Disclaimed or Reclaimed? Muslim Refugee Youth and Belonging in the Age of Hyperbolisation

Cawo Abdi

Cawo Abdi is an associate professor of Sociology at the University of Minnesota, where her research interests include migration, race, gender, class, Islam and development studies. Her forthcoming book, Elusive Jannah: the Somali diaspora and a borderless Muslim identity (University of Minnesota Press, 2015) is based on research conducted in South Africa, the United Arab Emirates and the USA. Her articles have appeared in numerous journals, including Development South Africa and Signs. She is currently engaged in a new project on the educational attainment and school choices of new migrants. Correspondence to: Cawo Abdi, Department of Sociology, 909 Social Sciences, University of Minnesota, 267 19th Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA. Email: cabdi@umn.edu

Abstract

Using data derived chiefly from the Somali community in Minneapolis, Minnesota, this paper explores the challenges confronting its youth. The findings are the result of an ongoing ethnographic engagement with this community that has been conducted for over a decade. Stressing that marginalisation is due to the combined impact of race, religion and class, the article points to the factors that have led some youth in the direction of drugs and crime while others have opted for radical Islam. In the post-9/ 11 era of securitisation, with evidence of over-policing of the Somali community, the challenges to incorporation are intensified due to the ongoing Othering process of this refugee group.

Keywords: Refugees; Radicalisation; Racialisation; Policing; Intersectionality; Belonging; Securitisation; Youth; Class; Muslim; Race; Religion

On Sunday 7 June 2015 at about 10:45 pm, Allamagan Mohamed Abdullahi, a 25 years old man, was killed in the Somali residential areas of Cedar-Riverside in Minneapolis (Sawyer 2015), just across from the West Bank of the University of Minnesota. This murder, still under investigation, adds to dozens of other murders involving young Somali men in Minnesota over the last few years, the majority remaining unresolved (McKinney 2013, Hirsi 2014).\

Allamagan in Somali translates to one who seeks protection from Allah (Allah- Magan). The name of this victim has little meaning in the American setting. Ironically, like all refugees, the majority of Somalis who settled in Minnesota and other American cities came to this country to seek protection from the violence and turmoil that tore their homeland apart. In the Somali civil war, it was men who were mostly targeted for clan-revenge killings, while women confronted multiple forms of gender-based violence (Abdi 2005). Somali refugees thus often assumed that physical, economic and emotional security would be achieved with migration, once they set foot on the land of the free. This is of course true for millions of other migrants and refugees still beckoned by Lazarus' depiction of the lady of liberty: 'Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore …' (1883).

Noteworthy also is that Allamagan happens to be the son of a celebrity that the majority of Somalis consider one of the top two or three playwrights, poets and actors in Somali history. Mahamud Abdullahi Isse, known also as Sangub, lived in Minnesota for over two decades and is the author, producer and actor of a highly regarded play, 'Qabyo' among many other famed pieces.1 Fatefully, Qabyo deals with the challenges and cultural dissonance that emerge with settlement in a Western context and the types of gender and intergenerational conflicts that life in a new country creates for Somali families. A key theme in the Qabyo series (two plays) deals with gender 'transgressions'. These transgressions are said to stem from Somali women's access to novel legal and financial resources in the welfare state system in North America and Western Europe. The play depicts how some Somali women 'abuse' these newly found rights to push for major changes in gender power imbalances in Somali culture. Examples that made this play a hit with Somalis every-where include women refusing to let men off the hook from childcare and housework tasks that were exclusively women's domain in Somali society (Abdi 2014). More importantly for this paper, however, are the themes regarding youth transgressions and the cultural shifts of younger generations. Here the music tastes (gangster rap), clothing habits (sagging pants), interracial dating and revolt against parental authority are highlighted. Sangub satirises the challenges intrinsic in migration, which he argued were unforeseen by those who have made it to the coveted Western world, and unforeseeable by the hundreds of thousands of Somalis stuck in refugee camps in Kenya, Yemen and Djibouti, nor the millions of Somalis internally displaced in the homeland who still dream of migration to the West.

In this paper, the life and death of this young man serve as a metaphor for the plight of young Somali refugee men (read Muslim, Black) and the over-policing and profiling that these men experience in the post-9/11 and the Black-Lives-Matter context. Current public discussions on Somali male youth revolve around their potential criminality – suspicions of drug and sex trafficking – as well as the newer 'crisis' of radicalisation, something that draws state and federal interventions and national and global media attention. This paper advances the debates on migration and racialisation in the USA as well as the impact of national and global war on terror for Muslim migrant refugee youth. Violence such as Allamagan's untimely death in urban America is illustrative of a form of inclusion for Muslim, black refugee youth into racialised American society. Somali youth deaths, which are often suspected to be in the hands of other Somali gang members, are anchored in the racialisation and institutional racism that persist in the USA, violence that is normalised as characteristic of inner-city America. I argue that young Somali men's deaths in gang-related violence (Somali on Somali) rarely receive the necessary attention and resources, while the global pol-itical rhetoric on the war on terror disproportionately criminalises Somalis in the USA, and Somali male youth in particular. The racialisation process that incorporates new migrant and refugees of colour into the narrow categories that prevail in the USA (black-white), and the unrestrained power of homeland security and the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) agencies are shaping the definitions of what American liberty means for new Muslim refugees of colour such as Somali-American youth, with serious ramifications for the settlement experiences of newest groups in the USA.

The paper builds on over a decade-long ethnographic work with the Somali community (Abdi 2005, 2011, 2014, 2015). I have extensive data across sectors and generations, detailed in these publications, drawing from hundreds of interviews not only with Somalis in the USA, but also with those in various parts of the globe (Somalia, Kenya, United Arab Emirates and South Africa). Finally, I draw from secondary newspaper coverage of the Somali settlement challenges and opportunities

and the ongoing media coverage of the Somali refugee youth 'crisis' and radicalisation prevention initiatives in Minnesota. The intention is to provide a critical portrait of the intersections of race, religion and class for new migrant communities in the US context.

Racialisation in Twenty-first-Century USA

If and how migrants are (mis)incorporated to the American 'nation' has always been raced and classed (Lowe 1996, Sanchez 1997, Foner and Fredrickson 2004, Portes and Rumbaut 2006, Bonilla-Silva and Mayorga 2011). The earliest waves of migrants seeking their fortunes in this new country were confronted with multiple opportunities and challenges, often contingent on when they arrived, where they came from and what they brought with them. The majority European migrants among the earliest arrivals were thus differentiated not only by class, with the majority's migration decisions shaped by multiple factors (economic, political and religious), but also by race as understood in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Religion was also a key fracturing ideology that plagued Europe for centuries, while region of origin mattered even for those leaving from areas that eventually became one nation state (Gans 1979, Gabaccia and Ottanelli 1997, Brodkin 1998).

While major shifts have occurred in our understanding and practices of race, narrow constructions of who belongs, who marginally belongs, who does not and cannot belong to the 'nation' and who qualifies as American prevail (Lowe 1996, Bonilla-Silva and Mayorga 2011). Not surprisingly, non-white groups continue to be viewed as Other, permanent outsiders (Lowe 1996). More recent work on group relations and the construction of race illustrate the complex shifts occurring in the USA and the diversity of experiences within groups that are often lumped together (Ong 2003). But what persists is the rigidity of structural forms of exclusion, and at times violence, subjected to some groups, even when they are embraced as part of the nation's fabric as citizens (Roberts 2004, Bonilla-Silva and Mayorga 2011). The exclusion of many people of colour from the 'imagined community' of the US nation confounds the recent population trends and demographic shifts predicted for the next half-century when the 'Anglos'– who have enjoyed both numerical and political power dominance in the American mosaic – are to become a minority; a trend already realised in some major cities in the USA (Alba et al. 2005).

More recent migrants and refugees whose national, ethnic or racial identity was not shaped by the narrow but hegemonic black-white binary in the USA shed light on the intersectionality of race, class and religion in the boundary-making and boundary-maintenance processes of post-9/11 US society. Some of these groups work around the margins of what is permissible to avoid reductionist categories that have real ramifications for the life chances of future generations. For example, research on West Indian migrants shows that these groups take great pains to distinguish themselves from African-Americans, with which they are often grouped and sometimes share residential proximity, to exercise a form of optional ethnicity in the rigid American racialisation schemes (Waters 1994). So though the West Indians share 'racial' characteristics with African-Americans, their history and presence in the USA are dis-tinct, and the first generations' efforts to overplay this distinction is understood to shield them and their children from overt and covert biases that white America subjects to African-Americans (Waters 1994). This distancing of course reproduces the racial stereotypes of inferiority of African-Americans, further reinforcing them (Pierre 2004).

Boundary-making in the USA is thus both fluid and rigid: more fluid for some and harder for others (Gans 1979, Waters 1994, 2009, 2015). These boundaries are most rigid, though not absolute, for non-white groups as the privileges intrinsic in white-ness, Europeanness, in America continue to be highly guarded (Alba et al. 2005). With class boundaries, new migrants with the least skills and education therefore enter highly racialised and segregated spaces. Portes and Zhou's(1993) segmented assimilation argument – that new migrants become incorporated into the segments of the society that most resembles their socio-economic and racial characteristics –can be applied to new refugee groups from various parts of the globe. Poor refugees of colour join America's inner city, where African-Americans are over-represented. Such communities have for decades suffered social ills including poverty and disproportionate incarceration of men, with enormous moral costs for these communities as well as the nation in general (Roberts 2004, Wakefield and Uggen 2010).

Muslim Refugees in the Age of Security

In addition to race, religion now also serves as an explicit definer of group dynamics in the USA. Faith as a categorising tool is as complex and as fluid as race, with religious groups often encompassing great diversity. While religious affiliation is often not visible to the eye, ways of identifying individuals' faith abound – such as the name on your passport or the birth place as proxy identifier of religion. In that sense then, just like race, it can lead to sweeping generalisation and institutionalised exclusion of whole groups. In ways that are reminiscent of how Jews were always suspect (and continue to remain so to a lesser extent) in Europe and elsewhere until recently, or Catholics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the USA (Moore 1986, Brodkin 1998), Muslims are the 'religious outsiders' (Moore 1986) of the twenty-first century in the USA, the result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and also the global geopolitics of the post-Cold War era. Political decisions following these attacks produced discourses that define all Muslims, whether on American soil or elsewhere, as potential perpetrators of bloodshed, as a category to be feared posing existential threats to Western values (Rothe and Muzzatti 2004). Fear of terrorism – now eternally defined as perpetuated by Muslims – anchors the 'politics of fear' that dominates public and policy discourses in the USA (Altheide 2006).

As a result, American law enforcement agencies with unprecedented powers conduct sweeping policing within Muslim institutions (mosques, schools, homes and businesses). Overt and covert data collection measures instituted in the name of security are affecting all Americans and undermine civil liberties enshrined in the constitution (Shamsi and Toomey 2013). But these violations have greater ramifications for some groups. The War on Terror has ushered a new era in American security discourses, with myriad forms of justifications pushed through in the name of securing the USA. Fear remains central to how such policies are justified, with potential violence in US soil often articulated to justify any measures taken to counter terrorism. As such,

> Terrorism – and especially the attacks of 9/11– enabled political actors to expand the definitions of the situation to all Americans as victims. Moreover, all those fighting to protect actual and potential victims should be permitted to do their work, unimpeded by any concerns about civil liberties or adding context and complexity to the simple analysis that was offered: Evil people were attacking good people, and evil had to be destroyed. (Altheide 2006, p. 432)

Not surprisingly, extensive scrutiny and profiling of Muslims by law enforcement agencies are accompanied by intensive media coverage, which in turn influences general attitudes towards Muslims. Distrust towards, and even fear of, Muslims abounds with many surveys on American attitudes to diverse religious groups reporting that Muslims fare worse than other groups (Pew Research 2010, 2014). In one of these surveys, Pew reports that '43 per cent of Americans admit to feeling some prejudice toward followers of Islam' (2010). These negative attitudes are the product of systematic policing and profiling by the Central Intelligence Agency, FBI and Homeland Security's Transportation Security Association (ACLU 2013). As such, while racism in its most blatant form is illegal in the USA, securitisation and its demands for discriminate treatment of certain groups have become acceptable in the War on Terror. Despite civil liberties organisations' outcry of the types of multiple abuses that prevail, secrecy as well as abuses anchor policies and practices around the War on Terror (Dakwar 2009, Shamsi and Toomey 2013).

The above discussion of the nefarious forms of racial and religious differentiation prevailing in the USA serves as an entry point to the contextual dynamics shaping new refugee groups, such as Somalis', settlement. Two trends that I want to pay closer attention to in this paper are the disproportionate criminalisation, incarceration and policing of Black youth in the USA – race – and the post-9/11 patriotic acts and subsequent homeland security interventions into Muslim communities and their institutions – religion. Class is intrinsically embedded in both of these categories, as we will see below, but is often not as explicit as race and religion. In such arrangements then, how do we detangled the sub-national and supranational identifications that are often reified in the racialised and securitised US milieu, from the complex identities that new refugees and migrants bring with them? How do youth and their community leaders react to what amounts to panic around Muslim refugee youth, racialisation and radicalisation?

Disclaimed and Reclaimed?

Somali youth, whose lived experiences often straddle between nations and cultures, become part of the newest Others as Black and Muslim refugees in the USA. Whether these youth are born and come of age in the USA, Kenya or Somalia has little bearing for how they are identified in the American context. How they might identify can also reproduce the hegemonic categories embedded in centuries-old American history shaped by slavery as well as more recent discourses around the 'clash of civilisations'. Salience of racial and religious differences emerges as consequential for Muslim refugee youth in the post-9/11 US context.

Immersed in the 'Disclaimed'

Persistent Othering and racialisation of poor Americans of colour affect new migrants and refugees identified as 'black'. Sociological research has for decades shown how race, class and gender, among other axes of inequality, shape the life chances of Americans. Structural forces or patterns of practice that change very slowly continue old and new forms of discrimination and prejudice against those holding the least power in society. As such, the continuing segregation in cities and towns in the USA reproduces multiple forms of hierarchies transmitted through the generations (Massey and Denton 1993, Peterson and Krivo 1993, Brunson 2007, Rugh and Massey 2010, Wake-field and Uggen 2010). These settings continue to be plagued by over-policing, with the war on drugs, war on delinquency and the stop-and-frisk policies producing over-incarcerated and traumatised communities of colour all over the USA (ACLU 2015).\

Inner-city America now houses most Somali refugee families who spent years and even decades in camps and who lost any property or assets that they might have owned in the devastating civil war in Somalia. A community leader in Ohio underscored the need and the unforeseen consequence of Somali families' pursuits of securing subsidised housing, as their low incomes cannot cover the exorbitant rental costs in middle-class residential areas. As such, this community leader commented on the double-edged nature of inner-city housing for Somali families:

> Many Somalis believe that they are riding a high horse and accomplished something great once they receive government housing. For these people it's a great assistance as it allows them to afford the rent. But when you look at it closely, it has become a great disadvantage for them. This is especially so for their children and the way these kids are being reared and the negative part of the [American] culture they are being exposed to–Roble-teacher, Columbus. (in Abdi 2015)

Refugees thus remain cognisant of the need for affordable housing. But if lucky enough to get such subsidised housing, the fear of inner-city life for them and their children is not lost to them. As such, Roble's comments regarding how such housing entail Somali children being reared within the 'negative part of the American culture' references the stigma and stereotyped perceptions that mainstream Americans, as well as new migrants and refugees, hold towards African-American-dominated inner-city residential areas, and the types of social ills associated with these areas. Residing in the inner city shapes how many Somalis become integrated in US society. These new-comers become immersed in America's structural racism, regardless of how they might reject the label 'black' as identity, an identity inconsistent with Somalis' sense of self. 'I am Somali, I am Muslim, I am African, I am Arab', are identifiers that the first-generation Somalis were familiar with. Some of the second and 1.5 generation embrace a 'Black' identity, not out of choice per se, but because that is how they know they are perceived in the larger society. Community leaders also embrace this label as an alliance-building strategy with other minority communities, though the not-so-innocent black label in America is never lost to the majority across the generations.

While some families choose to seek housing in suburbs, either in market rate rentals or with section eight housing vouchers which permit more choice in where one resides while still qualifying for subsidies, the majority of Somali refugee youth attend schools that are somewhat segregated, with some going to schools dominated my minorities, as clear from the excerpt below:

> The high school that I went to was extremely diverse. It was a school of about 1500 student, but only 1 per cent were Caucasian; the rest were Somali, Mexican, Hmong, and like mixed races, all these different things. (Yasin, Minneapolis)

Such segregation is consistent with class and racial divides in American public education. Somalis who experienced decades-old political turmoil and long stays in refugee camps thus enter a new American reality. As a consequence, it is not surprising that relations between law enforcement agencies and new groups such as Somalis resemble that found in poor urban America. A White Minnesotan woman who has worked with Somali youth in the Cedar-Riverside area for over a decade recounted examples consistent with the tense police–community relations that have recently occupied our airwaves around police brutality, harassment and abuse of young men of colour. Anne recounted how such contact is experienced by Somali youth on a daily basis. Talking about a specific young Somali man, she stated that:

He actually didn't have a bad record – pretty much, I mean, the things he had on his record were really minor type things. But, he was having bad experiences and the police had labelled him a gang member. The police actually, um, have a black binder that they carry around with them. Anytime they could take the pictures of any of the kids around here they created their own mug shot type book and labelled them all as gang members. And so this guy, he would be picked up all the time. They would even do things like after there had been a sexual assault of an Indian [native American] woman over by Little Earth by she said it was by a Somali man. So there was all this tension. So the police picked up this guy on Cedar Avenue and brought him over there and dropped him off, like, Franklin Avenue. And so he came back …I was in the neighbourhood at the time … and he came back just furious because I mean that was really dangerous for him. So that kind of stuff … . (Anne, Minneapolis, 2011)

Staff who work in programmes around the Cedar-Riverside area detail the heavy-handing policing and the guilty-until-proven-innocent approach that some law enforcement officials use with Somali and East African communities in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The around-the-clock policing subjected to this area divides the wider Somali leadership, with some demanding more police presence in light of the incidence of homicides – such as that detailed in the opening paragraph of this paper. Others however argue that police presence exacerbates the security condition, as it installs fear and further reinforces the perception that Cedar-Riverside residential area, which is home to thousands of Somalis, is a no-go zone. This stigma closes off the Somali community from the mainstream society that they are a part of and apart from. Highlighting this tenuous relationship with law enforcement in Minnesota, Anne also commented on over-policing:

So we have the Riverside Plaza Security, the Minneapolis Police, the Metro Transit Police, the Park Police, the U of M Police and Augsburg [college] Security sometimes come through too. Yep, yea. And yet we had to hire a security officer (laughter) because none of them want the responsibility of … what they all know to be true is that you can't control what people do and none of them want to be here when something happens because they all believe something will happen again because we can't control what people are going to do. Now, you know, it would be great if that didn't happen, if kids didn't have guns and didn't have rival-ries where they decided to use guns, you know? But they do. And they're angry, and they're poor, and they're in place that doesn't accept them very well. And a place meaning the United States and that gets into the whole immigration process and multiple identities and structural racism and the school system that doesn't really care if they graduate meeting standards […].

The above assessment of what is happening with Somali refugee youth is no different from the widely decried experiences of the black men in inner-city USA. As Western and Wilderman put it, inner-city neighbourhoods continue to be chronically short of legitimate work and embedded in a violent and illegal market for drugs. High rates of joblessness and crime, and a flourishing street trade in illegal drugs, combined with harsher criminal penalties and intensified urban policing to produce high incarceration rates among young unskilled men in inner cities (2009, p. 225).

The residential areas housing most Somali refugee youth fit this characterisation. Somali parents, most of whom are not as attuned to the racial history of the USA and whose language and financial

resources limit the types of cultural capital required to advocate on behalf of their children, remain confounded by their children's' challenges. Socio-economic struggles and racialised experiences inevitably exacerbate other forms of settlement issues that all migrants in a new country encounter. For Somalis and for Somali youth in particular, these challenges occur within the post- 9/11 context, where they have become prime suspects of radicalisation.

Reclaimed: Radical Groups Beckoning

A headline in the *Star Tribune*, a major Minneapolis newspaper, painted all Somalis as lurking terrorists. Such coverage represents the type of fearmongering common in the rhetoric around securitisation in the USA. This headline –'On battling recruitment in the Land of 10,000 Terrorists'– not only calls for more policing of those deemed danger to the nation, but also for policies that undermine civil liberties of citizens and residents (ACLU 2013). Former Minnesota Senator Norm Coleman perversely twisted Minnesota's '10,000' lakes metaphor. It is ironic that Somalis descended on this North Star State in the first place attracted by its '1000 opportunities' (The *Economist* 1999) as poor refugees who themselves fled violence.

Pushing for more efforts to stop Somali youth recruitment by extremist groups, and linking national- and state-level anti-terror initiatives, Coleman addressed his comments to Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton stating 'it is time for the governor and the Legislature to raise more than concern about our potential status as the Land of 10,000 Terrorists'. As the number of people who are known to have left to join Islamic State for Iraq and Syria (ISIS) from Minnesota in the last year or so is estimated to be around 20, mostly Somalis but including some non-Somalis, the usage of 10,000 illustrates the hyperbolic narratives dominating this subject, and terrorism and Islam in general. As others have already suggested, we witness a panic, with those deemed as Other – Muslims – identified as the culprit or potential danger to 'us'. It is obvious that the rhetoric reproduced in various forms by most of the national and even inter-national media remains disproportionate to the threat that Muslims pose on American security, with data clearly showing that far-right terrorism poses much higher danger to Americans (Washington Post 2013, Scott 2015).

Congressional hearings such as that initiated by Peter King feed media frenzy on an exaggerated danger of Muslims in the USA plotting terror attacks (Homeland Security 2011). Thus, the national and international intensive media attention on Minnesota has given face to 'home-grown terrorism', with perceived threats and fear of extremism transformed from one that our government protects us through foreign policy interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia or Yemen, to one where fear of our neighbours is whipped and thus justifies profiling of Americans and non-Americans in the USA (Shamsi and Toomey). Unbounded scrutiny, interrogation and intimidation entail deleterious ramifications for the civil liberties of Americans (Rothe and Muzzatti 2004), but even more so for newcomers who are already confronting other forms of criminalisation in their new settlement.

'Minnesota is ground zero in the recruitment of mostly young Somali men and women by radical Islamic terrorist groups whose principal aim is to attack and destroy America and its allies', Coleman, a former senator, wrote in this Star Tribune opinion piece (2015). Identifying Minnesota as the epicentre of recruitment is consistent with Homeland Security agencies' ongoing initiatives within this area. Minneapolis-St. Paul is one of three cities (with Boston and Los Angeles) identified for a national pilot project to Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) (White House 2015). Though CVE

sounds neutral in its focus on all forms of violent extremist, there is no question that the word left out as the primary focus of this initiative is 'Islamic' extremism.

Somali community leaders desperately try to figure out this fast-paced and complex web of policies that at once offer resources for programmes targeting inner-city Muslim refugee youth, while simultaneously subjecting them to higher bar to prove their loyalty to America. As such, in a recent demonstration organised in front of Minnesota State Capitol in St. Paul by Somali organisations following the indictment of six Somali men for trying to join ISIS, Sadik Warfa, the Deputy Director of Somali Diaspora, who spoke back to Coleman's claim, insisted that Somalis belong to this nation:

> I want to make sure the media gets this message, this is not the land of 10,000 terrorists, this is the land of 10,000 good Somali-Americans! We are here to contribute. We're not going to allow (you) to stigmatize us. We are standing with the families [of the young men indicted for trying to join ISIL] today as a proud community. So I want to make sure that you get this message, and I am sending this message to Norm Coleman and The Star Tribune! This is unacceptable! We can't accept this! This is our country.[2]

In addition to the outcry above, there has also been some push back on initiatives such as CVE. Some Muslim community advocates point out the contradictions intrinsic in public officials persecuting those accused of joining or planning to join Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and similar groups, while also disbursing funds intended for community programming to combat the lure of such organisations (Muslim Advocates 2014, CAIR 2015). Escalation of media coverage, programmes, FBI and Homeland Security-initiated community consultation events and competition for funding among Somali and other Muslim groups resulted in competing camps: some earnestly repro-duced the fear and became even more stringent provocateurs of the danger of (Islamic) terrorism in our midst, while others expressed dismay at the profiling and victimisation these discourses entail for Muslims in the USA. One community leader stated that many leaders feel that their hands became tied, as their organisation would be out of business if they refuse to be immersed in new initiatives proposed by security agencies.

These micro dynamics are concurrent with the macro policy and militarily interventions in Muslim nations-drone wars in Afghanistan, Yemen and Somalia, for example – as highlighted by President Obama's speech in opening the CVE conference in Washington (Hirschfeld 2015). The 'terrorist inspired boundaries of the nation's security now serve multiple imperatives, both domestic and foreign' (Rothe and Muzzatti 2004, p. 346). Thus the geopolitics of American foreign policy is also shaping Muslim refugee lives in the USA. In addition to the challenges of settlement and integration that all migrant and refugees experience, the Somali community and its youth thus become immersed in the politics of terrorism, security and patriotism. Visits by FBI agents and presence and announcements about foiled attempts of Somali youth planning to join al Shabaab or ISIL are now omnipresent in local and national papers (e.g. see, Radio France Internationale 2015, Hosenball 2014 and Bailey 2015 for Reuters, Elliot 2009, Scott 2015 for New York Times, *The Economist* 2015, Saiba 2014 for Japanese newspapers).

The limelight on the Somali community has resulted in great apprehension. Contact with law enforcement agencies is avoided, with profound distrust fed by the types of abuses and even torture subjected to Muslims accused of terrorist-related offences (Dakwar 2009). Contact between law

enforcement agents and the youth is tense, as highlighted by this excerpt from an interview with a Cedar-Riverside Somali refugee man in his early 20s:

> They [FBI agents] wanted answers and they wanted them now and they were pursuing that by any means necessary. They were harassing; um they would come take them [young Somali men] out of their classrooms. And they went about it the wrong way because I know from that our community is pretty tight knit community and we don't like outside influence, especially if the outsider is coming in with aggression. We completely shut down. We are like 'nope! they want something, something bad for us'. They [FBI] were very very disrespectful! I've heard of many such incidents. I've seen incidents where they abuse their power. As a community we don't understand! Yes, we migrated to this country but we have rights! all you need to do is be educated about your rights. Say 'hey, I don't think you are supposed to do that'. and I don't know, but once you know your rights you can questions things. But if you don't, you are kind of helpless. You just go along with what everybody says. Uh! I mean it has gotten better, because they try now to get information in a more subtle ways, I guess, but the relationship is still severed. There is no way you can go back to that like 'hey, we are the FBI, let us talk'. So there really isn't a relationship to build on, I think.

The assessment above of the relationship between the Somali community and the FBI and other law enforcement officers (the police, for example) represents something that many Somali leaders also express, though often wary of sharing this information publicly. The push to 'collaborate' to fit into the 'national' mould makes community leaders wary of criticising the heavy-handed ways that the FBI collects intelligence. Any contact with homeland security and FBI personnel thus raises apprehension of the whole community, and Somali community leadership is becoming further and further fractured as some are suspected of serving their own interests over that of the community by becoming 'informants' or traitors aligned with security agencies.

Conclusion

Allamagan – like most of the Somali-American refugee young men who either die violently in the USA (Canada, UK and other settlements) or fall prey to extremism – was born in Somalia, but left as infant, spent a few years in Kenya and came of age in Minnesota. While his heritage was Somali, he was an American, a product of Minnesota public schools. He was one of a small number of Somali men who grabbed the educational opportunities to be the first in his family to obtain higher education. Alas, that achievement was not sufficient, as he died violently, with slim chance that his killers will be brought to justice. But hundreds and even thousands of other young men in his community confront the potential double burden of the lure of gangs and extremist groups as well as contact with institutions and policies that discriminate on the bases of race, religion and class. The repercussions of these policies are further cemented by zealous sensationalist local, national and global media. With an assault of such scale, we should worry about the prospects of many of the youth in this community and other communities sharing its racial and religious identity.

The irony remains that refugees who made it to the USA continue to be perceived to have attained earthly Eden by those they have left behind (Abdi 2015). Prior to the conflict, children born into prominent families such as Allamagan might have died of accidental deaths, or incurable or undiagnosed diseases, but would most likely never have been involved in gangs or lived in residential areas deemed 'dangerous'. The tragic ending of this young man counters what Somali families

sought in the USA. With the majority of Somalis now defined by their refugee status, their recent migration, their inner-city housing, their religious identity and their vulnerability to extremist groups in the Horn of Africa or the Middle East, there is a disconnect and confusion this community grabbles with. Heavy on the hearts of many parents is not only the fear of gang violence, but also the fear of radicalisation and death in far-away places for their children. These two dangers are further exacerbated by constant harassment in the hands of law enforcement officials and overzealous media coverage. Despite these bleak prognoses, the Somali community leaders rightly underscore that the Other-ing processes applied to this newest refugee group damage not only these young men, but also the wider Minnesota and American community that they have joined.

Notes

[1] Notwithstanding his place in Somali literature, Mr Isse has left the USA under a cloud of suspicion, with allegations that he sexually abused a 10-year-old girl in the 1990s. His criminal proceedings were never completed after his flight to the Horn of Africa, which resulted in his name being placed in the most wanted sex offenders list in the USA (Pioneer Press 2007).

[2] My transcription of a video posted on CBS local, Minnesota, 2015. The italicised are my additions for clarification.

Works Cited

Abdi, C.M., 2005. In limbo: dependency, insecurity and identity amongst Somali refugees in Dadaab camps. *Refuge: Canadian periodical on refugee issues,* 22 (2), 6–14.

Abdi, C.M., 2011. The newest African-Americans? Somali struggles for belonging. *Bildhaan: an international journal of Somali studies*, 11 (1), 90–107.

Abdi, C.M., 2014. Threatened identities and gendered opportunities: Somali migration to America. *Signs*, 39 (21), 459–483.

Abdi, C., 2015. *Elusive Jannah: the Somali diaspora and a borderless Islam*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Alba, R. Rumbaut, R.G., and Marotz, K., 2005. A distorted nation: perceptions of racial/ethnic group sizes and attitudes toward immigrants and other minorities. *Social forces*, 84 (2), 901–919.

Altheide, D.L., 2006. Terrorism and the politics of fear. *Cultural studies ↔ critical methodologies*, 6 (4), 415–439.

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), 2013. ACLU report documents FBI abuse since 9/11. *ACLU*, 17 September. Available from: https://www.aclu.org/news/aclu-report-documents-fbi-abuse-911 [Accessed 9 July 2015].

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), 2015. Chicago leads New York city in use of stop-and-frisk abuse by police, new study finds. *ACLU,* 23 March. Available from: https://www.aclu.org/news/chicago-leads-new-york-city-use-stop-and-frisk-police-new-study-finds [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Bailey, D., 2015. Six Minnesota men charged with conspiring to support Islamic State. *Reuters*, 20 April. Available from: http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/20/usa-security-minnesota-idUSL1N0XH1D820150420 [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Bonilla-Silva, E. and Mayorga, S., 2011. On (not) belonging: why citizenship does not remedy racial inequality. In: M.K. Jung, J.H. Costa Vargas, and E. Bonilla-Silva, eds. *The state of white supremacy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 77–92.

Brodkin, K., 1998. *How Jews became white folks and what that says about race in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Brunson, R.K., 2007. Police don't like black people: African-American young men's accumulated police experiences. *Criminology & public policy*, 6 (1), 71–101.

Coleman, N., 2015. On battling recruitment in the land of 10,000 terrorists. *Star Tribune*, 23 April. Available from: http://www.startribune.com/norm-coleman-on-battling-recruitment-in-the-land-of-10-000-terrorists/301153401/ [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), 2015. California Muslim groups vote to oppose federal CVE program, cite concerns about stereotyping. *Council on American-Islamic relations (CAIR)*, 24 February. Available from: http://www.cair.com/press-center/press-releases/12876-california-muslim-groups-vote-to-oppose-federal-cve-program.html [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Dakwar, J., 2009. Pentagon report whitewashes Gitmo abuses. *American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU),* 24 February. Available from: https://www.aclu.org/blog/pentagon-report-whitewashes-gitmo-abuses [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Elliot, A., 2009. 2 Somali-Americans charged with aiding terror. *New York Times*, 13 July. Available from: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/14/us/14somalis.html?_r=0 [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Foner, N. and Fredrickson, G.M., 2004. *Not just black and white: historical and contemporary perspectives on immigration, race, and ethnicity in the United States*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Gabaccia, D.R. and Ottanelli, F., 1997. Diaspora or international proletariat? Italian labor, labor migration, and the making of multiethnic states, 1815-1939. *Diaspora: a journal of transnational studies,* 6 (1), 61–84.

Gans, H.J., 1979. Symbolic ethnicity: the future of ethnic groups and cultures in America. *Ethnic and racial studies*, 2 (1), 1–20.

Hirschfeld, J.D., 2015. Obama urges global united front against extremist groups like ISIS. *New York Times*, 18 February. Available from: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/19/us/obama-to-outline-nonmilitary-plans-to-counter-groups-like-isis.html [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Hirsi, I., 2014. Somali community seeks answers to gun violence in Minneapolis. *Minnpost*, 10 April. Available from: https://www.minnpost.com/community-sketchbook/2014/04/somali-community-seeks-answers-gun-violence-minneapolis [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Homeland Security, 2011. Hearing on the extent of radicalization in the American Muslim community and that community's response. *Committee on Homeland Security, Homeland Security, Washington*, 10 March. Available from: http://homeland.house.gov/hearing/hearing-%E2%80%9C-extent-radicalization-american-muslim-community-and-communitys-response%E2%80%9D [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Hosenball, M., 2014. Two Minneapolis men charged with conspiring to support Islamic State. *Reuters*, 25 November. Available from: http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/25/us-syria-crisis-usa-idUSKCN0J92DZ20141125 [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Lazarus, E., 1883. *The new colossus*. Available from: http://www.libertystatepark.com/emma.html [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Lowe, L., 1996. *Immigrant acts: on Asian American cultural politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Massey, D.S. and Denton, N.A., 1993. *American apartheid: segregation and the making of the under class.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

McKinney, M., 2013. Shootings targeting Somalis raise worries of gang war: three recent killings of young men are thought to be connected. *Star Tribune*, 31 August. Available from: http://www. startribune.com/shootings-targeting-somalis-raise-worries-of-gang-war/221883721/ [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Moore, Robert L., 1986. *Religious outsiders and the making of Americans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Muslim Advocates, 2014. Coalition letter to Obama administration on countering violent extremism. *Muslim Advocates.org.*, 18 December. Available from: http://www.muslimadvocates.org/coalition-letter-to-obama-administration-on-countering-violent-extremism/ [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Ong, A., 2003. *Buddha is hiding: refugees, citizenship, the New America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Peterson, R.D. and Krivo, L.J., 1993. Racial segregation and black urban homicide. *Social forces*, 71(4), 1001–1026.

Pew Research Center, 2010. *In U.S. religious prejudice stronger against Muslims*, 10 January. Available from: http://www.gallup.com/poll/125312/religious-prejudice-stronger-against-muslims.aspx [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Pew Research Center, 2014. *How Americans feel about religious groups*, 16 July. Available from: http://www.pewforum.org/2014/07/16/how-americans-feel-about-religious-groups/ [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Pierre, J., 2004. Black immigrants in the United States and the 'cultural narratives' of ethnicity. *Identities: global studies in culture and power*, 11 (2), 141–170.

Pioneer Press, 2007. Playwright, 72, added to most-wanted list for fleeing sex-offense charges. *Staff Report*, 16 October. Available from: http://www.twincities.com/allheadlines/ci_7194003 [Accessed 9 July 2015].

Portes, A. and Rumbaut, R.G., 2006. *Immigrant America: a portrait*. Berkeley: University of California Press.