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REFUGEE LIVELIHOODS **Livelihood and diasporic identity constructions of Somali** **refugees in Cairo**

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The Refugee Livelihoods Project, a follow-up project to the Global Review on Protracted Refugee Situations, examines refugee livelihood strategies and the potential for UNHCR and other actors to promote sustainable livelihoods in those situations where refugees have been dependent on humanitarian assistance for long periods.

EPAU's goal in publishing these studies is to widely communicate the knowledge developed to date about supporting refugee livelihoods and to stimulate a better understanding of the ways in which refugees can be helped rather than hindered in efforts towards improving their livelihoods.

Statement of purpose

This working paper is based on eight-months of research conducted from September 1, 2002 to April 30, 2003 under the auspices of and with the funding from the Forced Migration and Refugee Studies Program at the American University in Cairo and examines two interlinked processes in the lives of Somali refugees in Cairo, namely: (1) securing livelihood by using a set of shared strategies, and (2) the ways in which these daily strategies involve the refugees' reconstruction of traditional collective identity constructs such as clan affiliation and Somali nationalism, and the creation of new and significant identity constructs based on shared diasporic experiences. In the Somali refugee population in Cairo, these two processes are interconnected precisely because the question of sharing identity is part and parcel of individual and collective efforts of securing livelihood and maximizing resources.

Theoretical framework

The author uses the term 'Somali refugee' to refer to all Somalis who identify themselves as people who fled their homeland because they could not find security and stability since the Civil War in 1991. However, not all of the Somalis who feature in this study are recognized as refugees by the UNHCR. Hence, the individuals interviewed for the purposes of this project include recognized refugees, asylum seekers, rejected applicants, those whose files have been closed, and some who have not gone through the process of applying to the UNHCR for asylum.

The author's use of the term 'refugee' is based on a conceptualization of 'refugeeness' that is rooted not only in the flight and displacement of particular individuals and groups but also in the complex daily practices of living, networking, forming relationships, and constructing identities that such individuals and groups experience and take part in as they live in one or several host-societies. In other words, being a refugee is not a simple identity construct that emerges from one or several experiences of violence, war, persecution and displacement from the homeland. It is rather, in Liisa Malkki's words, "process of becoming a gradual transformation, not an automatic result of the crossing of a national border" (Malkki 1995: 114).

Highlighting the complexity of the lived experiences and identity formations of refugees - and in this particular case Somali refugees - means taking into account particular significant aspects of their diasporic lives. These are: refugees are often part of transnational family households whose members make joint decisions and partake in collective efforts to secure livelihood for family members as they live and move in different nation-states. Moreover, the needs, challenges, and aspirations of these individuals and their families go beyond the context of the current host society. In fact, they are shaped by present and past diasporic experiences as well as the refugees' life experiences in the homeland. This has the following theoretical implication: one needs to reexamine the notion of mobility by analyzing it as a process that entails a lot more than a basis for legal identifications of people. Perhaps one should look at temporary and long-term displacement, on-going movements and resettlements as parts of a larger process of resistance of a wide range of people against different forms of marginalization and discrimination. These people include refugees with legal or illegal status and former refugees who have become citizens of host societies where

they may be legally included but economically and culturally remain marginalized. The national discourses, the laws, and the economic realities of host societies often lead these people to opt for a transnational life in which they move and dwell in different host societies in order to have more security, stability, and acceptability as individuals, families, and as communities. (Shandy and Gozdziak 2000, Long 2000, Hyndman 2000)

The methodological approach adopted focuses on the activities and plans of individual refugees, who because of their vulnerability, are constantly working on bettering circumstances and possibilities for themselves and their families and communities. The author has chosen to study refugees from an action-oriented perspective because it allows the author to look at the ways in which the refugees, in their daily acts of getting by and getting ahead, interact with one another, NGO staff, members of host societies, and other refugee groups. This focus, in turn, offers a richer understanding of the varied and complex aspects of the experiences of refugees, their relations with the host society, NGOs and international governmental organizations such as the UNHCR, as well as their relationships with one another and other refugee groups.

Studying refugees in an urban setting is particularly significant in bringing out the fluidity and the contradictions inherent in both the theoretical and legal constructions of refugees. Refugees in urban settings often do not live in refugee camps that are physically isolated from the host societies. They live in lower-class neighborhoods where nationals from poor and working classes reside. On the one hand, this may imply more autonomy and mobility for refugees than would be possible in refugee camps. On the other hand, living in urban residential areas among nationals often means that refugees have to fend for themselves in what are often economically depleted and politically corrupt metropolises. In such urban settings, refugees do not desire to be “visible,” for they are viewed as a temporary problem to be solved. Hence, to deal with the insecurities and alienation that go along with this urban atmosphere, refugees may look within for the process of securing livelihood. Consequently, the making and remaking of ethnic communities become intertwined with acts of surviving and gaining resources. Yet the constructions of identities in diaspora remain linked to the experiences of flight from the homeland and seeking asylum, which results in differentiation of co-ethnic refugees on the basis of their affiliations or identity groups back at home.

The author defines ‘livelihood’ as legal, economic, educational, and social capital that refugees strive to secure and maximize in order to get by in Cairo and plan ahead for their future. To describe the livelihood processes of Somali refugees, the author has looked at the specific legal, socio-economic, educational and health needs that the refugees by in large have; and the specific strategies they use to meet some of these needs e.g. sharing households, participating in income generating activities, setting up and making use of Somali-run educational services, resorting to inexpensive ways of accessing health services, etc.

‘Integration’, as a concept has been used in various and sometimes inconsistent ways, whether by scholars, NGOs, or government institutions working with refugees. For example, Kibreab (1989) argues that the distinction between ‘local settlement’ and ‘integration’ is often overlooked and the two terms are used interchangeably. Kibreab points out that integration is the “economic, social, and cultural process by which the refugees become members of the host society on a permanent basis” (p. 469). Local

settlement, however, is a situation in which the refugees may be settled in a host society, but they are isolated spatially and marginalized economically and legally. Other scholars have also called for a conceptualization of integration that takes into account unequal access to resources, cultural differences, and political conflicts among refugee groups and different member groups of host societies (Harrell-Bond 1986, Kulman 1991). Frechette (1994) stresses the importance of viewing integration as a continuum, as a process of varying degrees and forms of “acceptance, participation, and change” in which both the refugees and host society are involved.

In this paper, the author argues that livelihood and integration are interlinked. However, ‘integration’ as talked about and sought by Somali refugees needs to be understood as complex, transnational, and multi-faceted layers of participation and acceptance that the refugees and their family members seek as they live in different host societies. That is, integration is not only linked to the conditions of the refugees and their relationships with one host society, but also to the statuses and the needs of other family members in other host societies. In so far that Egypt and other Middle Eastern societies do not offer permanent residence and citizenship rights including the right to employment, permanent residence in the Egyptian society, integration is not seen by Somali refugees as a viable goal. Therefore, becoming legally secure through obtaining a refugee status or enrolling in school and securing sustenance while planning to move to host societies in the West is perceived by many refugees as the only kind of life they can lead in Cairo for the time being. The refugees are aware of other family members, friends, or clan members who have acquired citizenship rights in the West but have found meaningful integration into their host societies unattainable because of racial discrimination and economic exploitation. In fact, a sizeable number of these Somalis from the West have moved to Egypt over the past few years where they are able to afford better education for their children and thereby ensure that their children have more chances of social mobility when they move back to their countries of citizenship. Furthermore, some of the refugees who are aspiring to move to the West consider the possibility of a similar transnational life for themselves when they move and acquire citizenship in Western societies.

Background of the Host Society

Throughout its history, Cairo has hosted many foreigners and refugees. In the first half of the twentieth century the refugee population in Cairo consisted of Armenians, Palestinians, and Sudanese. Many of the Armenians have moved since then to other countries. More Palestinians and Sudanese have moved to Cairo in the second half of the century. In the last two decades, the refugee population has widened to include sizeable numbers of refugees from Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia as well as more Sudanese.¹

In addition to being one of the drafting members, Egypt is a party to the 1951 Convention. Egypt is also a party to the 1967 Protocol and the OAU Convention of 1969. This entails an obligation on the part of the Egyptian government to recognize refugees who are eligible for asylum and accordingly provide them the protection they need. However, Egypt has passed on the execution of this obligation to the UNHCR

¹ This is not an exhaustive list of refugee groups in Cairo. The author is only citing those with large numbers of people.

Cairo office. Also, Egypt has placed reservations on four of the articles in the 1951 Convention, which in effect meant the following: first, refugees' access to employment is highly restricted because they are required by law to obtain a work permit, something that is almost always not possible due to the conditions of domestic employment and the very tight restrictions placed on foreigners' employment. Second, the children of refugees are not entitled to free state education not even for primary schooling.² Third, refugees are not entitled for public relief and assistance or rationing. Finally, like many foreigners in Egypt, refugees and their children do not qualify for Egyptian citizenship regardless of the length of their residence in the country. In the case of refugees, these limitations are of serious consequences due to their legal and economic vulnerability.

Moreover, the fact that the cash-strapped and understaffed UNHCR had to assume the responsibilities of the Egyptian government of processing refugees' applications, has led to prolonging the processing of cases with waiting periods for decisions often lasting to more than a year.³ This has meant that many asylum seekers live in extreme economic and legal instability. Moreover, those refugees who are recognized often face continuing hardship and economic problems since they are not allowed to work, and receive very little or no financial assistance or educational grants from the UNHCR office.

In short, life for many of the refugee population offers very few or no legal rights and extreme economic hardship. This is particularly true of African refugee populations whose cultures and languages are noticeably different from that of the host society.

Profile of the Somali refugees in Cairo

In January 1991, the despotic and corrupt regime of the late President Mohamed Siyaad Barre was overthrown in Somalia by a coalition of clan-based opposition movements. After the fall of Barre's government, a violent power struggle erupted among the various opposition movements. Thousands of Somalis were killed in the civil war. Many more perished in the war-induced famine. Many had to flee their country to Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, South Africa, the Middle East, North America, Europe, and Australia. Since large numbers of Somalis who fled their homeland are now dispersed in different parts of the world, in a real sense there is a 'Somali diaspora.' Close to 100,000 Somalis have moved to Europe since the civil war. Fifty thousand Somalis have settled in the United States since 1990, and in Canada the number is 70,000. In the Middle East (mostly Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Egypt), the number of Somali refugees is close to 75,000 (Montclos 2000).

In Cairo, according to the UNHCR Cairo office Operations Situation Report of March 2003, there are currently 1832 recognized Somali refugees, 952 rejected applicants,

2 In a personal communication with one of the UNHCR staff in June 2003, I have been told that the Cairo office has been negotiating with the Egyptian government to do away with the latter's reservation on Article 22 pertaining to refugees' access to primary school education. Although I have been informed that there was some progress made in the negotiations with the government, I am not certain if Egypt's reservation on Article 22 has been removed.

3 For the past six months, there have been serious efforts by the UNHCR to expedite the process of asylum cases and consequently the waiting period that many asylum seekers often endured has been shortened.

and 1, 544 asylum seekers whose cases have not yet been decided. Prior to the 1991 Civil War, the Somalis residing in Cairo were of three main groups: diplomats and their families, university students who were recipients of scholarships either from the former Somali government or the Egyptian government within the bilateral educational relations between the two countries, and female-headed families who came to Egypt for the education of their children while the husbands were working in the Gulf area and sending income to their families in Cairo. The onset of the Civil War resulted in a new flux of Somalis coming to Cairo. For the first half-decade after the onset of the war, Somali refugees were mostly of urban background, had college degrees, and had previously held professional or administrative jobs in the homeland or in Gulf countries. They fled the country via Kenya or the Gulf region without spending more than a few days or weeks in the transit areas (Al-Sharmani 1998). In addition, some of the male refugees already had wives and children who were living in Cairo when the war began. Since 1999, the profile of the Somali refugee population has changed. Many of the refugees who are currently living in the city have been here for five years or less. Moreover, they are of different socio-economic background and have experienced different patterns of flight from those who moved to Cairo immediately after the Civil War or those who were living in the city prior to the war. A large number of both groups have since resettled in the West. The current groups are a more heterogeneous mix of Somalis of rural and urban background. They also have much less education. Furthermore, the patterns of flight of the current refugee groups are very different in that a considerable number of them lived for some time in other host societies, specifically Libya, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, and Yemen.

Significance of the study

Kibreab (1996) poignantly describes refugees in urban African countries as “What the eye refuses to see.” Most African countries that are host to large numbers of refugees tend to isolate refugee populations or keep them in highly precarious legal and economic conditions so that the refugees feel vulnerable and adopt invisibility as a survival mechanism. Moreover, refugee populations in such host societies are forced by government policies to depend on aid organizations for sustenance. This state of affairs only increases the vulnerability of the refugees. For example, refugees contribute to the economy of the host societies as consumers who spend money – albeit meager- on rent, food, and goods. Moreover, pro-government press in some of these host societies sometimes uses the presence of refugee groups as a way of diluting the government’s responsibility for prevalent problems such as unemployment and crime. One good example of this was an article published in the pro-government weekly Egyptian magazine *Rose el Yossef* in mid- January 2003 about the danger of the “flood of Africans and Asians who were stealing bread from the mouths (i.e. stealing jobs) of the unemployed Egyptian youth.” (*Rose el Yossef*, Jan11-17: 24). In early 2003, the pro-government *Al-Ahram* daily newspaper also published letters from readers in the section entitled ‘Al-Ahram Mail’. The letters were complaints about the problem of an increasing number of African and Asian refugees who were accused of not only taking jobs away from nationals but also bringing social problems such as promiscuity and prostitution.

Researching the livelihood strategies of culturally and ethnically diverse urban refugees and the dynamics of their relationships with host societies and aid organizations is important for several reasons. First, this kind of research allows us to

reexamine the notion of nation-states and territorial borders through the context of mobile refugee groups in nation-states struggling to hold on to power over their own populations, who often use refugees as a tool of political pressure. That is, the power of nation-states and their control over distinct territories are highlighted by the exclusionary nationalist discourses adopted by host governments and their lack of ability and will to integrate refugees. Nevertheless, the actual lives of urban refugees, who often live in more than one host society and become part of transnational decision-making family households, contradict official representations and expectations of refugees.

Second, African/Middle Eastern countries, as host societies for diverse ethnic and cultural refugee population, offer original contexts to examine the notions of integration and the different meanings of cultural and ethnic homogeneity and heterogeneity. In some of these Middle-Eastern host societies (e.g. Egypt, Libya, Saudi Arabia) the discourse of nationhood and national identity is based on restricted and highly exclusionary notions of what defines a national. There is very little room in such discourse for multiculturalism and ethnic differences. The uniqueness of such Middle Eastern countries as host societies for refugees is most pronounced in the juxtaposition of a restrictive nationalist discourse and an inclusive Muslim identity that Muslim non –Arab refugees (as in the case of Somalis) often make claims to in their attempts to have more access to the society.

Somali refugees are the second largest African refugee population in Cairo.⁴ They are part of well-connected transnational communities of Somali refugees who have settled in various Western countries since the Civil War. Many scholars have displayed Somali society as homogeneous, sharing one culture, religion (Islam), and language, but plagued by a divisive kinship system and dysfunctional corrupt state (Lewis 1994, Samatar and Laitin 1987, Samatar 1997). Other scholars have challenged this notion of homogeneity and focused on highlighting the regional, racial, and economic hierarchies on which the society is based (Mukhtar 1995, Kusow 1995, Besteman 1999). There is consensus among those scholars, however, that Islam has historically been one of the main foundations of national identity. In fact, Cassanelli (1982) stresses that “if today one can almost automatically say that to be a Somali is to be a Muslim, historically it can be said that to accept Islam was to accept membership in a larger Somali nation.” (Cassanelli 1982: 129). Yet Somali refugees in Cairo find that Muslim identity is differentiated in an Arab Muslim setting where the non-Arab ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the Somalis set them apart, very distinctly, from the Egyptians and place them in an inferior status. Thus a study of the Somali refugees provides a good context for examining the issues of integration and cultural difference within the context of Egyptian and Arab nationalism.

Moreover, the literature about Somalis in Diaspora, while scarce and very recent, has mostly focused on their experiences in the West (Al-Sharmani 2000, Berns McGown 1999, Budiani 2000, Kroner 2000, Kusow 1998, Mohamed 2001, Tiilikainen 2001). There have been very few studies, in fact, about the Somali refugees in Cairo (Al-Sharmani 1998, Budiani 2002, Kroner 2002) although they constitute a sizeable group who congregate and live together in particular neighborhoods in Cairo and form a community for survival and livelihood.

⁴ The Sudanese comprise the largest African refugee group.

Research design and methodology

Selection of interviewees and field sites

With a team of four Somali research assistants (three male and one female), the author conducted an eight-month study on the livelihood strategies and identity constructions of Somali refugees in Cairo. Both quantitative and qualitative methods (questionnaires and in-depth interviews) were used to collect the data. The research assistants and the author administered a questionnaire (See Appendix I) to a total of 300 Somali refugees of different age groups, sex, clan affiliation, patterns of flight and displacement, and legal status. The interviewees were chosen from the two main neighborhoods in Cairo where the largest number of Somali refugees in Cairo reside, Ard il Liwa and Nasr City. Two research assistants were assigned to work in each neighborhood. The selection of these two neighborhoods is also significant in that they are populated by Somalis who experienced different patterns of flight and displacement. For example, most of the Somalis who fled from the homeland via Libya and lived there for a while have now settled in Ard il Liwa close to friends and acquaintances they met in the previous host society. On the other hand, many of the refugees who had lived in Saudi Arabia settled in Nasr City. Yet both neighborhoods are also populated by those refugees who came directly from Somalia or from host societies other than Libya and Saudi Arabia.

The unit of analysis is the individual. The questionnaires and in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals. In addition to the variables mentioned above in the selection of interviewees (age group, sex, clan affiliation, neighborhood, legal status, flight patterns), they were also selected on the basis of the different kinds of refugee households they lived in i.e. households with a single family unit, or more than one family unit, or households with a family unit and single men or women, etc. Although the questionnaires and main interviews were conducted with specific selected individuals, insofar as the livelihood strategies of the interviewees involved joint decision-making or efforts with other members of their household, supplementary interviews were conducted with those members.

Quantitative data: questionnaires

The aim of the questionnaire as a research tool was 1) to obtain data on demographic information about the interviewees in terms of age group, clan affiliation, marital status, and occupational and educational background; 2) to identify the legal, economic, educational, health, and social needs of the refugees; 3) to identify the strategies that the interviewees use to secure legal, economic, and social capital for the purposes of their livelihood; 4) to determine the extent to which Somali refugees interact with Egyptians and participated in the host society; and 5) to determine if there are collective and community-building efforts in which the interviewees engaged for the purposes of securing livelihood.

The fieldwork started on September 1, 2002 and was completed on April 30, 2003. Throughout the month of August 2002, preceding the fieldwork, the author held three training sessions a week with the four research assistants and agreed that the most effective way to administer the questionnaire was to read or rephrase the

questionnaires to the interviewees and write down their answers instead of asking the interviewee to complete the questionnaire on his or her own. This is because most of the refugees were not comfortable with the idea of writing down information about themselves although the questionnaires were anonymous. Also, some of the refugees were illiterate, and the idea of a research assistant or the author reading the questions to the interviewee allowed the two parties to have a relaxed and informal discussion where the interviewee could talk more easily, pause, and ask questions. Prior to administering questionnaires, the assistants or the author explained to the interviewees the focus of the research project, the nature and goal of the funding institution, and how the findings were expected to be used. Each research assistant administered 2-3 questionnaires a week.

All the questionnaires were administered in the interviewees' apartments so that the interviewer would have a chance to observe the apartment and meet other members of the household. By the end of the eight-month period the research assistants had administered a total of 270 questionnaires while the author administered 30 additional questionnaires (300 interviewees in all). Throughout the period of the fieldwork, the author had weekly meetings with the research assistants. During these meetings, the research assistants presented the questionnaires they administered with the written answers and a report on each individual case with more detailed information. Each one of the research team kept weekly and monthly logs in which the gender, clan affiliation, residential area, previous host society, legal status, and marital status of each of the interviewees were entered. In the weekly meetings and at the end of each month, the author and assistants went through their logs to check that the selection of interviewees and informants was not skewed and that the interviewees included a wide range of individuals depending on the variables mentioned above in this section.

A fifth (non-Somali) research assistant tabulated the data collected from the questionnaires using the SPSS program and a code-sheet prepared by the author. The code-sheet was revised a couple of times until the entry categories were made as comprehensive as possible.

Qualitative data: life histories and in-depth interviews

In addition to administering questionnaires, the author conducted in-depth interviews with thirty informants. There were two purposes for these interviews: 1) to outline the history of interviewees' processes of securing livelihood back in the homeland, in previous host societies, and currently in Cairo, and to identify the links among such processes and their transformations; 2) to trace identity constructs and narratives that the informants claimed back at home and in previous host societies, and how they were redefined in the current host society.

In the selection of informants for the in-depth interviews, the author made use of the same variables that were used in the selection of the questionnaire sample as well as different identity constructs that the refugees claim as another variable. That is, the author chose informants who make use of different identity-based strategies of securing livelihood. For example, some informants primarily identify with their clans and used their clan members for livelihood, some identify with a larger community of refugees that they lived with in previous host societies such as Libya or Saudi Arabia, and others have a strong sense of Somali community and secured livelihood for

themselves and others through community-building efforts. One forum through which the informants used community-based strategies and resources was the Somali Refugee Committee of Egypt (SRCOE). The SRCOE is a committee of male and female refugees that was established in June 2001. They are seventeen male and female members from different Somali clans and residential areas and are supported by a group of different clan elders in Cairo.⁵ The SRCOE has been working on establishing community-based educational projects for Somali refugee children and adults.

The in-depth interviews usually lasted four to five hours and were conducted in one or two visits to the interviewee's household. In addition to these in-depth interviews, the author made use of participant observation by taking part in SRCOE meetings, religious and cultural gatherings held by Somali women, and social occasions such as weddings, funerals, and visiting the sick. The author also interviewed one UNHCR protection officer and talked to various legal, educational, and health service providers that deal with Somali refugees.

Research assistants

The research assistants administrated the questionnaires to interviewees who lived in their same neighborhood. The research assistants were hired according to the following criteria: (1) they were reputable and had good relationships with a wide range of Somali refugees in their neighborhoods, (2) they had high school degrees and spoke and wrote Somali and Arabic/ English, (3) they exhibited a good understanding of the focus of the research project and the data-collection methods to be used in the month of training that preceded the fieldwork.

Results and data analysis

Profile of the interviewees

Age group, marital status, and diasporic history

The majority of the interviewees are young (between 20-35) with only 3.4% older than 50 (Table 1). The interviewees are almost equally divided between male and female, with slightly more female (Table 2). The majority arrived in Cairo in 2001 (53%) and very few (less than 2%) arrived before 1999 (Table 3). Half of the interviewees are married. However, 40% is married but living separately from their spouses (Table 4).

⁵ Since April 2003, many of the members of SRCOE left for Western countries. Since September 2003 and particularly after a series of demonstrations by the refugees in front of the UNHCR, there have been several uncoordinated efforts to establish a Somali community. These efforts have resulted in establishing several small groups of people who identify themselves as Somali community members and communicate with the UNHCR on behalf of other refugees. Still these groups are not very well-coordinated.

Table 1:**Age of Interviewees**

	Number	Percent
15-19	16	5.3
20-24	69	23.0
25-29	65	21.7
30-34	67	22.3
35-39	41	13.7
40-44	19	6.3
45-49	13	4.3
50-54	5	1.7
55-59	2	.7
60-64	3	1.0
Total	300	100.0

Table 2:**Gender**

	Number	Percent
1	138	46.0
2	162	54.0
Total	300	100.0

1: Male 2: Female

Table 3:**Date of Arrival in Cairo**

	Number	Percent
Before 1999	4	1.3
1999	16	5.3
2000	45	15.0
2001	160	53.3
2002	75	25.0
Total	300	100.0

Table 4:**Marital Status of Interviewees**

	Number	Percent
Single	117	39.0
Married (Both Spouses in Cairo)	30	10.0
Married (Living Separately)	120	40.0
Divorced	23	7.7
Widowed	10	3.3
Total	300	100.0

Clan affiliations

The clan composition of the interviewees reflects a variety of clan affiliations with sizeable numbers of majority and minority clans. The majority is Hawiya (36%) followed by Darood (27.7%). It is to be noted that Somali society is divided into four major clan families: Darood, Hawiya, Dir, and Isaaq. Rahaweyn, a clan family, which is large in number, has been considered in the literature as a minority clan due to the political and economic marginalization that the clan members faced in the era of the Barre regime, as well as the atrocities they suffered during the Civil War. Because of the numerical size of the Rahaweyn clan in Somalia and in Cairo, the author listed it as an entry on its own, separate from the category of 'other' that includes all other minority clans (Table 5).

Table 5:**Clan Affiliations of Interviewees**

	Number	Percent
Darood	83	27.7
Hawiye	108	36.0
Isaaq	14	4.7
Dir	16	5.3
Rahenweyn	36	12.0
Other	43	14.3
Total	300	100.0

Educational and occupational backgrounds

A minority of 3% of the interviewees are holders of university degrees while 30% of the interviewees are graduates of high school degrees, 22% finished up to Grade 8 in junior high school, 15% finished primary school, 11% of the interviewees went to Quranic School only, 1% took literacy classes and 7% received no education at all (Table 6). Note that literacy classes are listed as language classes in the table since this is the term used for them in the homeland. There is not a big gap between the numbers of men and women who had high school degrees (51 to 39). However, there

were more women than men who received no education at all (19 to 3) as well as many more women than men who only received Quranic education (25 to 8).

Over half of the interviewees did not have any previous work experience, 17% worked as street vendors, 11% worked as professionals such as teachers or nurses and less than 5% worked as skilled vocational workers or drivers (Table 7).

More women than men worked in petty sales (30 to 22). Relatively more men than women held professional jobs (20 to 13). There was a significant gap, however, between the numbers of women and men who had no previous work experience (104 to 67).

Table 6:

Educational Backgrounds of Interviewees

	Number	Percent
University Graduate	9	3.0
Dropped out of University	1	.3
High School Graduate	90	30.0
High School Dropout	28	9.3
Finished Grade 8	67	22.3
Finished Primary School	47	15.7
Took Language Classes Only	3	1.0
Went to Quranic School	33	11.0
No Education	22	7.3
Total	300	100.0

Table 7:

Work in Homeland or Previous Host Society

	Number	Percent
Have not worked	171	57.0
Government Employee	7	2.3
Professional	33	11.0
Skilled Vocational Worker	14	4.7
Drivers	11	3.7
Petty Sales	52	17.3
Housekeeping and Child Care	10	3.3
Farmer	2	.7
Total	300	100.0

Patterns of flight and displacement

A little over than half of the interviewees did not live in any other host society prior to moving to Cairo. These refugees flew to Cairo and entered the country with an entry

visa purchased with the help of a family member, clan member, or a friend who was already living in Egypt. In some of the cases, the interviewees obtained entry visas as the spouses, parents, children, or siblings, of a real family member or a friend residing legally in Cairo. Before their arrival to Egypt 134 interviewees lived in one or more previous societies. Of this group 15% resided in Kenya, 9% in Saudi Arabia, 5% in Libya, and 8% in more than one host society (mostly Libya and Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Libya, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, or the three). Many of the interviewees had family members still living in previous host societies as well as other family members living in the West and the homeland. Some of the interviewees who previously lived in Libya came to Cairo by bus. Those who lived in Yemen or Saudi Arabia went back to Somalia either by plane or boat and flew to Cairo from the homeland with legal entry visas.

Residential areas in Cairo

From Ard il Liwa and its vicinity such as Sahafiyeen and Agouza, 132 people were interviewed. A slightly larger number of people (168) were interviewed in Nasr City and its vicinity (e.g. Masr El Gedida). The number of interviewees from Nasr City is larger since it is a bigger neighborhood with more Somali refugees than Ard il Liwa.

Socio-economic conditions and livelihood strategies:

Legal status/needs and strategies

A third of the interviewees (107 people) were asylum seekers who were still in the process of applying for a refugee status. Another third (106) were rejected by UNHCR for a refugee status, 9 people had their files closed, 72 people were recognized refugees, one person withdrew from the application process and five people decided not to apply for a refugee status. The 300 interviewees were almost equally divided among those who had legal residence in Cairo and those who were living in the country without residence (152 and 147 people respectively). The recognized refugees obtained residence through the UNHCR. Others, who were not recognized refugees and had residence, obtained it through three of the following ways: 1) some enrolled themselves or their children in Al-Azhar school or private Egyptian schools and were able to obtain residence through school enrollment, 2) some purchased it from Somali and Egyptian middle men for \$200, and 3) many fewer people obtained residence through their spouses or parents who were already legal residents in Egypt.

It is important to note that over the past year the Department of Immigration and Residence at the 'Mujama' had been continually denying residence to Somali refugees who apply for it through school enrollment. This change was mostly motivated by increasing concerns of the Egyptian government that the number of the refugees was on the rise and being able to obtain residence through school enrollment encouraged more refugees to come into the country. Thus, over the past six months the Egyptian government has been very strict and vigilant about making decisions regarding application for residence that are filed by Somali refugees. This has greatly reduced the number of people who were able to purchase residence from middlemen. Moreover, since January 2003 the government had stopped issuing entry visas to

Somali applicants, which consequently affected the number of refugees entering the country.

Those who have legal residence through venues other than the UNHCR often confront the problem of not being able to renew their residence status. This is particularly true of those who had purchased it. Also, the refugees who obtain residence through the UNHCR complain of the long time it takes to renew their residence. Moreover, the recent practice of voiding the passports of recognized refugees and stamping residence on UNHCR cards made many refugees feel more vulnerable since the voided passports lessens the chances of pursuing resettlement with their own means, encouraging refugees to turn towards clandestine means when the opportunities for legal resettlement are unattainable.

Both unrecognized and recognized refugees suffer varying degrees of legal instability. In fact, over the period of the eight months of the fieldwork, there were three occasions when Somali refugees were arrested and detained by Egyptian police because of the issue of residence. While the majority of the detainees were not recognized refugees and/or did not have legal residence, there were some who were recognized refugees. Thus even the UNHCR card does not necessarily guarantee its Somali holder protection from police harassment and detention. To counter this vulnerability, Somali refugees resort to several strategies. In addition to the obvious one of obtaining legal residence, some refugees attempt to obtain student IDs either by actually enrolling in educational institutions if they can, or obtaining semi-official student IDs from the Somali Association for University Students. While talking to Ahmed, a twenty-seven year old who had been rejected by the UNHCR for a refugee status, he showed me his recently acquired student ID from an Al-Azhar school and said, "It makes me feel a little bit more secure. Last Friday, I showed it to a police officer that stopped me in the street. He let me go. You know police officers pay more attention to student IDs than to UNHCR cards. They don't care about UNHCR cards."⁶

Also some refugees take Arabic classes and work on improving their Egyptian Arabic so that they could appear "less foreign" in public spaces by talking Egyptian Arabic. For example last spring, on his way back from an English class for Somali Refugees at AUC, Soliman, a thirty-year old asylum seeker was picked up by a police officer and detained for a couple of days. A few days later during a gathering with other Somalis in Ard il Liwa, Soliman's roommates scolded him for not bothering to learn Arabic. Osman, one of his roommates, said, "If Soliman spoke Arabic and was able to talk to the police officers, maybe they would have let him go. He could not talk to them at all because he did not know Arabic. That made problems for him. He showed that he was a refugee who just arrived in Cairo and had no legal papers."

Another common strategy for avoiding police detention, which is sometimes self-defeating, is confining oneself to the areas where other Somalis congregate such as particular coffee shops in Ard il Liwa and Nasr City where men usually spend time together. However, during police raids these coffee shops are precisely the places that police officers target since they are known by Egyptians in the neighborhood and the police as places where "black foreigners" gather (these words were used by an

⁶ The names of all the refugees quoted in this report have been changed for purposes of confidentiality.

Egyptian neighbor in Dokki in an exchange with a police officer as overheard by a research assistant during one of these raids).

Economic sustenance: remittances, financial assistance from UNHCR, and income-generating activities

Remittances: While unemployment is a major issue that Egyptians themselves have to deal with, it is particularly an acute problem for refugees who have no employment rights whether they are recognized or unrecognized. In the case of Somalis, this means that since they are unable to work and provide for themselves legally they have to depend on family members living elsewhere for financial support. Of the interviewees, 264 receive monthly remittance from family members living in the West. Of those, 138 people receive between \$50-100 a month. The rest receives more than \$100 with 41 people receiving between \$151-200 (Table 8). The majority of the remittance comes from family members in the USA and Europe (31% and 35% respectively), whereas 10% of the remittance money is sent from Saudi Arabia (Table 9).

It is important to note that in the cases of many of the refugees, remittance money is not a sufficient and secure source of income that the refugees can count on. Money is sometimes sent intermittently partly because of the insecurity of the economic and employment status of the sender. Moreover, the decision of who needs remittance and how much is an issue that is continually contested and debated by family members living in different host societies. For example, a Rahma, a mother of four and a rejected asylum seeker going through re-appeal procedures at the UNHCR, feels that the remittance money (\$100) she receives on and off from her two elder daughters in Saudi Arabia is not an adequate and stable source of income that she can count on for her children's sustenance. The girls send her money whenever they find work (as maids or janitors). In addition to the times when they are out of work, the girls sometimes decide not to send money to their mother whenever a more serious family situation arises such as the illness of their father who was still stranded in Somalia. There was also the time when the older daughter met a young Somali immigrant and wanted to get married. The daughter decided then she needed to save most of her income for her wedding expenses. The daughter went back to sending remittance when the mother and her younger siblings in Cairo, and her grandmother and aunts in Kenya called to scold her and urged her not to let down the family. Rahma's half brothers and sisters who live in Canada send her meager sums of money (\$50) twice a year whenever Rahma's daughters are out of work. Rahma complains that her half-brothers only send money after repeated calls from herself (which cost her money she desperately needs to make ends meet) and the support of her mother and sister. Because of this financial insecurity, Rahma depends on a combination of strategies in which intermittent remittance is only one resource. Her other means of survival include generating income –albeit irregular- from providing a wide range of services to slightly better-off refugees and Somali expatriates. These services are housekeeping, childcare, cooking and selling food.

Remittance is received through a Somali-based transfer system called 'hawala.' There are several Somali-based 'hawala' businesses in Cairo as well as in many other host societies where Somali refugees live. They are run by a group of male and female refugees known in every neighborhood. These Somali-run 'hawala' systems

charge much less than Western Unions and banks (\$5 for every \$100) and deliver the money quickly. The family member who is sending the money from a Western or any other city gives to the representative of a particular 'hawala' system in that city the amount of money to be remitted, the charge fee, and the name and phone number of the family relative in Cairo. The business representative calls his colleagues in Cairo and asks them to call the family relative to whom the money has been sent and deliver the amount. It usually takes a couple of days after the money has been remitted for the refugee to collect it.

Almost all of the interviewees said that they spend all the remittance money on living costs in Cairo. Such costs included rent, utilities, food expenses, health and education services, and donations for community charity work.

Table 8:

Remittance from Abroad

	Number	Percent
None	36	12.0
\$50-100	138	46.0
\$101-150	27	9.0
\$151-200	41	13.7
\$201-250	12	4.0
\$251-300	27	9.0
\$301-350	5	1.7
\$351-400	11	3.7
\$401-450	1	.3
501+	2	.7
Total	300	100.0

Table 9:

Countries from which Family Members send Remittance

	Number	Percent
USA	93	31.0
Canada	7	2.3
Australia	8	2.7
European Countries	107	35.7
Saudi Arabia	30	10.0
Libya	3	1.0
Somalia	8	2.7
Other	7	2.3
More than one	1	.3
Not Applicable	36	12.0
Total	300	100.0

Financial assistance from UNHCR: Of the seventy-two recognized refugees who were interviewed for this project, only 46 people receive financial assistance from the UNHCR. The financial assistance received by these interviewees ranged between L.E. 200 and L.E. 450 (Egyptian pounds)⁷. Of these 46 interviewees, only 16 people receive this assistance regularly (that is every month), 11 people receive it irregularly (sometimes every two or four months) and 19 people stopped receiving financial assistance all together because of recent UNHCR decisions to suspend financial assistance in the cases of single refugees and female refugees who were reunified with their husbands.

Income-generating activities: Although a significant number of the interviewees receive remittances, it is irregular and not sufficient for sustenance. Hence, some of the refugees engage in income-generating activities that are mostly carried out within the Somali refugee community. Sixty people out of the sample carry out income-generating activities. Eight people sell Somali clothes, incense, and food to other Somali refugees while 23 people do housekeeping and childcare, mostly for Somali families who moved from Western countries (4 out of 23 were employed by Egyptian families), 18 people teach Quran and Arabic or English to Somali refugee children and adults, 11 people engage in selling entry visas to other Somalis, and one person works in real estate, that is finding apartments for Somali refugees.

Sale businesses, housekeeping and childcare are exclusively done by female refugees. Teaching jobs are exclusively held by male refugees. Both male and female refugees engage in selling entry visas and the real estate work was done by a male. It is important to note that selling entry visas was a highly irregular source of income. In fact, the interviewees who engaged in this kind of work were able to do so successfully once, twice, or at the utmost three times. At each time, the person was able to sell one entry visa for \$250. Other kinds of income-generating activities are done more regularly with money earned every month. Maids and nannies make \$100 a month, teachers earn \$50 a month, small sale business owners make between \$50-100, and the real estate agent makes between \$50-100 a month. Only refugees selling entry visas and maids and nannies working for Somali families (who were citizens of Western countries and had recently moved to Cairo) are paid in US dollars. The rest earn their incomes in Egyptian pounds. The exchange rate of L.E 5 to \$1 was used to calculate their incomes (Table 10).

Maids and nannies that work for Egyptian and Somali families have various attitudes towards their employers. Most of the female refugees who do this kind of work prefer to work for Somali employers since they pay in dollars, offer accommodation, and in some cases even manage to get residence for their employees. However, others, particularly those who are married, prefer to work for Egyptian families because they do not have to spend the night and can go back home to their children. Some of these women also do not want to work for Somali families because they said it will hurt their pride. Asha, a mother of seven, said: "I work for Egyptians although I make less money. It is true I got worried when my employers asked about my passport and residence. I showed them an appointment slip from the UNHCR. That was many months ago. They don't know I got rejected. But I still can't work for Somalis. It will

⁷ One US dollar was equivalent to 5 Egyptian pounds at the time of the fieldwork. Since then, it has risen to 6.5 Egyptian pounds.

hurt my family, our pride. I don't want some day a Somali woman to put down my daughter and tell her your mother used to work for me.”

In short, the most regular income-generating activities that the refugees engage in are housekeeping and childcare for women and teaching for men. Some women also participate in very small-scale sales businesses that target other refugees and Somali expatriates who moved from the West. When running sales businesses, refugees draw on their past work experiences both in the homeland as well as in other host societies. For example, women who sell incense and Somali clothes have previous experience acquired in the homeland and during their residence in Kenya or Saudi Arabia. Women who sell Somali food also make use of their previous experience of selling food in street stands in Somalia. Male teachers also draw on previous experience of teaching in the homeland. Several of these teachers said that they first resorted to teaching as a strategy of survival and livelihood back at home when they were trapped in daily experiences of insecurity and lack of income during the early years of the civil war. Other men and women refugees acquire their working skills in diaspora as they watch and learn from roommates or new-made friends or acquaintances.

Very few of the refugees, who make use of these small-scale businesses, venture into a larger project. A married couple opened a small Somali restaurant in Ard il Liwa that caters exclusively to Somali refugees residing in the area. Two young men in the area also opened an inexpensive internet café that charges a L.E. 1 for an hour's access to the internet. The café is mostly used by Somalis. In short, previous livelihood strategies used by interviewees remain influential but are not decisive for the ones adopted and added to in new host societies.

The income-generating activities that Somali refugees engage in still remain mostly within the Somali community. Contact with Egyptians through work is still limited and is mostly confined to providing housekeeping and child care services to Egyptian families (Somali expatriates from the West still outnumber Egyptians as employers who hire Somali maids and nannies). Still, recently there are signs of more contact and coordination among Egyptians and Somalis in regard to employment and income-generating possibilities. Joined business ventures have been started by few Egyptian men and a handful of Somali refugees with the aim of generating money for Egyptian-owned businesses and providing employment for Somalis. For example, an inexpensive Egyptian telecommunication center in Ard il Liwa hired a Somali young man to respond to the increasing number of Somali customers who call the center to place orders for long-distance calls. One of the supermarkets in Hai El Ashir in Nasr City, where many Somalis from the neighborhood shop, hired two Somali teenage boys as sales and delivery persons. The owner of the place found that hiring Somali assistants was a sound business decision since a growing number of his customers are Somali refugees some of whom do not speak Arabic well and others who feel more at ease in the supermarket when they are helped by a Somali salesperson. Despite several Egyptian businesses that seem to suggest possible participation of Somalis in the Egyptian economy, many refugees are too inhibited by feelings of insecurity and legal vulnerability to venture into more business relations and economic activities with Egyptians.

The UNHCR (in coordination with other NGOs such as Caritas, CARE, etc) has supported some training programs for recognized refugees in order to develop their capabilities for securing livelihood. Such programs include sewing classes for women

and some technical courses for men such as welding. Also computer and English classes are offered at several church-run refugee programs (e.g. Saint Andrew's and Saint Bakhit Churches). However, very few of the refugees that were interviewed for this study participated in these training programs. Those who did mostly took part in computer and language programs. The commonly held view among Somali refugees is that the usefulness of such programs is greatly limited for the following main reasons: first there is usually a long waiting list and many refugees hardly ever manage to enroll in them. This is particularly true of English and computer training. Secondly, those who have taken specific job-related technical training (e.g. women who have taken sewing classes) point out that they cannot put their skills into use because they cannot purchase the necessary equipment to start working (in this case sewing machines). According to those refugees, there is also a lack of follow up from the NGOs to ensure that the refugees have developed and are able to use their learned skills for income-generating programs.

Table 10:

Amount of Income Earned from Activities in Cairo

	Number	Percent
None	238	79.3
\$20-49	10	3.3
\$50-100	32	10.7
\$101-150	6	2.0
\$152-200	3	1.0
\$201-250	3	1.0
\$251-300	4	1.3
\$351-400	1	.3
\$450+	1	.3
In Kind	2	.7
Total	300	100.0

Housing and household types: needs and strategies

Since the majority of Somali refugees live in rented furnished apartments, rent is the largest item of their monthly expenditure. Of the people interviewed, 61% live in apartments for a total rent between L.E. 400-600. Another 12.7% live in apartments rented for L.E 601-700 (Table 11). Moreover, many refugees are forced to move several times (52% of the interviewees moved between 1-2 times and 16% of the interviewees moved 3 times). The frequent movement of the refugees is caused by high rents and problems with landlords who are often unhappy with the large size of Somali refugee households. For example, Maimun, a mother of five, had to move three times. Her former landlord told her to leave the apartment without giving her enough time to look for another apartment. The landlord complained that her children were too noisy. He could not understand that she had to share the place with a friend and her three children. She, her friend, and their children had to leave the place in less than a week. Maimun said: "It was very hard. I had to stay with a relative and her children until I could find another apartment. My friend also had to find someone else to stay with. These Egyptian landlords take our money, but treat us badly because we

are foreigners and refugees.” For this informant and many other Somali refugees, the housing problems that they encounter are not simply the result of cultural differences in styles of life and patterns of childrearing between them and their Egyptian landlords. Rather, these problems are intertwined with their precarious and insecure lives as refugees. This is mainly because these refugees resort to housing arrangements in order to secure sustained livelihood: families, single people, clan members, friends from previous host societies, live with one another in the same apartments, in adjacent apartment buildings, and in the same streets. These housing arrangements naturally result in cramped apartments full of Somali refugees that can become too ‘visible’ and ‘undesirable’ whenever there are tensions in local neighborhoods.

Yet, new and creative housing arrangements continue to be an important strategy used by many refugees to be able to find shelter and sustain oneself and family. Refugees live in a variety of households: 1) households with one family unit, 2) households with more than one family unit, 3) households with a family unit and single men, 4) households with a family unit and single women, 5) households with a family unit and both single men and single women, and 6) households with single men and women (Table 12). The family unit is defined in this case as: parents and children, grandparents or children, siblings, or cousins, who are all depending on the same source of income. A household is defined as a group of people living together, sharing rent, utilities, and food expenses. For better sustenance and less expenditure, many of the households are shared by a large number of people. Seventy-one percent of the households are shared by 5-10 or more people. Apartments are cramped and too small for the large number of people living in them. Sixty-five percent of the households shared apartments that had two bedrooms only. Fifty-four percent of the interviewees paid between L.E. 50-200 as their share of the rent. Slightly over 10% did not pay anything because they either lived with friends or distant relatives and helped out with housework and cooking in exchange for rent, or they were Al Azhar students who lived in the dorm, or maids and nannies who lived with Somali employers (Table 13). Interviewees roomed equally with people from their same clans as well as different clans (49.3% and 50.7% respectively).

Food and other expenditure strategies

To spend less money on food, people in the same household share meals and split the costs of food. The diet is limited. Many refugees stay up late at night and sleep late in the morning. Hence most adults skip breakfast. Children are often fed traditional Somali fried “anjela” (made of corn and flour) with oil and tea and very little sugar (sugar is used very economically since it is consumed in tea drinking during the long hours of socializing with roommates and friends during the night). For lunch, household members often eat pasta and sauce. Leftovers from lunch are eaten at dinner, or ‘baladi’ bread is consumed with leftover sauce from lunch. Another inexpensive staple food is ‘ambula,’ a Somali dish that consists of white beans and rice.

In many households, members choose to suspend the dial service in the house telephone so that they can save money on telephone bills. They use their phones only for receiving calls from family members living abroad. Communication with family members residing abroad is also done through e-mail at cheap internet cafes.

Table 11:**Total Rent of Interviewees' Apartments**

	Number	Percent
LE100-200	3	1.0
LE201-300	3	1.0
LE301-400	20	6.7
LE401-500	83	27.7
LE501-600	102	34.0
LE601-700	38	12.7
LE701-800	30	10.0
LE801-900	9	3.0
LE1000+	4	1.3
Lives in the Dorm	4	1.3
Employer	4	1.3
Total	300	100.0

Table 12:**Kinds of Households**

	Frequency	Percent
A Family Unit	70	23.3
More than one Family Unit	20	6.7
Single men	56	18.7
Single women	7	2.3
Single men and single Women	33	11.0
A family and single men	68	22.7
A family and single women	27	9.0
A family and single men and women	11	3.7
Dorm	4	1.3
Lives with Employer	4	1.3
Total	300	100.0

Table 13:**Interviewee's Share of Rent**

	Number	Percent
LE50-100	81	27.0
LE101-150	41	13.7
LE151-200	42	14.0
LE201-250	22	7.3
LE251-300	15	5.0
LE301-350	6	2.0
LE351-400	4	1.3
LE401-450	1	.3
LE451-500	3	1.0
LE550+	1	.3
None	32	10.7
Pays all	52	17.3
Total	300	100.0

Education needs and resources

The interviewees have a total of 294 school-age children (6-18 years old). Ninety-seven of these children receive some kind of schooling while 197 do not receive any schooling. Of the 97 children who are getting some kind of education, 17 are going to formal private Egyptian schools, 24 are enrolled in Al Azhar schools, and 50 are enrolled in a home-schooling project run by a group of Somali refugees and expatriates. 6 of the children receive tutorials at home given by Somali tutors. The private Egyptian schools to which some of the refugee children go charge LE 650 a year. Azhar schools are free except for an annual fee of LE 20 for books. The community-run home schooling project is free and classes were held 3-4 times for a total of six teaching hours per week. The children in this project are taught the same curricula covered in Egyptian schools. Children who are given tutorials at home by private tutors are mostly taught Quran and Arabic and in some cases English. These tutorials cost LE 50 a month per child for 3 one-hour sessions a week.

Two-thirds of the adult interviewees do not receive any kind of education (200 people). Of the remaining third, 18 are enrolled either in Al Azhar-run high school, adult education program, or university, 23 take English and computer classes at private Egyptian institutes, 24 take language and computer classes at a Somali-run educational center, 9 take Arabic classes at private Islamic educational centers, 11 take tutorials in Quran, Arabic, and English at home with Somali tutors, 4 take Arabic and English tutorials with tutors from other African countries, 5 are enrolled in church-run education programs, 3 go to literacy programs run by the local government in different neighborhoods (Mahw il Oumeya Program), and 3 go to national universities other than Al Azhar (Table 14).

Children of recognized refugees are eligible for an annual educational grant of LE 600 provided by the UNHCR. The grant money is disbursed to the refugees in two sums given at different times of the year (in the fall and winter). Some of the refugees make use of this grant to enroll their children in formal schools. However, many who

are eligible for the grant cannot make use of it because of the difficulty of receiving the money in time to be able to use it to pay school fees. The refugees can only collect the money after providing a receipt showing that they have paid the school fees. This causes a problem for some who cannot pay the fees in advance of reimbursement. Also, refugees who are able to arrange to pay the school fees have great difficulty in getting reimbursed because of the slow process of paperwork involved. Moreover, the grant is often not enough to cover all of the tuition fees, book costs, and bus fees. In fact there are cases of children of recognized refugees who discontinue schooling because of the difficulty of paying the fees on time.

Most interviewees feel that they lack educational resources for themselves and their children. Many cite lack of legal residence, financial resources, and a sense of instability for their inability to pursue education. A considerable number of refugees found that their situation as temporary refugees who do not have rights to permanent resettlement, citizenship, and employment discourages them from pursuing long-term educational opportunities. One refugee conveyed this attitude through these words: “There is no education available for us. Anyway, why should one bother? We have to leave this country some day. We can never have rights. We cannot make it home.”

Table 14:
Educational Programs in Which Interviewees are enrolled

	Number	Percent
None	200	66.7
Azhar	18	6.0
Private Egyptian Language or Computer Centers	23	7.7
Somali-run Language or Computer Centers	24	8.0
Islamic Language Centers	9	3.0
Tutorials taught by Non-Somalis	4	1.3
Tutorials taught by Somalis	11	3.7
Government-run Adult Literacy Program (Mahw il Oumeya)	3	1.0
Church-run Education Programs	5	1.7
University Student	3	1.0
Total	300	100.0

Health needs and resources

The most common health concerns among the interviewees are chronic headaches, insomnia and stomach problems. Interviewees often associate recurring ailments that they suffer from with their lack of stability and their struggle to pursue resettlement.

Many complain of chronic headaches and insomnia, particularly when they are suffering from “buufis.” This is a term that the refugees use to mean obsession with traveling to and resettling in Western countries. ‘Buufis’ is a complex notion that has emerged out of the experiences of Somali refugees and is analyzed very well in the work of Cindy Horst (Horst 2003) on Somali refugees in Kenya. While I was visiting Habiba, a mother of eight, she talked at length about her hardships, her sense of instability, and her inability to obtain resettlement through the UNHCR. She had friends who resettled in the West. She said, “When I think of my life here and our problems, when I think of resettling and how I can’t get it, my head hurts so much. Now my head hurts all the time. I can’t sleep. My body aches. It feels like there are worms crawling all over my body.”

Apart from buufis-induced ailments, some refugees suffer from wounds inflicted during the Civil War, while others suffer from diabetes and respiratory problems. Some of the interviewees talk about family relatives and friends in Cairo who suffer from mental problems. People with mental problems are treated by traditional healers who read verses of the Quran over them and make them wear amulets with small wraps of paper on which particular verses of the Quran were written. In one case, a woman who had mental problems was eventually hospitalized by a male relative after several attempts of traditional healing. For other health problems, over a third of the interviewees (108 people) use pharmacies as their main health care provider. They go to the local pharmacy in their neighborhood, describe their ailment to the pharmacist and buy an inexpensive medicine. Twenty-four percent of the interviewees utilize private neighborhood outpatient clinics that are used by poor and low-income Egyptians. The main ones used by the refugees are El Liwa, Dr. Adly’s clinic, and Sharq, which are located in Ard il Liwa and its vicinity. Twenty-three percent of the interviewees use inexpensive Islamic clinics such as Mostafa Mahmoud Mosque Clinic (in the vicinity of Ard il Liwa), Rabaa' il Adaweya, and Tysir Clinics (in Nasr City). Twelve percent of the interviewees use the Caritas clinic (only recognized refugees used Caritas Clinic), and 4% went to the clinic at All Saints Cathedral (Table 15).

Table 15:

Health Care Providers

	Number	Percent
Private low-income Neighborhood clinics	73	24.3
Low-income Islamic Clinics	70	23.3
Caritas	36	12.0
All Saints	12	4.0
Pharmacies	108	36.0
Other	1	.3
Total	300	100.0

Community-building and livelihood strategies

For Somali refugees in Cairo, the daily process of survival and maximizing livelihood resources involves making claims to old and new collective identities that are sometimes complementary and other times conflicting. Clanism continues to be used as a support system, but it is by no means the only one nor is it the primary language of identity. Another significant support mechanism and identity discourse is a Somali nationalism whose purity and credibility are based on its being diasporic and being established away from the malaise of the homeland. In addition to clan and national identities, new diasporic identities are formed by the refugees on the basis of their shared experiences in previous host societies. In the following paragraphs, I will analyze how each of these identity discourses plays a role in daily acts of securing livelihood.

Clan affiliation continues to play its historical role as an informal support system that is frequently used as a supplement to the support of nuclear and extended family relations. Refugees continue to seek the assistance of their clan members in times of need and distress. For example, clan members are expected to help with donations for the costs of the medical treatment of another sick clan member, or to help free a detained clan member. Furthermore, clan affiliations are, in some cases, a divisive force. For example, in few rape cases accusations have been made against suspects that were based on assumed animosity between the clan of the rape victim and that of the suspect.

However, in the refugees' daily networking, getting by, and planning ahead, clan affiliation is by no means the primary basis of collective identity claims. Refugees choose housemates on the basis of other newly acquired collective identities such as identification with refugees with whom one lived and got to know in previous host societies. Khadija, a female Somali refugee and a mother of two, previously lived in Libya for many years after the Civil War. She moved to Cairo in 1999 and settled in Ard il Liwa. She says that she settled in Ard il Liwa because at the time there were two other Somali families she had known and befriended in Libya. Though these families were of different clan affiliation than that of Khadija, the three families were good friends and helped one another with settling into the new host society. Khadija adds that since her arrival many more friends followed from Libya and settled in Ard il Liwa. In fact, the women in Ard il Liwa who previously lived in Libya talk about a strong bond that they share. Khadija explains it as a bond that emerged out of the hardships they faced together for many years in Libya. In their new host society, they borrow money from one another, exchange information about UNHCR and living in Cairo, and share emotional support. For them, the collective identity that has been constructed from the experiences of flight and displacement that they had shared is just as important and meaningful in their lives as their clan affiliations.

Moreover, just as clan affiliation is sometimes invoked as a language of differentiation, so are collective identity constructs based on shared refugee experiences in previous host societies. For example, in the early phases of establishing the home-schooling project for the Somali children, there were many heated arguments among different refugee groups about the number of children that could enroll in the school. However, most of these arguments were not so much about which clans had the most slots. Instead, the refugees made their claims to the spaces in the school on the basis of their membership in particular diasporic communities

(e.g. Somalis from Libya versus, those from Saudi Arabia, versus those who have come directly from the homeland).

Instead of clan identities or those based on shared experiences in previous host societies, some refugees formed a sense of community on the basis of homogenizing Somali diasporic nationalism. One good illustration of this national identity is the practice of giving donations for community charity work. All interviewees said that they donated money 3-4 times a year for community efforts to assist those in dire need. The donations given by each individual ranged between L.E. 10-50. Over the past year, some of these donations were used by community leaders to assist a mother of eight who lost her husband on a boat trip from Libya to Italy in his desperate attempt to seek resettlement in the West, and also to help several families who lost relatives and or possessions in a fire in their apartment building in Ard il Liwa. Donations were collected from Somali refugees at large, regardless of their clan affiliations or previous host societies. However, those who shared clan affiliations with those in need of donations or had known them as friends and neighbors in previous host societies always felt obligated to donate a bit more and immediately. When I asked interviewees why they donated money, the recurrent answer was that it was the Somali thing to do or as one of the interviewees put it, “It is our culture. Somalis may have many problems. We, Somalis, destroyed and lost our country. But we can’t just watch other Somalis die of sickness or of lack of food and do nothing. It does not matter what their clan is. It is our culture.”

It is significant that the interviewees used the word “qaraan” to refer to these donations, which is the Somali word for a cultural practice in the homeland of collecting money from one’s sub-clan or clan family to help a clan member in hardship. But in the case of Somali refugees in Cairo, the practice of “qaraan” clearly extends the boundaries of clan affiliations and is practiced on a Somali nationalistic basis. Hence the refugees have transformed particular aspects of the language and practices of clanism and made them part of an inclusive Somali identity discourse that is used for maximizing the livelihood opportunities for the refugees. In short in Diaspora, old identity languages, which were conflicting in the homeland, are now being used in new and complementing ways.

Yet diasporic Somali nationalism is not free of contradictions. On the one hand, many of the refugees who had been away from the homeland for ten years or more talked with nostalgia and lament about Somali nationalism that was lost in the Civil War, which they came to appreciate in diaspora. Many such refugees participate in community-building efforts and finding community-based solutions for their problems and needs. On the other hand, people who came directly from the homeland feel that they have better appreciation for Somali nationalism since they lived in the homeland throughout the whole or a deal of the Civil War and the subsequent years of chaos and lawlessness. Both groups sometimes view each other with suspicion, the diasporic group accusing the latter group of being tainted by the atrocities of the Civil War, and the latter group accusing the former of having been away from the homeland for too long to appreciate what binds all Somalis together.

In short, the language of collective identities among the Somali refugees is a multi-layered and complex one in which various identities have their significance in different contexts and all of which are invoked and implicated in daily strategies of securing livelihood.

Integration into host society

Almost all interviewees say that they have no or very little interactions with Egyptians. They do not socialize with Egyptian neighbors. Many have uneasy relationships with landlords, and many of the students in language and computer institutes, high schools, or universities say that they have very little interactions with fellow Egyptian students. Many attribute this to a sense of fear and wanting to avoid Egyptians because of their vulnerable legal status and lack of employment rights. Others cite cultural and language differences as inhibiting factors in addition to the sense of fear. A considerable number of refugees say that they live with Somalis in Somali-concentrated areas, network, and socialize with Somalis and hence have very little incentive to interact and build relationships with Egyptians.

There are refugees who complain of Egyptian racism, citing police harassment in particular as a striking example of such racism. Some of the interviewees are often stopped by police men of lower ranks in the street, told to show residence papers, searched, and robbed of any little money (e.g. LE 5 – LE 20) they carry with them. Refugees who are arrested and detained because of lack of residence also complain of police brutality. In February and March 2003, over twenty Somali refugees attempted to cross the borders to Libya where they were planning to take a boat to Italy. They were arrested by Egyptian officials at the border and sent back to Cairo. In detention, many said that they suffered beating from the police officials. Some women charged that they were sexually molested by police officials. Some of those who were detained and then released also claimed that they were only released after their family relatives and friends had to pay bribes to the police ranging from \$100 to \$500. None of those refugees who claimed to have suffered from these acts wanted to file a formal complaint because of the fear of retaliation and further discrimination by Egyptian officials.

The issue of integration or lack of integration into Egyptian society is often discussed by the refugees in relation to their experiences of integration or lack of integration in previous Arab Muslim host societies. On the one hand, refugees lament the loss of employment possibilities that they had in Saudi Arabia and Libya, and which they lack in Cairo. On the other hand, Egypt looks better to the refugees when they remember the harsh experiences of the racism of Libyan employers or the constant threat and reality of deportation in Saudi Arabia. For example, Kaltoum and her husband, Abdel Risak remember their five-year residence in Libya as a time of contradictions. Abdel Razik explained the contradictions as such, “We suffered a lot of racism. I worked as a construction worker there. I was hired once by a Libyan soldier to do some construction work in his house along with two other Somali refugees. We worked in this man’s house for days. When we finished the work, he refused to pay us. He even had us put in prison and we were beaten. But I could still work and make money even when I had problems. The housing and food were cheap there. Here in Cairo, I can’t work. Life is hard.” According to Kaltoum and her husband, there is less overt racism in Cairo compared to what they suffered in Libya. But they feel marginalized in Egypt by their inability to work, make a living, and reside legally. Hawa, a maid who lived and worked in Saudi Arabia, remembers the harsh experiences of having been deported twice for lacking legal documents. Hawa also talks about Saudi racism, which she experienced in encounters with Saudi ‘Mutawa’ or morality police. But she also feels that her life in Egypt is highly

precarious because of her illegal status and inability to find work. She says, “Even when I was deported, I was able to come back to Saudi Arabia and work again.”

Hence in the experiences of Somali refugees striving for rights, integration is a relative matter that involves dealing with less or more marginalization, different kinds of discrimination, and securing or lacking different kinds of rights in different host societies that are interconnected in their lives.

Relations with other refugee groups

The one refugee group that Somalis in Cairo are aware of is the Sudanese since the latter is the largest African refugee group in Egypt. Accordingly, Sudanese are more visible in the UNHCR and other NGO offices. Almost all of the refugees interviewed for this study say they have no interactions with Sudanese or any other refugee group. Those who have had some interactions with Sudanese refugees say that they were mostly confined to having had Sudanese classmates in English language classes run in Saint Andrews’ Church, or having chatted with Sudanese refugees on the UNHCR premise. But none of the interviewees room with Sudanese or befriend them. Moreover, there is a sense among a large number of the Somalis that the Sudanese because of their visible number, longer residence in Egypt, and their strong contacts with church-based NGOs, that they have access to more resources and obtain more aid from NGOs than Somalis do. It seems that the situation of Sudanese and Somali refugees is analogous to that of recent immigrant groups that physically and socially isolate themselves from one another so as to consolidate individual and collective efforts and resources for the group’s survival.

Relations with the UNHCR

The UNHCR occupies a significant space in the hearts and minds of the Somali refugees. The refugees look at it - more than they do towards the Egyptian government or society - as responsible for not only their protection but also for sustenance. Yet, to a large extent, the UNHCR does not necessarily play a crucial role in the livelihood of refugees since recognized, like unrecognized refugees are not entitled to employment. Moreover, because of the dwindling budget of the UNHCR office in recent years, benefits granted to recognized refugees such as monthly allowances, educational grants and health coverage have been greatly slashed. For example, for the past year and a half financial assistance to a considerable number of single refugees has been discontinued. In some of the cases when female refugees with or without children have been later joined by their husbands, they have been denied financial assistance. There is the difficulty of making effective use of educational grants for children and the limited health coverage. These problems are compounded by the issue of obtaining and renewing residence, which is time-consuming, and being able to use the UNHCR card as a meaningful and useful identification card when confronted with police harassment. Most refugees are painfully aware of these problems and often feel frustrated and let down in their interactions with the UNHCR.

Often the sense of frustration and disappointment that refugees feel are not entirely caused by actual problems and gaps in the services that refugees receive from the

UNHCR. It is also caused by mutual misunderstandings between both parties. A considerable number of refugees share distorted images of the UNHCR as a Western Christian-based organization or Western organization that is corrupted by its Egyptian staff. Also many refugees think that UNHCR protection officers expect them to stress the significance of their clan identities in their claims for refugee status. Consequently, many refugees feel compelled to make claims to a minority clan in their application for asylum, regardless of the strength of their claims apart from their true clan affiliations. I think this particular misconception on the part of the refugees has been re-enforced by a tendency on the part of some UNHCR staff members to reify clan affiliations and draw somewhat rigid distinctions between different clan groups in terms of their cultural practices as a way of sorting out valid and bogus claims.

However, since late 2003, there have been efforts by the UNHCR to address some of the major problems of Somali refugees such as the high rejection rate, the closed cases that need to be reopened, and resettling eligible refugees. Refugees feel that there have been some improvements. For example, a large number of rejected refugees have been recognized after their re-appeal applications have been reviewed. Also a significant number of Somali single people and families have been approved for resettlement. Still on the part of the Somali refugees, there are some divisions among different groups of people on how to deal with the UNHCR and who should interact with it on behalf of the community.

Conclusion

The current Somali refugee population in Cairo is a young and heterogeneous mix in terms of its patterns of displacement, comprising of refugees who have moved directly from the homeland and those who have lived in one or more host societies in Africa or the Middle East before moving to Cairo. The majority has similar educational background (high school graduates) and occupational background (workers in the informal sector). Their current life in Cairo is greatly limited in legal, economic, and educational rights and resources. To cope, they make use of intricate mechanisms of familial, clan-based, and new community-based networking and strategies. Moreover, the Somali refugees in Cairo are an integral part of transnational families and sub-communities that have very strong economic and social ties to one another. In fact, for the Somali refugees in Cairo and their family members and close friends in other host societies, mobility and establishing transnational families become part of a process of resisting marginalization and achieving varying degrees of participation and acceptance in several host societies rather than the elusive goal of adequate integration in one host society. In other words, securing livelihood and seeking integration becomes on-going transnational way of life for the Somali diaspora.⁸

⁸ Many of the refugees here constantly work on seeking resettlement either through the UNHCR, Western embassies or often through clandestine means. In the past few months, several hundred refugees left the country via Niger and Libya and fled to Italy by boat. Many Somalis have lost their lives and money in these horrific journeys. One of the interviewees in this study lost five children in their late teens and early twenties in a boat journey from Libya to Italy early this winter. On the other hand, there have been quite a few success stories of refugees who made the journey safely and were granted asylum in European countries. Some of them have already started working and sending remittance to family members left behind in Cairo.

The difficulties associated with resettlement and integration of Somali refugees in the Egyptian society and resettlement illustrate the contradictions inherent in Egypt's position towards refugees. Within the framework of the policies of the government and its actual practices, Somali refugees in Cairo as well as many other refugee groups, can be seen as the 'others' that cannot and should not be part of what is perceived as the "nationals." Yet, the presence of these refugees is not entirely undesired by the host society because they bring in money and spend it in the country. For example, the three hundred interviewees in this project receive and spend roughly over \$500,000 of remittance money per year. Moreover, the total annual rent money of 300 households is the equivalent of \$200,000. While it is true that the amount of money spent by Somali refugees is not significant to the overall Egyptian economy, it is beneficial to a considerable number of Egyptians. That is, in Egypt where unemployment and inflation are major problems, money spent by refugees on rent is a source of income to a sizeable number of Egyptian apartment owners in lower-class neighborhoods. In many cases, this monthly income is a needed supplement to the owners' meager salaries as government employees. Moreover, owners of small businesses such as cheap internet cafés are able to profit from the refugees' use of the internet for affordable and regular contact with their family members in the homeland and other nation states.

It is arguable that in addition to the government's refugee policies, cultural and linguistic differences have led to the isolation and separation of the Somali refugee from the Egyptian society. However, it is significant to add that living within, and confining oneself to his or her own refugee community has become an important and common survival strategy among Somali refugees. While this strategy is helping many refugees secure their livelihood, it is undoubtedly separating the Somali refugee community further from the larger host society as well as from other refugee groups.

To improve the livelihood of the refugees, NGOs and international governmental organizations that work for the protection and well-being of the refugees, particularly the UNHCR, could undertake more aggressive legal advocacy work for the refugees' right to work. Moreover, they could provide modest financial and logistical support for the income-generating activities of the refugees. Sales of Somali clothes and food would be one activity that more women could take up. Also the scattered educational efforts carried out by individual tutors and a small home-schooling project can be consolidated into setting up a large community-based school for the refugee children, similar to schools set up by other refugee groups in Maadi. Again this would require financial and logistical help from NGOs.

By investing in the livelihood activities initiated by refugees, the UNHCR can work towards changing two sets of misconceptions that are held by some of its staff and Somali refugees respectively. The first, which is adopted by some UNHCR staff that have worked with Somali refugees, has to do with conceiving Somali refugees as lazy and dishonest. The second misconception, which is shared by many refugees and which is not unrelated to the first, has to do with the refugees' discomfort and fear to make evident their own individual and collective efforts to sustain and plan for themselves. They believe that the UNHCR will mistake their resourcefulness and hard work for lacking the need and the eligibility for protection and support.

APPENDIX I

Basic Demographic questions:

Sex:

Age:

Region of origin from Somalia:

Clan affiliation:

Neighborhood of residence within Cairo:

Current size of household:

Clan affiliations of household members:

Current occupation (if any):

Previous Occupation in the Home country or other host countries (if any):

Educational Background:

Marital status:

Location/status of spouse:

Current occupation of spouse (if any):

Number of children (if any):

Age of children:

Location/status of children:

Location of parents:

Location of siblings or cousins:

I. Legal Needs/Resources and Strategies:

1. Residence:

1.1 When did you come to Cairo?

1.2 Did you enter Cairo with a temporary visa?

1.3 How did you obtain it?

1.4 Do you have residence in Cairo?

1.5 If yes, how do you obtain your residence?

1.6 What are the problems/advantages of your legal status in Cairo?

1.7 Which institutions/individuals do you deal with to obtain residence in Cairo?

a. UNHCR

b. Mujama

c. Ministry of Foreign affairs

d. Egyptian middlemen and women (who?)

e. Somali middle men and women (who?)

2. Refugee Status/Eligibility for Resettlement:

2.1 Have you applied for refugee status?

2.2 How do you go about accessing information and applying for UNHCR refugee status, appealing of rejection decisions, requesting family unity, requesting change of legal status, resettlement?

a. With the help of members of your household?

b. Clan members?

c. Somali friends or acquaintances from same residential areas?

d. Somali friends and acquaintances from previous periods of residence in other host societies?

e. Members of SRCOE

f. Church-based NGOs

g. Other NGOs

II. Economic Needs/Resources and Strategies:

1. Income:

- 1.1 How do you support yourself (and) family in Cairo?
- 1.2 Do you receive remittance from abroad (If yes, specify where)?
- 1.3 Do you receive financial assistance from the UNHCR (If so, how much, how often)?
- 1.4 Do you work? (If so, what do you do? Where? Who is your employer? How regular is your work?)

2. Housing:

- 2.1 How did you find your present accommodation?
- 2.2 Where else did you live in Cairo? For how long?
- 2.3 Who lives with you?
- 2.4 If flat-mates, how did you meet them? Are they from your clan? Did they live in the same host countries as you?

3. Expenses:

- 3.1 How much of your income do you spend on:
 - a. housing
 - b. food expenses
 - c. educational expenses (Where?)
 - d. relatives? (Where?)
 - e. medical expenses
 - f. applying and renewing residence
 - g. preparing your refugee application case
 - h. community-based activities and donations (What are they? Which groups?)
 - i. transportation

III. Educational Needs/Resources and Strategies:

1. Do you receive any kind of education? If yes, where?
2. When did you start? How did you find about it?
3. Have you taken/Do you take literacy programs?
4. If yes, where? What kind of programs?
 - a. government-run (Mahw il Oumeya)
 - b. church-based
 - c. run by Islamic charities (which ones?)
 - d. Somali community-based
5. Do you take English language classes? Where?
6. Do you receive any vocational classes?
7. Are your children receiving schooling? What kind?
 - a. Are you satisfied with the educational resources available for refugees

- b. Somali adult refugees
- c. Refugee children
- d. Somali refugee children

8. How and where do you access these educational resources for yourself and or children/relatives?

- a. literacy and language programs for adults
- b. vocational programs
- c. high school
- d. university education
- e. private and public elementary and junior high schools
- f. community-based tutorials

IV. Health Needs/Resources and Strategies:

1. Did you have any health problems back at home and in prior host society? If so, what were they?

2. Did you have any health services? How did you access them?

3. Do you have any health concerns here? If so, what are they?

4. Do you seek any medical assistance?

5. Which, if any, of the following health service providers do you use?

- a. Caritas Health Office
- b. Kasr El Aini Hospital
- c. All Saints Church Clinic
- d. Neighborhood clinics run by Islamic charity organizations. Please specify
- e. Other

V. Cross-Cultural and Ethnic Networking and Resources:

1. Do you have contacts and regular interactions with

- a. Egyptians
- b. other refugee communities (Who?)

2. In what contexts do you have contacts and regular interactions with Egyptians?

- a. as neighbors
- b. as landlord and tenants
- c. as classmates (in regular schools, literacy programs, universities, Azhar schools?)
- d. as government and or non-governmental officials (which organizations?)
- e. in mosques
- f. other

3. How do you characterize these contacts and interactions:

- a. close and friendly
- b. friendly, but superficial
- c. distant
- d. hostile

- e. neutral:
- f. other:

4. Do you have contacts and regular interactions with other refugee communities?

5. If so, which communities? In what contexts?

- a. UNHCR premises
- b. church-based NGOs (which?)
- c. church-based educational programs (Which?)
- d. other NGOs
- e. other non-church based educational programs? (which?)
- f. your neighborhood
- g. mosques
- h. other:

6. How do you characterize these contacts and interactions:

- a. close and friendly
- b. friendly
- c. distant
- d. hostile
- e. neutral
- f. other

7. Do you depend on Egyptians or members of other refugee communities in meeting any of the needs discussed in this questionnaire?

8. If yes, who are they?

9. How do you depend on these contacts?

10. What needs do they help you meet?

11. How did you make these contacts?

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