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Raising Citizens: Parenting Education Classes and Somali Mothers' Experiences of Childrearing in Canada

Mothers are viewed as the people who are raising future citizens of Canada; therefore, their parenting practices are being targeted for intervention by civic organizations funded by the state. In this article, I argue that modernity narratives and neoliberalism approaches to mothering inform parenting education classes for Somali refugee women to Canada. Thus, Somali women are often seen as victims. Stereotyped identities conceal their social and historical agency. This research draws on 15 individual interviews with Somali mothers and participant- observation in two parenting education classes in Canada.

Keywords:

Somali, women, mother, refugee, citizenship, education

1 Introduction

Citizenship education is carried out through interactions between the nation-state and immigrants. In Canada, these state programs are implemented by social service agencies (Ilcan and Basok, 2004). Parenting education classes that target refugee women are one of these programs.

The parenting education classes I attended were taught and instructed as preparation for living in Canada by social workers that have little knowledge of the histories and experiences of the women. The focus on the pathology of refugees (Harrell- Bond, 1999; Summerfield, 1999) obfuscates the structural violence that is a reality of their lives in Canada. Guiding parenting education classes were modernity narrativesⁱ of refugee women, Africans, and Muslims, which intersect with Western, middle-class assumptions of mothering. Somali mothers, however, are not merely "being made" through the process of imposing stereotyped identities; but, are also "self-making," that is negotiating between gendered social pressures as mothers who are both Somali and immigrants to Canada (Ong, 1999).

This article examines parenting education classes designed for women who immigrated to Canada as government- assisted or privately sponsored refugees.ⁱⁱ These classes target Somali mothers who were in the first or second year of resettlement in Ontario. Social workers and settlement workers act as brokers of the state to mold Somali refugee mothers into becoming more desirable mothers; that is, more like mothers in the imagined Canadian community who are viewed to be self-sufficient (Ong, 2003; see also Philips, 2000). This article examines how Somali women resist these processes through their parenting practices. As such, the research investigates the views and experiences of childrearing among Somali mothers in Canada. In this article, I argue that modernity narratives inform parenting education classes for newcomers to Canada. This educational practice takes place to homogenize and

adapt Somali women into the hegemonic Canadian culture. Instead, I suggest that Somali women's social and historical agency need to be considered by social workers and/or settlement workers in order to unearth Western assumptions that underlie parenting education classes for refugee women and to better support women as mothers in Canada. To do this, I explore women's perspectives and experiences of migration as they relate to mothering.

2 Somali women in Canada: Perspectives on gender and refugee studies

Boyd and Grieco (2003) suggest that to understand the unique experiences of female migrants researchers should consider three different stages of the migration process that will produce various outcomes and experiences for migrant women. The stages include the pre-migration stage, the transition across state borders, and their resettlement experiences in the adoptive country (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). To provide this context, in this section, I present each stage of the migration processes and how it has affected women at the macro level.

The largest numbers of Somalis have sought refuge in Canada since the beginning of Somalia's conflict in the north (1988) and in the south, subsequent to the collapse of Siyad Barre's government (1991). Most live in the province of Ontario, with approximately 75,000 Somalis residing in the Greater Toronto Area (Israelite et al., 1999). A failed coup in 1987 and the civil war in northern Somalia (1988-1991) led to the displacement of over a half a million people. The displacement of Somalis within and across borders escalated in the 1990s with drought, famine, and the renewed civil war. Many sought refuge in Ethiopia and Republic of Djibouti, but thousands eventually found resettlement in other countries, such as Canada (Lewis, 2008).

Berns McGown (1999), who conducted ethnographic research with Somalis in Toronto, suggests that Somalis originally from Mogadishu settled in a cluster of apartment buildings near the airport west of the city and gradually moved to less concentrated areas (p. 23). To this day, many families live in high-density and low-income areas of the city.

In the early 1990s Somali individuals and families were mainly inland refugee claimantsⁱⁱⁱ; however, others entered as Convention refugees^{iv} as well as immigrants. In the cases of refugee claimants, the lack of identity documents, especially among Somali women, was a major

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issue. Many Somalis did not take their identity documents with them when they left their home country because of frantic departures and banditry. As well, women were less likely than men to have a driver's license, passport, or other official documents. There was also no way of obtaining new documents or of authenticating existing ones because of the lack of an existing government in Somalia (Israelite et al., 1999; Jibril, 2011). The case led the Canadian government to pass Bill C-86 in 1993 and amend the Immigration Act in 1997, which created a category of refugees without identity documents: Undocumented Convention Refugees in Canada Class (UCRCC). The effect of the policy was that undocumented refugees from Somalia, the majority women and children, had to wait five years after refugee determination before they were able to apply for permanent residency, leaving many families in legal limbo for over ten years. Their immigration status affected their ability to gain employment, for youth to get post-secondary education, and it prevented family reunification (Israelite et al., 1999; Jibril, 2011).

The newcomer Somali individuals and families who were displaced as a result of the Ethiopian occupation (2006-2009) and/or have lived in cities or camps in various countries as refugees before settling in Toronto come from both urban and rural areas of Somalia. These newcomers usually immigrate to Canada as Government Assisted Refugees (GARs).^{iv} Somalis have migrated from different regions, including Northern, Central, and Southern Somalia. Somalis in the city occupy various social positions, including their level of education and socio-economic status; however, the majority live in poverty. According to Michael Ornstein (2006), 63 percent of Somalis in Toronto live below Canada's unofficial poverty line.

There is increasing settlement of newcomers in second and third tier cities in Canada, including the Kitchener-Waterloo area, the second site of my fieldwork. In 2002, Citizenship and Immigration Canada created a federal plan to encourage newcomers to settle outside of Canada's main immigrant destinations (Montreal, Vancouver, Toronto) with one of the main alternatives being Waterloo Region. The immigrant and refugee population in Waterloo Region comprises one-fourth of the total population (Abu-Ayyash and Brochu, 2006). According to one of the Board of Directors for the African-Canadian Association of Waterloo Region and Area, there are approximately 4,000-5,000 Somalis living in Kitchener-Waterloo. Similar to Toronto, many Somalis in the Kitchener-Waterloo area were displaced from Somalia during Siyad Barre's presidency (1969-1991), particularly in the years before his government was overthrown. Many of these families first settled in Toronto and moved to Kitchener-Waterloo. There are various reasons Somalis have chosen to move to the Kitchener-Waterloo area, but the majority of the Somalis I spoke with in the area noted they moved to raise their children in a city that has less violence and fewer gangs compared to Toronto, and they wanted to live close to universities.

There are also many newcomer Somalis who are being resettled in Kitchener-Waterloo. Similar to the newcomers in Toronto, these Somali individuals and families were displaced from Somalia following Ethiopia's occupation of Somalia (2006-2009) and/or they have lived in cities and camps as refugees in other countries throughout the world before resettling in Canada (personal communication with Somali community leader, November 21, 2010). The majority of Somali households in the region are female-headed since many men died or went missing during the war. The increasing amount of Somali families that are female-headed households and are resettled in Canada is also a result of international resettlement policy, which gives higher priority to "women at risk" (Boyle and Ali, 2009). Many Somalis live in poverty in the Kitchener-Waterloo area, however, there are some who are educated and who occupy a higher socio-economic status (field notes, October 2010).

2.1 Gendered experiences of displacement and migration

I am aware of the potential shortcomings and critiques associated with using the word *refugee*. The term refugee has a legal definition in international law and refers to those who have fled their countries and crossed borders into another country for political reasons (UNHCR 1951, UNHCR 1967). This legal definition excludes those individuals and groups who have been forcibly displaced due to environmental disasters, development and economic reasons as well as those who are internally displaced. The reasons for displacement are usually highly complex and include a variety of compounding implications for crossing borders to seek asylum (Fellin, 2013).

Studies on refugees' experiences show that the label tends to universalize heterogeneous populations and that it conceals how gendered experiences are variously experienced (Malkki, 1992; Voutira and Harrell-Bond, 1995; Zetter, 1991). Scholars now realize that experiences of displacement and migration are gendered (Boyd and Grieco, 2003; Colson, 1999). Understanding the reasons women seek resettlement and their experiences of migration help us understand how gender affects adaptation and integration in the adoptive country (Boyd, Grieco 2003). It is important, however, to examine gender from both the perspective of the woman or man's home country with that of her or his adoptive country (Indra, 1987; McSpadden and Moussa, 1993). The social locations of immigrants and refugees transform and are renegotiated in their adoptive countries because they are contingent and variously shaped by their positions in socio-economic, racial, and gender hierarchies (McDowell, 2008; Pessar, 2001). Since gender is a social construct, what it means to be female or male will vary depending on the society (Boyd, Grieco 2003). For instance, identities can transform in the adoptive country if women are in a higher social position in the adoptive country in comparison to the home country (Pessar, 2001). However, if one fails to fulfill his or her expected gender roles in either of the contexts the individual will experience a range of social pressures,



which can lead to exclusion (McSpadden and Moussa, 1993, p. 204). Through the process of migration, settlement, and integration, gender roles and demands are reshaped, made problematic and negotiated (McSpadden and Moussa, 1993, p. 205). This research is among others that examine how the social pressures placed on women who identify as mothers from both their home and adoptive country are renegotiated in the resettlement context.

The refugee label has the effect of removing the individual from his or her context and replacing him or her with a stereotyped identity (Colson, 1999; Zetter, 1991). Neglecting past experiences result in the lack of knowledge and/or an unwillingness of social workers and/or settlement workers to engage with, hear, and consider the personal histories of these women as pertinent to the integration process. In turn, this leads to mothers' inability to receive the proper supports with raising their children in North America (Fellin, 2012).

Separating Somali women from their histories also tells us something about who is an ideal citizen and who is included in the nation: acceptable migrants are those who leave their past behind and become like 'us,' that is, migrants will only be accepted when they emphasize their similarities and hide their differences to make themselves more like citizens (Philips, 2000, p. 40). In this way, certain ethnicities, religions, languages, ways of being, and worldviews are considered to be 'normal,' while others are defined by difference reinforcing, maintaining, and reproducing inequalities in citizenship (Bannerji, 2000; Mackey, 2002; Philips, 2000; Thobani, 2007). Nevertheless, what is considered to be different changes over time (Hall 2000) and in the current social and political environment in Canada, Somali women are marked by their race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status *as well as* their migration status.

2.2 Muslim women in multicultural Canada

The Canadian nation-state was established as a result of settler-colonialism, and by displacing and dispossessing the indigenous populations. Social evolutionary paradigms based on the assumptions that white Europeans occupied the apex of the human evolutionary scale underpinned the colonial project (Bannerji, 2000; Day, 2000). Despite significant social and political shifts since then, it has been argued by scholars of multiculturalism in Canada (Bannerji, 2000; Day, 2000; Mackey, 2002; Thobani, 2007) that multiculturalism policy continues to be used by the Canadian state to manage internal 'Others,' including First Nations as well as immigrants, refugees, and racialized groups. The ongoing processes that reproduce the Canadian nation continue to be based on similar assumptions of a white Canada, which also shaped the official multiculturalism of the 1980s. A 'multicultural mosaic' in Canada meant various 'Others' could exhibit their cultural differences, as long as such differences did not threaten the status quo or the political and ideological system (Mackey, 2002, p. 143-45).

The US imperial 'War on Terror' has changed the ways

multiculturalism is conceived in North America. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US, President Bush distinguished between "bad Muslims," who were responsible for terrorism, and "good Muslims" who were eager to prove that they were not terrorists by joining the US and its allies against "bad Muslims" (Mamdani 2004). Mamdani (2004) argues the discourse of "good Muslims" and "bad Muslims" reconstructed all Muslims as bad unless they prove that they are good. Mamdani (2004) conceptualizes the narratives told in the West as "Culture Talk." The view of social evolution of societies and cultures from barbarism to civilization is constructed on racial thinking and continues to inform narratives of colonized peoples in the world (Said 1993). During the Cold War, Africa was represented as having an inability to progress and reach modernity due to 'African tribalism' (Mamdani, 2004; Razack, 2008). According to Mamdani (2004), with the end of the Cold War, Islam and the Middle East became viewed not only as incapable of reaching modernity, but also as resistant to it.

The narratives of Muslims as well as the policies emanating from the 'War on Terror' represent and affect the lives of men and women in North America differently (Razack, 2008, p. 84). For instance, one of the policy objectives in the war of Afghanistan, made by the Bush administration, was the liberation of Muslim women. In doing so, 'women's rights' discourse was used to justify the war (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Razack, 2008). In the media, images of veiled women represent these women as victims. These representations not only victimized women, but also essentialized them, replacing their context with the stereotyped identity that sees them as passive victims who need to be helped (Thobani 2007). As such, these stereotypes often shape how non-Muslims view Muslim women in North America, including the Somali women in the parenting education classes described in this study. Studies have shown that in Canada it is believed that immigrant women are responsible for transmitting racial, cultural, and national difference onto their children (Thobani, 2007, p. 237). In this context, there is a normalization of white, Western, middle-class culture that includes beliefs about proper ways of mothering. This leads to the pathologizing of Somali culture and Islam. As such, Somali women become targets of resettlement programs such as parenting education classes that intend to modernize their mothering practices and to teach them how to raise their children *properly* (see also Villenas, 2001, p. 9).

2.3 Mothering in a neoliberal context

Parenting education classes that target Somali mothers need to be seen in light of the construction of the 'active citizen' in Canada that is based on North American neoliberalism. North American neoliberalism is characterized by the reversal of welfare programs, capitalist imperialism linked with "lawlessness and military action," (Ong 2006, p. 1-2) and the emphasis on citizens' freedoms. The 'neo' part of 'neoliberalism' is the new emphasis of governments on regulating the self (Ong 2006), which involves processes of "responsibilization"

whereby state interventions are used to motivate and manage self-sufficiency with the purpose of reducing claims on the state (Kennely and Llewellyn, 2009, p. 899; Rose, 1999, p. 74; Walsh, 2011, p. 861).

Parenting education classes are used to modify and shape the parenting practices of Somali mothers to teach them how to raise their children like mothers in the imagined Canadian community. The effects of this form of governance on Somali mothers are twofold. First, the emphasis on self-regulation and responsibility construct those who engage in paid work, have skills and education, English language abilities, and are *good* parents, as *ideal* citizens; however, those who make demands on the state are not considered to be responsible citizens (Hart, 2009, p. 643; Walsh, 2011, p. 873). In this context, the issues that are affecting Somali mothers, including unemployment or underemployment, lack of English proficiency, and low levels of literacy are viewed as failures of each individual. They also contribute to the belief that mothers, who immigrated to Canada as refugees, are a *burden* on the state (see Hart, 2009). Parenting education classes do not address these structural issues and instead look to modify the behaviour of mothers toward their children to become *good* parents.

The second way neoliberal governance affects Somali women is their positions as mothers of future neoliberal subjects. Within neoliberal understandings, groups who live in poverty are considered moral deviants who are blamed for their own circumstances. These moral judgments are extended to what is considered *good* or *bad* mothering (Pasternak, 2010, p. 173). One such group that is targeted in such discourse is lone parent, female-headed households (Giles, 2012). As stated earlier, Somali families in North America are increasingly female-headed (Berns and McGown, 2003), as were the mothers targeted in the parenting classes I attended and the majority of the women I interviewed. Furthermore, all of the women in these classes received social assistance, which provides evidence of their poverty. The focus of the parenting education classes on self-responsibility reinforces discourses of *good mothering*. North American beliefs about *good mothering*, include assumptions around middle-class choice and material realities. As a result, structural issues that affect poor families, such as lack of food, access to affordable housing and safe neighbourhoods become irrelevant (Giles, 2012, p. 116). The result is “blame the mother” discourse is maintained and reproduced rather than any critique of the larger system being offered (Giles, 2012, p. 123). *Good* and *bad* mothering discourse interrelate with ideas surrounding mothers’ roles as producers of creative, flexible, and productive future neoliberal subjects positing children as possible future citizens (Giles, 2012, p. 124). Assimilation programs, such as the parenting education classes focused on in this study, have targeted women since they have been historically thought of as transmitters of culture (Villenas, 2001, p. 8).

The state is no longer directly involved in the responsabilization of citizens; however, they are indirectly

involved through the social service sector. For instance, parenting education classes are provided by family counseling organizations. Part of the state’s actions to reduce the degree to which it meets its citizens social and economic needs has been to partner with the private sector, involve individuals and communities to reconstruct institutions, such as philanthropic or social service organizations, that support and assist marginalized citizens. Building upon Rose’s (1999) theory of “community as a means of government,” Ilcan and Basok (2004) have conceptualized this process as “community government,” whereby the government shapes and orients communities to engage in activities and programs to responsabilize “certain groups of citizens for particular purposes and ends” (p. 130).

Since the 1990s, in Canada, the social service sector has been increasingly responsible for providing social and economic services. The government has been able to reduce the amount of resources put towards advocacy by transforming the funding structure. While continuing to praise the social service sector for their contribution to public policy, the government undermines this contribution by reducing their ability to be involved in advocacy. This is accomplished by changing core funding to project funding, reducing financial support, and emphasizing accountability of social service institutions (Ilcan and Basok, 2004, p. 135). As a result, agencies have less time and resources for research, education, and advocacy, areas that are not funded by the government and are difficult to measure (Ilcan and Basok, 2004, p. 136). This has largely been successful and uncontended because the community is viewed as neutral, that is non-political (Ilcan and Basok, 2004). However, as Li (1996) argues this form of responsabilization of citizens is not unilateral; it is negotiated and contested by social service agencies, workers, and participants of the programs. It is within this context that social service agencies are offering parenting education classes for Somali refugee mothers in Ontario. The article critiques the belief in social services’ neutrality, recognizing the pressure placed on them through state funding, and contributes to research that critically examines these programs.

3. Methods

3.1 Research design

The research was designed as a multi-sited ethnographic research project. Specifically, it draws on participant-observation of parenting education classes that target Somali women and semi-structured interviews with Somali mothers in the Kitchener-Waterloo area and in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. For this study, I sought to understand the childrearing experiences of Somali women who immigrated to Canada. The project obtained ethics approval from the research ethics board at The University of Western Ontario. This study is part of a larger research project on the experiences of Somali children and youth in educational spaces in North America (Fellin, 2012). An earlier version of this article was presented at the American Anthropology Association Meetings in San Francisco, CA in 2012 (Stachel, 2012b).

3.2 Recruitment and interlocutors

The criteria for participating in this study included being a woman who identified as Somali and had one or more children living with her in the Kitchener-Waterloo area or in Toronto. For the parenting education classes, the refugee resettlement program identified the women as mothers. The children did not have to be the women's own. The women who were interviewed identified themselves as mothers. Mothers were invited to participate in an interview through an information letter written in English and translated into Somali. Those interested in participating in the study were invited to take part in an individual interview at a time and place that was convenient to them. Even though I studied the Somali language for two years, I did not have the proficiency to carry out extensive interviews in the language. Somali oratory is rich in metaphor, poetry, and allegory, some of which I would miss if I did not have assistance (see Besteman, 1999). As such, if my interlocutors felt more comfortable speaking in Somali, I offered to have a Somali interpreter present in the interviews. In the Kitchener-Waterloo area and in Toronto, I employed two different Somali mothers who had experience as interpreters. The presence of an interpreter did have an effect on the interviews. The interlocutors may have silenced parts of their histories and may not have spoken as openly because of the presence of another Somali community member, or were encouraged to speak out for the same reason. Nonetheless, in some contexts, the presence of an interpreter allowed me to access information that I would not have learned on my own.

For participant-observation of the parenting education classes, I approached the organization that was offering the program and gave them an information letter about my research. Once they consented to my participation, I sought informed consent from the counselor of the group and the mothers participating in the group.

This article draws on 15 semi-structured interviews with Somali mothers in Kitchener-Waterloo and Toronto. Thirteen of the mothers immigrated to Canada as government-assisted refugees under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP). These women were receiving social assistance, were either widowed or divorced, and had between 2 and 8 children. The education level of the participants ranged from grade 3 to 12. The other two participants came to Canada as immigrants. Both of the women were married when they immigrated to Canada (although at the time of interview one was divorced) and both had graduate degrees.

3.3 Data gathering

The study draws on participant-observation in two parenting education classes (2010) in Ontario. It is also based on preliminary research for 2 years (2008–2010) and ethnographic fieldwork for 16 months (2010–2011), including participant-observation with Somali youth and their families in after-school homework programs, refugee organizations, Somali community programs and events, in families' homes, and in mosques in the Kitchener-Waterloo area and in Toronto (Fellin, 2012).

During participant-observation, I detailed field notes including descriptive, analytic and methodological field notes (Bernard 2002). During 16 months of fieldwork, I conducted the interviews with Somali mothers that lasted between thirty minutes and two hours. The questions posed during the interviews focused on four main themes: (1) the women's experiences of displacement; (2) experiences in refugee camps or in cities in other countries before immigrating to Canada; (3) their experiences immigrating and living in Canada; and (4) their experiences raising children.

3.4 Data analysis

For the interviews, a grounded theoretical approach was used to identify categories that emerged during participant-observation and interviews and to analyze them using ethnographic research on Somalia, Somali refugees as well as theories from post-colonial feminist studies, refugee studies, neoliberalism, citizenship education, and multiculturalism (Bernard, 2002). A transcriptionist transcribed the interviews verbatim with all identifying information removed. An open coding approach was used to analyze the emergent themes and patterns through a close study of the interview transcripts and field notes (Bernard, 2002). The themes and categories were checked against the literature and theories discussed above. The quotes used to represent Somali mothers in this article do not reveal any identifying information in order to protect the participants' anonymity.

4. Results

4.1 Parenting education classes

On March 20, 2010 I met with the director of a government-assisted refugee resettlement program, a caseworker, and a social worker. The meeting was about a psycho-educational support group that would target Somali mothers who, within the past year, had immigrated to Canada as government-assisted refugees. The purpose of the program, I was told, was to reduce social isolation, improve parent-child relationships, increase positive parenting, improve settlement in Canada, and provide an opportunity to discuss issues, concerns, and to problem solve collectively (field notes March 20, 2010). An overview of the topics and objectives of each week showed me that the women's strengths were not considered. Only one of the eight weeks was dedicated to the women's personal histories; labeled the *trauma* piece. The next four weeks focused on parenting sessions with topics including, raising children in Canada, appropriate disciplining, parental responsibilities, parent-child relationships, understanding children, and communicating with children (field notes March 20, 2010). The lecture format of the classes do not draw on women's experiential knowledge in these areas. The women's own parenting styles were viewed as *backward* and therefore they needed to learn *modern*, Canadian parenting practices. This included negatively perceived assumptions regarding Somali women's use of physical discipline (see also Villenas, 2001, p. 9). In all of the sessions I



attended, Somali women's experiences of parenting were never consulted and their strengths and ways of coping as parents throughout their displacement and subsequent migrations were never considered. Further, the first group I observed did not have a Somali translator, but one who spoke Arabic. Only two of the women in the group spoke Arabic and all of the group members had beginner English proficiency.

In the second parenting class I attended, the counselor made similar assumptions of physical punishment and neglect on the part of mothers. The sessions were run as lectures given by the counselor, rather than an engagement in dialogue with the mothers. The focus was on physical abuse, what it included and the consequences of inflicting it on a child (i.e. Family and Children's Services to be called to the home, psychological impact on the child). The counselor also discussed emotional abuse and the possible effects on the child (i.e. low self-esteem, drug and alcohol use). Finally, she discussed neglect; having a dirty house, clothes, not changing diapers, and a lack of supervision. The mothers, throughout this session, were not asked for their input or given the opportunity to present their own strategies for dealing with their children's behavior (field notes, November 4, 2010).

These parenting education classes only focused on the past in terms of women's victimhood, rather than their strengths and the adversity they had overcome to get to North America with their children. The view of refugees as helpless and vulnerable in psycho-educational interventions in North America mirror those of humanitarian aid organizations working in refugee camps (Harrell-Bond, 1999; Malkki, 1996; Summerfield, 1999). Underlying the educational programs, therefore, is the view that refugees are not only victims of war, but also victims of their *traditions* and *backward* cultures. They must become *worthy* of Canadian citizenship in today's political environment, which is regarded as a privilege or a prize rather than a right.

4.2 Mothers' experiences of structural violence

The findings of this research suggest that by replacing Somali mothers' contexts with a stereotyped identity, their experiences of structural violence in Canada are undermined. Here, I use Scheper-Hughes' (2004) conceptualization of structural violence to refer to the invisible "social machinery" (p. 14) of social inequality that reproduces social relations of exclusion. During participant-observation in parenting classes and interviews with mothers, it became clear that a focus on Somali women's victimhood obscured the issues they were faced with everyday. These included the closing of borders resulting in the separation of family members and their experiences of poverty. Both issues clearly affected their economic and emotional well-being.

4.2.1 Separation from family members

In the first parenting group I attended, the women talked about the family members they had living in refugee camps. One young woman spoke of her brother and

fiancé; an older woman talked about her 26 year-old son who she had not seen in 11 years; and another spoke of her mother and four brothers (field notes May 1, 2010). Discussing how family members call her on the phone and cry to her, one woman showed me a picture of her family members and admitted that she did not like to look at the picture because she did not want to think about how she left them and what they are going through in the refugee camp (field notes May 29, 2010).

The separation of family members affects women's emotional well-being. Since 9/11 the Canadian state has increased border controls and tightened screening practices. One of the effects of such policies is that families are separated. In 2010, for instance, I met Fardowso in the parenting class. In one of the classes, she talked about the problems she faced with family reunification. In 2011, she was still going through the application process. In Yemen, Fardowso's husband left his family on a boat to Saudi Arabia, but was later deported back to Somalia. Soon after Fardowso immigrated to Canada, her daughter who was married with four children and due to be resettled in the US, died. Every time I met with Fardowso she talked about her separation from her husband and grandchildren, with great sadness and loss. She continues to try to get her grandchildren to Canada; however, since her granddaughter was the primary applicant, she needed to start a new application process (personal communication May 26, 2011). Fariido was also a participant of the 2010 parenting class. During our meetings at this time, Fariido made the connection between her worry of her children in the camps and her physical symptoms that included headaches, loss of balance, and insomnia. She also talked with me about not wanting to leave the house and that everything makes her cry. She added that she feels guilty when she is happy (field notes October 28, 2010).

In 2011, in an interview with Fariido and her daughter, she asked for my advice on finding out about the application for family reunification with her other children. Fariido explains: "My problem is that the Canadian government said they were going to bring my kids from Ethiopia, but it has been 1 year and 9 months and I am getting worried. We have done all of the paperwork on both sides and we are always thinking about them" (Fariido April 25, 2011). Both Fardowso and Fariido said they were always thinking of their family back home and crying while also experiencing physical pain that stopped them from going outside in the winter.

The worry over family is amplified during periods of armed conflict in Somalia. Sophia discussed with me how the war in Somalia affects Somali women's ability to function in their day-to-day lives in Canada. She said that for herself, she would feel so sad and angry hearing about relatives who have died, been shot, or bombed, that it de-habilitated her. For instance, in one day she had ten family members killed because a bomb hit their house in Mogadishu (personal communication with Sophia December 18, 2010).

4.2.2 Mothers' experiences of poverty

Structural violence obscures the social, political, and economic history of poverty, taking it for granted and blaming poverty on the poor themselves (Scheper-Hughes, 2004, p. 14). Along with the limits of family reunification, many of the mothers talked with me about their experiences of poverty in Canada: housing issues, violence, and income for basic needs. The findings show that the poverty of family in other countries also influences mothers' poverty in Canada.

I witnessed many families living in housing situations that the mothers I interviewed considered unsafe and were worried the housing situations would affect their families' health. I saw parents with a newborn baby living in an apartment with no heating in the middle of winter, and children with bed bug bites who did not want to eat or sleep in their apartment because of the cockroach infestations. Faduma attempted to articulate her experiences of living in this housing situation: "I had this other house that had cockroaches, it had big, big mice. At nighttime, I cannot sleep. I have to watch the cockroaches and rats 'cause they're going to hit my kids if I sleep. All night I'm up" (Faduma June 29, 2011). In a cooperative housing complex in Kitchener, I met with Amal who had decorated her living room with large couches covered with oversized pillows to create a feeling of comfort in a home with stained walls from water damage and no heating (field notes October 2, 2010). Zeinab had similar experiences. As I sat in her apartment drinking tea, a cockroach scurried up the wall. During our conversation, she talked with me about how she cleaned all of the time but her apartment is infested with cockroaches. Zeinab started crying when telling me that her children would not eat what she cooked for them because they were afraid there were cockroaches in the food (personal communication with Zeinab December 2, 2010). When I raised concerns with one of the women's caseworkers about the conditions the families were living in she replied, "Somali women use words to manipulate and lie." She continued that because I am a different person they complain to me thinking that I will help them and that she believed it was the women's faults for the state of their apartments (personal communication December 2, 2010).

In Toronto, I met with Somali mothers who lived in areas known for gun violence. A mother sat and spoke with me in her apartment about her worry about her daughter coming home from night classes at university. The mother told me that throughout the night she hears gunshots (personal communication November 8, 2010). In another area of Toronto known for violence, I visited a mother who was a lone parent living in a cooperative housing complex in dismal shape with her daughter. The unit had a boarded-up front window. Inside, the mother had the house clean with big Italian style couches, a television, table, and chairs, however, there were no windows to the outside (field notes November 24, 2010).

Other housing issues included access to affordable housing that could accommodate large families. Idil tries to illustrate this problem: "You have 8 kids and there's no

way you can get an apartment that would fit, so that's another issue. And people, they get evicted from apartment to apartment. They have to lie...You have to hide some of your kids in order to be allowed in a 3-bedroom apartment" (Idil June 29, 2011). Many mothers talked about the housing costs and the effects on their ability to provide for their children. Zeinab talked about the lack of money to meet her family's basic needs because of the cost of rent. Showing me her cheque from Ontario Works that gives her \$344.00 for her basic needs and \$578.00 for her shelter (equaling \$922.00), she asks how can this be enough when the rent itself is \$800.00 (personal communication with Zeinab December 2, 2010).

During my fieldwork, I found the majority of Somalis continually listen to the news and frequently talk to their family members throughout the diaspora on the phone because they are deeply concerned with the political situation in Somalia. Their concern, to a large extent, has to do with family and community members who remain in Somalia or in the neighbouring countries of Kenya, Yemen, and Ethiopia, where Somalis' positions are increasingly precarious. In addition, I found when possible that Somali women in North America help their families in the diaspora by sending money to relatives in different countries, including Somalia. Although refugees in North America usually occupy lower socio-economic positions, small amounts of money by North American standards can enable the survival of many in the Horn of Africa. Remittances sent by Somalis have the advantage of reaching family members directly; in fact the total sum of remittances sent to Somalia is much greater than development aid (Horst 2008, p. 144). Sending remittances to family in Somalia or in neighbouring countries exacerbates Somali mothers' experiences of poverty in North America.

4.3 Displacement and migration: Somali mothers' strengths and coping strategies

Stereotyped identities that view Somali mothers as vulnerable victims undermine the political histories and the complex relations and experiences of Somali women who immigrate to Canada. These histories are presented as unstable and unknowable, and eventually deemed irrelevant and unusable in citizenship education classes that target them. My approach was to examine the links between the past and the present to view Somali women as social and historical agents. By doing so, the findings show the survival, strengths and coping strategies of these women as mothers throughout their migration experiences. In all cases, the women's concerns were to maintain the safety and to protect their children in harsh conditions.

Throughout my fieldwork I heard stories from women that illustrated their strengths and resilience despite the adversity they faced throughout their migration trajectories. Both Zhara and Hodan told me stories of the loss of their children in Somalia while trying to save them. Zhara told me the story of losing her first born baby during the war because she could not leave the house to

access a hospital that was taken over by warlords. She blamed herself for not getting her son to a hospital in time,

My own son died with my own hand. I didn't know how to carry him to hospital because there's a war. He was dehydrated and had diarrhea. I didn't know—He died, and I'm holding him because he's sick. . . . My mom came and then said, 'Zhara, today I didn't see you, you didn't come down.' She said, 'What's up? Is he still sick? Here, Mohamed.' I say, 'Yes, mom. I don't know.' And he died. I don't know... I thought he was sleeping. . . . When my husband changed him, he was crying, crying, vomiting. . . . My husband went to [to call the doctor] he knows to see him. My mom came to greet me and then she saw him and she said, 'Give me the baby. Let me pray for him.' He died. My mom, she realized he passed away and she put him in my bed and started consoling me (Zhara, May 31, 2011).

Hodan told me the story of her oldest children as I sat with her and her son at the kitchen table in her apartment. During the civil war in Somalia, Hodan convinced her husband that they should send their four oldest children by boat to seek asylum in Yemen. Her children were on a boat that was bound for Yemen when it capsized and the passengers died. Hodan's husband blamed her for the deaths of their children and as a result left her. Living in Canada and raising her six remaining children as a lone parent, she continued to blame herself for the loss of her children (personal communication April 22, 2011).

Other mothers told the stories of how they helped their families' to survive as refugees in neighbouring countries. The Ibrahim family was led by Fardowso and includes 19-year-old Abuubakar, 17-year-old Ladan, and 14-year-old Hanad. The family was internally displaced to Mogadishu and then to the north to Boosaaso, as their region was one of the hardest hit in the war. They eventually fled the country in 1996 to Yemen where Hanad was born and they lived for 12 years. Fardowso explains the families' living conditions: "In Yemen we lived in a refugee camp that was far from cities and there were only Somalis. The children went to school in the camp. Life in the camp was hard. We were given little food and it was not enough. We tried to get stuff from Yemen people outside of the camp, to get more to survive" (Fardowso May 26, 2011). Here, Fardowso is explaining that despite the risk, she traveled outside of the camp in order to get more food for her family.

Yasmin, who immigrated to Canada a year earlier than Fardowso in 2008, had a similar experience. Yasmin attempted to articulate her migration trajectory:

"I was born in Mogadishu and went to school until I was in grade 11. I left because of the war. I first went to Basaso and then to Yemen. I spent 9 years in Yemen. I had my girl in Somalia and my boy in Yemen. They went to school in Yemen, an Arab school in the refugee camp."

Continuing with her narrative Yasmin discusses the work she did in order to get the basic necessities for her family:

"Life was hard. I was working in an Arab house, cleaning it was hard to get along with the families, but if [I] didn't I would have to find somewhere else. I needed the money to pay bills and get food so it was hard, hard to find work. When I was working in the houses I use chemicals; my eyes would be hurting, my throat was bad, my back hurting. One day I went to work and got in an accident. I had a pain in my leg, arm, and I had to have my joints put back together" (Yasmin May 27, 2011).

Fariido's experience was similar. Fariido, along with her husband, fled Somalia in 1993. Fariido's husband died in his sleep in 2006 in Yemen's capital city, Sana'a, where he worked. Fariido also worked as a house cleaner for Arab families and developed a growth in her throat that needed immediate surgery because of her daily exposure to chemicals. Her health condition and need for immediate surgery expedited the process of the family immigrating to Canada (personal communication with Fariido April 25, 2011).

Faaiso also had to work a low paying job to take care of her children in South Africa because of her refugee status. She was in constant fear for her children and herself living in South Africa. In explaining her fear she says,

"We lived in South Africa under terrible conditions. We had fear for our lives on the streets, here the cars stop for you, but there they would run you over—kill you. They did not care if you were not South African, especially if you are dressed like a Somali. They would loot stores, killing people, stealing things. They would take girls and rape them as young as 5" (Faaiso, April 14, 2011).

Sahro moved from a refugee camp in Kenya to the capital city, Nairobi because of her health. While coping with her own health conditions of high blood pressure and diabetes, Sahro made sure that her children still attended school despite the fees. Sahro explained how she maintained the learning of her 6 children, "Some of my kids were going to a public school and some private school, and I had problems with the school fees. Sometimes I did not have the money, but still they were going to school every day" (Sahro, April 25, 2011). The pride for roles as mothers and the concern for children's well-being throughout the war in Somalia and their migrations contrary to the deficit framing perspective of Canadian parenting education classes that view Somali mothers as Muslim refugee women who do not know better in how to properly care for their children (see Villenas 2001, p. 3-4).

4.4 Somali culture and language in the diaspora

In the interviews, I found that Somali mothers negotiate the social pressures of the adoptive society by claiming both home and community spaces to maintain and to teach Somali culture and language as well as Islam to their children. I use “community educational spaces” as an overreaching term to highlight and examine learning that takes place outside of private/public schools and includes, but is not limited to, after-school homework programs, *dugsi*, Somali language classes, community programs, and events (Fellin, 2012). Mothers, often play key roles in creating these educational spaces and/or ensuring their children have access to these spaces. In all three of my fieldsites it was Somali mothers who created Somali language classes to teach their children their native language. For instance, Filsan suggested that Somali children growing up in Canada are not learning Somali language so there is a disconnection between elders and the youth, an important relationship back home to help youth transition into adulthood (Tefferi, 2007). Consequently, Filsan set up Somali language classes on Saturdays for children to learn the language. She volunteered her time to coordinate and advertise the classes and to take on the role of teaching the children (personal communication with Filsan July 17, 2009). Mothers also created and volunteered in after-school homework programs for Somali children and youth to help with their mainstream schooling. For instance, when Sophia first moved to Canada she created an after-school homework program to help Somali students with school. Some of the parents were not able to help their children with their homework because they were not proficient in English. As well, she believed it helped to fill in the gap in the school system to help newcomer children with learning English and transitioning into school in Canada (personal communication with Sophia November 15, 2010). In my research with Somali youth, I found that when youth were engaged in Somali community educational spaces, their grades went up and they were less likely to leave school (Fellin, 2015). In this way, Somali mothers, in their roles in community educational spaces play a key position in mitigating risk to their children. In fact, when Somali children experienced exclusion in their mainstream schools, community educational spaces offered youth spaces of belonging (Fellin, 2015). This individual and political agency that mothers used to not only maintain their culture, language, and religion, but also help their children integrate in Canada despite the structural violence they have experienced runs contrary to the views of neglect and lack of parental involvement in their children’s lives in parenting education classes.

5 Discussion

Parenting education classes are used to *responsibilize* Somali mothers, to raise future citizens of Canada. The classes are taught in a way to hide differences in approaches and views of parenting and to homogenize Somali women to be like Western, middle-class mothers. Modernity narratives of Muslims, Africans, and refugees

that rely on ideas of progress and do not consider historical and global dynamics as well as neoliberal perspectives on mothering inform the parenting education classes that target Somali women. As a result, the structural violence experienced by Somali mothers in Canada, including the separation of family members and their experiences of poverty is overlooked in parenting education classes. Further, the strengths and capabilities of these women to protect their children throughout their migrations are undermined through the imposition of a stereotyped identity of victimhood. Seen as merely victims of trauma and in need of being weaned of their cultural habits and inducted into Canadian society were the focuses of these classes.

Somali mothers, however, are not merely “being made” but are “self-making” by claiming both the home and community spaces. Similar to Villenas’ (2001) study of Latina mothers who were also targets of parenting classes in a small-town in North Carolina, I found that Somali mothers’ narratives of their children’s education involved claiming the home space as well as community spaces as responsible for maintaining and teaching Somali culture, history, and language, as well as Islam. Berns McGown (1999) shows that Somali mothers in Canada are the ones taking care of their families by getting wage labour and keeping their children together. They are also learning the Qu’ran to teach their children their religion in the home.

By arguing that Somali women are resourceful, I am not negating their experiences of adversity. Rather, I seek to consider whether a focus on Somali women’s agency may be more effective in citizenship education classes, benefiting the women and their roles as mothers by focusing on their strengths through an acknowledgement of their pasts.

Replacing Somali women’s past with a stereotyped identity affects them as mothers in Canada. The findings show that experiences of migration and armed conflict are gendered (Boyd and Grieco, 2003; Pessar, 2001). The pre-migration stage that included men being lost or dying during the civil war affected women’s roles and their decisions about their children. Women had to make decisions concerning their children during the armed conflict in Somalia. Once these women crossed state borders, they also had to ensure the survival of their children throughout their migrations through getting wage labour in often harsh conditions and ensuring their children attend school. Since they were able to cross international borders they could apply and were able to get Convention Refugee status. As widowed or divorced women with children, they were identified by UNHCR as high priority for resettlement. However, once resettled in Canada their positions in economic, legal, and racial hierarchies led to silencing their voices in parenting education classes. As such, this research contributes to our understanding of how gender influences international migration throughout the migration process (Boyd and Grieco, 2003).

In light of the above, it becomes evident that there needs to be a restructuring of the approach to citizenship



education for refugee mothers. The multicultural model admits difference; however, the reasons for difference are constructed in terms of 'ethnic cultures.' According to Bannerji (2000, p. 44-45), when Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau created multiculturalism policy (1971) there were few multicultural demands on the government by third world immigrants. The issues they did raise had to do with racism, immigration and family reunification, and difficulties with childcare and language, many of the issues raised by Somali mothers in this study. Contrary to popular belief that multiculturalism was a response to third world immigrants, multiculturalism policy was constructed from above and became a way for the Canadian government to reduce issues of injustice, such as racism, to issues of cultural diversity that focus on religion and 'tradition.' The effect was that third world immigrants were culturized and mapped into specific ethnic communities (Bannerji, 2000, p. 44-45), perpetuating the idea that 'multicultures' have identifiable cultures, seen as traditions brought from their past (Mackey, 2002, p. 151). Somali women in this study were treated in much the same way.

Based on theories of modernity and liberal universalism, national narratives that construct immigrants and refugees as both internal and external threats, are a part of the larger nation-building project. Canada's national narratives are filled with tales of its territorial transformation from a "wilderness" to a "civilization" (Mackey, 2002, p. 17). An essential element to obtaining civilization is the improvement of the nation's people. The goals of progression and development are primary tenants of Western liberal culture. Underlying these goals is an assumption of its authority and right to define others as 'cultural' and subordinate to its unmarked core culture. Western liberal culture, therefore, gets to decide the differences that are allowed and the differences that need to be developed, altered, or improved (Mackey 2002, p. 161). The parenting education classes directed at Somali mothers mirror these social evolutionary theories. The view that mothers' parenting practices need to be 'improved' was quite different from their actual experiences of childrearing. Programs that seek to help with the integration of refugee women need to unearth assumptions that reinforce the subordinate status of refugees as well as Muslim women in Canada, and instead need to build upon their strengths as mothers by considering their experiences of parenting that include histories of survival and mitigating risk to themselves and to their families. Similarly, by refusing to see Somali women as merely victims, there is a change of focus from one's victimhood to an approach that sees the effects of the intersections of structural violence on the overall well-being of Somali women in North America.

6 Conclusion

Parenting education classes directed at Somali women are based on modernity narratives about Muslims, refugees, and neoliberal approaches to mothering. They do not consider the strengths of Somali women to

survive the armed conflict and displacement in Somalia and the ways they mitigated risks to their children throughout their migration. Somali women are pressured from their home culture to maintain and to teach their language, culture and religion to their children in the diaspora. My findings suggest they are carrying this out in both home and community spaces. At the same time, they are also under pressure of the adoptive country to be more like citizens in how they parent their children. Social service organizations are under increasing pressure to carry out the roles of the state. In this case, it is to assimilate the parenting practices of refugee women, to "responsibilize" them as mothers with an eye to the future that this will help them to raise responsible future citizens. The larger systemic exclusion of Somali mothers through structural violence, however, needs to be considered to better support Somali women as mothers in North America.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Modernity narratives are informed by colonialism and are used in the West to classify certain cultures as peaceful and civil and therefore considered modern from cultures they perceive as pre-modern and/or anti-modern (Mamdani 2004, Author 2013). Pre-modern people are characterized as not yet modern or unable to reach modernity. This is often used in the West to describe people from Africa. Anti-modern peoples are described as being ruled by customs and tradition that predispose them to violence. This narrative is often invoked by the West to talk about Muslims (Mamdani 2004, Said 1997, Author 2013).

ⁱⁱ Convention refugees have obtained refugee status in another country and have immigrated to Canada as government-assisted or privately sponsored refugees. Their status in Canada differs from asylum seekers who apply for refugee status within Canada.

ⁱⁱⁱ Inland claimants enter Canada as asylum seekers applying for refugee status within Canada.

^{iv} Convention refugees have obtained refugee status in another country and have immigrated to Canada as government-assisted or sponsored refugees.

^v Government assisted refugees immigrate to Canada under government assisted refugee program and are sponsored by the Canadian government for their first year in Canada through financial and settlement support.

^{vi} There is no official poverty line in Canada the "Low Income Cutoff" continues to be the measure used by Statistics Canada