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**RADICALIZATION WITHIN THE SOMALI-AMERICAN  
DIASPORA: COUNTERING THE HOMEGROWN  
TERRORIST THREAT**

by

Scott E. Mulligan

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Thesis Advisor:

Nadav Morag

Second Reader:

Fathali Moghaddam

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COUNTERING THE HOMEGROWN TERRORIST THREAT**

Scott E. Mulligan  
Attorney-Advisor, Transportation Security Administration, Cleveland, Ohio  
J.D., Cleveland State University, 1997

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December 2009**

Author: Scott E. Mulligan

Approved by: Nadav Morag  
Thesis Advisor

Fathali Moghaddam  
Second Reader

Harold A. Trinkunas, PhD  
Chairman, Department of National Security Affairs

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## ABSTRACT

In 2008, Minneapolis resident Shirwa Ahmed became the first U.S. suicide bomber after he detonated his explosives-laden vehicle in front of a government compound in Hargesa, Somaliland. Ahmed's transformation from an average American teenager to an Islamic *jihadi* was gradual and complex. This thesis will examine how Ahmed, and other Somali-Americans, morphed into *Salafi jihadis*.

Through interviews with law enforcement, social services providers, and homeland security officials, the cultural, religious, and assimilative traits existing within this unique diaspora community that have affected the trajectory of the radicalization of its members will be examined. Factors such as historic clan identity, religious pragmatism, pastoralism, and Somali-nationalistic identity generally discourage the adoption of transnational movements like global *jihadism* by first generation Somali émigrés. An in-depth analysis of the profiles of Somali-American travelers suggests that Somali youth are less like their parents and are more similar to their American and European-Muslim counterparts. Thus, they are a virtual “*tabula rasa*” upon which *jihadi* recruiters may not only write but also erase much of the youths' inherent clannish identity and cultural traits. These newly indoctrinated youths rush to embrace American culture but are torn between two diametrically opposed identities. The resulting tension leaves a gap ready to be filled by *Salafi* Islam.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. BACKGROUND

In 1996, 14-year-old Shirwa Ahmed escaped the Kenyan refugee camp in which he, his mother, and three siblings had been living since fleeing their Somali homeland three years earlier (Meryhew, 2009). Through one of the many U.S. charitable organizations supporting Somali refugees, the family obtained passage to the United States (Meryhew, 2009). Originally placed in the Pacific Northwest, Ahmed's family made their secondary migration to Minneapolis, Minnesota a year later in order to be closer to other family members (Meryhew, 2009).

Despite being older than many Somali refugees arriving in the United States, Ahmed quickly embraced his new hostland. At Roosevelt High School, his teachers described him as an "average student" with an affable nature who quickly grasped English and American culture (New York Times, 2009). According to his friends, he was just one of the guys, wearing hip-hop fashions, playing pick-up basketball after school, and hanging out at the Mall of America on weekends (Meryhew, 2009). In June 2000, Ahmed graduated from Roosevelt and began attending college classes at a local community college (Meryhew, 2009). During this time, Ahmed worked several jobs including pushing a wheelchair at Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport (Meryhew, 2009).

Up to this point, Ahmed's life appeared both typical and promising, which is why Ahmed's metamorphosis over the next eight years from average teenager to Islamic jihadist is so alarming. This transformation culminated in the ending of Ahmed's life. Ahmed left the U.S. for training in Somalia, and on October 29, 2008, he slid behind the wheel of a Toyota Land Cruiser in Bossasso, a town in northern Somaliland. Ahmed drove his vehicle through the streets until reaching the Puntland's intelligence headquarters (Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor, 2009). Once there, Ahmed detonated the explosives in his Land Cruiser and ended his life at age 26 (Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor, 2009). Almost simultaneously with Ahmed's death,

three other vehicles replicated his attack throughout the northern region of Somaliland. Once completed, the attacks claimed 28 souls and wounded 48 others (Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor, 2009).

The attacks served as a wake-up call for U.S. officials to the growth of political Islam in Somalia and the problem of *jihadist* recruitment within the U.S. Somali Diaspora. Ahmed's radicalization by the Somali based "al-Shabaab" ("the youth") terrorist organization marked the development of a new "homegrown" terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland. While Ahmed's attack occurred on distant soil in Somalia, the fear that a typical Somali-American youth could be radicalized in the U.S. and travel abroad to fight on behalf of *jihadists* is concerning. Moreover, it begs the greater question of what happens when these battle-hardened *jihadists* return to the U.S. and put their terrorist training to use on U.S. soil.

This thesis examines the Somali Diaspora within the United States and how the cultural, religious, and social characteristics of this unique émigré group may affect the radicalization process. Using the unique Somali cultural context, this thesis will examine how young Somalis morph from well-adjusted American teenagers into *jihadists*. Chapter I of this thesis outlines the problem facing homeland security officials in countering this homegrown threat. Chapter II explains the methodology used in researching this issue. Chapter III reviews the existing literature in both radicalization and assimilation studies as it relates to the Somali diasporants and describes where current gaps exist that this work addresses. Chapter IV describes the Somali historical, sociological, and religious landscape for the main argument of this thesis, demonstrating how a small, but significant, number of Somali diasporants radicalizes to join the global *jihad*. Chapter V discusses the unique qualities of the Somali culture, as demonstrated by their relative homogeneity, prior rejection of political Islam, how the integration experiences, and evolution of the community upon arrival to the United States creates a "crisis of culture," which renders the individual susceptible to radicalization. The term "radicalize" will be used to define the journey made by these individuals as they proceed from relatively ordinary lives to a point where they decide to take up arms against the "enemies of Islam." Chapter VI examines the open source information on the lives of the

Somali-Americans who left the U.S. to join the al-Shabaab terrorist network between 2007 and 2008 and attempts to determine the inextricable linkages among the radicalization experiences. Chapter VII will evaluate the radicalization process and examines how it applies to Somali-American “travelers” to determine the differences between the radicalization process of the Somali diasporants and their U.S./European counterparts. Chapter VIII will then provide recommendations regarding the tailoring of outreach to this unique diaspora community.

## **B. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

In March 2008, the U.S. State Department designated the Somali based al-Shabaab as a terrorist organization. This designation was based in large part upon the group’s admitted ties to the al Qaeda terrorist network (U.S. Department of State, 2008). Interestingly, one year later the group’s leadership confirmed this relationship when it pledged *bayat* (oath of loyalty) to al-Qaeda (AQ) leader Osama bin Laden (Roggio, 2009). According to the Mukhtar Robow, a top military commander of al-Shabaab:

[w]e will take our orders from Sheik Osama bin Laden because we are his students. Al-Qaeda is the mother of the holy war in Somalia. Most of our leaders were trained in Al-Qaeda camps. We get our tactics and guidelines from them. (Sanders, 2008)

As Al-Shabaab has emerged as a radical force in Somalia, so too has the group’s recruiting refined itself in the targeting of western Somali Diaspora communities, including those in the United States, Britain, Australia, and the Netherlands (Kohlman, 2009). In September 2008, the East Africa Al-Qaeda leader Saleh Nabhan began disseminating recruitment messages via the Internet to western diaspora communities stating, “[h]ere are training camps in Somalia . . .that have opened their doors so that you join them. So be truthful with Allah and answer the call of jihad and prefer the lasting over the perishing and the next life over the present life” (Grace, 2008).

Other recruitment efforts have included polished Internet video clips, which are set to rap music and feature the English speaking Abu Mansoor Al-Amriki,<sup>1</sup> also known as “the American,” and his exploits. These videos of Al-Amriki include him leading a group of Al-Shabaab members in a raid against Ethiopian troops. These recruitment efforts clearly target young Western audiences (Patterson, 2009). At the same time the Internet and other media tools are being utilized by Al-Shabaab, the group’s use of one-on-one recruitment has been widespread in diaspora communities. This has included the more reclusive small group settings using basements, mosques, community centers, and sporting activities (Forliti, 2009).

The efficacy of the Al-Shabaab recruitment efforts is shown by its ability to lure young American Muslims to Somalia to fight in the on-going war, including the January 2007 capture of two American citizens fleeing Somalia after Ethiopian troops regained control of previously held Al-Shabaab territory and the case of Abu Mansoor al-Amriki discussed above (Patterson, 2009, p. 3). This problem, however, took on greater prevalence when, in 2008, recruiters facilitated the travel of approximately 20 American-Somali youths to Somalia from Minneapolis/St. Paul diaspora (Patterson, 2009, p. 3).

Law enforcement has speculated that the 20 “travelers” left the United States in order to train and fight in Somalia’s on-going civil war or to train for terrorist operations, such as suicide bomber Shirwa Ahmed’s attack, discussed previously (Liepman, 2009). As the links between these Somali groups and Al-Qaeda grows, law enforcement remains concerned that through the influence of Al-Qaeda, the now regional conflict within Somalia will grow into an international one. Patterson (2008), a New York Police Department Analyst, states, “[w]hile AMISOM forces and rival tribal groups may be the first target of future Al-Shabab operations, it should come as no surprise if and when those sights are shifted at United States interests either at home or abroad” (p. 3).

However, while it is clear that U.S. Somali Diaspora is being targeted for recruitment by Al-Qaeda and other Islamists organizations, little is actually known about

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<sup>1</sup> Abu Mansoor’s actual identity remained unknown until September 2009, when he was identified as Omar Hammami, a 25-year old native of Mobile, Alabama. Hammami, prior to travelling to Somalia, was a sophomore at University of South Alabama where he was the president of the Muslim Student Association.

the Somali-American community, its potential for radicalization, and what steps, if any, can be taken to better inoculate community members from radical Islamists messages (Evan, 2008). As will be discussed in this thesis, the Somali Diaspora in America is “one of the most unique sets of newcomers to ever enter this nation” (Population Association of America [PAA], 2006). The Somali Diaspora’s war-torn homeland, their experience as refugees, their Sufi-Sunni Islamic practice and a persistent tribal-clan culture sets this group apart from other Muslim émigré populations arriving in the U.S. and creates a complex problem for homeland security officials in tailoring outreach.

Although the Somali Diaspora is often “poor, marginalized and disenfranchised” and “appear ripe to recruit for participation in terrorist organizations” (Menkhaus, 2009, p. 35), they historically have been a “surprisingly poor source of recruitment into al Qa’aida” (Menkhaus, 2009, p. 35). Despite this, however, generational gaps and growing crisis of identity within the community may increase the receptiveness of community members for the *jihadist* message, as seen in the 2007–2008 disappearances of approximately 20 Somali-Americans from the Twin Cities (Ahmed, 2009).

As a result, there is a need for policy makers and law enforcement to better understand this community, its unique characteristics, and what factors may explain, not only why these communities have historically shunned *jihadism*, but also why recent events indicate that second and third generations may be more susceptible to the Jihadist call to arms.

### **C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Do the culture and integrative patterns of a Muslim Diaspora community into the West effect the radicalization of individuals within that community?

What changes in the Somali-American community are occurring that has made second and third generations susceptible to radicalization (as evidenced by the recent disappearance of an unknown number of youths from the Minneapolis, Minnesota community)?

How can outreach to this community be tailored to better facilitate cooperation with respect to jihadist recruitment, taking into account the unique social, economic, and cultural aspects of this community?

## II. METHODOLOGY

The research for this thesis is broken down into two parts: first, is a study of the two largest existing Somali Diaspora communities in the U.S. the Columbus, Ohio and Minneapolis/St. Paul communities; and second, is to develop a profile of the Somali youths who have been recruited by jihadist groups. Due to the fact that many of these individuals are deceased, incarcerated, or still missing, much of the background data was taken from journalist interviews of friends, families, and teachers of the missing Somali-Americans. Once a profile is developed, it was then compared against other jihadist recruits in the United States and the United Kingdom Muslim communities. The differences and similarities was then identified and compared with the integrative profile of the Somali communities to determine if any of these cultural and integrative factors may play a role in either discouraging or encouraging radicalization.

Several interviews were conducted for this thesis with individuals working in the Somali community in the St. Paul/Minneapolis region and Columbus, Ohio. These two areas were chosen due to the fact that they have the largest Somali populations in the United States.

The author interviewed individuals with a diverse range of experience ranging from public safety, such as firefighters servicing the community, immigration/social services employees, and law enforcement/intelligence officers. Each interview was conducted either face-to-face or over the telephone. The interviewees' identities will remain anonymous and only a general title would be given, such as law enforcement officer-Ohio (OLE1).

Although it is acknowledged that by withholding the identities of the individuals, the reader will be unable to assess the credibility and/or knowledge base of each interviewee, concealing their identities was a necessary step for two reasons. First, identifying the individuals by name could unnecessarily jeopardize or harm their relationship with the community that they service. Second, in at least one case, the interview simply would not have occurred had the individual been required to gain

permission from their supervisor, which would have been the case had the individual been identified by name. The interviews focused primarily on the individuals experience within the community and their experience in providing social and public safety services to the community.

#### **A. COLUMBUS, OHIO**

In the Columbus, Ohio community, the author interviewed three individuals within the community.

1. The first interviewee was a state level law enforcement officer who works directly within the Somali community in Columbus, Ohio. He will be hereafter referred to as OLE1.
2. A second interview was conducted with a senior manager of a state social services agency who oversees contracts and programs aiding refugees in the Somali community, identified as OSS1.
3. The third interview is an academic residing in Ohio who currently provides consulting services to several federal, state, and local law enforcement organizations in regards to the Somali community and Muslim culture, identified as OSP1.

The research in the Columbus community was limited to the above individuals and supplemented by state and federal reports, studies of the communities, and other open source information.

#### **B. THE TWIN CITIES—MINNEAPOLIS, ST.PAUL, MINNESOTA**

As with the Columbus community, the research was limited to semi-structured interviews of officials having close contact with the communities.

1. The first individual interviewed was a law enforcement officer working in the Twin Cities community. He will be identified as MLE1. As with OLE1, this interviewee provided information on the Somali community's relationship with law enforcement, views of police, what the primary obstacles of effective government outreach are from his point of view, and what crime and youth problems are present within the community. Notably, significant similarities were observed by both the Columbus law enforcement officer and the Minneapolis law enforcement officers with respect to their impressions and experiences.

2. The second individual interviewed was an emergency services (EMS) professional, servicing the Minneapolis area. This individual's area of responsibility was a large Somali community in the area, and he has had extensive experience in servicing the needs of the community. He is identified as MFS1.

Although originally intended, the author was unable to secure interviews from either the DHS Office of Civil Rights and Liberties or a member of the federal law enforcement community in Minneapolis. Despite several attempts, the interviewees in each case were unable to secure approval from their supervisors to be interviewed regarding the subject matter. Some unclassified information was provided by the sources in the form of documents, but no statements regarding federal outreach will be attributed to any federal official.

Once the interviews were complete, the information has been used to develop a "Somali context" or group of characteristics, history, and cultural traits that may affect the radicalization process. Then, using existing interviews with journalists and varying testimony from family members, friends, and teachers, profiles were prepared of three Somali youths who left their communities in the U.S. to fight in Somalia. Then these profiles were compared against existing studies of other non-Somali homegrown terrorist groups in Europe and the United States to determine if their trajectory is different based upon the Somali culture and context. Factors that were compared include socio-economic status, integration status, racial/ethnic/religious conflict between the diaspora group and the host-country, and assimilation conflicts between first and second/third generation émigrés.

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### **III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature reviewed can be broken down into two categories. The first group studies the process of Islamic radicalization and the second examines the Somali-American Diaspora from a sociological perspective. What is notable in this existing literature is not what literature exists, but rather what literature is absent from the field. Specifically, there appears to be no research that specifically addresses the radicalization path of the Somali-American Diaspora. Also absent is research addressing whether the Somali-Diaspora has a distinct radicalization pattern that would explain why young Somali-Americans, such as Shirwa Ahmed, discussed in the introduction, who have generally not been attracted to radical Islam, have recently become more receptive to these recruitment efforts.

#### **A. RADICALIZATION RESEARCH**

With respect to the radicalization process in general, the research is extensive. However, despite common themes in the literature, there are also marked differences in how authors view the subject of radicalization. At the core of these differences appears to be what role religious ideology plays in the radicalization process. For some authors, discussed below, radical Islam and religious ideology are central to the radicalization process. Conversely, others contend that while Islam is an important part of the terrorist narrative, it is only the justification or “vener” for the socially deviant and violent behaviors at the core of terrorism.

Falling in the latter category, with his two books *Understanding Terror Networks* (2004b) and *Leaderless Jihad* (2004a), Marc Sageman argues that focusing on religious ideology in terrorism is largely a mistake. Sageman contends that terrorists are predominantly driven by social bonds, and that “cliques” should be considered greater motivators than any firmly held understanding of global Salafi jihad (2004, p. 154). Sageman further attempts to debunk the belief that terrorists are poor, uneducated, and

disenfranchised (2004). He claims that 75 percent of the terrorists he studied were married, had no criminal history, were middle class, and had modern educations (2004, p. 154).

Supporting Sageman's view is Olivier Roy in his book *Al Qaeda in the West as Youth Movement: The Power of a Narrative* (2008). Roy contends that while humiliation among Muslims is often cited as a motivator, there is a "radical discrepancy between the map of the actual conflicts in the Middle East and the map of recruitment" (2008, p. 7). Roy asserts that in Europe, Al-Qaeda should be understood as a youth movement that shares many factors with other forms of youth dissent or rebellion (2008, p. 6). Roy further attempts to explain suicide terrorism (the "archetype of radical Islam") in terms of the "Columbine syndrome," i.e., the targeting of a group of known individuals and then committing suicide in order to achieve importance and relevance (2008, p. 6).

Adopting the view that religious ideology does play a central role in radicalization is the New York City Police Department study and Dutch Intelligence (AIVD) study. The AIVD study, entitled *Recruitment for the Jihad in the Netherlands: From Incident to Trend* (2002), examines how the Netherlands' Moroccan-Muslim population has radicalized in recent years. The AIVD study found that many of the recruits of radical Islam are young, second generation immigrants who are dissatisfied with their assimilation into Dutch society, unemployment, perceived discrimination and a feeling of "relative deprivation" (2002). Also, many of these individuals, according to AIVD, feel unsatisfied with the level or manner of religious practice by their parent, which makes Salafi Islam all the more appealing. The introduction to radical Islam provides young Moroccan men with a purpose, a feeling of empowerment to effectuate change in their environment as well as a needed social network against the discrimination by the larger Dutch community.

The Intelligence Division of the New York Police Department in its study, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*, also focuses on the importance of Salafi Islam (Silber & Bhatt, 2007). The NYPD report identified four phases of radicalization using profiles of terrorists such as the 7/7 London Bombers, the Madrid

Train Bombers, and the 9/11 terrorists. This study focuses almost exclusively on the individuals' identification with and adoption of the Salafi-Jihadist ideology (Silber & Bhatt, 2007, p. 30).

Other studies such as Tomas Precht's study, *Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalization in Europe*, builds off of the NYPD study (2007, p. 30). Precht focuses on three broad sets of causes: background factors, trigger factors, and opportunity factors (2007, pp. 50, 56). Interestingly, Precht focuses on identifying the "trigger" factors that push the individual from his pre-radicalization phase to a full-blown extremist hermeneutic. These include events such as western foreign policies and actions, a provocative event, the presence of a charismatic leader and the glorification of jihad (2007, p. 56).

Other studies of terrorists in the United Kingdom and the U.S. are crossovers of the many works listed above but also have distinguishing factors that were considered in determining how an individual becomes radicalized. Similarly, a study by Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, entitled *Homegrown Terrorists in the U.S. and U.K.*, laid out six manifestations of the radicalization process that were observed in homegrown terrorists (2009). Three of the manifestations were internal to the individual, including: adopting an all-encompassing legalistic interpretation of Islam; trusting only select religious authorities; perceiving an "inherent schism" between Islam and the West and western ideas, such as participation in democratic processes (Gartenstein-Ross & Grossman, 2009, p. 40). The remaining three are observable and include low or no tolerance for competing interpretations of Islam (p. 48); attempts to impose religious ideas on others (p. 50); and a radicalization in political thought by the individual including a belief that the West is conspiring against Islam and that the Muslim people must be rescued (Gartenstein-Ross & Grossman).

In summary, there are areas where researchers have found common ground on the issue of radicalization. Particularly, most researchers agree that one essential element of radicalization is the belief that Islam is under attack by the West. Although the

importance of this belief is disputed, some researchers believe this is a driving belief while others believe it is used as a persuasive narrative, all appear to agree that it is a present component.

In addition, the importance of factors such as assimilation, economics, and educational opportunities vary among researchers. Some researchers, such as Sageman, claim that terrorists tend to be better educated, affluent individuals while other researchers clearly take the position that the poor and disenfranchised are the ripe recruits for terrorist organizations and can often be driven to terrorism by their status.

With respect to the Islamists in Somalia, literature exists that outlines the emergence and development of political Islam in Somalia. Kenneth Menkhaus, a professor at Davidson College, has produced several pieces on the history of Islamism in Somalia and how Islamism has frequently been obstructed by the Somali culture (2002). The Center for Countering Terrorism, a U.S. Army West Point center, has produced a study of Al-Qaeda in Africa as well, although an almost complete lack of footnotes or reference citations make much of the work difficult to critique.

## **B. SOCIOLOGICAL LITERATURE**

While extensive works exist regarding diasporas in general, there still exist some gaps in researching the U.S. Somali Diaspora, in particular, the nature of these communities' integration into their host country. While works such as *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, provide a baseline review of immigration and assimilation in general terms (Brazier, 2000), it is not intended to focus on each group's individual assimilation issues.

With respect to Somali Diasporans, a recent study conducted by the United Nations Development Program attempts to track where Somalis who have fled Somalia actually live. Aside from outlining general population numbers of various Somali Diaspora communities, the study further attempts to characterize how the various waves of Somali émigrés integrate differently to their host country and relate back to their homeland (United Nations Development Project, 2009).

Other studies, such as the Putnam and Noor (1999) study, attempt to study the Somali-American Diaspora and what factors have affected the immigration and assimilation of this group, including factors such as religion and skin color. The Putnam and Noor study point to the multiple obstacles for Somali Diasporas in America. Namely, the fact that the larger U.S. society may view the Somali immigrants as simply part of the “black” community; however, the African-American community does not view them that way. Furthermore, the Somali community does not view itself as black either but rather as a separate community. Nevertheless, the relevance of this work suffers significantly due to its age and pre-9/11 lens.

Other studies focus on how American-Somali communities interact with their non-Somali neighbors. One study of interest is *Somali Immigrant Settlement in Small Midwestern U.S. Communities*, produced by the University of Wisconsin; it studies the integration of Somali immigrants into a rural suburb of Minneapolis-St. Paul (Grossman, 2007). The author observed factors that first led to the migration of the Somali-American community away from larger metropolitan areas to more rural communities and then examines how the group interacts with the new host populations and the process of assimilation.

A study that combines both a criminology and sociology approach to its research was conducted by city of Minneapolis’s Office of Civil Liberties regarding Somali youth issues (Adan, 2006). This study reviews current issues in education, assimilation, crime, and unemployment, which affect the Somali community and, in particular, younger Somali-Americans (Adan). This study is particularly effective in describing assimilation barriers based upon education, language proficiency, and cultural reluctance to “Americanize”.

An interesting study conducted by the Cedar Riverside Neighborhood Revitalization Program (CRNRP) and the Somali American Education Program (SAEP), looks at how to better engage the Somali youth community in Minneapolis’s Cedar Riverside neighborhood (Kasper, Fleck, & Gardner, 2009). The study conducts multiple interviews of community activists, social workers, and also Somali youth. Unfortunately, the study, by its own admission was unable to secure interviews from actual Somali

youth living in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood, which arguably undermines the findings (Kasper et al.). Instead, Somali students from other neighborhoods are interviewed about the Cedar Riverside community. While these students spend time in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, they ultimately have the opportunity to leave it, which may provide a different perspective on the state of the community.

In summing up the sociological literature, some key themes emerge. First, there appears to be a consensus that the Somali-American community has to date not achieved the level of assimilation that many of their Muslim counterparts have. As most studies have pointed out, barriers such as language, education, race, and economic status have relegated many members of this community to poverty and minimum wage employment. As pointed out by the city of Minneapolis study, these barriers have led to a rise in crime and gang membership among the members of this population.

In summing up the two groups of research, sociology, and radicalization literature are extensive. The sociological data regarding Somalis and how Muslim Diasporas integrate into western societies appears to be comprehensive. Equally, with respect to radicalization, the literature regarding how individuals progress from typical young adult to terrorist is extensive and appears only limited by the number of terrorists who's data is available. However, where a gap exists in current research is in the analysis between how Somali culture may affect this radicalization process.

As Sageman found in his study in *Leaderless Jihad*, Pakistani youth in the U.K. are drawn to *jihadism* because they are torn between two worlds (homeland and hostland) neither of which fully accepts the individual (Sageman, 2003). This lack of acceptance renders certain youth susceptible to radicalization as they attempt to find identity in the alternate identity of *jihadism*. A useful line of inquiry with respect to youth in the Somali Diaspora becomes whether Somali youth who come to the United States are like those Pakistanis in Europe, who are trapped between cultures, or whether their integration, or failure, to integrate alters the radicalization path.

## **IV. THE SOMALI “CONTEXT”**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The uniqueness of the Somali community, both in Somalia and in the diaspora, stems from what can be referred to as the Somali “context” (Counter Terrorism Center, United States Military Academy (CTC-USMA), 2006, p. 29). This “context” can be loosely defined as the culminated characteristics of the Somali people including their history, religious practices, social structure (in particular clannism and pastoralism), and their global diaspora and its integrative characteristics.

This “cocktail” of factors affects how Somalis integrate into their hostland, how governments are viewed, and how the transnational message of jihadism is received and evaluated. While this context has historically inhibited the rise of jihadist Islam (CTC-USMA, 2006, p. 29) and has made Somalia a “surprisingly poor source” for recruitment to violent jihadist movements (Menkhaus, 2008, p. 39), there are indications that modernity may be undermining these inhibitors with the progression of time. This chapter will examine these factors in order to provide a context when viewing Somali radicalization in later chapters.

### **B. HISTORY OF SOMALIA AND THE US DIASPORA**

As a uniquely American idiom, the phrase “that’s ancient history” refers to an “event . . . that occurred in the remote past and has no practical relationship with the present” (Dictionary.com, 2009). In the colloquial use of this phrase, Americans refer to events that occurred a few years, a few months, or even a few weeks ago. While this view of history and its relevance to modernity is generally shared and understood by most Americans, this is a concept not shared by many in the Muslim world (Lewis B., 2008). In contrast to the American view, the Muslim world’s relationship with “ancient history” and modern history alike is one in which there is a practical relationship to the present. In this way, history provides the hermeneutic in which modern events, its actors, and motives are interpreted.

No place is this view of history more prevalent than in the interpretation of current events by *jihadists*. For example, on October 7, 2001, Osama Bin Laden justified the attacks on the U.S. because of “the on-going humiliation and disgrace” felt by the Muslim people for “more than eighty years” at the hands of the West (Lewis B., 2008). While many Western observers searched for meaning in this, much of the history conscious Muslim world immediately understood this obscure reference (Lewis B., 2008). The reference was to the fall of the Ottoman sultanate in 1918, which marked the end of the last recognized caliph, the head of all Sunni Islam, and “the last in a line of such rulers that dated back to the death of the Prophet Mohammed in 632 A.D.” (Lewis B., 2008, p. 3).

Somalia is no different from the rest of the Muslim world in its relationship to history. The past serves as a lens through which world events may be viewed and the actors in those events can be assigned motives and intentions not otherwise stated (Lewis B., 2008). As Somali culture and history is communicated orally rather than written, this history takes on a prevalence, which may not exist in other cultures. In this oral culture, it is the responsibility of parents to pass along history first hand to their children, who will absorb the history of not only Somalia but also their individual family’s place in that history. As a result, it is common through rote memorization that Somali children learn the name of every male lineage in their line of descent, which allows forefathers to “remain in the consciousness” of their offspring (Issa-Salwe & Olden, 2008). Likewise, for those Somalis driven into exile by war, the original cause of the displacement is remembered and passed on to the next generation as well as any associated grudges against the parties deemed to be responsible for the displacement (Volkan, 1997).

## **1. History of Somalia**

Located in the horn of Africa, adjacent to the Arabian Peninsula, Somalia is a land that has been influenced by both Arab and European powers. Prior to the rise of the Prophet Mohammed, Arab, Persian, and Chinese merchants travelled extensively through northern Somalia and its coastal lands trading with indigenous populations in frankincense and myrrh, which the region continues to export (Putnam, 1993). As early

as seventh-century A.D., the indigenous Cushitic (ancestors of current Somalis) interaction with Arab and Persian traders lead to the introduction of Islam and the proliferation of the Arabic language within the region (Bureau of African Affairs, 2009).

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Somalia and its people felt the full effects of European colonialism. During this time, Somalia was divided into five areas based upon colonial occupation by both far and near powers. The five areas were British ruled northern Somaliland; northern Italian Somaliland; French Somaliland (now independent Djibouti); Western Somalia (the Ogaden region), controlled by Ethiopia; and the Northern Frontier District, controlled by Kenya (Samatar 2007). The Republic of Somalia's five-point star on its national flag serves as a reminder of these five regions and its colonial past (Samatar A., 2007).

During the first two decades of the twentieth-century, British rule was frequently challenged by several Somali nationalist groups. The most notable among them was dervish rebellion led by Mohamed Abdullah, known as the "Mad Mullah" by British soldiers (Bureau of African Affairs, 2009). Abdullah and his insurgency was ultimately quashed by British forces in 1920; however, Abdullah remains a prominent figure in Somali national identity (Bureau of African Affairs, 2009).

After World War II, as part of the Axis surrender, Italy relinquished control of Italian Somaliland. In accordance with this peace treaty, the United Nations was given the responsibility of disposing of all former Italian colonies, and, in 1949, the UN placed Italian Somaliland in trusteeship for 10 years, ultimately granting Somali independence in 1960 (Bureau of African Affairs, 2009). With independence on July 1, 1960, the British and Italian sections of Somalia were merged to form the Somali Republic. For nine years from 1960–1969, Somalia was the most democratic nation on the African continent, with several peaceful transitions of power and a widespread support of the democratic constitution adopted in 1961 (Samatar A., 2008).

Although a democratic government was in place during this time, from its outset Somalia suffered from its colonial heritage and tribal culture. At one point during the 1960s period, "political parties proliferated to the point where Somalia had more parties

per capita than any other democratic country except Israel” (Samatar D., 1987, p. 69). This chaos in the electoral process and the rise of pan-Somali nationalism, which sought to unite French Somaliland and the Somali populated portion of Kenya and Ethiopia, proved too much for the fledgling democracy (Bureau of African Affairs, 2009). This unrest came to a head with Prime Minister Mohamed Ibrahim Egal’s (1967–1969) renouncement of Somalia’s claim to both the Kenyan and Ethiopian portions of Somalia (Bureau of African Affairs, 2009). This action, while providing much needed peace with Somali’s neighbors, angered much of the country including the military. This anger and damage to national pride ultimately manifested itself in a military coup against Egal in October 1969 by Major-General Mohammed Siyaad Barre (Bureau of African Affairs, 2009).

Barre’s takeover marked the end of the constitutional democracy in Somalia. In its place, Barre formed a 20-member Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC), placing himself at its head. From its inception, Barre pursued a philosophy of “scientific socialism” that relied upon and borrowed heavily from the Soviet Union espousing the official mantra of “socialism unites, kinship divides” (Issa-Salwe & Olden, 2008, p. 572; Lewis I., 1998). Barre’s rule was characterized by a marked reduction in political freedoms through the application of an aggressive national security service whose efforts were turned mainly towards Barre’s political enemies (Bureau of African Affairs, 2009). As part of his socialist theme and often for his own political benefit, Barre began the redistribution of property by use of military force throughout Somalia (Bureau of African Affairs, 2009).

As Barre’s predecessor was ousted in part because of his relinquishment of Ogaden territory to Ethiopia, the Barre government undertook to reclaim this region by force. From 1977 to 1978, Somalia engaged in the bloody but ultimately unsuccessful Ogaden war against its western neighbor Ethiopia. In a shift of allegiances that is indicative of the complexity of the region, at one point in the war the Soviet Union was backing both Ethiopia and Somalia in the war. Eventually, the Soviet Union would shift support from Somalia to Ethiopia exclusively, forcing the United States to shift their support to Somalia. Ultimately, Somali forces were driven back by Ethiopia in a

humiliating defeat. This defeat served to embolden several opposition movements against Barre's government and ultimately lead to the demise of the regime.

After the Ethiopian defeat, the Barre government abandoned its socialist philosophy as it embraced the United States as its patron. This relationship included financial and military aid from the United States, including aid in repelling Ethiopian forces who attempted to invade Somalia in 1982. Having found a reliable patron state for support, Barre turned his attention inward to the internal unrest that had been growing since Somalia's defeat in the Ogaden War (Bureau of African Affairs, 2009). Barre unleashed his security forces and military on the populace in order to silence a growing and vocal opposition party within the country. One of the more vivid examples of these strong-arm tactics is Barre's quelling of unrest in the city of Hargesa. In that action, through the indiscriminate use of artillery, the Barre government leveled the town forcing 300,000 Somalis from their homes (or approximately 4 percent of the overall population of the nation) (Menkhaus, 2002). To give a better sense of the proportion of the destruction, forcing 4 percent of a population out of its area of residence would be the equivalent of displacing the greater New York metropolitan area.

However, these repressive tactics only fostered greater opposition to Barre's government, which by 1988 resulted in a full-scale civil war in the country. On January 27, 1991, forces from the United Somali Congress (USC) of the Hawiye clan, acting under an alliance with other opposition groups in the Ogadeen sub-clan and Isaaq clan, overthrew the Barre government (Bureau of African Affairs, 2009).

After the fall of the government, various factions engaged in a protracted struggle for control of the country. Clan-based competition and violence between heavily armed warlords marked this period as each group attempted to gain control of the country (Kohlman, 2009). Initially, one faction of the USC attempted to unilaterally form an interim government. This unilateral action was rejected by other factions, which ultimately led to the northern half of Somalia declaring its independence and forming the Somaliland Republic. The USC's attempted government was subsequently split into two different warring factions. The most notable faction was led by the commander of the USC military wing, General Mohammed Fara Aideed, who would gain prominence in his

later role as a warlord. This struggle for control soon devolved from opposition parties fighting each other to powerful warlords struggling to gain advantage over competing factions. At the same time that clan violence was at its height, political Islam began its slow growth in the region. Similar to the Taliban in Afghanistan, Islamists in Somalia during the post-Barre period gained strength by promising to end the reign of the warlord and establish law and order within the country (Kohlman, 2009).

In 1991 alone, it is estimated that several hundred thousand Somalis died as a result of the conflict (Samatar A., 2008). In response to the widespread humanitarian crisis in the country, in August 1992, the international community authorized the United Nations Operation in Somali, or UNOSOM I, in an effort alleviate the growing crisis (Carson, 2009). The United States began Operation Provide Relief, which entailed the deployment of a meager fifty peacekeeping troops to the region (Samatar A., 2008). This action was intended to protect and stabilize the country enough that relief supplies could begin to make their way safely into the country. It is estimated that at this point Somalia was suffering a national attrition rate of five-hundred thousand deaths a year due to famine and the ongoing violence (Samatar A., 2008).

According to A. Samatar, Operation Provide Relief initially proved successful in getting food to the hungry in Somalia and protecting the relief convoys in the area (2008). The small force however was ineffective in quelling the violence or establishing lasting order in the country. As a result, in 1992, the United Nations, led by the United States, implemented Operation Restore Hope, (UNOSOM II), which was intended to capture the Somali warlords who were escalating the civil war (Samatar A., 2008).

As a note, it was after U.S. intervention during Operation Restore Hope that Al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) founder Shaykh Hassan Aweys made contact with al-Qaida's military wing, headed up by Abu Hafs al-Masri (Gettleman, 2009a). After this contact, al-Qaeda sent four instructors to Somalia to train AIAI soldiers in "advanced combat tactics and weapons" (USMA-CTC, 2006). According to al-Qaeda during this time, these trainers played a direct role in combating the American and UNOSOM forces in

Somalia (Kohlman, 2009). However, in spite of this claim, the extent of the actual role played by AQ operatives during the American intervention remains unclear (Kohlman, 2009).

The UNOSOM II operation is significant in part because of the October 1993 Battle of Mogadishu in which two U.S. Blackhawk helicopters were brought down by militants using rocket propelled grenades (Bowden, 1998). The ensuing battle killed 18 U.S. soldiers and wounded 73 others (Bowden, 1998). The estimates of Somali deaths from the battle range from 300 to 1500, with an unknown number of wounded (Bowden, 1998). From a Somali/U.S. relations standpoint, this battle marked a turning point in U.S. public opinion, particularly after the viewing of the horrific pictures of Somalis dragging U.S. service members' corpses through the streets after the battle. It also marked the beginning of the American withdrawal from the country a year later and the ultimate withdrawal of the majority of the international community (Carson, 2009). Eight years later, and in a post 9/11 world, *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter Mark Bowden's book *Blackhawk Down* was released as a feature film in the United States (Bowden, 1998). While the significance of this movie and its timing can be disputed, it did offer a negative representation of Somalia and the Somali people. Undoubtedly, the "good versus evil" framework that the movie puts the Somalis in has had some effect in forming the negative perception that average Americans has with this population.

While the effects of the Battle of Mogadishu on U.S./Somali relations is unclear, the battle's use for *jihadist* lore is clear. For *jihadist* the battle serves as one of the cornerstones of what Kohlman calls the "founding myths" of Al-Qaeda's methodology (p. 6), namely, that the elite of America's military could be trapped and beaten by a lightly armed group of *jihadists* and that, once beaten, the U.S. would flee (Kohlman, 2009). Al-Qaeda leader, Osama Bin Laden, frequently cites to this battle as proof that America is a "paper tiger" (Laden, 1998).

Since the intervention of U.S. and United Nations in the early 1990s, little stability has been achieved in Somalia. Warlords and clan militias have effectively thwarted numerous attempts by various entities to establish a central government in the country. While pockets of stability have emerged, in particular the region of Somaliland

in the north of Somalia, which declared its independence and has subsequently established a relatively cohesive government, for the most part the country remained relatively lawless. During this time, many local systems of government arose using clan-based *sharia* courts, which provide improved law and order in the community (Menkhaus, 2009). Islamic charities also play a vital role in providing essential service to these communities. These charities, often funded by Gulf States, earned what Menkhaus describes as “performance legitimacy” among the Somali people and, in large part, are probably responsible for the growth of political Islam in this traditional apolitical Sufi state (2009).

In 2006, a loose coalition of these sharia courts, as well as clerics, local leaders, and militias formed the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and overran a U.S. backed alliance of militias known as the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (Carson, 2009). Since the fall of the Barre regime, the ICU proved to be the first power to exercise broad control over most of southern Somalia (Liepman, 2009). This Islamist movement, strongly linked to the Hawiye clan-family, rapidly took control of most major cities in the region including the capital Mogadishu but excluding the independent Puntland/Somiland regions in the north (Issa-Salwe & Olden, 2008, p. 579).

The initial review of the ICU by Somalis was overwhelmingly positive as stability was established, business became productive, and general order was maintained (Menkhaus, 2009). Businesses and the Somali Diaspora generally supported the ICU as Somalis began to believe that the worst of the 15-year unrest was over (Menkhaus, 2009). However, the ICU, while garnering the widespread support of Somalis at home and abroad, also began to force out the more moderate voices in its movement (Menkhaus, 2009). In so doing, the party also undertook two policies that led to its ultimate downfall. The first, is the “blithe” dismissal of U.S. requests to expel a small number of believed al-Qaeda fighters who were operating in Somalia; and second, the continued antagonism against neighboring Ethiopia (Menkhaus, 2009).

During this rise of the ICU, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) under President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, which had been forced to flee to neighboring Kenya during the 2005–2006 unrest, attempted to return to Somalia and made its new seat of

government in Baidoa (Issa-Salwe & Olden, 2008). At the request of the TFG, in 2006, Ethiopian forces, with the backing of the United States, launched an offensive that effectively overthrew the ICU, its leadership and routed the ICU's violent militant wing, al-Shabaab (Orr, 2009). Al-Shabaab ("the youth"), led by Adan Hashi Ayro, a veteran of the Afghanistan jihad who trained with Al-Qaeda prior to 2001, developed the group under the auspices of the ICU in 2005 (2009, p. 6). The TFG, under the protection of the Ethiopian army retook the capital city of Mogadishu on December 28, 2006 (Gartenstein-Ross & Gruen, 2009).

However, within weeks of the defeat, former ICU and Al-Shabaab militias began an effective and organized insurgency against the TFG and the Ethiopian military (Orr, 2009). Al-Shabaab's military commander, Ayro answered to Hassan Dahir Aweys, an individual designated as a terror suspect by the United States for his past leadership role in Al-Ittiad al-Islamiyya (Patterson, 2009). The Ethiopian and TFG responded to the insurgency with military force, which led to a devastating conflict throughout the country that ultimately displaced 700,000 residents out of a population of 1.3 million in Mogadishu and destroyed much of the remaining private and public infrastructure within the capital city (Samatar A., 2008).

The subsequent two years 2006-2008 has seen extensive disease and starvation and by 2008, one third of all "humanitarian casualties" recorded worldwide were in Somalia (Amensty International, 2008). Making matters worse, according to Amnesty International, approximately 6,000 civilians have been killed since 2007, with allegations of war crimes rampant on both sides (Amensty International, 2008).

In January 2009, the Ethiopian army withdrew from Somalia leaving Somalia more or less where it had begun in 2006 (Gettleman, 2009). Upon the Ethiopians' withdraw, moderate Islamist leaders took control of Somalia, including the new president, a former school teacher Sheik Sharif Sheik Ahmed (Gettleman, 2009). Currently, the government is defended by approximately 5000 African Union troops however only portions of the capital remain in control of the transitional government. (Gettleman, 2009).

Despite the desperate situation however, the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops has led to a decline in support for *jihadist* in the region, particularly al-Shabaab (Gettleman, 2009). As the Christian Ethiopian army has withdrawn, al-Shabaab's continued presence and strong-arm tactics have created a rift between them and the general population. A defector of al-Shabaab movement explained, "Our commanders were trying to tell us that there's no Somali national flag and no national borders," and the "jihad will never end. Once we finish in Somali, we go to Kenya and then elsewhere" (Gettleman, 2009). This decline in support may ultimately prove to reduce the overall appeal of *jihadism* in the diaspora community as well, as much of the Somali outrage has largely been nationalistic, as opposed to religious, in nature. Another problem, however, is pointed out by Gettleman, that while it appears the Somali population may be growing weary of the *jihadist* many terrorism analysts contend that Somalia continues to be a magnet for non-Somali "jihadists looking for the next holy war" (2009). These non-Somali extremists are attracted to Somalia as the new religious battlefield against the West, much as Afghanistan and the cause of the *mujahedeem* did during the Soviet occupation.

## **2. Somali Religion**

Although Somalis have a long history with Islam and most Somalis are Muslim, Islam in Somalia continues to be a "veil lightly worn" (CTC-USMA, 2006, p. 29). Even so, Islam is the official religion of Somalia and with very few exceptions Somalia remains one of the most religiously homogeneous countries in the world with an estimated 99 percent of all Somalis being practicing Sunni Muslims (Gall, 1998, p. 386). Somalis as a people have practiced Islam for over a thousand years, after it was brought to East Africa by the Arabian Peninsula in the ninth-century (International Crisis Group, 2005). Somalis historically follow Shafi'i version of the faith characterized by the veneration of saints, including the ancestors of many Somali clans, and has traditionally been dominated by apolitical Sufi orders, which stresses the spiritual aspect of religious experiences (International Crisis Group, 2005, p. 1). However, a more fundamentalist versions of Islam, such as Wahabbism, which has been imported by neighboring Gulf States, does exist (Lewis I., 1998).

The Somali practice of Islam weaves in tribal and pre-Prophet customs, and maintains cultural practices that would otherwise conflict with a more fundamentalist Sunni practice. These include the *siyaaro*, which is a pilgrimage to the tombs of Saints, many of which are tribal/clan ancestors; the celebration of *Mawliid* (the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed); and the application of clan/custom law (*xeer*) and civil law not based upon *Sharia* (Lewis I., 1998). In fact, in many Somali areas where traditional practices thrive, cases when *xeer* law conflicts with *Sharia* law, the binding authority will be *xeer*. Other aspects of Somali culture that tends to show moderation in Muslim observance includes not requiring women to veil, the use of the amphetamine *khat*, which in some practices incorporated into religious customs and the pre-Islamic practice of female circumcision,<sup>2</sup> all of which are strongly opposed by Salafis and Wahhabist Muslims (Lewis I., 1998).

The rise of Salafi Islam however has been a relatively recent phenomenon in Somalia and has gained on and off again prosperity since the fall of the Barre government in 1991 (Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa, 2005). The term *Salafi* derives its name from al-Salaf al-Salih and was originally a modernist reform movement, however it is now more closely associated with a puritan and fundamentalist tradition based upon literalist readings of scripture (International Crisis Group, 2005, p. 1).

This modern rise in Salafist doctrine in Somalia coincides with the rise of the Islamic Courts Union discussed above and the subsequent imposition of *sharia* courts and Islamic schools. This rise can be attributed largely within Somalia to the presence of well-funded Gulf State charities and relief organizations, which while providing much needed humanitarian aid, also serve a missionary role for *salafi* Islam (Menkhaus, 2009). While many Somalis have accepted the presence of Islamists groups in their midst in exchange for security, there is evidence that this form of Islam may not be universally acceptable. As Ken Menkhaus states, the tolerance of *salafists* in Somalia is a begrudging and probably temporary acceptance due to Somali's pastoral life "imbuing

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<sup>2</sup> This practice, also known in the west as female genital mutilation, is practiced by Christians and Muslims in at least 37 countries throughout Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia (Ross-Sheriff, 2003).

the culture with a strong preference for pragmatism over ideology” (2002, p. 111). Despite this pragmatic tolerance, many Somalis find dogmatic salafism, with its transnationalist views and banning of many Somali cultural traits, such as khat, to be an unacceptable Arab infringement (Lewis I., 1998).

An observation of Islamic practice in Somalia and the tension between the varying practices is shown in translated letters from Al-Qaeda operatives in Somalia between 1990–1993; these were translated as part of the U.S. Military Academy’s Harmony project (CTC-USMA, 2006). These Al-Qaeda operatives echo Menkhaus’s opinion that Sufi Islam serves as a barrier to *jihadist* recruitment. In one letter, Sayf al-Islam, an al-Qaeda operative working in Somalia, coins the Sufi/Salafi divide as “the problem,” which appears to serve as a barrier between Sufis and Islamists in day to day relations (Database, 1992–1993). Sayf explains the difficulty in working to maintain peace between the two sects in order, as Sayf describes it, to “win them [the population] over step by step” from Sufism (Database, 1992–1993). However, even the Al-Qaeda operatives acknowledge that Somalis as a general rule view the imposition of strict Islamic doctrine as a Gulf Arab custom that is “un-Somali” (Lewis I., 2004).

However, just as Somali pragmatism can drive Somalis away from political Islam, so to can the “felt necessities of the times” cause Somalis to rally under the banner of Islam (Holmes, 1991). This energy for zealotry is particularly heightened when there is a threat from an outside (i.e., non-Muslim) force, such as the British during colonization or more recently the Christian Ethiopian incursion (Menkhaus, 2002, p. 110). In fact, the only two times in Somali history that Islamists have successfully mobilized large numbers of Somalis is in fighting foreign Christians—the first is Said Mohamed Abdullah Hassan (the “Mad Mullah”) against British and Italian colonization in the early twentieth-century and the second against the Abyssinian conquest in the sixteenth-century (CTC-USMA, 2006, p. 29).

When coming to the United States, the Somali version of Islam appears to retain much of its nuances as practiced in Somalia (OSP1, 2009). However, as can be seen in Chapter V, it is likely that the religious practice will not stay stagnant but will rather

become more mainstream with that of the rest of the United States' Muslim population. This may include the adoption of a more Salafist form of Islam, although not necessarily political Islam.

### 3. “Clannism”

One of the most resilient features of Somali society is that of the clan. As I. M. Lewis points out, while the Somali nation-state is an “accidental aggregate of peoples and tribes thrown together more or less by geographic boundaries . . . . the clans serve as the basic building blocks of Somali society” (2004, p. 489). These invisible forces of clanship predate the nation state of Somalia and have survived the rise and fall of both democratic and authoritarian governments alike. These forces have frequently played an integral role in bringing about the demise of both.

This clan identity and family lineage serve as an oral calling card among Somalis and serves as the basis for Somali personal identity. A poignant example of the importance of this lineage is provided by a British journalist reporting from the capital, Mogadishu, following the overthrow of the president, Mohamed Siyad Barre, in 1991. The journalist, who was observing a queue of civilians waiting to pass through a roadblock manned by rebels, describes the following (Hartley, 2004, p. 184):

As each person was waved through, another came forward and began uttering a litany of names. My guide with the flaming red hair said the people were reciting their clan family trees. The genealogies tumbled back generation after generation to a founding ancestor. It was like a DNA helix, or a fingerprint, or an encyclopedia of peace treaties and blood debts left to fester down the torrid centuries. I was thinking how poetic this idea was, when bang!, a gunman shot one of the civilians, who fell with blood gushing from his head and was pushed aside onto a heap of corpses.

“Wrong clan,” said my flaming-haired friend. “He should have borrowed the ancestors of a friend.” (Issa-Salwe & Olden, 2008, p. 574)

The Somali clan system is a “national” genealogy, an ethnic family tree divided through paternal descent (in the male line) with each clan named after the founding ancestors of the group (Lewis I., , 2004, p. 494). The highest fork in this genealogical tree can be traced back to two brothers, “Samaale” and ”Sab”. These two brothers and

their descendents form what can be called the “clan-family” (Lewis I., 2004, p. 495). Below this clan-family exists the actual clans, which range in size between 20,000 and 100,000 members, although 20,000 is considered an average number (Lewis I., 1998). Below the clans are numerous sub-clans and lineages that further define the family and identity of the individual. The “Samaale” clan-family stems from nomadic pastoralists of Somalia and are the predominate clan family in both Somalia and the diaspora (Lewis I., 1998). This clan family is made up of four families, the Dir, Daarood, Isaq and Hawiye (Lewis I., 1998).

The “Sab” clan-family, by contrast, originates from agro-pastoralists and are broken down into two clan families of the Digil and Rahanweyn clans (Lewis I., 2004). These clans generally occupy the more agriculturally rich Somali area between the Shebelle and Juba Rivers in southern Somalia (Lewis I., 2004, p. 495).

The majority of the Somali population is made up of these six clans. These clans can be further divided into numerous sub-claims, for example, the Samaale’s Dir clan is divided into the Issa and Badabursi sub-clans (Issa-Salwe & Olden, 2008). The Daarood clan also can be divided into the Mijerteyn, the Dulbahante, the Warsangeli, the Marrehen and the Ogaden tribes (Issa-Salwe & Olden, 2008).

The clan continues to be an important social structure in both Somalia and its diaspora community, although in the diaspora its significance as the fundamental “principle of personal and social identity” varies greatly (Lewis I., 2004, p. 490). For instance, clannism, especially in unstable environments such present-day Somalia, remains the basis for security and support within the society. As a pastoral society, Somalis rely heavily upon the clan system in order to implement social order and conduct general governance of areas. This reliance on clanship varies with the availability of alternative sources for such security, support, and identity. The growth and reliance upon clannism in Somalia since the beginning of the Somali civil war has been exponential as the clan frequently has served as sole source of security within the community; this is especially true with respect to the clan-based Sharia court systems (Lewis I., 2004, p. 505). In more peaceful times, when a functioning government exists, or in a stable western diaspora where social supports and security are available through a state

apparatus the necessity for the clan dissipates. As I.M. Lewis states, “the clan divisions of the nation tend to unify reactively in response to external pressures and to dissociate when they disappear” (2004, p. 493). As will be discussed in Chapter V, in western nations where identity is developed by the individual, the clan identity can also be challenged as individuals struggle with defining themselves separate from lineage.

The prevalence of the clan within the diaspora is difficult to define with precision. As OLE1 stated, the clan continues to be a prevalent force within this community, particularly among middle age and older Somalis (OLE1, 2009). When asked how clannism fares in the younger Somali population, OLE1 replied that many young Somalis claim that the “clan is not important, that we are all Somalis,” but at the same time they will still live segregated from other clans and overtly shun other Somalis based solely upon their clan affiliation (2009).

Anecdotally, OSP1 relayed a story illustrating the resiliency of these clan ties. According to OSP1, an area Somali female disappeared in a Columbus, Ohio park. The woman’s clan organized an impromptu search party to go look for her. During the search a Somali man from a Westside clan arrived to offer his help but was turned away by organizers who stated “she’s not from your clan so what do you care?” (OSP1, 2009). OLE1 and MLE1 both stated that younger Somalis will profess to outsiders that clan affiliation is not important (OLE1 & MLE1, 2009). However, despite their claims, the clan still appears to play an important role in residential location, marriages, and identity (2009).

A review of where Somalis live also shed little light on how clan integrity fares in the U.S. For instance, in the Columbus, Ohio Diaspora, OSP1 indicated that communities continue to be separated along clan lines, with clan affiliation continuing within the west and north Columbus communities (2009). OLE1 however indicated that while the minority Bantu population resides in the west side of Columbus, a large smattering of different Somali clans exist throughout the city (OLE1, 2009). The Marehen (sub-clan of Darood) remain the most prominent clan in the Columbus area (OLE1, 2009). The clan divide was not as observable in the Minneapolis/St. Paul

Diaspora according to MLE1, who observed that the close living arrangements, particularly high-rise apartment buildings within the Twin Cities has deteriorated the prevalence of the clans amongst the Somalis (MLE1, 2009).

#### 4. Pastoralism<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned above, historically the primacy clans of Somalia have their roots in a pastoralist heritage, with four of the six clans assuming a pastoral lifestyle. Despite extensive urbanization over the last 50 years in Somalia, approximately 50–60 percent of the population continues to live a pastoral lifestyle (CTC-USMA, 2006, p. 30). The significance of pastoralism, especially in forming theories about *jihadism* and radicalization, is far from universally agreed upon. In one respect, societies with a history of pastoralism have proven difficult to organize politically due to their independent structure and lack of a clear need for central governance. As Arab explorer Richard Burton explained it, the Somalis are “a fierce and turbulent race of republicans” or later as an outspoken sergeant in the British-African corps judged “Somalis no good, every man his own chief” (Lewis I., p. 493). Both of these examples are directly attributable to pastoral societies where a central, national government is not necessary for day-to-day existence, but rather the individual and his family group is of primary importance. To the contrary, a *jihadist* doctrine discourages this sort of clan identity in favor of a more transnational identity. Instead of an obligation to the family, *Salafi jihadism* emphasizes an obligation to a worldwide Muslim peoplehood (*umma*). These differences in global outlooks and allegiances may explain why historically *Salafism* has not been a widely marketable belief system to pastoralist societies where “every man is his own chief” (Lewis I., p. 493).

Other important aspects of pastoral life, when considering the propensity toward radicalization, is the pastoral disposition toward “honor cultures” (Nisbett, 1996). Generally, an “honor culture” is one where an individual as a cultural expectation is required to protect his honor, including by force if necessary (Nisbett, 1996). “Honor” in

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<sup>3</sup> Pastoralism is defined as “the practice of herding as the primary economic activity of a society.” (Dictionary.com, 2009).

this context is defined not so much as an individual's personal honesty or integrity but rather as the individual's "social status, precedence, or right to respect" (Stewart, 1994). Honor cultures normally arise within societies in which the individual has an economic risk from his fellow contemporaries and the state is either weak or non-existent in protecting these interests (Stewart, 1994). Within a herding or pastoral society, this is particularly true where a herder's livelihood is based upon his ability to protect his flock and ward off thieves and competing herdsmen. Under pastoral circumstances, herders must not only be able to defend their flock but that ability must be sufficiently "advertised" to the larger community (Stewart, 1994).

In a tribal-pastoral society such as Somalia, this honor culture tends to be held in the collective amongst the tribe and serves as "a cohesive force that strengthens the group's identity by defining its boundaries and providing defense against competing groups, and is more important than individual honor" (Moritz, 2008, p. 103). As a result, in tribal, pastoralist societies, the "honor of the collective" is the primary objective because the tribe as a whole protects and defends the security and economic interests of the members (Moritz, 2008, p. 103). This may in part help to explain the importance of clan and clan identity within the Somali community discussed in section three of this chapter.

What is most notable about this "honor of the collective" is the fact that research indicates that, as with other honor cultures, these collectives exhibit resiliency through generations even when the society itself has urbanized out of the grazing lands (Nisbett, 1996). This honor culture manifests itself in various forms of Somali society, including the diaspora communities.

As noted by Scuglik and Alarcon, this tribal violence and clan mentality remain an integral part of Somali culture and may explain in part the role of gangs striving for social stature in immigrant communities (2005, p. 23). These manifestations could also help to explain why individuals who have never stepped foot in their Somali homeland react so viscerally to allegations of war crimes against Somali women who they have never met, or why missteps by law enforcement against an individual in the Somali communities is internalized by the entire community. MLE1 speculated much of the

impediment to outreach in the Somali community on the federal side stems from the massive FBI “roundups” of Muslims shortly after 9/11 (MLE1, 2009). Despite being eight years removed, this memory remains imbedded in the Somali-American psyche. MLE1 noted also the Somali sensitivity towards slights or signs of disrespect, explaining how one misstep would close the door forever to an individual (2009).

## **5. History of the U.S. Somali-Diaspora**

A *diaspora* is generally defined as a community or group who share “a common origin who reside, more or less on a permanent basis, outside of the borders of their homeland” (Barth, 2003, p. 452). In their host land, these groups identify themselves or are identified by others as part of their homeland’s national community, and generally participate in the affairs of their homeland, either politically, economically or socially (Barth, 2003, p. 452).

Diasporas and their homeland have a complex relationship that changes depending upon the conditions in both lands. The diaspora’s role can be both passive and active (Barth, 2003). These passive roles take on many forms, including instances where the diaspora community is blamed by other members of the hostland for events and actions of their homeland (Barth, 2003). Examples of this include the negative treatment of members of the Iranian Diaspora in the U.S. by non-Iranian U.S. citizens during the Iran Hostage Crisis or the internment of Japanese Americans after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Unlike the passive roles listed above, diasporas can assume an active role as well and thereby influence the foreign policy of their host land and the actions of their homeland. For instance, a recent study by the World Bank found that “by far the strongest effect of war on the risk of subsequent war works through Diasporas. After five years of post-conflict peace, *the risk of renewed conflict is around six times higher in the societies with the largest Diasporas in America* [emphasis added] than in those without American Diasporas” (Barth, 2003, p. 451). In particular, American Diasporas due to

their relative prosperity and ability to access political systems appear to have a greater capacity to effect conditions and politics in their homeland than other Diaspora communities (Barth, 2003, p. 451).

At their best, these diasporas can serve as bridges between host and homelands; they can provide significant economic support to their homelands and can “transmit the values of pluralism and democracy” back to their homelands (Barth, 2003, p. 450). Diasporas, in many countries, serve as a crucial financial lifeline for the population, and, as in Somalia, can provide a pool of educated and prepared leaders for the homeland.

However, not everything that diasporas bring to the table is positive for either the homeland or host land. As stated above in the World Bank findings, diasporas can frequently serve as the financier and instigators of violent unrest through the support of extremists, terrorists, and insurgencies. As stated by Barth, the interest that the diaspora sometimes has in the homeland is one of collective identity or connection with the people, not the actual state (2003, p. 455). For example, during the first Palestinian intifada in Israel, many American Jews pressured Israel to adopt a moderate response to the uprising on the perception that “Jews do not break bones” (Barth, 2003, p. 455). This detachment allows diasporas to see conflicts and national interests in more dogmatic lights instead of the more pragmatic view that individuals who are trapped living in war zones will normally adopt.

Furthermore, diasporas can “internationalize” or “broaden [a local] conflicts by importing it to the hostland,” which thereby expands the local conflict to an international one (Barth, p. 450). As Lyons (2004) states:

Conflict-generated Diaspora groups are not societies to promote Esperanto or to study long gone cultures. They are social networks that link past conflict, the contemporary challenges of living in a host state and an aspiration of return to a particular piece of territory that is the symbolically important homeland.

This “link,” as Lyons states, includes the fluid interaction back and forth between hostland and homeland with respect to how its diaspora community is treated and how the homeland perceives this treatment of its diaspora members.

*a. Somali Immigration*

Immigration from Somalia and other African countries to the United States has grown exponentially over the last three decades. During period from 1971 to 1980, the number of African immigrants to the U.S. was 80,779 (Healy, 2009). Between 1981 and a 1990, this number jumped to 176,893 and would later double to 354,000 during the period from 1991 to 2000 (Putnam, 1993).

Similarly, the numbers for refugees from Somali has risen dramatically, and this directly reflects the political instability in the region. The 1990 U.S. Census counted the Somali population in the United States at only 2,070 (Putnam, 1993). The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) reported in 1985 that only 139 Somalis were admitted to the United States (2001). However, with the fall of the Barre regime in 1991 and the on-set of the violent warlord period, the numbers increased exponentially. In 1996, the number of Somali immigrants increased to 6500 and, by 2003, over 43,000 Somalis had entered the United States (Healy, 2009).

Today, the estimates for the number of Somali-Americans living in the United States vary greatly. Estimates range from conservatively 30,000, based upon official 2000 U.S. Census totals, to over 200,000 as reported by Somali community organizations (Woessner, 2002). It is probably safe to assume that the actual number of Somalis living in the United States is significantly larger than the 2000 census estimates. First, since the census, there has continued to be migration by Somalis to the United States since 2000. According to the Office of Immigration Statistics, *Annual Flow Report* (2008), refugees from Somalia have continued with the Office of Immigration Services (OIS) reporting refugee/asylee migration from Somalia to the United States at the following rates: 10,405 in 2005; 10,357 in 2006; and 6,969 in 2007 (Jeffreys, 2007). As a result, the 30,000 estimate in 2000 is at least doubled based upon 2005–2007 numbers.

According to the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, the two largest Somali populations in the U.S. are in Twin Cities of Minneapolis/St. Paul and Columbus, Ohio (Jeffreys, 2007). It is estimated that each of these communities has between 17,000 and 80,000 residents who identify themselves as Somali (Jeffreys, 2007). However, it is

difficult to estimate the actual numbers (SSD1, 2009). Part of this difficulty lies in the fact that refugees often do not choose where they are originally settled. The U.S. Department of State will frequently determine where new refugees are settled (SSD1, 2009). However, once a population is settled, it frequently will move based upon familial ties to other communities, employment opportunities, housing/schools, or simply unhappiness with current location (SSD1, 2009). For instance, large groups of Somalis can be found in Shelbyville, Tennessee and Lewiston, Maine, not because the State Department originally settled them there, but rather they moved for affordable housing or employment opportunities

Regardless of their ultimate settlement location in the United States, “[f]ew countries in the world possess Diasporas with as much economic and political importance to their homeland as does Somalia” (Menkhaus, 2009). As of 2004, Somalia was ranked as the fourth most remittance dependent nation in the world (United Nations Development Project, 2009). The Somali Diaspora’s annual contributions to the homeland are estimated to be between 2.5 to 3 billion dollars and serve as one of the cornerstones of the Somali economy (Healy, 2009). These remittances, according to the World Bank, represented 23percent of the average Somali household income and as an extreme example, in the Hargeisa province of Somaliland, up to 25 percent of households claimed remittances as their sole source of income (Healy, 2009, p. 19).

Laura Hammond contends that “[r]emittances result in the strengthening of this transnational community that exists in multiple localities [and the] , , inability or failure to remit can weaken the social ties, sow the seeds of conflict and alienation of the sender” (Hammond, 2006). With respect to Somali cultures, the failure to live up to this obligation can sometimes have dire consequences, such as a lack of marriage prospects for a family that fails on its remittance obligations. Despite the burdens of remittance payments and the difficult economic situation many U.S. Somalis find themselves in, there is little evidence of “remittance fatigue” among the American-Somali Diaspora (Healy, 2009, p. 19). Despite Healy’s contention, however, one interviewee did indicate that in his experience, the dire need in the homeland and the ubiquiteness of

telecommunications between the diaspora and homeland makes the frequent requests for money a begrudgingly tolerated burden for the community (OLE1, 2009).

Other on-going connections between the Somali Diaspora and homeland include what can be called “human capital” remittances that significantly shape the country and its politics. This human capital remittance is the practice of western educated diaspora members returning to their homeland to serve in the government or in other positions of leadership. For instance, the first Prime Minister of the Transitional Nation Government (TNG), as well as many of his cabinet, were from the Somali Diaspora community. In Somaliland, 10 of the 29 Ministers of the government came from the Somali Diaspora. As of January 2008, approximately two-thirds of the cabinet and the Prime Minister of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), are members of the Somali Diaspora (Healy, 2009, p. 15).

This large involvement of the diaspora in Somalia indicates the transborder nature of the Somali community. As one interviewee pointed out, it is difficult for western minds to understand the nature of the relationship between the diaspora and the Somali homeland (MLE1, 2009). It is not the same as a westerner, of Scandinavian descent, wanting to visit Sweden. In that case, the westerner visiting his Scandinavian homeland is going as a tourist (MLE1, 2009). However, the Somali émigrés generally intend to return to their homeland and continue to maintain close family connections (MLE1, 2009). These connections are more like returning to one’s hometown, with those same hometown family, friends and history (MLE1, 2009).

## V. CRISIS OF CULTURE

The necessary backdrop in assessing the radicalization process of members of the Somali-American Diaspora lies in understanding the “crisis of culture” that exists within the second and third generation émigrés in this community. This crisis of culture, as described by OSP1, is actually a crisis of identity among the second generation created by the “push” to integrate into Western society while at the same time feeling the “pull” of their Somali identity. Although this tension is a relatively global phenomenon for immigrant youth, as demonstrated by struggles with language, perceived and real discrimination, cultural incompatibilities, and conflicts between adults and children, Somali children encounter greater difficulty in integration than other groups due to the unique nature of their culture (Scuglik & Alarcon, 2005). As explained by Andrew Liepman, Deputy Director of Intelligence at the U.S.’s National Counterterrorism Center, the American Somali community’s “relative linguistic isolation and sudden adjustment to American society has reinforced, in some areas, their greater insularity compared to other more integrated Muslim immigrant communities” and “has aggravated the challenges of assimilation for their children” (Liepman, 2009). This chapter will discuss these challenges of assimilation described by Liepman, and how it creates a crisis of identity within the Somali Diaspora that may render Somalis susceptible to radicalization.

The integrative experience of the Somali Diaspora in the U.S. has generally been characterized by the formation of “tightly knit and insular enclaves” that are predominantly “poor and overwhelmingly uneducated” (Menkhaus, 2009). According to 2007 U.S. Census data, the Somali community is considered among the poorest and newest immigrant communities in the United States with nearly 60 percent of the U.S. Somali Diaspora community having arrived in the United States since 2000 (Bureau, 2007). The 2007, U.S. Census indicates that 51 percent of the Somali Diaspora community lives in poverty with a median household income of \$21,461, compared with the national median of \$61,173 (Bureau, 2007). Furthermore, the Somali American Diaspora is also one of the youngest émigré communities with an average age of 26.8 (Bureau, 2007). As a result of this, this community “suffers the highest unemployment

rate among East African Diaspora communities and . . . the lowest rate of college graduation” (Liepman, 2009, p. 2) with over 50 percent of all Somalis under the age of 25 not having not completed high school (Pew Research Center, 2007).

These statistics indicate a serious issue regarding Somali integration. This poor integration is mainly caused by two interdependent factors: a lack of English language proficiency and acculturation stress (“culture shock”) brought about by race and the pressures of westernization.

#### **A. THE LANGUAGE BARRIER**

Eighteen years of relative lawlessness in Somalia has caused illiteracy rates to skyrocket and has all but decimated the homeland’s formal education system. According to A. Samatar, literacy in Somalia has declined since the beginning of the civil war in 1991 from 75 percent to 20 percent in 2006 (University of Minnesota, 2008). This is in stark contrast to pre-civil war eras where it would be common for an educated Somali to know the national Somali dialect, English, Italian, and Arabic (Samatar A., 2008). However, today, new arrivals to America are significantly burdened not only by a lack of knowledge of English but also illiteracy in their own Somali dialect. As a result, this can translate in English proficiency at less than 20 percent of the first generation Somali Diasporants in the U.S. (OSP1, 2009).

Aggravating this problem is the fact that the émigré process gives few opportunities for parents to obtain a working knowledge of the English language. According to a SSD1, who works within the Columbus Somali community, the language programs offered to new immigrant arrivals operate off of the concept of “attendance not results” (SSD1, 2009). This means that the contractor for language services is paid based upon the attendance, not whether any results are actually achieved for the students (SSD1, 2009). Many times a Somali émigré will teach the class in his native tongue with very little English actually being spoken, which exacerbates the problem (SSD1, 2009).

Proficiency in English, more than any other factor, alters both a young diasporant’s identity and his relationship to his family in the U.S. (Scuglik & Alarcon, 2005). In the field of immigration studies, it generally accepted that acquisition of

English (in English speaking hostlands) is the most important driver for acculturation into the host society for an immigrant population (Guarnaccia & Lopez, 1998). The acquisition of English “turbo charges” the acculturation process, especially among young immigrants who will rapidly adopt western culture; just as their parents, who may not be fluent, will either stay stagnant culturally or in many cases retreat deeper into their homeland’s culture (Guarnaccia & Lopez, 1998).

In many cases where young adults acquire English while parents do not, the family roles are altered; the young men become the family’s communication link to the outside world. This role of family representative dramatically shifts power from a historically patriarchal structure to one in which a teenage boy or young adult is making decisions regarding traditional parental responsibilities and roles, such as paying of bills. English-proficient teens can also learn to manipulate family situations to their advantage by filtering communications, which further shifts the balance of power in the household (Guarnaccia & Lopez, 1998, p. 23). This is made worse, according to MLE1 (and reinforced by Guarnaccia & Lopez in their 1998 study), where parents in the Somali community are unsure regarding the legal limits of discipline over children in the United States (Guarnaccia & Lopez; 1998; MLE1, 2009). In many cases, Somali parents believe, or are told by their English-speaking children, that they cannot physically discipline their children because of American laws regarding corporal punishment (Guarnaccia & Lopez, 1998). As a result, this language gap also serves to widen the cultural and identity gap between Somali youth and their parents and community.

## **B. ACCULTURATION ISSUES—RACE, IDENTITY, AND CULTURE SHOCK**

After coming to America, Somalis may for the first time encounter “race” as a method of social classification. In coming to the United States’ racially heterogeneous and race-conscious society, Somalis move from a majority status in both race and religion in their homeland to being faced with a minority status in both.

In their homeland, Somalis live in one of the most homogenous societies in the world, as over 99 percent of the country is Sunni Muslim and “black” (Guarnaccia &

Lopez, 1998). By contrast, in coming to the United States, a Muslim émigré will join approximately 2.4 million other Muslims out of a total population of 300 million U.S. citizens, thereby making up less than one percent of the U.S. population (Pew Research Center, 2007, p. 10). While Somalis historically have adopted an identity based upon religion and clan, this issue of race being either “white and black” shifts the nature of identity to a racial one, as they are placed by the larger society that is more race conscious than their homogenous homeland (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007, p. 76). As a result, Somalis feel categorized by the larger society as “black,” instead of more familiar identities as Muslim, Somali, or Hawiye clan, identities that they may have maintained in their homeland for generations.

This new classification may not only be new for Somalis but also unwelcomed. As identity is first, “who I say I am,” and second, “who society says I am,” a conflict arises within Somalis between what society seeks to impose and how the individual or community view themselves (Stone, 1962). This is especially true where the imposed identity is not perceived as advantageous or desirable to the group or individual (Stone, 1962). In these cases, the individual will attempt to assert an alternative identity, such as nationality or religion (Stone, 1962).

In the case of Somalis, their arrival to the U.S. may be marked with the label of “black,” which will be rejected by Somalis in lieu of an alternate identity. Researchers studying the integration of African migrant communities to Western nations have found almost universally this rejection phenomenon of the immigrant population away from the “black” community (African-American) towards alternative identities (Ajrouch, 2007).<sup>4</sup> Most studies have found that in lieu of integrating into the U.S. “black” identity, migrant communities tend to stress alternative identities such as nationalism and religion (Ajrouch, 2007). Interestingly, the converse of this principal applies in a study of

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<sup>4</sup> This phenomenon is not restricted to Somalis; many black émigrés coming to the United States will react in a similar manner including Jamaican, Haitian, Ethiopian, Senegalese, and Trinidad émigrés (Foner, 1987; Stafford, 1973; Waters, 2003; Woldemikael, 1989).

Lebanese émigrés who tend to integrate towards “white” U.S. societal identities and may not accentuate religious and nationalistic differences in comparison to their black African counterparts (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007).

A 2009 study of West African Muslims who immigrated to Harlem, New York revealed the same strengthening of nationalist and religious identity in an attempt to fend off the societal classification into the overall African-American community (Abdullah, 2009). In this study by Abdullah, West African Muslims, despite living in close proximity and working in the same economic community as their African-American counterparts, tended to accentuate their national and religious distinctions such dress and language from the larger community (2009).

Strengthening of this alternate identity will also include becoming more devout religiously in order to further strengthen the groups “otherness.” A vivid example of this can be found in the *hijab* (Muslim veil), which can be considered a strategic representation of the values and identity perceived to be superior to those of the dominant society (Ajrouch, 2007, p. 322). In the Ajrouch study, researchers found that an overwhelming majority of Somali women in fact wear the *hijab* in Canada,<sup>5</sup> despite the fact that women in Somalia “do not simply wear the *hijab* culturally” (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007, p. 89). From this evidence, Ajrouch concludes that émigré groups to actually become more religious upon migration in order to distinguish themselves from ethnic classifications that they do not determine to be advantageous (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007, p. 89).

### C. “LIVING LIKE A TURTLE”

If first generation Somali refugees struggle to maintain an identity apart from the larger society and even strengthen their homeland identity, the second and third generation youth face a much greater problem as they attempt to please their parents and

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<sup>5</sup> While the Ajrouch study examined the Somali community in Canada, not the United States, the proximity of Canada to the U.S. and (as Ajrouch states) the proximate cultural values of the two countries make it somewhat comparable. However, it is logical that with the United States history of slavery and racial discrimination against blacks, the *hijab* would become more important in the U.S. because “black” status may be seen as even more undesirable than in Canada.

community by retaining Somali culture and identity while at the same time assimilating into the larger educational and social structure of the U.S.. One Somali girl described the conflict to a U.S. newspaper reporter as “living like a turtle: you have to learn to live on both the land and the water, at home and at school” (Thatcher, 2000). However, this land/water negotiation is difficult where both forces actively resist the other. As an example, Shirwa Ahmed, one of the first Minnesota Somali youths to disappear, expressed bafflement at African-American student’s unwillingness to accept him when they (African-American Students) stated, “You’re not black, go back to Africa” (Elliott, 2009). Ahmed asked his friend, “[h]ow can they [African-American students] be mad at me for looking like them? We’re from the same place” (Elliott, 2009, p. 4). At the same time, African-American students were rejecting Ahmed for being “not black,” Ahmed’s relatives were criticizing him for mixing with and emulating the “ghetto people” (Elliott, 2009, p. 4).

W.E.B. Dubois, in 1903, summed up this polarity in cultures, and how it creates dissonance in identity by saying:

Immigrant adolescents are both more vulnerable and more resilient to the challenges they face than the adults in their lives, but it also places them in a conflictual position between the original and the new. It is an overwhelming challenge for many of these adolescents to attempt to merge such polar cultures and still allow comfort with individual identity. (DuBois, 1903)

OSP1 explained this conflict between the “original and the new” by observing that the “freedoms, individualism and liberties” of American society creates a shock to the socio-centric identity of the Somali clan and family culture (OSP1, 2009). In Somalia, the family and clan define identity for Somali youth, and cultural norms are taught to the young by the family (OSP1, 2009). The fact that the family is also the only source for shelter, security, and education gives it the primacy and the authority to serve as the one voice for the young person’s identity (OSP1, 2009). However, when Somalis come to the United States, culture is no longer taught exclusively by the family (OSP1, 2009). Rather, it is taught by a combination of community, the media, peers, and public education (OSP1, 2009). Also, as many of the needs of individuals, such as security and

education, are met by society in the U.S. as opposed to the family, the family/clan take on less importance (OSP1, 2009). Therefore, just as new, identity-shaping influences arise, the importance and reliance on the family dissipates.

In these ways, the lack of integration is more akin to Muslim Diasporas in European nations where economic and integrative barriers abound frequently causing insular communities to form. For example, as in the Twin Cities, the United Kingdom community of Beeston, which produced three of the four London 7/7 bombers, the diasporas are insular, generally residing together in tightly knit neighborhoods (Alsan, 2009; MLE1, 2009). Poverty in both communities is prevalent with high unemployment rates shared by both. In the Minneapolis Somali community of Cedar-Riverside, the unemployment in 2000 was 17 percent, which is three times the state average of 5.8 percent (Kasper et al., 2009, p. 9). Similarly, the British government has stated that the economic conditions in Beeston Hills stand out as some of the worst in all of the United Kingdom (Alsan, 2009). Likewise, the Pakistani Diaspora in the Beeston suffers from an increasing gang problem and issues with drugs and alcohol among Muslim youth, and like Minneapolis, clashes between youth along racial lines in both communities are common (Adan, 2006; Alsan, 2009).

All of these factors together serve to distort the identity of the young Somali. This crisis of identity leaves the individual torn between two identities, neither of which they fit into. This gap leaves the young person vulnerable to *jihadist* recruiters who offer them an identity that transcends these two competing worlds in favor of an exciting and seemingly meaningful identity of *jihadist* (Sageman, 2003).

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## VI. THE “TRAVELERS”

### A. INTRODUCTION

*All of this talk of the movement must stop ... focus on your life here. If you become a doctor or an engineer, you can help your country. Over there you will be a dead body on the street.* (Elliott, 2009)

The above quote was made by Minneapolis Imam, Sheikh Abdirahman Sheik Omar Ahmend, during a meeting in the spring of 2008 (Elliott, 2009). The meeting was in response recent news that an area travel agent had turned away a young Somali man after he attempted to buy a plane ticket back to Somalia (Elliott, 2009). In the crowd that evening listening to the imam were several young Somalis who in a few months would make the journey to Somalia and join their cohorts who had left in late 2007 (Elliott, 2009). These young men, or “travelers” as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) would later term them, were estimated by the FBI to be in the “tens” (Axe & Ulmer, 2009). However, the exact number of young men making the journey is difficult to determine for several reasons. First, parents may be unwilling to report the disappearance for fear that law enforcement will arrest their children upon returning; and second, the pressure felt in the tight knit community not to talk to law enforcement (MLE1, 2009).

The scene at the mosque that spring evening was being played out throughout several Western countries as young Somali men from Europe and North America answered the call of *jihad*. A British television station in 2009 reported approximately 60 British-Somalis had returned to Somalia to fight (Rugman, 2009). The news report told of a British national of Somali descent living in a London suburb who was a suicide bomber in Somalia in 2007. The 21-year old man, a former college student in west London, in his martyrdom video encourages other Somalis to answer the call, stating, “are you pleased to live as slaves and die as slaves? Death and honor is better than life and humiliation . . . . I advise you to migrate to Somalia and wage war against your enemies” (Rugman, 2009).

Similarly, in Sweden this phenomenon has played itself out, although on a smaller scale to the U.K. with an estimated 20 Swedish-Somalis returning to their homeland for

*jihad* (Landes, 2009). This includes Yassin Ali, a Swedish citizen of Somali origin who after being arrested in Sweden for sending money to Al-Shabab returned in March of 2009 to Somalia where he assumed a top leadership position with Hizbul Islaam, a recently formed coalition of insurgents in Somalia (Landes, 2009).

## **B. “TRAVELERS” A NEW PHENOMENON?**

While the actions of the Twin Cities travelers were a shock to the community, it is worth noting that diasporic involvement in homeland conflicts is not a new phenomenon. Nor is this involvement strictly limited to the Islamic faith. For example, many Jewish Diasporants since the creation of Israel have travelled to defend the homeland when it fell under attack (Mendoza, 2009). Likewise, as pointed out by Lorenzo Vidino, the United States has several decades of experience with U.S. residence “travelling for *jihad*” (Vidino, 2009, p. 3). During the 1990s, it is estimated that between 1,000 and 2,000 U.S. volunteers left to train with various *jihadist* groups throughout the world, a number comparable to European Muslims during the same year (Vidino, 2009, p. 5). Many of these individuals were recruited and funneled through the *Al Khifa* recruiting network, which was funded and organized by Al Qaeda founder Osama Bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam (National Commission on the Terrorist Attacks upon the United States [9/11 Commission], 2004, p. 58). Furthermore, Marc Sageman, in his study of four hundred terrorist biographies, found that 84 percent of “global salafi mujahedin” joined the jihadist movement while living in a diaspora (Sageman, 2004). Likewise, the Committee on the Psychological Roots of Terrorism for the Madrid Summit on Terrorism (2005), consistent with Sageman’s findings, found that 80 percent of jihadist recruits joining and becoming radicalized in western diasporas (Post & Sheffer, 2007, p. 104).

Therefore, the actual recruitment of Somali youth from their U.S. diaspora to their homeland should not be viewed as a totally new phenomenon. However, unlike the 1000–2000 Americans who joined the *jihad* in Afghanistan in the early 1990s, Somali Diasporants, in a post-9/11 environment, may pose a greater concern. This is particularly true where the transnational jihadist organization they are joining has vowed to allegiance to al-Qaeda, an organization that has declared war on the United States (Wright, 2006).

Furthermore, unlike the *jihadist* of the 1990s, the problem of “redirecting” has become a concern for law enforcement, as illustrated by the U.K.’s experience.

The United Kingdom’s experience with the July 7, 2005, attacks on the London underground illustrate the problem of travelers and homegrown terrorism. In that attack, the ringleader Mohammed Siddique Khan originally travelled to Pakistan in November 2004 to fight in the Islamist-declared *jihad* against coalition forces (BBC, 2008). However, Siddique Khan was at some point “redirected” back to the United Kingdom to attack his homeland (Silber & Bhatt, 2007). This “redirecting,” which is the process of convincing a jihadist that his jihad is best fought against the “far enemy” (Western homelands and societies), is what has fostered a new concern for recruitment within these communities.

This concern was validated in August of 2009 when four Australian nationals were arrested in Melbourne, Australia for plotting to attack the Holsworthy Army Barracks on the outskirts of Sidney, Australia (Jane's, 2009). Three of the men were humanitarian refugees from Somalia. Each man had a typical Somali refugee story of fleeing Somalia, spending a limited time in a Kenyan refugee camp, and then gaining refugee status into his host country of Australia. All had fled Somalia as children, learned English, received a western education, and, by most accounts, integrated into Australian society. However, at least one of the plotters, Yacqub Khayre, travelled to Somalia and received training from al-Shabab fighters and then returned to plan his attack in his hostland (Jane's, 2009).

### **C. THE TWIN CITIES’ “TRAVELERS”**

A large data sample was not available regarding the Twin Cities youth who left their Minnesota home to travel to Somalia to fight with al-Shabaab. Data was obtained on 14 of the individuals, including age, education status, criminal history, marital status, and affiliation with Somali youth gangs (see Table 1). Information was taken from court documents as well as interviews conducted by reporters of friends and acquaintances for

several of the Somali travelers. The most extensive information available was for three individuals, Shirwa Ahmed, Mohamed Hassan, and Burhan Hassan, who will each be profiled individually below.

This chapter will discuss the data collected on these individuals and then compare their profiles against other homegrown *jihadists*, taking into particular account the “crisis of culture” discussed above. This is important as the central argument of this thesis is that this identity crisis is a necessary component in analyzing the trajectory of these youths in joining global *jihad*.

Table 1. Twin Cities “Travelers”

	Name	Education	Departed	Age	Criminal History	Gang History
A. First Wave	Shirwa Ahmed	Some College	12/4/2007	26	N	
	Khalid Mohamud Abshir		12/12/2007	26	N	
	Kamal Said Hassan	Some College	12/6/2007	24	N	
	Umar Muhammad Jama		12/8/2007		N	
	Ahmed Ali Omar	High School	12/8/2007	23	N	
	Abdifatah Yusuf Isse	Some College	12/8/2007	25	N	
	Salah Osman Ahmed	Some College	12/6/2007	26	Y	
	Zakaria Maruf	High school	2/1/2008	30	N	Y
B. Second Wave	Mustafa Ali Salat	In High School	8/1/2008	18	N	
	Mohamed "Miski" Hassan	In High School	8/1/2008	17	N	
	Troy Kastigar	High School	11/3/2008	28	Y	
	Jamal Bana	In College	11/3/2008	20	N	
	Mohamoud Hassan	In College	11/4/2008	23	N	
	Abdisalam Ali	In College	11/4/2008	19	N	
	Burhan Hassan	In High school	11/3/2008	17	N	

As can be seen from Table 1, the recruitment and departures of the travelers occurred in what can be categorized as two waves from 2007 to 2008. The first set of “travelers” left between November and December of 2007.<sup>6</sup> In this first wave, the travelers had an average age of 24.8 years old. Only one person had a criminal record, Abdifatah Isse, for possession of drugs and writing bad checks (New York Times, 2009). Of the first wave travelers, five of the six<sup>7</sup> had graduated from high school, and three were engaged on and off in some college level work, although none had obtained a higher degree (New York Times, 2009). Of this group, none appeared to be involved in Somali youth gangs common among in the Twin Cities community (MLE1, 2009).

The second wave of the Somali travelers, by contrast, were four years younger having an average age of 20.2 years and would have registered an average age lower than 20 but for the outlier of the group, 28-year old Muslim convert Troy Kastiger. Except for Kastiger, all of the youth were considered to be the “hope of the Somali American community” (Ahmed, 2009, p. 3).

The exception, Troy Kastiger, known as “Abdirahman,” appears to be the anomaly of this wave. Raised by a single mother in Minneapolis, Kastiger was a 28-year old convert to Islam and according to his mother was of Native American descent with no previous ties to Somalia (Yuen, 2009). Unlike his fellow second wave travelers, Kastiger had several misdemeanor convictions ranging from credit card fraud to driving on a revoked license (Yuen, 2009). With the exception of Kastiger, all of the second wave travelers were excelling in school and had no gang ties or criminal histories.

#### **D. PROFILE #1 SHIRWA AHMED**

In 1996, then 14-year old Shirwa Ahmed left a Kenyan refugee camp for the United States. Ahmed’s mother settled her family in Portland, Oregon and later moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota in order to be closer to her extended family. In 2000, then 18-

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<sup>6</sup> The exact date of departure in many of the cases was unavailable or could not be located by the author. Other departure dates such as Isses’s and Salah Ahmed’s were taken from their criminal indictment, others were taken from press reports. While the exact dates in many cases are not verifiable they do present a general range of times, where the exact date is not known but the month is, the first day of the month is used.

<sup>7</sup> No educational information was available on Jama.

year old Ahmed graduated from Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Described by his teachers as affable, quiet, and an “average student,” Ahmed had by appearances integrated into his hostland as well as any other émigré to the United States (New York Times, 2009). His lifestyle reflected that of any other American teenager, memorized rap lyrics from “Ice Cube”, he wore hip-hop fashions, played basketball after school and hung out at the Mall of the Americas in Minneapolis competing with friends over who could gather the most phone numbers for girls. According to his friends, however, “Shirwa could never do it. He was too shy” (Meryhew, 2009). Although by all outward appearances Ahmed was integrating into American life, according to friends, he was also cognizant of the separation between himself and larger neighborhood community, especially among the African-American students who frequently clashed with Somalis (see Chapter V).

Ahmed attended college on and off and took various jobs, including pushing a wheelchair at the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport along with other Somali youth. Interestingly, half of Ahmed’s income from that job went to pay remittances back to distant relatives in Somalia, which placed an enormous strain on a family that lived below the poverty line (Elliott, 2009). During this time, Ahmed attended a local community college and hung out with friends. However, between 2003 and 2004, Ahmed began to distance himself from his old friends and acquired a more religious-minded friend-set (Elliott, 2009). He began praying at the mosque five times a day, attempted to grow a beard, traded in his hip-hop fashions for pants cuffed at the ankle, and adopted more conservative Muslim customs, such as not touching women. Ahmed began serving as a counselor to other Somali youth dealing with alcohol and drug addiction. Additionally, he would frequently preach to Somali youth outside the mosque and encourage friends to pray.

While friends recount Ahmed reaching out to troubled youth within his community, court documents show Ahmed himself being reached out to by *jihadist* recruiters. Cooperating witnesses detail multiple meetings around the Twin Cities, including meetings in private residences and mosques where conspirators discussed the *jihad* in Somalia and the need for the Somali Americans to fight against Ethiopia (United

States v. Cabdulaahi Ahmed Faarax et al., 2009). In one meeting, a co-conspirator located in Somalia explained via telephone, “We need you guys here,” and others explained that travelling for “jihad was the best thing that they could do” (Elliott, 2009, p. 9).

On December 4, 2007, Ahmed departed the United States as part of the first wave of travelers, according to FBI affidavits (United States v. Cabdulaahi Ahmed Faarax et al., 2009). Ahmed, unlike his fellow travelers, travelled to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in order to conduct the *hajj* pilgrimage before travelling on to Somalia via Yemen (Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor, 2009). Once in Somalia, Ahmed and his fellow travelers trained at an al-Shabaab training camp, which included “dozens” of other young ethnic Somalis from elsewhere in African, Europe, and the United States (2009, p. 8). In late October 2008, Ahmed’s sister received a phone call from her brother stating that he was in Yemen and would be heading home soon.

However, instead of returning home on October 29, 2008, Ahmed drove his explosives laden Toyota Land Cruiser through the streets of Hargeysa, the capital of Somaliland. As he passed through an intersection, he gunned the SUV, plowing into the side of the Ethiopian consulate and detonated the explosives. At the same time, three other vehicles conducted simultaneous attacks in the northern breakaway region of Somaliland. The final death toll included 28 people and 48 wounded (Elliott, 2009). Ahmed would later be identified when FBI agents discovered a severed finger at the site, which fingerprint analysis linked to Ahmed (United States v. Cabdulaahi Ahmed Faarax et al., 2009).

#### **E. PROFILE #2 BURHAN HASSAN**

Hassan Burhaan’s mother fled Somalia with him when he was 8 months old. They settled in a refugee camp in nearby Kenya and arrived in the United States when Burhan was four years old (February 12, 1996). Burhan was a typical American teenager who did well in school, talked about girls, and occasionally borrowed \$20 from his mom on weekends to see the most recent Hollywood movie (Elliott, 2009). Burhan was described by relatives as “the hope of the Somali American Community.” He ranked in

the top of his class at Roosevelt High School, a high school in the Cedar-Riverview neighborhood of Minneapolis. His straight “A” average was made all the more impressive by his enrollment in college level courses, which were sponsored by the University of Minnesota to prepare students for careers in medicine (Yuen & Aslanian, 2009).

By all accounts, Burhan was the model high school senior. He was ambitious, with plans on applying to Harvard in the spring. He studied Islam at nearby Abu-Bakar As-Saddique mosque since 1998, where he also attended the Islamic youth group (Ahmed, 2009). According to his uncle, having no personal memory of Somalia, Burhan exhibited little interest in Somali politics or clan issues, either at home or in Minneapolis (Ahmed, 2009). His uncle, Osman Ahmed, further contends that any perceptions of Somalia and Burhan’s obligations to his homeland were formed within the walls of the As-Saddique mosque (Ahmed, 2009).

On November 4, 2008, as the country prepared to elect a new president, Hassan quietly boarded a Northwest Airlines flight to Kenya. His mother and his friends did not realize that he was missing until that evening when school administrators from Roosevelt High School called his mother to inform her that he son had missed all of his classes that day (Ahmed, 2009). Burhan’s mother contacted relatives, who assured her that Burhan was probably working with the “get out the vote” project in the Cedar Riverview neighborhood and would return that evening (Ahmed, 2009). When Burhan failed to return, his mother entered his room finding his luggage, laptop, clothes, and passport gone. Burhan would not be heard from again until one week later when he called his mother and told her simply, “I am fine, I am in Somalia” (Elliott, 2009).

According to Burhan’s uncle, once his cousin arrived in Somalia, while his mind was still trying to reconcile the promised utopia of Somalia with the real Somalia, his travel documents and belongings were taken from him by the recruiters (Elliott, 2009). Burhan was then whisked away to a hidden military training camp. Once there, instructors stressed to him that if he fled or returned home, he will be tried as a terrorist or end up in Guantanamo (Ahmed, 2009). Seven months later, Burhan’s journey came to end when he was killed, allegedly by al-Shabaab militatants after he indicated his desire

to leave Somalia. The day Burhan died was, coincidentally, one day short of the day his classmates at Roosevelt High graduated. While Burhan's tale devastated his family and friends, he was not the only Somali-American who has made the trip to their homeland.

#### **F. PROFILE #3 MOHAMOUD HASSAN**

Born in 1986 in Somalia, Mohamoud Hassan, nicknamed "Snake," arrived in the United States as a young child (Elliott, 2009). Originally, settling in San Diego, Hassan's family later moved to Minneapolis, where he lived and cared for his grandmother while attending Roosevelt High School (Elliott, 2009). Hassan excelled in high school and was voted "most friendly" by his 2006 graduating class (Elliott, 2009). Hassan surpassed his peers academically and, upon graduation, attended the University of Minnesota (Elliott, 2009). While at college, Hassan became the vice president of the schools Somali Student Union and became interested and passionate about Somali politics (Elliott, 2009). After the 2006, invasion of Somalia by Ethiopia, Hassan published an essay on his Facebook page. The essay, published on May 2, 2007, was in support of the Ethiopian backed Transitional Federal Government (TFG) (Hassan, 2009). In his essay, Hassan articulates how the TFG is the only legitimate authority in the country, and he denounced the Islamic insurgents as "a handful of thugs:"

The reality is that those who oppose the Transitional Federal Government have no alternative to offer. They are quite content to see Somalia in the same state of chaos and anarchy that it has been in for the last 17 years. Yes, they may try to present themselves as the saviors of Somalia but in reality they are the destroyers of our nation. Under various disguises and multiple aliases they oppose the return of normality and sense of order to our country. They want to keep us in a state of nature where those who are strong get their way at the expense of those who are weak. (2009)

However, as stated by Elliott (2009), in the fall of 2007, Hassan began attending the Abubaker al-Siddique mosque in Minneapolis. He began downloading sermons onto his IPOD (Elliott, 2009, p. 7). He also began seeking out jihadists websites and listening to the lectures of pro-Al Qaeda cleric Anwar Al-Awlaki (Elliott, 2009, p. 7). Hassan, who a year earlier, was arguing Somali politics and advocating against Islamists in his homeland, slowly began to approve of the insurgency and their goals (Elliott, 2009, p. 7).

Furthermore, the May 2008, U.S. airstrike that killed Aden Hashi Ayro, a leader of al-Shabaab, along with 10 civilians outraged Hassan who responded with “how dare they,” and “[w]ho is the terrorist?” (Elliott, 2009, p. 7). While Hassan’s outrage initially appeared to be nationalistic in nature it, evolved into a religious calling as he began telling his friends that the turmoil in Somalia was punishment from God and that only restoring the caliphate would redeem the Somali nation (Elliott, 2009, p. 7). This new-found devotion seemed to be formed by a combination of Internet jihadist videos and cahtrooms (the preachings of jihadist clerics such as “Constants on the Path to Jihad” by Yemeni Cleric Anwar al-Awlaki), and his connection with Zakaria Maruf (Elliott, 2009, p. 7).

Zakaria Maruf, was believed by law enforcement to be a recruiter for al-Shabaab in the Twin Cities area prior to his departure to Somalia in February of 2008 (Elliott, 2009). Notably, Maruf also was friends with Shirwa Ahmed (Profile 1) and had frequent contact with most of the Twin Cities travelers (Elliott, 2009). If Hassan was the “hope of the Somali community,” Maruf, 30, was the failure (Ahmed, 2009; Elliott, 2009). Upon coming to the U.S. as teenager in 1993, Maruf was convicted of some minor crimes prior to becoming involved in the violent Somali youth gang, the Hot Boyz (Elliott, 2009). Arguably, one of the lost youths of the Somali community, Maruf left the gang and committed himself to Islam, including doing the call for prayer and preaching to Somali children on street corners (Elliott, 2009, p. 8). However, with his criminal record, his attempts at rehabilitation were limited, and the only employment he could secure was as a stockboy at Walmart (Elliott, 2009). This underemployment further impeded him when he attempted to marry, having one family decline his offer to marry their daughter, stating that she would “end up on welfare” (Elliott, 2009). On February 1, 2008, Maruf, disappeared from the Minneapolis community and would later resurface in southern Somalia (Elliott, 2009).

After Maruf’s disappearance, Hassan’s fervor increased as he continued to communicate with Maruf via conference lines, which were set up by area contacts and well attended by Somali youth (Elliott, 2009). Maruf boasted during these calls about his

position with al-Shabaab, and how he was married and important and that he would take his listeners “to the battlefield” if they journeyed to the homeland (Elliott, 2009, p. 8).

According to friends, Hassan was not completely persuaded by Maruf’s pleas until he witnessed the shooting death of a close friend outside of the Brian Coyle Youth Center in September 2008 (Elliott, 2009, p. 8). “I used to think that death only happens to old people” Hassan was quoted as saying to a friend “but he was young—my age, I guess I could die tomorrow” (Elliott, 2009, p. 8). After this event, Hassan began clandestine meetings with University of Minnesota student Abdisalan Ali, 27-year old Muslim convert Troy Kastigar, and high school senior Burhan Hassan (Profile #2) (Elliott, 2009, p. 8). In October 2008, the young men visited University Travel Services, a travel agent in Cedar Riverview, with an older male escort who informed the agent that they wanted to travel to Somalia (Elliott, 2009, p. 8). The boys returned a week later and paid cash for their plane tickets at a cost of \$1800 each (Elliott, 2009, p. 8). On November 1, 2008, Hassan drove to Chicago’s O’Hare International and boarded a plane for Dubai (Elliott, 2009, p. 8).

#### **G. COMMON THEMES IN THE TRAVELER’S PROFILES**

What common themes can be gleaned from these three profiles? Although Ahmed’s age at 26 sets him slightly apart from his fellow travelers, all three individuals are young, unmarried, and high school graduates at a minimum. None of the three individuals had any documented history of mental illness, or criminal records, and all three avoided the problems such as drugs and gangs, which appear to be common to many of their peers in the Somali-American Diaspora.

Only Zakaria Maruf (30), the suspected recruiter, appeared to fall into the “lost generation” category of Somali Diasporants in the U.S. This “lost generation” as described by OSP1, is the group of young people who arrive in the U.S. between at the age of 15 to 25 (2009). This generation does not speak English and because of their age are either too old to receive a public education or are placed in high school classes in which they are educationally ill equipped to perform. As OSP1 states, they “should be in first grade” but are placed in high school, which leads to high drop-out rates (2009).

OLE1 observes that most of this generation ends up working in traditionally low skilled jobs, such as warehouse workers or driving taxicabs, etc. (2009).

In contrast to this lost generation, the three profiles above show individuals who, in many ways, represented the best and most engaged of the Somali Diaspora. These individuals appeared to have at learned English, progressed successfully through the educational system, despite the fact that many of their contemporaries do not, and each had either attended college or were destined for college. The most glowing example of this is, Mohamoud Hassan who was a bright, charismatic college student who was deeply interested in the politics of a homeland he likely had few memories of. These very traits in any other setting would drive typical college students towards “social movements ranging from anti-war movements, environmental causes and anti-globalization, in this setting it drove them towards global *ihadism*” (Aslan, 2006).

Elements of the crisis of culture discussed in Chapter V can be found in each of the profiled individuals. This seems to be more so in the case of Shirwa Ahmed, possibly for the sole reason that more information is available about him. First, despite Ahmed’s apparent integration into his hostland, there remained significant ties to his Somali identity. Despite economic hardships at home, Ahmed continued the cultural obligation of sending up to half of his take home salary back to Somalia in remittances (Elliott, 2009). Other indicators include Ahmed’s struggle between a western identity as an African-American youth and his Islamic identity. His ultimate conversion to a *salafist* identity demonstrated his rejection of the former.

Similarly, with Mohamoud Hassan, although he appeared to have westernized, he continued to feel the pull of his Somali culture. He idealized Somalia as a utopia and maintained the hope of returning there to rebuild his homeland (Elliott, 2009). Hassan further faced the tension between his hostland and his homeland through the actions of U.S. backed Ethiopian forces and direct U.S. military involvement against the al-Shabaab leadership (Elliott, 2009).

## VII. RADICALIZATION AND HOMEGROWN TERRORISM

### A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter evaluates how the Somali travelers went from typical diaspora members whose culture and background has historically rejected global *ihadism* to becoming *ihadist* recruits. The one factor that is universally agreed upon by counter-terrorism researchers, with respect to how someone radicalizes to global *ihadism*, is that there is no universal profile. As Marc Sagemen, author of *Understanding Terrorist Networks*, writes, “[t]here’s really no profile, just similar trajectories to join the jihad and that most of the men were upwardly and geographically mobile” (Public Broadcasting Company, 2007). This “trajectory,” as Sageman coins it, while containing individual nuances caused by environment, situation, or personality, maintains several observable commonalities.

### B. PATH TO RADICALIZATION

The Twin Cities travelers’ path to radicalization can be broken into four phases for review: 1) pre-radicalization; 2) adoption of fundamentalism through a “crisis of culture;” 3) fundamentalist to jihadism through injustice framing; and 4) action.<sup>8</sup> As discussed in the literature review, there numerous models to for the radicalization process and different researchers place different emphasis on one factor over another. However, for the purposes of this analysis it is less important which model is used and more important to compare other instances of radicalization with the Somali travelers to determine if any differences exist.

While not necessarily a stage, most models begin with a review of the pre-radicalization, or a “before” snapshot of the individual. Generally, these snapshots are of individuals who appear to be well-integrated, second/third generation Muslim émigrés with moderate to high educational level and, from outward appearances, have

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<sup>8</sup> This outline roughly resembles one presented by FBI Official John Miller’s testimony before United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, May 10, 2007, which appears to have been taken from NYPD’s Silber and Bhatt study (New York Police Department, 2007).

successfully made the integrative journey into their western hostland. The second phase is the adoption of fundamentalist, Wahabbist/Salafi, Islamic practices (defined below). This adoption commonly requires the shedding of much of the outward manifestations of western culture as well as adopting a “literal interpretation” of Islam (Gartenstein-Ross & Grossman, 2009). The third phase is progression is the conversion from fundamentalist to *jihadist* through the adoption of “injustice framing” requiring the development of an “us versus them” belief system. Finally, through a triggering event or simply through group pressure the individual is driven into action (Gartenstein-Ross & Grossman, April 2009).

As a caveat, while numerous individuals begin on this path, the majority do not proceed to the final act of terrorism. While many countries and many more diaspora communities practice Wahhabism, the majority never progress down a path of radicalization. Rather, it is important to note that this journey is overwhelmingly taken by western diasporants, who start out westernized and appear to be drawn to jihadism as a social movement more than a lifelong religious tenant. As Sageman found in his study, the ranks of the Salafi jihadists generally do not include religious scholars and individuals with a lifetime of devout religious practice but rather are individuals who seek identity through belonging to this larger social movement (2004).

### **1. Pre-Radicalization**

The “pre-radicalization” stage represents the “before” snapshot of the individual, prior to beginning on his journey towards *jihadism*. While this arguably is not a “stage” in the radicalization process, it is helpful to evaluate this period because the experiences and circumstances during this time will either facilitate or deter the individual’s progression down the path of the radicalization process. In the case of the Somali Diaspora, this pre-radicalization “context” is what ultimately sets the stage for future radicalization.

The pre-radicalization stage often standouts only for its unremarkable nature. This stage is generally marked by members of western Diaspora communities attempting to integrate into their western hostlands. They become involved in the job market;

engage, and in many cases excel, in western educational institutions; and socialize to varying degrees with their western counterparts. All of this is generally done without acquiring a criminal record, becoming involved in gangs, or even garnering the attention of law enforcement (Silber & Bhatt, 2007, p. 6). All of the individuals appear to be marked by the enthusiastic adoption of their hostland's popular culture (Silber & Bhatt, 2007).

As Silber and Bhatt point out, the commonalities among the five Western-based plots that they studied are: male Muslims under the age of 35; second and third generation émigrés; educated, at least to high school level; little if any criminal history; do not begin as radical or devout and frequently converts to Islam (2009, p. 23). Examples of this frequently include individuals such as 22-year old, Shehzad Tanweer, the 7/7 Aldgate bomber, who was a second generation British-Pakistani. His father was originally a Yorkshire police officer, later turned entrepreneur who owned several businesses, including a fish and chips shop where Shehzad worked part-time (Bennetto, 2005). Shehzad excelled in cricket, worked out, pursued a degree in sports medicine, and drove a Mercedes sports car (Fattah, 2005). Other 7/7 bombers include ringleader Mohammed Siddique Khan, who during this phase attended university, smoked cigarettes, and was called "Sid" by his mixed group of friends (Malik, 2007).

In a similar way, which indicates little difference between Somalis and other Muslim Diasporas, the Twin Cities travelers adopted strikingly similar profiles to their European and U.S. counterparts outlined in the Silber & Bhatt study. For instance, Mohamoud Hassan is typical in his adoption of western culture, his embrace of popular "hip-hop" language and dress, and his academic achievements at the University of Minnesota (Elliott, 2009).

Similarly, Ahmed memorized rap lyrics, dressed in hip-hop attire, and according to his friends would emulate hip-hop gestures and movements, such as telling his friend Nicole Hartford, "Watch my swag, Nicole, watch my swag" as he walked away (Meryhew, 2009). He by all accounts had mastered English, was attending college, and had successfully integrated into the U.S.

Other travelers include the bookish 17-year old traveler, Burhan Hassan who maintained an “A” average at Roosevelt High School and spoke frequently about attending Harvard (Ahmed, 2009). Likewise, Jamal Bana and Abdislan Ali, both second wave, studied electrical engineering and chemical engineering, respectively, in Minneapolis area colleges and appeared destined to live out the American dream (Elliott, 2009).

What is notably absent from this “before” snapshot is a strong cultural understanding of the Somali homeland or any devout adoption of Islam at this point. As pointed out by Burhan Hassan’s uncle, the young men had no memory of their homeland and rather enjoyed an idealized utopian fantasy about Somalia (Ahmed, 2009). There is no indication that any of the youth felt the strong pull of clannism, nor did any of the youth appear to be exceptionally devout or religious growing up.

What can be gleaned from this is that there appears to be little difference between the Somali travelers and other radicalized individuals during this phase. Rather, all appeared to be typically well-integrated young adults with no or only minor criminal histories and no long standing relationship with fundamentalist Islam.

## **2. Adoption of Fundamentalism**

The second phase in the radicalization process is an individual’s exploration and adoption of a fundamentalist Salafi identity and the slow migration “away from their former identity” (Silber & Bhatt, 2007, p. 30). Salafi (from Salaf, “ancient ones” or “predecessors” in Arabic) is an “emulation, an imitation of the mythical Muslim community that existed at the time of Mohammed,” which is considered by Salafis to be the sole historical occasion where a fair and just society existed (Sageman, 2004). This fundamentalist practice relies upon a legalistic or literal interpretation of the Koran, devoid of modernization and interpretations that may have evolved since the death of the Prophet Mohammed, thus, returning to the fundamentals.

In embracing this legalistic interpretation of the Koran and Salafism, an individual adopts a “rules-based” approach to his faith including thought and practice (Gartenstein-Ross & Grossman, 2009). According to Gartenstein-Ross, who studied 117 cases of

homegrown terrorists, approximately half of the jihadis studied had adopted this “rules-based” approach on their path to *jihadism* (2009, p. 36).<sup>9</sup>

This adoption of this salafist/legalistic interpretation necessarily requires the abandonment of much of the individual’s prior identity, including quitting jobs that are inconsistent with Salafi doctrines, such as working in restaurants that serve alcohol (Silber & Bhatt, 2007). Other actions include dropping out of secular educational establishments, distancing themselves from non-devout or non-Muslim friends and adopting an orthopraxis approach to Islam that adheres strictly to outward signs of devotion such as wearing a beard, wearing pants cut short consistent with how the Prophet is said to have dressed, and not touching women (Aslan, 2006).

For instance 7/21 bomber Ramzi Mohammed altered his London lifestyle from someone who “drank, went clubbing, and chased girls” to a man who had to quit two different jobs so that he did not have to be near alcohol or pork (Gartenstein-Ross & Grossman, 2009, p. 39). In the 2007, Ft. Dix plot, the formerly non-observant Duka brothers began “praying differently” and refused to attend a relative’s wedding because they would play music at the wedding (Gartenstein-Ross & Grossman, 2009, p. 37).

It is worth inquiring, however, as to how a Somali diasporant, whose parents practice a form of Sunni Islam that has traditionally rejected fundamentalist Islam, takes up the observance of Salafi Islam in the United States. This is in large part due to the proliferation of Gulf State funded or affiliated Muslim institutions within Western states. These predominantly Wahhabist/Salafist organizations are far reaching organizations, who unlike their traditionalist counterparts, market towards young diasporants.

While evidence exists for these “tipping points,” other observers suggest that it is far more likely that the evolution to Salafi Islam is a slow and gradual development over a period of time and that a single event does not ignite the process but rather a series of circumstances start the process. As an example of this, it is interesting to consider Mohammed Siddique Khan, the recruiter, organizer, and one of the four perpetrators of

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that in Gartenstein’s study (2009), 59 individuals showed signs of this trait, while only four individuals actually did not adopt this interpretation of Islam. There was insufficient data on the remaining 55 individuals to confirm or refute this trait (Gartenstein, 2009, p. 36).

the London 7/7 bombings. Mohammed was born and raised in the industrial town of Beeston, a poor inner suburb of Leeds in Yorkshire, England (Alsan, 2009). His parents and siblings were observant Muslims who attended the traditionalist neighborhood mosque (Malik, 2007). The mosque was a locally funded mosque, which catered to the first generation Pakistani population, giving its sermons in Urdu (language of most Pakistanis) (Malik, 2007). The mosques' older Pakistani clergy rarely engaged with the youth of the neighborhood, except to facilitate the rote memorization of the Koran (Malik, 2007). The traditionalist practice at the mosque was not fundamentalist in nature, but rather "traditionalist," which sought to incorporate religious rulings and interpretations since the death of the Prophet Mohammed to the present as well as Pakistani cultural elements (Rashid, 2002).

When looking for the "catalyst" for Khan's journey towards fundamentalist Islam, several are proffered. For instance, the U.K.'s official government account of Siddique's turn to fundamentalist "self-identification" states that "after an incident in a nightclub, [Siddique] said that he turned to religion and it changed his life"(Malik, 2007). One of Khan's friends proffered another catalyst: that Siddique became a fundamentalist after witnessing Israeli soldiers forcibly interrogating an elderly Palestinian man at a West Bank checkpoint (Alsan, 2009).

However, Siddique's brother, when interviewed by a BBC reporter, stated that the theory of a catalyst was "bullshit," rather the shedding of Siddique's prior identity and adoption of Salafi practice was a "gradual change" that occurred over years (Malik, 2007). Khan's brother explained that in his mid-twenties Khan's family noticed that he had become a Wahhabi when he started praying differently, adding an extra hand gesture between prostrations at prayer (Malik, 2007). Khan's brother speculated that the familie's traditionalist mosque simply "couldn't connect with the second generation" (Malik, 2007). This connection with Salafism is attributable to the Wahhab marketing and the fact that Siddique did not speak Urdu, which limited his accessibility to his families mosque. Conversely, the Wahhab mosque and its more aggressive recruitment posture published literature in English making it more accessible to Siddique (Malik, 2007).

While the catalyst of the night club incident theorized by both the U.K. government's account and the witnessing of the Palestinian's treatment in the West Bank according to Aslan may have been factors, they arguably are not the underlying cause of this shift in worldviews and drastic change in identity. Rather, much of the shift towards a Salafi identity may occur on a gradual basis and be caused, in large part, by the unique second generation experiences of tribal-based émigrés in the diaspora. This experience causes the "cultural crisis," as discussed in Chapter IV, within these second-generation émigrés in both the U.K. Muslim community and the United States Diasporas that in fact serves as the "catalyst" for this conversion to Salafi Islam.

In this way, the Leed's bombers and the Twin Cities travelers are comparable. Their journey to fundamentalism was really a searching for an alternative identity; fundamentalism provided a global identity in lieu of one that possibly did not fit. Just as Siddique Khan was unable to find a Muslim identity at his father's mosque, so too, was Shirwa Ahmed unable to find his identity in the African-American hip-hop youth culture.

In the case of Shirwa Ahmed, the Twin Cities traveler, Ahmed began disassociating himself from his less devout friends; he attempted to grow a beard and wore pants with high cuffs, discarding his baggie jeans and hip-hop clothes (Meryhew, 2009). He also began counseling other Somali youth on returning to their culture and to Islam (Elliott, 2009).

Mohamud Hassan similarly went from being an engaged youth who was voted most "friendly" by his religiously diverse Roosevelt High School class to a youth who downloaded *jihadist* sermons on his IPOD (Elliott, 2009).

In attempting to explain how this process begins, many terrorism experts cite to a catalytic event experienced by the individual (Silber & Bhatt, 2007). These catalytic events can include person experiences, such as economic (loss of a job, blocked mobility), social (alienation, discrimination, racism), personal (traumatic events), and also larger global events (especially those involving Muslims worldwide) (Silber & Bhatt, 2007).

In looking for tipping points with respect to the Somali travelers, the most apparent is the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in 2006 and the subsequent occupation. In at least one Somali profile, Mohamud Hassan, this stands out as a possible “tipping point.” Hasssan’s essay in 2007, which chastised Islamists and supported the Ethiopian invasion, appears to have changed with U.S. strikes in the country and allegations of war crimes by Ethiopian troops on the Somali population (Elliott, 2009). This appears to be consistent however with the Somali community in general. According to OLE1, at first a lot of Somalis thought the “invasion was a positive thing, but after a while, the Ethiopian’s didn’t leave and Somalis began thinking maybe they are actually trying to take over” (OLE1, 2009).

### **3. Fundamentalism to Jihadism—Injustice Framing**

The next stage in the process of radicalization is taking the leap from fundamentalism to jihadism (Silber & Bhatt, 2007). As a transnational social movement, global jihadism’s greatest challenge is linking together all the disparate identities of its members under a single collective identity (Alsan, 2009, p. 52). One of the ways to create this collective identity and bring together Muslims of different nationalities, ethnic backgrounds, and races is through what sociologist William Gamson calls “injustice framing” (1992).

In implementing injustice framing, the group must first “name” the problem by identifying a situation that is un-just or in some way injurious (Felstiner, Abel, & Sarat, 1980). Next, the group must identify who is to blame for it; propose a solution to it, deal with those responsible, and, finally, connect it to a larger narrative that will resonate with as many people as possible (Alsan, 2009).

This “framing” allows for the creation of an “us versus them” mindset, which is arguably essential in moving individuals from fundamentalist to jihadist. This “us versus them” schism is highlighted in the Gartenstein-Ross’s study that found only six individuals of 117 did not adopt this “West versus Islam” indicator (Gartenstein-Ross & Grossman, 2009, p. 27). Furthermore, of the 117 individuals studied, over 70 percent

adopted a political radicalization “schism” view that western states have conspired to subjugate Islam and that only military action (jihad) is the proper response (Gartenstein-Ross & Grossman, 2009, p. 52).

In creating this “injustice framing,” first there is a requirement that an injustice be identified, or “named” (Gamson, 1992). This “naming” must be more than a cognitive or intellectual acknowledgement of what is fair, rather it must be what Gamson calls “‘hot cognition’, the kind of righteous anger that puts fire in the belly and iron in the soul” (1992). Social scientists generally agree that “anger and indignation” are high activation emotions that tend to mobilize individuals, whereas, in contrast, emotions such as shame, guilt, or embarrassment are considered low activation emotions, which tend to discourage action (Jasper, 1998).

In the case of the Somali travelers, the “hot cognition” was made up of several factors but, in particular, the U.S. backed Ethiopian invasion of Somali in 2006. Analysts point out that the two-year occupation by Ethiopia left Somalis “radically angry, a sentiment echoed nationally and abroad with the Somali Diaspora Network accusing the TFG and Ethiopians of pursuing a campaign of collective punishment and genocide” (Danish Defense Intelligence Service, 2009). OLE1 observed that some in the Somali community adopted the mantra of “[d]eath to Ethiopia and anyone who supports it”, making veiled reference to U.S. support of the invasion and the transitional Somali government (OLE1, 2009). As exhibited by second-wave traveler Mahmoud Hassan, there is an evolution in views regarding the Ethiopian invasion and U.S. support for that invasion amongst the Somali-American Diaspora (Elliott, 2009). At least in Mahmoud’s case, the allegation of rape of Somali women by Ethiopian forces and the U.S. strikes on the insurgency served as another “hot cognition” (Elliott, 2009).

Next, once an injustice is named, a target must be identified and blamed for the wrong (Gamson, 1992). This identification gives the framework a level of concreteness necessary to mobilize action. Otherwise, if an individual sees suffering but only abstract or intangible forces they are more likely to accept this status quo, i.e., in the case of earthquakes, drought, etc. In this case of Somalia, jihadist are presented with an almost

picture perfect antagonist in a predominantly Christian Ethiopia army. Furthermore, the fact that the current U.S. supported government actually invited the Ethiopians into Somali makes this “naming” process relatively easy.

As pointed out by Gamson, once an individual “names” the cause of the wrong, he must be able to expand the identity of the antagonist until he can have the wrong resonate with the individuals through his own personal experience (Gamson, 1992). This is done in the case of the Somali travelers by taking a semi-local issue, i.e., Ethiopian troops on the ground in Somalia and expanding it out. For example, first, Ethiopian troops were invited into Somalia by the Transitional Federal Government, backed by the United States. Second, Ethiopia is a predominantly Christian state, whose activities are supported by the U.S., also a Christian state. Therefore, Christians are waging a war against Islam.

In many cases, it appears that personal experience of many Somali youth may have bolstered the “us-versus-them” narrative. As pointed out by MLE1, within the Somali Diaspora community the memory of post-9/11 round-ups of Muslims by federal law enforcement remains a vivid memory, and most “Somalis know someone who was picked up during this period” (MLE1, 2009). Although relatively isolated, these round-ups have been duplicated somewhat, according to MLE1, in the federal law enforcement response to the “travelers,” which has included federal law enforcement pulling Somali college students out of their classes to question them (MLE1, 2009). These actions are seen by the Somali community, at least in the Twin Cities, as an attack on the community and particularly hurtful when targeting the “best and brightest” of their diaspora (MLE1, 2009). Furthermore, as an honor culture, this targeting of the most vulnerable of the community, i.e., young women may be a useful narrative.

As another example, second wave traveler Abdisalan Ali, a chemical engineering student, one night in 2008, after meeting with his mentor to discuss his upcoming MCATs, was wrongly accused of robbing a Subway sandwich shop (Elliott, 2009). According to interviews with his friends, this experience greatly altered his worldview, even after the charges were dropped (Elliott, 2009).

These factors, along with the ability to build a strong cohesive group dynamic, are critical in traversing the gap from fundamentalist to jihadist. In the case of the Twin Cities travelers, the fact that the groups were formed and departed in waves is indicative of the fact that they coalesced as a group, which creates pressure on members to continue on the path to jihadism.

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## VIII. FINDINGS

This thesis set out to determine if the cultural and religious traits of Somali émigrés in the United States Diaspora would somehow affect the established “trajectory” for radicalization that has been observed in other western diaspora groups. The answer is yes and no. It appears supportable that first generation Somali émigrés are not particularly susceptible to radicalization. Rather, as pointed out in this thesis, the historic clan identity, pragmatic religious practices, pastoralism, and nationalism of Somalis, both in at home and in the diaspora, generally discourages the adoption of transnational movements such as global *jihadism*.

However, as has been shown by the profiles of the Somali travelers, these young adults are less like their parents and more like their American and European counterparts. In this way, they are more of a “blank slate” as much of their parent’s clan and cultural traits are erased or otherwise altered in the process of integration. At the same time that these youth rush to embrace American culture, they are torn between two cultures, which are diametrically opposed to one another. This tension arguably leaves these youth in a gap from which *Salafi* Islam offers a ready-made rescue.

### A. OUTREACH EFFORTS—GRASSROOTS AND GLOBAL

Many western states that have experienced homegrown radicalization have also attempted to develop programs intended to suppress the appeal of *jihadism* to its populace. Universally, western states have acknowledged the difficulty in addressing this moving target as individuals adopt radical *Islam* in different manners and at varying rates.

In the United States, counter-radicalization efforts at the national level have been sparse. The *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (NSCT) and the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* (NSHS), while acknowledging the threat of homegrown radicalization within the United States borders does not provide a tangible plan of action or measurements of success for staving off the radicalization process domestically (Homeland Security Council, 2007; White House, 2006). This lack of a clear national framework is clearly not for lack of a desire to do so. As DHS Secretary, Janet

Napalitano outlined in her testimony before Congress in September 2009, one of the primary goals for DHS is to impede the radicalization process through increased communications, fostering trust between DHS and Muslim communities, and fostering resilient communities that can better resist the radical message (Napalitano, 2009). While DHS has taken several steps towards counter-radicalization, such as outreach meetings with community leaders and studying the radicalization process, there remain several significant impediments to a more comprehensive counter-radicalization program, such as those found in some European countries (e.g., the United Kingdom).

This chapter will be broken into two sections. The first section will examine briefly the United Kingdom's CONTEST counter-radicalization program and what aspects of it can be applied to the United States. The second section will provide the general observations about outreach by three state/local officials who work within the Somali community. Particularly, these interviewees discuss the issue of conducting outreach without making the community feel "under siege" and discuss the impact of gangs on radicalization.

### **1. The United Kingdom's CONTEST Program**

The United Kingdom's CONTEST program may be one of the most useful frameworks to analyze outreach and counter-radicalization programs in the U.S. context. This is not to say that CONTEST is effective, in fact, the efficacy of the program is disputed among British officials and critics alike; however, the factors that the program establishes is useful in examining the limits of their application to the United States. Updated in 2009, CONTEST is an overall counter-terrorism program whose primary objectives are: prevent, pursue, project and prepare (Her Majesty's [HM] Government, 2009). For the purposes of this analysis, the objective of "prevent," which is aimed at stopping terrorist before they become terrorists, will be looked.

The "prevent" portion of CONTEST is a strategy designed to accomplish five main objectives: challenging extremist ideology while supporting mainstream voices; disrupting the promotion of extremism; supporting individuals who are vulnerable to

recruitment; increasing resiliency of communities against extremism; and addressing the grievances that extremists are exploiting (HM Government, 2009, p. 80).

Countering radical ideology and disrupting the freedom of the messenger to deliver his terrorist narrative are two of the primary factors of the U.K.'s "prevent" program. In the UK's program, this factor relies on the government's ability to promote more moderate voices over those of extremists and ensuring that extremist viewpoints are challenged both in content and delivery. The British version places a large emphasis on radicalization on the Internet (HM Government, 2008, p. 4). While the importance of this factor is clear, in discouraging the radical narrative and encouraging moderate voices, the United States is faced with several barriers in implementing this program in the homeland.

First, curtailing the *Salafi* message through government action has significant Constitutional impediments. Primarily, those of the First Amendment's protection of free speech, and the restriction on the government's endorsement of one religious viewpoint over another. As provided by the First Amendment:

Congress shall make no law respecting *an establishment of religion*, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or *abridging the freedom of speech*, [emphasis added] or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and petition the Government for a redress of grievances. (United States Constitution, 1791)

The first prohibition restricts the U.S. government and state governments, via the Fourteenth Amendment, from promoting religious institutions while the second ensures that only specific "non-protected" speech can be curtailed by the government.

On the issue of unprotected speech, only in limited instances can speech be curtailed within the American judicial system. Courts have generally accepted some limitations on the time/place of speech, such as Oliver Wendell Holmes stating "[t]he most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing a panic" (*Schneck v. Ohio*, 1869). However, the restriction of speech based solely on its content has been hotly disputed within American jurisprudence.

For the purposes of quelling *jihadist* recruitment speech, the government is faced with two competing legal doctrines, namely the Constitutional interest in allowing individuals to freely express their views even if in opposition to the government and the equivalency of aiding or inciting someone into the commission of a crime. As the Court in *Noto v. United States* explained “the mere abstract teaching . . . of the moral propriety or even moral necessity for a resort to force and violence is not the same as preparing a group for violent action and steeling it to such action” (1961). This difference between abstract teaching of jihad and “preparing a group for action” is a narrow line within American jurisprudence and restricts the wholesale prohibition of the radical message.

The seminal case in this area is *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, in which the Court lays out the prevailing test for First Amendment speech. In that case, the leader of the Ohio chapter of the Ku Klux Klan gave two speeches to news reporters advocating the agenda of the Klan in establishing white rights in Ohio and making advocating the return of Jews and Blacks to Israel and Africa (*Brandenburg v. Ohio*, 1969). Once the footage was aired, the Klan organizer was subsequently convicted under the Ohio Criminal Syndicalism statute, which prohibited the advocacy of criminal/violent action for accomplishing industrial or political reform. The Supreme Court struck down the Ohio law as unconstitutional because the state may not prohibit “advocacy of the use of force or of law violation except where such advocacy is directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action and is likely to incite or produce such action” (*Brandenburg v. Ohio*, 1969). The test arising from this case is that advocacy will only be punishable by law where the defendant: (1) expressly advocates law violation; (2) calls for immediate law violation; and (3) immediate lawless action is likely to occur (Tanenbaum, 2006).

In analyzing whether the *Brandenburg* test is satisfied with respect to *jihadist* recruiters, the viability of curtailing this speech remains very fact specific and largely unsettled. For instance, in the case of Ali al-Tamimi, the spiritual guide for the Virginia “Paintball Jihad,” al-Tamimi’s activities fell squarely within this speech/encouragement category (Silber & Bhatt, 2007). Al-Tamimi’s clandestine meetings and instructions to his students to travel to Afghanistan to fight in the *jihad* was “speech” but does not appear to be speech that is protected for First Amendment purposes (*United States v.*

Khan, 2004). As argued by Tannenbaum, al-Timimi's encouragement and instructions to his followers expressly advocated a violation of law, and probably satisfied the imminence test even though the actual violation of law could have occurred several weeks later (Tanenbaum, 2006). Furthermore, the imminence requirement is in place in large part because speech that leads to imminent violence or action does not have the opportunity to be contested in the "market place" of ideas. Similarly, speech made in clandestine settings also does not have the opportunity to compete in this "marketplace."

Despite this, however, the ability of law enforcement to silence radical and violent ideas within these communities continues to be a difficult proposition. Rather, it appears that the individuals best situated to silence these *jihadist* voices in the community are in the community itself. Much of the contribution that the government can make in helping these communities police themselves against *jihadist* recruitment is done through appropriate outreach. This would also include the remaining factors of the U.K. program, in particular, building resilient communities, addressing grievances exploited by terrorists, and identifying at risk youth.

Also, it can at least be argued that outreach to more fundamentalist and *salafist* groups within the U.S. homeland should be considered. While these groups frequently espouse ideas contrary to American values, they also could become allies in curbing radicalism within their communities since actions by rogue members of their networks brings undesirable consequences for the greater community. This type of outreach has historical successes as pointed out by Joseph McCann, in his study of anarchist in the United States during the industrial revolution (2006). In the case of the anarchists, these organizations would frequently work with law enforcement in providing information on rogue members whose violent ambitions threatened the broader goals of the larger movement (McCann, 2006).

The interviews conducted on the issue of outreach within both the Minneapolis and Columbus communities identified the need for local and consistent grassroots outreach, in lieu of an isolated and macro approach. In particular, the interviewees identified the need to conduct a more holistic outreach that relies heavily on individual trust and relationships.

For instance, OSP1 observed that efforts to go into the Somali community and state, “We are interested in talking to you about radicalization” are generally ineffective (OSP1, 2009). Rather, a more successful approach has been “inviting” the community to not only be “a part of counter-terrorism efforts but also a part of the larger community” (OSP1, 2009). This can be accomplished by not only conducting outreach regarding terrorism but through involvement in the community regarding health issues, social services issues, and questions regarding immigration (OSP1, 2009). OSP1 explained that working to help Somalis on problems unrelated to terrorism builds trust and the personal capital needed when soliciting cooperation with sensitive issues such as radicalization (OSP1, 2009).

Echoing this was MLE1, who identified the need for a community-policing model to address the community and its challenges early on, instead of coming in after a terrorism incident had occurred (2009). MLE1 explained that frequently the local police have a better opportunity to work in the Somali community than their federal counterparts for several reasons (2009). First, federal law enforcement is generally not trusted by the Somali community (MLE1, 2009). In particular, the FBI is frequently resented in the community for the large post 9/11 roundup of Muslim-Americans and for the interviewing of Somali college students in Minneapolis, in particular for pulling these students out of classes (MLE1, 2009). While the true numbers of these interviews are probably quite small, this action has taken on an urban legend permanency within the community that continues to impede broader outreach (MLE1, 2009).

When asked how government officials make inroads into these communities if they do not have established roots, MLE1 acknowledged the disadvantage to this approach and simply stated that being upfront is the only way (2009). Also, working in partnership with the community and sharing information instead of simply asking for it is an approach that is consistent with the Somali culture. *Yaa warkii bi'in oo war haya* (Whoever could give us information, be blessed), is a Somali saying that emphasizes the importance of exchanging information during interactions (Issa-Salwe & Olden, 2008, p. 574). As an oral culture, Somalis place a premium on a person's ability to accurately relay information, or *wargalnimo* in Somali (Issa-Salwe & Olden, 2008, p. 575). A

failure to properly handle information causes a loss of face in the culture and an individual can become *gabadhaa guurwaa* (he whose daughter would not be married) (Issa-Salwe & Olden, 2008). MLE1 explained lessons learned from this oral tradition in hanging informational flyers in the lobby of a high-rise building in the Twin Cities. MLE1 explained that only one or two people would stop to read it; however, if simply one person was told the news, it would spread through a much larger portion of the community (2009). MLE1 observed that this “grapevine” was significantly more accurate than would normally be expected. This is probably attributable to the *wargalnimo* responsibility mentioned above (2009).

Another issue that was discussed by both Columbus and Minneapolis/St. Paul interviewees was the issue of clans and the importance of keeping perspective on this cultural feature. Both law enforcement officers agreed that it is possible to overemphasize the importance of clans when looking at recruitment and radicalization within this diaspora community (MLE1, 2009; OLE1, 2009). OLE1 further pointed out that initially several law enforcement entities maintained a myopic focus on clans in both terms of recruitment and in terms of information sources, only to discard these clan distinctions later on (2009).

All interviewees did agree; however, that clans continue to play a role in diaspora life and issues, such as obtaining interpreters and organizing outreach events must include a consideration of clan affiliation. Comments regarding this topic included the need to use several different interpreters from various clans in order to ensure a balanced accounting of conversations (MLE1, 2009) and ensuring that invitations to outreach are not through a single “community leader,” which often will result in members of only one clan receiving invitations (OLE1, 2009). As stated previously in this thesis, however, an overall acknowledgement that many Somalis, especially Somali youth, are drawn more towards a nationalistic and religious identity than a clan-based identity.

The issue of gangs was brought up by all those interviewed, each assigning varying degrees of importance to the problem. Interviewees almost unanimously identified Somali youth gangs as a serious issue to both the Somali Diaspora and the

associated communities they reside in. However, the significance of gangs as platforms for recruitment to *jihadist* Islam was downplayed by interviewees.

Gangs in both the Minneapolis/St. Paul and Columbus community appear to have begun as a defense mechanism to protect its members from harassment or assault by non-Somalis (OLE1, 2009). However, the Somali gangs have evolved into a criminal enterprise including significant revenue generating activities such as drug distribution and prostitution (MLE1, 2009). As to whether these gangs represented a threat of terrorism, one interviewee replied that the gangs could be a “good or bad thing for [jihadist] recruitment” (OLE1, 2009). On the one hand, according to OLE1, the violence normalized by street gangs in their members in achieving objectives could be redirected by a savvy recruiter towards *jihadism* (OLE1, 2009). As put by self-proclaimed U.K. al-Qaeda recruiter turned anti-terrorist advocate, “unlike the traditionalists, the network (jihadist) won’t judge a potential recruit on his actions. ”If the network see a drug dealer or someone from a gang, they will not condemn him like the traditionalists and say ‘oh brother haram, haram [forbidden].’ What they’ll try to do is to utilise his energy” (Malik, 2007). OLE1 pointed out the recruitment rhetoric directed at the Somali-Diaspora youth in the U.S. frequently includes chastisements such as “you’ve lost your character, you’ve abandoned your culture, your people, your values and your religion” and then attempts to convince the youth that their efforts could more honorably be directed towards the global jihadism (2009). At least one of the Twin Cities travelers appears to have been subject to his return to his people mantra. Zakaria Maruf, for instance, went from violent street gang member to devout *jihadist* (Elliott, 2009).

One of the unintended consequences of the community keeping their children away from street gangs may be that they push these young people into the hands of *jihadist* recruiters. OLE1 asserted that one of the unintended consequences of avoiding gangs may push youth into the hands of *jihadist* recruiters (2009). This occurs where a family’s fear about their sons joining gangs causes them to push children towards the mosque where a *jihadist* recruiter may be waiting for them (OLE1, 2009). A case in point may be that of Burhan Hassan, who died in Somalia in 2008. According to his uncle, Osman Ahmed, Burhan grew up studying at the Abu-Bakar As-Saddique mosque

where he attended their youth group (2009, p. 3). Burhan's uncle indicates how the family was relieved by his affiliation with the mosque because it meant he had not joined the gangs that are so prevalent in the community (Ahmed, 2009). According to Ahmed, who appears to place the fault for his nephew's radicalization squarely on the mosque, the children attending the mosque "had no perception of Somalia except the one that was formed in their mind by their teachers at the Abu-Bakar Center" (2009, p. 3).

However, none of the interviewees believed a firm link existed between the street gangs and radicalization (MLE1, 2009). Rather, MLE1 observed that the individuals who join fall into jihadist groups are higher-minded and appear to operate off of "higher ideals" than their gangland counterparts (MLE1, 2009). Conversely, MLE1 observed that Minnesota gangs, which are often divided along Somali clan lines, were interested in what "what gangs are interested in," namely "making money and living the gangster lifestyle" (2009).

As a result, this research suggests that an over-emphasis on gangs could be a mistake and waste of resources for homeland security purposes. While undoubtedly the current integration issues within the Somali-American community means that gangs will continue to be a problem in the short-term. This also means that the recruitment efforts by the gangs will continue to be extensive within the Somali community. However, it is unclear whether this will be anything other than a domestic criminal issue. Further research is justified into the link between Somali gangs and insurgency funding as these gangs continue to maintain strong clan ties with the homeland and continue to support the importation of khat, which could be used to finance terrorism.

The importance of not over-focusing on Somali Diasporants is critical. Although law enforcement is now engaged, the problem of the travelers should be kept in perspective. An eye towards world events must be incorporated into the community policing that occurs in this diaspora community. As seen throughout this thesis, understanding the context of immigrant groups as well as how world events can drive local events is critical in countering radicalization. The events in Somalia directly relate to the events in these two communities and should be monitored with that in mind. Just as the Ethiopian invasion drove much of the nationalistic and religious fervor over the

Ethiopian invasion should also be alleviated by the subsequent withdraw. This lack of a non-Muslim enemy may mean that Islamism will return to its historically subordinate position within the pragmatic Somali society. As a result, it is imperative that governments monitor these world events with an eye towards how they may affect the climate of their diaspora communities.

## **APPENDIX      INTERVIEWS**

- MLE1. (2009, October 14). Minneapolis Law Enforcement Official. (Author, Interviewer)
- MLE1. (2009, October 14). Somali Diaspora in Twin Cities. (S. Mulligan, Interviewer)
- OLE1. (2009, November 15). Somali Diaspora in Columbus, Ohio. (S. Mulligan, Interviewer)
- OLE1. (2009, October 15). Somali Diaspora in Columbus, Ohio. (S. Mulligan, Interviewer)
- OSP1. (2009, September 14). Ohio State Official. (S. Mulligan, Interviewer)
- OSP1. (2009, October 23). Ohio State Official. (S. Mulligan, Interviewer)
- Security, O.-D. (2009, October 15). Ohio State Official. (S. Mulligan, Interviewer)
- SSD1. (2009, September 14). Interview regarding Columbus Somali Community. (S. Mulligan, Interviewer)

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