“yaa tahay?”

exploring the evolutions of a cultural identity

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Abstract

"Yaa tahay?" is Somali for "Who are you?" Although this is the literal translation, among Somali people this question is widely understood to actually mean "What is your tribe/clan?" For young Somalis of the diaspora, particularly Somali-Canadians, the response to this question of "Who are you?" is simple – "Soomaali [b]aan ahay" (I am Somali). This response is driven by a mutual sense of Somali identity, commonly known as Soomaalinimo, and this affiliation to Soomaalinimo has been revived by young Somalis of the diaspora, including those in Canada.

Through a series of interviews and participatory workshops, this research seeks to explore the evolution of Soomaalinimo over time. The research explores how a futures approach that is based on principles of dhaqan (culture) and Soomaalinimo could present alternative narratives and futures. Young Somali-Canadians in two cities (Toronto and Edmonton) were given an opportunity to define Soomaalinimo for themselves, re-discover Somalia's past, and create future scenarios of how the Somali-Canadian identity might evolve in the future for their great-grandchildren. While the focus of this research is specifically on Somali-Canadian futures, this research also presents a new inclusive futures framework that can be generalized to different cultural groups. The goal of this research, and resulting framework, is to foster the development of futures that are culturally informed, intersectional, and anticolonial.

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بِسْمِ ٱللهِ ٱلرَّحْمٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيم

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For my ancestors and descendants

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Preface

This major research project initially began from a place of pain.

I had intended to do my research on a completely different topic until I learned of Hodan Nalayeh's (Allah ha u naxariisto[1]; May Allah have mercy on her) tragic death in July 2019. I never had the opportunity to meet Hodan in person, but she impacted me in a way that I could not fully recognize until she was gone. Hodan was a Somali-Canadian journalist, activist, and community organizer but to me and so many other young Somalis living in the diaspora, she was so much more. She personified hope and showed us a different version of the home many of us have never known through her television show, Integration TV, and her social media posts. Her dedication to showcasing a different side of Somalia, one that was less focused on the tragedies of the civil war, showed Somalis and non-Somalis alike the beauty of the country and the Somali people.

When I think about the work Hodan Nalayeh was doing until she passed away, I am reminded of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2009 TED talk about the dangers of a single story. In this talk, Adichie explains that if we are told about a certain situation, place, or people from one perspective, it soon becomes the only version we will accept as the truth (Adichie, 2009). Hodan was working to undo the single story of Somalia as a failed state and of Somalis as people who cannot help themselves. By showing the beauty of the country and the people, she was engaging the Somali diaspora, especially young Somalis, in an important conversation. One that asked, *who do we want to be*? and *what do we want to be remembered as*? It was these questions that came to mind when I heard the news and through many tears and lots of prayers, this research project slowly

[1] Throughout this paper, I have made the deliberate choice against italicizing Somali words. In doing so, I am refusing to establish English as the culturally superior language and Somali as the "other. To allow the reader to understand the Somali words used in this paper, I have provided an English translation next to the Somali word used.

started to come together.

What you are about to read in this report is a summary of eight months of me trying to make sense of tragedy and do my part to carry on Hodan's legacy. Although this major research project started emerged from sadness, I found myself healing through it because I was surrounded by the love I have for my community. I was surrounded by Soomaalinimo – the concept that encompasses what it means to be Somali and is easy to recognize if you are Somali but hard to understand if you are not. It was this Soomaalinimo that lifted me from the pain and helped me make sense of the confusion. It was also this Soomaalinimo that connected me to so many others and empowered me to have these conversations with others like me.

In the pages to follow, you will find the stories of those in my community. Somali-Canadians like myself, who have agreed to spend some time exploring how they define their Soomaalinimo and the future. In their own ways, they have taken the research question, "How might Soomaalinimo evolve in the future for Somali-Canadians?" and created tangible and intangible outputs to unpack not only the future, but also the past, and the present.

To better understand how this work fits into the larger field of Futures Studies, I had conversations with experts in the field who come from a range of diverse backgrounds and experiences. I also had the opportunity to speak with Somalis studying Somali history, the diaspora, and Soomaalinimo to learn what our shared history can teach us and how Somali traditions inform our understanding of the future. In this way, I hope to not only have conversations about the future with young Somali-Canadians but to also critically reflect on the Futures Studies field and what it means to study the evolution of a cultural identity. The framework I propose in this paper is the

manifestation of this reflection and my contribution to the Futures Studies field. This research reminded me of the power creating rich, diverse, and inclusive futures for all holds and I hope this can be translated in other settings and with other cultural groups.

This project is my personal and professional offering to the community that has raised me and taught me. It is a collection of conversations with others about our future and what we need to do to get there. This project is also for other people talking about the future, may they be professional futurists or not. The future is unknown, yes, but we need to continue asking the critical questions about who is talking about the future and which futures they are talking about. Finally, this project is for the generation of Somali-Canadians to come. I hope that when you read this, the question of our identity is one you are actively engaging with and owning.

INTRODUCTION

Before jumping in, I believe it is important to understand who I am and my relationship to the research. I am a first generation, Somali-Canadian, Black, Muslim woman who has lived all of my life in Canada without ever visiting Somalia, the land of my ancestors. Growing up, I struggled to make sense of the home I had never been to and if my identity was really a 50/50 split as indicated by the hyphen in the way I self-identify. In a way, I was always aware of the fact that I existed in two distinct worlds. My weekdays would be like other children my age, filled with school and homework, but my weekends would be spent at the dugsi (Quran school) surrounded by other Somalis. At home my parents spoke a mixture of Somali and English to my sisters and I and we responded with English, since we struggled to speak our mother tongue. My parents taught us as much history and culture as they possibly could about a home we never knew and instilled a sense of Somali pride early on. Every Somali person we met was my cousin, aunt, uncle, or grandparent and my network expanded faster than I could ask, "Is this a real aunt or a fake aunt?".

I mention all this to note that it is from this vantage point that I view the world. This also highlights the privileges my position affords me as I engage with this research topic. In many ways, I am already a member of the community my research focuses on. My membership was assigned to me at birth and my upbringing and experiences mean I share more similarities than differences with my core audience of young Somali-Canadians. This unique positioning is referred to as being an "insider researcher" (Crean, 2018). The insider part refers to the fact that my research for this project is with a group that I am already familiar with and a member of (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). This allows me to speak openly with the participants in my research and because we

share a language, identity, and similar experiences, they can be honest and open with me (Crean, 2018). Being an 'insider' also allows me easy access to the people I want to include in this research, helps me build trust with them quickly, and informs the development of my research approach so that it is relevant to my audience (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002). While the research cautions insider researchers from "going native" and losing themselves in the research (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009), the sheer fact that the outcome of this research carried personal importance to me helped me relate to my participants in a way that would have been difficult for an outsider researcher without the same investment.

However, it would not be accurate for me to claim that I am only able to act as an insider researcher. My positioning as a researcher and the fact that my experiences will never be exactly the same as my audience means that there are times when I also have a role as an "outsider researcher". Similar to my experience of existing in two worlds growing up Somali-Canadian, in my research I also recognize that I cannot fully be an insider. In her exploration of insider-outsider researcher status as a minority scholar, Mags Crean (2018) refers to this position as an outsider as the "outsider phenomenon". In this phenomenon, the distinction between insider and outsider does not exist in a dichotomy; rather, the researcher moves along a continuum at different points in the research process. I recognize that during the workshops and expert interviews with other Somalis, my orientation and positioning is closer to an insider researcher. When I am analyzing the findings and writing this paper, I start to move closer to the outsider researcher role without giving up the parts that make me an insider in the first place.

Of course, it was not until I started writing this paper that I found the words to explain the feeling I felt throughout my research journey. From the beginning, I knew I

wanted my research methodology to be one that was not only informed by Somali culture, but one which also spoke intimately to what it means to be Somali. Without being rooted in this cultural understanding, I knew that the futures envisioned could not be whole or true to our experiences. Through three different lenses – participatory design (gold), future studies (maroon), and traditional Somali philosophies (black) – this research design comes together like the threads that make up the Somali hido iyo dhaqan fabric[2].

With this vision of the hido iyo dhaqan fabric guiding me, I needed to make sure the methods I selected were authentic to the Somali experience. As a former British, French, and Italian colony, a large part of Somali history has been written by these colonial powers and filtered through this perspective. Even today, Somalis are still tied to these limited historical representations in modern-day narratives that play out across the globe. As Black Muslims, our experience is also one that can only be understood by having deep knowledge of what it means when these two identities intersect. The research that resonates most with Somalis is not one that only seeks to understand but one that actively includes Somali people in all aspects of the research design. Therefore, I designed my research approach to include tools that enabled me to view the research question through an anticolonial, intersectional, and participatory lens. Beginning with the literature review and ending with reflective journaling, these methods weave together and build on each other to answer the research question. As a futures project, the goal of developing possible futures was embedded in each of these methods and this was expressed through the search strategy in my literature review, the selection of research questions, and the structure of the participatory workshops. What emerged at

[2] Hidyo iyo dhaqan, literally translated to mean heritage and culture, is a term that encompass all things that are traditional Somali culture. While this can be used to refer to cultural dances, songs, and artifacts, it is most commonly used to refer to a style of fabric that is traditionally worn by both Somali women and men.

the end of this research was a framework for exploring culturally informed futures (Chapter 3) which is the crystallization of what this research aims to achieve.

METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

Literature Review (Secondary Research): To begin my exploration of the research topic, I conducted a detailed review of the literature using a combination of academic journal articles, literature, and grey literature (e.g. reports, working papers, blog posts, news articles). This literature review was primarily focused on two areas of inquiry – Future Studies as a field (including its history, ideologies, and applications) and what I am broadly referring to as Somali Studies (including the history of Somalia/Somali people as well as research on Somalis of the diaspora and Somali philosophies and ways of knowing). To maintain the intersectional and anticolonial lens of my research, I was intentional in selecting literature that was published by Somali people, by other African people, or by other People of Colour (POCs). However, there were some cases where I read and referenced works written by non-Somali, non-African, and non-POC people. With all of the literature reviewed, and especially in these cases, I critically appraised each article and book to determine if it was trustworthy, reliable, and relevant to the research question.

Expert Interviews (Primary Research): The information I gleaned from the literature review was enhanced and supported by interviews with experts from scholars in each area of inquiry. I selected this approach because of the small amount of published research on creating an inclusive foresight practice and on Somali history. By combining a literature review with expert interviews, the goal

was to answer some of the secondary questions as well as to develop a deep understanding of the subject matter. For this Major Research Project (MRP), I was able to interview the following experts:

Future Studies

- **Dr. Sohail Inayatullah** – Dr. Sohail Inayatullah is a political scientist and Professor at Tamkang University, Taipei; and Associate, Mt. Eliza Executive Education, Melbourne Business School. He teaches online from www.metafutureschool.teachable.com. In 2015, Professor Inayatullah was awarded the first UNESCO Chair in Futures Studies. He is also the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Futures Studies. An author and editor of 25 books, he has written more than 350 journal articles, book chapters, encyclopedia entries and magazine editorials. His latest books are Asia 2038: ten disruptions that change everything and with the Asian Development Bank, Futures Thinking in Asia and the Pacific.
- **Dr. Sheila Ochugboju** – Dr. Sheila Ochugboju is an international development and Futures professional with over 15 years' experience, working in Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria. She is also the co-founder and Director of a Knowledge Management and Media Consultancy called Africa Knows.
- **Dr. Colin Russo** – Dr. Colin Russo is a professional futurist, facilitator and award-winning engagement expert. Dr. Russo is also Managing Director of Engaging Futures and has twenty-five years of experience engaging stakeholders of State and Local Government sectors. He has a PhD in city futures visioning, policy and strategy transformation.

Somali Studies

- **Amina Musa** – Amina 'Isir' Musa is a writer, thinker and a community builder. She is a first-generation American Somali who is committed to the celebration and elevation of Somali culture and people. Amina completed her Master's in International Development and Social Change, focused on the Somali diaspora experience, in a way that centered identity, history and belonging. Her master's paper focused on young Somalis returning to the motherland, highlighting the nuances and fluidity of this generation's identity. She has presented her work in Helsinki, Finland, Philadelphia, USA and Hargeisa, Somaliland.
- **Dr. Safia Aidid** – Dr. Safia Aidid is an interdisciplinary historian of modern Africa and is currently an Arts & Science Postdoctoral Fellow at the Department of History at the University of Toronto. Her research addresses anticolonial nationalism, territorial imaginations, borders, and state formation in the Horn of Africa, with a particular focus on modern Somalia and Ethiopia. Dr. Aidid is currently working on a book manuscript entitled "Pan-Somali Dreams: Ethiopia, Greater Somalia, and the Somali Nationalist Imagination." She has a PhD in history from Harvard University.
- **Dr. Suban Nur Cooley** – Dr. Suban Nur Cooley is an Assistant Professor of English and Women's and Gender Studies at Ball State University. Her doctoral research focused on women of the Somali diaspora and how cultural memory and continuity, identity performance, and space are affected by memory, migration and displacement. Prior to graduate

school, she worked for many years as a writing and communications professional for organizations like the Refugee Development Center, Habitat for Humanity of Michigan, Dart Container, and the Michigan League for Public Policy.

Participatory Workshop (Primary Research): While the literature review and interviews helped me build a strong understanding of the two areas of inquiry, they also informed how I designed the participatory workshop. To ensure that the workshop was relevant to my community, it became clear that I would have to blend together the world of Future Studies (specifically, narrative foresight, scenario building and the futures visioning process) with the world of Somali Studies (mainly history, identity, and cultural practices) in a way that is intuitive to the Somali experience. Building on principles from both fields, I developed and conducted participatory futures workshops with young Somali-Canadians (largely between the ages of 18-25) in two cities that have a large Somali population. The first workshop was held in Toronto, Ontario and was hosted in partnership with the University of Toronto Somali Students' Association (SSA). There were 18 participants in attendance at that workshop. The second workshop was held in Edmonton, Alberta and was hosted in partnership with the University of Alberta SSA. There were 7 participants that attended this workshop. The format for both workshops was the same and participants were guided through four different activities that journeyed through the past, present, and future:

1. <u>Self-reflection and group mural:</u> The participants were asked to take 15 minutes to jot down what Soomaalinimo means to them. After the first 15

minutes, they were directed to use the materials provided (magazines, markers, fabric, printer, etc.) and pick four to six pieces that best represents what they wrote about Soomaalinimo. Participants shared their selections with the group and together, the group created a collage using all of the materials selected.

2. The future evolution of Soomaalinimo: Participants were divided into smaller groups for a discussion about the ways Soomaalinimo might evolve in the future and what this would look like for Somali-Canadians three generations from now. Participants were encouraged to present their visions of the future in the form of an oral story, musical, or play as per Somali tradition. These scenarios of the future were discussed and dissected in the larger group discussion.
3. Re-discovering the past: Using a traditional Somali storytelling method called Sheeko, each participant was handed a slip of paper with a piece of Somalia's past written on it. The participants had a few moments to review their individual piece of history and summarize it in their own words before sharing it with the group. Once everyone had a chance to share, I then invited the group to share aspects of their own history (family or personal) they were familiar with and was not previously mentioned.
4. Letters to our descendants: Using the outputs from the previous activities, participants had another opportunity to explore how Soomaalinimo might evolve in the future. Each participant was asked to write an intimate letter to their great-grandchild(ren) leaving them advice on how to navigate the future as a Somali-Canadian person.

Reflective Journaling (Primary Research): In my research, I aim to center the lived experiences of those that I have spoken with and I have been intentional in building on the scholarship of those that have come before me. However, because this process is so deeply personal to me, I have chosen to utilize journaling and video diaries as a way to document my self-reflection and process my different thoughts as I go through this MRP process. In writing this paper, I have consulted with my previous entries and will bring these in as required.

Despite my desire to create an inclusive and non-biased research study, I recognize that there are some limitations to my study. These include:

1) Sample size: In total, I was able to interview six experts from my two areas of inquiry – three from Future Studies and three from Somali Studies. Between the two workshops, there were a total of 25 individuals in attendance. Therefore, the sample size for both forms of primary research were low. Some of the reasons for this low sample size include the limitation of time and the limits of my existing professional and social networks, despite my sincerest efforts to reach out to those outside of it. This study could benefit from the participation of more individuals to help inform this research.

2) Generation and geography-specific: While I was very specific in focusing this research on the experiences of young Somali-Canadians that are generally between the ages of 18-25 years old, I recognize that my research is only representative of a fraction of this group, due to time constraints faced. I was able to focus on two cities – Toronto and Edmonton – with a large Somali population, but if I had more time, I would have hosted workshops in more cities and provinces. An intergenerational perspective, particularly around gathering

information on Somali history, would have enriched my research, but I also recognize this MRP is a first step in, what I envision to be, an iterative and ongoing process.

3) Generalizability: Due to my background, I chose to focus this research on examining the future of the Somali-Canadian identity. While I self-identify as a Somali-Canadian, my experiences and the experiences of those in my workshops are not generalizable to other Somali-Canadians. Despite our shared identity, we each have our own unique perspectives and we reserve the right to envision different futures for ourselves and our community. This research, like any research, is bound by the space and time in which it was conducted and, as such, cannot be generalized. However, I have summarized the approach used in this research into a new futures framework in a way that could be used by other Somalis or different cultural groups (Chapter 3).

CHAPTER 1: TOWARDS A SOMALI-CENTERIC FUTURING PROCESS

"It's like too difficult to speak the language. I feel like I'm losing my Somaliness. What do they call it again? Soomaalinimo?"

– Fatah, a young Somali-Canadian in the year 2020.

"It's tough. I feel like I lost my culture, you know? Like I loved my parents and they loved something, but I didn't show the same love. It was kind of hard. Tariq, honestly, I think I'm gonna take Faduma's Somali class. I think it's an important part! I really need to know Somali, you know what I mean? It's for the future."

– Ayub, a young Somali-Canadian in the year 2040.

"I'm planning on running for President of Somalia, it's so exciting! Did you hear? Somalia's third on the list of the world's best tour destinations? And did you hear, Abdi went to space? He's on Mars! I'm so excited. It's going to be so much fun! Honestly, I'm just looking forward to making us be the world's best destination spot."

– Faisa, a young Somali-Canadian in the year 2070.

The quotes above are excerpts from conversations that happen in the future.

Of course, these are not exactly from the future as the future is yet to happen, but these conversations happened as part of an imagined future, in the form of a play, created by young Somali-Canadians in Toronto. On February 7th, 2020, a group of 18 individuals, all Somali, came together to discuss the future of their shared cultural identity. This cultural identity, called Soomaalinimo, is something that ties Somalis worldwide. In the diaspora, young Somalis have come to identify with this concept

strongly and largely prefer this affiliation to a clan-based one. This is evidenced in the saying "Somalinimo till I dhimo" which translated means "Somaliness/Somali identity until I die". There is no information on when exactly young Somalis began using this phrase, but one can assume that this term came to exist because we live in a digital world that connects Somalis across the diaspora.

The relationship between Somalis and social media is an interesting one, and as journalist Najma Sharif writes, social media is a place where young Somalis feel a sense of belonging and tie to their cultural identity (Sharif, 2009). As people who have been displaced from their country, many Somalis have remained connected to each other and to their culture through the internet. On social media platforms such as Twitter, the saying "Somalinimo till I dhimo" has become a rallying cry for young Somalis of the diaspora as well as a source of pride. Social media has also become a place for activism and solidarity with other Somali people. In response to the omission of Somali people from the board of the newly launched academic journal Somaliland Journal of African Studies in 2015, Somalis worldwide united behind the hashtag "Cadaan Studies". Dr. Safia Aidid coined the term to call out the whitewashing ('Cadaan' means white in Somali) of the journal and of Somali studies in general (Aidid, 2015). I was only a few weeks away from finishing my undergraduate degree when I first heard about the "Cadaan Studies" discussion. Little did I know that nearly four years later, I would be engaging with this debate in my exploration of the future.

Studying the Future

"When I think of scenarios, I instinctively think of the storytelling I grew up with. Growing up, my sisters and I would gather around the living room and listen to my mother and father take turns sharing stories from their childhood. Sometimes they would tell us about the

traditional stories they grew up with. These stories conveyed a critical part of Somali culture my sisters and I wouldn't otherwise know. These stories have been in the back of mind ever since and when I think of foresight, I can see how these stories could be used to create potential futures through extrapolation. In a way, these stories went a long way in healing us from the trauma our families faced and connected us as a diaspora in a way that would otherwise not have been possible.

Similarly, I think foresight has the power to help people in my community move past the sometimes-unpleasant realities of our current situation into futures that we design. By giving the power back to people who have felt powerless in the face of displacement and civil war, this can go a long way towards healing and community mobilization. I also think by combining forecasting with backcasting, this will also give my community an opportunity to see what change we can create and enforce to make our future visions a reality – or avoid certain, unfavoured futures. I've been really interested in exploring the alternative uses for foresight in this way and I'm not sure whether this interest will lead into an MRP or not, but in the meantime, I am enjoying both the course and thinking about what could be."

– Reflection #2 for the Foresight Studio class, March 19, 2019

This passage is from a reflection I submitted as part of the Foresight Studio course. In the class, my instructors Helen Kerr and Zan Chandler taught us about the power of imagined futures and their wide-ranging applicability. As I was still learning about these concepts, I began to think about what this meant for my community and how we can use these tools to explore the future. At the time, I was unaware of the limitations that exist in the current strategic foresight field. I was also unaware of how many terms were used to refer to the study of the future. In conducting the research for this MRP, I have come across many different terms, both in literature and in my

conversations with futures experts. Futures studies, futures research, and futurology are all used to refer to the study of the future; strategic foresight, ethnographic futures research, transformational futures, are all connected but separate branches of this study and each has its own origins and goal. For the purposes of this MRP, I will be using the term futures studies to refer broadly to the field that is concerned with, "discover[ing] or invent[ing], examin[ing] and evaluat[ing], and propos[ing] possible, probable, and preferable futures" (Bell, 1997).

As I continued to learn more about the field, I slowly began reflecting on how the sayings I grew up with influenced the way I think about the future and what is possible. The Somali proverbs "Khayr wax kaama dhimee shar u toog hay" (Good times do not take anything away from you, but be prepared for bad/evil times) and "Intaadan falin ka fiirso" (Before you do something, think about it) advise having forethought and keeping one eye on the future. As Somalis are predominantly Muslim, a large part of Somali culture is shaped by the teachings of Islam. The faith is ingrained in everyday life such that Islamic perspectives on the future significantly influence our relationship with the future. A saying related to the future that is often quoted among Muslims comes from the Quran and it states that, "They [people] plan and Allah (God) plans, and Allah is the best of planners" (Quran 8:31). Another popular saying comes from the Sunnah (Prophetic tradition) where Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) advises Muslims to, "Trust in Allah but tie your camel" (Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 2517). When I reflected on these proverbs and sayings, I noticed some similarities in what I was studying. However, I could still see a disconnect between the field and the Somali and Islamic traditions I was familiar with. This is because the futures studies field is based on a predominantly Western worldview which has viewed time as being linear and

exponential (Inayatullah, 1999). This grounding on a Western perspective has led to the marginalization of non-Western cultures from providing input into the future and the future studies field (Sardar, 1993). One example of how this plays out in the traditions I am familiar with, is in the relationship between "control" and "the future". Modern-day futures studies, and particularly strategic foresight, is preoccupied with understanding the future in an attempt to reduce uncertainty about the future and assert some sort of "dominance" over the outcome through influence or planning (Son, 2015). This "understand to control" approach to modern future studies is seen mainly in corporate foresight and can be attributed to the impact neoliberalism[3] has had on the field since the 1990s (Son, 2015).

Furthermore, the field of future studies believes that the future is unknown and that there is no way to know with certainty what is to come. While it is true that human beings do not have the capacity to predict with certainty what is to happen in the future, many people believe in a divine and all-knowing being who does. In religions such as Islam, there are established future facts, such as the end-times and other prophecies that followers of the religion believe in. The concepts of predestination and destiny are also core tenets in many of the world's religions (i.e. Islam, Christinaity, etc.), yet these are not included in the modern-day understanding of futures studies. Futures studies scholars such as Ziauddin Sardar and Sohail Inayatullah have written about how, as the field advances, different ways of knowing about other cultures and religions are being lost in the process (Inayatullah, 1999; Sardar, 2010). These different ways of knowing have worldviews that are already established and guided its followers to the future. When the futures studies field does not open itself to include these other perspectives, the future risks being colonized by a Western point of view (Sardar, 2010).

[3] Neoliberalism is a political ideology emphasizes unregulated free market capitalism, is highly individualistic and prefers deregulation over collective state action (Vincent, 2009).

However, this is not only a crisis in how we understand the future, but it is also about the way we engage with the past.

Looking back to move forward

Our memories and understanding of past events have a strong impact on shaping our ideas of what is possible in the future (Arnold, McDermott, and Szpunar, 2011; Everding-Wustl, 2018; Inayatullah, 2018). Future studies recognizes the important role history plays and captures this in the double-sided version of the often-cited Cone of Plausibility (Fig. 1). Futures studies researchers understand history as a tool to help orient ourselves to the present and inform the future (Bradfield, Derbyshire and Wright, 2016). However, this is operating under the assumption that people know their histories and have a sense of how they came to where they now are. For those that have been displaced or do not have easy access to their histories, how does this impact their capacity to imagine futures for themselves and their communities?

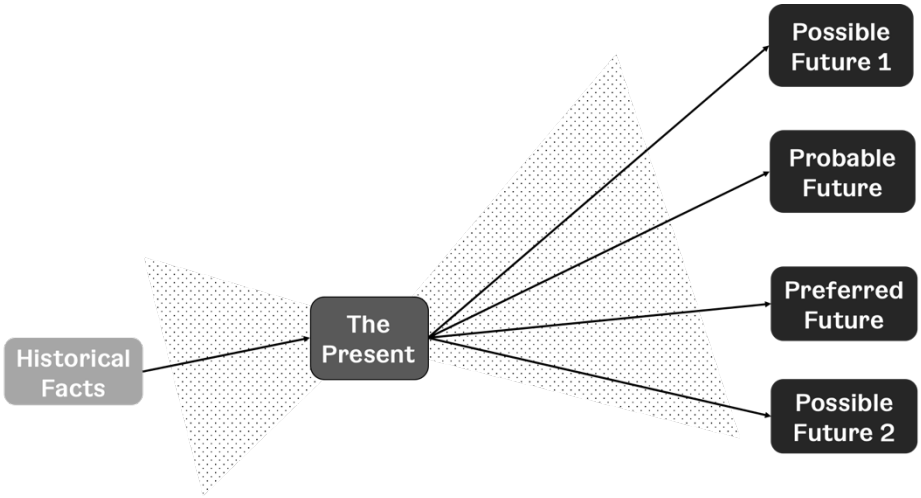

Figure 1: Cone of Plausibility (Draeger, 2017)

For young Somali-Canadians, this question is an important one. For those that were born in Canada after 1991 or came here when they were very young, it is likely

that we may only be aware about Somalia's recent past (20-30 years). This past is a snapshot in time and is mainly related to the civil war and reconstruction. However, we also know that this is not all Somalia is as Somalia has a rich past before this period. Becoming aware of this past and understanding it can open the doors to futures different than the ones we, and others, can currently imagine.

In the final report of the 1979 Monrovia Symposium, the Moroccan futurist Mahdi Elmandjra declared that, "Africans embarking on futures studies have to re-discover their past through their own eyes and to free their present through the assertion of their cultural identity, before they can attempt to reclaim their future" (Cole, 1994). Elmandjra's call to action encourages a self-exploration of the past by the African futurist and through an African lens. This helps to move the understanding of the past away from what has been shaped by a Western understanding of African history and towards one that centers African people (Chimee, 2019). When Europeans engaged in a process to "discover" African history, this meant that only histories that were documented were considered 'valid'. What was not documented was then non-existent or invalid. The extent to which European historians devalued African history cannot be understated. Therefore, I will leave the words spoken by British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper in 1963 to illustrate this point: "Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none; only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness" (Poulsen, 1981). The impact of this belief is immeasurable and for African cultures with a strong oral tradition, the denial and loss of this history is damaging.

Following Elmandjra's advice, this research will aim to uncover little known parts of Somalia's history through both documented and undocumented (oral) sources.

Relying on what is considered scholarly and academic sources of Somali history is not enough and without consulting traditional sources of information, this exploration of the future of the Somali identity risks limiting the imagination of future possibilities by a warped understanding of the past. This warped understanding is one that is largely shaped by the colonizers. However, history alone cannot be the foundation for making sense of the present and exploring the future.

Although young Somali-Canadians may not know much about our past and our people's past, we do have a strong sense of our Somali identity. Previous attempts at exploring future possibilities for Somalia have been led primarily by organizations established in the West, such as the Council on Foreign Relations in the United States and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the United Kingdom (Cooke & Henek, 2007; gov.uk, 2017). While Somalis were engaged in different ways in both projects, none were led by a Somali person. Relying solely on futures studies methods that are developed for use in the West does not allow for a deep understanding of what it really means to be a person from that country or culture. By focusing on Somali identity and cultural practices among my community of Somali-Canadians and combining these with existing futures studies methods, I will be able to present a perspective different than those developed by non-Somalis about the future of Somali people. The lenses I will be using to guide this research are two established concepts among Somali people - Somali tradition (dhaqan) and Somaliness (Soomaalinimo). Focusing my research on these two concepts enables me to use an anticolonial framework to explore potential futures.

Dhaqan and Soomaalinimo

The word dhaqan is an umbrella term for the traditions, worldviews, and cultural practices of Somali people (Ilmi, 2015). Among Somalis, the dhaqan is passed on by one generation to the next. Often, this responsibility falls mainly to the mothers and grandmothers as they are often the leaders of this cultural transmission (Berns-McGown, 2013). When the second wave[4] of Somalis came to Canada in the early 1990s as immigrants and refugees, it was the Somali mothers that fought to keep the dhaqan alive in a country far away from home (Bokore, 2017). When faced with navigating a new country and defining what it means to be Somali in Canada, Somali women leaned into dhaqan philosophies to make sense of the newness in the situation they were in (Berns-McGown, 2013). This reliance on dhaqan during times of hardship is what Ahmed Ali Ilmi refers to as dhaqan acting as a tool for liberation from oppression (Ilmi, 2015). As an indigenous African philosophy grounded in ancestral teachings and wisdom, dhaqan offers an anticolonial alternative to oppression. Central to dhaqan is the importance of being part of a wider community (Ilmi, 2015). Somalis have a strong sense of a communal identity and this is observed in the diaspora through the establishment of communities such as in Rexdale, Toronto where Somali people live in close proximity to one another (Kapteijns and Arman, 2008). The formation of dugsi's (Quran school) for young children is another way the dhaqan is maintained and reinforced in the diaspora. Dhaqan is the way that we as Somali people who are displaced from home, maintain our community and ties to our homeland.

Along with dhaqan philosophies, Somali people have a strong sense of what it means to be Somali. Soomaalinimo embodies this sense of identity and Soomaalinimo can be understood as having "a shared sense or sensibility of being Somali" and a "connection to the people and the land" (Aidid, 2019; Musa, 2019). It is a part of the

[4]The large immigration of Somalis to Canada in the 1990s is actually what is commonly referred to as the "second wave of migration". The first wave was after the regional war between Somalia and Ethiopia in the 1970s where many Somalis left the region to seek safety.

overall dhaqan philosophy but stands alone as a distinct and important concept among Somalis. However, what Soomaalinimo means and looks like today has been shaped and molded by the past, both intentionally and unintentionally. Historically, Somali people have self-governed in clans based on patrilineal lineage (Gundel, 2009). Clan-based social structures had their own customary laws (xeer) and heads of state (clan elders) and remained the dominant form of organization among Somali people until colonization (Bokore, 2017; Absiye, 2019). There are around six to eight major clans in Somalia with numerous divisions and sub-divisions in each. Prior to colonization, Somali people organized themselves throughout the Horn of Africa in each of these clans, at times through different clan-based Sultanates, and there was no single nation that unified all of them (Absiye, 2019). Through a Western and Eurocentric lens, this pre-colonial time has been referred to in academia as a time where Somalia existed in a stateless society (Ingiriis, 2018). However, when viewed through a Somali lens that understands Soomaalinimo goes beyond the idea of the nation-state, these clan-based republics are a form of organized societies. Throughout history and into present times, Somali people have always recognized each other as one people (Aidid, 2020). What colonialism did was create different territories based on which colonial regime forcefully took power and by 1920, the area where Somali people have historically lived was carved up into 5 different states (Ingiriis, 2018). This attempt at dividing and conquering Somali people would continue until July 1st, 1960 when two states, British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland, became independent and merged into the Somali Republic (Ingiriis, 2018). This unification of the two former colonial states would be the beginning of a conversation regarding nationhood building and Soomaalinimo.

One of the first markers of the Somali Republic was the unity under one flag – the five-pointed white star set in the center of a light blue background. This flag is meaningful to the Somali people because of what it represents. Each point in the star represents one of the five areas in the horn of Africa where Somalis live [(Djibouti, Northern Somalia (former British occupied land), the Ogadenia region in Ethiopia, the North Eastern Province in Kenya, and Southern Somalia (former Italian colony)] (Hesse, 2010). The nation building that took place once the Somali Republic was formalized was initiated by Somalia's earlier presidents including Aden Adde and Abdirashid Shermarke, and they wrote Soomaalinimo into the first Somali constitution that declared that all Somalis, regardless of where they are from, are Somali citizens (Aidid, 2020). However, the most influential person on Somali identity was Somalia's last president before the civil war, Mohamed Siyad Barre (Musa, 2014). During the time of Barre's rule, he pushed the unification of all Somalis across the five territories (Greater Somalia or Soomaaliweyn) and used the concept of Soomaalinimo to achieve this goal. Early on, he favoured solidarity under Soomaalinimo over tribal affiliations and in one of his many speeches to the Somali people during his presidency, he advised Somali people to align themselves with the saying "Qabiilkaynu waa Soomaalinimo" (Our tribe is Soomaalinimo) (Taariikh Archive, 2019). Siyad Barre saw tribalism as the biggest threat to a unified Somalia and to convey how dangerous he believed it to be, he encouraged Somalis to burn effigies that represented tribalism (Abukar, 2015). His motivation to bring Somali people under one identity was largely a political one as he wanted to centralize his power and limit the power of the individual tribes (Musa, 2014). Despite the political undertones, Barre's policies and campaigns transformed the Somali state and the sense of Soomaalinimo was high in the nation (Abukar, 2015). Throughout the Barre era, the sense of Soomaalinimo waxed and waned until the

Ogaden war in the late 1970s and the eventual dissolution of the Somali state in 1991 led to a belief that the Somali identity was dead (Musa, 2014; Aidid, 2020). However, young Somalis of the diaspora have begun to revive the belief in a united Somali identity and have molded it so that it better represents their values and beliefs.

II. CHAPTER TWO: THE EVOLUTION OF SOOMAALINIMO

The Present // Hadda

"In this day and age where narratives are so crowded, and young people are so buffeted by all kinds of narratives, they are losing the capacity to craft their own. They become passive in the story that is told to you. Giving young people the power to craft their own narrative is a very important future skill."

- Excerpt from an interview with Dr. Sheila Ochugboju (February 2020)

The power of a strong narrative is undeniable. It shapes the way people think and the lens through which they see the world. Narratives are important in future studies and narrative foresight is a process that engages individuals in a conversation about possible futures (Milojevic and Inayatullah, 2015). This technique differs from many of the approaches used in future studies in that its focus is not on how accurate or likely a future is. Rather, narrative foresight is focused on exploring current narratives and how they may transform in the future (Milojevic and Inayatullah, 2015). Good narratives are based in stories from lived experience and can be used to challenge dominant and discriminatory narratives regarding individuals or a group (Cole, 2009). This has long-lasting implications because who shapes the narrative tends to dominate the way things are framed now and in the future (Ochugboju, 2020). If you are in a community where that narrative does not seem to include or empower you, you do not see yourself being reflected in the future that is imagined for you. When individuals are able to share their own stories, narratives become a vehicle for uncovering hidden

complexities, different intersecting identities, and injustices present (Cole, 2009). However, individual stories cannot craft narrative. The strongest narratives are created and maintained through a social process that links the events of the past, present, and future (Milojevic and Inayatullah, 2015). Despite this process, this does not necessarily mean that the narratives that are most-widely accepted are true. Narratives are reinforced by the worldview of those that accept them, and it is important to question them, especially when they are harmful or outdated (Milojevic and Inayatullah, 2015). Identifying the existing narratives and transforming them is a critical aspect of the future visioning process (Inayatullah, 2020). Therefore, I believe it is important to begin the conversation about the future of Soomaalinimo by understanding which narrative of Somali-Canadians is the most prevalent, and questioning any underlying assumptions related to it.

The single story about Somali-Canadians

The majority of Somalis living in Canada began arriving in Canada in the early 1990s during the second wave of Somali migration and since then, our experience here has been complicated. This experience is one that is marked by high points, such as the 2015 election of Ahmed Hussen[5] to the Canadian parliament and government cabinet, as well as low points, such as the multiple media reports and portrayals of Somali-Canadians as violent and 'Other' (Ilmi, 2009; Berns-McGown, 2013). Even in the instances where Somali-Canadians have excelled, like Ahmed Hussen, their success and contribution to Canadian society at large is marked by racism and fear. In the case of Hussen, he was accused of being "a bully" by Ontario Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) Lisa MacLeod because he expressed his disappointment in MacLeod's unwillingness in joining the official communication signed at a meeting of ministers in

[5]Ahmed Hussen became the first Somali-Canadian to be elected as a Member of Parliament in 2015. In 2017, Hussen became the first Somali-Canadian to be a cabinet minister in the Canadian government when he was appointed the Minister of Immigration.

Winnipeg (Kalvapalle, 2018). The bullying accusations MacLeod made were in response to when Hussen said, “intentionally doing this [employing a rhetoric of fear and division] is irresponsible, it’s divisive, it’s fear-mongering and it’s not Canadian and it is very dangerous” (Kalvapalle, 2018). Although he did not explicitly call Minister MacLeod any insulting words, she said that she felt he called her un-Canadian and that his comments were “mean-spirited” and directed towards her. What is relevant here is not the back-and-forth between Ministers Hussen and MacLeod; rather, this example is meant to illustrate how the actions of a Black and Muslim man were interpreted by a white woman as being intimidating. This narrative of Black people and Muslim people being violent is not new and when combined into one identity, Somali, highlights the harm created when these two false, yet dominant, narratives intersect. Whether this is the portrayal of Malcolm X as a violent villain spewing hate in the Civil Rights Movement or the accusations of U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar as being un-American and untrustworthy, time and time again, Black Muslims have been viewed through the intersection of these two false narratives (Ahmed, 2019; Suleiman, 2020).

In Rima Berns-McGown's 2013 study titled “I Am Canadian”, she interviewed 40 young Somali-Canadians to challenge stereotypes about Somali-Canadians. In this study, she discusses how, despite self-identifying as Canadian, the interviewees did not feel like they were accepted by other Canadians and pointed to instances of anti-Black racism and Islamophobia as examples (Berns-McGown, 2013). The dominant narrative that Somalis are not Canadian enough and that we are not integrating well with Canadian society has caused Somali-Canadians to feel marginalized and othered by the very communities they live and work in (Ilmi, 2009; Berns-McGown, 2013). Furthermore, the media maintains and reinforces this narrative by seemingly refusing to portray

Somali-Canadians as anything other than (potential) terrorists or causing violence through gang affiliations (Ilmi, 2009; Berns-McGown, 2013). What is evident in both Berns-McGown's study and Ilmi's paper is that these narratives do not resonate with young Somali-Canadians and by continuing to preserve them without question will harm not only the future potential of this group, but also their present experiences. I think back to my conversation with Dr. Sheila Ochugboju about how narratives can shape how we think about ourselves and future possibilities and I realize that we need to go beyond challenging the dominant narrative and craft our own. As Dr. Ochugboju states, "crafting [your] own narrative is a very important future skill" (Ochugboju, 2020). For young Somali-Canadians with a strong sense of our identity, we can use Soomaalinimo as the scaffold upon which we begin to shape a counter-narrative to the dominant one.

Soomaalinimo 'till I dhimo: Somali until I die

"Where does Soomaalinimo reside? Soomaalinimo resides in people and in the bodies of the generations and people who connect us to Somalia, especially for so many of us who haven't had the chance to live there or visit. Soomaalinimo is reproduced, created, and sustained in the diaspora through their memories. The culture, their inheritance, is what keeps it alive."

- Excerpt from an interview with Dr. Safia Aidid (February 2020)

Young Somalis across the diaspora have been turning to Soomaalinimo to reconcile the different identities that make up who they are. "Soomaalinimo till I dhimo" unites us across the different countries we live in and reminds us that our Soomaalinimo binds us together until the day we die. Our sense of Soomaalinimo is

complex and multifaceted. It is as much about those that it seeks to include as well as those that do not feel included in the current representation of Soomaalinimo (Musa, 2020). Given this complexity, there is not a single definition that captures what it means to be Somali. Soomaalinimo is unique to each individual and the how strong our sense of Soomaalinimo is also varies. For the purposes of this MRP, and to set the stage for exploring how Soomaalinimo might evolve in the future, I focused the first activity in my workshop with young Somali-Canadians on defining Soomaalinimo on an individual and group level.

I asked the participants to take some time and self-reflect on what Soomaalinimo means to them. I encouraged them to think about both the tangible and intangible representations of this identity and at the end of this exercise, I received over 40 words and phrases that explained what Soomaalinimo meant to them (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Soomaalinimo means…

In their own words, Soomaalinimo is culture, language, family, food, and the people. Soomaalinimo also gives Somalis a sense of belonging and community, a home,

pride, connection, and comfort in being Somali. Soomaalinimo is largely viewed in a positive light, despite the challenges we face as a community. After the self-reflection exercise, participants shared what they had written with the group and we took the time to appreciate the similarities and the differences in our ideas around Soomaalinimo. This was to set the stage for the second part of this activity (collage-making) and speak aloud what our Soomaalinimo means to us. Even in cases where more than one participant defined Soomaalinimo using the same word, when it came time to select materials that represented this word, most of them chose a different medium (e.g. fabric, photograph, drawing, etc.) to bring it to life. This activity encouraged the participants to use both words and tangible objects to communicate their version of Soomaalinimo to each other. The goal was not to force everyone into a shared understanding of Soomaalinimo – rather, the hope was that through discussing everyone's perspectives on Soomaalinimo, participants could begin to combine these different viewpoints into one shared collage.

The collages created in Toronto and Edmonton demonstrate the diversity among Somali-Canadians. In Toronto, the placement of materials on the college began organically and, as pieces started to fit together, the participants chose to create a collage that showcases the different forms of Soomaalinimo by highlighting the experiences of Somalis living in Somalia and those living in Canada. Some of the pieces on the right-hand side of the collage (Fig. 3) that represent those living in Somalia include a hand drawn picture of a young girl wearing a traditional Somali dress (guuntino), pictures of cattle grazing in the wild, and a picture of a bowl of pasta with the words “A bowl of pain?” written on top to represent the Italian colonization of Somalia. In the middle, connecting the two worlds, is a piece created by one of the workshop participants. He used the materials he selected to represent his

understanding of Soomaalinimo and created a globe-like figure with pictures of currencies and different people all bundled up and tied with yarn. When I asked him to explain his contribution, he described how despite Somalis living all over the world and using different currencies, we are united by Soomaalinimo and it is the yarn that ties us together. Upon hearing this, the group collectively decided that his figure should be placed in the middle as it neither existed entirely on the Somalia side nor on the diaspora side.

Moving along the canvas and towards the left-hand side, this is where the group placed the pieces that spoke to the Somali-Canadian experience. Where the Somalia side was scenic and steeped in pictures of tradition, the Somali-Canadian side paints a more complicated picture. For every image of prosperity, there are two images that speak to the challenges we face as a community. The group placed more hand drawn pieces on this side because they could not find anything in the magazines or newspapers provided that accurately captured what they wanted to express. One of the hand drawn comics depicts two interactions that all Somali-Canadians know well – the first one shows two Somalis meeting in the street and greeting each other ("See tahay? / "Fiican walaalo"). The second one illustrates a call between two family members, one in Canada and one in Somalia, where the one back home is telling the one in Canada that they have a problem and need money ("Dhib baa ii haaysta, please send me money"). The person in Canada agrees to send their family member the money they require, therefore joining the many Somalis living in the diaspora that send home a total of $1.4 billion in annual remittance (Dahir, 2016). Another comic shows a Somali mother protecting her kids from a drive-by shooting and being hurt in the process. When asked about this particular image, the participant who drew this said that he wanted to

remain true to the experiences some Somalis living in Toronto face. He also pointed out that while the comic addresses gun crime, it also addresses the bond between Somali mothers and their children and highlights the extent the mothers will go to protect them. Other images on the Somali-Canadian side include pictures of beachfront houses, a circle with 'Community' written in the middle, and a drawing of a Somali man with several words written on his forehead. Surrounding the collage is a border made up of different fabric swatches from Somali clothing including fabric from baati's (cotton dress), gorgorad's (silk underskirt), and garbasaar's (shawl).

Figure 3: ***Soomaalinimo Across Two Worlds*****, 2020, mixed media on mounting board. 14″x40″**

In the Edmonton workshop, a lot of the same themes around what Soomaalinimo means came up. However, the final collage took on a very different form from the one in Toronto (Fig. 4). The participants in this workshop quickly identified that they wanted to have the map of Somalia be the focal point of this collage. To them, it was the most tangible representation of home and what it meant to be a Somali person. The group used the fabric swatches to build the map and filled it with photos and words about what it meant to be Somali-Canadian. In placing these photos, the participants were strategic and worked carefully to represent where in Somalia these photos would come from. For example, a picture of the Quran was placed on the North-East tip of the country and one of the participants noted that she placed it there because of the Islamic history and how Islam came to Somalia from Saudi Arabia. Other pieces on the map include two photos stitched together – one of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and another of the Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (Farmaajo) – which is one way the participants brought the Somali-Canadian identity to life. This map sits on top of a pile of words torn from magazines which represent how Somalis love to talk, discuss, debate and, as one participant put it, "Somalis love to talk about everything and anything with each other. You know, Shaah iyo Sheeko (tea and stories)". Phrases like "head in the clouds" and "baggage" are in bigger font and stand out against the small text of the other words. The group spent time discussing how Soomaalinimo is not only the things we see, but also the things we experience with our other senses. Focusing on the sense of smell, they took a few pieces of unsi (Somali incense) and used yarn to create a makeshift dabqaad (incense burner) to hold the unsi pieces. This addition also encourages those viewing the collage to interact with it as they peel back the tape to take a sniff of the unsi.

Figure 4: ***A Map Reimagined*****, 2020, mixed media on paper. 28″x20″**

There was also a lot of overlap between the participants in the workshops and the Somali studies experts I interviewed around how they expressed their sense of Soomaalinimo. Amina Musa describes Soomaalinimo as a longing for going home, and associates this with old pictures of what Mogadishu and Somalia used to look like pre-civil war. Musa also reflects on Somali history and notes that the past shows that Somalis, “can be dispersed but still have a sense of self which is more important than a political identity. We are living in a space beyond political identities'' (Musa, 2020). Like many of the workshop participants, Dr. Suban Nur Cooley points to the Somali language and traditional cooking practices as key markers of Soomaalinimo. In my conversation with Dr. Safia Aidid, she mentioned that what it means to be Somali, Soomaalinimo, changes based on location and time. Soomaalinimo in Canada is not the same as is being Somali in Somalia or elsewhere, but what remains consistent is the feeling of being a Somali person (Aidid, 2020). Soomaalinimo is also intricately tied to how Somali people view ourselves. In a way, the collages created by the young Somali-Canadians were also a reflection of how they view Somali people. In my interviews, I was more explicit and asked Amina, Suban, and Safia to choose three words that they would use to describe Somali people. In their eyes, Somali people are “resilient, warm and funny” while at the same time being “proud, complicated, and just a little bit crazy” (Aidid, Musa, Cooley, 2020). I can relate to these words used to describe Somali people because all I have to do to understand it is look around and look within. As I look back on the collages and interviews, I can see that Soomaalinimo is both a source of pride for Somali people as well as a reflection of the pride we have and the challenges we have faced as a community.

The collages developed and the words chosen for the self-reflection activity and in the interviews, are the beginnings of a narrative about Somali diasporas that is driven by Soomaalinimo. It is one that recognizes the complexity, refuses to settle on a single story, and is based on the bonds that tie us to one another and to the country. For the participants in my workshops, Soomaalinimo is central to what it means to be Somali and does not take anything away from what it means to be Canadian. With an understanding of the different meanings and forms Soomaalinimo could take, it was time to take a trip into the future and discuss how it may evolve in the future for Somali-Canadians.

The Future // Hadhow

In the beginning of this paper, I opened Chapter 1 with a few quotes from the futures visioning component of the Toronto workshop. This activity came after the self-reflection and collage exercise and participants at both the Toronto and Edmonton workshop were given the following prompts:

- Based on your current understanding of Soomaalinimo, how might it evolve three generations from now?
- Think about the experiences your great-grandchildren might have being Somali-Canadians of the future.
- At the end of the group discussions, you will share your concepts of the future with everyone else. Think about creative ways (e.g. short play, a story, a poem, etc.) to bring this to life!

The prompt to share their scenarios of the future in a creative format is one that comes from Somali tradition. In traditional Somali culture, Somali people highly value

and engage in artistic expressions such as poetry (gabay), theater (riwaayad), music (hees), and storytelling (sheeko). By encouraging the participants to tap into this creativity, the hope was that the scenarios developed would be ones that were inspired and delivered in a way that represented the culture. In the Toronto workshop, the bigger group was broken up into 3 smaller groups and of these groups one group decided to create a play while the other two decided to merge and hold a discussion. In Edmonton, there were two smaller groups and both of them decided to create short plays. While the majority chose to present their scenarios in the form of a play, each one was different, and the tone of the plays ranged from bleak to hopeful. Below, I briefly summarize the content of each play and the group discussion to give you a taste of the futures that were envisioned.

The future of Soomaalinimo

Guldoon, Fatah, Ayoub, and Faisa

Act 1 (1996): Guuldoon, a recent immigrant to Canada is on the phone with his family back home in Somalia. Guuldoon asks questions about how things are back home, shares his new experiences, and longs for his old life in Somalia.

Act 2 (2020): Guuldoon's son, Fatah, is on the phone with his family members back home. Since he is not fluent in the Somali language, he struggles to finish the conversation and tries to get off the phone quickly. Fatah then calls his friend, Abdi, and they reflect on the difficulties they face as second-generation Somali-Canadians. They talk about their challenges with the language and how they feel like they are losing their Soomaalinimo.

Act 3 (2040): Ayoub, Fatah's son, is annoyed at his father when he tries to hand over the phone to him so that he can speak to his family back home. He refuses and instead phones his friend, Tariq. Ayoub tells Tariq that he feels like his Soomaalinimo has faded and that he has lost his culture. He mentions how living in the suburbs makes him feel so disconnected from the Somali community in the city and has contributed to the loss of his identity. He decides to take matters into his own hands and tells Tariq that he is going to take Fadumo's Somali class to reconnect with his Somaliness.

Act 4 (2070): Ayoub's daughter, and Guldoon's great-granddaughter, Faisa, is on the phone with her friend Ladan. Faisa expresses her excitement about how far Somalia has come and tells Ladan that she is planning on running for the president of Somalia. Her Soomaalinimo is strong as she wants to show the world what Somalia has to offer.

...

Anisa, Hanan, and Ladan

Act 1: Anisa is looking after her granddaughter Ladan while her daughter, Hanan, works. Shortly before Anisa's daughter arrives, she begins to tell Ladan an old Somali tale called Dhegdheer. The daughter, Hanan, arrives and through broken Somali, tells her mom that she should not tell her daughter the tale because of how scary it is. In a monologue, Anisa tells the audience that she is worried about her daughter and granddaughter's future as they have lost the Somali language and the culture. She prays to Allah to protect them and says she is praying for Allah to bring them back to the religion and the culture.

Act 2: Anisa tries to tell Ladan to go and wash the dishes but Ladan does not understand Somali so she cannot communicate with her grandmother. Hanan arrives

and Ladan complains to her mother. Anisa tries to advise Hanan and Ladan ("She should be reading the Quran. You are pronouncing Ladan's name wrong! Pronounce it the Somali way") and Hanan tells her mother that she can take care of raising her daughter without her mother's help. In another monologue, Hanan reflects on how her main goal is to give her daughter a good life and a good future but that her mother, Anisa, has a different mentality that she believes will hold Ladan back. She also expresses frustration with having to speak Somali to her mother and states how she does not really understand it.

Act 3: Hanan tells her mother that she is taking Ladan to her husband's family, who are not Somali. Ladan says that she is looking forward to it because she can connect with those grandparents more than her Somali grandmother. In a final monologue, Ladan reveals the inner conflict she faces with her different identities ("I feel like I don't even know who I am. Am I Somali? Am I Canadian? Am I Black or am I white? I feel like other generations don't understand me"). She prays for a time when things will get better and she will have a better grasp on the different parts of herself.

...

Hafza, Hodan, and Tasnim

Act 1: This play is focused on three family members – Hafza, the great-grandmother, Hodan, the granddaughter, and Tasnim, Hodan's daughter and Hafza's great-granddaughter. Hafza and Tasnim, speaking in English and broken Somali, talk about packing for their upcoming family vacation to Somalia. Hodan joins them and encourages Tasnim not to take any cultural clothing ("A baati? You can see that in a museum! We are taking bikinis for the beach.") and questions why they take this trip

back home every single year. Tasnim tells her mother that she wants to go to learn more about her culture and although she does not speak the language, she is willing to learn. Worried about whether or not Hodan's clothing is appropriate for their trip, Hafza looks through Hodan's bag and tells Tasnim to pack some baati's for her mother.

Act 2: The family of three has arrived in Somalia and Tasnim is excited about wearing Somali clothing for the first time. Hodan, who has defied her grandmother's orders, is wearing the bikini she has packed and Tasnim notes that the people at the beach are looking at Hodan. Hafza and Hodan continue to disagree about Hodan's behavior and Hafza tells Tasnim that while she is disappointed in Hodan, she realizes that she is partially to blame as she did not raise her in the Somali culture. Hafza and Tasnim make plans to learn the language while they are in Somalia and reconnect with the culture. They decide to move to Somalia and take part in dhaqan celis[5]. In this future, dhaqan celis is unheard of but Hafza and Tasnim try to convince Hodan to stay in Somalia for dhaqan celis instead of going back to Canada. Not wanting to leave her daughter, Hodan stays and starts by changing into a baati and drinking Somali tea.

...

One of the common themes present in each of the three plays was how Soomaalinimo and the Somali-Canadian experience evolves through different generations in one family. I did not specifically direct the workshop participants to use an intergenerational lens in constructing their scenarios nor did I anticipate that they would take this approach. However, after seeing the three plays, it makes sense to me why they would decide to show the evolution of Soomaalinimo in this way. Growing

[5] Dhaqan celis, literally translated to mean "culture back", is a process where parents in the diaspora send their children to Somalia to learn the culture and language. This decision to return home is made primarily by the parents and is largely initiated when parents fear their children are losing their Somali culture. Children usually remain in Somalia until their parents feel like they are ready to return to the diaspora.

up, many Somalis live either with, or in close proximity to, their grandmothers, grandfathers, or other elders in the community. Even if you are not directly related, the elders in the community take on the role of advising the younger generation. While most of our parents speak English, many of the Somali elders living in Canada do not and rely on Somali as their primary form of communication. Like the three plays show, there is a language barrier between this generation and the generation of Somali-Canadians that do not speak the language well. However, in this category of young Somali-Canadians, there are those that speak the language well, those that do not speak it at all, and those that are somewhere in between. Like many other young Somali-Canadians, I can understand the Somali language but have trouble speaking it, so I relate to the concerns about the next generation. In each of the plays, language was a central theme and a marker to identify how close or far away a character was to their Soomaalinimo. When the workshop participants defined Soomaalinimo in the first activity, the Somali language was a common response and it is clear that language is strongly tied to Soomaalinimo. Since a large part of Somali culture is based on an oral tradition, language is important in maintaining the culture now and for future generations. In the play, *Anisa, Hanan, and Ladan*, the youngest member of the family, Ladan, feels disconnected from the Somali side of her family because she cannot communicate with her grandmother. In both the play *Guldoon, Fatah, Ayoub, and Faisa*, and the play *Hafza, Hodan, and Tasnim,* a future generation (Ayoub and Tasnim) expresses a desire to relearn the language as a way to connect to the culture. While Tasnim relies on dhaqan celis, Ayoub decides to attend a Somali language school in Toronto.

The group that did not do a play had a discussion and identified four key elements that they view as necessary to maintain a strong Somali community in Toronto. The first element is the establishment of institutions for Somalis to support each other. The second element is teaching financial literacy to young Somali-Canadians so that they can have a better chance at building a future for themselves and their families. The third element is building mentorship programs and social networks for young Somalis in post-secondary schools to connect them to other Somalis in the professions they are hoping to work in. Finally, the fourth element is being intentional about teaching young Somali-Canadians about the Somali culture. This includes having Somali classes that teach the language, cultural dances, and heritage.

After sharing these four elements, the group opened it up to the rest of the workshop participants and invited them to a discussion. One participant mentioned that it was not so much about building these elements but maintaining them and they pointed to previous examples of where classes and mentorship programs have started in Toronto but then, shortly after starting, had stopped. They felt that it is not enough for an institution to exist and that it needs to be partnered with a strong desire to maintain these institutions. As others built on this comment, the discussion eventually reached a point where the group focused on Soomaalinimo and asked if the four elements relied on this collective identity to thrive. One participant asked: "Is it our job, as the next generation of parents, to craft a unified sense of Soomaalinimo for Somalis in Toronto? Is it ethical to try to create this and is it even possible to do so in a way that is removed from clan-affiliations?". This led to a conversation around how creating this unified Somali identity would be a challenge because, as another participant put it, "this would mean we water down our culture to become homogenous. As a country

and people, we have our differences". The Somali language was identified as something that could bring Somalis together and build this sense of Soomaalinimo, since it already unites so many Somalis worldwide. However, one participant pointed out that: "As the next generation of parents, we need to understand that our children may not know the language or have the same appreciation for the culture as we do." To close out the discussion, the group agreed that as the first generation of Somali-Canadians, they can only commit to doing their best to instill the culture in their children and grandchildren, but that they would also compromise and understand the Soomaalinimo of future generations will differ from our current understanding.

In this exploration of how Soomaalinimo and the Somali-Canadian identity might evolve in the future, the workshop participants created future scenarios and came to an understanding that, despite the best efforts to teach the Somali culture and language, Soomaalinimo will evolve. Overall, the participants seemed to embrace this and began to discuss how to maintain elements of the culture for the future so that the evolution of Soomaalinimo is one that is informed by tradition. The plays and discussions identified the unique challenges this generation of Somali-Canadians will have as they will be expected to teach the future generations about Somali culture, while still learning themselves. However, this challenge is not one that we have to face alone, and we can look to our ancestors to learn how they have faced challenges in the past.

The Past // Waqti Hore

"The past can help us all heal by connecting us to all the things that tie us as a people; things we know to be ancestral and indigenous: our poetry, our song and dance, food ... other elements that connect."

- Excerpt from an interview with Dr. Suban Nur Cooley (March 2020)

The history of Somalia and of Somali people is a lengthy and complex one. Part of this complexity comes from the fact that this history is based on three different forms of knowledge. These are the, "western secular tradition, the Islamic religious tradition, and the indigenous Somali poetic tradition" (Bokore, 2017).

Of the three forms of knowledge, the most authentic and oldest is the indigenous poetic tradition because it is rooted in the rich oral culture of Somali people. So much of Somali history is captured in poems and the country has been long referred to as a "nation of poets" (Kapchits, 1998). One of the most popular forms of Somali poetry often referred to as Gabay has been used to convey historical accounts of what has happened in the past (Samatar, 1980). A famous Gabay was composed by the prolific Somali poet, Faraax Nuur in the early 20th century. His poem, abridged below, warns Somali people of the dangers of colonialism and encourages them to resist and fight the colonizers (Geshekter, 1985; Shire, 2014):

Original Somali Text:

"Ingiriis, Amxaar iyo Talyaani wey akeekamiye
Arladaa la kala boobayaa ka u itaal roone,
Anse ila ah aakhiro sabaan iligyadiisiiye
Waa duni la kala iibsadaan nala ogeysiine
Waa duni akhyaartii go'day oo aaran soo hadhaye
Waa duni ninkaad aamintaa kuu abees yahaye
Waa duni xaqii la arkayaa la arjumayaaye

Waa duni Akhyaartii lahayd iib ku doon tahaye

Odayaashaan loo yeedhay ee la anfac siinaayo

Asxaabihii bayna yidhi gaal ha aaminine

Haddaa niman Islaamiyo tihiin aadan ubadkisa,

Oydaan Illaahay ka go'in hayna oodine"

English Translation:

"The British, the Ethiopians and the Italians are conniving

The country is snatched, divided by the strongest

The country is sold without our knowledge

To me it is a sign of the end of times

The country where the strong-minded (patriots) are isolated and weak-minded are in abundance

The country where the ones you trust turn out to be venomous snakes

The country where the truth is killed at sight

The country where even some of the notables can be bought

To those elders who are fed by the imperialists

The companions have warned us not to trust the disbelievers

If you are Muslims and the children of Adam

Fend off against the colonial invaders"

Sayid Mohamed Abdullah Hassan, the leader of the Somali anticolonial Dervish movement and a prolific poet, was said to have been the master of this form of Gabay (Samatar, 1980). The Dervishes utilized the Gabay to share their message widely with the Somali people and gain public support for their cause. They would also compose

Gabays that described their successes against the Euro-Abyssinian imperialist forces in the early 1900s such as the narrative poem titled, "This News to Rome" that was composed in 1913. Over 54 verses, this particular poem details exactly how the Dervish army fought against the British and its recitation serves as a historical account of Somalia's history. While Gabay's are one of the most popular forms of Somali poetry, another form called Buraanbur is not too far behind.

Among Somalis in the diaspora, Buraanbur remain central to our dhaqan and ways of living because of its continued existence as part of weddings and other celebrations. This is another example of a dhaqan that Somali women have maintained in the diaspora as Buraanbur is a poem that is entirely composed and performed by Somali women (Kapteijns and Arman, 2008). Buraanbur's have been one of the main events at every Somali wedding I have been to in Toronto but describing exactly what it is when it came time to writing this paper was beyond my abilities. So, to make sure I could accurately capture the beauty of Buraanbur, I turned to the person I knew could do it best – my dear mom, Hamdi Hassan. When I asked my mom to summarize what Buraanbur is, she told me about how Buraanbur is a way to both compliment and discuss the lineage and clan of the groom, bride, and their families. This poem is accompanied by a drum and after every stanza in the poem, the guests enter the circle and perform a short dance to express their joy at both the wedding and the praising of their clan. Through song and dance, Buraanbur maintains tribal ties, which symbolizes unity between Somali people, and pays respect to the ancestors who came before.

The Islamic religious tradition is the second oldest form of knowledge of Somali history and it seeks to understand Somali history through a lens of religious and ideological teachings (Bokore, 2017). Islam arrived in Somalia shortly after Muslims in

Mecca were advised by the Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) to go to Abyssinia (modern day Ethiopia and Eritrea) to escape persecution (Netton, 2011). Since then, Somalis have had close ties to the Muslim world. Additionally, Arab influence has led to documented records of Somalia's past written by different Arab explorers, such as accounts by the Moroccan explorer Ibn Battuta in 1331 (Freeman-Grenville, 1975). In Ibn Battuta's writings about his encounter with Somali people in Mogadishu, he presents Somalis as wealthy people with an abundance of food and animals. He also writes about how the Sultan of Mogadishu (also called the Sheikh) welcomes him into his palace and feeds him the traditional food. What is evident in his writing is how much Islam played a role in the daily lives of Somalis of that time. While Ibn Battuta's historical accounts about Somali people are detailed and describe the importance of religion in Somali culture, it is still through one very visible lens, and in this case this lens is Islam.

Finally, the most recent form of knowledge of Somali history is the Western secular tradition. It is what Dr. Bokore refers to as the perspective of the colonizers and, as with the general study of African Studies, this tends to refer to the historical discourse about Somalia and is not necessarily coming from Somali people (Bokore, 2017; Hountondji, 2019). This European view of Somali history leads to what Ihediwa Chimee calls a "European periodization of African history" and through this process, "African history" is divided into discrete, ordered blocks of time (Chimee, 2019). This periodization keeps this history in the perspective of Europeans and, more often than not, the starting point for this history is either the transnational slave trade or colonialism (Chimee, 2019). An underlying belief that supports this perspective is that African people were not aware of their own philosophies before Westerners started to

document their history for them (Hountondji, 2019). The notion of centrality in the Western secular view of history is one that establishes Europe (and the West) as the sole source of knowledge on African history (Bokore, 2017). The denial of indigenous knowledge and African philosophies is the underpinning in this form of knowledge. Perhaps one of the most representative examples of this belief is through Richard Burton's exploration of Somalia in 1854 when he became the first European to travel to the country (Godsall, 2001). When he arrived, he wrote about how the Somali people had told him about how the bites from the mosquitos in the region led to deadly fevers, but he dismissed this knowledge as local superstition (Burton, 1856). It was not until 1897 that a British physician named Ronald Ross would identify mosquitoes as the vectors of malaria and in 1902, he would go on to win a Nobel Prize for Medicine for this work (CDC, 2015). While this is only one example, it is indicative of the low value Europeans placed on the traditional knowledge of Somalis in particular, and Africans in general. This was not surprising to me, but it reminded me of the relevancy and urgency of Mahdi Elmandjra's call for Africans embarking on futures studies to look at our past through our own eyes (Cole, 1994). In my workshops, we explored the history of Somalia and Somali people through each of these three forms of knowledge. While I acknowledge the pitfalls in examining Somali history through the Western secular tradition, I cannot completely avoid it, largely because since the mid-1800s, documented histories of Somalia and of Somali people have come from this perspective. These are available both in textbooks and in the archives of newspapers. For example, the New York Times TimeMachine news archive has articles about Somalia from as early as 1884 and provides historical information, albeit from a biased lens. Therefore, I included this knowledge but balanced it with knowledge from the Islamic religious tradition and Somali indigenous poetic tradition.

Since the research question revolved around the Somali identity, I was deliberate in choosing which pieces of history to share with my participants. In the literature, historians and futurists caution against "cherry-picking" pieces of the past to inform future scenarios (Bradfield, Derbyshire, and Wright, 2016). However, as Bradfield et al. later go on to write, the very fact that history is highly interpretative means that it is a good tool to uncover alternative perspectives of the future. By not accepting the different interpretations of the past, the dominance of the present remains unchallenged and this sets the stage for a single perspective to imagine the future. For Somalis in particular, this is damaging as our understanding of our history has been influenced by colonization and civil war, leading to a narrative that is biased and one-sided. Among young Somali-Canadians, what this means is that there is a heightened awareness of the recent past since 1990 but less awareness around history prior to the Civil War. Before we can have a holistic sense of possible futures for the Somali-Canadian identity, it is important for us to see ourselves existing outside of the limitations others have set for us. In other words, we have to see colonization, the civil war, and resulting displacement as one part of our story, not the whole thing (Ilmi, 2012).

In my attempt to rebalance the scales and offer an alternative view of history – one that is focused on Somali success and the ties of Soomaalinimo – I gathered 20 unique pieces of history from a wide-range of sources (Table 1). These snapshots of Somali history ranged from the 10th Century to the late 1980s and show some of the successes, challenges, and uniqueness of the Somali people throughout this time. I placed each piece of history on a slip of paper and asked each person in the workshops to randomly select one slip. After everyone had selected a slip, I gave the group 10 minutes to review the history written on it and self-reflect on what this history means to

them and how it informs their view of Somalia and Somalis. In both the Toronto and the Edmonton workshop, there was considerable excitement for this activity and when the group reconvened in a circle and each participant was asked to summarize the history they were given, the resulting discussion was an engaging one. Initially, I had planned it so that we would do one full round of sharing the history that I had brought to the group. Afterwards, we would go back around, and participants would have an opportunity to contribute additional pieces of history that were not mentioned. However, it did not end up working as planned, and what occurred instead was even better. As participants heard a piece of history that they had a personal connection to or were particularly excited about, they shared stories and other histories that tied to the one being presented. This excitement around learning a different version of one's own history is one that is common among those that grew up in the diaspora and can be part of the lifelong pursuit in the quest of forging a hyphenated identity (Ochugboju, 2020). With this different perspective on who our ancestors were and what they did in the past, I took the workshop participants back to the future to see what had changed.

Before the official introduction of the Somali Latin script in 1972, the Somali language was written in different forms including a modified Arabic Script (Wadaad writing), Osmanya Script (Far Soomaali), Borama Script (Gadabuursi Script), and Kaddare Script. Below is an example of how one phrase looks in English, the modern Somali script, and the Osmanya script.

English: This is the Osmanya Script.
Somali: Kani waa qoraalka osmanya.
Osmanya: 𐒏𐒖𐒐𐒘 𐒓𐒖𐒖 𐒎𐒙𐒇𐒖𐒖𐒆𐒏𐒖 𐒙𐒈𐒑𐒖𐒐𐒕𐒖

The Somali diaspora has always existed in various pockets of the world. As early as the 1880's, there were seamen that traveled to the port cities in England, Wales for example, and have settled there. Throughout the colonial era, Somalis had to travel abroad to gain higher education. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s many left with the aspirations of a prosperous life abroad.

For example, one of the editors of a magazine called *"New Directions"* at Howard University (an HBCU – historically Black university) in the 1970s was a Somali man named Abdulkadir N. Said. The magazine focused on events happening in the African continent and in addition to being the editor, Abdulkadir also wrote articles including some about Somalia and Somali people.

During the Middle Ages, Somalia's territory witnessed the emergence and decline of several powerful sultanates that dominated the regional trade. While there were many, eight sultanates were heavily recorded in history. These included:

- The Sultanate of Mogadishu (10th Century – 16th Century)
- Ajuran Sultanate (13th Century – late 17th Century)
- Warsangali Sultanate (late 13th Century – 19th Century, until British Colonization)
- Sultanate of Ifat (late 13th Century – early 15th Century)
- Adal Sultanate (early 15th Century – late 16th Century)
- Sultanate of the Geledi (late 17th Century – 19th Century)
- Majeerteen Sultanate (19th Century – early 20th Century)
- Sultanate of Hobyo (19th Century – early 20th Century)

In the early 14th Century, Sa'id of Mogadishu (part of the Ajuran Empire) was a Somali explorer who became the first ambassador for Africa to China, the first African to study the Mandarin language, and the first African to translate Mandarin to an African language (Somali).

Lieutenant Commander Geordi La Forge is a fictional character who appeared in all seven seasons of the American science fiction television series Star Trek: The Next Generation and its four feature films. The show, which was made in 1987, is set in the future in the 24th Century and in the show, Geordi La Forge was born on February 16, 2335 in Mogadishu, Somalia. In this world, Somalia still existed and a Somali was not only in space, but was a commanding officer aboard the USS Enterprise, a prestigious ship.

Abu Abdallah ibn Battuta was a North African intellectual who recorded his vast number of travels throughout the Islamic world during the 14th century. Ibn Battuta landed on the Somali coast sometime between 1329 CE and 1331 CE. In his journals detailing his travels, he has written the following about his interaction with the Somali people:

"They brought me a suit of their clothing--a silk wrapper to tie around the middle instead of trousers (which they do not know), an upper garment of Egyptian linen with markings, a lined gown of Jerusalem material, and an Egyptian turban with embroideries. They also brought garments for my companions befitting their circumstances"

Table 1: A diverse look at Somali history *(sample)*

The Future // Hadhow

"Hooyo macaan,

I want you to always remember who you are and where you came from. Tap into your identity during joyous times. Your Soomaalinimo will teach you ways to truly bask in the greatness of life. Tap into your identity during times of difficulty. For your Somali roots will give you the resilience you need to thrive.

You are Somali royalty. You are the child of greatness. Your community and ancestors live through your success. Therefore, you must remember to use your success to lift up your community wherever you are.

With lots of love, your Abooto"

"To my lovely grandkids,

It took me way too long to realize not only how little I knew about Somali history, but also how rich our history truly is! I don't want you to put off learning about our country's rich history as long as I have, and I urge you to learn about your history and embrace your Soomaalinimo. Growing up, I was never able to talk to my friends about Soomaalinimo the way other ethnicities would talk about their own sense of identity and I don't want you to go through that. Be proud of your Soomaalinimo!!!

Yours truly, your great-grandfather"

For the last exercises of the workshop, I left the participants with the following prompt: "Knowing what we know now, what advice would we leave to our great-

grandchildren about their Soomaalinimo?" I gave each participant a sheet of paper and asked them to write a letter to their future descendants. Between the Toronto and Edmonton workshops, I received a total of 23 letters. Although each letter was unique, I was able to identify a few themes that were consistent throughout the letters. Some letters focused on leaving advice for the future generation. The advice included encouraging their great-grandchild(ren) to remember your past, remember who you are, remember your community/family, and be proud of who you are. In some letters, the advice led to a call to action and the descendants were encouraged to lean into their nomadic ways, build networks with each other and give back, go back to Somalia, and learn the language. There were also messages that had hope for the future and mentioned the desire to see a Somali community that was better connected, prosperous, continued the Somali legacy, and hope for peace in Somalia. Finally, many of the letters had specific references to identity and wrote about how their great-grandchildren are royalty and come from a long line of strong people.

As I read through the letters, I was struck by the feeling that between the first and second explorations of the future, a transformation had occurred. Compared to the ideas that emerged from the first exploration of the future, these letters are more hopeful and optimistic. In comparison, the main focus of the plays and discussion was on exploring futures where ties to the Somali culture and a sense of Soomaalinimo was lost. The letters stay away from anticipating what Soomaalinimo looks like in the future and instead, focuses on encouraging the future generation to tap into their history and their community. History was also a common theme in a short story a participant from the Toronto workshop shared with me. The story is based on genetic memory and examines how technology can be used to bring Somali history to life in the future. This

story is a powerful statement on how we, as Somali people, reconcile the difficult aspects of our past with the parts we are proud of. A summary would not do this story justice, so I have copied an excerpt from his story below:

Husuus (The Memory) by H

"It's strange, I don't think I ever looked forward to having a Husuus." Abdullahi was telling Ikraam and Joseph excitedly.

Abdulllahi could tell they were starting to get uncomfortable again. After a week of discussing his failed attempts at performing what Azuma yelled back, he had to share his success despite what convention and taboo was telling him.

"So," he continued, "you won't believe what I saw. I don't think I completely understand it myself. I even tried it successfully this morning with a hus-dil (memory of killing)."

That was the last straw. Joseph put up his hand to cut off Abdullahi.

"We don't want to hear it." He said.

"But you have to know what I saw." Abdullahi replied, almost pleadingly.

"We sat here for a week while you talked about your hus-dhimasho (memory of death), but now you're smiling while recalling the awful experience of a hus-dil?" Joseph questioned with a tone of anger. "You need help Abdullahi." He said as he got up and walked away with Ikraam silently following his lead.

Abdullahi, tried to yell what he saw, but they had already entered the communal transport to head to New Mogadishu. He needed answers. And he knew where to get them.

***

“Eldest Gurti, someone has accessed the Husuus Depository.”

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What Abdullahi saw in his husus-dhil did not make complete sense to him. He needed answers. So, he spent a second day at the Husuus Depository. His first day here was mentally taxing, but it didn’t reveal anything.

“Good Afternoon Abdullahi.” The clerk greeted him as he approached.

Unsurprisingly she remembered him from the previous day. Not many people would willingly opt to relive nightmares they are forced to see.

“Good afternoon Initiate Saynab.” Abdullahi responded. “I’d like to access another viewing session please.”

“Of course. Please enter when you’re ready. The bio scanners will detect automatically.”

As he entered the viewing room, the hologram self-initiated. The image of Guurti Ikram immortalized here. Recognizing Abdullahi as the same user, the hologram asked whether or not he wouuld like to review the Order’s history or continue his previous session. Having already seen Gurti Ikram describe how the Order of the Gurti had built the repository after the great war as a memorial open to all, Abdullahi opted to skip the introduction.

“Continue the session please.” He replied.

He began viewing the memory of a little girl who had horrible things happen to her and done to her. He's had this Husuus personally last year. It was one of those Husuus everyone forced themselves to forget.

As he willed himself to relive this poor child's memories, he saw something in the mirror.

He looked different. He looked at the girl and he noticed she looked different too. It wasn't quite right.

His session suddenly terminated.

III. CHAPTER THREE: ENVISIONING CULTURALLY INFORMED FUTURES

"So Be It! See To It!" – from the journal of Octavia Butler (1975)

"What we don't see, we assume can't be. What a destructive assumption." – Octavia Butler

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Throughout this MRP, I was aware that I was designing this research for a very specific audience – young Somali-Canadians. However, as time went on, I began to think about how this approach might be used with different groups. The conversations I had in the interviews and workshops revealed an unmet need in how futures are typically envisioned, and a desire to address this with concepts that felt authentic and genuine. I realize that while the content of these conversations and workshops is specific, there are some generalizable components of the approach that could be lifted. With the goal of developing a culturally informed futures tool others could use, I reviewed my research design for this MRP.

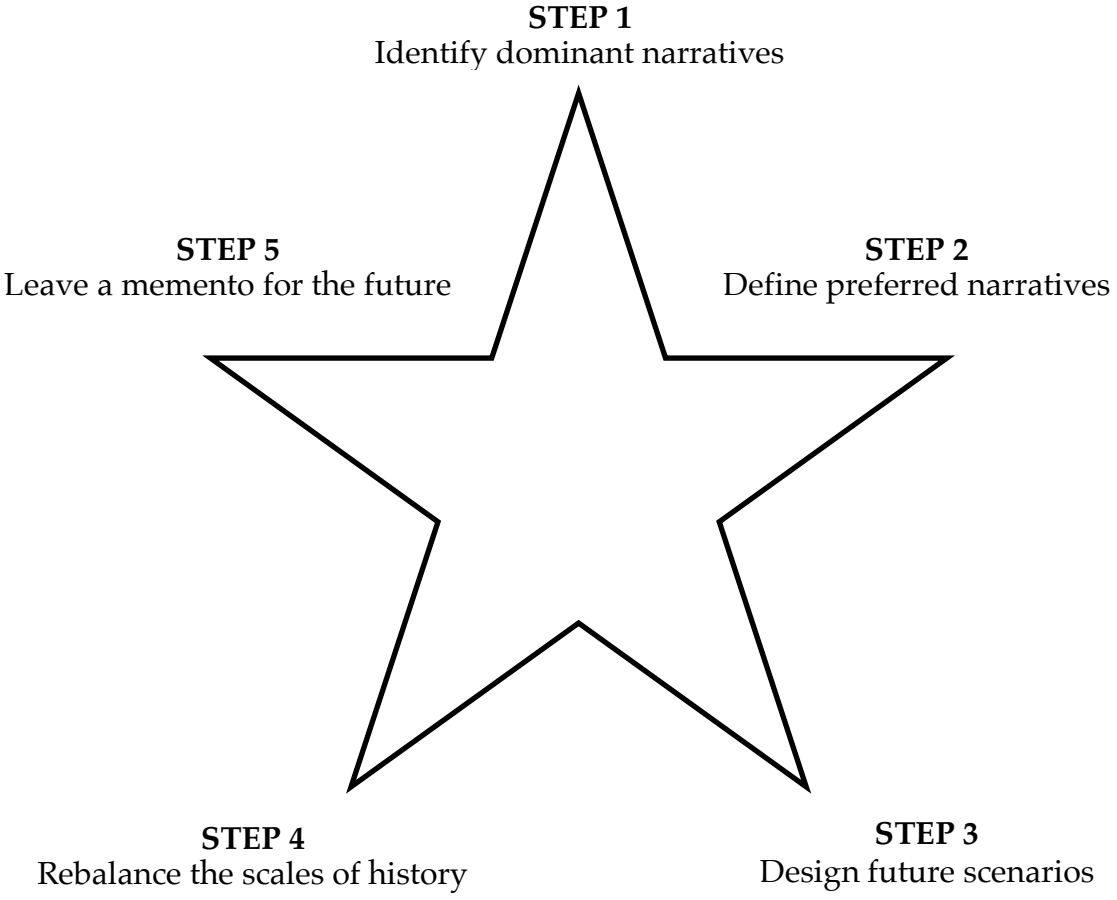
What emerged is a framework that allows for flexibility in selecting tools and adapting them to meet specific cultural contexts. The framework is intentionally designed to be driven by what the group decides is the heart of the true narrative. For my research with young Somali-Canadians, the heart of the true narrative was determined to be Soomaalinimo – the part of our identity that unifies us and is passed on from our ancestors. This will change for different cultural groups, and there likely is a similar concept that already exists that groups could lean into. There is also an intergenerational component to this framework that speaks to the fact that conversations about the future involve both those that have come before (ancestors) and those that are yet to come (descendants). Furthermore, cultural identity and heritage is

passed on through these intergenerational ties so embodying this tradition when exploring possible futures of cultural identity is important (Brannen, 2006; Schneiderman and Barrera, 2009). In that same spirit, I would like to acknowledge that this framework builds on the work of the all the Future Studies and Somali Studies experts I had the privilege to read and interview and the conversations I was able to have with all those that attended my workshops.

A new framework to envision the future of cultural identities

This framework (Figure 5) is intended to be used to guide the futures visioning process of how cultural identities might evolve. It is a representation of the process used in this MRP as well as a tool for others to use appropriately.

Figure 5: A framework for culturally informed futures



The framework has five key steps:

1) **Identify the dominant narrative (or single story) about the cultural group**
   Before going to the future or returning to the past, a discussion about where you are presently and what others are saying about you is important. This is not to center the voices of those outside the cultural group; rather, this step allows the group to come together over misunderstandings and frustrations they may feel. It is only by recognizing the distortion and disconnect that the group can come together and take back the narrative.
2) **Define a more preferred narrative based on traditional cultural teachings**
   Once the group has identified the issues in the dominant narrative, they can craft an alternative narrative that is more authentic to their experiences. This step is a transition point and using cultural teachings and ways of knowing to build this narrative is important. In doing so, the narrative developed is one that empowers the members of the group and allows them to think past the limits of the dominant narrative.
3) **Design future scenarios about the evolution of the cultural identity**
   This is one of two steps in this framework that are focused on the future. This step encourages the group to use the knowledge created in the previous steps and think about how their cultural identity might evolve for those three generations in the future ("for your great-grandchildren"). The selection of this timeframe is important because it is far enough into the future that they can think about changes more broadly, but it feels close because of the family ties. It is also important that these scenarios are not judged as "good futures" or "bad futures". Instead, the group should be encouraged to explore all that

could happen in the evolution and expression of the cultural identity in the future.

4) **Rebalance the scales of history by viewing it through a culturally informed lens**

   While it might seem counterintuitive to go to the past after exploring potential futures, doing this brings to light how visions of the future are shaped by the history we are taught and come to know. This step is an opportunity for the group to talk about their shared history and explore parts of the history that are not as commonly known. The group should also spend time discussing who has shaped the retelling of the past and, where possible, supplement this information with personal stories and histories.

5) **Leave a memento for the next generation to help them navigate the future**

   Finally, this last step asks the group to reflect on the previous steps and, either alone or together, leave a memento for their great-grandchildren. This memento could be a message, advice, or a reminder but it is intended to capture the discussion and share this with the future generations.

When these five steps are completed, the group has explored the past, present, and future through a process that respects and centers their cultural ways of knowing. The resulting futures are ones that they can intimately relate to and envision. The framework is flexible so when groups go through the process once, they can choose to return and complete all steps again or choose to focus on only a few steps. Additionally, any of these steps could be expressed in a creative form, similar to how my workshop participants created collages and plays.

While this framework is intended to be flexible and adaptive to the needs of the group, there are some ethical considerations to be made when using this tool. Similar to the research design guiding this MRP, this framework engages with futures work in a way is anticolonial, intersectional, and participatory. By focusing on traditional cultural teachings to present preferred narratives and using these narratives and teachings to view the past and the future, this framework centres the cultural group. To use this tool in a way that displaces these individuals and their voices is in direct opposition to the intentions of this tool. Serious consideration must be given to the appropriate use of this tool. Part of this consideration includes the researcher engaging in a process of self-reflection to better understand their intentions. One tool to facilitate this self-reflection in a holistic way is the, "Towards an Intentional Intersectional Practice" model proposed by Jacquie Shaw (2019). Through six iterative steps, this model (Figure 6) guides designers and researcher through questions designed to help them understand their responsibility and their role. When used alongside the framework I propose here, it ensures that those conducting this research are doing it mindfully and that they are the best individuals to lead this work.

In thinking about how I might be able to build on this research, I was interested in bringing this framework to young Somalis living in Somalia and learning from the futures they envision. However, despite being a Somali person, I recognize that I need to reflect on this framework and my identity as a Somali-Canadian to better understand if this is my role. By reflecting on the questions in the model and thinking through the benefits and the harms engaging in this work may bring, I hoped to gain some clarity. Somalis in Somalia and Somalis in Canada have had different experiences following the civil war and the rediscovery of history that might excite and empower a young Somali-

Canadian may harm or retraumatize a young Somali back home. There are also additional challenges with conducting futures visioning workshops in a place like Somalia where safety is temporary, and many have either directly witnessed violence or know someone who has. The privileges Somalis of the diaspora are afforded allow us to think past the immediate future and envision a world where things are different; this may not be the case with those in Somalia. With these, and many other factors, considered, I now understand that I would not be the ideal person to lead futures visioning workshops to understand the future of Soomaalinimo among young Somalis living in Somalia. Despite this, the framework could still be used in principle with adaptations to be made that are specific to the context. The ideal person to lead this work would be a Somali person who is similar in age to the participants and who has been born or raised in Somalia. This sets the foundation for mutual understanding and all of the benefits that come from being an "insider researcher"; strategies that I used in the design of this MRP.

Figure 6: Towards an Intentional Intersectional Practice (Shaw, 2019)

Step	Reflection
Show-up	• How do you invest in yourself? What is at stake? Do you hold stakes in the work you do? With the people you work with? With the people engage with and are affected/effected by your work? • Bring your experience with you. It holds what you can share. Your privilege exists to distribute. • How ready are you to make this, not about (just) you? You've got to commit, and sometimes it's going to suck. • But if you're not ready to approach this work, how can you be ready to design with/for/centering other people?
Learn/Unlearn	• Practicing intentional intersectionality is a PROCESS. Learning/unlearning will be ongoing. • There are people willing to educate. Seek them out and thank them (with actions). • At first your job is to listen. All it takes it to listen to these people.

	• It is no one's job to teach you if they don't want to. Especially if these people are marginalized. We've taught enough people, you're not the first, you won't be the last. Practice consent while learning. Do not be extractive with your process. • You've got to educate yourself.
Contextualize	• You're going to now contextualize within your own experience. Place yourself in the work. • Who is your community? How are you connected? What is your power? Who do you ally with? Why? What makes you uncomfortable? (dig deep) Whose ideas do you seek out? What ideas do you seek out? Whose ideas do you legitimize?
Question	• What do you understand now? • Do you understand what might be missing? Who says what is missing? • Ask other people. • Intersectionality is based in understanding that every experience is unique and valid. Asking fills blind spots, it adds robustness to your learning, contextualization, questioning; your overall practice.
Apply	• This looks different for everyone, in every situation. It can look like actively, vocally sharing your intersectional practice. • It could be creating inclusive space in your team and outputs, vocalizing concerns, being visible representation, asking marginalized folks what they need and how you can support
Evaluate	• You're going to make mistakes — it's inevitable. The goal is to reduce harm caused by your mistakes. • It is NOT enough to say, "well we tried". Intersectionality is about accountability. • Hold yourself accountable! • Your call out is critique

We all have our unique identities and communities where we belong, whether it be through membership assigned at birth or through shared experiences. This framework recognizes the privileges that come with this membership and leverages it to explore future possibilities. To decolonize the future and challenge the Western-centric perspective of Future Studies, this framework leans into indigenous, traditional knowledge that is intimately tied to what it means to be part of a cultural group. By critically reflecting on the researcher's motivations, the goal is that this tool is used appropriate and ethically to work *within* these groups and not for or just with.

IV. CHAPTER FOUR: IMPLICATIONS AND HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

"I'm overwhelmed by the weight of this MRP. It's not only something I am doing for my MDes but something I am doing for me and my people. To my fellow young Somali-Canadians, I hope and pray you will find peace and clarity in my research. I pray that you will finally feel heard and seen and that this is the beginning of us reclaiming the future narratives of who we are. Our Soomaalinimo runs deep in our blood and connects us to our homeland, even during the coldest of days in Canada. I will lean into my Soomaalinimo and use it to give me strength throughout this process."

- Excerpt from my personal journal on December 1st, 2019

At different points during this MRP, I felt intimidated, empowered, inquisitive, and emotional because of the two lenses I am examining this research through. On one hand, I am a Somali-Canadian person in the generation I am doing research on and with. This meant that, as I write in the excerpt above, my framing of the research study, workshops, and interviews was done with my community in mind. I was very aware of what would resonate with this group and I kept this in mind throughout the process. On the other hand, this research project was something I was doing for my master's degree and as an emerging futurist. As much as I was personally invested in this research, I was driven by a professional curiosity to learn more about the future studies field and how this practice could be more culturally informed. Maintaining this dual-perspective on the research was what I wrote about in the introduction to this paper but even though I knew there were words to describe it (i.e. insider-outsider positioning),

this did not stop me from questioning how I could remain true to both sides during this process.

In my interview with Dr. Inayatullah, I expressed this concern and asked for his advice. His suggestion to me was to be aware of my biases – of my different selves that are active, and if they are conflict or in alignment with my vision. He suggested that I have clarity in my mind, body, and spirit, about my intentions and my story. I also asked Dr. Ochugboju and Dr. Russo about how much the identity of the individual leading futures projects influences the direction of the futures developed. They both mentioned the importance of balancing your personal experience with the needs of the group you are working with. I kept this in mind as I completed the rest of my interviews and refreshed my intention before each workshop so that I could be the facilitator the group needed. As I move closer to the conclusion of this paper, I would like to remain true to these two perspectives and reflect on implications of this research and hopes for the future for both the future studies field and for my Somali-Canadian community.

<u>There are Somalis in the future.</u>

One of the challenges with the way futures studies is currently taught and practiced is that it resonates best for a specific (Western) context (Inayatullah, 1999). Since the 1990s, those in the field who are of diverse, non-Western backgrounds, have begun to identify that this perspective excludes other worldviews and the futures that are developed are non-inclusive and risk colonizing the future. Many of these futurists have also created new tools and processes that are grounded in non-Western perspectives and have pushed the need for diverse futures. In setting out to do this research, it was my goal that this project adds to this growing body of literature calling

for more diverse and inclusive futures. Through this research project, I have explored how an identity can be used to view the past, understand the present, and explore different futures. By doing so, there is the underlying principle that a strong understanding of this identity is required prior to doing this work. During this project, I have gone back and forth questioning whether or not this type of futures research can and should be done by a member of the culture under study. Reflecting on the types of conversations had and futures developed, I would strongly advocate for this type of work to be led by those who share the same cultural identities as those they are working with. This does not mean that there is not a place in this research for those that do not identify as Somali. Rather, there is a switch in power dynamics where those who are the focus of the futures research are not only subjects, but the originators and transformers of the futures project. We are all human and we have our own cultural biases that shape how we view the world (Russo, 2020). As futurists, we need to deeply understand our biases and also our limitations. We cannot step into every shoe. We will have blind spots we are not even aware of. I believe that it is only by recognizing this that we are able to work towards creating just and equitable futures for everyone.

One of the ways I have come to understand the difference between being included and leading futures visioning exercises, is by reflecting on one of my favourite statements. In 2018, a billboard designed by the interdisciplinary artist Alisha Wormsley was erected in Pittsburg as part of an ongoing public art project. On the billboard was a simple phrase: “There are Black People in the Future”. What is a simple, and I would argue factual, statement was met with public controversy and within a month, the billboard was removed (Sharp, 2018). In designing this billboard, Wormsley was responding to the lack of diversity in science fiction media and reminded people

that, whether your imagined futures include us or not, Black people will be in the future. I think about how this impacts my research project and I have come to the same conclusion. The future will continue to become more diverse in a variety of ways and by limiting the potential of the future studies field to a subset of worldviews, the futures that are imagined and designed for will be radically different than what we will end up seeing. It is in the best interest of the futures visioning process that we open up the doors to as many worldviews as we can and by looking at cultural identities (like Soomaalinimo), we are able to bring in different forms of knowledge and philosophies to inform our understanding of the future.

Hope for the future

Throughout this project, I met and spoke to many young Somalis across North America. When I shared what I was working on for this MRP, the response was immediate interest and willingness to support. For someone doing a project focused on Soomaalinimo, I knew my community would be supportive because of those bonds. However, I found myself being surprised time and time again with just how much my fellow Somalis went above and beyond to help move this research forward. Oftentimes in the interviews and workshops, the conversations naturally led to the question of, "so what's next?". In my research proposal, I was very clear about the fact that one of my goals for this research was to bring the findings back to my Somali-Canadian community. One of the ways I would like to do this is through a public exhibit showcasing the main findings of this research. The public exhibit will be mainly for members of the Somali-Canadian community in Toronto to visit and engage with the material presented as a way to begin this conversation and empower the community to continue this work. The conversations about what our future identity might look like

and what supports we want to create for the next generation of Somali-Canadians to maintain their Soomaalinimo have already begun in the workshops. By opening it up to more Somalis, the discussions started can evolve and eventually turn into actions that the community can take. What this research reminded me was that young Somali-Canadians are already thinking about their personal futures and what they would like to achieve. Given the space, they are highly interested in talking about and planning for their shared futures in a way that remains true and authentic to Somali traditions and practices.

With that said, I know this project is the first of many. The focus of this research was on young Somali-Canadians because this is the group I am already a part of and familiar with. It would be interesting to do a similar study with an intergenerational group and learn how visions of the future differ between the young and old in our community. It would also be interesting to take this study to different Somali communities around the world. Somalis have a large presence in the United States and the United Kingdom and the experiences of the Somali diaspora there are very different to the experiences we have in Canada. I also recognize that there are concepts similar to Soomaalinimo in other cultures and another area for future research could be for those in different communities to lead a culturally informed futures project using traditions and philosophies that are true to their experiences. This is an area of further research in which I would be happy to support (maybe through the proposed framework framework) but one that must be led by someone who is from the community of focus.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this Major Research Project was to answer the question, "How might Soomaalinimo evolve in the future for Somali-Canadians". On my own, I went back in time to better understand Somalia's past from three different perspectives, spent time reflecting on the current state of Somalis in Canada, and explored key Somali concepts we could use to guide our exploration of the future. Through interviews with Futures Studies and Somali Studies experts, I was able to ask questions to help me get a better sense of the opportunities and limitations of each field, historical context, and advice on how to approach my research study. Finally, I was able to transform the information I gathered from the literature review and interviews into a workshop where, for four hours, I could guide a group of young Somali-Canadians through exercises that will eventually answer my research question.

By situating this work in lived experiences and traditional Somali knowledge, I was able to identify gaps in the current futures practice while working towards building a culture-specific understanding of visioning for the future. Currently, discussions about Somali futures are being had for us and we do not see ourselves represented in both the process and the resulting future scenarios. By having this discussion among Somali-Canadians, we were able to speak into existence our hopes for the future and begin to discuss how we might make these dreams a reality. Although this research was specific to the future of Soomaalinimo for Somali-Canadians, I developed a new framework that could be used by different groups to imagine the future of their cultural identity. This alternative framework addresses the gaps in the current Futures Studies field and adds to the growing literature around creative inclusive and diverse futures.

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