starting point for conceiving of multiple faceted identities. Hewitt has elaborated a tri-partite definition of identity comprising of: situational identity, social identity, and personal identity.² Situational identities are those which are predominant in face-to-face interactions with others. This concept is certainly not a new one and was described as early as 1937 by William Isaac Thomas. Thomas wrote that upon entering the presence of others, we mutually construct a definition of the situation.³ The ability to define our own and others’ situational identities enables us to know how to act (and how not to act). It also informs our expectations and interpretations of behavior, both our own, and others’.⁴ We reveal our situational identities in various ways, especially through language and appearance. This allows those we are interacting with to define or place us in the given social situation.⁵ Situational identities are necessarily in a state of constant flux, and are able to change rapidly in dynamic, interactive environments. However, according to Hewitt, some aspects of identity are more stable and enduring.⁶ Our appearance and ethnic identification are clear examples of this.

As we move across situational identities, we define social identities for ourselves and others based on group memberships. These social identities remain relatively stable across different situational contexts. The membership groups are most often derived from ascribed characteristics and socially constructed categories such as gender, ethnicity, age, religion and class. While they provide meanings and labels that define who we are, they depend upon mutual recognition by

ourselves and at least some others.\textsuperscript{7} 

\textit{Personal identity} describes the efforts of an individual to construct and preserve an ‘autobiography’ or ‘life story’, which helps establish a sense of difference from others.\textsuperscript{8} Erving Goffman explains that personal identity involves distinctive traits of individuals, including their name and appearance, personal history and information, personality characteristics, and their special place in a particular kinship network.\textsuperscript{9} Jan Stets goes a step further and demarcates personal identity as the identity that defines us as unique individuals.\textsuperscript{10} While the distinctions between situational, social, and personal identity are a useful conceptual tool, I do not mean to suggest that these forms of identity are mutually exclusive. In any given exchange or relationship, all three or any combination of these identities is relevant to the thinking and behavior of participants.\textsuperscript{11}

In a particularly influential formulation, Stuart Hall argues that we should not discuss one identity, but rather focus on \textit{identities} because in his view, there are ‘processes that constitute and continuously re-form the subject’. Identities can therefore be understood as ‘temporary attachments’, which allow for the continual re-articulation of the self. Hall describes identities as ‘narratives’: the ‘stories we tell about ourselves’.\textsuperscript{12} These are contingent on location (especially pertinent for migrants and refugees) and context and this contextuality leads Hall to describe identities as ‘sliding’.

For Hall, identities are attached to more than one particular marker or classification (religious, ethnic, national etc…).\textsuperscript{13} Amartya Sen also deals with the importance of a singular method of classifying people by linking their identity to one particular marker.\textsuperscript{14} In describing the riots that occurred during the last years of the British Raj in Bengal, he tells the moving story of a man staggering into the garden where he was playing, bleeding profusely and begging for water. The 11-year-old Amartya yelled for his parents and the man was rushed to hospital. But it was too late and he could not be saved. The victim, Kader Mia was a Muslim day-labourer who had been stabbed to death by Hindus. His only crime was his religion. Sen describes his utter confusion at this horrific event. Why should people who have lived peacefully side-by-side suddenly turn on each other in a conflict that would kill many thousands? How could the poor day-labourer be seen as having only one identity — a Muslim who belonged to an ‘enemy’ community — when he

\textsuperscript{10} Jan E Stets, "Role Identities and Person Identities: Gender Identity, Mastery Identity, and Controlling One’s Partner," \textit{Sociological Perspectives} 38, no. 2 (1995).
\textsuperscript{11} Vryan, Adler, and Adler, "Identity."
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 66.
belonged to many other communities as well? ‘For a bewildered child,’ Sen writes, ‘the violence of identity was extraordinarily hard to grasp. It is not particularly easy for a still bewildered elderly adult.‘ Similar, Veena Das has described how violence which might have once been considered brutal, extraordinary and unexpected can become the norm when certain aspects of identity are negated or elevated.

In discussing the construction of Muslim identities in Mali, Brenner describes identity as ‘a process of naming: naming of self, naming of others, naming by others’. In his work there is a consistent emphasis on the nature of identity as ‘constructed and reconstructed by self and/or others through continuing actions and discourse in a political context’. Louis Brenner describes action and discourse as religiously inspired and also as motivated by social, political and economic systems and incentives. Thus, the process of ‘naming’ of both individuals and groups takes place against the background of the broader socio-economic context. Given the influencing factors on the construction and formation of identity, the investigation of the dynamics behind the labels people give to themselves and each other is able to provide insight into processes of social transformation. One major limit to Brenner’s notion of identity as ‘naming’ (which he uses chiefly due to pragmatic considerations) is that it does not account for the many complexities that comprise the issue of identity and identification, rather it presents the notion of ‘labelling’ as a working definition of the concept of identity.

Yuval-Davis discusses the establishment of cultural identities by refugees in their adopted homelands, and the various influences that affect this in great detail. She describes how factors such as gender, ethnicity, class and the very fact of being a refugee are used as markers to identify where an individual stands in terms of the ‘grids of power relations in society’. Like Hall, she highlights the importance of the ‘stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not).’ She believes that ‘constructions of self and identity can … be forced on people’.

The definitions above have focused inward from the standpoint of individuals in terms of individual agency, and the power of others to label identities. Another important standpoint is that of defining processes or social forces — that is, the effect that the outside world has on our constant creation and recreation of identity. This theme is taken up shortly, but it is worth discussing the notion of identity construction as defined in relation to what one is not. Anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen does not speak of identity. Rather, he terms the process ‘identification’ because

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15 Ibid., 173.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 200.
22 Ibid., 202.
identities are dynamic and exist only in relation to others. This idea can be taken further to the argument that we can only see ourselves by interpreting the words and actions of others towards us. That is, we see ourselves as we think others see us. Thus, the idea of self is distinctly social.

Numerous investigations of the role of religion in maintaining group identity and solidarity have been conducted, particularly in the case of migrants and refugees living in diaspora. Many of these studies examine the nexus between religion and ethnic identity. Additionally, many scholars have acknowledged and documented the enduring importance of religion in the preservation of cultural and ethnic traditions. Religion is understood to support the adjustment of first generation immigrants to a new host society, and providing a source of identity (although, often highly contested) for the second generation.

Different migrant groups, undoubtedly, conceive of and integrate their religious and ethnic identities in distinctive ways. Some communities emphasize religious identity more than their ethnic foundation, whereas others focus on ethnic identity and use religious institutions in the main to preserve cultural traditions and ethnic boundaries. Amit-Talai proposes a ‘transnationalism’ in which there is a bistatal connection between the homeland identity and the host country identity that spans cultural, political and geographic borders.

Immigration itself has at times been described as a theologizing experience, as migrants and refugees are faced with stress, alienation, and confusion that result from their arrival in a new country, which in turn encourages them to an increased religiosity. Thus, we can see the building of religious institutions and the establishment of familiar social and cultural activities within them.

26 Andrea Althoff, "Religious Identities of Latin American Immigrants in Chicago: Preliminary Findings from Field Research " in Religion and Culture Web Forum (Martin Marty Center, 2006); Hammond, "Religion and the Persistence of Identity."
as an attempt to resolve adjustment issues in the new host society. This can lead to a situation where religion assumes greater importance in the receiving country than it was granted before arrival.

It has also been contended that religion is used as a marker of personal and social distinctiveness in a multicultural context. As strong religious orientation is becoming less common in pluralistic and secular societies, members of a particular faith group may become more conscious of their traditions and transmit their beliefs, values, and behaviors more resolutely. Religious dress (particularly pertinent in the case of Islam), practices, and organisational affiliations serve as identity markers that help to promote individual self-awareness and preserve group cohesion. This is how religious, ethnic, and national heritage is displayed and thus maintained.

In this way, religious expression may ease the tensions between refugees and mainstream society in their new homeland by acting as a clearly understood identity ‘marker’. It is possible that ethnic variation will becomes less problematic when individuals define themselves first and foremost in religious terms. This will enable diverse communities to be brought together through shared worship. Membership in some kind of religious organization has also been shown to have psychological and social benefits. These include but are not limited to: economic opportunities, connection to community networks, access to educational resources and a sense of peer trust and support. These benefits all reduce social isolation for migrants and refugees. One can posit that as these benefits increase, individuals will be more likely to affiliate religiously.

31 Aparna Rayaprol, Negotiating Identities: Women in the Indian Diaspora (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).
32 Kurien, "Becoming American by Becoming Hindu: Indian Americans Take Their Place at the Multicultural Table."
33 Rayaprol, Negotiating Identities: Women in the Indian Diaspora.; Kurien, "Becoming American by Becoming Hindu: Indian Americans Take Their Place at the Multicultural Table."
35 Kurien, "Becoming American by Becoming Hindu: Indian Americans Take Their Place at the Multicultural Table."
Power, discourse and ideology

The formation, expression and representation of identity are intricately connected to notions of power. Understanding various forms of power and its manifestations is central to understanding the forces that inform generation 1.5 Somali identity. Many theorists have written on the notion of power, and its connection with identity construction. For many years now, the social sciences have looked to the work of Michel Foucault, whilst drawing on earlier influences (such as Friedrich Nietzsche), and later additions (such as to Slavoj Žižek) to Foucault’s work. Power is intricately connected with human activity. In Foucault’s words ‘Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere’. Foucault’s discussion of power is weaved into many of his monographs. From his discussion of the birth of the prison in Discipline and Punish, to his research into the history of the notion of madness in Madness and Civilization, to his History of Sexuality and even his Archaeology of Knowledge, the theme of power has had a lasting effect on academia. For Foucault, there is no Power (capital ‘P’) in the sense of absolute, objective hierarchy. Although smaller hierarchies may exist, power is better characterised by a complex web of power relations. The most insidious form of power is not the direct power of physical domination. Rather, it is the domination that is achieved through the expression of normalised discourse and other discursive formations.

For Foucault: ‘One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.’ Similarly, domination is not ‘that solid and global kind of domination that one person exercises over others, or one group over another, but the manifold forms of domination that can be exercised within society.’ Foucault looks for intricate expressions of power through insidious means. McHoul and Grace elucidate this further, by outlining that Foucault's conception of power is intelligible in terms of the way it is expressed:

Many different forms of power exist in our society: legal administrative, economic, military, and so forth. What they have in common is a shared reliance on certain techniques or methods of application, and all draw some authority by referring to scientific ‘truths’ … these techniques … like any other form of applied knowledge, have a history—and this is what allows for the differentiation

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 96.
44 Ibid., 97.
of systems of power relations. Foucault’s point is to stress that there are no necessary or universal forms for the exercise of power to take place: our society bears witness to the production of quite specific practice which characterise the ways in which power relations function within it.45

For migrants, experience of the expression of power does not necessarily have to be in terms of domination. Small ‘p’ power is articulated in more subtle ways. They may be more explicit, such as working or reporting conditions on visas, or implicit, such as shopkeepers in a new country not understanding their accent. Discourse and power are also closely related and the entire immigration trajectory is laden with discursive practices and power imbued discourses. In Australia, the discourse surrounding the threat of radicalisation, and associations made with Islam, have resulted in individuals of “Islamic appearance” being harassed more by airport security than Caucasians, for instance.46

Foucault covers the question of power primarily in his investigations into criminality and sexuality, but his critique is more general in its applicability. Processes of normalisation, occurring through discursive practices, result in disciplinary power and the proliferation of ‘truths’. New categories are created, which directly result in an ideological change of configuration in people’s individual identities. Disciplinary power, for Foucault, produces individuality. Power is creative. Difference is highlighted when there is a normalised state of affairs in society. Foucault explains that the notion of personality derives from the expression of power:

\[\ldots\ \text{as power becomes more anonymous and more functional \ldots those upon whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualized \ldots In a system of discipline, the child is more individualized than the adult, the patient more than the healthy man, the madman and the delinquent more than the normal and the non-delinquent.}\]47

McHoul and Grace explain that ‘for Foucault, the question of subjection, and the political struggles associated with “identities”, constitute the most important issues of our time.’ Indeed although they were writing over 20 years ago, I believe that this statement is more true than ever and it is a foundational concept within my own research. Notions of ‘being’ and ‘subjectivity’ are closely connected with political practice and social life. ‘By studying subjection in terms of its imbrication within power relations, Foucault was unrivalled in drawing out the full political and historical dimensions of this philosophical concern’.48 For Foucault, the human subject is itself an

effect of subjection. “Subjection” refers to particular, historically located, disciplinary processes and concepts which enable us to consider ourselves as individual subjects and which constrain us from thinking otherwise. These processes and concepts (or “techniques”) are what allow the subject to “tell the truth about itself”.

The issues raised by Foucault, concerning power, discourse and identity, form a well-established framework for examining individuals and groups of people. Social forces influence the way that people conceive of themselves through the discursive categories available to them and the discourse disseminated by many channels. Power has both a direct and indirect effect in creating and reinforcing certain types of subjects.

A person’s capacity for perceiving themselves is necessarily informed by established social practices. However, it is difficult (or in fact counterproductive) to attempt a stratification of ideological expression; power is always expressed through multiple layers of relations. This is to say that people are always conceiving of themselves in relation to the categories available to them. For example, the media creates, proliferates, and reinforces notions of subjects such as ‘illegal immigrants’, ‘boat people’, ‘queue jumpers’, and so on. This process has the potential to become a marker of a collective identity, in the same way that groups of marginalised individuals in the past have taken on board an original derogatory term and made it something to be proud of (such as ‘Wog’, ‘Nigger’, etc.). When the media perpetuates the notion that Somali migrants are violent Islamic fundamentalists, a powerful and distinct category is continued. Somalis are free to decide whether they choose to define themselves in such terms or antithetically. However, the important point here is that they involuntarily consider themselves against the created category. The connection of Islam with terrorism is now embedded in modern Australian society; the formation of categories disseminates through multiple avenues and exemplifies the network of power that can radiate from discourses.

Generation 1.5 Somalis in Melbourne grow up in a culture where many around them (not only individuals within society, but also structures of the society — media, immigration bureaucracy, schools, etc…) view them in terms of the categories prevalent; and if not now, then with the potential of becoming a certain subject with certain properties (such as radicalised). These conceptions do not stem from the subject a priori, nor do they cause the subject to respond in a certain way. They are, however, intricately tied up with the subject’s perception of the world and orientation within the world and how he or she is able to orient themselves with respect to the power relations. The subject does not grow up in a social vacuum.

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The importance of social capital

The notion of social capital has been popularised in the recent past to the extent that it often forms part of lay discussion regarding identity. This popularisation has blurred the boundaries somewhat between social capital and broader ideas of social connectedness. Social capital seems to be understood currently as an overwhelmingly positive force that enables social interaction and gain. However, conceptualising social capital in this way limits the scope of analysis. Specifically, it is important to emphasise the inherent power and inequality that is present in social capital as conceived by Pierre Bourdieu.

Social capital is another way of describing the webs of relations that exist in society. Social actors produce and distribute social capital and those with greater social capital are more easily able to advance their own interests, while it is more difficult for those without social capital to do so. It is based on mutual recognition (much like identity and power are) and groups transform objective differences into symbolic differences and classifications. This enables the creation of symbolic distinctions that differentiate groups of people. It is a dynamic and fluid concept of human relations and this makes it very difficult to quantify and measure.

Bourdieu defines social capital as ‘the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’. This means that social capital can be found in any social connection or interaction with others. This is most obviously achieved through membership of associations, participation in the workplace and public and government institutions, but equally through more informal networking and interaction. It is not the same as, but intimately connected with class structures. After all, Bourdieu was interested in how society is reproduced and how the dominant classes retain their position.

What is crucial to Bourdieu’s definition of social capital is that it is produced by social actors for their own benefit and distributed in unequal measure. It is therefore a means by which the powerful may further their own interests, often at the cost of those with less. However, it is important to state that while social capital is pursued for individual or mutual benefit, this pursuit is not always a conscious choice. It may equally arise as a result of activities engaged in by actors for other purposes.

Bourdieu’s concept is profoundly linked to notions of class, and greatly emphasizes conflicts and the function of power (social relations that allow an actor to advance their own personal interests). There are three dimensions to Bourdieu’s notion of capital; economic, cultural and social capital. These three resources are legitimized and made effective through the mediation of symbolic capital. This means that overall, social capital is a resource in social struggles that are

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played out in different arenas. Thus, the way actors experience social capital will be markedly different depending on their gender, age, class or ethnic background.

One of the key foundations of Bourdieu’s sociology in general is his concept of society as a plurality of social fields. At the heart of each of these fields are forms of social capital, which define positions and potentialities of the actors in that field.

The field of power is a field of forces defined by the structure of the existing balance of forces between forms of power, or between different species of capital. It is also simultaneously a field of struggles for power among the holders of different forms of power. It is a space of play and competition in which social agents and institutions which all possess the determinate quantity of specific capital … sufficient to occupy the dominant positions within their respective fields … confront one another in strategies aimed at preserving or transforming this balance of forces…

One important characteristic of social capital is that it is based on mutual cognition and recognition. It is from this basis that social capital is transformed into symbolic capital. Bourdieu argues that groups transform objective differences into symbolic differences and classifications. In this way, groups are able to create symbolic distinctions that differentiate them from other groups. For Bourdieu, it is precisely these symbolic differences, facilitated by social capital, that actualize and legitimate class differences. Otherwise, the social classes are simply classes on paper. ‘Symbolic capital … is nothing other than capital, in whatever form, when perceived by an agent endowed with categories of perception arising from the internalization (embodiment) of the structure of its distribution, i.e. when it is known and recognized as self-evident.’

Bourdieu’s is not the only definition of social capital. In contrast to Bourdieu’s focus on relations of power, Robert D. Putnam, for example, has a largely serviceable concept of social capital. He positions social capital as the instrument that allows a region to have a functional economic system and a high level of political integration. Putnam’s concept of social capital has three domains: moral obligations and norms, social values and social networks. Accrual of social capital, in Putnam’s view, in inherently positive, and in his conception, social capital is a force that permeates society and can be equally harnessed by all. This is in direct contrast to Bourdieu, who views social capital as instrumental in reproducing social inequality.

For Putnam, trust is a crucial tenet in social organization and social capital. This means that regulation of social relations between actors is voluntary. According to Putnam, this trust creates reciprocity and voluntary associations, and the associations and reciprocity strengthen and create

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more trust.\footnote{Ibid., 165-85.} In Putnam’s imagining of social capital, the capital is inherently self-reinforcing and cumulative. Putnam describes vicious circles, which are the result of distrust and individuals avoiding their civic duties, and thus disorder. Virtuous circles, on the other hand, are expressed in profound cooperation, increasing trust and civic activity.\footnote{Ibid., 177.}

I prefer to conceptualize social capital in the way that Bourdieu does. In this way, social capital is not something discrete that can be accumulated, rather it is a pervasive force that social actors are all subjected to, knowingly or unknowingly. This can have both positive and negative consequences for social actors. It seems that most social theorists can agree that social capital at its very core relates to the size and availability of networks that a social actor can access. It is ‘the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures’.\footnote{Alejandro Portes, "Social capital: its origins and applications in modern sociology," \textit{Annual Review of Sociology} 24, no. 1 (1998): 6.} These may be qualitatively different, for example, with a large criminal, street or homeless network as opposed to a large ruling class. Furthermore, an essential characteristic of social capital is that it is relational.

Whereas economic capital is in people’s bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships. To possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it is these others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage.\footnote{Ibid., 8.}

So social capital exists only when it is shared.

Even though social capital is accessed differently by particular social actors, it can be seen as a collective phenomenon. For Bourdieu, bureaucratic organization is a tool which concentrates social capital. It does so by converting numerous members into an institutionalized, organized accumulation of social capital. Thus, the establishment of a voluntary or community association is also an investment which aims to create networks of relations in order to accumulate social capital.\footnote{Bourdieu, "The forms of capital."}

A number of studies, over the past 30 or so years, have addressed the issue of the measurement of social capital. For example, Ronald Inglehart led a team of sociologists to create the World Values Survey since 1981.\footnote{The World Values Survey has continued to the present day through six waves of surveys. The seventh wave will commence in 2016. See Ronald Inglehart, "World Values Survey 2014," \url{http://www.iffs.se/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/WVS-brochure-web.pdf} Accessed 10 December 2015.} This study examines the variables of social capital; including trust and membership of associations. At around this time, John Sudarsky developed an instrument called \textit{The Barometer of Social Capital} in Colombia. This instrument was based partly...
in the World Values Survey.\textsuperscript{61}

Considering these metrics, it is important to note that social capital has been critiqued for its economic view of the subject.\textsuperscript{62} It has been assimilated into the spheres of economics and development, and the apparent divide between the social and the economic has been problematised and reconceptualised.\textsuperscript{63} It has been argued that social capital can be conceived in terms of a Foucauldian genealogy of the social.\textsuperscript{64} In this sense, William Walters argues that social capital can be viewed not just ‘as a way of representing social and political space, but in terms of its possible constitutive effects. It is about how social capital discourse seeks to make the social field calculable and amenable to practices of government’.\textsuperscript{65} Social capital is thus used in ways to make society calculable, and consequently, governable.\textsuperscript{66} This fits with Putnam’s concept of social capital as a measurable, positive force.

In the Australian context, Onyx and Bullen developed a framework to measure social capital for community organisations to assess themselves and their work.\textsuperscript{67} They identified a number of factors that contributed to building social capital, including local community participation, feelings of trust and safety and neighbourhood connections. Ramon Spaaij has applied the concept of social capital to the Somali community in Melbourne using sport as his focus. Spaaij highlights the distinction between bonding, bridging and linking social capital where bonding social capital refers to ‘social ties between persons such as relatives, kin, and close friends’. It promotes homogeneity and particularised trust due to its inward looking nature.\textsuperscript{68} Bridging social capital denotes ties between like people who are not as close, such as loose friendships and work colleagues. This type of capital is associated with resources that allow individuals to generate broader identities and reciprocity.\textsuperscript{69} Linking social capital refers to ties between people who do not inhabit the same social situations, such as those entirely outside a local community. This capital enables individuals to access a wider range of resources ‘including from formal institutions’.\textsuperscript{70}

Spaaij explains that for Melbourne Somalis, participation in an ethno-specific football club allows them a means to escape (even temporarily) social situations that may be fraught with tension.

\textsuperscript{61} John Sudarsky, "Clientelism and the Failure Complex; the role of the state in the wanning of cooperatives, an Action-research project" (Harvard University, 1980).
\textsuperscript{62} William Walters, "Social Capital and Political Sociology: Re-imagi
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} Walters, "Social Capital and Political Sociology: Re-imaging Politics?," 388.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 378.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 1523.
and to be among club members with similar ethnic backgrounds. This creates a safe and relaxed environment for members to come together and strengthen their already established friendships. Many of the young people associated with the club have close friends there, and indeed, became involved with the club because of their friends already playing there. Their participation allows them to rebuild social networks that were disrupted by their experiences as refugees and the war in Somalia. Their social encounters at the club allow them to discuss family and work issues and help each other in everyday life situations.\footnote{Ibid., 1527-28.}

The issue of bridging social capital is also addressed in Spaaij’s study of the Melbourne Giants club. Although the majority of the players and position-holders in the club are Somali, there are some players and spectators from other backgrounds (mostly other African countries such as Eritrea, Kenya and more). Participants in the study argue that social interaction is easier for other Africans in the group because they are similar in ethnicity and colour and are able to feel comfortable together. This is also the case with religion, with a shared Muslim identity also binding members of the club. This focus on perceived similarities is an important aspect of bridging social capital as well as bonding social capital.\footnote{Ibid., 1528-29.}

**Reading violence: considering the overt and covert dimensions of violence**

I now turn to an exploration of some of the conceptions of violence advanced by anthropologists, ethnographers and social theorists during the modern era. Both overt and covert notions of violence are examined. I discuss in brief the different types of violence that are expressed in response to particular situations and circumstances.

Overt violence is perhaps the most obvious form of violence. It is often described as physical aggression, and is expressed in explicit and direct forms. Historically, physical violence has been widely practiced, for various reasons. Louis Knafla outlines:

> Violence was endemic in early modern Europe, from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean, and from the Urals to the British Isles. Serfs and peasants wielded knives and staffs, most gentlemen and merchants wore swords and/or pistols, and nobles and their numerous retainers were similarly armed. Even teenaged students carried knives in their schools, brawled in the streets, and operated as gangs.\footnote{Louis A. Knafla, “Violence,” in *Europe, 1450 to 1789: Encyclopedia of the Early Modern World*, ed. Jonathan Dewald (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004), 170.}
Historians argue that in Europe at least, the practice of open violence peaked in the 1600s, before declining greatly in the mid-seventeenth century, and then again significantly in the mid-eighteenth century.\(^74\)

One prominent political and philosophical commentator during the 17th century was Thomas Hobbes. His concept of violence had its roots in the primeval war of everyman against everyman. Writing in 1651 at the peak of the practice of open violence in Europe, Hobbes described nature as a state of war until the influence of civil society takes hold. At the time of writing, he noted that the savage people of America still lived in the grip of this primeval war, not yet having been civilised.\(^75\) For Hobbes, the state of nature is anarchy until we are collectively organised. He used a description of life without state organisation — ‘nasty, brutish, and short’\(^76\) — as justification for the supreme authority of the state. This Hobbesian political realism holds that once states are established, the individual drive for power becomes the rationale for the states’ behaviour. This, in turn, leads to attempts to dominate other states and individuals. Hobbes’ views have inspired modern neoliberal thought and often frame the way in which international relations are discussed.\(^77\)

Other observers have noted the civilising influence of the state, although perhaps not in such strident terms. Norbert Elias, for example, argued that rulers disarmed courtiers and wealthy classes in order to protect their own interests. Thus, violence was no longer the primary means of dispute resolution in early modern Europe for these classes. Elias famously argued that there has been a prolonged trend towards the pacification of civil society, which is linked to the phenomenon of state control of the mechanisms of violence and the increase in civil elements of society as opposed to military ones.\(^78\) Elias’ ‘civilizing process’ is particularly interesting in terms of my own study because of the emphasis it places on the transition from medieval to modern societies and the monopoly the modern state now holds on legitimate violence. According to Elias, because of this monopoly, commerce, urbanisation, wealth and perhaps most importantly, taxation developed and flourished. Taxation allowed the formation of large armies and further property and goods seizure, but also facilitated the development of a legal system, which could resolve disputes without physical violence.\(^79\)

Other authors have also noted the decline in violence in parallel with the increase in state control:

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 171.
\(^{76}\) Ibid., 78.
\(^{79}\) Elias, *The Civilizing Process*. 
Without social support, many traditional forms of personal violence inevitably declined. At the same time, growth in the state’s control of violence through policing… and weapons licensing had a profound effect on communities, limiting opportunities for violence. Finally, with the decay of a popular culture grounded in violence and new expectations of social comportment enforced by the state’s judicial system, both group and interpersonal violence receded into the background.\textsuperscript{80}

However, it is difficult to apply these accounts of a decline in violence to the African context (apart from perhaps, the Ottoman empire’s influence in Africa). Indeed, overt expressions of violence in the Islamic world have been reported on and disseminated throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} and into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. As Rashied Omar notes; ‘In the contemporary period, Islam is frequently depicted as predisposed to conflict and violence’.\textsuperscript{81} While this is arguably only true of some parts of the Islamic world (it is worth remembering that vast numbers of Muslims reside peaceably in South East Asia and other places), it certainly seems to reflect the situation in Somalia.

Nuruddin Farah is a well-respected Somali novelist who has documented the naked violence in Somalia, (particularly on the streets of Mogadishu) over more than three decades. In his fictional works, which are strongly rooted in Somali politics, he describes the gun-toting, qat-chewing youth who are ready to extinguish human life without provocation and the comfortable, corrupt bureaucrats who make orders that carry no concern for civilians and their wellbeing. His descriptions of Somalia, while showing the anarchy and chaos present in all facets of life, also focus on the individuals who are able to manipulate the chaotic situation for their benefit.\textsuperscript{82}

Farah’s work shows us just how difficult it would be difficult to apply Elias’ idea of a ‘civilising influence’ to Somalia, as there has not been a consistent central governing system of organise and control citizens. Indeed, there is a vocal group of scholars and commentators who argue that stateless societies are highly brutal places. Writing in The New Republic, a very conservative American political journal, Steven Pinker states:

Pre-state societies were far more violent than our own… in tribal violence, the clashes are more frequent, the percentage of men in the population who fight is greater, and the rates of death per battle are higher… If the wars of the twentieth century had killed the same proportion of the population that die in the wars of a typical tribal society, there would have been two billion deaths, not 100 million.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{80} Knafla, “Violence,” 171.
This idea is of particular interest to me for four reasons. The first is that it seems to be an almost exact echo of the Hobbesian claims, which are more than 350 years old. Secondly, as discussed in section three, there is much to suggest that in fact Somalia in past centuries has been a remarkably safe place, due to the organisation and social control exerted by the clans. While it does seem that much of this social order was kept by the judicious use of violence (punishments for taking a life, or for theft or damage of property, for example), this is the sort of violence that modern states have also utilised in order to keep peace and order. Thirdly, Pinker’s assertion that stateless and tribal societies have higher rates of violence relies exclusively on one simple statistical marker: the number of deaths on the battlefield. It does not take into account the myriad other violence types that exist, or indeed the state sanctioned deaths of many civilians that occur every year. Equally, one could consider those displaced by conflict, or those who suffer the effects of climate change as measurable forms of violence to add to a statistical figure. Finally, Pinker refers to ‘pre-state societies’ that have been shaped by powerful states, rather than at a time when they were more autonomous and functioned quite differently.

It is possible to think of many forms of overt violence — such as military violence, intimate partner and domestic violence, child sexual abuse, revolutionary violence, and armed violent conflict. Although there has been a shift in the study of violence towards more covert expressions of violence over the last century or so, the overt forms of violence remain an important dimension for investigating the conceptions and experiences of violence in generation 1.5 Somalis. Overt violence is a reality in all geographical locations and post-modern studies that attempt, even implicitly, to downplay the primacy and brutality of overt violence miss the mark. Indeed, I found in my research that many Somalis in Melbourne would not return to Somalia because of the overt violence there.

While violence is often characterised by physical force involving injury to persons or property, scholars are increasingly interested in a broader use of the term, extending

… beyond the overtly physical to covert, psychological, and institutional violence. In this broader sense racism, sexism, economic exploitation, and ethnic and religious persecution all are possible examples of violence; that is, all involve constraints that injure and violate persons, even if not always physically.

Covert expressions of violence are equally important for this thesis. In their impressive edited collection *Violence in War and Peace*, Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois offer a nuanced definition of violence:

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Violence is a slippery concept—nonlinear, productive, destructive, and reproductive. It is mimetic, like imitative magic or homeopathy. "Like produces like," that much we know. Violence gives birth to itself. So we can rightly speak of chains, spirals, and mirrors of violence—or, as we prefer—a continuum of violence.\textsuperscript{86}

While the overt forms of violence are a crucial aspect of theorisations of violence, it is clear that violence is a multifaceted concept, and there are dimensions to it beyond physical aggression. As Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois describe it, ‘Violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality—force, assault, or the infliction of pain—alone. Violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim.'\textsuperscript{87} An assault on personhood may include violations on reproductive rights, incarceration, prohibition from wearing a preferred form of dress or removal of children from parents.

Along with the explicit forms of violence described earlier, there are also many implicit or hidden forms of violence that are entrenched in human interaction. These include structural violence, which is ‘generally invisible because it is part of the routine grounds of everyday life.'\textsuperscript{88} A pertinent example of structural violence is the colonial racism and class relations that accompany the acquisition, establishment, exploitation and maintenance of a territory by a coloniser. The unequal relationship between the colonisers and indigenous populations allows structural violence to become ingrained in the interactions between the two in ways that are still being discovered and unravelled today. There is a great deal of scholarship that points to the continuation of this unequal relationship and the structural violence it engenders.\textsuperscript{89}

Additionally, because structural violence can be more difficult to identify and to rectify (even if class relations and poverty are visible it is not simple to address them in the way that it is possible to stop one individual from compromising another), it is correspondingly difficult to address. For example, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois describe how the explicit physical violence of the apartheid regime, personified by a ‘sadistic Boer cop’ and his demonstration of torture techniques became a large focus of the South African Truth and Reconciliation amnesty hearings in Cape Town, while the deep structural violence of apartheid which forced 80% of the African

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 4.
population to live in social institutions ‘that resembled concentration camps’ were not examined closely at all.⁹⁰

This kind of pervasive violence fits well with Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas. For a thinker such as Bourdieu, violence is everywhere, in everyday social practice. It is rendered invisible or ‘misrecognised’ because of its constant and unremarkable presence.⁹¹ Individuals absorb the structures and mechanisms of the societies which they inhabit until they become part of their mental structures.⁹² This acceptance of social order (by both those who benefit from it and those who are disadvantaged by it) allows violence to be carried out in plain view without individuals thinking to question it. Similarly, there is a relationship between symbolic violence and performance of other types of violence as a result.

You cannot cheat with the ‘law of the conservation of violence’: all violence is paid for, and, for example, the structural violence exerted by the financial markets, in the form of layoffs, loss of security, etc., is matched sooner or later in the form of suicides, crime and delinquency, drug addiction, alcoholism, a whole host of minor and major everyday acts of violence.⁹³

Bourdieu’s symbolic violence is perhaps best known from his work of the late 1970s. He used the term broadly to refer to the inherent but unrecognized violence that is maintained and naturalized within systems of inequality and domination. In this study, I address the way the term ‘violence’ has been linked to a particular community group. I use the term covert violence to distinguish from Bourdieu’s because I am not focussing on hegemonic situations but rather on specific instantiations of the way that symbolic violence has been linked to generation 1.5 Somalis and how they experience this in Melbourne today.

Veena Das has also devoted much work to the way that violence is an accepted part of everyday life, manifest in incidences such as infant mortality, hunger and starvation, disease and humiliation.⁹⁴ She focuses on gendered forms of violence and how these intersect and interplay with political forms of violence. Her work engages deeply with the theoretical grounds laid out by scholars such as Foucault and Bourdieu, and offers rich practical examples of how the lives of so many are affected by these interactions.

In conceptualising covert violence, I am trying to engage with the acute reflexivity that allowed radically critical thinkers such as Foucault and Bourdieu to uncover the latent relationships between institutions such as prisons, asylums, hospitals, concentration camps and even schools and the acceptable forms of violence. It is particularly interesting to view violence as more than a

⁹¹ Bourdieu and Wacquant, An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology.
⁹³ Bourdieu and Wacquant, An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology: 40.
⁹⁴ Das, Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary.
simple dichotomy of victim and perpetrator. In the Foucauldian and Bourdieuan sense, it is something that permeates all aspects of life. When considering covert violence, I am thus trying to uncover the latent acts of violence in everyday interactions with family, friends and acquaintances, employers, the state and particularly across class and ethnicity demarcations.

Many theorists have come to view violence differently from the way it was previously seen. There appears a shift in some discourse away from the primacy of overt violence and towards the pervasiveness of covert violence. However, the overt violence and brutality in Somalia cannot be ignored. Given the complex and multifaceted expressions of violence in the Somali context, I will treat both overt and covert forms of violence as equally important to this thesis, without attempting to hierarchize them. I proceed from the dual perspective: (i) that brutal and physical forms and acts of violence radically affect individuals and communities, especially during times of war, famine, and political unrest; and (ii) that violence is also interwoven into the structures of society and internalised and expressed in multifaceted covert ways.

Concluding remarks

This section has discussed some of the scholarship regarding the notion of identity, and focussed on the suggestion that individuals may inhabit various identities in response to their environment. I examined the role of Islam in developing and expressing identity, and the difficulties this presents to Muslims living in a non-Muslim majority country. I outlined the ideas of Foucault’s ubiquitous ‘small p’ power, along with the productive effects of discourse and ideology. Social capital was then presented as a lens through which to examine migrants and refugees. I also examined theories of violence and the way that these have developed.

I believe the above themes are vital to understanding identity expression and the different forces that act upon it. Applying these notions to Somali Australians will be elucidating and may reveal latent aspects to both the expressions of power experiences by this group, and the characteristics of their constructed identities.

The theoretical ideas covered in this section may seem slightly disparate, but it is important to highlight that they have all be discussed in order to present a coherent and connected picture. In order to be able to map and link these difficult concepts, I found it best to use my own schema, in terms of visualising the way different forces are exerted on social actors. At the centre, an individual inhabits a world constituted by complex and multifaceted identities. These can be broken accordingly into situational, social and personal identities. A level out from the centre, there is a web of social capital. Another level out, there is the Foucaudian network of power relations, which permeate and filter through to the social capital level. The social capital level is effectively the operationalisation of the conceptual level above, in which power, discourse and ideology are
expressed through concrete examples. The media, for instance, is one concrete expression of power in the realm of social capital, which in turn influences and shapes the way that individuals conceive of themselves.

I am not claiming that this schema is exactly representative in an objective or hierarchical sense. In fact, if scholars such as Foucault and Bourdieu have taught us anything, it is that the individual is never at the centre of anything, but rather a small part in a complex world of powerful intersecting and competing social forces which are exerted to varying degrees and experienced qualitatively differently. In a Copernican sense, then, it is important to acknowledge that the primacy of the individual has been thoroughly dislodged and individuals should not be seen as the centre of a vast and complex universe of relations. Nevertheless, this thesis is about the way that individuals experience external pressures from their own particular vantage point and how these influence their expression of identity. In this sense, it makes sense to conceptualise these social forces from the perspective of the individual.
II METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Methodological considerations, practicalities of the methods and study design

My methodological starting point

In their volume *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln and their contributors trace the rich history of qualitative research in its many and varied forms. Using the term ‘moments’, they demarcate the stages of qualitative research which have emerged at distinct points of history and have been influenced by the social milieu of their times. The moments have often been separated by periods of rupture and challenges to established views. These moments have not ever ‘passed’, rather they still exist today and continue to shape the methodological approaches that researchers take.

Denzin and Lincoln highlight the plethora of understandings and orthodoxies within and across disciplines and the vast array of techniques available for collecting, analyzing and presenting data. They argue that in general, the neater and simpler techniques belong to previous eras rather than this current, ‘eighth moment’ of methodological backlash. This backlash is against the government-favoured quantitative, experimental (in the positivist sense) research.¹ Despite the ruptures and changes however, the central tenet remains the engagement of the researcher with the researched in order to understand and elucidate something of the lived experience of the research participant.

The qualitative research landscape offers many potential starting points. When I first began my doctoral study, I was very interested in grounded theory because of the way that the data generates theory with what (I thought) would be a minimum of intervention from the researcher. This seemed to me to be the most authentic way to come to a theoretical conclusion. I spent the first two years of this project working with grounded theory and it wasn’t until the conclusion of my interviews and part way through the data analysis that I realized grounded theory wasn’t such a good fit for me.

Denzin and Lincoln posit that grounded theory was developed in the second moment (post Second World War to 1970), which they describe as ‘the golden age of rigorous qualitative analysis’. Philosophically, post-positivism is the dominant school of thought in the second

moment. In this framework, there is an ontological assumption of an external reality, and an epistemological assumption that it is not only illuminating to discover knowledge about it, but possible for an objective observer working at a remove from participants to do so.

Grounded Theory was developed in 1967 by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Since that time it has become a leading method used in qualitative research globally over a number of disciplines as varied as sociology, nursing, education, cultural studies and computer and information science. Grounded Theory is a ‘mode of analysis of largely qualitative research data’. It is characterised by its profoundly empirical approach to the study of social life. The theory is generated by the back and forth between the empirical data and the abstract ways of thinking about the empirical data. Emphasis is placed on a research paradigm that sees the researcher influenced by a minimum of preconceptions and the ability to see ‘all as data’.

In 1967, when Glaser and Strauss published *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, they made their scholarly motivation quite clear, stating: ‘We would all agree that in social research generating theory goes hand in hand with verifying it; but many sociologists have been diverted from this truism in their zeal to test either existing theories or a theory that they have barely started to generate.’ The book suggested a revolutionary approach in social science research: Rather than merely studying existing theory, researchers should be allowing new theory to emerge from data. Strauss and Glaser fell out rather spectacularly over their differing interpretations of grounded theory, with Strauss later stressing that pragmatism and symbolic interactionism are the philosophies that methodologically underpin his iteration of grounded theory methods.

While this new explanation of the methodology of grounded theory was helpful for me, it ultimately caused me to look deeper into symbolic interactionism which in turn, led me to narrative inquiry. I decided that critical narrative theory was most suited to my work, and abandoned most of grounded theory practice. However, two key techniques advocated by grounded theorists remained useful tools throughout my research. The first of these was the writing of memos, which are essentially a form of ‘field notes’. These written records of what the researcher was thinking while undertaking a grounded theory study produced many later insights. Secondly, undertaking constant comparative analysis of incidents did enable the inductive nature of grounded analysis as theory to emerge. As I had spent much time writing memos and performing constant comparative analysis, I

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2 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 424.
found referring back to these during my analysis to be most helpful. However, other methodologies became my main focus.

**Narrative theory**

Narrative theory has its roots in literary criticism but is now used broadly across many disciplines. According to Riessman and Mishler, narrative inquiry has been used in psychology, sociology, medicine, literature and cultural studies, amongst others. Each of these disciplines has its own approach to narrative inquiry, and as a result narrative inquiry has become a point of scholarly investigation in itself because there are contested methods for its practice. For instance, it is recognized as a particularly useful methodology in the field of health, where it is used, for example, for patients to give personal accounts of their experience with illness. Narrative is also particularly useful for studies of refugees and migrants as it is able to encapsulate the disjointed experiences of flight, transit and settlement.

When using narrative inquiry, both the researcher and the participant are located as social actors within their own subjective worlds. They live according to the routines, rules and norms that are shaped by cultural and ideological norms. In the words of Byron Good:

> Narrative is a form in which experience is represented and recounted, in which events are presented as having a meaningful and coherent order, in which activities and events are described along with the experiences associated with them and the significance that lends them their sense for the persons involved.

A thorough investigation into the idea of narrative is given by Jerome Bruner. He describes narrative as a complex, organic construction, which grows and blossoms into ‘vineyards of narratology’.

> We organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative — stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on. Narrative is a conventional

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form, transmitted culturally and constrained by each individual’s level of mastery... Unlike the constructions generated by logical and scientific procedures that can be weeded out by falsification, narrative constructions can only achieve “verisimilitude.” Narratives, then, are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and “narrative necessity” rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness, although ironically we have no compunction about calling stories true or false.\textsuperscript{15}

In ‘The Narrative Construction of Reality’, Bruner sets out an exhaustive list of the features of narrative, which I will paraphrase here in the interests of brevity. For Bruner, narrative is something that occurs over human time. The events described concern particular happenings, which function as tokens of broader types. The people in a narrative, and the people hearing a narrative are motivated by their own beliefs and moral compass, in their actions and their reception of the story respectively. Interestingly, Bruner also places emphasis on the importance of genericness in narrative and highlights the recognizable genres that appear in narrative. Listeners will assimilate narrative on their own terms, depending on background knowledge. For Bruner, narratives continue to accrue and the accruals eventually create something called a ‘culture’ or ‘history’.\textsuperscript{16}

Bruner’s articulation of these features is particularly helpful in conceptualizing narrative in a more nuanced way. However, Bruner’s presentation misses a crucial feature of how this plays out in practice. When a researcher decides to use narrative theory, they ask people to tell them stories. The researcher then reflects on the narratives as given, and threads ideas and stories together to produce meaningful information. Yet this technique does not engage deeply enough with the possibility that other factors are influencing either (or both) the telling of the stories, and the interpretation of these by the researcher. Bruner’s account of narrative serves very well as a detailed description of the scene. Nevertheless, I feel it is missing critical reflection. A second layer of analysis, which has the potential to uncover latent aspects at play, can be deployed by bringing a critical perspective to narrative.

**Critical narrative inquiry and the importance of critique in ethnographic research**

There is a plethora of differing articulations and conceptualizations of what critical narrative inquiry represents, so a presentation of the ideas of critical narrative inquiry as I intend to embrace it is relevant. The approach taken in a critical narrative methodology involves the element of critique. Nicole Pitre et al. outline this approach:

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
A critical perspective permits an examination of human action and interaction in dialectical relationship with social structural constraints. The intent is to identify sources of alienation, power, and domination... The influences of socioculturally defined structures and ideology on human patterns of behavior, on thinking and reflexive practices, on personal meanings, and on verbal and nonverbal communication processes are considered. The underlying assumption is that history has and continues to shape the prescribed rules, conventions, routines, and habits that allow structures of power and domination to be reproduced and perpetuated within people’s symbolic world.17

Pitre et al. note that ‘narratives are embedded within historical, structural, and ideological contexts, social discourses and power relations. Through their narratives, storytellers locate themselves within the conditions that influence their choices and actions as social agents’.18 Bruner concurs that it is naïve to study the individual as an isolated unit of analysis ‘inside his or her own skin’ in a cultural vacuum. Rather, we must accept the view that the human mind cannot express its nascent powers with the enablement of the symbolic systems of culture’.19 Narratives are always constructed in a complex and entangled cultural web. However, in a cyclic way, personal narrative histories can be thought of as small elements of a larger cultural architecture — individuals’ narratives feed into a collective narrative and help shape the fabric of a society.

In light of these constraints, some narrative researchers analyze how the story was told, highlighting the co-construction of stories. They place emphasis on the process and context of storytelling events and their effect on the outcome. This may include the self-reflection of the researcher (such as field notes), and the immersion of the researcher in a relationship with the participants (such as participant observation).20 Another technique in the spirit of critique is to examine the stories in light of the performative agenda of the storyteller given the particular circumstances surrounding the narration. These researchers aim to identify how individuals represent themselves in particular situations, how identities are enacted and how past events are reconstructed within stories.21

A critical perspective on narrative construction does not offer a guidebook of prescribed steps for the researcher to follow. Rather it offers a lens through which to examine the drivers and forces behind stories with the possibility of shedding new light on — or uncovering latent aspects of — the stories as they are told. Critical narrative inquiry is a mode of inquiring, or a way of approaching narratives through the lens of social, ideological and cultural critique. The researcher examines stories told to position the storytellers’ experiences within personal, symbolic, structural

18 Ibid., 118.
21 Ibid.
and ideological worlds. This in turn, reveals much about how the storytellers view themselves and their agency in the world. The form of the data could be described as a phenomenological account of experience, as the researcher is collecting information subjectively. This account is thus necessarily predicated on epistemological preconditions, based on hermeneutic assumptions.

This ethic of critique, which is central in how the researcher goes about interpreting stories and making judgments, requires critical reflection in itself. When first embarking on my fieldwork, I felt a strong connection with the participants, and this may have caused me to look at their accounts uncritically. In fact, I was more than halfway into the fieldwork before a conversation with a Somali academic gave me pause to re-examine the data I’d collected. He urged me to look past what he called the façade of the respondents, and assured me that there were indeed great fractures in the relationships between parents and generation 1.5 respondents, and that these fractures were at risk of alienating a significant number of young people. This conversation encouraged me to make thorough follow-up contact with some participants and to broaden the scope of my participant observation.

However, I still struggled with the idea of treating participants with suspicion, nominating myself as the person able to interpret their stories about their complex and sometimes fragile relationships with family and the broader community than they themselves are. The other dialogue which helped somewhat to overcome these worries was a free-ranging discussion with my supervisor about trusting my participants but remaining sceptical about the data I collected from them. In this way, this becomes less of a critique of the individual, but rather a healthy critique of the data they present. It is also worth noting here that this is in agreement with Hewitt’s notion of tri-partite identity, as discussed in section one. No individual presents the exact same identity in all different situations.

The ethical considerations of this approach require that the researcher stays faithful to the meanings of the research participant. The participant who reads the researcher’s work will expect to find a rendering of their own meanings as presented during the interview.\textsuperscript{22} The surface story is seen to conceal a deeper reality ‘a told story conceals an untold one’.\textsuperscript{23} This does not mean to say that respondents are being disingenuous, merely that they, like any subject, interpret the world based on their own experiences and backgrounds. This is the problematized scene of interpretation for the researcher. It may be worth taking ‘a sceptical attitude’ in general to personal accounts because of the limits of the type, range and breadth of discourse accessible to the storyteller.\textsuperscript{24} Because these limits are constitutive, they are simply not visible to the storyteller. Our preconceptions and prejudices define us and limit the conditions of the possibility of our interactions as researchers.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 13.
This Gadamerian notion of prejudice kept surfacing throughout my research experience, and demanded that I look into its theoretical grounding. ‘Prejudice’ is central in the key metaphor given by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*. One of Gadamer’s contributions to the hermeneutic landscape is the idea that all understanding and interpretation involves a ‘fusion of horizons’. Once a personal student of Heidegger, Gadamer agrees that there are pre-conditions to our understanding and that we are constituted by our situatedness. Understanding always takes place on the basis of some pre-understanding; ‘understanding always involves projecting oneself’. In an almost Kantian transcendental move, there are, for Gadamer, certain conditions for the possibility of interpretation. ‘A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting’. ‘We “throw” our foreconceptions into the “play” of understanding and keep revising them until we finally understand.’ Here, Gadamer defends the influence that traditions have on our understanding. Rather than deceiving or clouding our understanding, traditions actually ‘open the world to us’ and make understanding possible.

The horizon represents the ‘whole historical lifeworld’ of an individual. Gadamer describes it as ‘the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point’. Horizons are not closed or fixed — they are in constant transformation, as is the texture of the sky evolving throughout a day and over the course of a year. Beyond our horizon there could be things that are neither tangible nor intelligible to us. This represents the limits of our being-in-the-world, and the limits of our understanding. A fusion of horizons takes place whenever we come to some new understanding. When consensus on an issue is reached through discourse, individual opinions are broadened. Gadamer is saying that the limits of our perspective are constantly evolving when we come to new understandings and interpretations. This is particularly relevant for members of generation 1.5, as will be discussed in the findings chapters.

The conception offered here acknowledges the cultural, social and ideological networks which influence an individual’s identity and personal narrative. Yet more profoundly, it acknowledges exactly the same conditions and constraints on the researcher who is engaging with an interviewee. However, this is neither seen as a hindrance nor a boon — it just is, and it is embraced as stories are told and gathered, and judgments and interpretations are made. The critical perspective recognizes these conditions as necessary to interpretation and illumination occurring through the interview process, and remembers the preconditions when reflecting on exchanges.

extra dimension to critical narrative inquiry, as I have chosen to define it, adds a deeper acknowledgement of the preconditions and backgrounds (both of the subjects and the researcher) which demand constant reconsideration and critique.

Josselson agrees that the Gadamerian approach is an effective way of conceptualizing the interview process, which provides an extra richness:

Gadamer’s (1975) view of the hermeneutic project parallels what occurs in the interview. Good interpretation results from a fusion of horizons, through dialogue, with the text. If the primary goal of interpretation is not the passive reflection of what was in the speaker’s mind but the exegesis of the implicit meanings in the text, then the horizons brought to bear on the interpretation offer a context of understanding which can be enriching to theory.31

Another important concept that is related in some way to Gadamer’s fusion of horizons is Wittgenstein’s forms of life. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein raises the notion of a form of life: ‘the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life’.32 The most commonly accepted reading of the notion is that forms of life are a type of dynamic and constantly shifting way of being in the world; depending on cultures, contexts and histories. Wittgenstein makes the elusive comment that ‘If a lion could talk, we could not understand him’.33 This aphorism highlights the social backdrop against which language is intelligible.

The relevance of Wittgenstein’s idea relates to the way that people (interviewers and interviewees) use language to communicate and to relate to each other. Language is a form of social practice, and subtle yet important meanings may be shared if disparate forms of life are understood. However, from an ethnographic perspective, meaning may be lost if forms of life are not well understood and appreciated — for instance, coded meanings; slang; loaded phrases; jokes; and so on do not always communicate effectively when worlds are separated. The scale of Wittgenstein’s work is immense, and I could not hope to engage with it deeply, however I use Wittgenstein’s aphorism purely as a metaphor; a thinking tool to help get through complex issues.

An example of this is the confusion that arose in an interview when I asked a participant to tell me about their family life at home. This young man described some 25 people living in his house as brothers and sisters. I was bemused and asked for more detail, and it emerged that they were (sometimes distant) cousins who had recently arrived and were staying between relatives’ houses while they looked for a permanent place to live. I had been ready to accept that Somali

32 L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell., 1953). 23. Wittgenstein claims that language functions due to an underlying acceptance of given rules and grammar by individuals, but the implicit agreement is actually a form of life. Nevertheless, the notion was only used five times in the *Investigations*, and consequently, this sparing use had led to differing interpretations.
33 Ibid., 223.
families are much larger in size than the average Australian family, but this discussion had me confused for a long time before I was able to make sense of his version of ‘immediate family’. My form of life (or way of being in the world) was different enough from this young man to ensure that simple misunderstandings such as this were common.

Generation 1.5 and the limits of language

In this thesis, the group of interest represents a particular way of being in the world; a shared history, culture and context, which demarcates them from others. This form of life, or shared horizon, has been termed ‘generation 1.5’. Initially the term ‘generation 1.5’ was used by Rumbaut and Ima in the 1980s to describe immigrant youth who were not born in the United States. However, since Rumbaut and Ima’s initial use of the label, educators and researchers have used the name in varying ways.34

Here is Rumbaut and Ima’s (1988) description of their target population from the first pages of their seminal manuscript addressing the generation 1.5:

These respondents are members of what we will call the “1.5” generation: that is, they are neither part of the “first” generation of their parents, the responsible adults who were formed in the homeland, who made the fateful decision to leave it and to flee as refugees to an uncertain exile in the United States […] nor are the youths part of the “second” generation of children who are born in the U.S., and for whom the “homeland” exists as a representation consisting of parental memories and memorabilia, even though their ethnicity may remain well-defined. Rather, the refugee youths in our study constitute a distinctive cohort: they are those young people who were born in their countries of origin but formed in the U.S.; […] they were not the main protagonists of the decision to leave and hence are less beholden to their parents’ attitudes […] and they are in many ways marginal to both the new and old worlds, for while they straddle both worlds they are in some sense fully part of neither of them. […] Though they differ greatly from each other in cultural and social class origins, […] they generally share a common psychohistorical location in terms of their age and migration status/role, and in terms of developing bicultural strategies of response and adjustment to that unique position which they occupy as “1.5’ers” in the interstices, as it were, of two societies and cultures, between the first and second generation, between being “refugees” and being “ethnics” (or “hyphenated Americans”).35

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In these, the first observations where generation 1.5 was named, the key distinguishing characteristic of this group is their inability to identify fully with either their immigrant parents’ generation or their own American peers. ‘They occupied a nebulous space between two different cultures.’

This is not to say that this is the first instance of researchers investigating such a group of people. Indeed, there have been countless studies of such people with almost identical descriptions, that do not use the term ‘generation 1.5’. In fact, one could argue that practically any description of migrant communities will include groups of young individuals who feel ‘caught in the middle’ between two cultures, as there are always children involved in migration flows. Nevertheless, this pre-existing phenomenon was named with a new term in 1988, and the concept has gained traction.

Oudenhoven described the generation 1.5 Latino students that she studied as being ‘caught in the middle’. The members of generation 1.5 are often described as straddling the gulf between nations, languages, cultures, religions, and more. There is a powerful metaphor in the use of the verb ‘caught’ because the generation 1.5er is indeed unable to choose one side of the gulf over the other. Their identity is formed and held over that space and it is difficult to jump (either back and forth, or permanently to one side). The terminology used when describing generation 1.5 usually refers to their unstable and uncertain identity. While many studies of generation 1.5 in various settings and circumstances point out the negative aspects of being caught in the middle, there is also undoubtedly a positive side to the equation, as expressed to me by the participants. Some enjoyed helping their parents make sense of Australian mainstream culture. Others were proud of their ability to understand different ways of life. Still more believed they were lucky to speak their language of origin as well as their day-to-day language.

While studies of generation 1.5 migrants have highlighted the difficulty they have in identifying with either their parents’ culture or the culture of their new homeland, this does not suggest that this question is easy to navigate for other migrants and refugees. In focussing on the specific challenges faced by generation 1.5ers I do not wish to imply that other individuals occupy a mono-culture and do not have to deal with similar issues. As I discussed in the previous section, I believe that all social actors occupy contested identities. And indeed, there is no monoculture that generation 1.5 can be positioned against. However, generation 1.5 have been identified as having


E. D. Oudenhoven, “Caught in the middle: Generation 1.5 Latino students and English language learning at a community college” (Loyola University of Chicago, 2006).

Huster, "Suspended Between Languages: Stories from the Biliterate Lives of Hmong Generation 1.5 University Women."
salient traits that position them apart from other groups. I think it is worthwhile focusing on their experiences as a point of interest.

From one Wittgensteinian idea to another, it is remarkable how relevant Wittgenstein’s earlier ideas about the limits of language apply to Somali generation 1.5. Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* is an extremely ambitious work, which attempts to explain how representation of language and thought are possible. Although Wittgenstein’s early work was driven by a specific philosophical project — an argument for the meaning of language different to that found in his later work, where the aphorism regarding forms of life given earlier is found. His comments regarding the limits of language are thus being taken slightly out of context, and I am considering them in parallel with the forms of life argument presented earlier.

This idea describes what the structure of the world must be like and how the world and language mirror each other. The idea is that reality has a certain logical structure. If we are going to have a language, then it must mirror the logical nature of world. Wittgenstein contends that there are certain limits in the world, and the *limits of language* mirror the limits of the world.\(^{40}\) The discussion of limits leads into how these are closely tied with the solipsistic world. For Wittgenstein, ‘The world is my world: this is made manifest in the fact that the limits of language (of the language which alone I understand) mean the limits of my world’.\(^{41}\) More specifically, the objects in the world which I can speak of, *are* my own private experiences — only I am acquainted with the experiences of the objects that language names. Hence, ‘The limits of my language mean the limits of my world’.\(^{42}\)

Although Wittgenstein produced a vast array of philosophical ideas, I have chosen to engage with such aphorisms due to their ability to encapsulate important and complex ideas with simple metaphorical language. His ideas help organise thoughts and provide insight. Again, I have chosen to use this aphorism as a metaphor and a thinking tool for this project. These considerations play an important part in conceptualizing the lifeworld of Somali generation 1.5, and their struggle to be understood.

Firstly, Somalia has a strong oral tradition in quite a radical sense. There is ample evidence of this in the fact that until the 1970s there was no written form of the Somali language. This modifies and shapes the discourse of the Somali people and likewise the possibility of written expression. Secondly, as many of the respondents confirmed, generation 1.5ers often speak better English than the Somali language. Although they all still live at home and communicate with their parents, aunts and uncles in Somali, they are more proficient in academic, professional and conversational English than the Somali language (this is despite their disrupted education and exposure to English quite late in life, after arrival in Australia). They are walking between two

\(^{41}\) Ibid.
\(^{42}\) Ibid.
forms of expression; two forms of life. This metaphor is often used and discussed in detail in the findings chapters. Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting the strength of the connection between this characteristic ascribed to generation 1.5 — their need to straddle multiple cultures and multiple identities — and Wittgenstein’s lifeworlds or, in Gadamerian terms, a continual fusion of multiple horizons.

**Ethical considerations and limitations of the approach**

When practicing ethnography, it is important to keep hold of the above ideas (lifeworlds, horizons of understanding) by recognizing that people may have a different perception of the world than the one that may be ascribed by the researcher. Ethnography analyses the cultures and behaviours of human beings from the point of view of those being studied. Ethnographers recognize that the natural world is not fixed or static, but in a state of constant flux. They also put emphasis on the context of the research environment and assumes the researcher will be presented with multiple and diverse realities. An example Rabinow gives of the quirks of fieldwork is that it can take place when the anthropologist least expects it. He describes finally fulfilling his images of social research — sitting with turbaned friends in an ancient walled city, notebook in hand just waiting to capture a cultural moment. When that moment comes, he is caught unawares by its speed and simplicity and the way it is taken for granted by everyone present but him. As time passes and he notes more significant practices, he discusses them with his friends and research subjects but these discussions affect his companions. They are forced to reflect on their activities and present them to the researcher.

Turning the critique back on ourselves as researchers, we may begin to wonder how much we give ourselves away in our everyday life. What does the language we use, the slang, and accent display about our social class? The varying relationships we have with others and institutions say a great deal about who we are and what we subscribe to. Rather than letting the voice of the participant shine through to illuminate the reader, the researcher is present, stage left giving notes and offering his/her own explanation of the stories told. I believe that there is a moderate way to approach the interpretation, and that is to target the self understanding, and identity enactment that the participant may very well be unaware of. Practically, this is achieved by ‘reading between the lines’, being alert to errors, inconsistencies and signs of the participant’s processes, conscious and unconscious. According to Packer, a worthwhile interpretation must also be able to reflect on the

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44 Ibid.
possible reasons the participant is unaware of internal processes. I referred to this sense of scepticism earlier in this section, in terms of maintaining a balanced scepticism of the data presented by research subjects. This helps a researcher to maintain distance, and to hopefully read what is being presented in a more illuminating way.

Ethically, the researcher must be prepared for the possible outcome that participants will feel demeaned and insulted by the interpretation of their stories. As Josselson explains:

Researchers have not yet discovered a means of explaining to participants that they, the researchers, will be taking interpretive authority in the final analysis; the customary informed consent form asks people to consent to something that they cannot possibly understand or foresee. Adequate concealment of identity protects confidentiality, but does not prevent narcissistic injury.

One way I mitigated against this was to follow up with the respondents and make sure I had understood what they intended to convey, especially if the context of the conversation was unclear, or I felt they had misunderstood a question. In order to do this, I probed similar themes and questions with them to see if their narrative position was consistent with the data I had already collected. I also triangulated the research by using a broad range of research methods (such as community member profiles, focus groups and extended interviews, field notes and participant observation) in order to strengthen my ability to interpret this information.

Ethically, I was very conscious of the possibility of presenting two faces to the participants. The first of a friendly interested person, and the second, a writer with an agenda who could be twisting words and might present a sensational version of “the truth”. But more than this, I was worried how I would be accepted by the community. More than a decade ago, in her 2003 thesis Celia McMichael argued that Somalis are often called upon to represent their community in focus groups for insights into migrant needs because of their circumstances of migration and cultural distinctiveness. She claimed that for this reason, Somalis are ‘tired of being researched’. I was worried that young people today (more than 10 years after McMichael’s study) would question the usefulness of my study and begrudge me the time to get to know them and their life. Therefore, prior to beginning my fieldwork, I was very uncertain about how many young people would be willing to work with me. I was especially worried that these young people, raised and educated in Australia would resent being studied by me, their peer in age (and often in student status). I was aware that in some cases the people I spoke to would be educated and working in the professional

48 Celia McMichael, “Memory and Resettlement: Somali Women in Melbourne and Emotional Wellbeing” (University of Melbourne, 2003), 25.
sphere and I wondered why on earth they would want to share their stories, their challenges and their achievements with a white outsider.

I tried as much as possible to approach all communication in the spirit of critical narrative inquiry, characterised by an openness and a willingness to absorb as much information as possible from the participant, and treating them as the expert of their own embodied experience. However, when entering the analysis phase of the research (a phase that was temporally and physically removed from the respondents) it became possible to suspend my worries about my reception within the community, and view the same given information through the lens of critique. Following the above methodology in this project led me to a deeper understanding of the issues facing the participants, including the way that they have been represented and misrepresented in dominant discourse.

The process for gaining ethics approval

In the words of Phillipe Bourgois, ‘anthropologists cannot escape seeing, feeling and empathizing with the people in the study’. Based on my own experience with this group of individuals, I could not agree more. In order to strengthen my own confidence and ability to interpret information I collected, I armed myself with as broad a range of methods as I could. These included focus groups, extended interviews, participant observation and community member profiles. Here, I aim to build on the methodological considerations given earlier and to discuss the way these informed the practical structuring of my study. There were pragmatic considerations for carrying out the study that still require elucidation.

Bourgois also notes that ‘Anthropological fieldwork ethics do not need to be in substantial contradiction with commonsensical, spontaneous human ethics’. While I agree with this general statement, ethics approval is an important process in a study such as this. I was expecting to find the ethics approval process to be an arduous bureaucratic route, which all students wishing to work in the field must follow. However, instead it was an opportunity for me to refine my thoughts at an early stage in the project and to become clearer about what sort of people I wanted to interact with and how I would do this.

The application for ethics approval was a multi-staged process involving many discussions with my primary supervisor, but it also gave me the opportunity to engage with other academics in similar fields at my university. With the help of their expertise I was able to refine not only my target group of respondents, but also the questions I would ask them, and the ways I would interact

50 Ibid.
with them. I prepared a list of interview questions for approval which would guide my semi-structured discussions with the respondents (these can be found in Appendix B). In the end, the ethics process was more challenging than I expected, but it was ultimately a rewarding, educational process. It gave me access to a panel of experts (at the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee) and the body of their experience in this area. I received approval to undertake the study using the following methods of interaction.

**Methods of interaction**

*Participant observation*

Participant observation is considered an essential method in anthropological and ethnographic studies. One early example is the work of Frank Hamilton Cushing, and the four and a half years he spent as a participant observer with the Zuni Pueblo people in a study for the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of Ethnology around 1879. During his time as a participant observer Cushing became involved in the customs of the people, after having learned the language and even became initiated into the priesthood. He was heavily criticized as having ‘gone native’ and having lost his objectivity because he did not publish extensively about the culture.  

Indeed, there is a great deal of research that documents the role of the researcher as both an insider and an outsider. Participant observation is a particularly important technique in noting responses in discussion about culturally or personally sensitive issues. Non-verbal responses in such discussions are as important as verbal responses in allowing the researcher to put together a coherent picture of the participants’ experiences. 

According to DeWalt and DeWalt, participant observation increases the validity of a study, as the researcher is able to gain a better understanding of the context of the study. The goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method.

Harvey Russell Bernard listed five reasons arguing for the inclusion of participant observation specifically in cultural studies to increase the study’s validity:

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1. It allows the researcher to collect different types of data. Doing this over a period of time familiarizes the researcher to the community, which facilitates involvement in sensitive activities.

2. It helps prevent people acting in a certain way when they are aware of being observed.

3. It helps the researcher to develop questions that make sense in the native language or are culturally relevant.

4. It gives the researcher a better understanding of what is happening in the culture and validates interpretations of the observation. It also allows the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data through surveys and interviews.

5. It is sometimes the only way to collect the right data for a study.54

One very relevant limitation to participant observation in this study is that male and female researchers have access to different information. As DeWalt and DeWalt note, male and female researchers have access to different people, settings and bodies of knowledge.55 This particular consideration is pertinent in any study concerned with Islam and practicing Muslims. There is also a dichotomy here between practicing objective research, and the natural human subjectivity that no researcher can ignore. There is an argument to be made that researchers can use their subjectivity to open their minds to the worlds of their participants. According to Carl Ratner, one solution to this problem is to practice a wide variety of methods to ensure that the researcher’s understanding of what is being said matches with the understanding of the participant.56

I conducted participant observation over a period of 24 months. This included attendance at sporting events, Somali festivals, meals at a Somali restaurant and regular volunteering teaching English at a community centre in North Melbourne. At the beginning of this study, I felt extremely conflicted about conducting participant observation on people I considered to be my peers. I had some heated discussions about this issue with my supervisors and it was not until I began to understand that participant observation could be conducted within the broader community rather than just the respondents that I began to feel more comfortable with this method.

Merriam has described participant observation a ‘schizophrenic activity’ for the researcher,57 because of the need to participate in the research setting, but not so fully that the researcher loses sight of the research goal and forgets to analyse what is happening around them. For various reasons, I always felt aware of my position as researcher. One of the strongest factors for me was physical appearance. I have fair skin and light coloured hair, and do not wear hijab as all the female respondents did. I was very aware of our physical difference, even in situations where


some of those physical differences were being minimised, such as trying on traditional Somali dress for a party, or when outside in cold weather and covering myself accordingly. Additionally, I was always very aware of my gratitude to be included in cultural events and celebrations, which kept me at a remove from my participants.

In addition to conducting participant observation in person, I also used social media and accessed Internet forums for young Somalis across the world. This is a form of digital ethnography, also termed ‘netnography’ — an online cousin of ethnography. \(^{58}\) In this way, I checked the ideas the young people had been discussing in interviews and focus groups against a broader but still targeted backdrop of discussion and debate. While accessing these forums, I was struck by the fact that I was practicing a kind of participant observation, although the people being observed were not aware of it. I felt that I was accessing some very intimate details at times, despite the fact that these sites are freely available and the content is public.

Community member profiles

This method is based on a technique developed by Mulligan and Nadarajah in their comprehensive reporting on the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka and India. They explain that community member profiles are ‘based on short interviews that can be turned into concise narratives’. \(^{59}\) As part of their longitudinal fieldwork which observed the community responses to the disaster, they utilised a number of different tools to paint a holistic picture of community life:

The study included a random ‘community life’ survey, the collection of ‘community member profiles’ (which focused on post-tsunami experiences), the collection of relevant local stories and the conduct of lengthy semi-structured interviews with tsunami survivors and a wide range of people working in relief and recovery projects and programmes. Demographic data, accounts of local history and other reports and stories were collected in order to construct a ‘social profile’ of each case-study community to make sure that the researchers could properly contextualize their findings.\(^{60}\)

I felt that this was an excellent technique for me due to its ability to capture a broad range of data in a short period of time. It is especially useful as a complementary method along with interviews and focus groups, because (as Mulligan and Nadarajah explain above) it is instrumental in allowing the researcher to contextualise the data collected. As I have previously described, I felt a strong need to

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portray the research subjects honestly and authentically and I was able to use the community member profiles as a framework to locate the findings from the longer interviews.

Additionally, the community member profiles allowed me to collect data in a more quantitative way for a study which is more qualitative. These profiles informed my analysis of data by providing a kind of nuanced lens to examine my findings. They also provided a broader range of data than I could have hoped to achieve using only in-depth interviews due to time constraints. As Mulligan and Nadarajah explain, while these profiles do not offer the richness of data that can be obtained from interviews and focus groups, they are relatively easy to complete and it is possible to collect them in substantial numbers. They can be considered as a ‘qualitative form of sampling’.  

I compiled 45 community member profiles. I present these data in section three. These profiles gave me basic data like year of birth, number of years lived in Australia and family size. The profiles were based on short snapshot interviews with Somalis and were not confined to those respondents who met my criteria for interviews. These profiles were invaluable to me in forming a base layer of quantitative data to refer to. They also allowed me to choose the respondents from a broader range of individuals. They were also a useful as a tool for me to gauge an individual’s willingness to be further interviewed and an ideal first step in establishing a rapport with suitable candidates.

Focus groups

Focus groups are structured, guided conversations with the purpose of data-collection. Originally described as a ‘focussed interview’, they were initially used mostly in the field of marketing. However, a new academic interest in focus groups developed in the beginning of the 1980s, and now they are used as a tool across a wide variety of fields, including education, communication studies, political sciences and health sciences.

Stewart and Shamdasani categorize seven advantages that focus group interviews offer over other methodological approaches. These are: the ability to gather data quickly and economically; the direct interaction with respondents; the ability to collect data in the words of respondents; the process of respondents reacting to each other; flexibility in setting and type of respondent;
suitability for illiterate people and children and the ease with which results can be understood. I found that most of these advantages manifested over the course of my study, particularly those that concerned the flexibility and direct contact with the respondents.

Erminia Colucci, writing in 2008, pointed out that even though scholars have acknowledged the utility of the focus group in cross-cultural research, and research with ethnic minorities, it is yet to be widely adopted in these fields. She posited that this may be because of a lack of confidence of researchers and the lengthy planning required to use this method in ethnoculturally different populations. Colucci asserts that in using focus groups in a cross-cultural research situation, some scholars have neglected to ‘explicitly express sampling criteria’, especially where ‘culture’ is concerned. She describes how in her PhD study which compared the cultural meanings and social representations of youth suicide in Italy, India and Australia, she required participants to be at least second generation in their home country. While this does not ensure that all participants will have exactly the same cultural understanding and symbols, it is a way of narrowing the sample to achieve more consistent data. Similarly, the participants of my study were generation 1.5 Somalis who have arrived in Australia as a result of fleeing the Somali civil war and continued unrest.

The focus group technique is a tool for observing ideas in a relatively homogenous group context. A culturally homogenous group can create an environment in which participants feel at ease and able to express their views. Phan and Fitzgerald agree that the focus group should be homogenous enough to allow free discussion, however, they add that the group must also be heterogeneous enough to provide a range of perspectives. While my focus groups were obviously ethnically and culturally homogenous (even taking into account the young people’s varying circumstances and experiences), it was difficult to ensure heterogeneity given the age of the participants and the relatively small size of the Somali community in Melbourne. In order to mitigate against these issues, I used the focus groups to encourage ease of conversation, and I relied on my in-depth interviews to provide the participants an opportunity to express views that may not have been accepted in the group setting.

Returning to the perennial dilemma in cross-cultural research; the emic and etic position of the researcher is especially relevant in a focus group situation. While there are certainly advantages and disadvantages to both positions, it is often recommended that the focus group moderator be of the same ethnicity as the respondents in order to enhance relations and increase the participants’
willingness to respond. In my study, it was not possible to have a moderator of Somali ethnic background. Nevertheless, the Somali community in Melbourne is rather contained and close-knit, and I had a sense that because my participants noted my outsider status, they believed I would have less opportunity to compromise their confidentiality within the small community.

In this study, the primary benefits of using the focus group method were the process of respondents reacting to each other (and indeed, the respondents putting each other at ease) and the ability to collect data in the words of respondents. This data informed the individual interviews which followed. Five focus groups were conducted with groups of between four and seven people in offices, community centres, schools and cafes. They took between 90 minutes and two hours and I used cues from the group to determine when it was time to end the session. In one focus group, I had to call the discussion to a close after two and a half hours because I was starting to struggle to take all the information in. This was with a group of women aged in their 40s-60s who were parents of generation 1.5 children and had very strong opinions about their sons and daughters.

Something I had not anticipated was that the groups became all male or all female. In mixed gender discussions, both the men and women were reluctant to discuss personal issues, such as girlfriends/boyfriends and expectations for men and women in and out of the home. Omar made similar findings in his 2011 PhD on Somali youth in Melbourne and Minnesota, and indeed, was convinced then to only interact with young men in order not to disrupt the free-flow of conversation he enjoyed with them.

Colucci describes how certain interactions which seem obvious are fraught with difficulty for the participants. In her research in India, she found that the participants were inclined to agree with each other and to turn to the moderator very frequently, expecting her to control the discussion. She proposes that this could be because she had higher education status than her participants. Interestingly, I felt the same way in my focus groups with the young men. As many of them were doing apprenticeships, and had voiced their difficulty in justifying their choices (as opposed to university study) to their families (especially female members), education status could be one reason for this. Additionally, I found that their English expression was not as rich as the women’s, so they may have been looking for guidance with language. Another possible explanation is that they were keeping me at a distance as is appropriate within Islamic culture for interactions between males and females.

One aspect of the focus groups which was very enjoyable was my chance to observe the group dynamic as the subjects up for discussion shifted and changed. At times, it seemed that the groups had forgotten I was in the room with them, although I had a sense that the discussion topics

70 Yusuf Sheikh Omar, “Integration from Youth Perspectives: A Comparative Study of Young Somali Men in Melbourne and Minneapolis” (Latrobe University, 2011), 84.
were somewhat new for the participants, and not topics they discussed often with each other. In particular, they enjoyed comparing their childhood memories and notes on how their families operated both culturally/religiously and socially. There was a lot of gentle mocking and teasing about adherence to, or lack of, culture.

The focus groups showed me very clearly that I needed to approach this research as a polylogue in the spirit of Edith Sizoo’s imagining. Rather than assuming that I was entering into a dialogue and collecting data from another party, I began to understand that there are many perspectives to consider, rather than the researcher and the participant. The level of vocal disagreement about some topics was strong evidence for this fact. I see this fluidity as a reflection the numerous (sometimes competing) facets of identity that an individual struggles to integrate in everyday life. This was a continuous, refreshing reminder that the identity theories, which I had been plotting and examining for so long, do have very real application. Perhaps the best way for me to realise that was to be in a room full of rowdy young people, wishing to make their voices and opinions heard.

One difficulty I encountered in the focus group setting was the loss of control I had over the discussion and the way that the more dominant personalities tended to take over the group and cause the more passive members to either lose interest or make it more difficult for them to contribute. I worked very hard to engage all members of the group equally, though of course that was not always possible. I also noticed that some of the shyer group participants at times looked as though they wanted to contribute something to the conversation but were either cut off, or seemed unwilling to express an opposing view to the more dominant participants.

The focus groups allowed me to interview a range of young people efficiently, and they also helped the men feel comfortable in speaking with me. Additionally, the data I collected from the focus groups informed my questions to those respondents who volunteered to take part in in-depth interviews.

**Extended interviews**

In ethnographic research individual in-depth interviews are used as a method to carry out intensive research, generally with a smaller number of people due to the time it takes to engage with individuals. Having engaged in a number of focus group discussions and completed some months of participant observation and collected numerous community member profiles, I decided to use semi-structured interviews as equivalent to guided conversations and encourage the respondents to speak at length on the topics they chose.

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According to Cohen et al., there is a wide variety of interview models discussed in method and methodology literature. However, a qualitative interview seeks to describe and understand the meanings of central themes of the subjects’ worlds. It seeks to cover a factual level, and then a more abstract meaning level, though this can present significant challenges. Martyn Denscombe draws attention to the multiple biases that may affect the interviewee based on their perception of the interviewer — the interviewer effect. ‘In particular, the sex, the age, and the ethnic origins of the interviewer have a bearing on the amount of information people are willing to divulge and their honesty about what they reveal.’ As this is something that is impossible to change, it seems that the best thing a researcher can do is to be aware of the possibility for different types of bias and the different situations and manners in which they may arise.

I had a set of 29 questions (See Appendix B) for each interview, which focused on memories of life in Somalia, the journey to Australia and settlement in Melbourne. I found that the interviews, while covering additional ground encompassed by the interview questions, generally followed the chronological order as designated by the questions. Although I covered the same questions with all respondents, and most interviews took around one hour to complete, there were some that took much longer due to the participant’s willingness to share additional information and tell additional stories. Additionally, due to some young men’s unwillingness to be interviewed individually, I made a compromise and carried out extended interviews in groups of two when required.

The Community Member Profiles identified people who would be interested in taking part in focus groups. The focus groups then identified those who were willing to participate in longer individual interviews. If a participant was willing, I conducted one or two repeat interviews with the same individual. Some of these young people recommended siblings or friends to speak with me as well.

In order to avoid prompting the interviewees and the potentially misleading data that can result, I often used a technique where I repeated a word of the participant’s answer to a previous question to encourage them to elaborate on their response. For example:

Subject: Faith is very important to my family.
Me: Your family?

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Subject: Extended family, cousins etc... We just call all our relatives family, not like in Australia where it's the mum, the dad, and two kids.

I made sure that all of my questions were open ended, and I gave a copy of the questions to the respondents at the beginning of the interviews to make sure they felt comfortable answering the questions. I made a decision to do this after applying for ethics approval, in order to give the participants as much information as possible before commencing the interviews. I recorded all interviews bar two young men who did not want to be recorded.

Field notes

For some scholars, field notes are the very essence of a study: ‘Thus they emphasize writing detailed field notes close to their field observations, mining these notes systematically through qualitative coding techniques, and producing “grounded” analyses tied closely and specifically to the original field note corpus’.77 Still others believe that it is best to become fully immersed in a culture, and that taking field notes may cause the deeper, more intuitive experience of being immersed in that culture to be lost.78

I chose to use field notes as a kind of personal journal, often completing them on public transport after attending cultural, sporting or social events or interviews and focus group sessions. I did not want to give too much weight to my own, reconstructed version of events because:

To put it bluntly, fieldnotes are gnomic, shorthand reconstructions of events, observations, and conversations that took place in the field. They are composed well after the fact as inexact notes to oneself and represent simply one of many levels of textualization set off by experience. To disentangle the interpretive procedures at work as one moves across levels is problematic to say the least... Little wonder that fieldnotes are the secret papers of social research.79

I recorded detailed field notes. At first, I thought that these could be memos as is the practice in Grounded Theory, but I found that I was not relying on them in the same way as is advocated in Grounded Theory. I preferred to use them as a complementary method rather than have a singular focus on the collection of field notes.

78 Bernard, Research methods in anthropology: qualitative and quantitative approaches: 292.
Emerson et al. describe two practical methods for taking field notes.\textsuperscript{80} They are not mutually exclusive, simply two approaches to the compilation of notes. The first approach involves taking notes only on things that strike the researcher as particularly salient. The second involves taking comprehensive field notes about everything the researcher observes during a particular period of time. I decided to adhere to the first technique and only make notes when something struck me as particularly relevant or interesting. This was obviously extremely subjective, and indeed, varied from interaction to interaction.

One of the main reasons I decided to make notes only about the salient happenings, was my awareness of being observed myself. I did not want to appear to be busily documenting everything around me for fear of influencing my participants’ behavior. Another reason was that in using field notes as a complementary method to my other methods, I was confident of having built sufficient understanding of the Somali community in Melbourne to accurately note which happenings were salient and worthy of documentation. As Wolfinger puts it, ‘Ethnographers frequently choose to record a particular observation because it stands out.’\textsuperscript{81} I was able to take preliminary notes in the field as advocated by Goffman\textsuperscript{82} and Emerson et al.,\textsuperscript{83} and then use these often handwritten notes to structure my lengthier, typed field notes upon leaving the field. I made very short notes as I was aware of my audience.

The nature of participant observation ensured that my field notes were a somewhat messy, loose collection of writing. Some were handwritten on the back of whatever paper was to hand some typed and some quick jottings intended to jolt my memory later. I found that these shorthand notes provoked a different reaction in me than the more comprehensive notes I had taken while in the field, as long term memory and short term memory throw up some different interpretation of events (especially if I had been informed by further participant interaction in between times). I believe this is because in writing the shorthand notes, I was not able to analyse a research situation as I was immersed in it and was forced to wait until I had left the field in order to engage in personal reflection. In general, I avoided explicit analysis during the fieldwork stage, however, I had established some roots within the Somali community and continued to have contact with some friends and to teach English once a week. It was difficult for me to consciously stop being ‘in the field’.

\textsuperscript{81} Nicholas Wolfinger, "On Writing Fieldnotes: Collection Strategies and Background Expectancies," \textit{Qualitative Research} 2, no. 1 (2002): 90.
\textsuperscript{83} Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, \textit{Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes}. 

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Establishing connections

I have some personal connections to young Somalis in Melbourne thanks to my time studying Arabic at the University of Melbourne, and my work as a tutor in Development Studies and in the administrative area of international student settlement at Victoria University. I discussed my idea of researching generation 1.5 Somali Australians with relevant friends and acquaintances to gauge their reaction before commencing. Their reactions were generally positive, with one close Somali friend saying ‘it will be good for someone to pay us some positive attention and not just put a nasty story in the paper’.

I was introduced to some people of influence and community leaders via my contacts and these people kindly agreed to help me connect with young Somalis who would fit my research profile. I began to realise that it would not be realistic for me to tackle the entire Somali community within Melbourne, given the broad spread of the settlement. So I decided to concentrate on two areas: the greater areas of Heidelberg West and North Melbourne/Flemington.

At first, I was directed to speak with a community leader in West Heidelberg by a number of my friends. They spoke with each other at length about this, and eventually nominated a man called Mohammed in his late 30s to introduce me to this leader. I attended my first meeting with him in the Heidelberg mall in May 2012, accompanied by Mohammed.

I was conscious of the fact that this meeting was about me asking permission to conduct my project within the Somali community in West Heidelberg, and also of the great respect with which this man was regarded. We met in a café he owns in The Mall in West Heidelberg. He was welcoming but quite reserved and I felt very young and inexperienced in his presence. I explained to him what I intended to do and the sort of people I was interested in interviewing and was somewhat surprised when he asked to see further documentation from the university and to meet with my supervisor. (It is worth noting that this community leader also holds a PhD, and so was perhaps more familiar with academic administrative processes than most people are.)

I invited my primary supervisor to a meeting with him shortly after. This meeting was characterized by a sense of caution and respect on the part of all present. My supervisor Yaso Nadarajah explained that she has a great deal of experience working with different community groups and spoke about some of her recent work in Papua New Guinea where she worked with elders to deepen the experience of reciprocity and sharing of mutually beneficial knowledge. I felt somewhat left out of this meeting, but tried to see it as an opportunity for my study to be validated by a powerful figure within the community. I was also conscious that this meeting might constitute the feeling of being ignored when a researcher ‘enters the field’, as noted by Clifford Geertz.84 I wanted to make clear that I had done preliminary research and had some grounding within the

community, however I had not expected the level of protocol that was required in order for me to be granted access to the community. This meeting with Yaso was also in some ways an extension of a cultural protocol with one elder from the community and another from the academic world. I believe it engendered a recognition of mutual responsibility and respect.

I had a sense of great respect for the gatekeeping, which protects community members, and also my first glimmer of understanding that the Somali Australian community in Melbourne has been researched and studied before. I knew I had to ‘prove myself’ in order to proceed. Indeed, this was also true in other regions of Melbourne and similar meetings also took place in Preston and North Melbourne. At these meetings, my supervisor was not required, and I had a feeling that I had passed the first test, and the first community leader has vouched for me to his peers. During these meetings I was conscious of being more reserved than is my natural personality, in order to show respect and not to speak out of turn with these respected elders. The meetings began with a discussion about what I intended to achieve and why I was interested in this particular topic.

On all three occasions, I had a strong sense that my focus on generation 1.5 was of interest. All three leaders remarked that there have been some issues between the younger generations and their parents and grandparents in Melbourne and that it would be valuable to have a greater understanding of the dynamics between generations. In North Melbourne, the community leader I spoke to was a woman who is extremely active in the cultural life of Somalis living in the area. She impressed upon me the importance of educating young people in the ways of their heritage and culture in order to avoid ‘problems with crime and the law’. In her eyes, it was vital to keep community and cultural links strong, and this was why she was eager for me to proceed with my study — to bring greater understanding about how the generation 1.5ers see themselves and their place in the world, in the context of the complex and often contested (and contesting) expectations they face from different quarters.

These discussions were quite lengthy, and afterward, the community leaders facilitated my introduction to some young people. I had a strong sense that after attending these meetings, I had been granted permission to continue with my study, as the leaders were gatekeepers for their community in a very protective sense. Invariably, some of the young people I was introduced to were more interested in being involved than others and were much more willing to be in frequent contact with me. These people became my key informants and I relied on them heavily to contact further participants and vouch for me personally.

These key informants were very generous with their time and all participated in in-depth interviews with me on more than one occasion. They would also organize times and locations for interviews and focus groups. I am very grateful to these individuals in particular, because without them it would have been very difficult for me to gain access to so many young people in a relatively

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short space of time. The fact that they encouraged their peers to let me speak to them enabled me to meet a much broader sample of Somali youth than would have been possible otherwise. Thanks to the key informants, I was able to secure a point of entry into the community when I knew only a few people. They served as my initial contacts, however I was later able to rely on a referral snowball sample technique.\textsuperscript{86}

I conducted in-depth interviews with a total of 24 respondents (12 in North Melbourne/Flemington and 12 in Heidelberg West). In addition to this, I held focus groups, discussions and interviews with 15 community members including parents, young people, professionals and older people (the older people needed translation by the younger members of the group). I also kept in regular contact with two social workers in the areas where I conducted the study. I was able to meet with a public defender at Victoria Legal aid who had experience defending young Somali offenders (all male).

Much of my data was gathered through extended focus groups and extended interviews. In addition to being particularly suited to this type of project it is also a link to the Somali oral culture. As I discuss in section three, the Somali language was not written down until the 1970s, and there is a strong culture of lengthy group discussion, (which is seemingly at odds with the ‘culture of violence’ that has been ascribed to Somalis, and interrogated in section three) both to impart information and to resolve issues.\textsuperscript{87} Additionally, the fieldwork was carried out at a pace that ebbed and flowed according to the needs of the participants.

Islam was a constant consideration during the course of the research, with frequent pauses during discussions so that respondents could pray. Almost all fieldwork halted during Ramadan, which in 2013 fell between July 9 and August 7. In 2014, Ramadan fell between June 29 and July 27. During these periods of fasting and prayer I communicated only via email with the respondents to organise future dates or exchange greetings. Every participant was a practicing Muslim (with various levels of observance) and Islam was a crucial part of their social and cultural lives and their sense of self. All the women wore headscarves as is common in the Somali community in Melbourne. All the men also dressed modestly. For example, they did not wear any singlets or low-hanging trousers.

All of the participants arrived in Australia after the eruption of the civil war in Somalia in 1991. Most arrived with their families via the Humanitarian and Refugee program and some were nominated for family visas by relatives who had already settled in Australia. They were from varied backgrounds in Somalia, although most were from urban rather than rural areas. Celia McMichael describes the odd practice whereby researchers document the lives of immigrants after they have crossed borders without focusing on the forces that led them to flee their homeland. She asked here

\textsuperscript{87} Ian M Lewis, \textit{A modern history of the Somali} (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2002).
participants to talk about their previous lives in Somalia, their flight and their arrival in Australia. Similarly, I have taken the view that my participants are informed by their physical, cultural and historic pasts and that it is important to find out about their lives in Somalia and their journey to Australia as well as their settlement here.

Data analysis methodology

Bourgois notes in his ethnography research into heroin addicts and crack smokers in San Francisco that ‘ending an ethnographic project often feels like a betrayal of friendship’, and it can be difficult to ‘leave the field’. I too found it difficult to move from data collection to interpretation and reporting. There was a ‘line in the sand’ where I stopped collecting more data, but before outlining my methodology for analysis the data, it is important to explain that the process of collating data began well before I finished collecting it. Qualitative data analysis is a fluid, reflective and iterative process that already starts as data are being collected, rather than after data collection has ceased. In fact, the process of collecting and analysing qualitative data has been described as as much ‘art’ as science, or as a ‘dance’, in the words of William Miller and Benjamin Crabtree.

Over almost three years, I documented around 80,000 words of raw material. For each interview or focus group session, I initially transcribed the session word for word. I did not set out to focus on certain themes, and indeed many themes that I was not expecting to emerge did in due course. As I was transcribing the data, themes emerged iteratively. At the same time, I was documenting countless field notes and reflections on participant observation I was carrying out. I started to use NVIVO software, but ultimately found that I was able to conceptually extract the dominant themes through a process of sifting, sorting and identifying key themes and collating them accordingly, without the aid of this program. Perhaps this was due to the relatively small number of interviews I conducted. Even though the amount of raw material I collected was large, I developed such intimate relationships with people that I felt I knew the issues deeply without the aid of a computer program. I can see, however, that if I had expanded the sample size, and especially the size of the research team, then such software would be necessary.

I coded the interview transcripts with around 40 different categories. Over time, I began to see overlapping categories and was able to collapse these into 11 distinct re-emerging themes. Once I had extracted key themes, I began collating all of the other notes I had made into categories. It was satisfying to see conceptual links occur in the most unexpected of ways. Similar stories kept

88 McMichael, “Memory and Resettlement: Somali Women in Melbourne and Emotional Wellbeing.”
emerging, and reinforcing the importance of the themes I had identified. Again, this was a time-consuming and iterative process, resulting in the themes outlined in the three findings chapters.

Finally, when reporting data in the findings chapters, I date the material and refer to the type of data collected, as ‘INT’ (for Individual Interviews) GROUP INT for those extended interviews that comprised only two young men, ‘FG’ (for Focus Group), ‘FN’ (for Field Note), and ‘PO’ (for a reflection on Participant Observation). As already mentioned, Community Member Profiles were an important starting point for deciding which avenues to follow in the research, and some of this data will be presented graphically in section three. In order to maintain confidentiality, I developed codenames for all research participants. I explained that they would not be referred to by their own names, and the young people were pleased about this.

Reflections on the process

When I first commenced drawing up this research project, I envisaged meeting a select group of Somali young people and interviewing them at length on many different occasions. I believed that collecting their life histories would be the most thorough way to come to understand the Somali generation 1.5 living in Melbourne today. As Mulligan and Nadarajah put it:

Life histories, or personal biographies, are a particular kind of story and they can be relevant to a wide range of research interests. However, they involve considerable time and effort because there is much to cover and the written account is likely to pass through numerous exchanges between the “subject” and the author(s).92

I was sure that the best way to collect accurate and authentic data was through engagement with my subjects’ life stories. I planned on meeting young people at community events (football, Somali Independence day celebrations, the Somali book fair amongst others) and striking up a relationship with them over time that would allow me to instigate the painstaking process of collecting life stories. I was looking forward to really getting inside their heads and I believed that time and trust would ultimately all but remove the barriers between us as researcher and respondent.

In order to begin this process, I started to attend community events as described above. I was also given access to some young people by community leaders. Although I hadn’t planned it, the meetings with young people fell into a pattern of a focus group, which ended with an invitation from me to meet again individually for one or more longer and more comprehensive interviews.

Unsurprisingly, these invitations were rarely taken up. I had been diligent in collecting data to form my ‘community member profiles’ and I ended up with 45 of these documents. I consoled myself that this data was also useful to be able to make quantitative statements but I was disappointed that Somali young people weren’t throwing themselves at me to tell me their stories. After all, I believed my research would benefit them. I began to understand that my original timelines had been wildly optimistic and that I would need to re-evaluate the logistics of the entire project.

Events in my personal life also conspired to make this abundantly clear to me after my husband was severely burnt in a freak accident. He was in hospital and then at home under my care for about six months before he was able to live as before and during this time I took leave from study and did not have any contact at all with the Somali community.

I was extremely nervous about returning to study and worried that my hard-won relationships would be in tatters. It took a couple of days of steeling myself to call my friends and contacts. But I was met with genuine empathy and compassion and I believe that this difficult event in my life actually helped to connect me to my research subjects who had previously been keeping me at length. I don’t know if this was simply due to the time that had elapsed between our meetings. Perhaps they had evaluated the experience and decided independently that it was a worthwhile project to give their time and stories to. Or perhaps my return after my husband’s injury offered proof to them that I really cared about the project and the broader Somali community in Melbourne. Perhaps they simply felt sorry for me and were more inclined to help me after learning that I had experienced hardship and needed to care for my family. I did have a sense that in sharing my very personal story, I had demystified the role of the researcher or inquirer and that they felt more comfortable relating to me at a personal level. Whatever the reason, after returning from my leave, I was able to enjoy a much closer relationship with the respondents.

The initial focus groups with all participants were relaxed and easy, however, even after my return to research, I still found that the young men were more reluctant than the women to be interviewed individually. I had anticipated that I would be able to strike up a rapport more easily with the young women, but I had also assumed that because all the participants were mostly raised in Australia they would be more open with me than their parents’ generation for example. While my experience did show this to be the case (some of the older generation viewed me with suspicion at first, even after being introduced by people of influence), I learned that the young people’s exposure to an Australian way of life certainly did not erase cultural and religious expectations.

After conducting group discussions and switching the recorder off, I was always invited to stay and chat with the participants. This led to many more hours of informal conversation. During the discussions in general, I took on the role of a moderator, often only interrupting a lively discussion to move on to new points of interest or to bring a debate to a close when I felt it had been

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covered comprehensively. This was an interesting position to be in, as the young people sometimes appealed to me to restore order when conversations became heated or too lively to follow any more. I felt that they had elevated me to this moderator position without me seeking it out.

To ensure anonymity of the respondents (in line with my Ethics Approval), I gave all the respondents codenames. Any time a given name appears in the thesis, it is a codename. Only four young men were comfortable enough to take part in more detailed individual interviews in the end. Two did not want to be recorded. In these cases, I made extensive notes after the interview, and have flagged these reconstructed quotes as they appear in the findings chapters. The other young men were happy to return to a more intimate group interview scenario with two participants. The young men were much less comfortable discussing gender related subjects, such as marriage and girlfriend-boyfriend relationships. I believe this is due to the Islamic teaching that non-related women and men should have a restricted relationship both in the public and private spheres.

As previously described, my experience mirrors almost exactly the experience of Yusuf Sheikh Omar in his PhD study completed in 2011.

At first, the research plan aimed at keeping the balance between female and male participants but during the pilot project in stage one, it was evident that girls were not comfortable discussing some matters related to gender relationships with me while boys did not mind. Islam teaches that interactions between men and women who are not related, should be restricted in both the public and private spheres... These gender divisions made it difficult for the researcher to discuss a range of issues with young women. For example, during the pilot interviews, the young women were reluctant to discuss issues on gender relationships particularly boyfriend–girlfriend relationships while young men were open about discussing these relationships. However, I did take the opportunity to conduct several focus groups with young women and in this context they were happy to discuss a range of issues. In that sense, they were an invaluable resource for the study.94

Although I conducted my fieldwork in Suburban Melbourne, in areas that (I had thought) were familiar to me rather than in some exotic locale, I was surprised at just how foreign and unfamiliar the worlds of the subjects were to me, despite having lived much of my adult life in the metropolitan areas of Melbourne. This showed me very clearly that we can inhabit a world and think we know it well. But others inhabit the same world, and experience it vastly differently.

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94 Omar, “Integration from Youth Perspectives: A Comparative Study of Young Somali Men in Melbourne and Minneapolis,” 84.
III CONTEXTUALISING SOMALIA AND SOMALIS IN MELBOURNE

(a) Somali history, contested issues, and representations of violence

Introduction

This section contextualises Somalia and the experience of Somalis in Melbourne. I look at Somali history, and cover several contested issues. This leads on to an important elucidation of the ways in which Somalis have been represented as violent in academic and popular discourse. Next I interrogate representations and misrepresentations of actual violent acts perpetrated by Somalis (or members of Somali-affiliated groups). It seems that violence is a characteristic often attributed to Somalis both in Somalia and abroad. I give some examples of how representations of Somalis have been constructed over the past two centuries, and the ways in which Somalis are represented and misrepresented in terms of violence today.

Contextualising Somalia

Ghassan Dibbeh has claimed that ‘Today, Somalia is considered to constitute a modern form of anarchy’. As Celia McMichael describes it: ‘Over more than a century, various accounts and depictions of Somalia have built a cumulative image of the country as inhospitable, hot, largely arid, peopled by needy and violent primitives and racked by conflict’. In describing the country, its geography, people, religion and culture, this section gives some examples of how such a perception has been created and maintained over many decades. A brief history of Somalia is thus the aim here.

Somalia is located in the easternmost part of the Horn of Africa. It borders the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, as well as 2385km of land boundaries (with Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti). It is comprised principally of desert and Somalis recognise four seasons (two rainy and two dry). The rainy seasons represent a reprieve after months of drought in the dry seasons. During the wet

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season, the rural population flourishes, with abundant supplies of food and only limited care required for the animals. Many social functions are conducted during this season. Due to its very harsh environment, climate is the primary factor in much of Somali life. For the large nomadic population, the timing and amount of rainfall are crucial determinants of the adequacy of grazing and the prospects of relative prosperity. Starvation can occur during droughts.4

Somali exports include livestock and bananas, and other crops such as sugar cane, maize and sorghum. Industry is focused on processing agricultural products. While the country is thought to be relatively rich in mineral resources including lead, gold, zircon, coal and uranium, these are not fully exploited.5 In fact, Somalia is one of Africa’s poorest countries and remains profoundly dependent on foreign aid. It has suffered recently from drought, flooding, famine and high foreign debt, in addition to the effects of the long-running civil war.

Somalia’s 2015 population is estimated to be around 10.5 million, however this estimate is complicated due to the large number of nomads as well as refugee movement from Somalia.6 Current population growth is estimated at 1.83% per annum.7 Since the onset of the civil war, many have relocated to urban areas. Although statistical information on urbanisation is scarce, current estimates place the rate of urbanisation in Somalia at 4.06% per annum; and the estimate of the current urbanised population being 39.6%.8 The estimated population of the capital of Somalia, Mogadishu, which has been a thriving urban centre since the 16th century, is currently 2.138 million. The next largest city is Hargeysa, with a much smaller population of 760,000.9

A brief ‘official’ history of Somalia

The Somalia we know today has a very short history. It was created in Mogadishu on the first of July 1960 when the previously Italian administered territory of Somalia achieved independence and merged with the formerly British protectorate which had become independent just four days earlier.10 However, it goes without saying that the history of the region and the Somali people is much longer.

The Kingdom of Punt, as described in ancient Egyptian writings, was probably located in the area of Somalia’s northern and eastern coastlines. Trading routes were established in these areas between the 7th and 10th centuries AD. Somali nomads had lived in the interior of these areas since

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6 Central Intelligence Agency, "Somalia."
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
this time. As Somalis migrated east and south, they expelled or absorbed the Oromo pastoralists and Bantu farming peoples and took over coastal towns that had belonged to the Swahili people of East Africa including Mogadishu.11

There are varied theories about the beginnings of Islam in Somalia. It is thought that early in the Prophet’s ministry, a band of persecuted Muslims fled across the Red Sea into the Horn of Africa with the Prophet’s encouragement. There the Muslims were afforded protection by the Ethiopian negus (king). Alternatively, Islam could have come to Somalia via contacts with Persian and Arab merchants and seamen who founded settlements along the Somali coast more than one thousand years ago.12 These, and other accounts, seem equally plausible.

Today the Somali people occupy the republic created in 1960, and also the Hawd and Ogaden regions of eastern Ethiopia, southern Djibouti, and north-eastern Kenya. Until the colonial period of the 1840s, the Somali people had never formed a single political unit. Rather, their organization was based on clan and region. With the ‘scramble for Africa’ in the late 19th century, Somali borders were drawn up with European interests as the primary concern.13 Even so, according to the Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern World, Somali homogeneity is reinforced by a ‘profound adherence to Islam’.14 I will return to this notion of a homogenous Somali society later in this section, as it is a controversial theme.

Colonial involvement

There has been a long history of colonial involvement in Somalia, much of it concerned with the territorial ambitions of both the colonisers and the indigenous population. At the turn of the 16th century, Somali armies marched under the leadership of Imam Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi (with Ottoman support) and invaded Abyssinia (Ethiopia). They destroyed many historic buildings, churches and manuscripts during this campaign. The use of firearms, which were only seldom available in Ethiopia at that time contributed to the conquest of significant territories.15 Ethiopia was saved by the arrival of Portuguese expedition led by Cristovao de Gama. Some claim that the Portuguese had responded to a call for help from their fellow Christians.16 Hostilities continued for the remainder of the century. This likely influenced the forming of a close relationship between the Somalis and the Ottomans, which subsequently kept the geopolitical tensions high in the area.

11 Ibid.
14 Barrows, “Somalia.”
Centuries later, both British and Italian colonial involvement with Somalia was commercially motivated, with the British garrison at Aden establishing relations with northern Somali coastal towns in order to secure a reliable source of meat. Italian involvement in Somalia began in 1888 when an Italian political figure, Vincenzo Filonardi, leased several coastal towns from the Sultan of Zanzibar. When his companies failed, the Italian state assumed control in 1905. The French controlled what is now Djibouti, where there are still people with Somali ethnic origins living today.

Colonial intervention in the early to mid 19th century contributed significantly to the drastic alteration of the political, cultural and economic Somali context. The country was considered to be strategically valuable, but with limited economic potential. Colonial powers did develop some infrastructure, such as the Franco-Ethiopian railway, and ports in coastal towns. The colonial division of Somalia has had long-lasting effects, perhaps chiefly in the contested borders. Interestingly, when the Italians occupied Ethiopia (briefly) in 1935-1936, they attached the ethnically Somali regions of Ogaden and Hawd to the colonial Somali province. However, when England restored Ethiopia’s independence, they re-established the borders with Ethiopia, further dividing ethnic Somalis. This territorial confusion and ambition has marked Somali political history indelibly, with conflicts such as the 1977-78 attack on Ethiopia weakening the regime of Muhammad Siyad Barre, and leading to a decade of instability before the eventual outbreak of civil war in 1991.

Post-Independence

The period immediately after the achievement of independence in 1960 was one of relative peace, with the political system still largely defined by lineage. However, clan-based political fragmentation escalated, as dozens of clan-based parties formed. This point is illustrated by the fact that at the 1969 elections (nine years after independence was achieved), there were 64 parties contesting to represent a population of less than four million. Samatar has argued that these parties represented clan lines rather than political ideologies.

Leland Barrows names the weak and uneven economic development of the country during this period, the divisive nature of clan society, and the irredentism resulting from the large numbers

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17 Barrows, "Somalia."
of Somalis living outside the borders, as accumulating problems which eventually led to the assassination of the president, Abdirashid Ali Shermarka and a coup d'état by the army chief of staff, General Muhammad Siyad Barre on 21 October 1969.22

One of Siyad Barre’s great aims appears to have been to foster a sense of nationalist sentiment through ‘scientific socialism’. Some of his policies were very forward thinking, such as those which allowed women greater rights and outlawed female infibulation.23 In order to encourage greater loyalty to the law and state, Barre created government bodies to punish disloyalty under the National Security Laws of 1970.24 Some examples of ‘disloyalty’ were tribalism and lack of revolutionary zeal.25 Some who spoke out against the regime were publicly executed.26 There was initially a great deal of support for Siyad Barre, but he was ultimately unable to provide a solution to Somalia’s chronic political instability. According to Besteman, Somalis remained divided along lineage lines, despite his efforts at unification.27

In 1970, President Muhammad Siyad Barre declared Somalia a socialist state, greatly strengthening relations with the USSR. In 1977, with the help of Soviet arms, Somalia attempted to seize the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, but was defeated. The tables turned when the USSR switched its allegiance to Ethiopia, based on the socialist orientation of the new Ethiopian administration.28 This has been described as a proxy battleground in the Cold War. Following this, Somalia improved its relations with its Arab neighbours and the United States, completing the turnaround between global powers.

Barre’s regime was weakened considerably by his territorial ambitions regarding Ethiopia, and with the increasing corruption, coupled with a terrible drought inland, a group of local clan leaders finally deposed Siyad Barre in 1991. British Somaliland also seceded from Somalia at this time. The clans could not agree on a replacement leader and the ensuing power struggle between warlords Mohamed Farah Aideed and Ali Mahdi Mohamed killed and wounded thousands of civilians. Some claim that Somalia has been without an effective central government since this time.29

22 Barrows, "Somalia."
24 Ibid., 12.
Civil War and Anarchy

Since the outbreak of war in 1991, Somalia has witnessed intense conflict between insurgent groups, with refugees fleeing advancing fronts from many directions. By 1992, some six million people were facing starvation and the UN deployed troops against rival warlords throughout the country. In the face of warlords’ opposition, international agencies tried to alleviate the suffering. Following this immediate anarchy, there were considerable efforts to unite Somalia. Somali factions participated in conferences in neighbouring countries and elsewhere under the auspices of the UN and the African Union. Attempts at unification came close to success in 2002, although the new president and parliament (elected and convened in Kenya) were prevented from moving to Mogadishu by hostile factions.

There has followed a string of transitional governments, with many rounds of peace talks and multiple international interventions. The Transitional Federal Government was established in 2004, regaining the South of Somalia by 2006 from the Islamic Courts Union. Conflict continued to escalate, with the administration’s Prime Minister narrowly avoiding death in an attack in 2005. The Islamic Courts Union then splintered into various radical groups, most notably Al Shabaab (the youth). These groups have since been fighting the Somali government for control of the country and Al Shabaab has become a powerful insurgent group.

In 2011, Somalia again suffered a major famine, and a mass exodus of its people in search of food. The civil war has continued, with brief periods of respite for over two decades. In August 2014, Operation Indian Ocean was launched to target the remaining insurgent pockets in the country. Al Shabaab has been steadily moving forces up towards Mogadishu and the absence of authority has led to Somali pirates becoming a major threat in the area and prompted a further exodus of those Somali citizens able to escape the country. In January 2014 the UNHCR estimated that a total of 1,121,738 refugees and 35,472 asylum seekers had fled Somalia. These refugees have scattered mainly throughout neighbouring countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia. Many made their way north by sea across the Gulf of Aden to Yemen. Some refugees have headed for Europe, with the UK hosting a sizeable population, and others have traveled as far afield as Australia. It is worth highlighting that the population of Somalia as in the 1970s stood at around 4 million. Even with an increase in population over the past 40 years, the combined total of refugees and asylum seekers as calculated by the UNHCR represents a significant proportion of this population. The population living abroad is crucial in keeping the Somali economy afloat: ‘From abroad, the Somali

30 Wright, A Dictionary of World History.
diaspora is estimated to send home between US$750 million and US$1 billion annually. However, there have been questions raised about the trajectory and final destination of that money.

Contested issues in Somali history

I have presented a brief historical narrative above. However, many of the issues alluded to deserve more detailed and complex analysis, especially due to considerable dissent among historians and Somali scholars. This section looks at some of the more contested issues in the history of Somalia.

Lewis points out that because the Somali language was not written until 1972, Somalia possesses an ‘unusually rich oral literature’. Partly because of this, there is scant documented evidence available for examining Somali history pre-19th century. By no means does this mean that there is not a long tradition of Somali history ripe for historical scholarship. In fact, many post-colonial scholars note that the lack of documented historical sources does not render historiography futile. Indeed, ignoring other modes of history can produce skewed historical narratives.

However, Besteman writes that there are only a few descriptions of Somalia pre 1800, and these come from early Islamic and Portuguese travellers and concern the coastal towns. ‘For the interior, we must rely primarily on oral traditions and narratives.’

Early documented history concerns the arrival of slaves into Somalia from the 17th century.

In general, these sources reveal that Somalis acquired slaves for a variety of purposes during different historical periods: urban coastal families had used slaves in the Benaadir textile industry for hundreds of years; rural families obtained slaves for tending livestock, as concubines, and in increasingly large numbers for agricultural labor during the commercial boom of the nineteenth century.

The explorer Ibn Battuta arrived in the 14th century to coastal towns producing raw materials and cloth. He was amazed to find port cities that might almost be called merchant

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35 Lewis, A modern history of the Somali: 5.
38 Ibid.
republics, and recorded the following impressions: ‘Mogadishu is a very large town. The people are merchants and very rich. They own large herds of camels…and also sheep. Here they manufacture the textiles called after the name of the town; these are of superior quality and are exported to Egypt and other places.’

Somalis were safe from being enslaved as they were part of the Islamic world and there is a religious tenet that free Muslims cannot be enslaved. Slavery of other groups would continue well into the 20th century, despite the fact that the Italian colonial government issued three ordinances outlawing slavery.

**Islam in Somalia**

The history of commercial and intellectual contact between the inhabitants of the Arabian and Somali coasts may help explain the Somalis’ close connection with the Prophet Muhammad. The Somali clans claim descent (though distant and mythical) from noble Arab ancestors, even including the prophet Muhammad.

Despite the much earlier Muslim settlement in Somalia, large-scale conversion of the Somalis arguably did not take place until the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries with the arrival of powerful Muslim patriarchs, in particular the renowned Sheikh Daarood Jabarti and Sheikh Issaak. Darood was married to Doombira Dir, the daughter of a local patriarch. This union gave rise to the alliance that forms the largest clan-family in Somalia, the Daarood. Sheikh Issaak founded the large Isaaq clan-family in northern Somalia. Chapin Metz asserts that in addition to the clan system of lineages, the Arabian sheikhs introduced the patriarchal ethos and patrilineal genealogy typical of Semitic societies into Somalia. This genealogy would gradually replace the indigenous Somali social organization. As a result, Islam is inextricably linked to genealogy in Somalia.

Islam is often characterised by a close relationship between faith and the state. In the case of Somalia, where an already powerful kinship organisation structure existed, Islam was made compatible with the existing social structure. The Somali have maintained their disparate kinship groups, even within the unifying force of Islam. Lewis points out that Islam in Somalia has long been associated with the brotherhoods ‘which express the Sufi, or mystical view of the Muslim

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41 Ibid., 55.
43 Barrows, "Somalia."
faith’. Sufism is more readily accepted in some Muslim countries than others, (it is decried as heresy by the Saudi Arabian Wahhabis\(^{47}\)). It emphasizes a personal relationship with God while also exalting ‘the charismatic powers of saints’. Thus, it is ‘particularly well adapted to the Somali clan system in which clan ancestors readily become transposed into Muslim saints’.\(^{48}\) So we can see that Islam and the clan system are intricately tied together, and have influenced each other for many centuries.

The vast majority of Somalis today are Sunni Muslims (Sufism is still practised within the broader context of Sunni Muslims). Many scholars believe that Islam is a distinguishing factor of great importance for the Somali.\(^{49}\) It has been invoked to explain a supposed sense of singularity among Somalis. According to Chapin Metz, their loyalty to Islam ‘reinforces distinctions that set Somalis apart from their immediate African neighbours, most of whom are Christians… or adherents of indigenous African faiths’.\(^{50}\)

Chapin Metz argues that Somalis have modified Islam to their particular social and physical environment, for example, merging Islam with the clan system as described earlier. She notes that elements of traditional knowledge were used in astronomical interpretations, which were traditionally used to determine seasonal changes and times for migration.\(^{51}\) This astronomy is now also used in Somalia to set the dates of rituals which are specifically Somali. Certain types of illness (including tuberculosis and pneumonia) are also attributed to spirit possession by folk religion practitioners and believers. Somalis still actively engage in pre-Islamic rituals including a collective rain-making ritual practised in the south. According to the Pew Research Center’s 2012 Global Religious Affiliation report, less than 0.1% of Somalis identified as believers in ‘folk religion’.\(^{52}\) However, the report acknowledges that it is very difficult to collect data on folk religionists due to the lack of official recognition of folk religions and the blurred boundaries between official religions and folk religions, meaning that elements of both may be practised concurrently.\(^{53}\) The report stipulates that in Sub Saharan Africa, ‘many of those who indicate that they are committed to the practice of Christianity and Islam also incorporate elements of African traditional religions into their lives’.\(^{54}\)


\(^{48}\) Lewis, *A modern history of the Somali*: 64.


\(^{50}\) Chapin Metz, "Somalia: A Country Study," 94.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 101-02.


\(^{53}\) Ibid., 34.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 36.
The importance of clans

In 1961, Ian Lewis described Somali society as consisting of six patrilineal clan-families formed by the descendants of mythical Arabic ancestors who arrived in Somalia 25-35 generations ago. He explained that each clan-family encompassed a set of patrilineally related clans, subclans, sub subclans and lineages. Since Lewis’ seminal account of Somali Pastoral society, much attention has been focussed on the segmentary lineage, the pastoral lifestyle and the strength of Islam in Somalia. According to Lewis, kinship pervades all aspect of Somali life; personal, political, cultural and religious. Likeress has been drawn between the six clan-families and the ‘Old Testament version of the tribal segmentation of the children of Israel’.

The pastoral nomadic clan-families comprise the Dir, Isaaq, Hawiye and Darood. The Dir are concentrated in the West, the Isaaq in the central northern and eastern regions and the Darood can be found further east. The Hawiye live mainly in the south. These clans are nomadic and traditionally spend much of the year in transit, however, they remain within their broader area of land. The agricultural clan-families comprise the Digil and Rahanwayn. These clans live mainly in the south. Lewis estimated that not more than an eighth of the total Somali population are sedentary cultivators (although there has been rapid urbanisation in Somalia since independence). ‘The Dir family are generally regarded as having the oldest Somali heritage’. From this information, it can be seen that the clan system is not purely a locality or class-based system. While the pastoral nomads do move around, they are based within certain regions and move between known points. Although the agricultural clans are not given the same status as the nomadic clans, this may be a result of the arrival of many agricultural labourers as slaves from the 17th century.

Muhammad Farrah Aidid, the de-facto leader of Somalia from 1991 to 1993, describes clans in this way: ‘The very fact that this social structure has been continuing for thousands of years without much change despite colonial rule and an oppressive military regime under Siad Barre shows its strength, utility, and capability to solve the various problems and exigencies of their difficult life.’ Indeed, other scholars have pointed out how uniquely suited the clan system is to the particular challenges and requirements of living in Somalia. For example, Ken Menkhaus explains that ‘the law and order Somalia enjoyed prior to the 1980s — and Somalia was

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unquestionably one of the safest places in Africa — was a reflection of the social contract more than the capacity of the police (or of a central government).  

However, it appears that Somalia has also been divided along kinship lines. The clan system has existed within Somalia for much longer than any form of centralised government, and the two governance systems have not co-existed peacefully. One reason given for Siyad Barre’s nationalist campaign of the late 1970s was to abolish distinctions based on social inequality to remove the master-slave distinction. The campaign aimed to draw the clans together under one national flag. In this quest for unification, tribalism was condemned as the most serious impediment to national unity. Siyad Barre denounced it as a ‘disease’ obstructing development not only in Somalia, but also throughout the developing world. Harsh punishments were meted out to those who were practising activities that amounted to tribalism. This campaign was a sustained attempt to unite Somalia, however, it was ultimately unsuccessful. It has been argued that the very idea of an organised state is anathema to Somali society because the nomadic system is ‘essentially anarchic’. This claim is somewhat controversial, and goes against Menkhaus’ description of a social contract and the order that prevailed before the civil war. However, the importance of nomadic kinship relations in the organisation of Somali society cannot be denied.

Drawing on psychological explanations of personal and national characteristics, Lewis emphasizes the way that the physical conditions in Somalia have influenced the character of the Somali people: ‘In the harsh struggle for survival which is a nomad’s lot, suspicion is the natural attitude towards those with whom one competes for access to scarce pasture and water. This defence mechanism is extended to all contexts of social interaction and hence becomes a national characteristic.’ It is important to remember that Lewis, while formidable in his contributions to the study of Somalia, was writing over half a century ago. Nevertheless, according to Lewis, the clans were ‘driven by the poverty of their resources to intense competition for access to water and grazing’, which are matters of life and death in the desert. Despite this controversial explanation of the way Somalis are pitted against each other in a struggle for survival, it seems that the clans have been able to maintain a kind of fragmented stability across the country, even if they did maintain the stability with violent methods. Unification attempts, on the other hand, have led to more direct conflict. I believe this shows just how fragmented the social landscape of Somalia is.

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64 Hesse, "The Myth of 'Somalia'," 250.
The clans are said to originate with a single male ancestor. ‘Ethnic Somalis are united by language, culture, devotion to Islam, and to a common ancestor… the mythical founding father, Samaale or Samaal’. Bernhard Helander also makes reference to a ‘mythical level of ancestry’. This seems to be intimately linked with Somali-Muslim heritage. Besteman points out that despite the laws prohibiting the use of terms to distinguish ethnic groups, the Gosha of Southern Somalia are labelled by many such terms (including boon- person of low status, addoon-slave and jareer- rough hair texture) Jareer denotes those who are of ‘African’ and thus slave ancestry as opposed to the mythical Arabic ancestry of Somalis. While Lewis argues that the distinction between slaves and the noble classes is clear in northern Somalia, Besteman adds that in the south, the distinctions have become more blurred due to a wider variety of commoner groups. Chapin Metz acknowledges the ‘recognized social inequalities, sometimes marked by physical appearance owing to intermarriage’.

According to Chapin Metz, some texts refer to these two mainly agriculturist clans of Digil and Rahanwaywn as Saab (ignoble). This term is widely acknowledged to be derogatory. Saab was designated to those who pursued certain disdained occupations. The Samaal felt that the Saab had lowered themselves by their reliance on agriculture and their willingness to absorb foreigners into their clan. Hesse calls this ‘borderline xenophobia’. Certainly, it is arguable that southern Somalis suffered more at the hands of colonisers, and then at the hands of their own government: The southern (agricultural) Somalis residing in the valleys of the Juba and Shabeel rivers have had their lands removed and taken over by colonial plantations, while they themselves were forced to work for colonial labour schemes. They then lost their rights to their land through Barre’s socialist nationalization laws and suffered through the Cold War militarization of Somalia. During the civil war, the southern lands especially were sites of massacres, and in the more recent famines of the 2000s, the southerners again suffered disproportionately compared to their northern counterparts.

This highlights the absence of Somali homogeneity and the social stratification that is so significant to Somali history. Some attribute this stratification directly to the clan system. According to Besteman, the social organization of Somali society lends itself to conceptions of

72 Ibid., 77.
74 McMichael, "Memory and Resettlement: Somali Women in Melbourne and Emotional Wellbeing."
inferiority through the ‘investment of notions of lineal purity in the clan structure’. While Somali clans are fiercely egalitarian with regard to leadership and political control, they contain divisions of unequal status. The primary division between those of lower castes and the ‘pure blooded’ clan members is that the lower castes are not able to claim (regardless of whether there is any truth to the claim or not) direct lineal descent from the clan’s founding ancestor.

The nomadic castes trace their line back to a common mythical level of ancestry. In general, members of a clan family can often trace their genealogy back some thirty generations to a common ancestor. Some of my participants described reciting these generations in Australia and family competitions to see who could remember the most generations. Others told me that it had little relevance to their family, and they had not understood its significance until much later in life.

Besteman argues that a significant number of Somalis have Arab-Persian or slavery heritage. These minority groups have been politically under-represented and were victimized during the civil war. The presence of these groups is both a challenge to the segmentary lineage model and evidence of the widespread social stratification within Somalia.

The influence of Siyad Barre

The regime of Siyad Barre is generally reviled among Somalis today, and there is no doubt that it led to the civil war and the ensuing conflict and chaos. However, it was a period of immense social and cultural change in Somalia and as such, deserves closer attention. When he came to power in 1969, Barre set out to change the fabric of Somali society radically. Socialism was swirling through Africa in the phase of de-colonisation and Barre employed his own particular version of ‘Scientific Socialism’ in order to achieve his aims. This severely curtailed the operation of the clan system and in fact was a transition to anti-tribalism altogether. Barre aimed to achieve a sense of national unity and a Pan-Somalism.

There was a conflict between the government’s desire to modernise and unify the country and the pre-existing clan way of life. In order to suppress traditional clan activities, Barre forbade such activities as diya (blood compensation) and instigated a state controlled death penalty. The government also began to provide money for funeral expenses of those that died in towns with no family members to curb the rural clan dependence. There was also a state sponsored program to

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urbanise the country and relocate nomads. Even the traditional greeting of *ina adeer* (cousin) was replaced by *jaalle* (friend, comrade) to minimise the connotations of kinship.79

Barre also instigated positive change during his leadership. One of the clearest examples of this is his push to create a national written language. Up to this point, there had been no indigenous written language and because the colonial activities had required northern Somalis to use English and the southern Somalis to use Italian, there were serious communication issues within the country. Illiteracy rates were very high so the task that confronted the government was daunting. The government created a written language using the Roman alphabet, and instigated an intensive literacy campaign. Following a year of teaching in the urban areas, more than 30,000 students were sent into the country to pass on their knowledge to the nomadic Somalis.80 This had a positive effect on the pan-national sentiment of Somalis and also increased efficiency of the civil services. The literacy rate had also reached 60% by the late 1970s.81

In addition to the campaign to eradicate illiteracy, Barre adopted educational policies which focussed on an expanded and accessible technical education system and the development of higher education options in Somalia. Tertiary-level courses available in the capital Mogadishu, included law, teaching, agriculture, economics, engineering and medicine. By the early 1980s, considerable progress had been made towards Barre’s ambitious educational goals. All schools were nationalized and there were four levels of education. However, the progress was not uniform. Girls and children from nomadic groups still often only completed three or four years of the eight-year primary curriculum and enrolments beyond primary school continued to be low in the late 1980s. Likewise, the education reforms were not as successful in reaching the rural population, where despite enormous efforts on the part of the government to restructure the school system in order to encourage further study, there were high levels of secondary and technical school drop out rates.82

The collapse of the Somali state and the subsequent civil war altered Somali life immensely. This has been particularly devastating in the area of education, where an entire generation has missed one of the most prized opportunities of childhood.83 The education system in Somalia broke down entirely between 1987 and 1991.84 Many adult Somalis had access to a reasonable level of education, promoted by a culture of pride surrounding the school system, with a select class of older Somalis also being able to access British and Italian schools. However anyone born in the 1970s or 1980s in Somalia had a partial or disrupted education at best, with a complete

halt to schooling post 1991. This disruption has a marked effect on Somali migrants and refugees living outside their homeland because, as Lee Cassanelli and Farah Sheikh Abdikadir observe: ‘whilst primary school enrolment levels in Somalia were reported by UNICEF in 2006 to have stayed very low since 1990, the Somalis who were better educated, including many teachers, were the ones who were able to leave refugee camps for Australia, the US and Europe since then.’

*Imagined Somali Unity*

Despite the relative ethnic and religious homogeneity in Somalia, as previously discussed, it is hard to overstate the challenges to Somali national unity. As with many African nations which were carved up in the 1880s by invading colonial powers, the borders on the map do not correlate with indigenous alliances and distributions. In fact, the Somali flag has a star with five points, which represent the various places where there has traditionally been a concentration of Somali inhabitants. These include The British and Italian Somalilands (now the Somalia of most maps). The other three points stand for Djibouti, the northeast corner of Kenya and the contested Ogaden region in Ethiopia.

In the words of Hyndman: ‘The imagined pan-Somali nation has never corresponded to the colonial nor post-colonial borders of the country.’ The rift between colonial and ethnic borders has resulted in conflict and violence, especially in Kenya where there is a large population of ethnic Somalis. Tension between the Kenyan government and this population is high, and ‘surveillance and expulsion of Somalis by the Kenyan government remains current practice.’ There are also attacks being carried out in Kenya by Al Shabaab in retaliation for this mistreatment.

According to Barrows, Somali efforts to form a nation state have been hampered by the legacy of the European partition of Africa, the empire building activities of Ethiopia and the segmentation resulting from Somali clanship. Territorially, at least, Somalia has long been a contested concept, even among Somalis. Evidence for this is the disputed ownership of the Ogaden valley of Ethiopia, where many ethnic Somalis reside. This has been a source of conflict within Somalia and between Somalia and neighbouring countries for centuries. It has been argued that the fact that the Somalia depicted in most maps still exists owes a great deal to international organisations such as the United Nations, the Arab League and the African Union. Indeed, the

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88 Hesse, "The Myth of 'Somalia'."
89 Ibid.
state borders as they appear on a map do not represent the spread of ethnic Somalis at all accurately. ⁹⁰

As described, the Somali prize their Arabian connections and value those traditions, which proclaim their descent from noble Arabian lineages and from the family of the Prophet. ⁹¹ The Somali language is also clear evidence of this contact, containing a considerable number of Arabic loan-words. Arabic itself is sufficiently widely known to be regarded almost as a second language.

Besteman argues that ex-slaves arriving in Somalia ‘adopted clan affiliations as an aspect of personal identity, to negotiate social relations, and to build kinship networks’. ⁹² This reflects the fact that clans are a form of social capital in Somalia, an issue that will be revisited many times throughout this thesis. She claims that by the 1970s, mid Gosha valley villagers (largely comprised of descendants of slaves) spoke only Somali dialects, practiced Islam and shared Somali cultural values. This ‘Somalization’ of slave descendants gave the impression that Somalia was linguistically, culturally and religiously united. ⁹³ It also problematizes the popular conception of clans as ancient bloodlines, and highlights the flexibility of this social construct.

Violence in the geopolitical Somali context

While the origin and reasons for the continuing violence in Somalia are complex and multi-faceted, some with their roots seemingly in ancient practices, others no doubt encouraged by colonial and modern interests, it is clear that violence and conflict have been common in Somalia since independence. Resistance to Siyad Barre’s regime grew during the 1980s, until the army was struggling to control numerous armed rebel groups across the country. The opposition groups managed to overthrow Barre in 1991. In the resulting power vacuum, there were many factions competing for dominance. The original political motives at play in overthrowing an oppressive regime that favoured one clan became somewhat muddied when conflicts within sub-clans emerged. The country sank into a two-year-long period dominated by roving banditry. In the years that followed, clan affiliation became a sine qua non for individuals to be spared from violence. ⁹⁴ In a strong rebuttal of Siyad Barre’s regime, during this period there was a push for decentralisation, along with a return to a reimagined customary or tribal law. ⁹⁵

⁹⁰Ibid.
⁹¹Lewis, A modern history of the Somali: 5.
⁹³Ibid., 114.
There has been much written about the role of the state in preventing, reducing and controlling violence. How much this applies to Somalia, which has been (and remains) a pawn in a much larger global development, and where state development was pushed through exceedingly quickly to serve other ends, is debatable. Additionally, this discussion does not allow for the forced development that was present for the short time that Somalia had a functioning central government under Siyad Barre during the 1970s and 1980s. During this time, radical social reform, which explicitly tried to overrule and render the clans and other ancient cultural traditions unnecessary was pursued at an alarming rate. There was corruption and nepotism and these ultimately rendered the government unstable enough to be overthrown. Since that time, there has been no effective state control of the use of violence.

There have been international interventions in Somalia since well before the formalised Italian and British colonisation. Ferguson writes that ‘accepted wisdom even now holds that “primitive” cultures are typically at war and that the primary military effect of contact with the West is the suppression of ongoing combat’.69 However, it has been suggested that on the contrary, the west is not suppressing ongoing combat, but rather encouraging it, even among groups that were previously peaceful. According to Ferguson, ‘many, perhaps most, recorded wars involving tribal peoples can be directly attributed to the circumstances of Western contact’.70

Ferguson argues that the violence occurred both as a result of Europeans encouraging conflict to serve their own purposes,98 and with the influx of previously unknown materials (such as the steel used in weapons), which quickly became indispensable to the tribal people.99 He describes a long history of colonisers inventing or inflating certain primitive and violent characteristics in order to further their own territorial ambitions, beginning in the mid 16th century and continuing to the 20th century.100 For example, for many centuries, tribal people all over the world were characterised as cannibals as part of the ‘often racist othering of non-western cultures under colonial rule’. It has been pointed out that claims of cannibalism are inherently unreliable because Spanish royal proclamations made in 1503 permitted the use of cannibals as slaves.101 There is also a great deal of emerging scholarship concerning the global south, which critiques dominant discourses.

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69 Ferguson, "Tribal Warfare," 69.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid., 70.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., 70-71.
101 For example, for many centuries, tribespeople all over the world were characterised as cannibals as part of the ‘often racist othering of non-western cultures under colonial rule’. It has been pointed out that claims of cannibalism are inherently unreliable because Spanish royal proclamations made in 1503 permitted the use of cannibals as slaves. See William Arens, The Man-eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
This scholarship emphasises the global north’s need to perceive their colonies as ‘other’ and doing this by categorising them as inferior.  

Colonial violence has no doubt shaped generations of Somalis. Compagnon points to the extreme violence used by colonisers in the 19th century to ‘pacify’ the Horn [of Africa], in particular by the Italians. Following the colonial period, Somalia has been engaged in conflict with its neighbours over territory disputes, with international occupying forces (some described as ‘peacekeeping forces’) and has witnessed total state breakdown and all the accompanying confusion and unrest. The short-lived government created by Siyad Barre was marked by corruption and use of state subjugation techniques. He also showed increasing favouritism to his own clan family and ‘concentrated power and resources within his own clan and sub-clan family, manipulating Somalia’s clan system to his own ends’.  

Additionally, while scholars such as Pinker and others have ascribed violence to statelessness, Siyad Barre’s scientific socialism project during the 70s had as one of its main aims the effort to create a high degree of centralised control. This effort was ultimately unsuccessful. Barre was also capable of using violence to subjugate and control in the name of advancing the Somali state. The violence deployed by Barre could be argued to be representative of an attempt to create a pacified and developed state, in line with Max Weber’s notion of monopoly on violence.  

It is difficult to fit a linear conception of development and a reduction in violence to Somalia. For example, in considering the pacification argument, the clan system proves difficult to assimilate. It also prevents a simple hierarchy from developing, as envisaged in the creation of the state. This may in fact contribute to engendering violence. It has been argued that hierarchy plays a strong role in preventing violence because of the lack of ambiguity regarding dominance. The clans to some extent disallow the clean hierarchy of the state and there are constant struggles for dominance without the allegiance to a head of state that seems to be necessary in other conceptions of how violence has been reduced and controlled elsewhere. This can be seen in the brief period

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103 Daniel Compagnon, "Mahamed Siyad Barre: The Emergence of Path Dependent Patterns of Violence" (paper presented at the Patterns of Violence in Somalia, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Massachusetts, 2013), 11.
106 Compagnon, "Mahamed Siyad Barre: The Emergence of Path Dependent Patterns of Violence.”
where Somalia was united under Siyad Barre. Although there were most certainly compounding factors, such as the international political circumstances and interventions, Barre’s rule was ultimately cut short by clan conflict.

In the context of the Somali civil war, Lidwien Kapteijns describes how episodes of clan cleansing (a term she uses to echo the well understood ‘ethnic cleansing’) were carried out, and how the testimony of civilian survivors of the clan cleansing campaign reveals that they were hunted down intentionally because of their group identity and ‘even by name by people who knew them well — precisely by people who knew them well’.

This echoes testimony given by survivors of the Rwandan and Yugoslav genocides. As an illustration of how identity uniquely categorises individuals, this is a particularly interesting case because in times of peace, individuals are able to move from one clan to another – women change clans when they marry, and men and women may also change clans to secure grazing rights. However, during the civil war, the clan identity of individual Somalis was seen as fixed, immutable, and enough reason for them to be murdered.

Kapteijns paints a picture of a shrewd and manipulative elite (the warlords) who are able to direct and orchestrate violence at will in order to eliminate any alternative to war and warlord domination. According to this picture, it is not merely inevitable enactment of ancient tribal allegiances that ensures the continuation of violence, but the clever manipulations of individuals with vested interests in continuing the violence. This illustrates the danger with ideological discourse — that false ideologies (or, at least, reductive and over-simplistic ones) become consolidated and permeate the identities of the individuals or collective.

The dominant representation of Somalis as violent in discourse

The earlier theoretical discussion of different types of violence (both implicit and explicit forms) in section one is important in terms of understanding the ways in which Somalis have come to be represented as violent. It is not difficult to find examples of such representation in the case of Somalia. Indeed, Somalis have been represented as violent in the dominant academic discourse for more than a century. Regardless of the veracity of whether Somalis are a ‘violent people’, the idea has emerged, evolved and pervaded both outsiders’ perceptions of Somalis and their own perceptions of themselves. This process seems to cycle into a positive-feedback loop: the sense of togetherness and shared identity which fosters such extreme violence and barbarity in a select group.

110 Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, "Introduction: Making Sense of Violence."
111 Lewis, Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society.
does so through the othering of people from within and people outside the particular group projecting perceptions onto the group. Or, as Sen puts it: ‘Within-group solidarity can help to feed between-group discord’.\textsuperscript{114} Here, we begin to understand how violence begets more violence.\textsuperscript{115}

There is no doubt that the dominant representation of Somalia has been as an unusually violent and anarchic place. It is described as a bloody and dangerous nation, even by scholars who are traditionally seen as sympathetic to Somali interests. Lewis, for example, describes the Somali expansion northwards up to the 19\textsuperscript{th} century as dominant in the history of the Horn of Africa. This migration was accomplished at great cost to other resident populations, involving ‘considerable displacements of other populations, and the Somali sphere was only extended by dint of continuous war and bloodshed’.\textsuperscript{116}

The western view of Somalia is encapsulated in the 2001 film about an American military operation: \textit{Black Hawk Down}. The film highlights the camaraderie and suffering of the American troops and their ethical decisions to leave no man behind. Somalis are depicted only as part of a shadowy background. Their brutality is paraded in the film with all the violence they wreak on the Americans being finely detailed. In contrast, the violence against the Somalis is shown in soft focus, from a distance. They are indistinct figures who crumple quickly under American fire. In this film, Somalia functions merely as a foil to portray the American ‘good guys’ and their tribulations in their interaction with the primitive and savage Somalis. While Hollywood is by no means an authoritative source of knowledge of African politics, the views presented in these movies are widely disseminated, and for some, may be the only representation of Somalia available.

In analysing the representation of Somalis as violent in discourse, I began to extract the main ways in which this violence is expressed and attributed to Somalis. Below I outline the four main categories I found that such descriptions of Somalis fall under. These are violence arising from (i) a personal characteristic, (ii) the clan system, (iii) their harsh environment, and (iv) due to outside intervention. I want to make it clear that the views outlined below are not my personal views. Rather, they are arguments that have been advanced as evidence that Somalis and Somalia are violent, and are thus essential to understanding the reflections made on these pervading representations by generation 1.5 Somalis in Melbourne.

\textit{(i) A personal characteristic}

In 1894, Richard Burton, the great British explorer and geographer described the Somali thus:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{114} Sen, \textit{Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny}: 2.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, "Introduction: Making Sense of Violence."
\item \textsuperscript{116} Lewis, \textit{A modern history of the Somali}: 19.
\end{itemize}
In mind the Somal (sic) are peculiar as in body. They are a people of most susceptible character, and withal uncommonly hard to please … They have the levity and instability of the negro character; light-minded as the Abyssinians … constant in nothing but inconsistency—soft, merry and affectionate souls, they pass without any apparent transition into a state of fury when they are capable of terrible atrocities.  

Close to a century later, the humanitarian and historian Louis Fitzgibbon called them the ‘Irish of Africa’: ‘they are extremely generous yet fierce and war-like simultaneously…they are people to be reckoned with, as history has clearly revealed’.  

More recently, a conservative online journal has described Somalis thus: ‘Somalis are a primitive, nomadic people who normally practice polygamy, wife-beating, and female genital mutilation…In addition to Somali youth’s fondness for Islamist murder and mayhem, ordinary crime is appealing as well. Areas of large Somali population are stuck with worsening gang problems’.  

It is crucial to remember that (as in the case above) the commentary on violence in Somalia has often portrayed the country as peopled by backward and ignorant thugs, who are enacting ancient forms of violence. Mantzikos puts it thus:  

Somalia continues to be a country that inspires images violence, chaos, disorder, and abject poverty. For the past two decades, various clans and subclans have been deadlocked in a violent struggle for power and dominance. The lethal use of force has become the culture in resolving disputes between rival clans, groups, and governments.

This is a shallow analysis, which fails to consider colonisation, independence, Somalia’s interactions with its neighbours and Western interventions.

Popular accounts of nations, cultures and peoples are often riddled with attempts to explain behaviours by ascribing certain characteristics or traits, as the quotes above show. While this is a tempting thing to do in terms of trying to understand people and events, it has major pitfalls. Perhaps chief among these is the tendency to psychologise groups of people and assume they must all be the same, based on the time, place and circumstances of their birth, and to miss the many examples of heterogeneity that occur in what people prefer to conceive of as a homogenous group.

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The second description I extracted was violence arising from the clan system, which relates to this very issue — the tendency scholars and other commentators have to make broad assumptions about Somalis based on the clan system.

(ii) The clan system

The clan system is perhaps the most often cited reason for the violence in Somalia. During the Somali civil war, the international reportage implied that the clan system was at the root of many if not all Somalia’s problems. The reports drew on the idea that Somalia was continuing to act out primitive ancestral rivalries.  

… the American media and some academic accounts of Somalia’s collapse presented Somalia’s destruction as having been almost inevitable. The model of the tensions inherent to this kind of genealogically based system provided an explanation built-in conflict, making Somali social structure appear fundamentally divisive and resistant to state-building efforts.

In a pertinent example of the above, Helen Chapin Metz, writing for the Library of the United States Congress, describes the clans as follows:

Genealogy constitutes the heart of the Somali social system, It is the basis of the collective Somali inclination toward internal fission and internecine conflict, as well as of the Somalis’ sense of being distinct- a consciousness of otherness that borders on xenophobia.

Chapin Metz argues that the social division of clans is to blame for the Somalis’ predisposition to internal conflict. In addition, she believes that this division allows Somalis to assume themselves to be different from others, to the point of extreme prejudice to others.

It is difficult to find comprehensive explanations in scholarly writing for the continuing conflict in Somalia. For example, Besteman argues that over the past several generations a social order emerged in Somalia that was less primitive and rooted in principles other than the segmented lineage, however she fails to elaborate on this new social order, or explain where its principles are rooted.

More recently, reports on Somalia have focussed on the clan divisions and how they lead to an inescapable cycle of violence. One BBC reporter notes that it is clan divisions behind Somali

122 Ibid.
violence. However, BBC’s Somali affairs analyst points out that ‘Somalia's neighbours and the wider international community are exploiting clan divisions to their own ends’.  

A prominent Somali blogger, Jaylani Abdalla believes that ‘…the primitive and blind Somali tribes claim kinship association and number in the millions without any possibility of opting out from this murderous large gang group’. This is not the first time that clans have been likened to gangs. Abdalla urges young Somalis to ‘break the status quo and challenge this primitive and useless culture of allegiance to an extended tribe by blood association, where you are required to spill blood for a wrong cause’. Some of the young people I spoke to adopted similar language, although they were careful to point out that clans can also offer positive connections to their members.

Appadurai has pointed out that anthropologists often develop ‘theoretical metonyms’ about places that come represent the fundamental and critical aspect of any given area. This observation is aptly illustrated by Somalia and its reputation. Some oft-quoted reasons for Somalia’s troubles are: clan warfare, environmental scarcity and some kind of inherent Somali violence. These arguments have become accepted as fact and reported verbatim in many and varied forms of media.

Not all scholars believe the clan system is at the root of Somali violence, however. According to Menkhaus, ‘Somali political culture features a very prominent and elaborate role for conflict management, in large measure because precolonial Somalia was a stateless, decentralized, nomadic society in which conflict between clans over pasture and wells was endemic’. These

126 Ibid.
129 Abdalla Title of Weblog.
130 Arjun Appadurai, Modernity At Large (Minneapolis: Univerisity of Minnesota Press, 1996).
were necessary because of the ‘chronic violence in this anarchic pastoral setting’. While Menkhaus describes in detail some of the traditional negotiation and peacekeeping mechanisms practiced in Somalia, he goes on to say that they were only partially successful, and that ‘precolonial Somalia was rife with armed convicts and long-running blood feuds’. Menkhaus equates statelessness with conflict and violence and plays down the ability of traditional mechanisms to promote order and security but then goes on to describe how the high compensation price sought by the wronged parties was a deterrent as the costs were borne by clan members, so peer pressure to observe social contracts was very high.

Tripodi notes that while clanism is very strong, it did not cause the failure of the Somali republic in the 1990s. Instead, he points to the corruption that has been present in Somali leadership. Interestingly, Tripodi states that as a result of the kleptocracy and inefficiency post-independence in Somalia, a sense of scepticism and disillusionment was generated among the people and that as a consequence, ‘the Somali population considered the army to be the only institution able to guarantee the unity of Somalia’.

(iii) Their harsh environment

Somalis have also been represented as violent due to the harshness of their climate and the need for competition to secure scant resources. In the words of Lewis, ‘it must be appreciated that the nomadic Somali are a warlike people, driven by the poverty of their resources to intense competition for access to water and grazing.’ Besteman and Cassanelli similarly note that ‘at the heart of the ongoing crisis’ in southern Somalia, is a constant ‘struggle for resources’.

In discussing the recent famine situation in Somalia, Menkhaus outlines the volatile farming context in Somalia. ‘This is a part of the world that is more susceptible to extreme variations in seasonal rainfall than almost anywhere in the world. One in every five years there is an extreme drought; one in every five years there is an extreme flood.’ Menkhaus notes that historically, Somalis have developed agricultural ‘coping mechanisms’ to deal with this environment, but these ‘have been overloaded in recent decades by a wide range of factors’.

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133 Ibid. 
134 Ibid., 185. 
135 Ibid. 
137 Ibid. 
138 Lewis, A modern history of the Somali: 11. 
One only has to glance at Kaplan’s oft-quoted article ‘The Coming Anarchy’ where he argues that overpopulation coupled with environmental scarcity, crime and disease are ‘rapidly destroying the social fabric of our planet’ cited to support the idea that environmental scarcity is at the root of Somalia’s problems.\textsuperscript{141} There have been other reports of the need to control resources as a factor in Somali violence, not only in the precolonial times, but also more recently:

For some 16 months, from December 1990 to March 1992, when the United Nations eventually brokered a ceasefire, there was almost continuous warfare in the south as clans fought for control of resources, especially land and water. As many as 25,000 civilians died in the first four months of fighting in Mogadishu alone.\textsuperscript{142}

Indeed, there is a significant body of scholarship on environmental degradation as a cause of war,\textsuperscript{143} most particularly where ecological change such as drought has caused immense poverty (as in the case of Somalia and also Sudan\textsuperscript{144}). This scholarship is relevant, and sometimes convincing in the case of Somalia. However other reasons have been posited for Somalia’s decline.

(iv) Outside interventions

There are two ways that outside interventions are used to explain violence in Somalia. The first relies on a historical narrative which emphasizes the way Somalia’s circumstances have affected the psychology of Somalis over the last few centuries. For example, Besteman highlights the importance of slavery in the formation of a Somali ‘national characteristic’.\textsuperscript{145} She suggests that the many migrational movements, coupled with the expansion of Somalia over 500 years ago and the penetration of Islam and Arab Muslims have left an indelible mark on the Somali national character, and that the Somali are predisposed to violence, having seen it play out before them over the course of many centuries.

We can apply this theory to more recent times as well: As Somalia has been involved in many recent violent conflicts, it now has a core of trained militants who fought in Afghanistan and Iraq.\textsuperscript{146} Generations of Somalis have been exposed to violence and trauma as a result of external interventions among other things. Parenti suggests that the Somali people may be predisposed to violence as a result of their experiences: ‘Societies, like people, deal with new challenges in ways

\textsuperscript{142}Garner and El Bushra, Somalia - The Untold Story: The War Through the Eyes of Somali Women: 4.
\textsuperscript{143}Bächler and Spillmann, Kriegsursache Umweltzerstörung. Environmental Degradation as a Cause of War.
\textsuperscript{144}University for Peace, Environmental Degradation as a Cause of Conflict in Darfur (Addis Ababa 2006).
\textsuperscript{145}Besteman, Unraveling Somalia: Race, Violence and the Legacy of Slavery: 1.
\textsuperscript{146}Mantzikos, “Somalia and Yemen: The Links between Terrorism and State Failure.”
that are conditioned by the traumas of their past. Thus, damaged societies, like damaged people, often respond to new crises in ways that are irrational, shortsighted, and self-destructive'.

The second way that outside interventions are claimed to have contributed to Somali violence relies on the way external interventions have disrupted the economic balance of the country. The evidence from Somalia suggests that economic interests are significant in the perpetuation of the civil war and some recent authors underline this point. Ken Menkhaus in particular, has consistently documented and described the political situation in Somalia over the last three decades. He believes that it is in the interests of some key players to draw out the conflict for as long as possible:

When one considers the evidence of the past decade in Somalia in light of the political economy of war theory, several things become clearer. First, there is an impressive but shrinking set of actors whose interests are served by protracted conflict and lawlessness, and who appear to actively and successfully promote both.

Similarly David Keen emphasises that war may well be the continuation of economics by other means. Small but influential groups thus come to have an economic interest in prolonged conflict. Commentators holding this viewpoint affirm that it can be misleading to associate war with complete collapse or breakdown of an economy — although it may certainly skew the development of an economy. It also challenges the notion that it is Somalis’ primitive violence which has caused and prolonged the conflict. Rather, there may be very nuanced economic motivation for certain parties to prolong the conflict for personal benefit. Despite the competing interests, Dibbeh argues that there has been ‘economic progress despite the destruction of all public infrastructure such as electricity production, the spread of violence and more importantly, the absence of central government or even a central bank’.

Outside interventions have certainly contributed to the growth of Al Shabaab, which is one of the most sophisticated Islamist groups within Somalia today. It is described as a ‘clan-based insurgent and terrorist group’ by the United States National Counter Terrorism Center. Within Somalia, after decades of suffering at the hands of various governments, international task-forces and various clan councils, the perception of the group is considerably more complex. Al Shabaab is

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149 Menkhaus, Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism: 11.
considered in Somalia to be ‘both the instigator of ongoing conflict and also the most viable means to peace’.  

Mitchell Sipus describes how in Kenya, there is financial and ideological support for Al Shabaab. In East Leigh, Nairobi, where there is a large Somali population, Al Shabaab is active in its investment in mosques, school programs and local business. While not everyone in the Somali community in East Leigh supports Al Shabaab, they are too wary to reveal their allegiance. This creates a climate of mistrust and fear. Some believe in Al Shabaab’s aggressive vision for a unified Islamic state, others simply hope that Al Shabaab offers an end to the seemingly endless violence Somalia has already suffered.

I wish to draw attention here to a thread that runs through the categories above, namely the tendency of many authors to ascribe certain psychological characteristics to bodies of people. Characteristics may be ascribed due to factors such as physical environment, exposure to violent conflict or the implementation of cultural systems of identification and exchange. I do not dismiss these ideas, as it is clear that people develop strategies and mechanisms to cope with whatever circumstances they face. However I believe that any reductionist temptation to ascribe traits to groups of people must be examined critically, as it has historically often resulted in racist interpretations of cultures and peoples. One author who has examined this in relation to Somalia is Daniel Compagnon, who points out that after the collapse of the few remaining state institutions in 1991, criminal, sexual and personal revenge violence was rife. The ‘pathological behaviour’ of individuals was not necessarily politically or clan-motivated:

Yet, given the clan structure of the Somali society, then the last effective ideological and practical frame of reference that remained for most people once the state and all modern institutions had collapsed, it was difficult to see any such violence as “private”—i.e. disconnected from clan-based factional politics. The picture was so blurred that the violence of clan conflicts has been overemphasized—thus pointing at the “exceptionality” of the Somali case.

During the civil war, violence and lawlessness was rife in Somalia. This is characteristic of political anarchy in most ‘failed states’. However, in the case of Somalia, it is very easy for commentators to attribute this to the existing clan structure as an explanation for all deviant behaviour. ‘Somalis became cartoon-like images of primordial man: unable to break out of their destructive spiral of ancient clan rivalries, loyalties, and bloodshed.’

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154 Ibid.
156 Compagnon, "Mahamed Siyad Barre: The Emergence of Path Dependent Patterns of Violence," 10.
Interrogating representations and misrepresentations of violence

I now turn to examining the representation of violent acts committed outside Somalia by Somali individuals and those affiliated with Somali groups. I do not evaluate the representations or the accuracy of the reporting. Rather, I wish to present typical examples of the way that Somalis are represented (especially by the media) when violent acts do occur. While the violence within Somalia has been well documented so far, this section looks at violence carried out by Somalis in Australia and internationally. There has been much concern about ‘home-grown terrorism’ and ‘ethnic violence’ in Western countries, and I provide some examples of this phenomenon below.

The media perform a central role in shaping the way society as a whole sees different groups. This can influence attitudes towards these groups, affect their civil rights and even influence government policy towards them. This in turn may influence the relationship between individual members of those groups and the wider society. Other authors have noted ‘the tendency of media coverage to position ethnic minorities as problematic others to a white, normative self.’ In March 2009, the Australian Human Rights Commission released a report regarding African Australians’ experiences of rights and access to key services. One finding of this paper concerned media debates focusing on ‘the numbers, “integration potential” and settlement needs of African Australians’. According to the report, the Australian media ‘usually focuses on crime or on political commentary about African Australians — and has often been negative or critical, and sometimes misleading’. The following examples relate to violence which has been ascribed to Somalis in Australia. I argue that Australian Somalis have been misrepresented through the use of false or misleading statistics which is illustrated by the cases below.

Writing in the Herald Sun in 2008, journalist Liam Houlihan claimed that in the twelve months to June 2007, 283 Somali born people committed a crime. Using 2006 census population data, this equates to roughly 1 in 9. His article provoked a public outcry, and much attention was directed to ‘ethnic crime’ in the following days. However, as Media Watch pointed out two weeks later, the journalist made a serious mistake in his reading of the crime results released by Victoria Police. He counted the number of offences committed by member of the Somali born population rather than the distinct number of offenders. If a Somali born person was alleged to have committed three offences, in his reading of the statistics, this counted as three separate offenders. Using the statistics correctly, we can see that only 115 alleged offenders were Somali born. This is not 1 in 9,

161 Liam Houlihan, "Fears our crime being imported," *Sunday Herald Sun*, 9 March 2008
rather 1 in 23.\(^{162}\) This number, while still greater than, is significantly closer to the 1 in 31 offenders in the Australian born community as reported by Mr Houlihan.\(^{163}\)

In 2012, there was widespread anger from the African community when Victoria Police released ethnic crime statistics. These purported to show that Sudanese and Somali-born Victorians were about five times more likely to commit a crime than other Victorians.\(^{164}\) ‘The police statistics show the rate of offending among the Sudanese community is 7109.1 per 100,000, while for Somali people it is 6141.8 per 100,000. The figure for the wider community is 1301.0 per 100,000’.\(^{165}\) At a forum organised by African youth representatives and attended by members of Victoria Police, the youth challenged the decision to release the statistics and argued that they were ‘incomplete’. At the forum, the police representative also conceded that there may be instances of false identification by criminals contributing to the high statistics, and that because of community attitudes, Africans may be blamed for crimes they did not commit.\(^{166}\)

However, the 2013/2014 crime statistics released by Victoria Police show that the crime rate per 100,000 population was 7489.5.\(^{167}\) This is, in fact, higher than the rates of crime attributed to Sudanese and Somali-born Victorians in 2012. It is not known how the police arrived at the 2012 statistics, although their Official Release states that all the data contained comes from the LEAP database.\(^{168}\) Notwithstanding the challenges made by the community regarding the accuracy and legitimacy of the statistics (and my own concerns regarding the way the statistics were calculated), it is important to emphasise the productive element of reporting statistics in this way (as detailed in section one).

Young Muslims have been increasingly represented in the media as having the potential to become radicalised. One highly charged area of concern in Australia is the risk of young people becoming attracted to the ideology of the Islamic State (ISIL). In April 2015, a Somali-born Australian was killed while fighting for ISIL. Sharky Jama had been a successful model for over two years, and was well liked and respected within the Melbourne Somali community when he decided to travel to Syria.\(^{169}\) His death was reported in the context of growing numbers of Jihadis leaving Australia to fight in Syria and other places. However, relatively few media outlets followed the story and reported on the response from within the Somali community in Melbourne. Sharky’s father, Dada Jama, said he would speak out with the Somali community and pass on the message to

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\(^{163}\) Houlihan, "Fears our crime being imported."

\(^{164}\) Dan Oakes, "African Youth Crime Concern," The Age 2012

\(^{165}\) Ibid.


\(^{168}\) Ibid.

\(^{169}\) Mark Schliebs, "Ex-model Sharky Jama killed as Jihadi toll totals 20," The Australian, April 16, 2015 2015
‘look after their kids’. Community leaders have spoken about forming groups against extremism within the Somali community in Melbourne and have urged the government to closely scrutinise the plans of any Australians travelling to areas where ISIL is known to operate. A 2015 report released by the Lowy Institute says that the previous Abbott government’s ‘troubled relations’ with Australian Muslim communities hampered efforts to prevent radicalisation and that the significant numbers of Australians fighting in Iraq and Syria represent ‘a serious national security threat’. The same report points out that while there was a surge in numbers of Australians joining Al Shabaab following the Ethiopian invasion, this appears to have dissipated ‘following the disruption of a support network in Melbourne and Al Shabaab’s dramatically reduced popularity in the Somali diaspora’. The prominence of the perceived threat of radicalization in Australia is not supported by the Lowy institute’s findings. The increased media attention on radicalization and those ‘at risk’ is not confined to Australia. For example, Travis Dixon has documented the way that terrorism is reported extensively over the last decade in America. Using the UCLA Communication Studies Digital News Archive, he sampled 146 cable and network news programs aired between 2008 and 2012 to find that Muslims were greatly over reported as terrorists compared to other groups of people who committed terror offences.

Internationally, there has been increasing attention on international terror attacks, including those carried out by Al Shabaab. Kenya is the most frequent target for Al Shabaab operations, after the deployment of Kenyan troops in the African Union Mission to Somalia. Recent attacks include the 2013 Westgate shopping mall attack, and the 2014 Nairobi bus bombings, Gikomba bombings, Mpeketoni attacks and Lamu attacks. There has been widespread criticism of the Kenyan government’s response to these attacks, which has included mass arrests of the local Somali population. Diplomats and analysts argue that this will create greater divisions and fuel dissent, making radicalization more likely.

Many believe that Al Shabaab has infiltrated Kenya and young Kenyans are being recruited to carry out attacks. There is a large and marginalised Somali-born population in Kenya. In a parallel to the situation in Australia, newspaper reports have noted that ‘a huge population of

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173 Ibid.
disillusioned youth is vulnerable to radicalisation and recruitment. There are widespread feelings of disenfranchisement and vulnerability with the Kenyan-Somalis living in the north claiming to be viewed ‘with suspicion and as lesser citizens’ by the government and fellow Kenyans, and also ‘targeted indiscriminately by security forces in terrorism related crackdowns’.

In addition to terrorist activity in Kenya, there has been a recent surge in piracy off the Somali coast. This has declined since 2012, however it remains a threat, and was a high-profile news item between 2008-2013.

Besides state collapse and terrorist threats, Somalia has got other problem areas that have attracted international actors. Piracy rose in 2008 by 200 per cent from 2007. Besides hijacking vessels heading west from Asia across the Gulf of Aden to reach Europe, Somali pirates took, in September 2008, 30 hostages on a French luxury yacht who were released for a ransom of about $2 million.

Reports have described the pirates as ranging from very young and inexperienced, to older and part of a more cohesive group. They are often under the influence of the stimulant qat, which makes them edgy and unpredictable. The instances of Somali piracy have declined rapidly over the last few years. This is due in part to an upsurge in the successful capture and prosecution of pirates as part of an international effort to halt the hijackings, and to the increasing ability of ships passing through the area to organise and defend themselves.

There are now firm links between the pirates and Al Shabaab although these links are not yet fully understood. It is claimed that between 20 and 50% of the ransom money pirates collect is given to Al Shabaab. Pirates also operate out of ports that are controlled by Al Shabaab. They pay rent in cash, or in arms that they have seized.

While there has been significant reportage around the danger of Somali piracy, there has been far less analysis of the development and rise in piracy off the coast of Somalia. In fact, it has

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177 Ibid.


181 Ibid.


184 Ibid.
been posited that some young Somali men have been forced into piracy by the disappearance of fishing livelihood of local Somalis due to illegal trawling and dumping of toxic materials off the Somali coast. While the gangs originated in order to protect their waters and their livelihoods, some argue that they quickly became aware that piracy was a much more lucrative profession.

Concluding Reflections

I have devoted this section so far to an exploration of relevant issues concerning Somalia and Somali people. This chapter has given some contextual detail on the physical, social and political setting of Somalia. This history is important to understand, not only because of the myriad developments in recent times, but also because it is a highly contested history, which is by no means ancient and forgotten. I believe that these contested issues remain important to Somalis living in Melbourne today. This section also discussed the dominant representation of Somalis and how Somalia has been described as an inherently violent place. I extracted four main ways in which Somalis have been represented as violent in discourse: because of an inherent personal characteristic, clan divisions, the harsh environment and outside interventions.

In considering violence in the Somali context, both overt and covert forms of violence are relevant. Somalia remains a place where there is physical brutality as well as deep-rooted structural violence. However the representation of this violence must be problematized and questioned. I gave some examples of the way that violent acts perpetrated by Somalis in Australia and internationally are represented (or misrepresented), especially by the media, along with a brief critique of the possible reasons for and intentions of this violence.


III CONTEXTUALISING SOMALIA AND SOMALIS IN MELBOURNE

(b) The Melbourne Somali community

Introduction

In this chapter, I offer some demographic information regarding Somalis in Melbourne, both from census data and from my own research. This information helps to situate the findings of my study. Some broad sample characteristics from my data are extracted and presented, before several issues of significance for Somalis in Melbourne are briefly sketched. This chapter prepares the reader for the findings chapter to follow.

The phenomenon of Muslim migration to Australia

Human history has been characterised by the movement of people from one part of the world to another, from the initial migration of homo sapiens out of East Africa, to the movements of the present day. These patterns of relocation have varied widely, from migrations in the period of early sedentary agriculture (around 10,000 BCE) to the movements around the Mediterranean Mesopotamian and Roman worlds, to the far-reaching phenomenon of Western colonisation through successive waves, and finally, the aftermath of decolonisation in the recent past. The most recent era of migration arguably began in the 1950s with the wave of decolonisation sweeping across many previously colonial territories.187

After the Second World War the global driver of migration was essentially the Western demand for labour.188 Flows of people moved largely from the South to the North (from developing countries to more developed countries), attracted by the prospects of better living standards. Other migrants from former colonies moved to countries like Britain, France and The Netherlands. Circumstances were different in North America and Oceania, where labourers were required to support economic development but also to strengthen populations. Indeed, in both the years 1949

and 1950, approximately 150,000 people migrated to Australia, bringing the total migration to Australia in the post-war years to around half a million people.\textsuperscript{189}

At the time, migrants moved on a permanent basis and those who were deemed to possess the right characteristics enjoyed broad political rights. In Australia, European migrants were preferred, with as many British as possible, because other newcomers would bring ‘imported’ cultures that were different from locally produced ‘Australian’ cultures.\textsuperscript{190} However, by the 1960s, the need for immigration had broadened the eligibility of those allowed to enter the country. Many European Muslims, mainly Turks, took advantage of these opportunities to seek a new life and home in Australia. There was an agreement between the Turkish and Australian governments between 1967 and 1971 under which approximately 10,000 Turkish citizens settled in Australia.\textsuperscript{191} In the 1970s, many Lebanese citizens also settled in Australia, with Lebanon becoming one of the top 10 countries of origin for the overseas-born population in Australia by the 1981 census.\textsuperscript{192} This is not to suggest that the waves of Muslims that arrived in the 1960s and 1970s were the same as those who followed in later decades. Indeed, it must be said that Turkish and Lebanese Muslims were (and remain) characteristically distinct from Muslims from Africa or South-East Asia (for example). Nevertheless, this is the first example of significant numbers of Muslims migrating to Australia.

Muslims in Australia have a rich and lengthy history that is thought to pre-date European settlement. Some of Australia’s earliest visitors were Muslim, from the east Indonesian archipelago. They are thought to have made contact with mainland Australia as early as the 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} centuries. Along with the general increase of Australia’s population following the Second World War, the Muslim population also increased significantly. This was largely due to the post-war economic boom, which created new employment opportunities. While Melbourne’s diversity had until recently, been largely Europe-based, a significant wave of migrants from south-east and northern Asia arrived throughout the 1970s. In the last three decades, many Muslims have migrated to Australia under refugee or humanitarian programs.

Recent decades have seen upheaval across broad swathes of the Muslim world. Conflict and tensions remain high in many areas and the result of this has been extraordinary levels of displacement. Following the U.S. military occupation of Iraq, the country continues to face large-scale displacement and pressing humanitarian needs. Millions of Iraqis have fled their homes and

\textsuperscript{192} Phillips and Klapdor, "Migration to Australia since federation: a guide to the statistics,” 23.
are living in increasingly desperate circumstances. Similarly, the ethnic violence in Darfur and South Sudan has displaced millions. In Palestine, it is estimated that there are up to 7.2 million displaced as a result of the ongoing diplomatic stalemate in the region. More recently, floods have caused further devastation and displacement in Pakistan, a country that hosts significant numbers of Afghani refugees. In 2010 the Brookings Institution calculated that there were nine to ten million refugees in the Muslim world and at least 14 million internally displaced people. With the current Syrian refugee crisis, this has increased considerably.

At the 2011 Census there were more than 476,291 Muslims in Australia, of whom 292,925 were born here. This is rapid growth from the 2006 census, when there were only 340,000 Muslims in Australia, with 128,904 born here. However, there is currently a great deal of misunderstanding about Australia’s Muslim communities. As Janet Phillips notes, Muslim Australians are not a homogenous group as some media reports might lead us to believe, but make up a small, culturally diverse section of Australian society. Australia’s Muslim communities are now predominantly concentrated in Sydney and Melbourne. Since the 1970s, Muslim communities have developed many mosques, Islamic schools and cultural and religious organizations.

The Melbourne Somali population

Somalis constitute one of the largest African refugee populations currently living in Australia. In 2006 the Census recorded that there were 4,314 Somalis living in Australia and the last census in 2011 saw that number increase by a third. The first Somali arrivals in Australia took place in the late 1980s when the regime in Somalia began to oppress and attack its opposition in the North. This displacement accelerated after the total collapse of the Barre government in 1991 and the beginning of the civil war. During this chaotic period, food scarcity due to the drought and the political
upheaval prompted many more Somalis to leave the country. This movement continued well into the 2000s.²⁰²

Victoria has the highest number of Somali inhabitants (almost 54% of the Australian total) and large numbers of them have settled in the inner north and western suburbs of Melbourne. Many of the Somalis that have immigrated to Australia are from urban backgrounds; most from the capital, Mogadishu.²⁰³ This is particularly pertinent to later discussions on kinship and education. The vast majority of Somali migrants in Melbourne arrived as refugees under the humanitarian program and because of the civil war, many Somalis have lived in other countries en route to Australia.²⁰⁴

In my research design, I stipulated that I would interview Somali young people aged between 18 and 30. As previously stated, this age group encompasses those who arrived in Australia at a young age after the start of the civil war. I was aware that many of the Somalis who currently reside in Melbourne came to Australia via other countries. My preliminary research revealed that many members of the Somali community living in Melbourne have also lived in a country neighbouring Somalia (such as Eritrea, Ethiopia or Kenya). This was often in refugee camps where there was very limited access to schooling facilities so their first exposure to any system of education was in Australia, often at a relatively advanced age (up to ten or eleven years old).

I assumed the respondents would still be living with their immediate families and this turned out to be correct. Somalis traditionally have large families (between five and ten children is common) and the children usually do not leave the family home until they are married.

The 2011 census data was my primary source of quantitative data.²⁰⁵

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<th>Table 1: Somali demographics (2011 Census)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Born in Somalia</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of people in 2011 Census</td>
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<td>As percentage of total Victorian population</td>
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²⁰⁴ Michael Clyne and Sandra Kipp, Pluricentric languages in a immigrant context (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999), 4-5.
I was surprised (in Table 1) to see that the number of people who identified as having Somali ancestry was in fact lower than the number who indicated that they speak Somali, but more on this later.

The next step was to determine where the highest concentration of Somalis resided. I already knew of several key suburbs or areas, but statistical data informed where I focussed the study. Census data from 2011 indicate that Somalis in Melbourne reside around four main areas. These are Heidelberg West greater area, the North Melbourne/Flemington greater area, the inner North East (Carlton, Collingwood and Fitzroy), and the inner West, most notably, Braybrook (see Tables 2, 3 and 4).

My initial contacts in the Somali community had already noted that the Heidelberg West and the North Melbourne/Flemington areas were ‘hotspots’ of community activity. The ABS data justified my selection of these two areas as focus areas for the study. In West Heidelberg alone, 9.39% of the suburb speaks Somali, while North Melbourne and Flemington are also well represented. As a proportion of all who speak Somali in Melbourne, if one includes the surrounding suburbs as well, the Heidelberg West and North Melbourne/Flemington areas account for over 40% of this group. A similar story can be told by looking at the number of people from these areas who were born in Somalia — 39.59% can be accounted for in these two greater suburb areas. The final column in all three tables shows just how small the Somali population is relative to the whole Victorian population.

One final thing I did with the data was to determine the number of people who had Somali ancestry for each suburb area, and to look at what proportion of these people were born in Somalia as opposed to Australia (see Table 4).

Collating this information for the two target suburb areas, it can be determined that in Heidelberg West wider area, 50.0% of people with Somali ancestry were born in Somalia, and 17.3% were born in a location other than Australia (presumably in transit to Australia). In the North Melbourne/Flemington area, these figures are 46.6% born in Somalia and 15.8% born outside Australia. It is clear then, that these two localities are good target areas for studying generation 1.5 Somalis.
**Table 2: Number of people who speak Somali language by suburb (2011 Census)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suburb/area</th>
<th>Somali language spoken (Number)</th>
<th>As percentage of Suburb population (%)</th>
<th>As percentage of all who speak Somali in Victoria (%)</th>
<th>As percentage of total Victorian population (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heidelberg West</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>9.39</td>
<td>8.91</td>
<td>0.0094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reservoir</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>0.560</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>0.0050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidelberg Heights</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.0035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preston</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>0.505</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.0028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellfield (Banyule)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.944</td>
<td>0.00099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Melbourne</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>8.07</td>
<td>0.0084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flemington</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>6.43</td>
<td>0.0067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascot Vale</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.0028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kensington</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>0.0027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlton</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>0.0073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collingwood</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>0.0023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzroy</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>0.0020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braybrook</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.0043</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Number of people who were born in Somalia by suburb (2011 Census)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suburb/area</th>
<th>Somalia as Birthplace (Number)</th>
<th>As percentage of Suburb population (%)</th>
<th>As percentage of all were born in Somalia (%)</th>
<th>As percentage of total Victorian population (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heidelberg West</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>8.88</td>
<td>0.0051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reservoir</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>0.311</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>0.0028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidelberg Heights</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.0017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preston</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>0.314</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>0.0018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellfield (Banyule)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>0.00078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Melbourne</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>7.31</td>
<td>0.0042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flemington</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>0.0033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascot Vale</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>0.675</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>0.0017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kensington</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0.721</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>0.0013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlton</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>0.0033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collingwood</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.927</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>0.0011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzroy</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>0.604</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>0.0011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braybrook</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.0028</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Number of people who had Somali ancestry by suburb (2011 Census)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suburb/area</th>
<th>Total with Somali ancestry (Number)</th>
<th>Birthplace as Somalia (Number / %)</th>
<th>Birthplace as Australia (Number / %)</th>
<th>Birthplace Elsewhere (Number / %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heidelberg West</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>219 (50.0%)</td>
<td>154 (35.1%)</td>
<td>65 (14.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reservoir</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>118 (52.9%)</td>
<td>48 (21.5%)</td>
<td>57 (25.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidelberg Heights</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>82 (41.4%)</td>
<td>80 (40.4%)</td>
<td>36 (18.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preston</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>73 (49.7%)</td>
<td>55 (37.4%)</td>
<td>19 (12.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellfield (Banyule)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>37 (72.5%)</td>
<td>8 (15.7%)</td>
<td>6 (11.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Melbourne</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>179 (44.1%)</td>
<td>161 (39.7%)</td>
<td>66 (16.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flemington</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>149 (44.7%)</td>
<td>129 (38.7%)</td>
<td>55 (16.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascot Vale</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>68 (58.1%)</td>
<td>34 (29.1%)</td>
<td>15 (12.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kensington</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>54 (49.5%)</td>
<td>39 (35.8%)</td>
<td>16 (14.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlton</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>157 (42.0%)</td>
<td>146 (39.0%)</td>
<td>17 (19.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collingwood</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>51 (47.7%)</td>
<td>28 (26.2%)</td>
<td>28 (26.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzroy</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>53 (53.0%)</td>
<td>24 (24.0%)</td>
<td>23 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braybrook</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>106 (47.7%)</td>
<td>78 (35.1%)</td>
<td>38 (17.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Of those with Somali ancestry

*Percentage figures may not add to 100 due to rounding to 3 significant figures.
The sample

I collected some basic data on a sample population of 45 people, using community member profiles. I describe community member profiles as a method in detail in section two, but I present the data here to give more detail about the Somali population in Melbourne — particularly the people that I met in the course of my study.

I made an effort to speak with roughly even numbers of men and women. Out of the sample of 45, 23 were women and 22 were men (as shown in Figure 1). Figure 2 shows that the entire sample population speaks Somali at home. In general, it was the younger people who spoke Somali and English (especially between siblings), whereas the older people usually spoke only Somali at home.

Figure 1: Gender distribution of Sample (N=45)

![Gender distribution of Sample (N=45)](image)

Figure 2: Language spoken at home of Sample (N=45)

![Language spoken at home of Sample (N=45)](image)
The oldest people I met were in their 60s. They are still playing a relatively active part in cultural life as I met them at cultural events, festivals and community meetings. The youngest people were in their late teens and early 20s. All of them had finished high school, and many were studying at tertiary level. The people I spoke with were born between 1949 and 1996.

As Figure 3 shows, the entire sample population was born outside Australia. The people born in Kenya were likely to have been born in a refugee camp. Some of those in Ethiopia were perhaps born in the contested Ogaden region.

Figure 3: Country of birth of Sample (N=45)

The vast majority of people within the sample arrived in Australia around 15 to 20 years ago. This coincides with the outbreak of civil war in Somalia in 1991, and the years it took for many to go through refugee status certification processes. This period of time was often spent in camps in Ethiopia or Kenya. The longest period of time someone had resided in Australia was 24 years; the shortest was 6 years.

Figure 4 shows that the family size of my sample was significantly larger than the Australian norm. The most common number of children per couple in Australia is two, while for my sample, it was five. In general, the older people had the largest families, and the younger people had smaller families. I defined family size as immediate family — if someone had children, this included their partner and their children; if they did not have children, then this figure included their siblings and parents. This was a distinction I was careful to make, as it is culturally normal for Somalis to think of families as extended family groups. For this reason, I also did not use the term

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206 Ibid.
‘household size’ to avoid confusion by including relatives who were staying for a short period (perhaps between jobs, between houses, or settling into a new area).

Interestingly, none of the respondents lived alone, or with friends or colleagues in a share-house situation. They were either living at home with their parents, or they had moved out with a spouse and had children of their own. The smallest family size (in Figure 6) is four, and there were three instances of this. These were young Somali born people who had moved out of their parents’ home with a spouse, and had only two children.

Figure 4: Family size of Sample (N=45)

Figure 5 shows that the respondents are clustered broadly in the suburbs mentioned earlier in Tables 2, 3 and 4. Of this initial sample of 45, 70% lived in one of my two broad focus areas (39% in the Heidelberg West greater area, 31% in the North Melbourne/Flemington greater area).
Figure 6 shows that every member of the sample has some form of educational attainment. According to a 2012 report by the OECD, approximately 41% of women and 35% of men aged between 25 and 64 in Australia have attained tertiary education. The numbers in figure 6 are similar, with a slightly higher proportion of my sample population having tertiary education attainment. The majority of the respondents who had only attained primary school education were aged above 50. At the time these people were attending primary school, the education system in Somalia had not yet been overhauled (which happened post-independence). At this time, Somalia was much less urbanised and subsequently it’s likely that at least some of these people lived rurally at a significant distance from high schools, and were not able to attend.

The other interesting thing to note about Figure 6 is that of the sample, more females had attained university level qualifications than males. In fact, this indicates that a greater proportion of the females who attended high school went on to attain tertiary level qualifications. Secondly, by plotting this data by family size, this shows that in general, those with larger families had lower levels of educational attainment.
Figures 7 and 8 show that while 9% of respondents reported that their mothers had received no formal education, all of their fathers had attained at least primary school level. Interestingly, the level of both maternal and paternal primary school attainment was around equal at roughly one third, although I did not stipulate whether their parents had finished primary school, as the school systems varied widely across Somalia in that time. While more fathers than mothers had received high school education, the reverse was true for tertiary education. Of the mothers who had attended high school, a greater proportion had gone on to university level study, as compared with the fathers. So, in fact, from the sample, more mothers had attained tertiary level education, despite significantly more fathers achieving primary school and high school education.

Figure 9 shows the breakdown of employment status for the sample. The sample is very small, and the interpretation of this data is complex. However, two trends did emerge. The first was that older people in the sample were most often unemployed (perhaps corresponding to their low levels of education attainment and difficulty with English).
Another trend was that women with young children were much more likely to be unemployed, regardless of educational attainment. Many of my female participants told me they would like to leave the workforce for the purpose of having children and raising them to school age. They were very clear that they would return to work at this point.

**Somalis in Melbourne: significant issues**

There is no doubt that Muslim migrants and refugees settling in Australia have encountered their own particular challenges. Their disrupted circumstances can be compounded upon arrival in Australia, where some culture, language and social norms are quite different.\(^{208}\) Likewise, the methods and patterns of adjustment have varied from those previously seen in migrants in Australia. For example, a study by Clyne and Kipp showed that in the face of racism, Arabic speakers fell back on their language, perceiving it as an asset, rather than avoiding their community language as Chinese speakers do.\(^{209}\)

It is clear that there are many structural constraints and conditions confronting migrants and refugees in their new environment that shape the kinds of family arrangements, roles, and orientations that emerge among them. So do the norms and values they encounter in their new homes. Moreover, immigrants are not passive individuals who are merely acted upon by external forces. They play an active role in reconstructing and redefining family life. Indeed, members of the family, by virtue of their gender and generation, have differing interests so that women (and men)…


\(^{209}\) Clyne and Kipp, *Pluricentric languages in a immigrant context*: 324.
and young people (and older people) often try to fashion family patterns in ways that improve their positions and further their aims.\textsuperscript{210}

The displacement of Muslims has affected their ethnic, cultural and religious practices in their host countries for a number of reasons; for example, in the way that sex and age ratios affect family patterns in the composition of migrant groups. Foner notes that if men greatly outnumber women, this can lead to women having more power in relationships.\textsuperscript{211} Large numbers of older people can also affect family dynamics as they may watch children while parents are working. They may also provide the strongest representation of pre-migration beliefs and practices within families. This was supported by evidence from the respondents. When older individuals are absent from a community, men may be forced to take a more active role in household responsibilities because there are fewer adults within households.\textsuperscript{212}

Migrants are also exposed to different customs, religions and political ideals. This is apparent in many areas, perhaps most strongly in male-female relations and the question of gender roles and the relationship between younger generations and their parents and grandparents. Women are more enthusiastic than men to endorse values that enhance women’s position and young people also generally enjoy their new freedoms, which their parents may resist.\textsuperscript{213} Furthermore, government assistance, if provided, can allow individuals to be more independent. In general, earnings and entitlements translate into greater autonomy and power. Perhaps unsurprisingly, women are often more receptive to notions of gender equality than men.\textsuperscript{214}

The Refugee Council of Australia has identified the following common issues affecting African refugee settlement in Australia:

- challenges in gaining sufficient settlement support;
- the impact of trauma on resettlement;
- the financial burden of repaying travel loans
- supporting family members still in Africa;
- the struggle to reunite split families;
- learning English and adjusting to schooling and tertiary education in Australia;
- finding secure employment, including recognition of qualifications of past work experience; and
- accessing health services.\textsuperscript{215}

\textsuperscript{211} Foner, "The immigrant family: Cultural legacies and cultural changes."
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 964.
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 971.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{215} Anikó Hatoss and Henk Huijser, "Gendered Barriers to Educational Opportunities: Resettlement of Sudanese Refugees in Australia" \textit{Gender and Education} 22, no. 2 (2010): 153.
These issues were all touched on by the respondents. In addition, they reported that standing out from ‘Anglo Australians’ was problematic. In Australia, Somali migrants are of special interest for a number of reasons: Because of their physical features, Somalis are ‘highly visible and are potential victims of racism’. This is further intensified by their faith, in particular for women, who will usually be identified as Muslims by their dress.216

According to the Banyule Community Health Service Somali Research Project (conducted in 2005), the majority of Somalis in Banyule (this local council area includes West Heidelberg and surrounds) have come from large towns or cities in Somalia, which would indicate that adult Somalis arriving in Victoria during the first wave of refugee intake were urban Somalis most likely to have benefited from Barre’s educational policies and programs.217 At the 2001 Census, nearly half of Victoria’s Somali population was under 25 years old. This means that half the 2001 Somali population living in Victoria was part of the generation of Somalis who were under the age of 14 in 1990, when the school system ceased to exist. The remaining half fell either into the category of Somalis who had the opportunity under the Barre regime to access to a University level education, or who were over 35 and may have received an education under the British or Italian education system.218

Somali language and culture are strongly oriented to spoken language. Until the 1970s, northern Somali education was conducted in English and Latin script became the official script of the Somali language. This means that in Somalia, anyone born prior to 1950 had very little chance of becoming literate in their own language, and attaining literacy in another language would also have been difficult. Nevertheless, there were some educated Somalis who did speak and write English and Italian, as the Italian and British colonial authorities had established a schooling system and set their own curriculum. This was, however, only available to a very select minority, who often trained as interpreters, and worked mainly as administrative assistants. There also must have been merchants who were able to communicate in different languages (Arabic, Swahili for example) as the port in the Gulf of Aden was a commercial hub. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find reports of such experiences, due to what Pavla Miller has noted as the tendency of historical accounts to define education in terms of a narrow scope.219 There is a tendency in educational histories to ignore (or forget) educational experiences that fall outside this scope, such as female experiences, experiences of the poor or less wealthy, and experiences of educational enrichment that falls outside the context of mass schooling.

218 Keating and Simons, "Somali students in VET- some factors influencing pathways."
However, it is only a small portion of the total population that would have had access to these educational experiences. Thus, the majority of Somalis born before 1960 arriving in Australia would not have had access to education beyond primary school level. This tallied with what the respondents told me about their grandparents’ education attainment and the way they pressured their children and grandchildren to obtain a good education, as they had been unable to.

Somalis (particularly the urban dwellers who migrated to Australia) value education highly, and aspirations to attain a university education and a professional career are high among in the community in Australia. However, there is a lack of understanding of the breadth of education and training options available to in Australia, which often leads to conflict between parents and children who are making educational choices their parents do not endorse. This has been noted previously by Keating and Simons:

Inter generational communication on the issue of VET is often fraught within the Somali community, with young Somali people undertaking VET study often unable to communicate to family members that their choices are realistic … amongst the Somali community, apprenticeships are generally not highly regarded.220

As Martha Bigelow points out in her work in the United States, education is highly esteemed among Somali youth. It is described as the most valued piece of cultural capital for the Somali youth in her work. According to Bigelow, this is because education allows Somalis living abroad to fulfill the ‘cultural expectation to financially help family members in the United States or still in Somalia, Ethiopia, or Kenya’. 221

The importance the Somali community places on education was a big feature of my fieldwork. The young people described the expectations their parents have of them, and their sometimes unrealistic hopes about which sort of profession their children will enter. Keating and Simons’ research regarding VET education was also very well supported by my research, with many young men especially explaining that the previous generation had little understanding of the scope of the VET system in Australia and also saw little value in practical training such as apprenticeships. The young people all agreed that there were a select group of professions which were most favoured (perhaps predictably, doctor and lawyer were often raised), and that there were other professions which were disappointing to Somali parents.

Interestingly, all of the young women I conducted extended interviews or focus groups with were either working, or studying with the idea of gaining employment later. Some ridiculed the notion that they should stay at home and not work. Although they plan to take a break from working when they have children, they were certain that they would return to work when their children

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221 Bigelow, “Researching and Educating Somali Immigrant and Refugee Youth,” 149.
began school. This complexity in gender identities has been noted in other African communities in Australia.\(^{222}\)

Another significant issue raised by the respondents was their status as refugees. With the political disruption of the past two decades, the UNHCR estimates that there are 1.5 million internally displaced Somalis along with hundreds of thousands across the continent of Africa and around the globe.\(^{223}\) These refugees have experiences that set them apart from voluntary migrants. By definition, the circumstances that lead to a refugee experience disrupt the ‘home country’ in some way — personal and societal upheavals go hand in hand. For example, refugees often have to overcome unique obstacles to maintain contact with family members left behind or scattered around the globe.\(^{224}\)

For refugees, sending societies intentionally or unintentionally create barriers to transnational ties. If the sending society is in disarray, as is the case in Somalia, formal communication networks are jeopardized. The ongoing circumstances of sending societies will influence refugee transnationalism. For example, the difficulty of maintaining close ties with family in the sending society may make it easier to reject pre-migration beliefs because individuals in the sending society are exercising less surveillance and informal social control.\(^{225}\) In my study, this was more true for the parents of the respondents, as the young people tended to keep in regular contact with relatives and friends in Somalia via social media.

Somali refugees have commonly sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Camps in Kenya and Ethiopia have provided a temporary haven for the majority of displaced Somalis, but small numbers have also gone to Yemen, Djibouti, Tanzania and Egypt. Some have resettled in European countries and North America, as well as Australia. The respondents described how many people have lost contact with family and friends in the context of this scattering. Somali immigrants to Australia include a relatively high proportion of women with their children, whose husbands and other male relatives have often died or are missing.\(^{226}\) These families may be separated from family support and structures that they would normally rely on in Somalia. They have also experienced relatively high levels of trauma, deprivation and distress, and may be suffering the effects of such experiences. There are relatively few older males, who traditionally play a significant role in the development of male adolescents and young men.\(^{227}\) This means that community structures to

\(^{222}\) Hatoss and Huijser, “Gendered Barriers to Educational Opportunities: Resettlement of Sudanese Refugees in Australia” 156.


\(^{225}\) Ibid., 50.


\(^{227}\) Noelle Hurd, Marc Zimmerman, and Yange Xue, "Negative adult influences and the protective effects of role models: A study with urban adolescents," Journal of Youth and Adolescents 38, no. 6 (2009).
support cultural maintenance or the negotiation of new values have to be created in Australia at the same time as settlement is occurring.

It is important to highlight here, as McGown does, \(^{228}\) that while migrants and refugees are undoubtedly influenced by the host country's values, customs, religion and social norms, this process is dynamic and mutual. Arriving populations also change the host country when they are absorbed. As Julian Burnside described in a 2013 speech about refugees in Australia: It would be difficult to imagine Melbourne today without cappuccino and lattes. However, in the past, the Italian immigrants bringing these novelties to our shores were marginalized and victims of racism for their cultural differences. \(^{229}\) Now, Melbourne is justifiably proud of its cafe culture, and the delicacies that can be obtained all over the city. When I asked the respondents if something similar could happen with Somali (and in general, African) refugees, they were circumspect. They didn’t believe that their culture could have such a positive influence in Australia, because of the small numbers of African migrants in Australia and because the differences in culture were just too great.

This supports McGown’s thesis that the further apart the receiving and arriving cultures are, the harder it is for them to integrate and become comfortable with each other. \(^{230}\) Again, the visible difference of Somalis must be considered. Their dark skin, their conservative dress and their religious identity mark them as different immediately. It has been noted that religious identity in particular, can be a barrier to settlement if a refugee feels that their religion is threatened. \(^{231}\) Indeed, unfavourable reception of this facet of identity can lead to increased religiosity. Moghissi, writing about identity formation, states: ‘In the case of diasporas of Islamic cultures… the formation of a collective identity, or diasporic consciousness and solidarity, is more often a response to an inhospitable climate in the host societies than an expression of cultural nostalgia’. \(^{232}\) This process can be either positive or negative and this depends on the response of the host society. He gives the example of schools being open and tolerant of religious dress and prayer at school as a means to encouraging greater integration, while an unreceptive and closed society can create a greater religious conservatism ‘than that which was actually experienced … in the home country’. \(^{233}\)

According to McGown, ‘political cultures that allow ethnic or religious minorities to participate in society’s transactions — without disadvantaging them for their ethnic or religious affiliation — will ease the process of cultural weaving for immigrants’. \(^{234}\) It has been argued that those people who flee persecution from Muslim majority countries have often been targeted for

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\(^{230}\) McGown, *Muslims in the Diaspora: The Somali Communities of London and Toronto*.


\(^{233}\) Ibid., xvi.

their liberal views, and in fact are not usually religiously conservative. However, upon arrival in an unreceptive host country, they adopt a more religious identity as a means of protection and solidarity with others in a similar situation. This view was supported by the respondents, who explained that their parents held tightly to their religion as marker of identity and that religion had become more important to them in Australia than it was at home in Somalia.

_A response by the community to these challenges_

I now briefly describe one particular strategy I believe is employed by the Somali community in Melbourne to face the above-mentioned issues. I argue that they have developed a strong collective identity (based as discussed above on shared religious and cultural practices) to support each other in a sometimes-hostile environment.

Here, I wish to briefly discuss some field notes made after my interviews and participant observation regarding the fact that the Somalis seemed to have a distinct sense of self, and a habit of setting themselves apart, both from other minority groups such as other refugees and migrants, and from mainstream Australians. This has been noted by other authors, and also particularly in the Australian context. Specifically in relation to education, there appears to be a Somali belief that they prize education above other migrant and refugee groups in Australia.

The idea that Somalis set themselves apart from others was a common one in different types of academic literature. It was conveyed to me by many of the respondents in mostly positive ways throughout the course of my fieldwork. For example, some members of the older generations prided themselves on their success in Australia, despite their extreme disadvantage at the time of arrival. The younger people told me often that while they had other Muslim friends, there were cultural differences between them, and it was often easier to maintain friendships with other Somalis. The women in particular distinguished the strength and pride of Somali women as something that set them apart.

While teaching English in North Melbourne, I noted that the older Somali men who congregate at the community centre there seemed to keep themselves apart from other community centre users. This took me some time to realise, however I began to arrive 10-15 minutes before the English class began in order to observe the people making use of the facilities. These were almost all men at that particular time of day, with roughly one third being Vietnamese, one third South American (particularly Chilean and Argentinian) and the rest made up of Somalis and other migrant

235 Barrie Wharton, "Globalization, Islam and the struggle for cultural identity in contemporary Europe" (RMIT, 14 October 2014).
groups. I noted that while some of the other men played cards and had discussions in imperfect English, the Somalis preferred to speak their own language and keep to themselves. I did not witness any hostility, rather a polite distance between the groups. This could be because of language and communication difficulties, and also because the Somalis are likely to be much more recent arrivals than those Vietnamese and South Americans who largely arrived in Australia in the 1970s.

I spoke about this with an experienced social worker in the area and her opinion was different. She explained that while other migrant groups established connections within their own ethnic community first, and then branched out and began to interact with other groups, the Somalis she has worked with have been less likely to seek connections with non-Somalis. She argued that they are remarkably self-contained and do not see a need or benefit to expanding their relationships beyond their immediate circle. This idea was reinforced by an experience I had while visiting a group of older women at a home in the flats in North Melbourne. There are diverse ethnicities represented in this building, and it had been selected as a site that could be improved by increased social interaction between residents. To this end, a social organisation had set up some regular events. These were intended to be relaxed, with a variety of food and some planned activities. The activities were designed to keep the residents coming back to the next event.

For example, one week there was a photo station set up and the residents were invited to have their pictures taken. They would need to return the following week to collect them and take part in the next stage of the activities. While there were large numbers of residents attending these parties, it was notable that Somalis were underrepresented. I learned this by speaking with the social workers who were organising the events. On the particular occasion that I was visiting the flats, one of these events was in full swing in the congregation area downstairs, and outside in the playground. However, as I ascended to the fourth floor and went to knock on the door, I heard that inside there was a party in full swing as well. There was music and I could smell delicious smells. Inside were approximately 12 women aged between 40 and 65 who were enjoying themselves very much, albeit far away from the planned event downstairs. I asked them why they were not attending the other event and their response was dismissive. One lady said to me ‘Why would we, when everything we need is here?’ Others expressed that they felt more comfortable among their friends and family and therefore did not wish to attend. I spoke to them about how the events were designed to bring together residents from different backgrounds and situations but they seemed puzzled at this. The general feeling was that this was not necessary, as they had their own groups already.

I will discuss this particular strategy and the way that the community has become self-protective further in the findings chapters. I believe it has manifested in many different ways, sometimes to the advantage of the community, particularly where they have robust support networks. However, sometimes it has caused individuals to shun other forms of outside assistance that have been offered, which might have been better able to meet particular needs.
It is clear that the Somali community in Melbourne is anxious to preserve a sense of collective identity. As Williams describes it, Somali collective identity in Australia is often interlinked with religious and ethnic identity, to the extent that many refugees in Australia have used religion as a means to preserve ethnicity.  

Concluding remarks

In this second chapter of section three, I gave some demographic information regarding Somalis in Melbourne, both from census data and from my own research. I also briefly sketched several issues of significance to the Somali community in Melbourne. These broad sample characteristics and issues facing the community were presented to contextualize the findings chapters that now follow.

IV FINDINGS

(a) Exploring violence: overt and covert forms, reflections of generation 1.5 and the notion of ‘radicalisation’

Introduction

The following chapters are devoted to my empirical data and give voice to my participants. In this chapter I discuss overt violence that has recently taken place in Somalia and the way it has been interpreted by the respondents. Secondly I discuss events and situations that have affected Somalis in Melbourne. I reflect on these and examine whether or not they are covert forms of violence. Next I turn to the descriptions (in their own words) of violence that have affected generation 1.5 Somalis in Melbourne. Finally, I examine the idea of ‘radicalisation’ and the way in which generation 1.5 Somalis conceptualise it.

Overt forms of violence: experiences and interpretations

In section three, I examined the sorts of violence that have taken place in Somalia, both pre- and post-colonial involvement. Following a period of relative stability post-independence, the country was thrown into a civil war in 1991. This coupled with competing economic interests, internecine conflict and harsh climatic events (most notably drought leading to extreme food scarcity and famine in many areas) has resulted in a significant amount of violence in Somalia, particularly over the last three decades. In section three, I outlined that violence is a characteristic often attributed to Somalis both in Somalia and abroad, before tracing how such representations have been constructed over centuries.

I think it is particularly pertinent to note at this point that while sitting in front of an intelligent and articulate young adult (often the same age as myself), perhaps sharing some baklava and Lebanese coffee, or maybe talking in a brightly lit library or community centre, the idea of overt violence in this form seemed awfully far away. When overt violence was raised by the respondents, it was mostly in the context of the violence that has occurred in Somalia. The topic
often came up either later in an interview, or during the second or third time I met with people. However, I didn’t note any discomfort when speaking about violence in Somalia. Indeed, details were relayed to me in a very pragmatic or practical tone, even when they concerned disturbing events to be recalled from childhood, or in some cases memories of traumatic injury or loss of loved ones.

**Sumaya:** Some areas are safer than others, but it’s a scary place. I wouldn’t go now. If someone gave me a ticket today I’d prefer to stay here. I remember I was 5 when we left. I remember Americans coming and storing all their weaponry in our household. I remember my brother got shot and all the blood everywhere. He was 15 and he was coming back from Qur’an school and he was on his way home and he got shot. And my brother brought him home covered in blood and then he went to hospital. The bullet had gone straight through so they stitched him up.

INT / 05.05.2013

Some of the respondents had a strong grasp of recent Somali politics. It was clear that they discussed this with their peers and others within the community. I found that it was culturally common to see men aged between 40 and 70 spend a full afternoon in a café with their friends in deep conversation. I was told that these conversations covered the situation in Somalia, Australian politics, the Somali community in Melbourne and other news and current affairs. The current affairs of Somalia are still quite present for the community in Melbourne, and it seems that some of the young people had heard and observed this, and taken in some of that knowledge. So when describing the situation in Somalia, some of the respondents were very well informed. They often made reference to the civil war and the subsequent international interventions that have occurred there.

On the other hand, there were some people who actively distanced themselves from Somalia, and professed disinterest in knowing about developments there. Indeed, there were quite varied answers regarding the cause of the conflict.

**Hani:** My uncle always invites me [to Somalia] and I don’t really want to go. I don’t want to see a war-torn country. I don’t know what I’d get out of it.

**Sumaya:** ... it’s not stable at all. The electricity still gets cut all the time and there are sometimes curfews and you can’t go out.

FG / 02.11.2012
**Suleiman**: I asked my mum when I was a young kid, a teenager about why there was so much fighting in Somalia and she said there has always been fighting in Somalia and there always will be. That’s why they had to leave.

INT / 20.02.2014

Suleiman’s answer is a very clear indication that in the mind of his mother, the fighting in Somalia is endemic, and will not change. He was not inclined to visit Somalia for this reason.

Cabaas was an example of an individual who took a great interest in Somalia. Consequently, he provided a nuanced answer, which displayed an understanding of Somali political history from the 1970s to the 1990s.

**Cabaas**: I think the war started because the president, Siyad Barre tried to do too much in our country too fast. He wanted to set up all this education stuff and to, you know, change the way people were living for years. Nobody likes to change so fast. And when the people were getting sick of him, other bad people stepped in and made things worse.

INT / 19.05.2013

Scholars have noted the speed with which Siyad Barre made all references to clans a strictly punishable offence and outlawed traditional cultural practices, such as councils for resolving disputes, and even traditional ceremonies such as weddings. Once his regime was challenged, however, Barre sought to strengthen some clans at the cost of others in order to shore up his own rule.¹

Aaliya describes the situation in Mogadishu in some detail.

**Aaliya**: I don’t even know what to say about it [Mogadishu] anymore. There is so many wars I think from 1991 until today 2012 so it’s a really changed city. War after war after war. Many times people fled and then they came back and then another war broke out. The wars used to be between clans before and then it changed to some warlords fighting one another and then it changed to some kind of regions thing when other African troops intervened and then the war was between Somalis and outside troops and still that kind of war since 2006 is going on. There is an official government which was elected I think one month ago and people have good hopes but now the president he... nominated the prime minister I think it was the day before yesterday and people are really disappointed with the guy he came up because he is [a] business man and when the war was going on he was in

Aaliya describes the situation around the time of the Ethiopian military invasion of Somalia in 2006. This conflict was very strong in the minds of older Somalis I spoke with, however it was not mentioned by any other of my younger respondents. The above account shows how much interest Aaliya takes in Somali political affairs from Australia. She engaged actively with family members in Somalia, and studied politics in Australia. As the quotes below show, this was not the norm in the context of the interviews. Many more respondents told me they had no idea about what happened in Somalia on a day-to-day basis.

**Mansuur:** I don’t really care about it to be honest. It’s not my home anymore.

**Said:** No, I don’t know a single thing about it. My life is in Melbourne.

It is interesting that there was such a wide spectrum of responses on this topic. Some respondents regularly accessed news about Somalia, in Somali, Arabic and English. Others lacked this interest and did not consider Somali current affairs to be important. Some of the respondents told me that their parents had worked very hard to leave Somalia, and that they wanted their children to be Australian and be informed about Australian issues. Others said that discussions about Somali politics were a sore point within their homes and that their parents were unhappy speaking about the situation in Somalia as it was too upsetting for them.

Many of the respondents mentioned accessing forums and chat rooms that discussed Somalia and aspects of Somali life. These online spaces were available to them to access privately, and not all of them had discussed this with family members. These were a link for them to Somalia and a way of learning more about the situation there. They explained that it was good to have sources of information other than news broadcasts which they did not think were entirely trustworthy. In addition, the online spaces were populated with other young Somalis and they enjoyed conversing in Somali or English to learn more about developments in Somalia.

Aaliya’s account below is a good indication of the range of conflicting interests that are vying for power in Somalia. According to her telling, her mother, who belonged to the Sid clan was persecuted after the president was overthrown so she fled the city. Her father’s clan, while small, was incorrectly assumed to be part of the Darod clan and therefore implicated in the already ongoing conflict between the Darod and the Hawiye. The Darod clan was in power in the government but was overthrown by the Hawiye clan. The Hawiye did not stop at ousting the President’s Sid sub-clan politically; they also started to ‘eliminate’ anyone from the Darod clan.
Aisha compares this to the genocide that occurred in Rwanda in 1994 between the Tutsi and the Hutus. According to Aisha, the Hawiye persecuted or killed anyone who resembled a Darod clan member or who had any connection to the clan at all (real or imagined).

**Aaliya:** And after the war broke out my mum was of the clan who was persecuted because she was from the president’s clan so she fled away from the city. My father’s clan wasn’t really that big, they didn’t really have influence. It was just people sometimes they were accused like being part of the Darod clan because the bigger war was between the Darod and the Hawiye. The Darod was the clan that had the government, the Hawiye came, they overthrow the Darod and then they didn’t overthrow only, they didn’t go after the clan, you know the Sid clan of the president but they just started to eliminate anyone from the Darod clan like what happened with the Tutsi and Hutus in Rwanda. They said these people used to colonise us so everyone who looks like that clan, any connection, we just tell him: ‘You are from that clan’ and they kill him. So many of the Somali were persecuted for looking like that clan.

INT / 01.06.2012

This account reveals the depth of confusion and the profound instability of the clans in Somalia at that time. It was a very dangerous place to be, where individuals could be killed for some physical characteristic that falsely or correctly led others to assume knowledge of their identity. Episodes of clan cleansing were carried out during the Somali civil war, and the testimony of survivors reveals that they were hunted down intentionally because of their group identity, sometimes by name by those who knew them. Similar testimony was given by survivors of the Rwandan and Yugoslav genocides. Sen’s argument that conflict is engendered by the ‘presumption that people can be uniquely categorized based on religion or culture’ is pertinent here. However, the clan cleansing took place between groups of people who shared religion and culture, despite belonging to different clans. This alludes to an oft-mentioned feature of the Somali conflict — the fragmented nature of the social and cultural landscape, despite ethnic and religious homogeneity.

There are many different versions of events that took place in Somalia during the 1990s. The clan warfare, although consistently reported on has been difficult to document comprehensively and accurately. What is certain is that the Somali clans have at times been brutal in their eradication of each other’s members. In times of such heightened conflict, as Aaliya described, it was not unusual to be misidentified as a member of a particular clan and injured or killed because of the assumed clan membership. In contrast, many respondents reported that their parents could tell what

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clan someone belonged by looking at them, which raises questions about the accuracy of such comments. However, it seems that mistakes were often made with regard to kinship in Somalia.

In discussion about violence in Somalia, many different theories were offered for the root cause of the continuing conflict. Below, I have collated some responses into the same categories described in section three.

(i) Violence due to a personal characteristic

Suleiman’s answer (above) to why there is violence in Somalia above, reveals that in his family, at least, the violence is attributed to a personal characteristic of the Somalis. ‘…she said there has always been fighting in Somalia and there always will be.’ Bilan agreed.

**Bilan:** In Somalia when you’re young, 8, 7, 9, 10, you must stand up for yourself, because you know children are really very cruel... but when you are older you should grow up from that culture, from that bullying culture. But the fighting continues with the Somalis. Especially between women. Once two people argue, it almost always ends up in fighting in Somalia, and bashing.

INT / 19.05.2013

Her description of violence as a childhood last resort, when others are cruel is not unusual, but she believes that Somali children do not grow out of what she terms a ‘bullying culture’. Here, Bilan implies that some Somalis remain childlike in their psychology, and are unable to grow up. She specifically notes that women are very likely to fight physically, which will be discussed in greater detail further on in this chapter. Aaliya also used the term ‘bullying’ to describe Somalis’ violent responses:

**Aaliya:** This is something that goes back a long time in Somali culture. Yes, I think it goes back because they fight about something so easy. Like ‘you scratched my car’. And if you say ‘what are you talking about, I didn’t touch your car. Just get lost!’ You say get lost and a fight starts. So, you know, the young Somali guys, Do they hear that from their mothers? I don’t know where they get it from. It’s in their genes. ... You will hear some mums telling their boys ‘you have to stand up for yourself, and do whatever it takes’. And they wouldn’t tell their children bullying is not acceptable in Australia. ... The Somalis are bullies... they really bully people.

INT / 01.06.2012
Aaliya pointed out that the fighting culture ‘goes back a long way’ for Somalis, and argued that it only takes something very small to set this off. She wonders if this is something that is now ‘in their genes’, which is an explanation that draws on science. However, she then reflects that this message is passed on from parents to children, and thus permeates from one generation to the next, even in the Australian context, where she believes the acceptable culture is different from in Somalia. Interestingly, she states that the violence is passed from mother to son.

**Aaliya:** Also, Somali girls really fight. Australia doesn’t know fighting, but in my country people fight.

**Elizabeth:** Physically you mean?

**Aaliya:** Yeah, it’s normal. The Somalis are physical fighters. The women fight, especially the women fight too much. They fight about something which is really very easy like their kids, if one kid hits another child the mothers will be so furious. They will fight and the one who is defeated will go out and find her sisters and friends and whatever and bring a group and then this group they... bash each other.

INT / 01.06.2012

Aaliya in particular, has a very strong opinion about the violence of Somalis, and especially the women who she believes are very easily prompted to use physical violence as a response to their circumstances. Again, she has described a situation where there is a minor dispute. She argues that Somali women have as their first response to such situations, a violent instinct. They will not attempt to resolve the dispute through debate, but will use physical strength to do so. She also describes how the situation will escalate from there, and how if one party is defeated, she will round up supporters from her family and group of friends and return to the winner of the previous argument to try and defeat her with the added physical strength of her supporters. While she was the most vocal about female violence, Aaliya was not the only person to describe women fighting in groups.

**Ishaar:** Women, they do the group fighting. It’s something that existed... I don’t know where it came from and we don’t see it much as violent. Nobody sees it as violent. I guess this the way some women solve their problems together.

GROUP INT / 17.08.2014

According to Ishaar, this physical violence is a dispute resolution system that is not perceived to be violent. This could be because it is common (although it was not mentioned by many of the respondents), or because physical violence is not seen to be as serious if it occurs between women.
rather than men. According to Ishaar’s explanation, this violence is not identified as such, perhaps because it is a customary way of resolving disputes.

Absame: *I remember when we were in the camp in Kenya, there were so many women fighting all the time!* *We all lived very close together and they argued about their kids and their things (belongings).* *And I remember now, once I did see a big group of women doing a fight in the street. But my mum made us leave straight away.*

FG / 10.02.2014

Absame’s recollection does offer some support to the comments above about women fighting in groups, however the living situation in refugee camps is very densely packed and fraught with uncertainty, and the situation he describes may be no more than a general response to these difficulties. Indeed, according to Absame’s account, not all women participated in this fighting, with his mother at least choosing to remove herself and her children as quickly as she could.

(ii) Violence due to the clan system

Many of the respondents discussed the role of the clan system in the expressions of overt violence in Somalia.

Bilan: *I think it’s the clan system that’s totally responsible for the war there.* *There are loads of other African countries where they’re very poor too, and have the same droughts, and they’re not fighting all the time.*

INT / 19.05.2013

Bilan was not one of the young people who was actively engaged in the discussion of Somali politics. However he raises an important point in the comparison between Somalia and other countries who have similar climatic conditions. His analysis suggests that drought and harsh environmental conditions are not the reasons for the conflict in Somalia.

Nevertheless, the respondents did generally agree that the clan system played a role in the conflict. It was interesting that while the overwhelming response when asked for explanations of violence and conflict in Somalia referred directly to clans as an explanation, some young people were able to offer detailed insight, referring specific historical events, particularly periods when different clans had political power. Other young people believed strongly that the clan system plays a big part in the creation and recreation of violence in Somalia, but were not able to explain this in depth. Indeed, there was a sense from some respondents that the clan system itself is inherently
violent, and that we shouldn’t expect anything different from a group of people who subscribe to such a system.

Hani, for example, argued that the clan system is no more than a prejudice that is handed down from parents to their children. Her statement below supports the argument made by Aaliya earlier, that children absorb the beliefs and prejudices of their parents and act on them as well, although Hani believes that it is both mothers and fathers who transmit these messages.

**Hani**: And it’s also the parents that influence the children — my father was completely against teaching about the tribes but there are parents who will tell the importance of their own tribe to their kids and that kid would go to school and find out a person from a different tribe and start that enmity and cause problems because that child is already thinking differently from a very young age. So that’s what causes the problem. It’s the parents that transfer that into their kids and their kids will do the same thing again.

INT / 20.01.2014

(iii) Violence due to the harsh environment of Somalia

On the previous page, Bilan contrasted the violence in Somalia with other more peaceful African countries, where he believes the environment is equally harsh. Suleiman did make reference to the harsh environment in Somalia as a reason for violence. Interestingly, however, there were no other reflections from the respondents on the severity of the climate and harsh living conditions in Somalia as a reason for violence to occur. This was despite this idea cropping up quite regularly from academics and reporters as a possible reason for the extended conflict and violence in Somalia.

**Suleiman**: I have heard that in the old days it was about making sure they could get enough water and grass for their camels. And I do believe that — it’s always so dry there that people would die without getting access to water.

INT / 20.02.2014

(iv) Violence due to outside intervention

Some of the respondents who had shown that they were interested in the politics of Somalia noted the outside interventions which they believed had exacerbated or prolonged the conflict in Somalia.
Aaliya: But before it used to be two men in Somalia they would have a physical fight and then they leave [finish the argument]. But now what happens in my country when two people argue, especially men, they use guns and kill each other ... now your enemy will kill you.

INT / 01.06.2012

Absame: It’s a hard question. I don’t know much about what is happening in Somalia today, but the way I understand it, there was a lot of involvements from America and the Soviets too. I want to know how all the guns and weapons got into there in the first place, because the Somalis couldn’t afford all that steel and guns and tanks as well. I have discussed this a lot with my father and also with my friends.

GROUP INT / 10.02.2014

Some thoughts on the experiences and interpretations of overt violence

In section three, I presented the four main ways that violence is attributed to Somalis in public discourse. Here, I’ve organised the reflections on generation 1.5 into the same categories. What was surprising to me as I was analysing this data, was the low correlation between discussions of violence with the young people, and the categories proliferated in the discourse. Part of the reason for this is likely to be that their life experience is quite different from those still living in Somalia, or those who have spent their adult life living there. Additionally, their conceptions and ideas of Somalia were quite different from those that are presented in academia and the media. This may be because they hear different recollections and interpretations from the older generations of Somalis in Melbourne.

One of the main features of overt violence is the ease with which it can be identified. The respondents were very free in their discussions of overt violence in Somalia, and did not have any difficulty identifying such violence. Indeed, when I did ask the respondents about violence, they were able to tell me about what had happened in Somalia in the past, and to give me scant but practical details. But there was a clear juncture in their minds between the violence that had taken place in Somalia and any overt violence that had been experienced in Australia. This is not to say that none of the respondents had ever experienced overt violence in Australia. However, overt violence that happened in Somalia belonged in Somalia, was explained in certain terms, and was removed from their life experience. Interestingly, while the young people discussed women fighting both in the refugee camps and in Australia as a way of resolving differences, they did not consider
this to constitute violence. Rather, they thought of it as a perhaps regrettable but legitimate way of resolving differences.

In compiling this chapter, it became clear to me that more respondents had discussed overt violence in Somalia in interviews than focus groups or group interviews. That is, more people were talking about violence in Somalia with me, when they were on their own. It appeared easier for individuals to discuss violence in Somalia in such a setting. This is perhaps because one of the features of the individual interviews is that they had a tendency to become more sombre and melancholy than the focus groups or group interviews. In a group situation, while sensitive topics were still able to be broached, there were often a multitude of opinions, so the same depth of individual experience was rarely traversed.

Covert forms of violence: experiences and interpretations

I now turn to describing covert violence as it has been experienced by the Somali community in Melbourne. This section is devoted mostly to my reflections on information I was given, and to situations described by people associated with the community (such as social workers, and community elders). While beginning to compile this section on covert violence, I realized that most of the examples I had collected did not come from quotes from interviews and focus groups. Rather, the instances of covert violence presented below were more from my field notes and observations of community meetings, and discussions with older Somalis in Melbourne.

The closure of remittances to Somalia

One such example of an issue which affected the Somali community was the question of sending remittances to Somalia through official channels. Over the course of 2013 and 2014 it became more and more difficult for Somalis to send money back to their families using the Australian banking system. This was because there was extended pressure on the banks to close the official money transfer channels due to suspicion that money entering Somalia was being diverted to support Al Shabaab, a group known to commit acts of terrorism. There were numerous meetings about the situation in the Preston/West Heidelberg areas and in North Melbourne/Flemington. These meetings were both formal and informal, and some were just conversations between friends who were worried about the situation. They spoke about how it was nearly impossible to send money through any of the big four banks and the smaller credit unions were also steadily closing their remittance programs.
There were two levels of obstacles to those wishing to send money to Somalia. Firstly, the official level, which comprised the banks and credit unions closing off the flow of money to Somalia. Secondly, the personal obstacles which were encountered depending on which person was serving at a particular bank were particularly difficult. There were theories about which time it was better to go into a bank, and which sort of person should go (old, young, male, female) to get the best chance of transferring money.

At a community meeting in Ascot Vale in October 2014, there was an extended discussion about remittances and the increasing difficulty being encountered when sending money home. Some people told stories about how going to a particular bank at different times of day, or on different days would make the process easier or more difficult depending on who was serving behind the counter. There was agreement that sending money to Somalia was regarded with deep suspicion by many bank employees.

Westpac was the last Australian bank allowing remittances to be sent to Somalia. This avenue was finally closed after much uncertainty on March 31, 2015, putting already vulnerable individuals in Somalia at further risk. This caused a great deal of stress and worry to some community members in Melbourne, although they did acknowledge the risk that once they sent money to Somalia they did not have control over it, and they believed there was a significant chance that the money could be intercepted (some told stories of sending money which never arrived).

This is a fitting example of how covert violence operates. There is inherent violence in stopping a flow of money to a vulnerable population, especially when it is known how much this population relies on remittances from outside their country (in 2015 remittances formed 35% of the Somali GDP). The priority of the dominant actors is to ensure that Al Shabaab has a reduced chance of getting funds from outside Somalia, (‘foreign banks’ concerns stem from U.S. regulation and enforcement’). In order to ensure this, the money flow is suspended to those who need it but do not practice any terrorism-related activities. Indeed, the decision to stop the flow of remittances is an example of ‘legally allowable activities that disrupt or influence the democratic flow of civil life in favour of “higher powers” and against the well-being or rights of citizens or workers’, which can be understood as a form of covert violence. This decision ‘selectively victimizes certain members of the population’.

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5 Chris Cummings, "Westpac Bank in Australia Ceases Somali Remittances," American Banker 4 April 2015
7 Jessica Hatcher, "Ending Somali-U.S. money transfers will be devastating, Merchants Bank warned," The Guardian February 6, 2015
8 Cummings, "Westpac Bank in Australia Ceases Somali Remittances."
Additionally, the personal obstacles encountered are also examples of covert violence, although this is not officially sanctioned in the same way. The community members pointed out that they were at the will of different bank tellers and that they believed that their ethnicity and the destination they wished to send their money to was regarded with mistrust. According to their reports, sometimes they were able to send money, and other times the same bank branch would refuse with no reason given. In this case, they felt that the bank employees had control over whether their money was sent to Somalia or not. They altered their routines, behaviour and ‘cover stories’ about what the money was needed for in Somalia in order to have the best chance of sending money back to Somalia.

As I mentioned above, the majority of fieldwork data in this section came from participant observation, rather than from conversations with generation 1.5. The issue of remittances shows this clearly, because in my conversations with the young people, while there was an awareness of the money being sent back to Somalia, it became clear that generation 1.5 were not often expected to make contributions to funds, and they had a limited engagement with the issue. Nonetheless, some voiced irritation at the financial expectations of relatives in Somalia.

Sumaya: I think they live better there than us here! Must be all the money we send them. We give them so much. The American dollars buy them so much.

INT / 05.05.2013

Access to (and willingness to engage with) social services

In conceiving of covert violence, I thought about the disadvantage that Somalis face in their capacity as recently arrived refugees. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the way that Somalis access social services, I conducted an extended interview with a social worker in Flemington who had worked for a decade with the Somalis living locally. She spoke at length about how recent cuts to the sector had forced her agency to reduce its number of cases by a third. She told me that the first clients to be removed from the active case lists were Somalis. This was because the agency had tightened its criteria for accepting clients, and their reasoning was that, based on experience; the Somali clients chose to access support networks within their own communities than other minority groups and were therefore more likely to resolve their issues without the support of the agency. In her words,

Social Worker: Somalis are known for sorting their own problems out. They sometimes take advantage of the services we offer, but just as often, I think, I will work with a client and come up with a plan to deal with some issue. And I mean work over an extended
period of time, say 12 weeks. And then they don’t bother coming one week, and I hear through the grapevine that they have moved away from their particular problem, to another suburb or state, or that they have been given a job by a relative, or invited to live in another family’s house. So my work is wasted. They just, you know, they keep their problems ‘in-house’.

INT / 08.12.2014

The use of the word ‘wasted’ above suggests annoyance on the part of the social worker. It also suggests, that she feels her work has no further advantage than the immediate situation. Perhaps she considers her contribution less as an educative process, and more as a means to an end in an immediate crisis situation.

This is undoubtedly a difficult situation, and the response of the agency is not unreasonable. It is a sad fact that when funds are cut to service areas, the service providers must tighten the criteria by which they accept applications for assistance. However, I believe this situation is also indicative of everyday misunderstandings between the Australian way of giving assistance and the Somali method of solving problems. I was told many times in my discussion with Somalis of all ages, that it is good to be able to rely on your family (and sometimes your clan) in order to solve personal problems. Indeed, this reliance on extended networks can be seen as a form of social capital in the Bourdieuan sense. This is particularly true because the power that accrues through one network of belonging is at the expense of another. That is, Somalis who take advantage of their kinship and clan networks cut themselves off from the local Australian systems in place to offer assistance in times of need. This is further evidence of the strategy of looking inwards, and choosing to rely on resources from within the community.

I did hear of a formalized situation that was an example of the above, regarding an agreement between a Somali community organization and the Sherriff’s office. In the case of traffic infringements (of which there are apparently many, because many Somalis drive taxis for a living), this organization had come to a solution with the Sherriff’s office. The president of this well respected community organization described a situation as follows:

**President**: Imagine you have a Somali taxi driver who is 45 or 50. He runs through a red light or gets a parking ticket and is sent an infringement notice in the mail. He receives the official envelope and he is too scared to open it, so he puts it away in a drawer and forgets about it. Or maybe he does open it, but he is not able to understand the official language that is printed there. So he puts it away and tries to forget about it. Then a couple of months later, another letter arrives from the same place. He knows that there is bad news, but he tries to ignore it again. Then again, another letter arrives and when he opens this he sees that now he has to pay three fines instead of just one, or maybe he has
to go to court. His English skills are not very good and he is very worried about the police involvement. So he might come to us for help and show us all his letters. And always we say, ‘why didn’t you come earlier? We could have solved this problem much faster’.

INT / 13.11.2012

The arrangement with the Sherriff’s office allows the taxi driver (or another individual in a similar situation) to convert some of his fines to community service, and to carry out the community service in an organization that is linked to the local Somali community.

The above shows an example of successful ‘in-house’ management of problems, however, there were also multiple issues that were pointed out to me as being very difficult for the community to manage ‘in-house’. Youth unemployment is a significant problem for Somali males, according to Iman, a young social worker (and a member of the target population) with Somali young men. He told me anecdotally that Somali male high school dropouts are overrepresented in comparison to their peers. He argued that because Somali parents do not enforce discipline in the home for their sons, they may not gain employment for many years. This unemployment can cause familial discord, including parental nagging and sibling jealousy (this is later explored in further detail in the third findings chapter). However, he agreed that the Somali community prefers to manage these cases independently, without seeking help from the community services that exist to address these problems in the mainstream community as well as for minority groups.

According to Iman, it would be useful for young Somali men to engage with the social services that are available.

Iman: I try to talk to these guys, you know, to tell them that there is nothing embarrassing about seeing a social worker. It might really improve their life! But they just won’t do it. They prefer to ignore their problems. It is difficult for them to talk to an outsider about what is going on in their life, and I think they feel afraid to show that they are weak.

INT / 13.02.2014

When asked about accessing financial help from Centrelink, Iman told me that some of his clients ‘couldn’t face’ going into a Centrelink office. I pressed him for further details, and he said that in his opinion, Centrelink makes it difficult for people to access payments to save money.

Iman: But they do that for everyone, not just the Somalis. No one likes to fill out the forms, and take in the ID and wait and wait and wait. But you just have to do it.

INT / 13.02.2014
While this could be argued to be a form of covert violence (although, it could perhaps more convincingly be described as poor bureaucratic practice), Iman does not believe that it is targeted at Somalis. Nevertheless, he agreed that it is difficult to convince Somalis to access social services. It is worth noting here though, that if young Somalis know that they are able to rely on familiar networks to help them when they need it, they may consider accessing social services a waste of time. However, it is also important to remember that the relatively recent arrival of large numbers of Somalis to Melbourne, coupled with their status as refugees has had an effect on the ability they have to mobilise resources and support members of their community. In this way, we see that the community tendency to look inward for help and support, may have adverse effects.

Iman told me that he was part of a team seeking to address young Somali men’s reluctance to present at medical centres when ill. According to Iman, it is difficult to persuade young Somali men to go to medical centres, both when they are ill and as a preventative measure or for regular checkups. Previous studies have shown that Somali women are frustrated with the western model of medical care, and that Somalis often present to an Emergency department rather than attending a medical clinic for relatively minor illnesses.

Some of the respondents told me that there is confusion about whether they will need to pay for medical care at a clinic. There are difficulties understanding which clinics bulk bill, and for what services, so the fear of being charged for medical attention causes them not to present at all. I see this as a form of covert violence, because although the medical centres are there and available for all patients to present themselves for help, a portion of the patients does not have the education or understanding of the local bureaucracy to take advantage of the services that are there for them. This is an example of low social capital impacting access to social services, and potentially resulting in to poor health outcomes that could have been prevented.

Some thoughts on the experiences and interpretations of covert violence

Covert violence is difficult to pin down because it has been absorbed ‘like air’ and is very difficult to escape from. In the cases above, which can be taken as emblematic of many similar situations in the Somali community in Melbourne, we can see the latent power structures which have imposed hierarchies and ‘ways of being and knowing the world that unevenly distribute suffering, and limit

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even the ways in which we can imagine the possibility of an alternative world. The over-representation of Africans (and other minority groups) in crime statistics in Australia can be thought of in terms of covert violence. The structural violence of discrimination against ethnic minorities by local legal systems and the media is well documented. In the above case of the taxi driver, the structural violence rests at a deeper level because it has led to a situation where an individual is being penalised for their lack of understanding of the local legal system — another reflection of the lack of social capital among the Somali community. I believe that the remedial system they have organised highlights how strong and capable the Somali community can be, despite their perceived disadvantage.

Power is always expressed through multiple layers of relations, and can be expressed in seemingly hidden forms. One issue which arose on a regular basis was the Somalis’ mistrust of official and bureaucratic processes. This included fear of the police, as has been reported in the context of African youths (and other ethnic minority groups). This mistrust can result in further disadvantage to the Somali community in the following way.

A number of Somali community workers and a social worker told me that they believe the number of Somalis as stated in the census is incorrect. They said that many Somalis are afraid to note their ethnicity down in writing on the census form. They are also afraid to note their religion as Islam, so they leave the section blank, or put down that they speak English at home. According to community service workers, this is a problem because funding and services are targeted at areas where there is the highest need, and if the census data shows fewer numbers of Somalis residing in a certain area, funding and services may be reduced in that area.

According to the social workers, the fear that causes Somali Australians to either lie or refuse to answer questions about their ethnicity, religion and culture leads directly to negative consequences for them (in this case, funding cuts to services they might need to access). This is an example of structural violence reproducing the conditions which allow it to flourish, as it leads to a cycle of further disadvantage for Somalis in Melbourne.

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Reflections on violence by generation 1.5

This section focuses on the responses of my participants and their reflections on the perception and representations of Somalis as violent. There are many examples of covert violence offered, accompanied by their reflections. These examples reflect the lived experience of generation 1.5 on a daily basis. For instance, the following quote is a reconstruction of a conversation I had with a young man who did not want to be recorded.

Elizabeth: What can you tell me about violence in the Somali community in Melbourne?
X: I don’t want to talk about this issue, because it gets taken out of context and looks very bad for us, for my community.

Elizabeth: Can you explain a bit more what you mean?
X: I don’t want to say anything about it because, even if we do have some violence problems in our people in Melbourne, I don’t think it’s right to focus on that. Every group of people has some problems, even if they’re rich and white. I think that when we talk about it all the time we are making sure that that’s the thing that people remember about us.

INT / 09.08.2014

The conversation continued in a similar vein for a few minutes, with me probing gently into why this young man did not want to engage with the issue of violence in the Somali community. He told me that he believes that there is violence in every group of people because there are good and bad people everywhere. After some more polite questions from me, I began to have the feeling that I was causing him distress, so I turned the conversation to other topics. His sense of unease was very strong, and reminded me that this is a significant personal issue for some young Somalis.

Gendered experiences of violence

When questioned about violence in the Somali community in Melbourne, the assumption from the females was that I was referring to domestic violence. The males, on the other hand thought first of criminal violence and assaults. See the two contrasting responses below:

Elizabeth: What do you think about violence in the Somali community?
Ismahaan: If that happens, if a woman gets bashed, she will retaliate and get her husband back.

INT / 04.05.2013
Elizabeth: What do you think about violence in the Somali community?

Iman: I think there are some problems with the police, yes.

INT / 13.02.2014

This reveals much about what the females and males consider violent, and what features in their daily lives constitute violence. Violence is often described as a masculine trait, and it is true that violent crime occurs much more among males than females, but my female respondents described incidents of female violence towards males in retaliation to intimate partner violence (this violence would almost certainly go unreported). The women used language such as a man being ‘taught a lesson’ by his wife (and in some cases her sisters, cousins and friends, which adds an interesting dimension to the conversation about women’s group violence above). Interestingly, none of the males had any such experiences to relate. According to the women, this was most likely due to the need for men to save face and not appear weak or emasculated. The women stressed that because divorce was a frequent and accepted feature of Somali culture (both in Somalia and in Melbourne), there was recourse for women if they suffered at the hands of their husbands and also a way out of a violent marriage. However, this could also be an indication that the men did not consider that such interactions constituted violence.

Layla: I had a cousin that was suffering very badly from her husband. She didn’t want to break up the marriage because it had been a long time to organize it with all her family. But this guy lost his job and he was at home all the time, the whole day, and he was giving her trouble. And she couldn’t take it any more. She spoke to his parents and they went to the Imam and she got a divorce a year after they got married. I think she felt guilty because her parents paid for them to go do it in Somalia. But you can’t stay in a relationship where there is violence!

Nafiso: I never knew anyone in a violent marriage, but I heard some stories about a guy who was bashing his wife, and she got all her sisters to go round there and they pulled his hair and they taught him a lesson. And he stopped doing it.

FG / 15.01.2014

The above reflections indicate that the women in both cases ‘found a solution’ to the problem of violence in their marriage. One solution was to leave the marriage, the other solution was to intimidate the violent partner into stopping his previous behaviour. In the discussion in this particular focus group the respondents did not judge that one solution was better than another.

Rather, they were pleased that the women involved had been able to solve their problems with their husbands.

Relations with law enforcement

The young men chose to tell stories of friends and acquaintances who had been involved with the police (all felt that this involvement was unfair). There is a significant body of work that deals with youth and police relations, particularly ethnic minority youth. Some studies have suggested that minority youth have a more troubled relationship with police and report more personal negative experience with police officers.18

It has also been well documented that police have a tendency to mistrust young black males.19 More recently, scholarly work has been devoted to examining the complex ways citizens manage their behaviour towards the police. In particular, Ronald Weitzer and Rod Brunson have uncovered the contours of male youth’s strategic responses to the police in living in an inner-city neighbourhood with high crime rates in the United States.20 Discussing minority male relationships with police, Robin Engel suggests that the wider the gap in the social background of the police officers and the minority youth, the more likely mutual displays of disrespect are. Engel states ‘it is possible that particular types of citizens (e.g., young minority males) may act in disrespectful or otherwise resistant ways to symbolize their perceptions of injustice’.21

In my interview with one of the young men who did not wish to be recorded, he explained that the police expect Somalis to be criminals, so what is the point of telling them otherwise?

X: They’re always on the look out for us. Especially if we’re in a group of friends together. Sometimes I wonder if we should do something bad just to see what happens. I know they’re going to question us anyway, so maybe we should make it worth the hassle?

INT / 09.08.2014

The above is a reconstructed quote, and the conversation continued for some time with me trying to unpack the statement ‘I know they’re going to question us anyway, so maybe we should make it worth the hassle?’. Essentially, this young man believed that he would be targeted because of his ethnicity and that this would probably result in negative consequences for him, regardless of his innocence or guilt. He said he was sometimes tempted to ‘play up’ to this increased police attention because then at least he would ‘deserve’ the attention. However his friends had always talked him out of such behaviour, warning that the result would be damaging for him and his family.

The idea that young Somalis are unfairly targeted by police was very common with the respondents.

_Bashir_: There is always, always, always someone from our community in trouble with the police. It’s obvious it’s because we are Somali

_Bilan_: It’s still hard because, we’re not trained to trust the police, you know? The boys expect bad things will happen if they go there, and sometimes I think that’s probably true.

FG / 02.11.2012

When pressed about what she meant by ‘not trained to trust the police’, Bilan explained that law enforcement was something to be feared in Somalia, and that many parents of young people had a visible attitude of mistrust.

_Bilan_: Our parents are afraid of the police. I knew that even from a very young age. They would cross over the street to avoid them, and you could tell that they were very nervous.

INT / 19.05.2013

The behaviour from Bilan’s parents served to reinforce the way that power is expressed in society through multiple layers of relations. People are always conceiving of themselves in terms of the categories available to them. Bilan’s parents consider themselves as untrustworthy in the eyes of the police, or believe that police are suspicious of them because they are seen as very dangerous. This move encourages Bilan to ask herself whether she needs to be wary of police as well, even in Australia. Generation 1.5 Somalis in Melbourne grow up in a space where they are forced to view themselves in terms of the constructed categories prevalent, and to negotiate their identity formation and expression against the backdrop of embedded power relations in society. This is also simply due to the fact that police in Somalia operate in a very different way compared with police in Melbourne. In Somalia, police and other official representatives were certainly people to be feared, rather than trusted.

However, I do not suggest that young Somali Australians do not have grounds for fearing members of the police force in Australia. There have long been questions about how the police
interact with young African Australian males in particular. In 2013, a case brought against Victoria Police by six young African Australian men was settled outside court the day before it was due to be heard. The young men accused Victoria Police of widespread racial profiling and alleged that police force members were stopping them for unwarranted searching and questioning. As part of the case, they requested a statistician, Professor Ian Gordon, to analyse police notes. He found that young African Australian men living in Flemington and North Melbourne were stopped two and a half times more than their counterparts who were not of African descent.22

Police diary notes which were to be used as evidence in the case showed that police had described African Australian males as ‘criminals loitering in the area’. ‘Unable to provide police with reason of why they were there or what they were doing. Nervous in police presence’ was an example given by police in a stop where they required an African Australian teenager to justify being in a public place. This is in disagreement with the law, which requires police to have a legitimate reason to interfere with a person’s freedom of movement.23 Additionally, Professor Gordon’s analysis of police statistics found that in fact young men of African descent committed significantly less crime than other populations in Flemington and North Melbourne.24

In 2015, two of the men who brought the original case against Victoria Police released a report titled The More Things Change, The More they Stay the Same. Daniel Haile-Michael & Maki Issa spoke with young people in Sunshine, Flemington, Noble Park and Dandenong about their experiences with the police and found that negative experiences were still common, public occurrences which caused isolation, fear and anxiety.25

It seems that young Somali Australians consistently see themselves as the type of people who will be targeted by police and are likely to end up in jail. I observed tension between a group of Somali young men and police officers in Footscray in September 2013. At that time there were construction works being undertaken at the footbridge, with some ramps and stairs being blocked off. There was a group of around 8 young men, aged between 17 and 25 or so. They were in high spirits; laughing and talking and pushing each other around as a joke. Two uniformed police officers, one male and one female were approaching along the footpath. They were heading in the direction of the group of boys, but it was not clear if they intended to speak with them or not. As soon as they were noticed, the laughter died away. The group dispersed immediately, in groups of twos and threes. Some went into the station, others walked away in the same direction as the police

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24 Donovan, "Victoria Police settles racial profiling case."
officers were heading, and two even crossed the road against the lights to avoid having to speak with them.

I was with a friend — a young Somali woman who is active in the community and she told me that this is not uncommon. I was amazed that it was preferable to jay-walk in front of police officers rather than be found in a seemingly innocent group of friends, however she said that in the minds of young Somali men, anything is better than having contact with a police officer. After all, once they are across the road, they can always run away if necessary. When I spoke to some of the respondents about this incident, their response was matter-of-fact. Many believed it is better to disappear rather than risk a confrontation. They thought similarly about ticket inspectors on public transport. I have seen young Somalis exit a train as ticket inspectors have boarded it, or passed through to the next carriage in an attempt to exit successfully at the next stop, however I had assumed that they had not had a valid ticket. Perhaps this is not always the case.

Iman explained that in his work as a social worker he had dealt with many young men who felt they were targeted unfairly by the police.

_Iman:_ I talk to heaps of these guys, you know? They feel like they’re trying to live their life and when they hang out in the mall, or go out with their friends, there’s always someone watching them and the police get involved if there’s a big group of them.

INT / 27.04.2014

Absame reflects that part of the problem for the Somali youth comes down to a lack of understanding of the law and of Australia’s bureaucratic processes and of the inability of their parents to link to a network that would be able to help their sons (lawyers, social workers, medical officers for example).

_Absame:_ Some of the young guys act violent and sometimes he have problems with maybe the ticket inspectors and sometimes he acted like... we accused him of acting like he was above the law: driving without license, you know things like normal teenagers do. I hear from other people — there’s too many young Somalis who are in jail. They are in jail for some easy things which if they have some people to fix, or if their parents know more about the law or if their parents could help them... It’s a very, very big disadvantage.

_Elizabeth:_ So you think if they had better representation they wouldn’t be in jail...

_Absame:_ Better representation, yeah, because they often go to jail, for things that young Australian people — teenagers wouldn’t go to jail for. You know, sometimes they bash people? And bashing people doesn’t go to jail for bashing because of some justification, but the Somalis go.
These Somali youth are exposed to a form of inherent structural violence. Poor representation and understanding of the structures of the legal system, for instance, can lead to an inflated proportion of Somalis appearing in crime statistics. This, in turn, may reinforce notions of inherent violence in Somalis and reproduces the conditions for a cyclic reproduction of events.\(^{26}\)

Additionally, there have been incidents of police and journalists analysing statistics incorrectly and producing data which inaccurately claims that young Somali Australians and African Australians more generally commit more crimes than other populations. It is difficult to overstate the implications of this inaccuracy, both in terms of the effect it has on the young people themselves, and in terms of the way it encourages others to view them in a certain way. The reinforcement of such inaccuracies entrenches ideological categories and reinforces what are, for generation 1.5, prejudiced distributions of power.

**Representation by the media**

Many of the respondents talked about how crime was a reality for any one living in any country in the world and the way that if a Muslim commits a crime, the lead story is his identification as Muslim and how that must have contributed to his crime.

**Omar:** I read an article a couple of years ago on the Herald Sun, and it was two young men that I actually knew they were Ethiopian. They were non-Muslim. And they got intoxicated and they were harassing people, I can’t remember exactly what the article was on. But they got categorized as young Muslim youth who weren’t used to this culture, and alcohol and the lifestyle. But there was actually a lot of alcohol back in Ethiopia and even in Somalia... there was alcohol back home. It’s not something new but they were getting categorized as Muslims who never drank alcohol in their life, but now that they’re here they get introduced to alcohol, they don’t know how to handle it. So I was like, ‘Yeah, I recognize these guys and they’re not Muslim, so you can’t say there’s no alcohol in their culture’.

GROUP INT / 11.05.2014

Here, Omar is referring to a situation where Islam was used directly as an explanation for poor behaviour. The assumption that the young men were Muslim and this explained their unfamiliarity

The problem of absent or disengaged fathers

One common reflection made by the respondents was on the loss of fathers during violent conflict or in circumstances unknown.

Amal: The high school I went to [in Australia], many of the Somali students there didn’t have fathers. Some of them said their father left in the morning and never came back. They couldn’t bury them ... 80% of them. They shot Meriam’s dad right in front of the family...

INT / 21.01.2014

The respondents worried about the effects of this loss, both on their mothers and on the children who have been raised fatherless in Australia. This was also an area of concern for the older women I spoke to who claimed that the lack of a father can lead to young men in particular ‘getting into trouble with the law’. The problem of absent or disengaged fathers has also been remarked on in other studies with some young Somalis in London explaining that absent fathers are part of the reason Somali boys get into criminal activity, because of lack of authority and discipline. In 2009, Farah Aw-Osman, the president of Canadian Friends of Somalia wrote an essay pointing to the problem of absent fathers as directly linked to crime rates among Somali youth in Ottawa, saying:

'The absence of Somali fathers in the lives of their children is a key reason as to why so many youth have fallen into the hands of the criminal justice system.' Some of the young people agreed:

*Elizabeth*: So who is responsible for this situation?

*Ismahaan*: Well in the families its just like they’re single mothers. The fathers are really useless.. the African fathers, especially the Somali fathers are really... not involved.

*Elizabeth*: Do you mean here, in Melbourne? Or also in Somalia?

*Ismahaan*: Even in Somalia. After the war they lost their responsibility. But in Somalia you can give them some concession why this happened because there is no work, there is nothing to work for so they turn to chewing qat. You know what qat is? Some kind of drug whatever it is and the mothers are, especially in Somali society, the mothers took the role of father, of bringing money to the family and the role of mother as well. But in Australia... I don’t know, they really, really don’t know. They [the men] lost the responsibility of being a father, of being role models to their children. Some of them even doesn’t know which school their children is studying at.

INT / 03.12.2014

Many of the respondents identified a change in gender roles upon arrival to Australia, with the mothers taking on more responsibility inside and outside the household. This is discussed further in the following chapters. Suffice to say, the lack of strong discipline from fathers was a recurrent theme in discussing many of the issues faced by Somali young men in Melbourne. It is worth mentioning here that in my discussion with older women (the first generation migrants), many expressed serious concerns for their sons’ futures. They were worried about employment, their attendance at university, or other study (including apprenticeships). There was a sense that the world is more difficult to navigate for males than females. When I asked why this is so, a common response was that women can simply manage more things in life. One mother told me that ‘things come easier for my daughters’. Another said there are ‘too many distractions for the boys’. Certainly, the mothers had a differentiated view of their children based on gender.

Some thoughts on the reflections of generation 1.5 on violence

When reading ethnographic and anthropological accounts of violence, there is often a visceral nature to the retelling. There are details (such as the use of bamboo poles to impale victims during

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the massacre in Rwanda,29 or the torture carried out in Cambodia in the killing fields).30 The respondents did not tell me any raw details. They didn’t seem to know the details of physical violence that had been perpetrated in Somalia. They spoke at length of political conflict, and the food scarcity and the continual disruptions of living in a war-torn country (the unreliability of the electricity supply, the lack of petrol, the sirens and raids which meant they had to hide). From my interaction with older Somali women, I believe that this is because the first generation migrants have not told their children many details. In the focus group with the mothers, I asked about their choice to speak with their children about what it was like in Somalia before and during the civil war. Their responses indicated that they did not wish to burden their children with this knowledge.

*Mother 1:* Why would I tell my children this? It was a very bad time. They do not want to remember these things.

*Mother 2:* We start a new life in Australia. It was difficult to get here, and now we have a different future. I do not want my children to have this heavy past with them all the time.

FG / 30.03.2014

Das and Kleinman describe how the recovery of the ‘everyday’ requires a renewed capability to address the future.

How does one shape a future in which the collective experience of violence and terror can find recognition in the narratives of larger entities such as the nation and the state? And at the level of interpersonal relations, how does one contain and seal off the violence that might poison the life of future generations?31

From the data I collected, I have come to the conclusion that Somali first generation migrants to Australia have made strong efforts to contain and seal off the violence they suffered. This is manifest in many ways. I believe that the older generation has made a conscious choice to withhold certain information from their children. The respondents told me that their parents wanted to ensure they grew up with the knowledge that when Somalia was in a peaceful period, it was a beautiful country, and the good memories they have of the parks, universities and city life.


Sumaya: Our parents have such amazing love for the country because it’s their home…
So they have these beautiful memories. Whereas, all our memories are of trouble and war. To them, they remember the days when there was university, cafes, and beaches. It was beautiful! I wish I could go to that Somalia. The photos are so nice to look at. To be forced out and to see the country destroyed… It’s still their home because they came here as adults. But to us, it’s not home, because we were raised here and it’s normal for us. So I really feel that I belong here.

INT / 05.05.2013

‘Radicalisation’

A final important idea to cover in this chapter is that of ‘radicalisation’. When presenting the examples of violent acts perpetrated by Somalis, the notion of generation 1.5 becoming radicalised was briefly discussed. This term is often used in connection with an individual who has been exposed to extremist views, before taking these views on. Such individuals are considered to be willing to deploy extreme acts to promote their views; often deemed to be acts of terrorism.

None of the respondents volunteered the term ‘radicalisation’ during the interviews and focus groups without me introducing it into conversation. It is interesting that the term which is so often used by academics, reporters, authority figures and members of government was not in the lexicon of the generation 1.5ers I interviewed. However, many wished to discuss events such as terror raids in Melbourne in September 2012 and August 2013 and reports that dugsis (cultural schools, which are similar to Sunday School, but also include elements of education such as Arabic grammar and letter formation) may be teaching extremist doctrines. They were also worried by reports that groups such as Al Shabaab are recruiting young men to fight jihad. Interestingly, the media reports they mentioned very rarely linked dugsis directly with terror attacks. In fact, some of the reports were about the calls from within the Somali community to regulate dugsis in Melbourne.32

The collective memory of the young people regarding media reports of dugsis teaching terrorism was not supported by the evidence I could find. Indeed, it has been suggested that scholars are insufficiently critical of the construction of collective memories.33 Beth Roy has also shown how strong emotions and political motivations can alter and reconstruct memory.34 The young people clearly had strong feelings about their representation in the media, and it is possible that this

coloured their memory, and led to what Luisa Passerini describes as ‘distortions or “false memory”’.  

In general, there was a strong sense of injustice around these events and reporting, and in some focus groups I had to call for quiet more than once to allow everyone’s ideas to be heard.

_Hani_: I was overseas when this news happened in Australia, and I came back and heard it and I was gobsmacked. I was like, ‘Seriously? Kids learning Qur’an leads to terrorism?’ I found that to be the most stupid thing...the most stupid reporting. If they actually came in and saw what the kids were learning, they would never conclude to that. Never!

_Ismaahan_: I think everyone had the same feeling of ‘Oh my God, you’re kidding me’. Just disbelief. It was ridiculous.

_Amal_: And come on! We’re the ones doing the teaching! It’s not some guy who has come from Somalia. It’s us! We grew up here. When I saw the reports on TV I couldn’t understand it, it was all foreign to me. And it’s really strange to see it on TV and think ‘Oh, that’s what people think of me’.

FG / 02.11.2012

The above exchange illustrates the shock felt by the young people and the distance they place between their practicing of Islam and the way it has been interpreted. Nobody in any focus groups or interviews discussed radicalisation as a real threat from the Somali community. Some young people wanted to explain that they believe that the threat in general has been grossly overestimated.

_Hani_: My brother, one of them, he started to practice at 19 or 20, and to other people, as soon as a boy starts to practice his religion, even though it’s a private thing, it’s like what’s happening? Is he going to be an extremist? Should we be worried? He lost some friends for sure when he became religious. I think girls have more permission to practice their religion. And for my brother, it didn’t have anything to do with that kind of radicalisation. He never thought of going overseas and getting into war. He just wanted to better himself. He would just do little things that the prophet would teach us in our books, little good things like charity and good deeds. And he became a better person; he was a positive person, a much happier person than before. And my whole family were really happy.

INT / 20.12.2014

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Hani’s response indicates that for some of her brother’s friends, his decision to start practicing his faith was unacceptable. I asked Hani about what she meant by ‘started to practice’. She explained that while her brother had attended mosque and religious events with the family (he still lived at home), he had not read Qur’an or prayed daily. He made a decision to start doing these things, and also (she suspects) to stop drinking alcohol with his non-Muslim friends when they were out.

**Kadiye:** I never knew anyone who was approached to go and fight, or to do any terror acts.

**Said:** There is always somebody saying that we can’t be trusted and that we will fight for the terrorist cause, but I don’t meet anyone who actually feels this way. Sure, we think what is happening in Somalia is very bad news. But our home is here now, and we are not going to risk everything our parents have done for us to go to a war that doesn’t belong to us.

FG / 10.11.2012

Said was not unusual in mentioning a sense of responsibility towards his parents and the sacrifices they have made. Again, Said speaks about belonging here — and he uses his allegiance to Australia to explain why he would not go to a war that does not belong to him.

There was another answer which came up over the course of the interviews and the discussion groups which surprised me.

**Naado:** And it’s just another hit, another jab, you know? Now they say the Somali community teaches terrorism at school and tries to influence children. It’s basically like the bogey-man. They make it bigger and bigger every time they do reportage.

**Kadiye:** People, you know, they got to be scared of something. So maybe it just has to be us?

**Cabass:** Every time I’m watching like a detective show or something and the bad guy is Muslim — he’s always Muslim! I think about how it’s shown as good guys versus bad guys. And if you want to be a good guy, then you have to have a bad guy to fight against.

FG / 10.11.2012

These comments show that some respondents believe that there is a human need to categorise and label others. They support an observation made by Barrie Wharton at a public lecture in Melbourne in October 2014.\footnote{Wharton, “Globalization, Islam and the struggle for cultural identity in contemporary Europe.”} He encouraged the audience to think of the villains in Hollywood films and how these have developed from Nazi sympathisers, to Soviet sympathisers to Arab terrorists over the last
few decades. He characterised this development as evidence that ‘we all need to fear someone’, and that Arabs and Muslims are the latest villains we have elevated to be a vessel for our fears. This ‘othering’ is certainly not a new phenomenon and has most memorably and vividly described by Edward Said in his foundational text *Orientalism* in 1978.\(^{37}\) Since then, this concept has been elaborated on by many authors including Gyan Prakash\(^{38}\), Nicholas Dirks\(^{39}\) and Hamid Dabashi.\(^{40}\)

The young people I spoke with had similar viewpoints, although they did not refer to Hollywood as evidence for these views. Rather, they reflected on their personal experience and the broader context of terrorism and fear of the other. They worried that the media fuelled fear, with little or no evidence to back the claims up.

When I asked them what they thought about second-generation terrorism (explaining that it means acts of terrorism carried out by people who were born or raised in the country they commit the attacks in), they dismissed the phenomenon altogether.

**Amal:** *I have heard about that, but if you think about it — there must be thousands and thousands living there, and lets say three of them go back and the religion is misrepresented to them or they meet people with certain political agendas they come back and that gets reported on so strongly, and all of a sudden ordinary people get investigated and can’t live their lives. And what about all the people who do the school shootings? We don’t say that all white Americans are gun killers and they have an agenda against everyone else.*

INT / 21.01.2014

Many times after leaving interviews, I had a sense that there was a gap in the way that the women spoke about the men’s propensity to violence. It seemed strange to me that they would often speak about instances where men had harmed their intimate partners or family, but did not believe that these same men would harm others outside their immediate circle. There is something of a conflict between the way the women presented young men as not dangerous, and the way they view violence in their own community. This could perhaps be explained by different definitions of exactly what constitutes violence. For example, many young people described situations where violence had been used as a direct response to an issue. They gave examples of women using violence to protect their children from perceived slights, or to solve marital issues (including as a response to male instigated domestic violence). Some young people discussed the way that violence

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\(^{37}\) Said, *Orientalism*.


is quickly resorted to by Somalis in general; they believed more than is the norm within other communities.

Additionally, I heard many descriptions of how young Somali Australian people feel disenfranchised, targeted unfairly by authorities, lacking in social support and mistrusted by the broader Australian community. These are often-cited indicators of the potential for someone to become radicalised, however none of the young people I spoke to believed that this was a real possibility.

**Conclusion: key findings**

When overt violence was raised, it was raised in the context of Somalia, not Australia. Generation 1.5 could analyse it quite deeply, and offered various reasons why it might happen. On the other hand, during the period of my field work, there were a number of current issues which were reflective of the covert violence Somalis in Melbourne are exposed to. The situation with remittances is illustrative of the ways in which covert violence functions, and the different levels it affects individuals, for example. Another example of covert violence is the misleading over-representation of Somalis (and other minority groups) in crime statistics. As the agreement between a Somali community organization and the Sheriff’s office shows, there have been steps taken to address this covert violence within the Somali community, however this situation is not the norm, and it is not always possible to address the issues that face Somalis ‘in-house’.

The young people offered many reflections on the sorts of violence that face them on a daily basis. These included problematic relationships with law enforcers, difficulty gaining adequate representation if they were in trouble with the law and the problem of absent or disengaged father figures. There was a notable difference in the way that young men and young women conceived of violence, with the men stressing issues with the police, and women focusing on intimate partner violence.

In terms of radicalisation, the respondents reported that they had been badly affected by media coverage of terror raids and what they believed to be suggestions that there is a problem with the Somali community in Melbourne. The girls who taught at the *dugsis* were especially surprised and disappointed by reportage suggesting that what was being taught in *dugsis* in the Australian context was dangerous, although I could not find evidence to support their memories about the media reportage. They pointed out that no reporters aside from ABC and SBS representatives have ever come to meet with them and enquire about the schools.

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The respondents have been affected by many different forms of relational power: Legal, administrative, economic, military. Being a migrant/refugee places them on the receiving end of many expressions of power that are both explicit (gaining entry to a country, reporting as part of visa conditions) and implicit (difficulty in entering the labour market, learning new languages or making oneself understood). This is especially relevant to Muslims in Australia because a great deal of fear around terrorism is projected onto them, and has resulted in documented abuse. Perhaps most relevant here is the media, which creates, proliferates and reinforces public opinion around refugees, Somalis, Muslims and terrorism among other things.

The generation 1.5 Somali Australians I spoke with have a strong sense that their identity is something that is available for public consumption and critique. Because of their visible ethnic and religious difference and the increasing scrutiny that is focussed on individuals who share their characteristics, they felt unfairly judged by members of the mainstream Australian public. Overt violence is something that many of them had stories of from their time in Somalia, but not from the time after they settled in Australia. This violence was real to them, but at a remove from their everyday lives in Australia. I believe this is because their parents’ generation have decided not to share detailed stories of their experiences with violence in Somalia in order for their children not to be burdened with them.

Covert violence, on the other hand was something that many of the respondents had experienced during their time in Australia, even if they did not recognise it as such. The disadvantage they face in their status as refugees and the challenges they have in terms of expressing their identity openly and without fear of repercussions attest to this. However, they stopped short at suggesting that the problems that face the Somali community could lead to radicalisation of young people. The respondents did not believe that the Somali community in Melbourne poses a real threat. Instead, they believe that the danger has been overestimated for various reasons. Some pointed out that it is difficult to identify Somalis from other dark-skinned Africans. Others believe that the negative reportage about their community is purely to sell newspapers and attract TV viewers. Still others pointed out that there is a natural human need to have something to fear, and that unfortunately, for many people, their community occupied that position.

The following chapter examines some of the issues raised in this chapter in more depth, including clan divisions and the importance of Islam in the young people’s lives.
IV FINDINGS

(b) Negotiating identity: examining the role of Islam and the place of clan kinship

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the significance of Islam for generation 1.5 Somali Australians in Melbourne. Aspects of Islamic life including personal faith are discussed in the context of living in Melbourne today, especially with reference to the representation of young Muslims and Somalis in the media. Secondly, the stated insignificance of clan allegiances for the young people is discussed. However, this is probed; generation 1.5 seem to understand a great deal about clan allegiances and are able to discuss them at length when questioned. I draw a distinction between the ways the respondents engage with Islam in a very practical sense (observing dietary requirements, daily prayers, regular worship) and the way that their knowledge of the clan system is mostly theoretical. I do not suggest that this diminishes the importance of the clans for the young people, rather that they have had limited opportunities to experience and engage with the clan system in Australia in the same way they do with Islam.

Examining the role of Islam

It has been suggested that Islam provides the strongest determinant for Somali identity in diaspora.1 The respondents were in agreement about the importance of Islam in their lives. They discussed it as a personal, social, political and cultural force and were very open about the way their religion affected them and contributed to their identity. Aaliya’s statement below is representative of the way many young people discussed Islam with me.

Aaliya: I am a very religious person. I believe that Islam is the best way to live your life and I do my best to follow the ... orders every day.

INT / 21.06.2013

In a group interview, I asked Mohamed and Ali how they thought of Islam in their lives.

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**Mohamed:** For me, religion is the thing that defines me. It is very important to my family and to me and it’s different to the religions you have here (like Catholic, Jew, Hinduism) because it means more to Muslims than other religions mean in Australia. I don’t see other people praying like we do.

**Ali:** Yeah, I think religion, you know being Islamic is my... what defines me... yeah, I’m religious, but I think my religion and my beliefs doesn’t really prevent me to study or socialize or be like a normal person

Two interesting perspectives are presented above. Mohamed believes that religion means more to Muslims than other religions do for their adherents in Australia. He highlights the difference between Islam and other religions practised in Australia, and the visibility of the way that Islam is practised. Ali, however, makes a distinction between being religious and being a ‘normal person’. He feels a need to point out that his religion and beliefs do not prevent him from engaging in other areas of life.

Throughout my fieldwork, I was struck many times by the physical and practical presence of Islam in the lives of the respondents. This was particularly pertinent at the time of Ramadan, when I mostly ceased contact with the Somali community (except for the occasional email or text message). However, it was also noticeable at community events, such as soccer games or cultural festivals. There was a daily observance of prayer, and it was not unusual for people to excuse themselves politely and kneel in a quiet corner to pray. This was disconcerting in the context of what were sometimes very loud and lively events. Equally, conversations with all generations were peppered with references to Allah. *Insha’Allah* (if Allah wills it) was perhaps the most common phrase I heard in discussion. There was also an acceptance that human actions are defined by the purpose of Allah. I have experienced a similar language and way of being in the company of devout evangelical Christians. I was very interested to find out about the features of religious belief and practice in Australia as I had so often read that Islam in Somalia is uniform across the country and the practice that most unites the Somali people.

While Somalia has often been presented as a religiously homogenous country, it is important to note that the religious practices across Somalia are not entirely uniform. The Islam that is practiced in Somalia is a very particular interpretation of the religion. Sufism and traces of Sufism permeate the religious practices today, despite consistent efforts by different groups to eradicate it.

Another aspect of Islam that is quite particular is the continued adherence of some Somalis to folk and animist religions. For example, Aaliya described her journey to Somalia in order to be treated with what she described as ‘tribal medicine’ for a chronic problem with her leg. She was
reluctant to give details about what the medicine entailed. This is possibly an example of the folk aspects of the ancient Somali practices being incorporated into modern Somali Islam.\textsuperscript{2} Aaliya has limited function in both legs, and requires a mobility aid to get around. She emphasised that her disability was the result of something foreign in her body which needed to be gotten rid of in order for her to heal. There are doctors in Somalia who practice these healings, and she told me that they live outside the cities. While Aaliya’s remaining family in Somalia reside in the main in Mogadishu, she had to drive for 4-5 hours outside the city to find a healer. She was not willing to give any details about what occurred during the healing.

\textbf{Aaliya:} I have been back to Somalia a couple of times for my leg. This is not the normal Islam that is practiced in Australia, but a specific sort that belongs in Somalia. I am lucky to be able to return and to visit the tribal medicine doctors.

\textit{INT / 21.06.2013}

When asked about how this sort of Islam relates to the ‘normal’ Islam that in is practiced in Australia, she responded like this:

\textbf{Aaliya:} Yeah, this is an addition to Islam that we Somalis have. But it is all about our relationship with Allah, so it is fine.

\textit{INT / 21.06.2013}

There are echoes of Sufism in Aaliya’s statement above. Sufism is quite widely practiced in Somalia, and it focuses on the inner, mystical elements of Islam. This emphasises the relationship that adherents have with Allah above all else. Sufism has come under attack in Somalia, with Al Shabaab forbidding its practice and destroying shrines and the graves of saints.\textsuperscript{3} Healing such as Aaliya described has often occurred in Sufi practice across the Muslim world although it is difficult to document as it is considered private.\textsuperscript{4} It may also be dangerous to identify as Sufi in certain places and times, as seen above.

This was not the first only time the respondents described ‘additions’ to Islam that are specific to Somalia. One other comment that was frequently raised by both males and females was the position of women in Somali households compared with other Muslim communities. This is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{2} Chapin Metz, "Somalia: A Country Study."
Many respondents spoke about Islam being the thing that ‘defines’ them. They were very open about this. However, sometimes in the context of the same interview, I heard them complain that they were defined by their religion by others (this will also be discussed further in the following chapter).

Ismahaan: This is one aspect of my life, Islam, I mean. It is very important to me, but it is not the only important thing about me.

FG / 02.11.2012

In discussing refugee identity, Yuval-Davis highlights the influence that markers of identity have on refugees and their establishment of cultural identities in their new homelands. She focuses on the ‘stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not).’ She believes that ‘constructions of self and identity can [...] be forced on people’. So the respondents felt comfortable in defining themselves by their religion, but (perhaps because of perceived ignorance of Islamic teaching) were not comfortable for others to do the same thing.

I propose that what is concerning to my participants is that their situational identity (that which is predominant in face-to-face interactions with others and allows us, upon entering the presence of others, to mutually construct a definition of the situation) is being conflated with their personal identity (that which involves distinctive traits of individuals, such as their name and appearance, personal history and information, personality characteristics, and their special place in a particular kinship network). If personal identity is the identity that defines us as unique individuals, it is an identity that mainstream Australians are able to keep private if they choose. However, for the respondents, their situational identity (aided by their very visible difference) trumped their personal identity to a mainstream observer and their entire identity was subsumed by the fact of their religion. While the understanding of religion as part of the private arena is contested and historically specific, it was a common complaint from the respondents that mainstream Australians have a choice about whether their religion (or lack of religion) is public. Conversely, it is one of the first things noted about generation 1.5 Somalis due to their dress, visibly different appearance and certain religious requirements.

The conversation about religion and its importance often turned very quickly to a worry about how Islam was perceived by mainstream Australian society:

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6 Ibid., 202.
7 Thomas, Primitive Behaviour.
9 Stets, "Role Identities and Person Identities: Gender Identity, Mastery Identity, and Controlling One’s Partner."
Amal: In terms of religion, it’s like any other religion. If somebody is Christian, Jewish, whatever, it’s your personal life. It’s you and your relationship with God and whatever you believe. And everything else, like everything Somali and Australian, is your culture. It’s where you live. And I think my life is pretty similar to yours in terms of work and family and my religion is my private life. So when you see the vision of yourself in the media it’s really hard, and you think; ‘I’m just like you!’

FG / 02.11.2014

When Muslims are (over)represented in the media as potentially violent fundamentalists, a powerful and distinct category is proliferated. In reinforcing notions of Muslims as ‘terrorists’ or ‘radicalised’, these ideas become constitutive concepts of experience. So when people see Somali generation 1.5ers in the street, they have a predisposition to view them in this way. Amal’s comment above reveals that this process affects the generation 1.5 subjects as well. And it’s ‘really hard’ for them, as it challenges their own conception of identity. None of the respondents told me that they had questioned their faith as a result of others’ interpretations or ignorance of Islam. I was told about some family members who chose not to practice although it was not clear whether this decision was informed by the reception of Islam by the mainstream Australian population.

Hani described how becoming a more observant Muslim changed her brother Ibrahim’s life for the better.

Hani: I remember one day, my sister was like, ‘Oh Ibrahim, you know what he did one day? We were on the road and there was this dead cat on the street and he stopped it and got out and moved it off the road, got if off the road and then put in in the boot to put it in the bin’. And I was amazed, because anyone would just leave it there, personally, I would leave it there, because, yuk! But he wanted to do the right thing. It was because he was practicing he was becoming a better person. And I think that personal choice is easier for girls to make. And everyone else like his work friends thought it was a negative thing and tried to convince him out of it.

FG / 02.11.2012

Here, both Amal and Hani highlight what they perceive as the private nature of their religious belief in direct contrast to the public nature of the condemnation they receive for their religion. Although Hani says here that she believes it is easier for girls to practice Islam than boys, this was not the consensus, with a number of women pointing out that they are much more visible because they wear hijab. I discuss this in greater detail below.

Many participants gave examples of how Islam had improved their everyday life in order to illustrate its importance to them. They often highlighted the effect it has on their desire to better
themselves and to do good for those around them. This was juxtaposed with their idea that the general opinion of Islam in Australia is very low.

*Said:* Islam is a wonderful religion. It helps to make you a better person.  
GROUP INT / 17.08.2014

*Amal:* It’s interesting when someone has seen a program for half an hour on SBS and they think they know the whole story of Muslims.  
INT / 21.01.2014

Here, Amal points out that there is a great deal of ignorance regarding Muslims and Islam in Australia (despite the programs she says are offered on SBS to educate the general public). Amal’s comment regarding SBS was somewhat unusual, as most of the young people believed that SBS and ABC are the two national TV channels, which are sympathetic to Muslims and other minority groups. They directly contrasted this with the commercial channels, which they believe present insensitive and ill informed material regarding Muslims in particular. Perhaps Amal meant to highlight that it takes more than half an hour of watching a program about Islam (no matter what channel it is broadcast on) to understand Muslims.

A common complaint was that mainstream Australians are more likely to assume that Muslims have issues with crime and violence, and to believe that if there are a couple of individuals whose behaviour is unacceptable, that this is representative of the whole community. This was discussed in the previous chapter in regard to police interaction with young African Australian males.

*Kadiye:* I don’t get how people can focus on all the negative things that Muslims do when it’s actually not that much, statistically. You know, white guys beat their wives up all the time, and they hurt their children and drive badly and kill other people on the road. But there is no ‘Aussie crime wave’. But I don’t want to be the guy to point that out to my friends, so I just stay quiet about it.  
FG / 10.02.2014

Kadiye’s reflections expose a deep level of prejudice prevalent in mainstream society. By inverting the imagery, and inviting us to consider an ‘Aussie crime wave’, it becomes clear that this is not something which we would likely hear reported. When a situation is turned on its head, for example, with mainstream Australia viewed through the same lens as Muslim Australians are observed, the implicit power relations become apparent. This is a trope used by many artists to encourage us to reconsider ourselves in light of the stereotypes we project onto others. For example,
the satirical documentary ‘BabaKiueria’ shows us how patently ridiculous these kinds of assumptions are by presenting white Australia as seen through Aboriginal eyes.  

Kadiye explained that if the topic came up in conversation at work, he would remain silent or leave the room rather than open a dialogue. When I pressed him about why he did not feel comfortable talking to his friends about his faith and the way it is represented, he answered simply that he believes he can show people best by being a normal, nice guy and that they will understand that there are bad Muslims just like there are bad Christians and Jews but not all Muslims are like that. Although he told me this, his body language did not match what he was saying, and it seemed that he felt too nervous to discuss this topic with his work mates. He did admit that he did not like to make things serious at work, because:

**Kadiye:** You know, we’re all relaxing, having a good time together. It doesn’t need to be political.

FG / 10.02.2014

I would argue that the situation is already political if Muslims are being denigrated or at least discussed in ignorance and Kadiye is not able to address that issue, for fear of what others will think of him. This is a strategic choice in how to handle a particular situation, and Kadiye has chosen not to challenge the assumptions of his work mates, perhaps to keep social relations cordial and unstrained.

Once again, Kadiye’s situational identity has over-ruled his personal identity, to the point where he feels it necessary to leave the room whenever conversations about his faith (an integral part of his personal identity) arise. Kadiye sought to give the impression that he did not mind the way his work mates discussed Islam, and he did not tell me that he had ever been persecuted or made fun of directly, however he became very uncomfortable during this discussion. I recorded the following field note after leaving the focus group.

**Kadiye very awkward discussing the way his religion is understood in the work place. I wonder if he feels guilt at not defending his beliefs more? Other members of the group also quiet during this discussion. The tone of the conversation became muted and it took some time for the group energy to bounce back.**

FN / 10.02.2014

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Islam in the media

Many young people wanted to tell me about the shift in behaviour towards them after the September 11, 2001 attacks in The United States.

**Hani:** It’s scary. Ever since 9/11, I never used to question my belief at all. I never used to think that Islam taught anything negative. And then 9/11 happened and I was in year 9. Everything changed. People looked at you differently, like you were the enemy. From one day to the next. One day, you were just a normal kid with a scarf. You were odd, yes, but you weren’t the enemy. Now, you were the people who didn’t belong in this country, the opposite of all the normal people. I felt that so strongly after 9/11. And that was because of the media. And the day after it happened, my best friend had her hijab pulled off while she was going into the bus, and people spat at her. And I thought ‘What happened? Why are people being so negative towards us?’ ‘Til today, I find it really hard when people generalise and jump on the boat of ‘Muslims are terrorists, Muslims teach terrorism’ and they just don’t do any of their own research. I find that really heartbreaking.

FG / 02.11.2014

Hani’s comments reveal the very personal and intimate effect an event such as 9/11 had on young Muslims living in Australia. She characterises a ‘before’ and ‘after’ period in which everything had changed. Interestingly, she admits that before 9/11, while she just felt like ‘a normal kid with a scarf’ among her peers, she was considered to be ‘odd’. However, post the terrorist attacks, she said she felt that she became ‘the enemy’. And that she no longer belonged in this country. She was conscious that the public perception of her had altered, although she felt that she had not altered at all.

According to Hani’s analysis, this change came about due to the media reportage of the event. This was a common theme among the respondents, who felt that the media portrayed them unfairly and inaccurately.

**Sumaya:** Because they have that image from the news reports and they get it from the media and the Internet. These terrible headlines... And you can’t really blame the general public for what they think- you see the news and you think ‘that could be true’ and I just wish people would sit down with us and talk

... It’s just so unfair that they can write all this stuff that is so wrong. They’re always talking about things like ‘ethnic gangs’ and the problem Muslim youth.

INT / 29.11.2014
In relation to the gangs, a 1999 Study by White et al. examined the possibility that disenfranchised young Somalis would form groups such as gangs in Melbourne. The study focused on those who had experienced poor social integration and disruptions in schooling. The report found that while there were clashes with other youth (particularly those from a mainstream Australian background), the main source of conflict was racial harassment of the young Somalis. They banded together in order to protect each other in the face of the apparent threat. Interestingly, the report found that the young people were strongly committed to Islam and their families and also to Australian institutions. They were also found to be remarkably law-abiding citizens with many future hopes and aspirations despite their difficult pasts.

Amal: That’s what I mean, the journalists don’t do research. If you’re going to do a story about a group of people, and generalize them, at least just take the time to go and speak with them. Find out about them and who they are and exactly what is going on. Don’t speak to one or two people and make up a story about that.

FG / 02.11.2012

Bashir believes there is another reason that cultural issues are not adequately reported on in Melbourne.

Bashir: Well, they could come and do a report, but that would mean that they’d need to visit us, maybe a couple of times even, and there might not be a story at all if they go looking. If they don’t bother to look, they have a guaranteed story with all the terrorism stuff.

Suleiman: The other problem, is that nobody will watch A Current Affair if the story is all about a happy multicultural community doing good things. They want to hear about danger and they want to know about all the different dangerous people.

FG / 02.11.2012

The respondents understood the way that the media shapes public opinion, and did not condemn the general public for their perceived tendency to believe what appears in the popular media. Indeed, many of them told me that they believe most people are time-poor and simply do not have the resources to seek out alternatives to popular media.

Here, it is worth noting that while media bias is a well-noted phenomenon, and one that is studied in various universities and monitored by various watchdog groups, there are signs that the

general public’s trust in mass media is not high. In Australia in 2014, the Roy Morgan ‘Image of Professions’ survey found that only 18% of people polled had high or very high trust in Newspaper journalists and TV reporters.\(^{12}\) Another poll recently found that trust is significantly higher in ABC and SBS reporting than Commercial stations’ reporting. More than two thirds of respondents trusted ABC and SBS TV news and current affairs reporting. Conversely, less than half of the respondents trusted Commercial TV news and current affairs reporting.\(^{13}\) This suggests that at least some members of the general population are more discerning than the respondents think.

However, they were not forthcoming with ideas to encourage a forum of cross-cultural discussion.

_Sumaya:_ But seriously, do you think that people would go out of their lives and say ‘listen, I’m going to talk to a Muslim and find out what they’re all about’. And it’s hard. No-one wants to approach and say ‘Hey! You’re Muslim! Tell me all about yourself and your life’. People don’t have time. And they don’t have time to even google Islam and find out a bit more information.

INT / 29.11.2014

The idea of ‘lazy reporting’ was also a common theme in the interviews. There were various reasons offered to explain why reporters rarely get the full story, from the idea that bad news sells and this is what the reporters want to produce, and then the more nuanced understanding that some reporters may be scared of Muslims because of the bad press that already surrounds them.

_Cabaas:_ I find it really hard, you know, because the reporters, other than SBS don’t want to come here and find out what we’re all about. I really think they might be scared of us because of our difference and that they are affected by all the negative stuff they here on the news. Which makes it like some kind of circle we’ll never break out of.

GROUP INT / 25.08.2014

The response above shows the belief of the respondents that there is a cycle whereby reporters are reluctant to get close to Muslim communities in Australia, and this reluctance leads to shallow and inaccurate reporting which in turn fuels a further distance between Muslims and the mainstream Australian community. The respondents believed that their misrepresentation in the media means they are mistrusted by the mainstream Australian public.


\(^{13}\) “Trust in Media.” Melbourne, Australia: Essential Media Communications, 2013.
The association between Islam and terrorism is now very prevalent in modern Australian society. This discursive formation is disseminated through multiple avenues, most notably the media and in some cases the police force (see the next chapter for further discussion). This exemplifies the network of power that can radiate from discourses. However I wish to spend some time here reflecting on what this means for the identity of the respondents. In section two, I used a number of identity theories in order to examine the expression of Generation 1.5 Somali Australian identity. At the innermost level, I have made use of John Hewitt’s tripartite consideration of identity. The next layer out concerns the accrual and dispersal of social capital. In the Bourdieuan sense, social capital greatly emphasizes class and the idea that the way individuals experience social capital will be markedly different depending on their gender, age, class and ethnic background. I conceive of this kind of social capital as the operationalization of the next level of force, which impacts the identity of the respondents. This is Foucault’s small ‘p’ power. This power, which is present for all social actors and is characterised by a complex web of power relations exercised through the expression of normalised discourse and other discursive formations.

While I believe that this model is applicable to any individual and the struggle to express and maintain their identity, I am convinced that it is significantly more challenging for the respondents to do so because the same forces that act upon all social actors are stronger for them. For example, in terms of John Hewitt’s tripartite definition of identity, their situational identities are deeply informed by what others know and assume about them. Again, this is true for any social actor, but generation 1.5 Somali Australians approach interactions suspecting or knowing that others have already constructed a certain opinion of them. This informs their expectations and interpretations of their own and others’ behaviour. Similarly, their social identities are intricately tied up in being members of a visible group, based on age, ethnicity and religion. Personal identity concerns the efforts of an individual to construct and preserve their personal narrative, which helps to establish a sense of difference from others. This includes their distinctive traits (again, many of which are highly visible). Goffman suggests that personal identity involves personal history and appearance and a special place in a kinship network. These were all described in detail by my participants over the course of my fieldwork. Another way to think of the struggle that generation 1.5 Somali Australians face in maintaining a coherent sense of identity is to posit that there is greater distance between the different selves of these young people than for many other social actors. In this sense, they must bring together more disparate identities, and under more intense scrutiny than is the norm.

Stepping out to the next sphere of influence for the respondents, the notion of social capital in a Bourdieuan sense is also particularly relevant. There is a close connection between social capital and class, which I found to be particularly relevant to Somali generation 1.5ers in
Melbourne. This was expressed in a number of ways. Firstly, I believe that the people I interviewed were largely from families of middle to upper-middle class in Somalia, although they did not state this directly. There is evidence of this in the relatively high educational attainment of their parents (and in some cases, grandparents). Additionally, I was told that those people who were better educated and employed were the first to be able to leave Somalia around the time of the outbreak of the civil war. Thirdly, the respondents believed that there was a hierarchy of ideal destination countries for Somali refugees. While European countries apparently ranked highest, Australia was also high on this list, ahead of Asian countries and other African countries. Therefore, I believe that the people I spoke with were better connected in Somalia (in order to have been able to settle in Australia, they told me they required more money and connections than what was required to settle in another African country, for example). So my respondents and their families have potentially fallen in class rankings between Somalia and Australia. I argue that one strategy they have employed to deal with this situation is to become quite an inward-looking and independent group, which sets itself apart from other groups.

This has been found by other researchers in a recent (2007) report on Somalis residing in London. The authors identify that Somalis ‘have a tradition of self-reliance and communal solidarity that often conflicts with their exiled status as passive recipients of welfare benefits’. I believe this self-reliance has both positive and negative aspects. For example, one outcome is the focus on young people and the need for them to improve their life circumstances which the older generation believe has pushed young people to achieve well in their education and entry to the labour market. However, some young people felt very pressured by the expectations upon them and would prefer not to face such intense scrutiny from their (well-meaning) parents and grandparents. Another outcome, which was discussed in depth in the previous chapter, is that there is a reluctance to engage with social services. This is partly due to Somali Australians’ preference to look to other members of their community for support in situations of difficulty. Indeed, there are many examples of these community connections proving successful in managing social, financial and personal problems. However equally, it means that there is limited knowledge of how (and perhaps more reluctance) to access relevant external services which might be of assistance when necessary.

In terms of the next level in my model of those forces which affect the identity of generation 1.5, I believe that Foucauldian small ‘p’ power is also particularly applicable to this group of social actors. The complex strategic situation referred to by Foucault is made further complex for the respondents by many factors. First, their status as generation 1.5 which means they are straddling quite different cultures. Secondly their visible difference due to their ethnicity and religion, and thirdly their refugee experience which has meant disrupted schooling, the need to learn

another language quickly, loss of family social capital and the structural disadvantage they face in
many aspects of life in Australia, such as access to the labour and housing market.

The generation 1.5ers I spoke to are walking a delicate tightrope (which of course, is
common language in reference to generation 1.5), however they must also contend with their
identities being conflated with a larger misconception surrounding Islam. Ghassan Hage has
consistently argued that ‘Australia still comprises a predominantly white, Christian society,
currently characterized by an increasing fear of different ethnic groups’.15

When I asked the respondents why they thought there was such a strong focus on Islam in
the media and from the general public, there were varied answers. Omar described it as a simple
result of the attention being focussed on the latest migrants to arrive in the country:

Omar: We arrived here last, and you know, there aren’t really that many of us, compared
to the Italians and the Greeks.

GROUP INT / 11.05.2014

The small numbers of Muslims and their visibility was a common theme.

Absame: When I walk around, people know straight away that I’m different. I can’t
change the colour of my skin. You know, in Heidelberg it’s almost normal because we all
live together, but as soon as I catch a train or a bus somewhere I’m the one that sticks out
again.

Kadiye: It’s weird because in my family we have really strong friendships with our
neighbours and aunties and uncles so it’s like we could go on forever not really knowing
any Anglo Aussies. But when I started my trade, that changed really fast. The rest of the
boys are all white and even though they’re really good guys, it takes a long time to feel
comfortable.

FG / 10.02.2014

Kadiye previously commented that he did not wish to enter conversations at work when the topic of
Islam and Muslims came up, preferring to leave the room and keep peace with his colleagues. He
professed not to care about this, but his comments above show that he has experienced tension in
the workplace because of his visible difference.

While the respondents painted a very positive picture of Islam for them in their personal lives, some did offer explanations as to why the religion is condemned, and how it can be practiced improperly.

*Naado*: And the people who follow Islam in an oppressive country and want to escape it, they want to escape the implementation of the religion, and not the religion itself. This is a problem with society, not the religion. If the society implements the religion badly, people will want to escape and to feel free.

In my discussions with Naado, it became apparent that she had reflected deeply on what Islam means to her on a personal level and the way that the religion has been practiced in different times and places. This was a topic of interest to her and she was eager to discuss the way that Islam is practiced in countries she has visited or has some connection to. Naado is an intelligent and articulate young woman, and she was one of the few respondents to draw distinction between the implementation of religion and the religion at its heart. One area of strong interest to her was the wearing of hijab.

*Wearing hijab*

Naado explained to me that she had considered not veiling herself in her late teens after she finished high school and started university. Interestingly, she had not told friends about her deliberations, although she did not give the impression of having agonised over her decision. Rather, it seemed that she felt a duty to question this aspect of her life and examine her beliefs before continuing to veil herself.

One of the mixed gender focus groups yielded interesting discussions about wearing Hijab and what it means to Somali women.

*Mohamed*: Yeah, I don’t know any girls that don’t wear hijab. I don’t think it would be allowed to be honest.

*Bilan*: All the women in my family wear hijab. I remember being really excited when I was little to be able to do that too. It was really something I looked forward to, because it would show I had reached my maturity.

FG / 25.08.2014
The expectation and willingness of the young women to wear hijab is not found in all Muslim communities in Melbourne. In her 2009 thesis, while acknowledging that most parents were happy for their daughters to wear hijab, Chloe Patton describes the family tensions that arose when one young Iraqi girl, Zhila, decided she would like to be veiled. Her father (a university academic) was so unhappy with her decision, he threatened that she would be forced to leave the family home.\(^\text{16}\) Patton discusses the reasons some young women have for their desire to be veiled and the way that their religion differs from the religion of their cousins and extended families still living in Muslim majority countries. According to Zhila: ‘You have more strength in your belief, and they’re just there and they were born into it and that’s it’.\(^\text{17}\)

It is difficult to draw conclusions about increased religiosity in the Somali community in Melbourne, although a number of studies have highlighted increased religiosity in diasporic communities across the world.\(^\text{18}\) Some of the respondents reported that they felt their religion had been tested by being a minority religion and was stronger as a result. However, others spoke about the way that religion in general is not very important in Australia and thus, Islam featured less in their personal lives. The young men who did not want to be recorded both reported that Islam is not important to them but that they ‘go along with it’ to keep their parents happy.

When the discussion turned to the way hijab is perceived in Australia, Hani had this to say:

\begin{quote}
Hani: I find the whole notion of being free and not wearing the hijab really ridiculous. This is my freedom — the opportunity to wear my hijab is my freedom. If there was a ban on hijab today, I would move out of this country. Because that is oppression. I think a lot of people don’t know what freedom is.

Elizabeth: Would you go back to Somalia?

Hani: It doesn’t matter where, just somewhere I would be able to practice my religion the way I believe is the right way.
\end{quote}

INT / 22.09.2014

This comment did not have the air of a flippant observation. Hani was very serious about her desire and right to dress as she chooses. Her allegiance here is to Islam and the practice of her beliefs rather than to Australia. She is clear that it is more important to her to be able to practice Islam than it is to remain in Australia. For Hani, there was a hierarchy: The most important thing for her was

\(^{16}\) Chloe Patton, "Multicultural Selves: Young Australian Muslims’ Images of Self and Belonging" (RMIT, 2009).

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 204.

Islam, which trumped the commitment she felt to any nation. She clearly stated that her priority is the ability to practice her religion in the way she believes is right.

Bilan discussed the way that others acted towards her based on nothing more than her wearing of hijab.

_Bilan:_ It’s so weird, because it’s like the only thing they see about me. They don’t recognise me as a woman, as a nurse, as a sister or daughter. They just think ‘Oh, she’s Muslim’. That used to make me really angry. Really angry and upset, but one of my colleagues at work sat with me one day and helped me to see…. she explained that that means their reaction to me is more about what the hijab means for them.

INT / 19.05.2013

There appears to be an immediate tension for women who wear hijab, as it has come to be treated as a symbol of the supposedly negative aspects of Islam and as a sign of the potential of Muslims to subvert social cohesion.\(^19\) The hijab can be likened to what Goffman would describe as a ‘stigma’; an undesired attribute which is deeply discrediting and which allows us to believe that the person with the stigma is ‘not quite human’.\(^20\) If the hijab is a stigma which represents Islam, then observers feel that the person wearing the hijab is inferior, and identified only by her religion. This was touched upon many times by my female respondents who felt very strongly that their wearing of the veil caused others to see them as inferior. I observed evidence of this on numerous occasions throughout the period of my fieldwork, most often while on public transport. It was very common for me to take the bus or train to my interviews and focus group meetings, and I noted that when veiled young women got onto public transport there was often a reaction from others in the carriage, or on the bus. This ranged from surreptitious looks directed at the veiled women, to conversations dying down and quite obvious stares.

I did not witness any verbal or physical abuse, although I was told stories of women who had been spat on or shoved out of the way, as well as those who had been ordered to ‘go home’ and get out of Australia. There have been a host of Australian newspaper reports over the past five years indicating that racist attacks on Muslim women (particularly on public transport) are becoming more prevalent.\(^21\) The Islamophobia Register in Australia has compiled reports of abuse of Muslims since September 2014 and has noted a spike in these reports after incidents which bring terrorism to


\(^{21}\) Mohaned Taha and Philippa McDonald, "‘No-one sits next to me anymore’: Australian Muslim women on how their lives have changed," *ABC News*, 2 October 2014 Lucy Battersby, "Veil lifts on daily abuse faced by Australian Muslims," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 December 2015
public attention (for example, the Martin place siege in Sydney, or anti terrorism raids in Brisbane).

Bilan’s discussion with her colleague reveals a level of perspicacity regarding the idea that this stigma reveals more about those who cannot look past it than about she herself. As observers have chosen to focus on the stigma, and the presumed inferiority of the person wearing it, their fear may make it difficult to inform them about Islam and Muslims, which will allow them to continue to be close-minded and never challenged in their beliefs.

Nafiso described her hijab as an outward expression of her commitment to Islam.

*Nafiso:* This is the thing that shows the world that I follow Islam. It is an important part of who I am. I get it if other people don’t want to wear it. That’s fine by me. But I don’t go around judging other people’s clothes. No, it’s not something I would wear, but I’d never make rude comments about them. I think everyone should be able to wear what they want.

INT / 25.01.2014

Nafiso understood that while the hijab is a symbol of her faith for her, it represents different things to different people. Many of the young women I spoke with lamented that their wearing of the veil made their religion a matter of public consumption. They were adamant that they would like their religious practice to remain private (a luxury which they believe is afforded to people of many other religious faiths), but at the same time, they were clear about their choice to remain veiled. Removing their veils in order not to attract unwanted attention was not an option for them.

While Nafiso was not concerned with other people’s decisions regarding modes of dress, some of the young men I spoke to were concerned about their exposure to women in dress they considered immodest.

*Said:* When I’m at work, and some of the apprentices’ girlfriends come, I can’t believe the things they’re wearing. I just try to not look at them and keep going with the job. They tease me sometimes about it but I don’t feel comfortable...

*Cabaas:* I wouldn’t be happy if my sisters were dressing like that [the way white Australian women dress]. I don’t think it’s good for anyone to go around wearing [revealing] clothes like that.

*Elizabeth:* When you say anyone, do you mean men and women?

*Cabaas:* Yeah, both.

FG / 10.11.2012

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22 Battersby, “Veil lifts on daily abuse faced by Australian Muslims.”
Interestingly, the young men thought it was equally important for them to be modest as for the women. However, they also felt entitled to judge women based on their dress according to their own religious code.

**Cabaas:** Yeah, everyone does their best to follow Allah and the prophet, but we’re human too. We make mistakes, or some people don’t believe in all of the religion. It’s like saying that everyone who lives in Australia doesn’t have sexual relations before they get married because that’s what the Christian church teaches. And the Jewish religion too.

GROUP INT / 25.08.2014

This very astute analysis from Cabaas again turns the lens back on the analyst. It seems ridiculous to assume that all inhabitants of Australia abide by the ancient rules of their religion, but this is the sort of reportage that young Muslims in Australia hear about themselves every day. Consider how it might look if we assumed that any Australian who identifies as Christian must believe in original sin, never have pre-marital sexual relations, abstain from getting any kind of tattoo, and so on. It would be absurd to measure mainstream Australians by strict and inflexible religious standards which do not appreciate the diversity of lived religious expression. And yet this is a common occurrence for young Muslims.

Wearing hijab is a fitting example of the way my female respondents practice Islam in a significant and physical way. In their decision to veil every day, they are committing themselves outwardly and physically to their religion. This commitment comes in the face of significant pressure from some mainstream Australians, including verbal and physical abuse in some cases.

The respondents were vocal about the importance of Islam in their lives, and on the whole, they believed that it sets them apart from both mainstream Australians, and other ethnic minorities. They described the difficulties they encountered when their religious identities were questioned by mainstream Australians, although some were more willing to defend themselves than others. The importance of Islam to their identities was continually underscored.

This was not the case when discussions turned to the Somali clan system. As I describe below, some of the respondents were anxious to distance themselves from the clans and to play down the importance of the clans to their identities.

**The place of clan kinship**

The question of clans comes up with striking regularity in discussions about Somalia and Somali culture. This is true from the very early anthropological texts about Somalia to the latest reports detailing the security situation there, or many items in the popular media. In fact, they seem to be
the singular most recognisable attribute of the country. Mention is made of the clans to differentiate Somalia from other African nations facing similar humanitarian crises, to explain why the political situation has deteriorated there so rapidly and profoundly and also to describe the tension Somalis feel between allegiance to Somalia as a nation, to family, to Islam and to clans.

According to Aden Ibrahim, president of the Somali Cultural Association, clan divisions are still prevalent in Melbourne.23 A 2008 report found that Somalis believe clan divisions are standing in the way of community cohesion and development in Melbourne.24 Ramon Spaaij emphasizes the fragmented nature of the Somali social landscape in Melbourne and points to clan divisions as contributing to this fragmentation. He argues that ‘Clan divisions have been particularly salient at the level of community associations that compete for power and funding.’25

Indeed, I spoke with a public defender at Legal Aid who told me of two separate incidents where Somalis were on trial for criminal offences and they required an interpreter. In both cases, the trials had to be stopped as the interpreters could not refrain from adding their own remarks to the statements they interpreted from the defendant. They both questioned the trustworthiness of the two defendants based on their clan membership, saying things like: *He says he was not in the area on the Saturday night in August, but I wouldn’t believe what he says, because he is from the *** clan, and you can’t believe anything they say. They will lie to get ahead all the time.* This is clear evidence of the clan divisions which are still pertinent in Melbourne today.

Given the consistency and the depth of the discussion surrounding the Somali clans, I expected the young people I interviewed to raise the topic in conversation independently and also fairly early on in the interviews or focus groups. Interestingly, in the individual interviews, none of the respondents brought the topic up until I asked a direct question about clans or the political situation in Somalia. When the topic was raised, they gave considered responses, many of which included an element of political or social analysis regarding clan function in Somalia.

*Elizabeth:* So what can you tell me about clans in Somalia?

*Absame:* The clans is like... an ancient system to divide up the country’s people into groups where they have a duty [to each other]. It can get pretty dangerous if one clan feels insulted by another one, like if someone doesn’t get a job they applied for in an organisation that’s part of a clan. They all start to argue and it escalates pretty quick.

FG / 10.02.2014

23Cited in Drew Warne-Smith and Lauren Wilson, "Somali terror suspects `new to mosque`," *The Australian* 6 August 2009
25Spaaij, "Beyond the Playing Field: Experiences of Sport, Social Capital and Integration among Somalis in Australia," 1525.
Absame’s observation highlights the ancient nature of the clan system as a form of territorial governance, and the way that it functions based on mutual allegiance. The example he offered of the clan’s protection of its members was a common theme among the respondents. This is also very commonly described in academic and political writing as the main function of the clans. They have been described as ‘social insurance cooperatives’. However, the academic description of clans is steeped in ancient nomadic settings, with discussion of dowries, camels as currency and competition for water to survive in the desert. Compare this ancient rural imagery with some of the examples the young people gave me which take place in urban or commercial settings.

_Cabaas:_ So if you are in a different clan, you might not get a job with a company where the director is from another clan. And if you do get that job, you might not be able to move up very high in the company.

GROUP INT / 25.08.2014

_Suleiman:_ My uncle, he wanted to open a shop, a business in the central district in Mogadishu after the civil war, but he couldn’t find somewhere to rent in that district because it was controlled by another clan. I don’t even know who it was in charge, but they wouldn’t rent any buildings to him; not even a tiny room in an office.  
_Ali:_ It’s hard to get ahead unless you have those clan connections looking after you.

FG / 10.02.2014

The young people very clearly identified the clan system as a form of social capital. They told me that in Somalia it was difficult to be successful without clan connections, and described the clans as a web of relationships that included everybody somehow. While they did not describe any of the ancient clan practices such as taking revenge for murder (something which is very often referred to in the literature), they did talk about how the clans back you up if you are in trouble financially or in business.

The clan system can be considered as a form of social capital as conceived by Bourdieu. Far from being a system that accords every member equal opportunity, the clans emphasise the inherent power and inequality that is present in social capital. Again, Bourdieu’s definition of social capital as ‘the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance

26 Hesse, "The Myth of 'Somalia',' 251.

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and recognition" is most fitting.

It seems that the clan system is an ancient institution in Somalia. I believe it can be seen as a vehicle for examining social capital, which is generated each time a person subscribes to that institution in order to make a social, familial, financial or political connection. However, the clans are not simply an ancient kinship organisational system — the situation is far more complex. For example, the respondents informed me variously that clan conflict is responsible for the continued failure to establish a central government in Somalia, linked to pirates and their activities, and the reason their parents fled Somalia.

In a Foucauldian sense, we can use the clan system as a lens to examine the way that ideology permeates individual actors across space and time. It allows individuals to orient (and re-orient) themselves in relation to the unspoken, implicit structures of Somali society and historical roots. In this reading, clan discourse has been so ingrained in Somali identity that it acts as an implicit interpolation. However it is important to note that the young people did not raise the topic of clans independently. They seem to be distancing themselves from the social organisation that was the norm for their parents and grandparents in Somalia.

Here, it is relevant to reflect on the idea of invented traditions as presented by Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger. In their edited 1992 book *The Invention of Tradition*, they proposed that many of the traditions we take to be ancient in origin are in fact quite recent and sometimes ‘invented’, rather than having emerged organically from a cultural system. The articles in the volume make it clear that invented traditions are particularly prevalent in the development of modern nations and nationalism. I do not suggest that the clan system is an invented tradition, but I wish to draw attention to the idea that some rituals and traditions which seem as though they have existed for centuries have, in fact been initiated far more recently and that this is not well understood by those that practice these traditions. This is a thinking tool in order to remain sceptical about the many purported attributes of the clan system, and its mobilisation as an explanation for violence, political turmoil and humanitarian disaster.

Kadiye’s opinion about the origin of the clan system reflected the nomadic and pastoral history of Somalia, but also the way that the clan system has been taken advantage of:

Kadiye: *I think the tribes existed because Somali was like, a really hard place to live. The climate and the weather is hard and the people got together for protection and to help each other, like a security net. So that’s one side of it. Another side is that it was exploited by colonial powers or people who were supposed to be doing aid instead. And they tried...* 

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to focus on the differences between the clans and make a wedge between people who used to be friends.

FG / 10.02.2014

This is in agreement with some of the published material about the clans, regarding the harshness of the environment of Somalia and the need for safety in numbers. However, Kadiye believes (along with many other commentators) that this human security net was manipulated by outsiders to their own advantage.

Sumaya had different ideas about the origin of the clan system.

**Sumaya:** I think it was more of a systematic kind of thing that was put in place, probably from the colonial power or whatever, I don’t know. My dad talks about it!

INT / 05.05.2013

She clearly does not believe the clan system to be as ancient as Absame does. Italy (the colonial power she refers to) did not have much involvement in Somalia before the early 20th century. When I pressed her on the existence of clans before the colonial power implemented the system, she replied that yes, of course it must be the case, because:

**Sumaya:** I remember other kids reciting the line of the family when I was younger and it went on for a very long time!

INT / 05.05.2013

She is describing the ritual recitation of the family tree, which some (although it is very difficult to know how many) families consider very important. Sumaya told me that for some families, this recitation can go hand in hand with Qur’anic recitation and is similarly expected to be done by heart.

Some respondents offered positive descriptions for the clan system.

**Nafiso** described it this way: *The clans are there for when you get into trouble. Maybe you have debt, or your business is not going well. Or maybe your kid did a crime and you need help to go to the courts or get him out of jail...*

FG / 15.01.2014

When I asked a focus group if the clans carried any influence in the legal system in Somalia, there was a general agreement that they did, although this was not the case in Australia. The group went on to discuss the positive and negative aspects of the clans at length.


**Hani:** In some ways it helps, but the negative side obviously is, when someone, say you’re from a particular tribe and another tribe which is more common and affluent in that area is killed by a minor person, then that person would retaliate and come and start a war against this person. So it’s like a back and forth issue of fighting and killing because one people (sic) died. And the pride they have – I think it’s more a pride issue when they say ‘Why did you kill our people, this is our blood?’ And this is what led to the war in Somalia.

**Amal:** Yeah, because tribes have always existed and the way it was used was assisting, helping each other and developing communities, but it wasn’t actually meant to cause problems but people and their lack of education...

The clan system offers a clear way to identify and understand actors’ places within a network of relations. While there are no distinct modes of dress or jewellery that distinguish members of clans, the respondents told me their parents could usually tell who belonged to which clans. This information is apparently readily proffered, however most people do not need to ask. However, this is not a foolproof or completely accurate identification, and mistakes are made in ascribing kinship.

The young people mobilised the clan system themselves as an explanation for the circumstances in Somalia, and of Somalis who have emigrated elsewhere. I have already discussed Ramon Spaaij’s findings that the Somali Australian community in Melbourne is divided by clans and that these divisions prevent successful representation in the fight for social and financial resources. Similarly, in London, one study found that clan divisions have remained prominent and have weakened the community’s ability to pursue collective projects. However, this is by no means a universal occurrence among Somalis living abroad. Mulki Al-Sharmani has argued that Somalis in Cairo have emphasized the need for unity and cooperation, and that they explicitly contrast this to the clan conflict in Somalia. In the same edited volume, Cindy Horst points out that while Somalis living in Minneapolis tend to remit only to their particular networks, there are no significant clan divisions in the city. This suggests that clan divisions are not a fixture of Somali

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31 Spaaij, “Beyond the Playing Field: Experiences of Sport, Social Capital and Integration among Somalis in Australia.”
identity, rather that they are a response to certain specific circumstances.

Nonetheless, the people I spoke to referred frequently to the role the clans have played in the war in Somalia. They also frequently referred to the problems the clan system causes, while acknowledging that there are positive aspects also.

**Amal:** So we never ever discussed it at all. It never comes into the conversation other than us bagging it or saying how much it causes problems. But we actually we’re never taught that at a young age so when I was older I found out the good side of tribes, which is you know, people assisting one another, people recognizing where you’re from, even though you’re in a different part of Somalia.

**Sumaya:** I found out my cousin, she’s my second cousin actually, was one of my friends. We were talking about our grandfather and we realized it was the same guy. So it’s good in some ways.

**Elizabeth:** Now, when I’ve spoken to a lot of older people, they’ve talked about what clans are and what an important part of life they are.

**[Group reacts]:** Ew!

Oh!

Here we go...

**Elizabeth:** And when I’ve spoken to young people, I’ve had [the above] reaction. So I wanted to gauge what you think about the clan system.

**Sumaya:** I didn’t even know my tribe until I was second year of university.

**Amal:** I think it’s absolutely irrelevant.

**Hani:** The thing is, at a young age, my parents actually never taught us our tribe. They never gave it any importance to us as kids — especially living in Australia. My dad is the one that’s totally against teaching us our clan, but my mother said ‘you should know who you’re from and who are your people.’ So at a young age I remember my aunty coming to my house and saying ‘can you count from generations what the names of your clan are?’ and she used to teach us. And my dad would hear and say ‘Don’t teach my kids that’. And so at a young age, we thought it was something bad. I personally thought it was something that caused wars and was difficult and hard and it was just something negative to me.
**Elizabeth:** So do you know what clans you belong to?

**Sumaya:** Yeah, but do we really have to go into it?

Sumaya’s frustration at being asked about her clan identity was palpable. Throughout my discussions with the young people, while there was a high level of knowledge of clan systems, I began to wonder if they were distancing themselves from the clans partly in order to differentiate themselves from their parents and the previous generation. Some of them said explicitly that the clan system doesn’t belong in Australia and that it is not useful anymore. This was in direct contrast to the opinions of older Somali Australians I spoke with who believed strongly that clans are important and useful in both Somalia and Australia.

Interestingly, the family tree recitation described above by Sumaya was expressly forbidden in Hani’s house, although there was some disagreement between Hani’s parents about the importance of clan knowledge for children. Some of the older people I spoke with believed that it was important for the younger generations (those who have spent much of their lives outside Somalia) to understand and take part in this ritual in order to know their place, and where they come from. For them, the ritual recital of clan lineage serves to orient young people in their personal, familial and national history.

What characterised my discussions about the clans was an initial strong reticence to speak about the topic, followed by very in depth discussion about the influence the clans have had in Somalia. However, this influence was described at arm’s length, and the respondents very rarely reflected on the impact of the clans on their own lives. Some of them were not even aware of which clan they belonged to until they reached adulthood as described by Sumaya above. As Hani describes, she only found out her clan lineage by accident:

**Hani:** ...and then at an older age, when I found out about my tribe at Uni.

**Elizabeth:** Did you ask about that, or did it just come up?

**Hani:** Well the thing is, it was by accident that it came up because none of my friends are the same tribe as me. But one of them made a mistake and assumed she was. So I went home that night and asked my Mum about it for the first time.

The majority of respondents believed that there were some young Somalis who found the clan lineage important, although these people were not held in particularly high regard. I began to sense that the generation 1.5ers were linked by their professed disregard for the clans. They sought to identify themselves as different from their parents, the first generation migrants. The majority of older Somalis in spoke to in Melbourne told me positive stories about the clans and how they are
there to help when people experience difficult times. (However, there were some — such as Hani’s father — who have disassociated from the clans completely.) The young people had been exposed to the clan system in Somalia for long enough to have personal memories of it, and it is still something that is important to their parents in Australia. Many older men and women I spoke to were proud of the clan system and told stories of how it had benefitted them in Somalia and in Australia (helping them to find employment, housing, or getting them out of financial trouble).

*Ismahaan*: Some people still have arguments about it! I sit there and I’m like ‘Yep, I know what I am and that’s all that matters’.

*Amal*: it’s still an issue amongst people in our age group who really feel like because they’re a certain tribe they’re superior. They have this feeling. It exists in Somalia and it exists here. I just don’t know why. Because the clans aren’t really in place here, you know?

FG / 15.01.2014

*Said*: It depends who you hang around with. Personally, I don’t care about the clans very much. But I know my parents still do.

GROUP INT / 17.08.2014

Hani’s father did not like to have the clans discussed in the house when she was growing up. Hani told me that she believed this was positive.

*Hani*: It’s sad, because I thought everyone didn’t know, that everyone else was like me. I think the clans are completely irrelevant.

INT / 20.01.2014

But I was conscious that what the young women were saying did not entirely match the information they were giving me. On the one hand, they told me that the clan system was ‘completely irrelevant’ to them, but on the other they had lengthy discussions with me and around me on the subject of clans.

Similarly, Hani highlighted that she did not even find out her clan lineage until university and only then by accident, but the way the accident arose was through her friend assuming that she was part of the same clan and questioning her about it. Ismahaaan described how it is important for her to know who she is ‘and that’s all that matters’. So the identity conferred by clan-belonging is actually important to her, even if she says she does not care what other people think, or care what clan others belong to. The young people seemed to be taking control of their current circumstances by distancing themselves from a clan system that had not offered them anything in terms of help in
distress, rather they viewed it as an old-fashioned system which had no use for them in their lives in Australia.

It took a number of focus groups and individual interviews for me to realise that I was suspicious of the data I was collecting on the young people’s impressions of the clan system. It was difficult, because once asked, they were all happy to talk about the subject. However, I was always required to raise the topic before it could be discussed. Something that initially surprised me (and then made me suspicious after I had heard the same story over and over) was that they professed not to care at all about the clans, but were able to offer well thought-out answers to my questions on the topic. These answers had obviously been discussed before, and not thought up ‘off the cuff’. I was also interested in the fact that what the young people reported was quite different to what people of their parents’ generation reported, so I believe they had discussed the clan system privately amongst themselves as well as with older people. Finally, I was surprised at how long discussion about clans could go on after I had raised the topic. They had lots to say, and truly wanted me to understand their perspective on the clans. For these reasons, I began to suspect that their dismissive stance on clans was not all it seemed.

I puzzled over the reasons for the young peoples’ professed disinterest in the clan system, especially in direct contrast to the importance placed on clans by older community members. One reason the young people didn’t want to identify with the clan system was perhaps that they recognise that it is called upon to explain many of the negative circumstances in Somalia. They do not wish to be considered primitive or old fashioned, instead locating themselves in their “new” culture and looking forward, rather than being associated with a “backwards practice”.

I believe that they were also purposefully distancing themselves from their parents’ faith in the clans in order to identify themselves as different from their parents’ generation. I started to wonder if one of the things that could perhaps help to explain this indifference was that all the young people I spoke to were either studying or working and were living with their parents. Due to the support of their immediate families, and the relatively few financial and professional pressures they have experienced, it is possible that they have not needed to draw on the support of the clans. Perhaps if the young people had more exposure to financial, personal and professional pressures, they would be forced to rely on their clan networks more heavily. Equally, while I believe the support system offered within the Somali Australian community is strong, there are limits to what connections such a newly arrived refugee group has been able to make in the past two decades since they began to settle in Australia. While these connections were well established and regularly called upon in Somalia, the scope for what can be achieved in Australia based on such connections is limited.

Wittgenstein’s metaphor of forms of life is a useful metaphorical tool to help unpack what is going on here. Forms of life are a type of dynamic and constantly shifting way of being in the world; hinging on cultures, contexts and histories. The importance of the clan structure is not
something at the forefront of generation 1.5 identity. Their form of life is conditioned by spending their youth in Australian society. They do not view the clan system as a vital part of life in the way their parents do. For their parents, on the other hand, the vagaries of their historical trajectories mean that many will have relied on their clans in the past, and still feel a great sense of connection to them today. Nevertheless, if generation 1.5ers were to travel back to Somalia and live for a period of time under greater hardship with distant family connections, they might begin to see the relevance of the clan system for themselves. Even if the clan structure is dismissed as irrelevant by many of the participants, they do know about it. It exists dormant in the background — in their own personal narrative histories — and is thus still a part of their constructed identities.

So the clans are certainly present in the minds of the young Somalis I interviewed, even if they stress that they do not mean much to them. There was, however, no strong agreement about the history of the clans, or about their current incarnation. See this conversation below:

Ismahaan: I always knew what tribe I came from but never really in depth. I didn’t learn the sub, sub, sub tribes.
Sumaya: When you describe it there’s one common one and from that a sub one and a sub from that and so on. It’s like a family tree.
Hani: I think there’s two different clans, the Darod and the Hawiye.
Sumaya: There’s many
Hani: Oh yeah?
Ismahaan: There’s all these other ones! And each speaks its own dialect. There’s heaps of other ones though.

It must be stated that many people come from different areas within countries and regions and have particular dialects and practices. However, it is difficult to think of other regions and countries where those that are aligned to each other have been required to take certain formalised steps in response to different events including marriage, blood payments when a clan member has done wrong, grazing rights and ritualised recitation of kinship lines. According to Hesse, not all Somalis agree to which lineage other Somalis belong. As Somali genealogy presents so many ways to affiliate with or disassociate from fellow Somalis, Hesse even argues that this may be the point of the genealogy system. So the young people’s confusion is understandable, given the lack of certainty about lineage. This is also because certainty is established through practice, and as I have argued, while Islam is practiced in a physical sense, daily, the clans are understood through family knowledge, but have a much more limited practice among the young people.

35 Hesse, "The Myth of 'Somalia'," 249.
In my meetings with community leaders and social workers involved with the Somali community in Melbourne, there was much more of an immediate focus on the issue of clans, and they were described without any probing from me. One noted community leader described the clans as ‘insurance’ in case something goes wrong. He stressed the importance of the clan system in everyday life and described the way that some elements of the clan protection system have been re-established in Australia through the organisations committed to Somali welfare.

It is important to note though, that despite the large number of Somali organisations (a fact that one community elder put down to clan pride and wishing to prove that one clan is as powerful as another), there are few, if any, questions about clan affiliation before joining. Indeed, I was not able to find any situation of clan-based discrimination within the Somali community in Melbourne.

Similarly, the sporting clubs organised by the young men remain a relatively clan-free arena. Spaaij argues that sport is seen as being inclusive and remaining relatively free of clan politics. He also notes that within the Melbourne Giants Soccer club, although the founding members are Somali, and it is a Somali community organisation, there are players and spectators from other backgrounds such as Eritrea, Kenya, Sierra Leone and Ghana. There is a warm welcome for these other Africans to the club, based on their shared skin colour and common African identity.36

**Conclusion: key findings**

All of the respondents spoke about the importance of Islam in their lives. Many described Islam as a powerful force in their identity construction, and there was a lot of worry about how Islam is perceived by mainstream Australians. They spoke about how the active practice of Islam is something that raises concerns in mainstream Australian society. One example of this was the way that hijab is perceived and reacted to. Within the Somali community in Melbourne, the vast majority of women are veiled and some of the respondents were frustrated that the veil is the only thing that people see about them, to the point that it negates other facets of their person.

Despite the challenges of participating fully in Islamic life while living in a Muslim minority country, the young people were proud of this particular aspect of their identities. This was not the case when I asked them about the importance of the Somali clan system. Some of the respondents acknowledged the purpose and use of the clan system in Somalia, but most were anxious to distance themselves from it in their lives in Australia. This was despite the fact that they were clearly well informed about the history of the clans and the way they operate both in Somali and in Australia.

36 Spaaij, “Beyond the Playing Field: Experiences of Sport, Social Capital and Integration among Somalis in Australia.”

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While the young people were reluctant to broach the topic of the clan system, they were very knowledgeable about it when it did arise. They gave examples of how membership of a particular clan had helped or hindered their family members in Somalia with business prospects and opportunities. They reflected on the role of the clans in Somalia and in Melbourne and there was a consensus that while the clans were an integral part of life in Somalia, they are no longer necessary for the younger generation living in Melbourne. None of the respondents ever identified themselves as belonging to a particular clan until I asked them directly. Islam was part of everyday practices, while clans were thought about but did not inform practice.

While the young people told me that they did not believe the clans were important in Australia and that they thought the clan system was responsible for much of the bloodshed and conflict in Somalia, they told me they did not care very much about the clan system. However, it was clear that they had thought about it in quite some detail as they offered considered responses to all of my questions. I had the feeling that they had discussed these issues before at length and indeed, they went on to discuss the clans for a long time without much prompting from me when offered the chance to do so. I believe that they actually do care about the clan system quite deeply despite their initial lack of interest about the topic.
(c) A contested sphere of identity: multiple dimensions, the value of education and the place of women

Introduction

In this chapter, I turn my attention to the nature of the contested identities occupied by generation 1.5 Somalis in Melbourne, by highlighting the multiple (and often competing) facets that influence the configurations of identity expression. The second part discusses the role of education in the Somali community and the perspectives of generation 1.5 on the importance of education. Education is something that is prized by the broader Somali Australian community, and consequently carried a great deal of expectation. Thirdly, I discuss the place of women in the Somali community, and how this adds another compounding factor to the contested sphere that informs generation 1.5 expressions of identity.

One very important reflection to make on the accounts of the respondents as reported in the chapter below is that their experiences are very clearly gendered with regard to competing identities, their perspectives on education, and of course, the place of women within their community. What became starkly clear to me as I compiled this chapter was that in most cases, it is the young men who experience greater difficulty in assembling and presenting a coherent narrative or identity. In order to present this data as accurately as possible, I have divided the sections by gender.

The multiple (competing) dimensions of identity for generation 1.5

As has been previously discussed, generation 1.5 Somalis in Melbourne occupy very contested identities. There are manifold and often competing facets to the way in which their expressions of identity are configured. In terms of this occupation of contested identities, it is worth remembering the description of power and ideology as offered by Foucault; that power is intricately connected with human activity. In Foucault’s words ‘Power is everywhere; not because it embraces
everything, but because it comes from everywhere’. Connecting this with the formation of self-identity, Somali generation 1.5 certainly present a multifaceted case. Power, in the form of implicit ideology, comes from everywhere. But, for them, ‘everywhere’ represents so many directions that have the potential to form their conception of self — migrant, refugee, Somalia, clan systems, Africa, Australia, multicultural, and so on. Just how contested the identities of these young people are should not be underestimated. Their conception of themselves is intricately tied up with their perception of the world and orientation within the world and how they are able to orient themselves with respect to the discursive categories made possible for them.

I wish to point out here that it took some time for me to be able to speak more frankly with the respondents about the issues that confronted them in terms of balancing family expectations with the expectations they felt from other quarters. In the first instance, they were keen to point out that they were proud of their roots and culture and focussed on the many positive aspects of their familial relationships. I needed to ask them further questions such as ‘Is there anything your parents don’t understand about your life in Melbourne?’ for them to begin to unpack their experience a little more. Towards the middle of my fieldwork, in the beginning of 2014, I made a note after an interview on the back of a bus timetable

*Are they trying to protect their parents? Or do they want to protect themselves from being portrayed as immigrant kids going off the rails?*

FN / 21.01.2014

After some follow up interviews, I had a sense that their reticence to speak about certain issues was not so much a conscious decision, rather a result of the fact that many had not explicitly thought about these issues. To them their lives are normal, and perhaps not worthy of dissection and presentation. I believe that for some respondents at least, our conversations encouraged them to think about themselves in a way they had not done before.

*Female experiences of contested identities*

**Filad:** I think everyone has difficulties finding out who they are in life, no matter where they come from. But for us, it’s like we have to be one person for our parents, one person for our grandparents, one person for our friends, one person for our colleagues. It’s hard to find the person you can be in all situations.

INT / 19.05.2014

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1 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume One: The Will to Knowledge: 93.
Here, Filad has summed up the struggles she faces in negotiating her identity on a day-to-day basis. Other respondents touched on similar themes to those mentioned above, telling me that they were torn between their families and the outside world. According to Loukia Sarroub, Muslim youth are ‘triangulators of identity, and, as a result, culture is enacted in the in-between places they occupy in their home and school worlds’. Sarroub’s work with immigrant Yemeni girls in the US has greatly facilitated my understanding of the experiences of Somali youth and the fact that their identity construction does not only occur in response to or in conflict with white mainstream society. It also occurs within their families, across generations, and within their communities. Filad refers to this above, saying she feels the need to be one person for her parents and another person for her grandparents. She is struggling to meet the expectations of different generations within her community. Somali generation 1.5ers must integrate many distinct identities including Muslim, visibly different refugee, young person and generation 1.5. Their identities are contested and complex. This is the case for many young people but, as I described in the previous chapter, the forces that act on the identity expression of my research participants are more numerous and powerful than those that affect mainstream young people.

Layla spoke about the need to fuse identities:

Layla: You just have to be able to get to a point where you know who you are to different people and join those individual personalities up to get the one person. You can take bad and good things from different situations and the different expectations we have on us all the time. I don't know, maybe it's possible to join the good things together? And then you could become some kind of super woman! Laughs... But you got to protect your own culture and who you really are. That’s important.

FG / 03.02.2014

Layla’s comments above are rich and detailed in terms of explaining how she sees herself in light of the competing expectations placed upon her. She acknowledges that it might be possible to maintain a consistent and coherent sense of self, but is perhaps a little sarcastic or gently mocking of the idea that she can take the ‘good things’ to make ‘some kind of superwoman’. Although she laughed as she spoke about this issue, I had a sense that her identity is in flux, and that she is consciously trying to manage this. Her final comments regarding her own culture and who she really is show how tightly she holds onto her Somali identity, and how much this forms a core part of her sense of self.

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3 Ibid.
Male experiences of contested identities

In terms of acceptance by the mainstream community, there were varied responses from the young men.

**Omar:** Yeah, I found that in the wider community, I wasn’t accepted as an Australian, you know? I could say I was an Aussie as much as I liked, wear the green and gold as much as I liked, but no matter what, around my friends, I was never considered an Australian. I went to actually a very multicultural school, so there was a lot of Islanders, Arabs, Somalis. It was very diverse. It was called Banksia Secondary College; it’s shut down now. But it was a very diverse school … and if ever the teacher would be like ‘Omar what nationality are you?’ I’d answer ‘I’m Australian.’ She’s like ‘But, your background’, and so I’d tell her I’m of Somali background and I consider myself as an Australian. So that was difficult, and then when I’d go home, I’m Somali but my parents would be [telling me] ‘You act like an Australian, you don’t even talk your own language at home. You got to talk your own language’.

GROUP INT / 11.05.2014

Omar’s response indicates his willingness to identify as Australian, and the difficulty he faced when questioned about this identification. He acknowledges his background but reaffirms his desire to be considered Australian. However, he contrasts this denial of his Australian identity in the public sphere with his parents’ idea that he was too Australian inside the home.

Interestingly, one of the main identifiers for Omar (above) in terms of ‘Australian-ness’ was the ability and willingness to ‘wear the green and gold’. Sport has long been acknowledged as a ‘means and marker of integration’. It was clear that sport was a place where my male respondents felt able to express their Australian identity.

**Mansuur:** I just love the AFL football we have here. It’s a totally new game. And I know the stats and the scores. So this is something I can talk about with my Anglo friends. At first they were surprised that I knew what it is [Australian Football], but now it’s something we can discuss all the time.

INT 17.05.2014

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4 Noble and Taber, "On being Lebanese-Australian: hybridity, essentialism and strategy among Arabic-speaking youth."
When the men discussed elements of Australian culture they valued, sport was often referenced. Bashir suggested that this was because in the refugee camps, the children did not have a structured school life, or the facilities to study.

*Bashir*: So we would all get together, like, maybe 50 kids or more and play Soccer. We could always find a soccer ball to kick around and it was great! I mean, the camps were really hard. It wasn’t all fun, but we had the best time with each other.

FG / 02.11.2012

But a love of sport is not enough to bridge all the differences between Somali generation 1.5ers and their peers.

*Ali*: I would say the Europeans; the wogs were accepted more as Australians rather than the Arabs and the Somalis and I thought that was because of our different faiths. With the Arabs, the Lebanese were Muslims just like the East Africans and Somalis so during lunch time we’d all take the time out to go pray... but they had a lot more similarities with the wogs that were non-Muslim because you know, they would eat the food from the canteen, where we wouldn’t eat it. We’d bring foods from home because we had to eat halal. So they were accepted more as Australians than us. But at the end of the day, whenever there was multicultural day and everyone was putting their different culture out in public, the Europeans did the same thing. So that was the only day it felt like ‘They’re just like us too’.

GROUP INT / 28.05.2014

Ali first says that he believes that the Europeans (who were often referred to as ‘wogs’ without any derision or distinction in the discussions) were more accepted because they were not of a different faith. He highlights the fact that all the Muslims would take the time to pray at lunchtime. Here, we see once again the lived practice of Islam, as discussed in the previous chapter. And for my research participants, their physical and practical commitment to Islam recreated the difference between them and their peers, through everyday practice. Ali presented a hierarchy of which ethnic backgrounds were most acceptable in his school. This response has echoes of the way multiculturalism has functioned in Australia in the past. I was drawn to make a connection between this perceived hierarchy of migrants and the hierarchy of acceptable migrants under the White Australia Policy. This divisive policy allowed migration based on European appearance. At that time, these demarcations were explicit and celebrated as a good method for Australia to expand its population. While this is no longer the case, Ali’s comment reveals that he, at least, believes that there are some migrants that are more acceptable than others.
Another revealing comment came from Mohamed:

**Mohamed:** The thing is, everybody in Australia is always talking about being tolerant. *But how tolerant can they be? I think there are some people it is too hard to tolerate.*

**Elizabeth:** What sort of people are they?

**Mohamed:** You know, the people who do bad things, or who are too different?

**Elizabeth:** Too different?

**Mohamed:** Yeah, like different skin, different religion, that’s not OK. Different food and music is fine though.

INT / 20.03.2014

This analysis invites us to question the use of ‘tolerance’ as something Australian multiculturalism has promoted. Mohamed was quite matter-of-fact in his assessment of what sorts of characteristics were tolerated in Australia, however he was also faintly sarcastic about what people it is ‘too hard to tolerate’. Ghassan Hage points out the insidious inner meanings of the term ‘tolerance’. Far from being a term we should be proud of, he argues that it reflects our narrow and insular ideals. As Mohamed puts it, ‘Different skin, different religion, that’s not ok.’ Our ‘tolerance’ does extend, however, to foreign food and music. Similar to Ali’s comments above, there is a sense here that there exists a hierarchy of acceptable migrants and that Somalis are low in the ranking. This idea came up quite regularly during the interviews, and I was interested to contrast the hierarchy of ideal places to migrate to after leaving Somalia, and the reception of Somalis in Australia, a place that was high in the ranking of ideal destinations.

Suleiman was very sure of the need to respect and maintain his culture:

**Suleiman** Personally I think it’s good to hold on to your culture...you know, you have something different to offer the country you’ve become a national to. I might be an Australian, but just like the Italians, you go to Lygon Street, you walk along, there’s different meals... a different way of life. So some part of my culture, people might like it if I hold on to it, but if I just automatically disregard my own culture, they won’t have an appreciation for it. But there are things that I like and accept about the Australian culture, which I’ve come to. Like the AFL, it’s not a sport that’s recognized by the whole world but it’s a really nice game.

FG / 10.02.2014

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5 Spaaij, "Beyond the Playing Field: Experiences of Sport, Social Capital and Integration among Somalis in Australia," 1520.

This statement from Suleiman stresses the need to value your own culture if you expect others to value it too. It also recognises that not every part of a culture will be appreciated and adopted by outsiders.

While compiling this chapter, it was interesting for me to note that while many young men referenced sport as a way of connecting with mainstream Australians (and other minority groups), the young women did not discuss sport, or any particular activity which they felt brought them closer to their peers and colleagues. It is not culturally acceptable for Somali women to play football, although there are some women involved in the Somali football association in Melbourne in administrative positions. Upon reflection, I believe that the young women I spoke to had largely more positive relationships with members of the mainstream population (particularly in the school setting) and did not feel the need to establish connections through other avenues.

There was much discussion about the presentation of identity to Somali parents and extended family. Many respondents described their parents not understanding their perspectives. Many other reports and studies have found that Somalis experience significant intergenerational conflict due to Somali youth having different life experiences and expectations to their parents.\(^7\) Absame explains that that he feels held back in his attempts to blend into Australian culture by his family:

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\text{Absame: For me it’s more like my mum. She expects me to be very religious and when I’m with her to act proper Somali and I can’t talk English, she expects me to speak the Somali tongue. But when I’m at work I just act normal, and talk normal English.}
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FG / 10.02.2014

Here, Absame also identifies as Australian. That is what is ‘normal’ for him. It seems that being Australian is easier and more relaxed than being ‘proper Somali’, and that, for his mother at least, it is not possible to be ‘proper Somali’ while speaking English. This was something that many older people discussed with me, and is indeed a very common migrant and refugee experience. The parents and first generation arrivals had a clear idea of how their children should behave, and what are acceptable choices for them to make. The following generations (including the respondents) are exposed to many new experiences and have the opportunity to lead very different lives from the ones their parents had envisaged for them. There is something of a tension here in that many older Somalis I spoke with had left Somalia in order to ensure a better life for their children: One with

\(^7\) Smith, "Problem Gambling in New and Emerging Refugee Communities."; Keating and Simons, "Somali students in VET- some factors influencing pathways."; Omar, "Integration from Youth Perspectives: A Comparative Study of Young Somali Men in Melbourne and Minneapolis."; Harding, Clarke, and Chappell, "Family Matters: Intergenerational Conflict in the Somali Community."
more freedom and opportunities. However, they did not recognise the breadth of opportunity available to their children in Australia.

This was something that the mothers I spoke with had serious concerns about, however, these concerns for the most part, were confined to their sons rather than their daughters. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the mothers I spoke with were much more confident in their daughters’ abilities to navigate life successfully. Their focus and attention was directed firmly towards their sons. The pressure felt by my male respondents was accordingly higher than the pressure felt by my female respondents.

The difference between home life and professional life was highlighted by many of the males I spoke with. In general, their level of concern was directly related to their occupation: Those who worked in the industrial sector found a greater discrepancy between the expectations at work and at home than those in a white-collar profession. However this was not universally true. Abdinoor states:

Abdinoor: Well me personally, I wasn’t born here. I came here when I was five. So I know what my expectation level is at home. So like, the way I speak at home I am expected to know the whole Somali community. But the younger ones, the ones who were born here, everyone is a bit more lenient with them. But I’m just comfortable. I sort of have to, I won’t say fake, but when I work, I do trade, plumbing. The way I am at home, that’s me but at work I have to put on a different character to fit in. But I don’t have to do that at home.

GROUP INT / 11.05.2014

Here, Abdinoor acknowledges that he behaves differently at home and in the workplace. But he is more comfortable with the expectations he has at home than those that are present in the workplace. This is in direct contrast to Absame’s experience of being ‘normal’ in the workplace and altering his behaviour when at home with his mother.

Iman’s experience was different again:

Iman: Well, I work as a youth social worker, you know? And in our area [North Melbourne], we’re working with lots and lots of multicultural youth. So it’s actually a topic of interest in the office and when we’re out on the street. The only thing is that my parents used to think that this was women’s work, not work for a man. I spent a lot of time talking to them about what I do to make them see that it is a good job to have.

INT / 27.04.2014
Iman points out that he is immersed in a multicultural world at home and at work, so the transition for him is presumably easier. But he also explains that he needed to educate his parents about his chosen career in order for them to have an understanding and acceptance of his work.

Iman is working towards a fusion of horizons in the Gadamerian sense. The horizon represents the ‘whole historical lifeworld’ of an individual. Gadamer describes it as ‘the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point’. The limits of his parents’ being-in-the-world — their own historicised life-world and understanding — is being challenged. If a new consensus on this issue is reached through discourse, his parents’ horizons will be broadened. As Gadamer argues, the limits of our perspective are constantly evolving when we come to new understandings and interpretations. Similarly, Wittgenstein’s notion of forms of life is again relevant here as a helpful metaphorical tool: the dynamic and constantly shifting ways of being in the world hinge on cultures, contexts and histories.

Similarly, Bashir, a graphic designer, reports as follows:

**Bashir**: I work in a really white office. When I was at Uni it was pretty Anglo too, so I was used to it. But it’s not really a problem for me. Honestly, the issue doesn’t come up except for Ramadan when they ask why I don’t have [my] lunch with me.

FG / 02.11.2012

Here, despite his acknowledgement of visible difference, Bashir is not concerned about shifting between public and private identities. This situational identity allows him to interact comfortably with a wide range of people in his life. It enables him to know how to act or how not to act, and informs his expectations of situations.

Mansuur described how the navigation of contested identity becomes easier with practice.

**Mansuur**: It was harder when I was younger. But now they don’t really care as much, but they’re still really aware of it. But it’s like getting used to two cultures and walking the fine line is not the easiest thing. But once you get the hang of it, you just cruise through.

FG / 10.11.2012

But Mohamed was frustrated with the need to tailor his responses to different situations.

**Mohamed**: It just sometimes gets me so exhausted that I have to be one person at home, another person with my Somali friends, then another one at work, and another one with

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8 Gorner, Twentieth-Century German Philosophy: 148.
Mohamed seems to assume here that he is unusual in needing to present himself differently in different contexts. His wish to be ‘the same person all the time’ is at odds with current scholarly theories of identity, however it was clear to me that he believes that mainstream Australians do not need to alter the way they present themselves in different contexts. He wished to be able to present a singular version of his ‘authentic self’ in the same way he believes mainstream Australians can.

The question of career choices kept arising in the discussion around negotiating public and private identities.

**Mansuur:** I’ve found balancing the two ways, the old way and the new way can be a bit tricky at times and you have to live a double life in a sense, because I found that growing up while I was studying through high school, I really didn’t want to keep studying, I wanted to…do a trade but I knew that would be frowned upon and people would say ‘Why don’t you study instead?’ They wouldn’t give the trades an opportunity because if you’re a tradesman back in Somalia you’re considered a second-class citizen. Your job is not as important as a corporate job, you know, the guy wearing a tux. There is much more of a class difference in the trades back home. And the pay rate wasn’t high back home. And there wasn’t small businesses and things like that. So I was pretending a bit at school, and I actually got the apprenticeship without talking to my parents at all.

FG / 10.11.2012

Much like Absame’s experience above, Mansuur was not able to communicate his wishes adequately with his parents. He also stresses the trades are not highly valued by Somalis. However, unlike Iman, he was not able to explain why things are different in Australia, and why he did not wish to go to University (this is discussed in greater detail in the following section on educational perspectives). In my conversations with Mansuur, it became clear that he felt particularly torn between the life his parents expected him to have, and the life he wished to lead in Australia. He was a very good example of a generation 1.5er who felt pressured by straddling two worlds. This is particularly relevant for generation 1.5 Somali Australians, because they usually live at home until they get married. Therefore their parents are very present in their lives at a time when they are exercising greater and greater independence. Note that Mansuur pursued his apprenticeship without telling his parents about it, which indicates he was able to make a choice that was right for him despite knowing that his parents would not be happy with that choice.
Ishaar describes how, even though he is studying at a tertiary level, some members of his family are not pleased because he is studying a modern rather than a traditional course.

*Ishaar*: I still went to university, but I decided to do media instead of doctor, or engineer or something like that. So... this is something new, media to my family wasn’t interesting because back home we look at people who do certain trades and occupations, they’re not viewed as highly as someone who is a doctor or a teacher... and having my grandmother live with me at home, she doesn’t speak any English. And she doesn’t understand what we can study these days... what is available to us.

GROUP INT / 11.08.2014

In general, there was a level of resentment among the men pursuing a trade or working in the industrial sector that their skills were not appreciated by their families. They also admitted jealousy of their sisters (many of whom are teachers, nurses or working in the medical field) for the way their choice of career was accepted and celebrated. Interestingly, in Ishaar’s case, despite his choice of study requiring a university qualification, his family equated it with undesirable trade work because it was unfamiliar to them. This supports Yusuf Omar’s findings about Somali youth in Minneapolis and Melbourne. He found that the young men believed their parents’ expectations to be unrealistic, and not take into account the diverse range of educational and professional opportunities available outside university.¹⁰

*Ishaar*: I came here when I was 5 in 1998 and my mum’s a single mum and I have 3 older sisters. So living in a house full of women is hard... And the expectation that my mum had, because she saw my sisters, and they were a bit older when they came here. Especially my oldest sister. She took initiative straightaway saying, ‘Mum’s by herself...’ so she went to uni, got a degree. She did nursing and my other sister is a teacher and the other one is still studying. But I was completely different. I was different. That’s not what I wanted to do. But my mum, back home she worked for the UNDP, so she was expecting me to be educated, be proper. Go to university, do this do that.

GROUP INT / 11.08.2014

Ishaar’s family in Somalia was presumably well educated and connected for his mother to work for the UNDP. For Ishaar’s family, his sister’s choices of nursing and teaching were acceptable career paths to pursue. His younger sister is also studying at university in an unspecified course. The traditional nature of his sisters’ career paths seems to equate to success for his family,

¹⁰Omar, "Integration from Youth Perspectives: A Comparative Study of Young Somali Men in Melbourne and Minneapolis."
however his choice of media studies does not. This is despite media studies being a course that is generally considered respectable in Australia, and certainly not at a lower level than nursing or teaching. It is possible that his family does not see it as an appropriate career choice for a man. However I believe that the difficulty for Ishaar’s mother stems from the fact that his university course is a recent creation, and would not have existed in Somalia. It is most likely unfamiliarity which makes Ishaar’s mother anxious about his choice.

My reflections on female and male contested identities

The expression of identity is at the heart of this thesis, and the above section has shown that it can be challenging for generation 1.5 Somalis in Melbourne to inhabit their identities when confronted with the many different expectations they are faced with. These expectations come from within and outside their ethnic community. For example, the discussed the different people they needed to be for their parents and grandparents, and among their Somali Australian peers.

As previously stated, these experiences were heavily affected by gender. The female research participants acknowledged the difficulties they faced in relation to competing expectations, however these difficulties were multiplied for the males. For example, some young men spoke about how they were uncomfortable about expressing their Muslim identity in the workplace. One way they bridged the divide between themselves and mainstream Australians was through a shared interest in sport, particularly Australian Rules football. However they also identified a perceived hierarchy of minority groups in Australia, and believed they fell towards the lower end of the hierarchy due to their cultural, religious and physical differences. One source of continued frustration for the young men in particular was the lack of support from their families about their educational and professional choices. This is explored in greater detail in the following section.

The value of education

As I have previously described, Somalis prize education very highly. This is not unusual in many migrant and refugee communities, where education is seen as the reward for the struggle to leave a homeland, and the ticket to a better life. In addition, education has long been prized in Somalia, with both urban and rural parents sending their children to private Qur’anic schools to be educated

in Islam and Arabic for many centuries. At the beginning of the 20th century, modern secular education was introduced by the British colonisers in the north and the Italians in the south, but this was reversed by Siyad Barre in 1969. All private schools were abolished under Barre’s regime, but then public schools, universities and other public institutions began to close in the mid 1980s as tensions mounted throughout the country.

By the time Barre was toppled in 1991, all forms of education had been eradicated. Schools were demolished, their supplies looted, and teachers and students displaced, or even killed in the chaos that ensued. With no government in place, international NGOs and the scant-resourced communities organised what they could to keep children in schools. However, constant insecurity in a nation embroiled in a civil war made these efforts inconsistent. Those born before 1980 had a chance to secure a relatively good education, either as part of the British or Italian system, or later under the regime of Siyad Barre, which allowed them the possibility of better-paid employment. But there is now at least one generation raised in Somalia with little or no formal education.

The young Somalis who arrived in Melbourne after the onset of civil war at home have suffered severe disruption to their education. Once again, their experience of engagement with the education system was gendered, from primary school through to post secondary education. The respondents affirmed that education is important within Somali culture and also to Somalis in Australia:

*Muna*: Somalis value education more highly than other Africans.

INT / 03.02.2014

*Nafiso*: My parents used to tell me that when Somalia was a peaceful country, they had universities; they had higher education; the Italian system. It was really well developed and people valued education firstly because Islam teaches you to seek education — whether it’s Islamic education or secular education, you were always encouraged to learn. And that really infiltrated the Somali culture and made them go towards education more than any other African country. It is the priority. It still is, even in Australia today.

INT / 25.01.2014

Both Muna and Nafiso set Somalis apart from other Africans due to their prioritising of education. This can be seen as another instance where Somalis distinguish themselves from other groups and see themselves as distinct.

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12 Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*: 162.
In 2013, Hughes found that Somali parents were engaged with the Australian education system (despite having limited understanding of it) and reported that they were satisfied with their children’s academic experience. It is clear that Somali parents are hoping to rebuild their own shattered futures through their children.\textsuperscript{14} Despite sometimes significant language barriers, Ramsden found that Somali parents made every effort to engage with the Australian school system in order to monitor and understand their children’s academic progress. However, they were not aware of the existence of many educational resources, and due to their poor English language skills may not have benefitted from accessing them if they had known of their existence. Significantly, Ramsden found in 2008 that despite their wishes and efforts to engage with the school system, the fragmentation of the Somali community in Melbourne was a factor which limited the parents’ interaction with the Australian community in general and with their children’s schools.\textsuperscript{15}

**Female perspectives on the value of education**

The female respondents too believed that education is the ticket to a better life. They rated it as very important to their futures, both as a means to earn a better wage and as a way of having control in their lives, which was important to them after their fractured pasts. This finding has been echoed elsewhere, with Ramsden and Taket describing Somali parents’ belief in education as a means to master life’s opportunities and to regain a sense of control over their family’s future.\textsuperscript{16} As Aaliya puts it:

> **Aaliya:** ‘It is absolutely number one for my parents’.

INT 21.06.2013

In terms of their schooling experience, none of the respondents reported that there was any barrier to practicing Islam in their schools. In fact, many of them said that there were facilities where they were able to pray. Geni told me that while there was no dedicated space for her to pray, she had requested that a music room be made available to her and that this was done immediately.

> **Geni:** I remember I felt uncomfortable praying in public at school, so I asked my teacher in year 8 or maybe 9 if I could have a room. She went to the principal and he gave me a music room (we had a whole floor of little practice rooms for music) and he did it straight

\textsuperscript{14} Gabrielle Hughes, "Somali Refugees’ Views on Education in Melbourne, Australia: Implications for Identity Formation and Public Policy" (The University of Melbourne 2013).

\textsuperscript{15} Robyn Ramsden, "The Hope of Education: Somali Families and Social Connections" (Deakin University, 2008).

\textsuperscript{16} Ramsden and Taket, "Social Capital and Somali Families in Australia."
away, which I was really thankful about. I still remember today being so happy and feeling that they were looking out for me.

Education is a very important key to accessing and building social capital. This is well understood by Somalis living in Melbourne, and according to my participants, the benefits of education are more than monetary (i.e. a well paying job as a prize). The young women I interviewed were very interested in studying something that would benefit their community, such as nursing, teaching or social work.

Perhaps unusually, every female I interviewed was either studying or in specialised employment that resulted from study (most often in the health sector). Most of the females had completed a Bachelor degree or higher, around one-fifth had a Diploma level qualification and the remainder were still studying. Of the males, two were unemployed and looking for work, about a third were employed in the construction/industrial sector, some were employed at white-collar jobs and a third were doing an apprenticeship (most commonly plumbing or electrical). In the wider Australian population, more women than men complete tertiary education\(^\text{17}\) and my respondents believed that the same was the case for Somalis in Melbourne. However the available data do not support this (strongly held) belief. I discuss this further in the following pages.

I have included table five (on the following page) to comment on the numbers of Somalis (not differentiated by gender) completing tertiary education or qualifications in Victoria. It is interesting to compare these numbers within the Somali community between the two census years (2006 and 2011) and then to situate this in the context of the total Victorian population. The table shows that there has been a significant increase in the numbers of Somalis who attained a graduate qualification, bachelor degree, diploma or certificate between 2006 and 2011. For example, 117 Somali born people obtained a bachelor degree between 2006 and 2011. This represents an increase of 70.5%, a significant gain, particularly in a very small community. It must be stated that the Somali community in Melbourne is a very young one, so large numbers of people are in their teens and twenties; at the age when one would normally pursue higher education. However, in comparing this figure to the broader Victorian population (where we see an increase of 27.6% in numbers of individuals obtaining a bachelor degree), it is clear that the Somali community in Melbourne is increasingly involved with the tertiary education system. Similarly, an increase of 77.8% of Somali-born individuals gaining a graduate diploma or graduate certificate shows a deep engagement with tertiary education. The only higher qualification where the rest of the Victorian population outpaced the increase in attainment in the Somali-born population was Postgraduate degree.

\(^\text{17}\) Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Census 2011."
Table 5: Highest Level of Educational Attainment, Somali-born and Total Victoria: 2011,2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest level of educational attainment</th>
<th>Somali-born</th>
<th>Total Victoria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate degree</td>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>% of total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad Dip &amp; Grad Cert</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv Dip &amp; Diploma</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Education only</td>
<td>1,337</td>
<td>46.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Educational attainment</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated / inadequately described</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VICTORIA</td>
<td>2,889</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anecdotally, I was often told that within the Somali community young women achieve much higher than men in terms of education. One young woman even told me that Somali women go to university and Somali men go to jail. However a deeper look at census data does not support this claim at all. Looking at table six, it is clear that males outperformed females in 2006 and 2011 in post secondary educational attainment, with the notable exception that in 2011, more females had attained advanced diplomas, diplomas and certificates than males (there was a striking increase in the number of females with these qualifications between 2006 and 2011).

Table 6: Highest Level of Educational Attainment for Somali born by Gender: 2011,2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of educational attainment</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate degree</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad Dip &amp; Grad Cert</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv Dip, Diploma &amp; Certificate</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Education only</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Educational attainment</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated / inadequately described</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VICTORIA</td>
<td>1,326</td>
<td>1,564</td>
<td>1,081</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The contrast between the data and what was reported to me by both young people and older people was a great surprise to me. I had considered that my sample might be skewed, both because of its small size and because of the original links I had to the Somali community being connected with my own study and teaching. It could simply be that I interacted with a small subset of the community which did not comprise many males with university qualifications. The perceptions I witnessed may not have been representative of the entire Somali community in Melbourne, but of a smaller subset — that of the two wider suburb areas I targeted.

However it is difficult to overstate the frequency with which I was informed of the women’s educational attainment and how it compared favourably to young men’s educational attainment. I received a similar message from all generations in the community, not just the young people I spoke to. Nonetheless, the message I heard from many community members regarding the gendered differentiation of achievement in education simply did not match the census data. I did not have a chance to discuss this with the respondents, as I completed the fieldwork prior to analysing the census data. After consideration, I believe there are a number of possible explanations for the disparity between the perceptions of the community and the available statistics.

One possibility is that the census data is not entirely accurate. As discussed in the first findings chapter, I found other incidents of Somalis being motivated to respond to census questions untruthfully. However, in that instance, there was a clear motivation — they feared adverse consequences would result from them honestly reporting their ethnicity and religion. Here, however, it is difficult to see clear motivations to answer the census questions inaccurately.

Secondly, it is possible that over the past five years (there is another census due in 2016), there has been an increase in the numbers of women obtaining qualifications, however this is mere speculation. Further research when the 2016 census has been published will be fascinating and may reveal much about the community. The large increase in numbers of women obtaining a diploma or advanced diploma (between 2006 and 2011) could be a sign that some women may progress from a diploma qualification to a bachelor qualification. Again, the data captured in the 2016 census will be able to shed light on the trends in educational attainment within the Somali community in Melbourne. It will be particularly interesting to examine this data, as in a small community (such as the Somali community in Melbourne) numbers can change significantly over a short period of time. This is particularly true of a young community, where proportionally high numbers of people will begin to attend educational institutions.

Using my theoretical framework to examine this disparity in representation, results in some interesting possibilities. I believe that the responses I received from both my respondents and the broader community form part of a negotiated and strategic response to their circumstances, and in some ways it is not instructive to question the veracity of their claims, as they form part of their reality. Perhaps this is an example of the pride of the women I met, their strong sense of identity,
and their belief in their own ability to manage life and navigate whatever circumstances they are faced with.

For the women, I believe that the gender specific attitudes they have encountered from within their own community encourage them to believe that they are more studious than young men. The young women in particular have identified education as a tangible form of social capital which they are striving to attain. This may lead to overinflated estimates of the actual levels of educational attainment within the community. Due to constraints of the study, I was not able to address these issues with the respondents. Thus, these suggestions are no more than my own educated guesses, informed by the time I spent with the community.

While never in the mixed gender focus groups, in the female only groups, and in some of the extended interviews, some women were scathing of their male counterparts’ academic achievements. Remarks such as ‘he’s only studying a trade’ were common.

**Amal:** The Somali guys are lazy and there’s not as much expectation for them. Education-wise there’s a lot of expectation, but the expectation doesn’t start from when they’re young. It starts early for the girls so they can build on it. They boys have no responsibility at a young age like the girls do.

**Hani:** They’re spoon-fed at a young age and that carries on into adulthood. And that comes from the mother, not the father. I don’t think the women are not favoured, but they are treated in another way.

**Elizabeth:** Do you think that affects their ability to succeed in their education later on in life?

**Bilan:** Oh, definitely. You have to be disciplined to study and you have to know how to keep going, even when it gets difficult. I think the boys, they expect other people to help them and they give up too quickly if they feel like they can’t do something.

FG / 02.11.2012

I heard a variation of this explanation from many of the women I interviewed. They told me that they had been forced to be independent from a very early age and to assume responsibility around the house and in the care of their younger brothers, sisters and cousins (the average family size for the group I interviewed was six children, which is significantly higher than Melbourne’s average of 1.8). I took this as evidence of the strong difference between Somali girls from a young age and the prevalent stereotype of the oppressed Muslim woman. The young boys, on the other hand, had far fewer responsibilities. According to many of my female respondents, the boys in Somali families are routinely spoiled, often at the expense of the girls.

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**Bilan:** I remember one time I was trying to do my homework and it was hard, you know? And my mum, she came in and said I had to stop my homework so I could help my brother because he couldn’t understand what he had to do. And I told her, ‘But Iman is one year older than me! He should be able to do it on his own!’ But I still had to stop my own work so I could help him with his.

INT / 19.05.2013

Bilan’s explanation supports Hani’s comment above that this preferential treatment comes from the mothers, not the fathers.

While there is limited data in Australia, there have been numerous studies in the UK showing that Somali students significantly underperform compared to the mainstream population and also to other migrant groups. The situation is similar in Canada. However, in the United States, studies have found that Somali students are performing well, on the whole. As I have previously discussed, the sample I interviewed is somewhat skewed in terms of educational attainment and aspiration. In terms of the list of desirable destinations for Somalis, the respondents told me that European countries were highest on the list. Presumably then, the better-educated and connected Somalis were able to settle in the UK. It is not clear then, why their educational performance there is poor, relative to their peers.

According to the respondents, level of education was a key determinant of who got out of Somalia quickly after the outbreak of war.

**Elizabeth:** What enabled your families to leave Somalia before the war?

**Hani:** I don’t know why we moved. My dad was overseas in Italy studying, so maybe he could afford for us to go?

**Sumaya:** It was always easier if you had someone overseas already.

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24 A 2011 OECD report found that some students born in Australia to migrant parents, and first generation migrant students out-perform their peers at school. While not the norm around the world, the OECD found that in Australia, Canada and Hungary this was the case. OECD, *Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators* (OECD Publishing, 2011). This could be because of the ethnicities of migrants and refugees to these countries, or because of favourable circumstances upon arrival. More research in this area would be very welcome.
Amal: Generally, it’s the people that got out in the early 90s were those who were well off and could afford to escape. My dad left 1990. He realized that bad things were going to come. He went to Kenya. He was a real estate agent and got us out like that. I think he had some links to Kenya through his work. But someone without money, even if they could see things getting worse, there was no way out.

Sumaya: My parents left early at the start of the war and they could do that because they had wealth. So in Kenya we settled relatively easily.

Suleiman: I think the people who were educated could see that the situation was getting worse, and they had access to better information about when to leave and how to get out.

Amal: In Somalia at that time, education equalled wealth. And the people who got out early had the wealth to go. The ones that got out 96-98 went to the refugee camps in Kenya, Ethiopia, Jordan. They spread out. The wealthier you were, you had a better country to go to. To go to a European country, you were more wealthy than to go to an African country.

FG / 02.11.2012

The excerpts above reveal a number of things. Firstly, and most obviously, education was a key factor in determining the ability of people to leave Somalia quickly. This was due not only to the wealth they had as a result of their education, but also, crucially, to their professional networks. Secondly, the participants’ belief that the educated Somalis were better able to predict the deterioration of the situation and to act quickly to avoid becoming implicated. Finally, that there was a hierarchy of preferred destinations, which generally speaking, correlated negatively to physical proximity to Somalia. When asked about Australia’s position within this hierarchy, the general response was that while it was a more preferable destination than other African countries, it was not as sought-after as a European country such as The Netherlands, or Sweden. Many of the respondents arrived on humanitarian visas, which means there were no strict educational or professional requirements from receiving countries.

Sumaya, Suleiman and Amal describe the way those with more social capital (the better-connected) in Somalia were able to predict the worsening of the situation and to act to remove themselves from it. Suleiman’s comment that those better educated (and wealthier people, in Amal’s estimation) had access to better information and support networks is evidence of social capital being produced by social actors for their own benefit and distributed in unequal measure. This is in agreement with Bourdieu’s conception of social capital, and is an example of how higher levels of social capital can be the difference between life and death in extreme situations.

The young women discussed their male counterparts’ professional choices at length, and showed many of the same prejudices that the boys described from the older generations.
Naado: I don’t think for the boys that education is their strong point. There is a lot of Somali boys who don’t think about education at all. They only want to work and play. My brother who’s 31 this year never thought education was important. He was into soccer. My parents would always tell him to study and put the effort in at young age and you’d reap the rewards later. He’d get a good job and earn better money and he wouldn’t have to do a trade. But he never listened so when he finished school he didn’t go to university; he just did labour work and trade work. Then after that he went to Somalia, got married and then realized how important education was all of a sudden. So he did a diploma at NMIT and then to University and did accounting and finally finished last year. He tells me now; I should have listened to my mother and father. And I have 3 younger brothers and one of them has finished university. Another is going through a TAFE course and the other didn’t even choose to do TAFE. He’s just doing an apprenticeship. So those two will realize one day what the importance of education is and furthering your skills.

INT / 06.06.2014

Naado clearly believes that trade work and TAFE are inferior to a university education. She describes university as the best choice and is dismissive of the brother who ‘didn’t even choose to do TAFE’.

Amal: What’s interesting is that a lot of our parents, being migrants, didn’t have any access to school or uni. But the whole community places such a big importance on education for us. Not just TAFE. We have to go to university! In Somali households, university is the ultimate goal! I don’t know what happened to the boys… Somehow they got left behind.

INT / 21.01.2014

Sumaya: My brothers, they all went to uni – except my younger brother. I don’t know what happened to him… there’s always one! Some got Masters, but maybe because my mum and dad were on our backs to do something and they slacked off on my younger brother. They are lazy with him. They don’t even care anymore!

INT / 05.05.2013

According to the women, males and females have access to the same opportunities but young girls work harder and reap the rewards. This is possibly due to the parental pressure on girls to be studious from a very young age.

Muna: I think girls are just more interested in education.
This finding is an echo of Omar’s 2011 thesis, in which he posits that a barrier to young Somali men succeeding in education is that they are not equipped to apply themselves consistently because they are not required to contribute as much as women are in the home and family spheres. Therefore, the young men have not acquired the necessary skills to succeed in their studies. This is despite their parents having high expectations, and expecting them to attain tertiary qualifications.

Male perspectives on the value of education

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the males I spoke with did not view the situation in the same way. The group of men I spoke to were more likely to be doing a trade than studying at university, and they also believed that this was reflective of the Somali community in Melbourne as a whole, in contrast to the census data shown above. While they were described as lazy by their female counterparts, it is important to remember that they face a distinct set of pressures and challenges, which have been described above. They were much more focussed on the expectations they felt were put on them from a very young age to act properly.

Absame: when I’m at home my mum will tell me like most of the time she tells me to act religious or whatever like she will remind me of all the stuff I have to do. And I’ll do it in that moment to make them happy. But...now I’m here I want to be happy too. I’m here to learn and to make something out of myself. I was 11 when I came here. So not that young. So I still remember back home and how it used to be and stuff. So mum, she’s always reminding me why I’m here and she’s always on my back, like I got to study and you know you got to be good and all that. And with the trade, at least I’m doing something with myself. I’m not sitting at home, not doing bad stuff in the streets. I’m busy doing something so that’s the main thing.

Suleiman: My mum always goes on and on about what a young man has to do... He has to have a good job and a house and to have children. I swear, this guy is like Superman!

The comments above point to the burden of expectations the young men feel from their mothers, in terms of both their responsibility to do well in Australia to make their flight from Somalia

25 Omar, “Integration from Youth Perspectives: A Comparative Study of Young Somali Men in Melbourne and Minneapolis.”
worthwhile, and also in terms of the goals their parents have for them and the (perhaps unrealistic) timeframe in which they are expected to achieve these goals. However, here it is important to note, that the young women seem to be achieving these goals in much higher numbers than the young men.

For the young men I interviewed, education was a contested and conflicted space in terms of their desires and the need to manage their parents’ desires. There was a palpable sense of sadness and resignation that their parents did not appreciate that doing a trade is a legitimate and respectable job in Australia. The sadness, coupled with pressure from parents and grandparents affect relationships within the home and can cause resentment to grow. This was explained to me in a variety of ways.

*Absame*: Yeah, that’s it; they just don’t respect the trade as much as getting a degree. It’s just the mentality they grew up with. Back then it was just like anyone would do the job. They would do it the hard way and not go to school. It was just like an apprenticeship but the wages were rubbish and the safety side of it — it was very dangerous — which makes it rubbish. And when it comes to Australia it’s much more structured. They [teach you] what to do, what’s right and wrong and you actually learn more.

*Ali*: For me, it’s the same as Absame, but in my case it’s just like education-wise, from that point of view, parents from overseas have a lot of expectations of intellectual work like going to uni and doing stuff like doctor, or lawyer or whatnot. And they see the trade as not being number one on the list. And if you do come to Australia, it revolves around apprenticeships… and it’s not something (just) anyone can do. And they can’t understand that.

FG / 10.02.2014

Suleiman was even more explicit and explained that in Somalia, only lower-class people would perform menial work.

*Suleiman* Back home, only the poor people did the physical work. It was really dangerous, because they didn’t have all the regulations like in Australia, and it was seen as a really poor and nasty thing to do.

FG / 10.02.2014

This supports the view presented in section three, that in Somalia, certain jobs were looked upon with disdain, and were only to be completed by people of a lower class. Ali’s idea that the workplace in Australia ‘revolves around apprenticeships’ is not a false assessment. However the
2011 census data show that 79% of apprentices were male,²⁶ so it is a career path that is more common for men than women in mainstream Australian society as well. The young women are less likely to have been exposed to apprenticeships and the way they function. This fact may have informed the women’s assessment that to be studying a trade is an inferior choice to attending university.

The reported differences between young men and their families regarding education choices were a source of conflict. As Absame described it:

\textit{Absame: They’re never going to respect the trade as much as uni, so I try to keep both parties happy [me and my parents] and move on.}

FG / 10.02.2014

The conflict experienced by the males in relation to their education and professional choices was often coupled with a discussion about how they manage to meet their own personal needs and the needs of their parents. This led them to discussion around the need to have different parts of their personalities available to different people and the way they negotiate this contested identity.

The place of women

I had not intended to focus on the place of women among Somalis in Melbourne, but found that it was a topic that emerged early on in the fieldwork and was an important discussion point for both men and women in various ways. One effect of the disruption caused by the civil war and the great changes encountered in subsequent emigration towards the west has been to dislodge customary gender roles — very much to women’s advantage, and this was discussed by my participants in great detail.

Many of the participants informed me that in Somalia the gender roles were strictly outlined, but since the disruption of the civil war, this has changed significantly. In Somalia, men are considered the head of the household. They are raganimo — a Somali word meaning brave and also an eloquent speaker, which is especially important in Somalia due to the high value placed on oratory skills, such as reciting poetry.²⁷ Women are considered to be the managers of the household

²⁷ Abdullahi, \textit{Culture and Customs of Somalia}: 120.
and children.\textsuperscript{28} In Somalia, children are raised to observe these roles and also to respect their parents at all times, as both a source of \textit{duo} (advice and blessings) and \textit{habaar} (curse).\textsuperscript{29}

\textit{Female perspectives on the place of women}

The position of women in Somali culture was raised independently in many of my interviews and focus groups. In one all-female group, it took over the other topics and was discussed for over an hour. The women enjoyed pointing out examples where women have power in the household and also the public domain. One thing that stood out very clearly was the sense that the mainstream public misunderstands Somali women altogether. This is supported by Garner and El Bushra who claim that ‘Somali women, whether nomadic or urban, have never been submissive, either to natural calamities or to social oppression’.\textsuperscript{30}

\textbf{Layla}: Women’s position in the Somali household is stronger than other women in Islamic households, definitely.

\textbf{Hani}: This is definitely true. My father was more educated than my mother, but he wasn’t around as much. My mother was there from day one- following up and questioning us ‘what are you doing with your life’ and we’re all a bit scared of her. She is the leader of the house. My dad is more of a guest. His character is very soft and he doesn’t really know how to raise kids… no discipline. And my mum does all of that.

FG / 15.01.2014

Here, the women equate strength with position in the household. This involves child rearing, which is to be expected, but also has a strong emphasis on discipline.

However, the previous position of women in Somalia is also contested. For example, Hassan Keynan, a Somali sociologist living in Norway, explains that while ‘Somali “culture” has allowed and equipped Somali men to dominate women’ (citing a well know proverb that ‘a breast which contains milk cannot contain wisdom’),\textsuperscript{31} these previously well defined gender roles have been upended. Keynan has plotted the way that some Somali women have benefitted from their migration experience, in sometimes unexpected ways. Indeed, this was supported by my own research with many generation 1.5 women explaining that they are equally (if not more) capable

\textsuperscript{28} Peter Hansen, "Circumcising Migration: Gendering Return Migration among Somalilanders " Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 34, no. 7 (2008): 112.


\textsuperscript{30} Garner and El Bushra, Somalia - The Untold Story: The War Through the Eyes of Somali Women: 9.

and accomplished than their male peers. Similarly, the older women I spoke with told me with great joy about how they are more independent in Australia, and do not have to answer to a husband the same way they did in Somalia. There are many female-headed Somali households in Melbourne, which of course removes the requirement of answering to a husband—many husbands are not present, having been lost in the war or never being reunited with their family in Australia. However even those women who are married were very clear that they have significantly more power in Australia than they would have had in Somalia.

This is despite the fact that I was often told by the young women that in comparison to other Muslims, Somalis have always afforded women greater authority. Many cited the fact that Somali women can seek a divorce as evidence for this, along with the high proportion of women in Somalia who work outside the household.

Some of the women speculated that the position of women was very different in other Muslim households:

**Hani:** I used to talk to my Arab friends about our parents and they would always say that their fathers disciplined them and they would be scared of them and they didn’t have such a close relationship with their fathers because they were afraid. And I used to tell them it was the opposite in our house. Even if I stayed out all night—I would have to answer to my mother.

**Sumaya:** They have self-belief. I don’t know where it comes from but it’s very strong. My dad is very respected in his tribe but my mum is equally respected in her sphere as well. There is no expectation that the man does everything and the woman sits at home. She has her own business. She’s not put down!

Here, Sumaya affords equal weight to the work that is done inside the house and outside. There was a sense of respect when describing the work involved in running a household and rearing children. However, this work did not prevent women from also pursuing paid work outside the household and running business enterprises.

**Amal:** Somali women have a very strong character—whether it’s discipline, education, community life; they’re very involved.

**Sumaya:** My mum controls the finances of the house—she used to help me with homework and at school. Most things she did in the home.

FG / 15.01.2014
A strong matriarch seems to be at the heart of many Somali households in Melbourne. While I assumed this would be because of the high numbers of single mothers (due to fathers being killed in the war or not being reunited with their families in Australia), most of the respondents identified their mothers as the head of the house, regardless of the presence of a father. I asked the respondents if women had been made strong by the prolonged conflict in Somalia.

_Hani:_ I don’t know if it’s post-war. I think it’s a woman’s characteristic. It’s a culture thing. In Somali culture, women are able to divorce and remarry and that’s not the case in many Muslim cultures. That shows how much power women have.

INT / 22.09.2014

_Sumaya:_ They’re definitely not limited. Islam was never really implemented properly into Somalia, was it? Properly. It was more culture.

INT / 29.11.2014

While Hani describes women’s power and pride as a Somali characteristic, Sumaya believes that it is in the nature of Islam to oppress women, or deny them some aspects of power and that it is a failure to implement Islam fully that has allowed Somali women to possess the power they do. In section three, I described how the arrival of Islam in Somalia in the 7th century did not have as large an impact as has been claimed. Certainly, the fact that large-scale conversions to Islam did not take place until some 500 years later could be construed as evidence that Somali culture had time to flourish alongside but distinct from Islam before Somalis converted fully to the religion. The suggestion that Somalis still practice Sufism, and perhaps still engage with tribal customs and rituals which existed prior to Islam’s implementation is an intriguing one, and an avenue which is ripe for further research. Sumaya’s belief that Islam is inherently sexist, and Somali women have benefitted from the improper implementation of Islam was not held by all the young people I spoke to, with many highlighting that they believe that sexism can arise in Islam when it is not practiced properly.

Hani believes that Somali women are fundamentally different from Somali men.

_Hani:_ I think Somali women have more pride in them. It’s a national characteristic! I don’t think any Somali woman would sit at home and cry about being abused by her husband. She wouldn’t accept it. She would take a stand. She would either bash him up or call the police and the authorities on him. She is not belittled. She has a pride about her that she will not be discriminated against and abused.

INT / 22.09.2014
Aaliya similarly described how her mother refused to be oppressed by her father when she wanted to end her marriage.

_Aaliya_: My mother married when she was 18 or 19 and then she had 5 children close together and then she left. And she was unlike my father she was influential woman, you know some of her brothers were in the government. She was city, she was working, she was a graduate from high school and she was working for the army. So my father was different culturally so there is a clash between cultures. My father, where he came from a woman doesn’t have that independence.

_Elizabeth_: So your mother was urban?

_Aaliya_: Yeah, she was urban, and my father I couldn’t say he was like from the bush but you know he left from the village in Ethiopia when he was 16 but somehow his mentality doesn’t change that much from the way he sees women. He was of the belief that women should not work and should stay at home. And my mum was urban and she was a very proud woman. So she asked him he will either give her enough money to build her a house or he will allow her to work. She can’t support herself and her children and he doesn’t allow either one of the two so she has to get out from the marriage.

INT / 21.06.2013

Layla agrees that women are treated differently in other Muslim cultures:

_Layla_: When I went to uni I had that feeling when I made friends with other Muslim girls. The women were very different. And I think some cultures used Islam to advantage the men and put them higher than the women. You’d hear certain things and they say ‘Oh... Islamically... I’m not permitted to do that’ And you think, ‘that’s not Islam!’ They teach you that to keep you down. But I could still be friends with them and we discussed it really openly.

INT / 03.02.2014

Here, Layla suggests that it is the implementation of Islam which does this, saying ‘They teach you that to keep you down’. While Layla describes the timid nature of her non-Somali Muslim friends, she also claims she is able to discuss their differences ‘really openly’. However she then continued on to say,

_Layla_: After I left uni though, they weren’t really my friends any more. I would sometimes feel so frustrated with them, that they wouldn’t express themselves and work to get what they wanted.
The above comments show clearly the breadth of cultural and religious practice across the broader Muslim world. These practices change both across time and space. When asked about the situation for women in Somalia now, the answer was different.

*Nafiso: In Somalia at the moment it’s so unstable and there are so many radical groups coming and demanding things, and then they get overturned and more radicals come and demand more things. So I don’t know how it is for women there.*

This response indicates that the power women are accorded in Australia may not exist any more in Somalia as a result of the implementation of radical Islam. So there are two very different interpretations of Islam in play. The first, which Sumaya mused is an incorrect or incomplete application of Islam, allows women power and agency. Layla agrees that Islam is being manipulated to the detriment of women. The second, which is being implemented in Somalia now by the ‘radicals’, does not allow women free agency. Ironically, it seems that this is the way the young Somali women believe Islam functions in many other Muslim countries, even if it is not their preferred implementation of Islam.

The women highlighted again the importance of the differences in the way that boys and girls are raised, but this time offered this difference as a practical reason for female power in Somali culture:

*Hani: They’re spoon-fed at a young age and that carries on into adulthood… I don’t think the women are not favoured, but they are treated in another way. And this means they know how to work hard and to make a success of themselves. And they know how to get what they want later on in life.*

It was often raised that the young women felt they had ‘something to prove’ both to their parents, the Somali community and the mainstream Australian community as well. As Layla puts it:

*Layla: The way I see it is this. I have so many crosses against me. Number one is my religion. Number two is because I’m a girl. Number three is because I arrived here when I was already 9 years old. And I have to prove myself to so many different people. I have to say to my parents, ‘Yes I can be as much of a success as my brothers’. Then I have to
show the other people at school and at uni that I can achieve and then after that I need to set an example. So I will work hard to be a success.

INT / 03.02.2014

This is an example of a positive response to the challenges faced by those who occupy contested identities. In this case, Layla uses the expectations that others have of her as motivation to succeed in order to prove herself. For Layla, gender is another identity that must be negotiated (in addition to ‘refugee’ and ‘Muslim’), and she chooses to use it as extra incentive to achieve. While Layla describes the many different expectations people have of her and the way she has strived to meet and exceed them, Amal thinks otherwise about the measure of success:

**Amal:** I disagree. What I set to be a success might be different to other people. For Somalis, if you finish university, that’s success and if you don’t you have failed. But many boys are not going to uni. They do trades and doing other things. But at home the trades were done by lower class people. So I feel like they’re doing a lot! They’re learning a profession but they come home and they’re not respected. They are treated as less.

**Sumaya:** They do a lot of things. They set up the soccer here and that’s like a massive success. There are so many options for boys here.

**Hani:** Some of them are definitely trying to improve themselves, and if they don’t succeed in the academic section they do something else.

FG / 15.01.2014

The young women highlighted the role that gender plays in the construction of identities for males as well. As Amal explained, the expectation that all young men will graduate from university can have damaging consequences for those who wish to pursue other careers. The perception that they have failed was one that the young men described as well. Sumaya points to the formation of the Aussie Somali Football Association (ASFA), which has a number of teams around Melbourne. It is widely celebrated as an inclusive sporting organisation, and was mentioned many times during my fieldwork as something for the Somali community in Melbourne to be proud of.

**Male perspectives on the place of women**

The great changes brought about by the migration experience have had a significant effect on Somali men. As Keynan put it in 1995 describing Somalis in Norway:
Many believe that the changes taking place in gender relations are too radical and too destabilizing. They view the growing empowerment of women as a serious threat to their authority and dignity and, by extension, as a threat to the moral and cultural norms and traditions of Somali society. They complain about humiliation and lack of respect, marginalization and expulsion, orders being given by their wives, loss of family coherence and values and confusion and disorientation in the way children are brought up.32

A decade later, Ladan Affi made very similar findings regarding Somalis who had moved to Canada.33 And in Australia, Samuel Muchoki’s recent Latrobe University PhD thesis examined gender relations as interpreted by men from the Horn of Africa (Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia). Muchoki found that these men are suffering from a sense of marginalisation and even ostracism as is summed up in the title of a paper he published in 2013, an extract from a conversation with a participant in his study: ‘[In Australia] what comes first are the women, then children, cats, dogs, followed by men’.34 It is important to note that this shift within the Somali community in Melbourne is also taking place against a backdrop of increasing challenges to traditional masculinity in mainstream society. Challenges to what has been understood to be “male” and “masculine” are arising with greater frequency, to the point where it is common to speak of a ‘crisis of masculinity’.35

In many discussions, it was notable how much the young men deferred to the women in their lives; sisters, mothers and grandmothers.

**Bashir:** Well, I’m engaged now, but this was organised by my mum. She made the visits to the family and I think she chose the girl a long time ago too. Of course, she asked me what I thought, but I just think of it this way: Who knows you better than your own mother?

FG / 02.11.2012

This statement displays Bashir’s willingness to go along with plans that were organised by his mother, even though it is a situation that concerns him intimately and profoundly. His acceptance of an arranged marriage is very telling in terms of his position as a member of generation 1.5. He is a

32 Ibid.
34 Samuel M. Muchoki, “[In Australia] what comes first are the women, then children, cats, dogs, followed by men’: Exploring accounts of gender relations by men from the Horn of Africa,” *Australasian Review of African Studies* 34, no. 2 (2013).
successful graphic designer with a Bachelor degree, working in a very white-collar environment, surrounded by what he calls ‘Anglos’. Despite his adaptation and settlement into what he acknowledges is a very ‘white’ environment, he accepts his mother’s decision about who would make an acceptable wife for him. Bashir’s case was significant for me as an example of the tension of the position occupied by generation 1.5. He is in some ways very Australian in his outlook and his daily life, but in this context at least, he is very Somali.

Iman reported that his mother is equally influential:

**Iman:** The one who controls our house is definitely my mum. She is the one who tells us about what we should study, and how we should look after our money. My dad works full-time but she is only part-time and it seems like she knows everything that goes on in our house.

INT / 27.04.2014

Some of the men explained that they didn’t always like the way women had control in their lives:

**Suleiman:** My other Arab friends, they have a really different relationship with their mothers. They are much more independent and they check with their father before they do something. Like I still have to tell my mum every weekend if I want to play soccer. She doesn’t understand that I’m 22 now; I’m not a kid anymore.

INT / 24.04.2014

Interestingly, Suleiman would be more willing to run his plans by his father, but he feels resentful that he has to discuss them with his mother. Because all of my unmarried respondents lived at home with their parents, it seems they felt they had to obey the rules set out by the women in their family.

One of the young men who did not wish to be recorded told me that he doesn’t have a father in Australia. It is not known what happened to him, but the family believes that he was killed in conflict in Somalia. He described how growing up without a father proved to be an immense challenge to his identity as he did not have anyone to look up to or imitate. A recent study in London contrasts the situation of young Somali men and women in this context:

Another important outcome following the loss of a father is a lack of role models for many Somali boys. While many Somali women are enjoying a new sense of freedom and Somali girls are exploiting new opportunities in education, boys can experience a sense of alienation from the system and struggle for a sense of identity.\(^{36}\)

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\(^{36}\)Harding, Clarke, and Chappell, "Family Matters: Intergenerational Conflict in the Somali Community," 7.
Previously, I have discussed the level of pressure from grandparents and parents, and the expectation they have of their children and grandchildren (generation 1.5 Somalis); pressures which influence the contested nature of their identity expression. However, the above examples also demonstrate the conflicting expectations that exist between peers in the Somali community. It seems that the women and the men have different expectations and conceptions of what a positive professional trajectory looks like. There appears also to be some confusion and resentment around who occupies what roles around the home. These aspects of Somali life, which take some navigation for the actors, add more compounding factors to the contested space that informs their expressions of identity. Indeed, this adds a further challenging dimension (from within the community) to their already multifaceted contested identities. It seems that being studious is culturally more acceptable for girls. It matches the expectations of their parents, that they are more mature and better able to manage the requirements of the outside world.

**Conclusion: key findings**

The respondents occupied contested identities, and had different strategies to enable them to move between the different spheres of their lives, most notably in their interactions with their parents and with the mainstream Australian community. However, they did so with varying degrees of success and their experiences were gendered. Many felt the burden of competing expectations and struggled to integrate their many identities. While some accepted that this was reality for many people, not just migrants and people who look different from mainstream Australians, others felt it was unjust that they had to tailor their personality to different situations.

Education is highly valued by Somalis in Melbourne to the point where it becomes a distinguishing factor in their identity and something they believe sets them apart from other African communities. According to respondents, level of education (and as a result of education, increased wealth and better networks) was a key determinant in who was able to leave Somalia quickly when the political situation began to deteriorate in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The young women were sometimes dismissive of their male counterparts’ success in education. They claimed that there are lower expectations of Somali boys to help around the house and be involved in family life, and that they are therefore less-equipped to persevere with education. While the young men did not explicitly agree with the women’s account, they described the burden of the high expectations their parents place upon them from a young age. The men in a trade profession were very aware (in their own minds) that they had fallen short of their parents’ expectations. They explained that they were unable to assure their parents that working in a trade is a viable and respectable occupation in Australia, and that they felt their parents would always be disappointed that they had not attended university.
The place of women has evolved dramatically between Somalia and Australia. While some argue that Somali society had strictly defined roles for men and women, these have been eroded by political, cultural and social flux in Somalia itself, and by the journey from Somalia to other countries where women occupy many different roles. Both men and women described the inner strength of Somali women and the way that in Australia, many women are ‘head of the household’. They contrasted this to other Muslim families, where they believe children report to their fathers and are disciplined by them. Some women described how their mothers and other women had successfully sought divorce as evidence of women’s strength and ability to be masters of their own destiny.

The young men described the success of their sisters, wives and cousins in Australia. This was in terms of education, professional lives and ability to set goals and achieve them. However, this was not always viewed in a positive light, with some young men expressing frustration at the way their lives were directed by women. In addition, the young men have encountered significant difficulties and feelings of alienation because of the perceived success of the women. There was a notable lack of understanding and communication between men and women regarding these issues.
CONCLUSION

When I started this research in 2010, it was for personal interest. I was excited to further my own understanding of some of my friends and acquaintances in Melbourne. Sadly, each year that passed, the themes of the thesis became more and more salient, politicised, and prominent in the public agenda. The pressures on the young people I spoke with have increased in accordance with the level of public scrutiny on them. This thesis has been an interesting journey for me. It allowed me to speak with some very accomplished people and I am very thankful for their willingness to let me into their lives.

Overall, I was struck by the sheer scale of the effort that Somali generation 1.5ers in Melbourne have to go to in order to inhabit their contested identities, and the awareness they have about these identities and the way they have been represented. This is not an abstract awareness; rather it permeates everyday interactions, for example, in justifying your citizenship to a taxi driver, or leaving the lunch-room at work when the conversation turns to religion. I have critically examined the representation of Somalis by others, and analysed how their expression of identity differs from these representations. Even though I did not set out to dispel myths about this particular population, I found that their identity expression was vastly different to common representations of them.

Reflections on the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of this thesis

The thesis grapples with many theoretical concerns: identity, forms of life, issues of violence, power, discourse and ideology, social capital and representations of individuals and groups. There was a corresponding amount of theoretical groundwork to cover in order to faithfully present the findings in a coherent light.

While much of the theoretical groundwork has been linked to the findings chapters where appropriate, the methodological considerations require some further elaboration. Primarily, I want to offer some reflections on the way I employed critical narrative inquiry throughout the study. This form of narrative inquiry served me very well as the means to examine the stories presented by my respondents thoroughly and critically. I treated critical narrative inquiry as a lens through which to examine and potentially uncover the drives and forces behind stories. I hope that I have uncovered
latent aspects of the stories I was told. In the main, I was able to turn to critical narrative inquiry to unpack the stories I was being told about how my research participants struggle to maintain a coherent sense of self across temporal, geographical, cultural and religious divides from their heritage, and in some cases, the identity their parents, peers, and other members of the community, wished them to inhabit.

Critical narrative inquiry can potentially reveal much about how storytellers view themselves and their agency in the world. I would like to acknowledge that this research experience instilled in me a profound respect for generation 1.5 Somalis in Melbourne, as they navigate their way through difficult histories, complex structural constraints, and a highly politicised ideological sphere. It was a privilege to be given intimate access to their world, especially in such a politically fraught period.

Summary of key findings

I will briefly re-state the key findings in relation to the two research questions identified in the introduction:

1. How do generation 1.5 Somalis living in Melbourne aged between 18 and 30 express their identity?

Firstly, it is worth noting that the identities of generation 1.5 Somalis in Melbourne are constructed in the context of many ideological influences and discursive categories. The respondents gave multiple examples which highlight the way the implicit power relations in society affect them in ways which are unique, compared with other young Australians. Representations of Somalis by others shape generation 1.5, as they forge and express their identities. They are often forced to consider themselves in terms of the categories that others project onto them.

The respondents had a deep engagement with Islam. Many described it as the thing that defined them, and they were worried about how Islam is perceived by mainstream Australian. This included widespread suspicions that actively practicing Muslims are likely to commit acts of terrorism. Within the Somali community in Melbourne, the vast majority of women are veiled and some of the respondents were frustrated that the veil is the only thing that people see about them, to the point that it negates other facets of their person. Although there were many challenges to their participation in Islamic life while living in a Muslim minority country, the young people were proud of this particular aspect of their identities. They lived their religion in a physical and practical way, determining what decisions to make based on prayer and Islamic values, dressing modestly and engaging in daily prayer. Their engagement with Islam was far more significant than their
engagement with Somali culture. In fact, they made some disparaging remarks about the cultural artefacts which their parents found important, and it was clear that their identity was much more reliant on Islam and their religious practices than their cultural heritage.

The importance of clans in the identity expression of my participants was also of particular interest. I found that the young people I spoke with were for the most part very knowledgeable about the clan and kinship system, but that this knowledge was mostly theoretical. They do not practice clan and kinship relationships on a daily basis. In fact, some of them had not become aware of which clan they belonged to until their late teens or early 20s. They were also anxious to put a distance between themselves and their parents’ and grandparents’ generations in terms of the importance they place on clans. While they acknowledged that a kinship system can be useful and helpful to some individuals in a time of need, they themselves had rarely experienced a need for assistance which had forced them to call on their clan. It is also worth remembering that the clan networks are not as strong in Australia as they were in Somalia, so there are limits to what can be achieved using these networks.

What became apparent during my fieldwork was that the generation 1.5 Somalis were aware of a disruption of their social capital after their flight from Somalia. Although their families established and re-established networks here in Melbourne, they were conscious that they had lost their ‘standing’ in society. Some of them spoke about how their parents had created ‘another Somalia’ in Melbourne (perhaps evidence of my contention that Somalis in Melbourne are a very inward looking community), but how they felt locked out of this community, and had experienced a second rupture because they cannot or will not access the refugee networks their parents established. At the same time, many of the respondents felt that they were not able to take part fully in mainstream Australian society. Their descriptions echo the scholarly accounts of generation 1.5ers the world over: They are not fully integrated into their host countries’ societies, nor their parents’ communities and networks.

The respondents described different strategies to enable them to move between the contrasting spheres of their lives, most notably in their interactions with their parents and with the mainstream Australian community. However, many noted that this was challenging. They felt the burden of competing expectations and struggled to integrate their contested identities. In general, this age group (adolescence to young adulthood) is noted for being a challenging life period in terms of identity expression. Generation 1.5 Somalis are faced with compounded difficulty in this phase due to their visible minority status, multiple pressures from within their community, the increased scrutiny on their actions by outsiders, and so on.

ii. How does this compare with the representation of generation 1.5 Somalis in both the academic literature and the popular media?
I have shown that Somalis have been characterized as violent in both academic literature and the popular media. There have been various reasons advanced for this including that violence is a personal characteristic of Somalis, the clan system, the harsh environment of Somalia, and due to outside political and military intervention in Somalia. However, my analysis very clearly showed that while violence is an ongoing issue in Somalia, it is not the inevitable enactment of ancient tribal allegiances that ensures the continuation of violence, but the clever manipulations of individuals with vested interests in continuing the violence. This illustrates the danger with ideological discourse — that false ideologies (or, at least, reductive and over-simplistic ones) become consolidated and permeate the identities of the individuals or collective.

The respondents were able to detail acts of brutality that had taken place in Somalia and told stories of friends whose brothers, uncles and fathers had disappeared or been shot. Their reflections on overt violence, however, were almost exclusively located in Somalia. During my participant observation, I was able to note a number of examples of covert violence that affected the Somali community in Melbourne deeply. Perhaps chief among these was the closure of official channels through which remittances could be sent to Somalia. As I argued in the first findings chapter, there is inherent violence in stopping the flow of money to a vulnerable population. This decision selectively victimised certain members of the population.

The young people offered many reflections on the sorts of violence that face them on a daily basis. These included problematic relationships with law enforcers, difficulty gaining adequate representation if they were in trouble with the law and the problem of absent or disengaged father figures. There was a notable difference in the way that young men and young women conceived of violence, with the men stressing issues with the police, and women focusing on intimate partner violence.

There have been many accusations against Victoria Police regarding their racial profiling of young African Australian males. It is clear that young male African Australians are much more likely to be stopped by members of the police force with no grounds. Their representation in crime statistics is also higher than the rest of the population, but not by as much as has been reported in various forms of the media.

Because of the perception of the media and some academics, when violence does occur in the Somali Australian community, it appears to be subject to much more scrutiny than when it occurs in a mainstream setting. Many of the respondents pointed out that violence occurs in all communities, but that when it happens in a Muslim community and specifically in the Somali community, it is documented and disseminated broadly. This leads to an overrepresentation of Somali males (and Muslim males more broadly) being linked to violence and violent acts which in turn reinforces the notion that they are violent people.

I could find no evidence to suggest that this generation of Somalis is more likely to engage in violent behaviour than the average Australian of the same age. The respondents did not believe
that the Somali community in Melbourne poses a real threat. Instead, they believe that the danger has been overestimated for various reasons. Some pointed out that it is difficult to identify Somalis from other dark-skinned Africans, and some people might jump to conclusions about the identity of offenders. Others believe that the negative reportage about their community is purely to sell newspapers and attract TV viewers. Still others pointed out that there is a natural human need to have something to fear, and that unfortunately, for many people, their community occupied that position.

Unexpected findings

While the findings detailed above were the deliberate focus of the research questions, there are a number of points to which I wish to draw attention, as they were unexpected findings for me. Firstly, the respondents spoke to me at length about the importance of Islam in their lives. I had thought of Islam as an organisational force for configuring social relations and cultural expectations. However, they also discussed their personal relationship with Allah in great detail. They believed that Islam was a force that improved them and encouraged them to strive to be better people. They also did not see any differences between Islamic values and mainstream Australian values. Some told me that there are universal values of good and that all religions aspire to these. Their level of personal faith was relatively high, and appeared to be the result of deep consideration rather than a simple following of the cultural and religious practices of their parents.

For the young people I interviewed, religion, culture and ethnicity were important parts of their self-described identity. They shared many stories about how this identity had put them in risky, uncomfortable or unsafe positions. But they also described their pride in their identity and they way they present themselves to the outside world.

All my preliminary research pointed to the clans being a crucial aspect of Somali identity. Indeed, the older Somali Australians I spoke with highlighted the clan system as a valuable categorising and organising factor in their lives. The younger people were in some cases very dismissive of the clans and professed not to know or care much about them. However, they were very eager to talk about the clans amongst themselves in focus groups and with me in longer interviews. Some were anxious to distance themselves from the clan system in their lives in Australia. This was despite the fact that they were clearly well informed about the history of the clans and the way they operate both in Somali and in Australia. It is unclear why they professed such disinterest in the clan system, despite having an intimate working knowledge of the functions of clan allegiances. My reflection on this has resulted in two possible answers. Firstly, I believe that generation 1.5 is deliberately trying to put distance between their way of life and their parents’ (and grandparents’). Secondly, it is possible that the young people associated the clan system with the
widespread negative perception of Somalis and therefore did not wish to identify with it. More research into this area would be instructive.

While it is not unusual for migrants to value education highly, I was surprised that education was a distinguishing factor for the young people’s identities and something they believe sets them apart from other African communities in Melbourne. The respondents are active agents in their choices and many have mapped out professional trajectories for themselves. All of them were very aware of the hardships their parents had faced in order to reach Australia and make a new life here. Some spoke directly about owing a debt to their parents and their wish to repay this debt by studying hard and trying to ‘make something’ of their lives.

I was also very interested in the way in which Somali Australians in general seem to set themselves apart from other communities. For example, they believe their interpretation and practice of Islam is different from other Muslim groups in Australia. Historically, Somalis have set themselves apart. As I described in chapter three, Somalis have traditionally considered themselves distinct from others, based for example on their direct (mythical) connection to the prophet Muhammad. They also believe their focus on education sets them apart from other migrant groups as described above. I believe that this conviction (along with the older generations’ preference to rely on clan and kinship networks) has made them in some ways a very insular and inward looking community. While this emphasizes the strength of their own networks, it has also served as a deterrent to individuals from accessing services which might be helpful. These include welfare services, social services which might promote cohesion with other community groups and medical and financial services.

I also wish to highlight the fragmented nature of the Somali community in Melbourne. This has been found elsewhere in Somali communities living abroad, but is not a universal feature of Somali diasporic communities. It is often attributed to the clan system, which it is argued, prevents Somalis from presenting a united front and may disadvantage them in their mission to seek resources, or begin community projects. While I agree that the clan system is to some degree responsible for this, it is possible that the social landscape for Somalis in Melbourne mirrors the social landscape in Somalia, which has been fragmented for many decades. This fragmentation has thwarted attempts to create a sense of Somali unity many times, and will perhaps continue to do so. Additionally, my argument above that Somalis see themselves as particular, and set themselves apart from other minority groups and the mainstream community may also serve to be instructive. It is possible that within the community, small factions have been created which are insular and inward looking (in the same way that I have described the community as a whole). In this way, this insularity may have been split along other lines within the community to further reinforce the fragmentation which has been commented on by so many authors.

1 Al-Sharmani, "Diasporic Somalis in Cairo: The Poetics and Practices of Soomaalinimo." Horst, "The Somali Diaspora in Minneapolis: Expectations and Realities."
A final unexpected finding was the sense of respect that the males accord females in Somali culture. This does not accord with the stereotypical expectations of Muslim gender relations, and indeed, some of the young women pointed out that they were frustrated with their Muslim (non-Somali) friends and acquaintances for the way that they submitted to the males in their lives. Both men and women described the inner strength of Somali women and the way that in Australia, many women are ‘head of the household’. This is, they believed in contrast to other Muslim families, where children report to their fathers and are disciplined by them. Some women described how their mothers had successfully sought divorce as evidence of women’s strength and their ability to be masters of their own destiny. While my participants told me that Somali women have a characteristic of pride and a strong sense of self, both in Somalia and abroad, I believe that a significant change has been brought about by the migration experience. Women are experiencing freedom that they were less likely to experience in Somalia, and taking advantage of the many opportunities that living in the western world affords. However, this upheaval has had a marked effect on Somali men, with some reporting feelings of alienation and anxiety about their new, less-defined gender roles.

A final unexpected finding relates to the disparity between the community belief that females outperform males in terms of educational achievement. The available census data does not support this; in fact, it quite clearly contradicts it. All my contacts within the Somali community informed me that young women are more studious than young men. It was clear that being more studious matched the parental and cultural expectations of young women. It was seen as a sign that young women are more mature and better able to manage the requirements of the outside world. The respondents reported that there is a disjuncture between the expectations that parents have of their sons and the tools they equip them with to succeed. In particular, the young women argued that because there are lower expectations of Somali boys to help around the house, and be involved in family life, they are less equipped to apply themselves to study and persevere with their education.

**Avenues for further research**

This project has suggested many avenues for further research. It would be instructive to more deeply examine the disjuncture between the reported educational achievement of females and the way this is contrasted to a perceived under-achievement of males within the community. An examination of census data and the tracking of trends in this area will be particularly interesting with the release of the 2016 census.

Secondly, more deep engagement with Somali Australians about what they believe constitutes violence, and gendered differences in this perception would be timely, particularly in the
current climate of renewed focus on domestic violence. My own research has left me with many questions about what Somali men and women consider violence to mean, and if measures are to be taken to address violence against women and children, it is crucial to understand the different perceptions men and women have of violence.

Thirdly, an investigation into the collection, compilation and publication of crime statistics in Victoria and a comprehensive examination of the issues around racial profiling allegedly carried out by police may alleviate public concerns about specific ethnic groups and help to reduce media hyperbolation and scaremongering. This would certainly benefit the young people I spoke to, and improve their wellbeing.

It would also be interesting to carry out more targeted research into what effects media representation has on communities such as Somali Australians. While many authors have shown that the overrepresentation of particular groups in the media can lead to poor settlement, economic and mental health outcomes, I would like to see more information about how this occurs, and what may be done to address this issue.

Finally, I would encourage further research into what I identified as a tendency within the Somali community in Melbourne to look inward, and to be quite insular in their efforts to overcome problems they face. This leads them to rely on their own networks instead of accessing outside services which might be helpful to them. I believe it is possible to target services to better meet the needs of Somalis in Melbourne, and to educate service providers in some of the specific characteristics of the community in order to achieve better social, financial, and medical outcomes. Similarly, this project would require deeper engagement with members of the community to better understand their needs and the way they might access services, and also to educate them about the existence of external support networks which are there to assist them.

**Concluding reflections**

Throughout this project, I have often wondered about the hierarchy of migrants as described by some of the respondents. Do they feel that they are at the lower end of some scale because of the relatively small numbers of refugees from Somalia, or is it because there are too many differences that need to be bridged between Somali culture and Australian culture? What does the future of the Somali community in Australia look like?

I am reminded of an anecdote told to me at a multicultural forum I attended at the Immigration Museum. There had been a call to migrant and refugee communities to donate some culturally significant artefacts for an exhibition, which were then to be kept as documented evidence of the different cultural groups residing in Melbourne. I asked the woman organising this whether she had reached out to the Somali community in Melbourne, as in my view, they would
have very interesting artefacts and information to contribute. She told me that she had done so numerous times, but although they were very polite and at first seemed interested, the interest quickly waned. She said she had the feeling that they were ‘too busy looking forward to look back’.

It seems that the Melbourne Somali community has yet to attain a safe cultural space in which they can celebrate their heritage in the knowledge that others will accord them respect rather than suspicion. Given the current political climate, and the demonstrated disparity between the expression of young Somali identity in Melbourne and the dominant representations of them, it seems that further research in this area will be more and more relevant.
### APPENDIX A – List of all interviews and focus groups

*All names are codenames to protect anonymity

*This table includes recorded and transcribed interviews. It does not include follow up phone calls, emails, or more informal chats at other times or community events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Male Interviews</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Follow up sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iman</td>
<td>13-Feb-14</td>
<td>27-Apr-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suleiman</td>
<td>20-Feb-14</td>
<td>24-Apr-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansuur</td>
<td>17-Mar-14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohamed</td>
<td>20-Mar-14</td>
<td>24-Apr-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>9-Aug-14</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Female Interviews</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Follow up sessions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaliya</td>
<td>1-Jun-12</td>
<td>12-Sep-12, 21-Jun-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amal</td>
<td>21-Jan-14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilan</td>
<td>19-May-13</td>
<td>16-Sep-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filad</td>
<td>19-May-14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geni</td>
<td>2-Jun-14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hani</td>
<td>20-Jan-14</td>
<td>22-Sep-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla</td>
<td>3-Feb-14</td>
<td>22-Sep-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muna</td>
<td>3-Feb-14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naado</td>
<td>6-Jun-14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nafiso</td>
<td>25-Jan-14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumaya</td>
<td>5-May-13</td>
<td>29-Nov-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ismahaan</td>
<td>4-May-13</td>
<td>3-Dec-14</td>
</tr>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male Group Interviews</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Follow up sessions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abdinoor + Omar</td>
<td>11-May-14</td>
<td>25-Aug-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ishaar + Said</td>
<td>17-Aug-14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohamed + Ali</td>
<td>28-May-14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohamed + Cabaas</td>
<td>25-Aug-14</td>
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<th>Focus Groups</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Follow up sessions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Absame + Ali + Suleiman + Kadiye</td>
<td>10-Feb-14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amal + Bilan + Hani + Bashir + Ismahaan + Sumaya + Suleiman</td>
<td>2-Nov-12</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ismahaan + Sumaya + Hani + Amal + Muna + Layla + Nafiso</td>
<td>15-Jan-14</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mansuur + Said + Kadiye + Cabass + Naado</td>
<td>10-Nov-12</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Follow up sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus group with mothers</td>
<td>30-Mar-14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview with Social Worker</td>
<td>8-Dec-14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview with President</td>
<td>13-Nov-12</td>
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APPENDIX B – Ethics Attachments

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Project Title: Identity Construction of Generation 1.5 Somalis residing in Melbourne

Investigators:
Ms Elizabeth Lakey: BA (hons), S3317152@student.rmit.edu.au

Supervisors:
Dr Yaso Nadarajah: (PhD) 99253542, yaso.nadarajah@rmit.edu.au
Professor Pavla Miller: (PhD), 9925 8257, pavla.miller@rmit.edu.au

Dear …………,

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by RMIT University. Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions about the project, please ask one of the investigators.

Who is involved in this research project? Why is it being conducted?

• This is a student research project being conducted by Ms Elizabeth Lakey. The project’s principal supervisor is Dr Yaso Nadarajah and the secondary supervisor is Dr Pavla Miller.
• The research is being conducted to fulfil the requirements of Doctor of Philosophy at the Globalism Research Institute at RMIT.
• The project has been approved by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee.

Why have you been approached?

You have been approached because you are in a good position to understand the life experience of Somalis in Australia and speak about it with me.

What is the project about? What are the questions being addressed?

• This project will investigate the identity of generation 1.5 Somalis living in Melbourne. The aim is to build knowledge of this generation’s identity in relation to their experiences in Somalia, their travel to Australia and their experiences of living in Melbourne.
• The secondary aim of this project is to challenge the idea that is often in the popular media and in academic papers and books that Somalis are a violent group of people.
• Elizabeth will interview 20 young Somali women and 20 men across Melbourne.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

Elizabeth will require research participants to take part in an in-depth interview. The interview will take approximately 90 minutes. Once Elizabeth has analysed the findings of the interview she might need to clarify questions that have come up in relation to your interview information. This will
involve a second interview which might take up to another hour and could be done by email, phone or in person.

Elizabeth will then write up her thesis and will make a summary of the relevant sections available to you to read. You will have another opportunity to make corrections if you would like, or to add information. This process would take another hour to two hours if you chose to do so and might require a follow-up meeting.

The interview questions will be focused on your life as you remember it in Somalia, your journey to Australia and how you find living in Melbourne. They will be open-ended questions and you can answer them however you want. There is no right answer to these questions; the research is interested in your personal experiences.

Here are some example questions:

Life in Somalia
Which part of Somalia are you from?
Which part of Somalia are your parents from?
Did you live in a city, or in the country before you left?
What was your hometown like?

Journey to Australia
How did your family come to the decision to leave Somalia?
Was Australia your destination from the beginning?

Life in Australia
Where and with whom do you live?
Is your family here?
Can you think back over the time you have lived here and describe some moments or a time when you felt really ‘at home’ here?

What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

- The interview questions might raise sensitive issues or memories for you including your time in Somalia your travel to Australia.
- If you find the interview process distressing, Elizabeth will be able to provide you with contacts of free counselling services in your area if you wish to discuss the matters with someone appropriately qualified.
- Given that you will be able to decide what and how much information you would like to give Elizabeth, it is not anticipated that participating in this project will cause you undue risk or disadvantage.
- If you are unduly concerned about your responses to any of the interview questions or if you find participation in the project distressing, you should contact Dr Yaso Nadarajah (Elizabeth’s primary supervisor) as soon as convenient. Dr Nadarajah will discuss your concerns with you confidentially and suggest appropriate follow-up for you if necessary.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

It is not anticipated that there will be direct personal benefit to you from participating in this project. It is hoped, however, that this project will contribute to a better understanding of the Somali community in Melbourne and help to better represent Somalis in the media and in academic publications.

What will happen to the information I provide?

- The information you provide will be treated as strictly confidential. It will only be seen by Dr Nadarajah, Professor Miller, and Elizabeth Lakey.
• Any information that you provide can be disclosed only if (1) it is to protect you or others from harm, (2) a court order is produced, or (3) you provide the researcher with written permission.
• The results will be disseminated through Elizabeth’s doctoral thesis and in any publication of that thesis. This could be a paper or journal article. Elizabeth will use pseudonyms to protect your identity. The research data will be kept securely at RMIT for a period of 5 years after publication and then it will be destroyed.

What are my rights as a participant?

• The right to withdraw from participation at any time
• The right to request that any recording cease
• The right to have any unprocessed data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
• The right to have any questions answered at any time.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions?

• Elizabeth’s supervisor Dr Yaso Nadarajah – yaso.nadarajah@rmit.edu.au

What other issues should I be aware of before deciding whether to participate?

• Elizabeth will, with your permission, make an audio recording of the interviews. This data will be securely stored at RMIT University for 5 years after publication and then destroyed.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Lakey

If you have any complaints about your participation in this project please see the complaints procedure on the Complaints with respect to participation in research at RMIT page
CONSENT FORM

1. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet

2. I agree to participate in the research project as described

3. I give my permission:
   to be interviewed and/or complete a questionnaire  Yes  No
   to be audio taped  Yes  No
   for my name or identity to be used  Yes  No

4. I acknowledge that:
   (a) My participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied (unless follow-up is needed for safety).
   (b) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
   (c) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.
   (d) The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a report of the project outcomes will be provided to …………….. (researcher to specify). Any information which will identify me will not be used unless otherwise specified above.

Participant’s Consent

Participant: ___________________________ Date: ______________

(Signature)

Witness:

Witness: ___________________________ Date: ______________

(Signature)
Interview Questions

Life in Somalia
- Which part of Somalia are you from?
- Which part of Somalia are your parents from?
- Did you live in a city, or in the country before you left?
- What was your hometown like?
- Who were the members of your household?
- How big is your family? Did you all live together, or just with your immediate family?
- Do you belong to a particular clan? Which clan are you part of?
- Can you describe this clan in comparison to other clans?

The Journey to Australia
- How did your family come to the decision to leave Somalia?
- Was Australia your destination from the beginning?
- By what transport did you come from Somalia to Australia?
- Were there long stopovers?
- Were you 'at home' anywhere else on your trip? Were there any other countries where you stayed for a long time?
- How long did the entire trip from Somalia to Australia take?
- departure date -
- arrival date-
- Do you think this is your final destination, or do you think about moving again?

Life in Australia
- Where and with whom do you live?
- Is your family here?
- Are you close to your family?
- Do you work/study?
- Are you part of any groups?
- What sort of activities do you do?
- How much do you consider yourself a religious person?
- How important is your religion to you?
- Can you think back over the time you have lived here and describe some moments or a time when you felt really ‘at home’ here?
- Can you think back over the time you have lived here and describe some moments or a time when you did not feel accepted here?
- Do you think that Somalis are portrayed as a violent group of people? Why/Why not? Can you give any examples of this that you or someone you know have experienced?
- The media in Australia often describe Somalis as violent people. What do you think is the real story? Can you give some examples to explain what you mean?
- Can you tell me some other stories that can make people understand what you mean?
- Is there anything else you want to tell me about your life here?
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