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The Somali Diaspora in Greater Boston

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East Africans as America's Newest Immigrants

Our nation was founded on and thrives on immigration. One of the newest immigrant groups in the Boston area are Somalis. They are among the largest of the new populations of African immigrants. While precise numbers are very difficult to determine, there are approximately 8,000 in the Greater Boston area and another 2,000 estimated across the rest of Massachusetts. Very few studies have examined Somalis in the United States, and no studies exist on the community in Boston or Massachusetts.

It is an interesting sociological question to ask how similar the Somali experience has been in the United States (and in Boston) compared with other immigrant groups. In this article, we will attempt to suggest some plausible answers to that question, but a definitive answer awaits a formal research study.

Turmoil, poverty, and war—particularly civil war—are powerful motivating factors in the migration of large numbers of people away from their cultural roots. These circumstances have certainly been present in the case of the failed state of Somalia. Prior to the outbreak of civil war in 1991, the capital of Somalia, Mogadishu, was actually a tourist destination. But since then Somalia in general and the capital of Mogadishu have come to represent one of the worst cases in nation state failure and chaos in civil war.

Supporting Enterprise, Culturally

Saido Farah (left) and Deeqo Jibril pause before stocked shelves in a Somali-owned store, Farah's Roots Halal Meat Market in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston. Islam's ban on interest-bearing loans creates financial challenges for Somali immigrants who open small businesses. Photo by Talia Whyte/Inter Press Service (IPS). Reprinted by permission.

Arrival in the Diaspora

The trickle of Somalis who came to the United States during the 1970s and 1980s were oriented toward acquiring professional training and/or pursuing small business opportunities of the kind that many ethnic immigrant families run: grocery stores, butcher shops, clothing stores, convenience stores, or restaurants. The large stream of refugees began soon after militia armies defeated government forces in 1991. Comparatively speaking, these emigrations involved huge numbers—literally thousands—fleeing the chaos.

From the late 1990s to present, the young Somali immigrant population has mirrored other segments of the youth population in the United States, with a number of individuals pursuing opportunities in higher education, professional development, and small business, while others are not succeeding and are in danger of succumbing to personal disinvestment in their new country. Those who fail to latch onto socioeconomic opportunity are likely to see their energies channeled toward lower-paying jobs in the service sector—or worse.

Since 1998, many of those in the first and second waves of Somali immigrants, who have been educated in the United States, are actually now looking for jobs overseas, where their training will ensure a relatively higher standard of living. Kenya and the Middle East are major destinations because Somalis constitute a sizable segment of the business sector in those areas. A number of Somali-American professionals from Boston area have found jobs and settled with their families in the Middle East (primarily Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates).

Authors' Subset and Modification of Table 52, Population by Selected Ancestry Group and Region: 2006

Ancestry	Number		
	Total	Pct.	Pct. Sub-Saharan Only
Sub-Saharan African	2,540,781		
Cape Verdean	88,420	3.5%	9.2%
Ethiopian	151,491	6.0%	15.8%
Ghanaian	79,510	3.1%	8.3%
Kenyan	37,795	1.5%	3.9%
Liberian	44,873	1.8%	4.7%
Nigerian	237,527	9.3%	24.8%
Senegalese	10,341	0.4%	1.1%
Sierra Leonean	14,365	0.6%	1.5%
Somali	91,016	3.6%	9.5%
South African	53,974	2.1%	5.6%
Sudanese	40,261	1.6%	4.2%
Ugandan	5,058	0.2%	0.5%
Zimbabwean	4,410	0.2%	0.5%
Author's Modification, sub-Saharan African Total:	958,735		
(Authors' Comment: Possibly non-sub-Saharan African) African	1,588,718	62.5%	
Other sub-Saharan African	99,694	3.9%	
Total & Pct. Total	2,547,453	100%	

See U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, National Data Book, *2009. Table 52. Population by Selected Ancestry Group and Region: 2006 Available at http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/12statab/pop.pdf.*

Somali Global Demographics

Accurate data on the Somali population worldwide is only available in fragments. Figures vary widely and are virtually always underestimated. Since 2000, the Diaspora's population has multiplied manyfold and is thought to represent some 14 percent of the Somali population. This has prompted the latest UN-sponsored report to call the Somali population a truly global population.[1] For example, Somalis are the largest non-European ethnic minority in Finland, with a community of 9,000.

There has been a huge influx of individuals into the United States and Canada since 2000. UN data indicate that there were only 25,000 Somalis in the United States and 30,000 in Canada in 2000. North American activists from the Somali community have estimated that there are as many as 150,000 Somalis in the United States and another 150,000 in Canada. These activist estimates are anecdotal in that they are based on the community's general awareness of their numbers who receive state or local governmental services, the number of (Somali) children in various schools, community self-help organizations' estimates of their client base, and so forth. Those figures for both countries may be high. Census Bureau information from the 2009 Statistical Abstract National Data Book indicates that there were (as of 2006) some 91,000 Somalis in the United States. The 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates indicate that there were 120,102 with a margin of error of +/- 10,979,[2] representing roughly 3.6 percent of all African refugees or immigrants and 9.5 percent of all sub-Saharan Africans in the nation.[3] The Canadian government's National Household Survey places the Somali immigrant population at only 44, 995.[4] Further, although this particular survey was voluntary and only 20 percent of households were contacted, the 2006 census indicated there were only 37,790 of Somali heritage.[5] Currently it is thought that some 14 percent of the Somali population, or one million people, live in the Diaspora worldwide.[6]

Depending on the estimate, Somalis are arguably the third largest sub-Saharan African group in the United States, after Nigerians and Ethiopians, and they outnumber Cape Verdeans, who started immigrating during the 19th century. Further, anecdotal evidence indicates that Somali immigrants are having large families (four to six children), and thus the Somali-American population can be expected to grow substantially over the next few decades.

Somali Global Diaspora Population, 2000	
Country	**Population**
Netherlands	25,000
United Kingdom	20,000
Denmark	14,000
Sweden	12, 000
United States	25,000
Canada	30,000
Norway	4,000
Finland	5,300
Switzerland	5,400
Germany	8,400
Italy	20,000
Australia	2,000
Saudi Arabia	20,000
United Arab Emirates	25,000
Source: Joakim Gundel, The Migration-Development Nexus: Somalia Case Study; available via http://www.somali-jna.org/downloads/Gundel%20-%20Dev%20Mig%20Nexus%20Somalia%20.pdf	

In Canada, Toronto has the greatest population of Somali residents. That number, however, has been declining as more Somalis seek opportunities in the better economies of western Canada. In the United States, Minneapolis is home to approximately 60,000 Somali-Americans and refugees. Other American cities have lesser populations: Columbus, Ohio, 30,000; Atlanta, 15,000; and Seattle, 10,000.

Approximately 28 percent of the people now residing in Boston were born in another country.[7] In Massachusetts there are about 10,000 Somalis, with roughly 8,000 residing in Boston. Roxbury and Charlestown are home to the largest concentrations, with smaller communities in Dorchester, Jamaica Plain, and East Boston.

The civil war surged, abated, and surged again in seemingly endless iterations across Somalia. This necessitated the separation of family members into different safe zones within Somalia and neighboring nations, and other parts of the globe, through emigration. As they settled in new nations, these immigrants have sought to reestablish relations with nuclear and extended family members who left prior or

subsequent to their own departure. As a result, Somalis in one nation have contacts with family or friends around the world.

The Terrorist Concern

Three Consequences of Terror and U.S. Policy for the Somali Community

- U.S. support for the Ethiopian occupation of Somalia was opposed by the Somali American population and was a critical factor in creating a relatively unified Somali American, Somali Canadian front for political action to change U.S. policy. Prior to the Ethiopian invasion, this level of unity would not have been possible. With the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops, the continuation of these North American alliances is uncertain.
- The intelligence community's reaction to these events has been intimidating at ports of entry, and Somali Americans have a certain dread of the questioning they will almost surely undergo. U.S. agents have visited a number of Somali Americans in connection with the global war on terror. The apprehension created has fostered an atmosphere that allows stereotyping and discrimination to develop in various communities across the nation and made new Somali immigrants suspicious of seeking assistance. There are no ombudsman-type functionaries who can address individual and community issues on their behalf. There are few outlets for the community's anxiety and frustration.
- Finally, there are a number of less-than-credible leaders or leaders with narrow followings who have presented themselves to the media and political figures as spokespersons for the wider community.

Despite the many negative articles in mainstream media focusing on the population of extreme Islamic militants known as Al-Shabaab and the anxious concerns of various agencies about perhaps two-dozen Somali youth who returned to Somalia in the last few years, there are a number of distinct signs of a growing process of "Americanization."[8] There is no case of a Somali-American who has traveled outside the United States returning and engaging in politically or religiously motivated violence. Yet, concerns escalated when the Islamic Courts Union came to power in Mogadishu in 2006. In turn, this development led to the invasion of Somalia by Ethiopia, which the Somali community viewed as an American-sponsored or -sanctioned effort. With the rise of Al-Shabaab and its call to Muslims to wage jihad in Somalia, several young Somalis heeded the call, committing suicide bombings in their nation. In October 2011, the *New York Times* reported that a Somali-American was identified as the bomber in an attack that killed several African peacekeepers in Mogadishu and that as many as 20 young

Somali men had left the United States to join Al-Shabaab.[9] Subsequently, many Somalis in the United States and Canada reported undue scrutiny from the authorities and media as Somalis came to be profiled at airports and at U.S.-Canada border crossings. Despite this uneasy relationship, many Somali Americans continue to visit Somalia and return home, engaging in no religious or political violence. Media reports usually focus on those involved in the terrorist actions in Somalia and do not cover those Somalis returning from vacation or family visits. Many Somali Americans (and respectively, Somali Canadians) viewed this unbalanced focus as an attack on the Somali community in general and as a reinforcement of negative stereotyping.

Similarities and Dissimilarities to Other Immigrant Experiences

Similarities

How does the Somali community compare with the ethnic-racial immigrant communities of the past? A reasonable comparison could be to look at the experiences of those who came to the United States as a result of wars and those who came as ordinary African immigrants. This analysis provides a rich context because the experiences sometimes converge in terms of education, employment, barriers, and other systemic problems, but diverge in other ways. Certainly it can be argued that those fleeing from wars are more vulnerable and mostly unprepared for their new environments. They have psychological issues that other immigrants may not have. Access to psychological services is nonexistent because the immigration system was created to deal with other social and economic issues. The younger Somalis who are born in the United States are also dealing with unique issues, unlike other immigrants, because of the psychological experiences and economic and social conditions of their parents. Many face isolation and lack of education and are totally unprepared for the new environment.

One similarity is the issue of gradual socio-cultural gap growing between both the older and younger generations and the degree to which each identifies with the "old country." Many who arrived here extremely young or who have been born here have little knowledge or feeling about the clan strife that has afflicted Somalia for the past two decades. They correspondingly have less of an emotional connection with Somalia. Also,

as with other ethnic-racial immigrants, the worldview of the younger generation is not always in line with that of the older generation, both in terms of allegiance to the homeland and life in America. There is, in short, a growing socio-cultural gap between the Somali generations in the United States. Whether this gap is being more intensely experienced by the Somali community than in previous immigrant communities is difficult to say. In many cases, the salience of the affiliation to Somalia is based on where they live and their awareness of a particular group that emphasizes ties to the old country. In a sense, Somali-American youth are living two lives—one in their homeland and another on Main Street.

Another obvious difficulty common to all new refugee-immigrant populations has been language barriers and limited awareness of how to access even the most basic community services. That problem has not accompanied the Somalis' arrival. As with the European immigrants of many decades past and the new arrivals from Vietnam in the 1980s or Central and South Americans more recently, the younger members of the community adapt more quickly to the new environment in terms of both language and culture. Consequently, this faster adaptation in turn begets a generational status problem because the young often become intermediaries for their elders. For example, it is the younger family members who, in many cases, speak English better and have more readily adapted to the new host country and thus intercede with various agencies on behalf of the family. This role can create embarrassment for elders and a strain on family relationships as the parent-child hierarchy is reversed, even if only temporarily.

Further, as with other new arrivals, there comes a point when the members of the immigrant-refugee community feel collective anxiety about their cultural heritage.[10] In terms of timeline, it often occurs between the generations of the initial arrivals and those born in the United States. Again, it is the young who quickly adapt to the new culture; for their elders, it is often all too quick. In this case, we include in that first generation not only those born here, but also those who arrived as very young children. In the Somali case, there are the added pressures of the Somali language having been exclusively oral until the early 1970s and the 30 years of conflict and living in the Diaspora that have eroded ethnic and extended family ties. Here in Boston,

the African Community Economic Development of New England has responded to these concerns by developing a Somali language class that have taught approximately 80 students.[11]

Another similarity with other immigrant groups is the practice of sending remittances back to "the old country." Vietnamese refugees, for instance, have certainly provided support for families back in Vietnam. From 1991 to 2005, the Vietnamese Diaspora sent $15 billion to Vietnam.[12] Yet, only a few years after the war, Vietnam had basically stabilized. Unfortunately, Somalia is still in turmoil, a fact that makes remittances even more crucial. According to the World Bank, recent research documents that remittances to Somalia (which came to at least $1 billion in 2006) constitute 23 percent of the income in urban Somali households, such as those located in Hargeisa, with some 40 percent of all households receiving assistance. A substantial segment of this money is channeled into educational opportunities for Somali children.[13]

Differences

Certainly the most significant difference in Somali immigrants is the religio-cultural. Nearly 100 percent of Somalis are Muslims. There are approximately 28 mosques or centers that host Islamic services in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. At least eight of the mosques are located in the city of Boston: Yusuf Mosque on Chestnut Hill Avenue in Brighton; Mosque for the Praising of Allah on Shawmut Avenue in Roxbury; Masjid Al-Quran on Intervale Street, Dorchester; Muhammad's Mosque #11 on Washington Street, Dorchester; Masjid Al-Noor on Circuit Street, Roxbury; Allston Brighton Islamic Center on North Beacon Street, Allston; and Masjid Al-Taqwa on Washington Street in Jamaica Plain.[14] Only the last one, Masjid Al-Taqwa, serves the Somali community exclusively. Some of the mosques provide schooling for children over the weekend, with lessons in Koran memorization and religious lectures. Finally, there is the new and very impressive Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center on Malcolm X Boulevard in Roxbury Crossing. This is the primary location of events for the greater Islamic community.

The composition of the Islamic service is different from a Christian Protestant service or a Catholic mass. An Islamic service includes the *muhadara*, which is often a lecture about social issues. The subject

can be almost anything: marriage, politics, the news of the week, or important current issues. These events are scheduled and announced by the mosque administration and open to everyone. The service also includes the Friday prayer or *qudba* (a speech before the prayer). The sequence usually has the speech first and the prayer last.

Also, the relationship of the religion to the individual is much more of a community tie that does not quite translate into the progressive urban American environment. Ironically, perhaps its closest approximation may be found in the rural Christian communities of the Bible Belt, where the first question asked of a newcomer is not "What do you do?" (i.e., job or profession), but rather, "What church do you belong to?" This similarity is ironic, because it is from these conservative Christian communities that a great deal of fear of immigration is generated. Muslims can go to any mosque for prayer, but they usually go to the mosque closest to them or the one where they can socialize more. This choice is mostly nation-oriented. If you are Pakistani, you will mostly likely attend services where most Pakistanis do. One other important distinction for Muslims is whether a person is a Sunni Muslim or Shia Muslim; this difference in sect can also determine which mosque one goes to.

In addition to religion, some of the cultural normative differences are perhaps worth noting, for it is often in work-a-day behaviors that perceptions and misperceptions are created. In the Somali community, normative behavior is to use the right hand for greeting and serving. The left hand is considered "the lesser." Also, traditionally members of the opposite sex do not shake hands or hold hands in public. Depending on the proximity to religious conservatism, women wear a rather distinct "*jilbab*" (a more colorful hijab), with married women and single women also differing in style of dress or head covering. Single Somali women are more likely to be less stringent in covering up (the full dress) unless they are very conservative. Whether one wears the full dress style or simply a head covering is a personal choice and is not specifically connected to whether a woman is single or married.

The current state of conflict, ongoing since the end of the Cold War, has no doubt fueled the culture-gap fear that lies underneath the surface for the new Islamic immigrants and host communities in the United States. The conclusion of the Cold War ushered in the end of bipolar

sponsorship and demands by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund for economic structural adjustments and international corporate investments, which in turn were followed by political turmoil, ungoverned areas, and a power vacuum in which chaos, war, and terror gained ground. Much of this pattern has played out in Africa and in the Islamic global sphere since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Political scientist Samuel Huntington has labeled the state of affairs as the "clash of civilizations." For the most part, a fear-driven process has stirred up a variety of cultural concoctions of stereotyped positions.[15]

Pertinent Issues for the Community

Employment, Small Business Participation

Somalis own perhaps two dozen small businesses in Boston, with the majority located in minority communities. On Harrison Avenue in Roxbury, one mini-mall alone has approximately eight businesses operated by Somali women. Women are prominent in all forms of local Somali enterprise, a rather crucial difference from other immigrant communities. Other small business endeavors include restaurants, coffee shops, dress and fabric shops, and convenience stores. Many of these, such as the Butterfly Café, are located in the vicinity of the new mosque on Malcolm X Boulevard. While the market focus of these endeavors is on the Somali and general Islamic community via specialty items not found elsewhere, there are signs of their appeal spilling over into other communities. One Somali convenience store also offers Latino food specialties. The fabric and dress shops show signs of endurance, because their clothing items and accessories are virtually unique. As one owner put it, "When they buy an item here, they know that they will not come across another woman wearing the same thing."

Financial issues for Somalis, and no doubt many new Muslim immigrants as well, are credit and interest. Islam forbids interest. Yet, in American society, credit and the interest that go with it are practically omnipresent. The alternative for most Muslims in the United States is to use a credit card but pay off the balance each month. This practice also means that Muslim-owned businesses have to have significantly larger cash reserves available, money often acquired through family and family connections. This mutual dependence leads to the hypothesis that

networking is perhaps more essential in Somali and Islamic immigrant communities than among Americans in general. Yet, the fact is that many Somalis have obtained loans, go into debt, own homes, or use credit cards. The conservative Muslims typically advocate against interest-carrying loans. This counsel is mostly ignored due to the reality of life in the United States, the West, and the ever-more-globalized economy.

The Somali professional community in Boston is still quite a fledgling sector, but its members do have a kind of informal association, with occasional get-togethers. Nationally, there are Somali lawyers, dentists, teachers, and police—but none in Boston as of yet. A few young professionals and engineers, however, are working for such large companies as Raytheon, National Grid, State Street, Fidelity Investments, and major hospitals in Boston. Also, they have yet to develop a strong presence in the traditional blue-collar trades, such as masonry, roofing, carpentry, joinery, framing, sheetrock/plaster work, painting, sheet metal work, electrical wiring, and plumbing. More detailed occupational data on this growing community simply do not exist. Most recently, in Boston new professional networking groups have formed, such as the New England Somali Young Professionals & Students. This group aims to connect local young Somalis living in the New England area so that they may share resources, promote events, and occasionally get together to organize events.

Education

The best numbers on the Somali presence in higher education in Massachusetts that the authors could estimate are as follows. There are approximately 100 Somali students at the University of Massachusetts Boston, perhaps another 100 at Bunker Hill Community College, 50 at Roxbury Community College, and smaller numbers dispersed across the state. Somali students have struggled as they have tried to assimilate into the culture of American higher education. Many face a new language, culture, and way of learning. For example, although more than 20 new students enroll at Bunker Hill Community College each semester, only small percentage remain the following semester.

Some 90 percent of the new Somali students enroll in college preparatory classes in high school; yet, they struggle as they face other personal challenges. When asked, they often attribute poor

performance to the lack of assistance at home because their parents are unable to speak English. Somali students also frequently have to work in order to support themselves and often support their families as well. With parents who only speak Somali, many Somali students must speak their native language at home and English in virtually all other settings. Advocates indicate that there are few resources that could fill the gap and provide support, enabling students to thrive academically.

Higher education is only a small piece of the educational picture. A federal investigation determined that there was discrimination in school assignments for young immigrant students and in English language classes for the older generation. The older generation is most often lost between the cracks when it comes to the availability and cost of English language classes.[16]

This situation raises the question of the cost benefit of urban educational investment in Boston and Massachusetts. Boston has launched a number of programs, such as the Newcomers Academy on Maxwell Street in Dorchester, which is part of Boston International High School for students new to the United States, who have limited English-speaking skills and whose education was interrupted in their nation of origin, impairing their academic progress.[17] These efforts were apparently undertaken in response to a 2010 federal lawsuit in which investigators concluded that the Boston public school system was violating the rights of limited English speakers by failing to implement specialized education. The efforts are investments that will pay dividends in the future. Subsequently, the Black Educators Alliance of Massachusetts and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights under Law of the Boston Bar Association have filed suit over the system's school merger plans and its impact on students of color.[18]

By comparison, in Canada, governments at every level are seeking ways to improve services for newcomers. It is, however, the community that organizes itself and delivers services to the community. The government service design looks great on paper, but delivery is ineffective due to poor leadership and lack of outreach to the community. Services designed and implemented from above often fail to reach down to the local level.

At the elementary school level in Boston, the issue of school assignments was brought up during a meeting with a dozen members of

the Somali community. The Somalis in attendance pointed out that the school system had a practice of automatically assigning Somali children to particular schools, regardless of where they lived and whether the children had a language issue or not. (This practice was not an actual policy, but it was based on a perception that because the children were foreign born, they must take English as a second language classes or special education classes, without any assessment.) The perception-driven decisions behind these assignments affected all new minority communities, not just Somalis. After a study documented this practice as a failure, the Office of the Mayor of Boston subsequently initiated another study of the issue.

At the secondary and higher education levels, Somali youth who spoke with the authors of this article felt a bit adrift and expressed the need for mentors or counselors who could help them navigate through their uncertainty; they also articulated a vague wish for a kind of community-based learning project that could provide them with a sense of focus.[19] These uncertain feelings could be the reason why the school dropout rate is high among many new refugee immigrant populations. Upon arrival, many school-age children in Boston are assigned to schools or a grade level based on their age (particularly if the student has no transcripts), not based on their academic background. Many Somalis had no formal education while in refugee camps. Thus, they are assigned to their "age grade," but their skills may be at a much lower level.

Health Care

One of the problems confounding the delivery of health care is the cultural reservations that many Somali women have about sharing the information that providers seek. For conservative women from Islamic cultures in general and Somali women in particular, even being asked certain questions is embarrassing, and the older the respondent the more embarrassment they feel. One study indicates that of Somali women over the age of 40, only 68 percent have had a mammogram, and only 35 percent have ever performed a self-exam.[20] In addition, the phrasing of a question can create a defensive "looking glass" reaction. For example, one woman interviewed indicated that a common question asked by a nurse or doctor—"What brings you here today?"—is considered insulting. The woman reasons that "obviously

I am ill, or else why would I be here?" So offense is taken because the patient worries that the doctor or nurse is implying that she is not actually ill. The same interviewee indicated that rephrasing the question to "What illness troubles you today?" would make a remarkable difference.

Although data are not readily available, it is felt that within the Somali community, as with other refugee communities, that there is a significant prevalence of anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. These mental health issues are particularly acute since nearly all families in the Diaspora are separated. Medical professionals may need more nuanced kinds of assessment tools when initially interviewing new patients from refugee populations.

Housing and Home Ownership

A number of Somali families are or have been homeless and have stayed in a shelter. Some 90 percent of the Somali community lives in some form of subsidized housing, either from the Boston Housing Authority or under a federal Section 8 voucher. They share that housing situation, despite the different arrival status of the two major groups of Somalis in Boston: those who came before the start of the warlord wars and those who have come since then. The former arrived as students or under some other immigration category. Those who came after 1993 have predominately done so as refugees.

There is probably a very low home ownership rate, because few have financial security. Religio-cultural issues come into play as well. On one hand, the notion of interest is anathema for many Islamic faithful. The culturally acceptable way is to have the funds to make the purchase of anything immediate and final with cash. The Somali culture (with the exception of the Somali-Bantu population) is a nomadic culture; thus, the notion of particular and permanent roots is somewhat outside the norm. When ownership of housing is accomplished, it is often done so by way of a number of loan configurations considered Sharia-compliant. Sharia is custom, incorporating the writings of a number of clerics and referring to something that is legal according to Islam. There is a school of thought that rejects any interest on money loaned, a viewpoint that leads to two alternatives: buy

everything in cash or find an individual who offers the same amount of money but calls the cost of borrowing something other than *interest*.

Community Agency and Organizational Capacity

One indicator of immigrant acclimation is the presence, vitality, and capacity of its community-based organizations and agencies. These are reservoirs of social capital for families and individuals. Currently, there are three Somali community agencies in Boston: African Community Economic Development of New England in Roxbury, Somali Development Center in Jamaica Plain, and Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Center, also in Jamaica Plain. These agencies focus on specific areas, but as with other nascent immigrant communities, they have to respond to needs to be viable for the community. Their programs and program development and maintenance are demand driven. Budgets are slim, and there is competition for resources. Therefore, the financial health of these organizations is difficult to assess.

There is little evidence of alliances between Somali Americans and other African immigrant communities in Boston. There is little to bring them together, particularly when the leadership of each is basically in the hands of elders, who tend to identify with customs in the homeland rather than current needs in their present communities. Thus, indifference or conflict operates more than cooperation. In the last decade and more recently, the Boston community has seen the development of community groups to address this situation. The Muslim American Society of Boston was established in 1999. Since that time, numerous other groups have been organized, specifically the Islamic Society of Boston and various national communities or student groups. Various websites provide listings of these organizations.[21]

From a community development perspective, young Somali American professionals and local university students should engage and volunteer with local Somali community agencies to help build their capacity, enabling them to develop more robust programs that will benefit the Massachusetts Somali community at large and, in particular, its youth. For instance, the agencies could develop key performance indicators or benchmarks for programs that reduce school dropout rates or

youth violence, or programs that address family health, literacy, English language learning, and job placement assistance.

For this collaboration between young talents and local community agencies to succeed, the agencies should be more transparent about how they operate, including the level of funding or grants that they have received from the state and federal governments or other donors on behalf of the Somali community. More important, these agencies should allow the young talents to become board members, rather than selecting family members or close associates to sit on the boards. These young Somalis are knowledgeable and likely to scrutinize youth programs and suggest new ideas that can realign resources for better service to the community.

Conclusion

The experiences of the Somali community and, to a considerable extent, other new African immigrant communities are both disparate yet similar to those of previous immigrant groups. They are disparate in terms of language, religion, and race when compared to the Eurocentric immigrant communities of a hundred years ago, yet similar in their experiences of intergenerational conflict between the elders and the youth, and in terms of being isolated and experiencing discrimination. Like many of the newcomers of the past, they have educational and skill deficiencies and see few entry opportunities into the more skilled blue-collar trades. Also, like other European immigrant groups of the 1950s, their community-based organizations are often limited in capacity and reluctant to cooperate with each other and the other African immigrant organizations in the city.

The greatest problem in constructing an accurate picture of the Somali community in Massachusetts, the entire country, and Canada, is the lack of data, despite the fact that several studies have been conducted.[22] Census studies have failed to capture much information that can shed light on the various new East African immigrant communities, of which the Somali community is the second largest, after the Ethiopian immigrants. One possible way to surmount this difficulty is to organize and develop a citywide census project that attempts to get better population data and identify local businesses owned and

operated by these new African immigrant communities. Another would be to develop a community-based organization that would specifically focus on addressing the issues and needs of the new immigrant youth.

The biggest consideration going forward is the future of the Somali youth. They are virtually at a crossroads. It is uncertain whether they will remain attached to the older generation and, more important, whether they will seek conventional means by which to achieve economic and social advancement and secure their place in a productive social life or fall into criminal activity. The community is seeking ways to inspire the young people to pursue education. To an extent, the younger generation is far less interested in fighting the old wars in the homeland and much more oriented to gaining their slice of the American dream. In part, their degree of interest in the old homeland versus the new will be determined by their economic and political success, as well as by their cultural integration. It is going to be difficult to determine their level of success without some kind of a baseline study of the Somali community that can provide extensive data on a number of socioeconomic indicators. Those indicators would include growth in the professional and political sectors, such as lawyers, doctors, state legislators, economists, and teachers.

While opinions can vary about the tipping point for indices of success, one might suggest that representation in Congress is a powerful indicator of arrival. For example, only a few years ago the Vietnamese community gained such a distinction—Republican immigration attorney Anh "Joseph" Cao from Louisiana. In 2007, Keith Ellison of Minnesota became the first member of Congress of the Islamic faith. The authors of this article look forward to the arrival of the first Somali American in Congress. That would serve as a solid benchmark.

NOTES

[1] Sheikh, Hassan and Healy, Sally. "Somalia's Missing Million: The Somali Diaspora and Its Role in Development," 2009 UNDP. Available at http://www.so.undp.org/content/dam/somalia/docs/Project_Documents/Poverty_Reduction/Somalia%20Missing%20Millions.pdf.

[2] United States Census Bureau: American Fact Finder. 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Available at

http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_10_1YR_B04006&prodType=table

[3] United States Census Bureau, 2009 Statistical Abstract, National Data Book, Table 51. Population by Selected Ancestry Group and Region: 2006. Available at http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/population.html. The reader can see from the sector of the table shown here that there is an "African" category. A slight calculation difference can be found it the totals. I did not want to assume that "African" meant non-sub-Saharan African, as plausible as that seems. A call to the Census Bureau, however, was referred to various desks and did not result in a definitive clarification of that presumption.

[4] See *Statistics Canada.* 2013. Canada (Code 01) (table) - National Household Survey (NHS) Profile, 2011 National Household Survey, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 99-004-XWE, Ottawa; released June 26, 2013. http:/www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E (accessed July 26, 2013); for a more direct look at the table click on http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=PR&Code1=01&Data=Count&SearchText=Canada&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&A1=Ethnic%20origin&B1=All&Custom=&TABID=1

[5] The authors contacted Statistics Canada, 1-800-263-1136, inforstats@statcan.gc.ca twice. The 2006 population figure was provided over the phone; the representative had no response as to why there could be such a discrepancy. The Somali community generally considers their population (and perhaps other African Canadian populations as well) to be underrepresented. The official Canadian census does not present a true picture of the number of Somalis living in Canada because of a basic flaw in the data collection process. The census is conducted by mail via forms sent to individual (Somali) households. The form has many personal questions and is too complicated for the average immigrant, and consequently it is often discarded. According to community leaders who have been working with agencies that deliver services, the Somali community numbers are not less than 100,000 strong in Canada. Somali Canadians reside in major Canadian cities, such as Toronto, Hamilton, Kitchener, Ottawa, Calgary, Edmonton, Montreal, and Vancouver. The 2006 census shows 37,790, while the Toronto District School Board shows 10,000 Somali Canadians attending Toronto public schools alone. Many others attend Islamic and private schools. These facts show that the data presented by Statistics Canada underestimate the number of Somalis living in Canada. It is felt that the immigrant communities require a special outreach from census officials to correct the official count.

[6] Gundel, Joakim. Available at http://www.somali-jna.org/downloads/Gundel%20-%20Dev%20Mig%20Nexus%20Somalia%20.pdf. p 263.

[7] The Boston Indicators Project, the Boston Foundation at

http://www.bostonindicators.org/indicators/civic-vitality/how-are-we-doing/1-1competitive-edge/112foreignborn.

[8] There are little advances being made. A state trooper in Maryland is of Somali heritage as is the director of the San Diego Police Academy. There is also a possibility that Massachusetts will soon have its first Somali American state trooper as well.

[9] Josh Kron, "American Identified as Bomber in Attack on African Union in Somalia," *New York Times,* October 30, 2011. See also "Joining the Fight in Somalia," available at http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/07/12/us/20090712-

somalia-timeline.html?ref=africa; sixteen names are listed with at least one "missing." See also http://www.bing.com/search?q=American-Somali+was+identified+suicide+bomber+in+Somalia&form=ASUTDF&pc=NP06&src=IE-SearchBox for other discussions on this topic.

[10] These concerns may or may not be formally articulated, but social action is initiated nevertheless. For example, local members of the Chinese community in Concord, New Hampshire, approached the Concord Community Education program and successfully initiated a Chinese language course, which, according to director Jeffrey Siegel, is overwhelmingly attended by those of Chinese extraction. In this case, concerns were not directly stated but were implied in the advocacy for initiating the classes.

[11] Maria Sacchetti, "Helping Somalis build bridges of language," *Boston Globe,* Wednesday, August 12, 2009, pp. B1, B5.

[12] "Mobilizing Overseas Vietnamese Human Capital to Promote Economic Growth in Vietnam," *Asian Analysis,* ASEAN Focus Group, Australian National University. Available at http://www.aseanfocus.com/asiananalysis/article.cfm?articleID=897.

[13] Samuel Munzele Maimbo (editor), "Remittances and Economic Development in Somalia: An Overview," *Social Development Papers: Conflict Prevention & Reconstruction,* Paper No. 38, November 2006, Washington, DC: The World Bank. (Further, it is noted that remittances were four times the amount of official developmental assistance). Available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTCPR/Resources/WP38_web.pdf?resourceurlname=WP38_web.pdf.

[14] While only Masjid Al-Taqwa in Jamaica Plain exclusively serves Somali community, Boston-area Somalis also go to other mosques for prayer and schooling for their children, but these services are not exclusively for Somalis.

[15] See William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States,* London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998; William Reno, "The real (war) economy of Angola," *Angola's War Economy,* Jakkie Cilliers and Christian Dietrich (editors), Pretoria: South Africa Institute for Security Studies, 2000, pp. 219–235. See also James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. See also John Mihevc, *The Market Tells Them So: The World Bank and Economic Fundamentalism in Africa,* Penang: Third World Network, 1995. Also see Jean-Francois Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Beatrice Hibou, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa,* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. For accounts of private military violence, see the meticulously detailed and documented work of Abdel-Fatau Musah and J. 'Kayode Fayemi, *Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma,* London: Pluto Press, 2000. Then of course there has been the decade plus of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, along with the latest popular upheavals in the Arab world—particularly in North Africa and Syria.

[16] The investigation found that slightly more than half of the 8,300 students affected were not receiving appropriate instruction because ineffective testing failed to detect a lack of English fluency. See Boston Public Schools settle federal lawsuit, October 2, 2010, CBS Boston at http://boston.cbslocal.com/2010/10/02/boston-public-schools-settle-federal-lawsuit/. Ostensibly, teachers received a letter that indicated a new policy was being formulated.

[17] Newcomers Academy is a program of Boston International High School, a diploma-granting school for students new to the country. Newcomers Academy serves up to 250 Boston residents who are between the ages of 14 and 18, arrived in the United States during the school year, have limited English proficiency, have limited academic skills in their primary language (are three or more years behind), and/or have experienced interruption in formal education in their countries of origin; see http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/Page/894. For another example of the various levels and kinds of responses to the difficulties systems face, see Anna Gorman, "Another year older: Refugees with unknown birthdays are assigned Jan. 1," *Concord Monitor,* January 1, 2010, P1, PA10. (Somali-Bantu refugees in San Diego, CA)

[18] "Civil Rights Complaint Filed Against Boston Public Schools," TAG Boston (Teacher Activist Group Boston); http://tagboston.org/2011/03/07/civil-rights-complaint-filed-against-boston-public-schools/.

[19] This has been an ongoing issue for some time; see for example Ben Wolford, "Young Somalis seeking dialogue assimilation, stereotypes are forum topics," *Boston Globe,* July 17, 2011, http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2011/07/17/young_somalis_seeking_dialogue/.

[20] Information about Somali Culture and Health Care, Culture Matters – The Cultural Competency Initiative, Stratishealth, http://www.stratishealth.org/documents/CC_Somali_121907.pdf.

[21] See Muslim American Society (MAS) - Boston at http://masboston.org/live/?page_id=2; see the Pluralism Project at http://www.pluralism.org/wrgb/profiles/index/tag:9; the Islamic Society of Boston at http://islamicsocietyofboston.org/; For a Nigerian site see http://www.shikenan.com/business-information/nigerian-african-directory-of-massachusetts/nigerian-associations-organizations-in-massachusetts; for an Ethiopian related site see http://nazret.com/blog/index.php/2007/08/21/ethiopia_boston_partners_on_the_move_to_.

For Ghana see the Ghana Association Of Greater Boston Inc. at http://www.ishcc.org/MA/Lexington/ghana-association-of-greater-boston-inc.

[22] Franklin Goza (goza@bgnet.bgsu.edu; 419-372-7256) and Elizabeth H Baker (ebaker@bgnet.bgsu.edu; 412.512.5977), "A Profile of Somali Refugees in the United States." Paper presented at the Population Association of America 2006 Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, CA, March 30–April 1, 2006; http://paa2006.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=61036. See also Franklin Goza, "The Somali Presence in the United States," in *From Mogadishu to Dixon: The Somali Diaspora in a Global Context,* eds. Abdi Kusow and Stephanie Bjork (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2007), pp. 255–274. See also Audrey Singer, "The Rise of New Immigrant Gateways," the Living Cities Census Series, Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2004.