

“Cashberta:”

Migration Experiences of Somali-Canadian Second Generation Youth in Canada

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Abstract

My paper examines the circumstances that have pushed Somali-Canadian male youth from Toronto to Alberta; a region with a growing and booming economy. Once in Alberta, Somali youth are caught in situations where many are unable to work in their professional fields, or are unemployed and underemployed due to lack of skills and education. Without employment, some of these Somali youths have ended up in criminal activities—ultimately leading to their death.

This paper is grounded in the migration, settlement and integration of the Somali diaspora of Canada throughout the 1990s to the present, with an emphasis on the difficult integration and settlement experience of Somali-Canadian youth. It seeks to better understand the experiences of Somali families, specifically Somali families from the Greater Toronto Area, and the barriers they have faced in their process of relocation from Somalia to Canada. Further, this paper emphasizes the experiences of Somali-Canadian second generation male youth who are impacted by the obstacles their immigrant families face upon arrival in Toronto, and how that has hindered their integration into mainstream Canada such as in the labour market, the education system and their experiences with discrimination and other systemic barriers. These families face literacy problems and therefore cannot provide necessary educational support to their children at home. They face employment barriers and housing conditions in areas that are sometimes prone to violence, and consequently do not possess the requisite political skills to assist their children in navigating the various institutions that they must interact with such as the schools, security, policing and judicial systems. All of these challenges have affected Somali youth leading to their own difficult experiences in Canada.

I anticipate that this paper will add onto the paucity of research on second generation immigrant youth, specifically the experiences of Somali-Canadian males in Toronto, and the struggles they face every day, such as acute discrimination due to their race, skin color and religion, and their origins from an immigrant household usually situated in low income neighbourhoods in the Greater Toronto Area.

Foreword

This paper aligns with and thoroughly expands on my plan of study entitled “Barriers to Somali refugee adaptation in Toronto”, by providing valuable evidence regarding the integration challenges faced by the Somali community in Canada in general, and Somali-Canadian male youth in particular. Furthermore, the research explores their personal experiences with regards to education, employment and discrimination which fall under two components: 1) local barriers to settlement and integration and 2) the experiences of Somali-Canadian second generation male youth in Ontario and Alberta. This fulfills the aforementioned objectives of investigating and examining the various barriers experienced by this specific demographic. The paper accomplishes this by conducting contemporary research on the local experiences of Somali male youth with the goal of developing new initiatives and improve existing settlement services in Somali led community organizations.

Acknowledgements

Looking back on the last two years, many people come to mind who have contributed to the completion of this paper. I wish to acknowledge my first academic advisor, Howard Daugherty who passed away and could not see this paper come to fruition. He gave me support during the preliminary days of this research—always cheering me up when times became stressful. Since then, I have had Ravi De Costa as my academic advisor—someone whom I am thankful to for his thoughtful feedback, constructive criticism and helping me shape my plan of study.

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I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my best friends; my parents- Fatuma Farah and Abdurahman Hosh Jibril for their prayers, encouragement, emotional support and sincere advice throughout my years of schooling. Despite their own struggles as immigrants they have encouraged me to always realize my full potential and beat the very system that has distressed them and other racial minorities who faced similar challenges in Canada. Certainly, I would have not been able to come this far without their support and I will forever be obliged to them. I wish to thank my family and friends who were there for me throughout this journey when I needed support, feedback and time to unwind from all the stress from school. I appreciate you all!

Finally, I would like to humbly express my appreciation to all of the participants in this research. Through this study, I have met community leaders who were toiling day in and day out assisting youth and families in integration and settlement matters—sometimes such simple matters as filling out application forms for housing or health insurance or disability claims forms. I also met dedicated parents, many of them single mothers struggling to raise six or more children. Some of my research participants are still grieving the loss of their children who were

murdered in Alberta or in Toronto. Yet although the majority of these parents, youth and community leaders are baffled by these tragic murders, almost all of them are nevertheless grateful to be living in Canada, as many of them could have still been in Somalia, a place that is still in the grip of civil and religious wars. Thank you to the Somali families, community leaders and youth who have generously allowed me to listen to their voices. I am appreciative for their efforts in opening up to me, trusting me and sharing their personal experiences with me.

Dedication

I dedicate this paper to all the Somali families who have lost their loved ones to senseless violence and to all the immigrant youth who are trying to integrate into Canada despite the odds.

I hope that my research contributes to the ongoing debate and public conversation on immigration, integration, multiculturalism and settlement issues.

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INTRODUCTION

In this study, I first examine the settlement challenges facing the Somali community from an immigrant perspective. Li (2003) gives an in-depth analysis on the historical phases and evolution of immigration policies into the emergence of ‘visible minorities’ in Canada after the changes were made to the immigration policies in 1967. One of the salient features of the history of our immigration policies has been the systemic discrimination faced by newcomers when arriving to host countries. Li (2003) also points out how well immigrants do in their host society depends not only on their social features but it has a lot to do with the ideological preference and predisposition of the dominant White settler society (Europeans). In order for this dominance to take shape, the White settler society constructs an “us “versus “others” differentiation. So while the dominant society defends the moral characteristics of high ethical values, wealth, education and fluency in the official language, the immigrants are constructed as “others” and then become marginalized (Li, 2003). But what about those second generation Canadian citizens who are entrenched in Canada with a birth certificate or raised in Canada like some of the young men in this study but are still faced with barriers on the basis of race, religion, gender and settlement challenges in the family structure? Indubitably, this “otherness” of immigrant parents transcends onto Somali-Canadian youth who are not quite the “other” but not quite “Canadian” either. They are not privileged to deconstruct and control the concept of who is and who is not an immigrant and this is due to racial difference which for many years has contributed to the debate of immigration. Certainly, racism and inequality is still rooted in Canadian immigration policies (Bannerji, 2000).

The examination of social exclusion, stratification and inequality is a fundamental framework that guides this study and is used to emphasize the systemic racist inequalities that have affected the young Somali community. Galabuzi (2006) and Bannerji (2000) have articulated that non-white communities have been otherized. Galabuzi (2006:174-176) suggests that social exclusion is not the opposite of social inclusion because the latter was created as a top-down policy framework. Instead, social exclusion tackles the root causes of systemic approaches that have and still continue to marginalize groups of new immigrants and second generation youth. For example, there is racism that stems from colonization and slavery as well as the everyday struggles in discriminatory labour market (on the basis of Canadian experience),

the use of language categorization such as “visible minority”, legal challenges involving immigrant and family reunification, educational system, all which Bannerji (2000) contends represent the “the dark side of multiculturalism” of our times. The anti-racist framework outlined by Bannerji (2000) is well-suited for exploring the experiences of racialized youth. Bannerji (2000) examines the Canadian policies and points to the fact that official multiculturalism is designed to serve the interest of the ruling elites while playing lip service to diversity. It is a sanitized multiculturalism that only views differences through the celebrations of cultures such as Caribana, Diwali and Eid festivals for the benefits of the aesthetics but conveniently ignores the larger issue of economic and social equality. In other words, the high rate of unemployment, the rate of high school dropouts among certain immigrant youth, the concentration of certain immigrant families in inner city “ghetto’s” remain unexamined so long as we continue to celebrate together during these “ethnic” celebrations. Consequently, this suffocation refers to the ghettoization of non-white minority communities who consist of new immigrants and other minorities who are otherized not only by race but also because of lack of commonality with mainstream society who often create hubs for themselves and engage in voluntary isolation in so called “ethnic enclaves” due to the lack of inclusion. Galabuzi (2006:181) also outlines more recent patterns of exclusion: “post-September 9/11, Canadian citizenship increasingly defined by place of origin, lack of representation in political institutions, contact with criminal justice system, neighbourhood selection, exposure to various forms of violence, poor health status and racialization of poverty”.

While immigrant communities such as the Somali community face challenges due to systemic approaches to integration, their low levels of social and cultural capital has a role to play in their settlement. Thus, the social and cultural capital framework is explored in this study to illustrate why many Somali families faced challenges with integration upon arrival in Toronto aside from the systemic discrimination. The concept of social capital has been articulated by Pierre Bourdieu (1977) as economic, social and cultural resources that can advance underprivileged communities forward in society. Robert Putnam (2000) defines social capital as trust, social networks and social values of a community. More recently, James (2010) states that cultural capital is the economic, political or educational attainment that parents can pass on to their children in order to be successful in society. For the Somali community, many of them

came to Canada with little or no social capital and educational attainment to pass on to their children because of their pre-migration context and unplanned migration journey.

From Somalia to Alberta

In the early 1990's, Canada and the United States became a safe haven for Somali refugees who were fleeing the conflicts and dangers of the civil war. Evidently, Toronto, with its highly praised multicultural reputation became a popular place of settlement for many Somali immigrant families who were looking not only for safety but also for a place that would provide their children with better opportunities. While there has been some research concerning first generation Somalis and the obstacles that they face in order to integrate into Canadian society, the impact that their transitioning experiences has on second generation Somalis is often overlooked. Reitz and Somerville (2004) argue that the experiences of first generation immigrants and their offsprings are distinct because of initial settlement challenges not experienced by the second generation. For example, while fluency in the English language is a major barrier for the first generation, it is not a problem for the second generation population as most of them are born and raised in Canada and thus are fluent in English.

However, second generation population may still experience longer term challenges of integration because of systemic barriers and racial discrimination which in turn lead to feelings of not belonging to mainstream Canadian society (Galabuzi 2001, Hall and Carter 2006). It seems that the experiences and barriers of first generation Somalis has created a rippling effect. Because of the various forms of discrimination faced by their parents, some Somali second generation youth have difficulties integrating, often feeling that they do not fit into the school or education system and becoming participants of criminal activities.

In the recent years, this societal dislocation led many Somali male youth from Toronto to leave their homes, families, and educational goals and expectations to move to the well-paying jobs in the Alberta oil boom. Sadly, in a period of five years, thirty-five Somali male youth have been killed in Alberta, leaving the Toronto Somali community dismayed and searching for answers. Although there is no factual evidence, both Alberta and Toronto news assume that the murders are gang and drugs related. Why have these Somali youth left the homes and lives that their immigrant parents have struggled to build? This is a pressing issue that I wish to explore.

This paper aims to assess the experiences of Somali families who have migrated from Somalia after the civil war, the integration barriers they have faced and the recent migration trend of Somali-Canadian second generation male youth to Alberta's oil industry. The intent of this paper is to engage with the Somali immigrant community on the experiences of second generation male youth. My overall goal is to make these migration cases more visible to the larger Canadian society. I trust that by uncovering the narratives of why many of these young men have migrated to Alberta, the Somali community at large and the other Canadians will understand the sensitivity of the challenges facing these youth. In the end, I anticipate that the data collected in this research will support service providers in understanding the complex situations of Somali-Canadian male youth so that they may plan for appropriate services accordingly.

Research Questions

My research argues that integration problems for Somali male youth are 1) related to the larger integration challenges faced by the Somali community in Canada; and 2) that the current educational and employment systems have failed some of these youth who in turn have become disenfranchised and lured into the economic promises of '*Cashberta*', the local vernacular term used by the Somali male youth to depict Alberta as a place of riches and instant cash. My exploration into this topic is organized around three complementary sets of research questions:

- 1) What are the barriers for Somali refugee families in Toronto and how has that affected the family structure at home?
- 2) What are the challenges experienced by Somali second generation male youth with respect to Toronto's labour market and/or education system? What are the effects of systemic racism due to their categorization of "visible minority"?
- 3) What does "*Cashberta*" mean for the Somali youth community? What are the motivations for young Somali males to migrate to Alberta for employment and what are some of the employment challenges faced by these male youths?

Methodology

This study was approached from a qualitative research methodology which allowed for the utilization of semi-structured interviews of the complex issues facing the Somali community. Neuman (2011:175) identified qualitative data as significant because researchers attempt to “borrow ideas and viewpoints from the people we study and situate them in a fluid natural setting” instead of converting “fluid, active social life into variables or numbers”. Therefore, by observing and recording what participants have said, this method gave me the opportunity to better understand the migration experiences of Somali families, the support and services provided to assist them by Somali community leaders and the everyday realities and challenges of some of the young Somali-Canadian males. It also allowed immigrant families and youth to express their personal experiences and perspectives openly on salient issues.

Participants in this study were recruited through snowball sampling technique as well as through networks’ and community organizations. I conducted a total of 11 individual semi-structured interviews from January 2011 to April 2011. Three of these were with Somali community leaders by phone and via email (in Alberta and Toronto). Three Somali families who have lost their sons to violent murders in Alberta were interviewed face-to-face and on the phone in Toronto. Finally, five Somali-Canadian male youth (ages 17-29) were interviewed face-to-face (three in Toronto) and on the phone (two in Alberta). Interviews that were in person took place in participant’s homes, schools, and organizations and/or in a coffee shop. Interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes with Somali families and Somali youth. Interviews time ranged from forty to an hour long with Somali community leaders because of other issues that arose in the conversation (i.e. recommendations and information about services provided to Somali families). All conversations were taped recorded, and I jotted down important notes during conversations. All the questions from the questionnaires were posed to participants. A summary of the open-ended questions asked to each and every one of the subjects can be found in the appendix of this paper. Also, consent forms were given (in person or emailed) to participants and signed prior to the interview. Oral explanations and also translations were provided to Somali mothers whose first language was not English prior to the interview.

All data was transcribed verbatim without correcting grammar or slang and were categorized into major themes and patterns. The data provided in this paper is an overview of what participants perceived to be the most difficult challenges of settlement and integration in metropolitan Toronto, and in Alberta for young Somali-Canadian males who have migrated there since the oil boom. All names of Somali families and youth used in this paper are pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants.

Research Limitations

This research had a small sample size to address the specific experiences of Somali-Canadian second generation male youth and their families. A much larger size would be needed to recognize and capture more accurately the challenges facing the young Somali community in Toronto and Alberta with respect to their racialization, education and unemployment or underemployment status. My selection of participants was not random; I accessed most of the participants through personal contacts, through Somali community organizations in Toronto and Alberta who referred me to potential participants. I also attended a community event where I made connections with Somali families and leaders who have been involved in the advocacy of this youth group. Therefore, it must be recognized that my background as a young Somali-Canadian female born in Canada with connections to the Somali community may have influenced how I recruited the participants and my interactions with them during processes. However, I was self-reflective throughout the study and was clear in the beginning of each interview with participants about the goal of the research and avoided speaking about my family experiences and assumptions of the issues facing the Somali community. I have transcribed and quoted the entire participants' responses verbatim before even writing down any of my own interpretations to avoid misrepresentation. I, however, faced some difficulties in recruiting participants at first. In the beginning of my selection processes, attempts were made to schedule interviews with Somali community leaders. One participant (Somali male leader) did not contact me back after we set up a telephone interview. Another participant (Somali male leader) did not return my call after leaving a voice mail explaining my research study. One male participant was reluctant to participate after receiving the consent form.

The perplexing problem of interacting with authorities of power positions in the Somali community (i.e. Somali male community leaders) stood as a limitation for me as a researcher. After attending one of the Somali events I became aware of the subtle manner of the interaction with Somali male leaders. Power and privilege superseded the commonalities between the Somali organizers and me as it seemed they were more intrigued with the possible research of a young white Canadian journalist (whose study is on the same topic) than my aspirations of networking and understanding the phenomenon now plaguing our community. I was faced with power imbalance as a young Somali-Canadian female born in Canada even with cultural competency and a university degree. Maybe, this was due to the perception that someone who is from mainstream society can produce good research on issues facing the Somali community instead of a female insider like myself. Perhaps, it was this kind of interaction with authorities of power in the Somali community that de-esteemed young Somali males through rejection and power imbalance that I was now facing as a young Somali female. Thus, what can be recognized is internal racialization within the Somali community because of the systemic structures in society. I also believe that power and privilege within the Somali community is still defined by gender, a cultural trait that has been imported from Somalia, a country that is highly patriarchal. Nonetheless, I could see the genuineness in these community leaders' efforts to resolve these murders and the issues faced by the Somali community.

Another limitation as a researcher, as female and insider in the Somali community, was the issue of trust between the young Somali-Canadian male youth and me. Initially, participants were hesitant to share some of their experiences in Alberta due to my affiliation with a recognized university. However, assuring them that pseudonyms would be used for the study was helpful. Overall, the participants in this study were open to expressing their experiences of migration, settlement and challenges with integration during one-on-one interviews. The findings below represent themes and patterns that emerged throughout the interviews.

Interviewees' Characteristics

The interviews sample was restricted to Somali families, youth and leaders. Most of the respondents interviewed had come to Canada in the late 1980s and 1990s after the civil war and early 2000s.

- Some of the families and youth interviewed migrated to neighbouring countries typically Saudi Arabia and Egypt prior to coming to Canada. Others migrated to countries like Kenya, Italy and the United States before relocating to metropolitan Toronto.
- Of the three mothers interviewed, two were leading single-earner families raising three or more children. The exception was one woman who was married at the time of the interview.
- Most of them considered unemployment amongst them and their youth to be a barrier in their integration and settlement, a fact they associated with low levels of education and discrimination in the host country.
- Furthermore, all three of the mothers interviewed lost their sons to violent murders in Alberta after heading west to find employment.
- Among the five youth interviewed, three came back to Toronto from Alberta after migrating there and residing there since 2006. The remaining two were living in Alberta during the time of the interview and were originally from Ottawa and Toronto.
- The educational levels of the majority of the youth interviewed were relatively low. Of these five youth, one completed a four year university degree and was working in his field of study during the time of the interview; one youth completed three years of university and took time off for financial reasons; two of the youths' highest level of education was high school while one youth drop out of high school at grade 11.
- The low level of the education of the majority of the youth clearly affected their employment prospects in Toronto and Alberta because, only one was working in his field; one was unemployed in Alberta; one was unemployed in Toronto after coming back from Alberta and two were working at the airport as a baggage handler and a screening security officer (positions that do not require much educational qualifications).
- All participants interviewed said they faced discrimination in the labour market both in Alberta and their home cities. Among the youth respondents, financial barrier and family responsibility was significant factors for their reasons for migrating to Alberta.
- What emerged from the interview data obtained from the Somali community leaders interviewed was their concern about proper integration and lack of adequate role models in the Somali community for the youth.

- All community leaders believed that socio-economic characteristics of the Somali community (high poverty, unemployment status, language barriers, and lack of male support) has a huge effect on the Somali second generation male youth, a fact that may have led to their involvement in anti-social behaviour in Toronto and Alberta or to the religious radicalization of some youth.

Across all themes, all participants interviewed emphasized discrimination as a factor in the marginalization of the community on the basis of colour, gender, culture, and religion and felt that unemployment was a major issue which has led many of these youth to Alberta. Somali male youth are likely to face discrimination when interacting with police or the criminal justice system. Respondents also stressed that some Somali youth have ended up in situations in Alberta with no family support systems as many of them separated from their parents who have remained back in Ontario.

Mapping of the paper

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section will provide a brief overview of migration experiences of Somali refugees to Canada. It will review challenges of settlement and integration and how the Canadian government policies have affected the Somali refugee community. The second section focuses on the specific experiences of second generation Somali male youth originally in Toronto with respect to employment, education and systemic racism. The aim is to present the literature on challenges in the labour market, education and experiences with discrimination. This section will also look at the identity challenges of Somali-Canadian youth and at media representations of, and reactions to, the Somalis murdered in Alberta.

This third section concludes voices to the first and second generations of Somali involved directly or indirectly with the murders. Based on my interviews, the section gives voice to the Somali male youth, families and community. The conclusion and recommendation provided in this section must be seen as a preliminary and as starting points for further, detailed research on the experiences of Somali second generation male youth originally from Toronto in Alberta.

1. MIGRATION EXPERIENCES OF SOMALI REFUGEES TO CANADA

Somali refugees, who were at one point, middle class citizens of their country left Somalia in the midst of war, persecution, and socio-economic devastation to settle in refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia or in host countries such as Canada. Soon after its independence in 1960, Somali military usurped power in a coup d'état in 1969 and turned the country into a twenty one year dictatorship that trampled the human rights of its citizens. When the military dictatorship of President Mohamed Siyad Barre was overthrown by Somali rebels in 1991, the rebels turned against each other and turned the country into a blood bath that killed thousands, starved thousands, displaced millions and destroyed all the country's infrastructure and institutions. From the late 1980s to the 1990s, Somali refugees fled to Europe and North America by the thousands because the country became controlled by warlords who turned against each other for power and resources. Once the civil war spread to the entire country, many Somalis spent years in refugee camps before relocating to host countries (Scott 2001, Opoku-Dapaah 1995).

As a result of the civil war, major governmental institutions such as healthcare and education were destroyed and Somalia's societal and governmental infrastructure was ruined. Consequently, destabilization and unsteadiness in Somalia resulted in many Somali resources being shattered, leaving struggling families with severely eroded social, cultural and economic capital. James (2010) articulates that cultural capital is the economic, political or educational attainment that parents can pass on to their children so that they may have opportunities in society. Murdie and Texeira (2000) found that Somali immigrant groups and refugees who arrived in Canada had very limited financial resources upon arrival and therefore could not afford their own homes. The socio-economic disadvantage of Somali immigrants is also discussed by Danso (2001) who concludes that Somali families were particularly disadvantaged due to the unplanned migration caused by the civil war. To support this claim, Danso (2001) compares and contrasts Ethiopian refugees with Somali refugees. Danso (2001) finds that the vast majority of Somalis arrived as refugee claimants seeking sanctuary in Canada as in-land applicants while Ethiopians were convention refugees and automatically given permanent residence. While both convention refugees and refugee claimants face barriers upon arrival, it is evident that by far, the situation of refugee claimants is far more insecure given long processes of

hearings and approval. Thus, Somali refugee claimants are in a poorer economic state in Canada when compared to the Ethiopian convention refugees.

Particularities of Somali families

The lack of proper documentation and identification was another adversity for many Somali families who sought sanctuary in Canada. Israelite et al. (1999) indicate that many Somalis left quickly and therefore left behind all of their properties, including identification (i.e. passports, birth certificates etc.) and certification of their credentials causing further delay in their asylum application. And for those who managed to leave with some documents, the authenticity of their papers was put into question by immigration officials. Since there was no longer any centralized administration in Somalia during the civil war, Somali refugees could not ask for new documents nor have their existing ones authenticated by Somali governmental agencies or diplomatic embassies outside of Somalia (Israelite et al. 1999). Given that many Somali refugees could not provide documents requested by Citizenship and Immigration Canada; the Canadian government modified the immigration act which created a new group of refugees—those without identity documents called the undocumented convention refugee in Canada class (Israelite et al. 1999).

The arrival of Somali families in Canada also coincided with large cutbacks of social services by the Ontario Conservative government of the time (Israelite et al. 1999). These cutbacks eroded social assistance payments, removal of rent controls, and other reductions in services (Israelite et al. 1999). Social policy cutbacks created a particular burden for many Somali women because many of their husbands were killed while fighting or several men were forced to remain in Somalia while their wives and children fled the war (Scott, 2001). As a result of this dislocation, many Somali women were left as single mothers who were entirely responsible for their household upon arrival to host countries. Due to lack of a male figure, these mothers also took on the role of the father for their children while coping with traumatic refugee experiences and a number of settlement barriers (Israelite et al. 1999). Studies have shown that “Black” ethno-racial groups often live in one parent households mostly headed by a female, and nearly all are destitute (Ornstein 2000, Anisef et al. 2010). For example, Ornstein (2000) found that 46.8 percent of Somalis and 38.3 percent of the “Black” ethno-racial groups live in one parent households. Findings also compare 32 percent of Ghanaians, and about 22 percent of

Eritrean and Ethiopians and 18.1 percent of Nigerians who are also female headed families (Ornstein 2000). Anisef et al. (2010) point out that there may be further deficiency in the social capital available to their offsprings residing in one parent families. In view of such family composition, children of immigrant families may be disadvantaged because single parents (on precarious income) might be unable to make essential resources available to them (Anisef et al. 2010). On the other hand, Tyyska (2006) observed that parental roles shifted and the relationships between parents and their children changed upon migration and settlement because of the lack of English fluency of the parents. As a result, parents can sometimes end up with limited control over their children's actions, especially during their adolescent years. Raising children in a very different society therefore joins the long list of challenges faced by Somali parents, already struggling with acquiring English language skills, finding affordable housing and employment (and in many cases, un- and underemployment) which all hinder their own integration as well as their second generation youth.

Settlement and Integration challenges of Somali refugees

Finding employment is a major struggle in many refugee and immigrant groups, even when they hold both educational and professional credentials in their country of origin. Various studies have shown that when immigrants first arrive, they often have to accept employment at a level below that of their education level or skills (Richmond, 2001). There is a lack of credit given to professional qualifications, credentials and training of visible minority immigrants in the job market in Canada (Danso, 2001). Many immigrants have been defacto de-skilled and excluded in the labour market. This is the case for many Somali immigrants, (predominately males) who are driving taxis in Toronto or are working menial jobs despite their high educational attainment. Danso (2001) reports that employment was a huge barrier in the initial stages of settlement for the Somali group with 22 percent in encountering employment in the job market, similar to many other newcomer groups. One Somali male respondent in Danso's research expressed his aggravation in the job market when he states: "What is so unique about this 'Canadian experience' every employer is always looking for?" (quoted in Danso 2001:10). The idea of being racially segregated in the job market clearly resonated with this Somali man. Recently, "Canada's color coded" study examined how skin color plays a role in accessing good jobs (Keung 2011). The findings illustrated that racialized or "visible" minorities are overrepresented

in the “hard-hit light-manufacturing” sector with unstable low-paying jobs, and are underrepresented in the public administration sector (Keung 2011). In the latter sector, racialized minorities were underrepresented so much that 92 percent of workers are white which brings attention the obvious —those affected by systemic racism in Toronto are not part of policy development and implementation (Keung, 2011). Thus, racialized minorities are often stuck in unemployment due to the effects of systemic racism.

Danso (2001) and Opoku-Dapaah (1995) focus on the barriers Somalis face in the housing market. Danso (2001) findings show that 16 percent of the respondents had difficulties in securing affordable housing. Opoku-Dapaah (1995) recognized that many families lived in overcrowded apartments. A 1995 study concerning the housing of Polish, Jamaican and Somali immigrants indicates that each group had different barriers with regard to housing (Murdie et al. 2003). For instance, language was a barrier for Polish immigrants that arrived in Toronto while Jamaican immigrants faced a racial barrier in accessing housing. Predominantly White areas often resent the idea of immigrants moving in their neighbourhoods. For example, one participant in Murdie et al.’s housing study stated that, “in government housing, Metro housing...some neighbourhoods are easy to get in...affluent people [whites] move out...we move to areas without security, there is not recreational facilities...basically you are reduced to something that is less than acceptable for a human being” which demonstrates the discriminatory nature of home ownership and private/public rental arena (Murdie et al. 2003:7-8). Some landlords did not quite understand the culture and traditions of the large family size of Somali immigrants or outside family relatives coming in to stay with them. An average Somali family may have six or more children. Landlords are also not considerate of family sizes and so the number of Somali families in one apartment becomes a problem. The bottom line is that housing barrier is a common problem for large immigrant families who due to their lack of financial capabilities are forced to live in smaller apartment units (Murdie et al. 2003:10). As a result, many immigrant communities live in “immigrant enclaves” in areas where immigrants live together upon arrival in the host country for both economic and social reasons (Myles and Feng, 2004). The housing units in these “immigrant enclaves” are meant to be transitional housing for low-income families or new immigrants (James, 2010). However, in actuality, families are fixed in these areas of public housing due to the high prices and limited options of Toronto’s housing

market. Myles and Feng (2004) state that Blacks live in the most deprived neighbourhoods, which consist of largely small populations of Blacks from non-English speaking countries (e.g., Somalia). Moreover, Myles and Feng's (2004: 10) research findings prove that "Black families tended to be younger, more likely to be single parents, less educated than South Asian and Chinese immigrants and reside in more ethnically and racially heterogeneous neighbourhoods."

Hidalgo (1997) proposes that shady elements such as drugs, violence and crimes are usually a result of the social conditions in the inner city low income neighbourhoods. Additionally, Hidalgo (1997) reports that families in low socio-economic areas recognize the negative influences of violence of certain neighbourhoods but continue to dwell in these areas perhaps because many lack the choice or necessary resources to relocate to a better neighbourhood. In the case of Somali refugees, many are located in Toronto's older suburbs of Etobicoke, North York and York (Murdie and Teixeira, 2000). Many live in high-rise buildings in the Dixon Road and Islington Avenue areas, or in high priority neighbourhoods (so designated by the City of Toronto for their levels of poverty) of Rexdale, and in high-rise complexes in the Jane and Finch corridors. All these areas are painted with the same media stigma —i.e. areas where immigrants crowd together and violence prevails. Lower socio-economic conditions tend to create breeding grounds for crimes and violence which results in high dropout rates of second generation youth in schools.

2. MIGRATING FROM TORONTO TO ALBERTA

A recent research entitled "*Early School living among immigrants in Toronto Secondary Schools*" acknowledges that age is an important factor in migration which determines students' academic performance (Anisef et al. 2010). The study defends that the younger the immigrant is at arrival, the better their academic performance becomes. Migration at a later age creates an increased risk for dropping out of high school because integration becomes more complex (Anisef et al. 2010: 7). Reitsma (2001), Israelite et al. (1999), Opoku-Dapaah (1995), and Scott (2001) all concurred about the particular traumas and struggles faced by Somali, Ethiopian and Eritrean refugee youth in Toronto and have the way they are disadvantaged in the education system because many of these young immigrants had "checkered" education backgrounds as

many were left in refugee camps or in the process of migrating after the civil war. Furthermore, Reitsma (2001) research confirms that Somali students in the education system are concerned with the representation given to them which affects their learning. Often times, they were mislabelled as “hyper-active” students or were “expelled quickly” (Reitsma, 2001:15). Research available from the Toronto District School Board and other sources illustrate that Somali youth have an alarming dropout rate in schools. According to a recent Board’s report, Somali students have a 36.7 percent dropout rate, which is the second highest in Toronto after Portuguese students who have a 42.5 percent dropout rate (Brown, 2010).

Perhaps, the education system does not take into account the different learning experiences of second generation youth. James (2010) contends that the education curriculum and institution is based on a Eurocentric attitude that can sometimes further disadvantage immigrant, racialized and ethnicized students. Reitz and Somerville (2004) explain that racial bias and the representation of teachers is critical particularly since there is an under-representation of teachers of color that reflect the student body. Also, the same authors point out that there is a disconnection between immigrant parents and schools because the role of parents has been devalued in the education system and as a result parents are unaware when their children are streamed into non-academic programs. Consequently, since the knowledge of the parents is not utilized, the disconnection between the immigrant parents and their children increases (Reitz and Somerville, 2004). Additionally, in working class neighbourhoods, schools have installed surveillance cameras and hired hall monitors and/or security guards to watch over students. Therefore, Black youth are socially constructed in relation to the working class immigrant neighbourhood in which they inhabit, which in most cases are located in high priority, low income and crime infested areas (James 2010).

In spite of their lack of Canadian education, Somali parents continue to aspire for their children to obtain an education and do well in Canada. Reitz and Somerville (2004) notice that even when first generation immigrants experience systemic challenges and barriers, they still encourage their children about the significance of continuing their education in order to make something of themselves and their family. James (2010) argues that second generation youth can negotiate the system regardless of the challenges they might face in regards to race, class and gender because second generation youth can participate in the unequal education system with the

support of their parents. Yosso (2005: 9-13) refers to various forms of capital that racialized communities can use to “survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression.” Yosso (2005: 9-13) identifies aspirational capital as “the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality.” According to Yosso (2005: 9-13), “aspirations are developed within social and familial context, often through linguistic storytelling and advice... that offer specific navigational goals and challenge oppressive conditions.” However, James (2010) recognizes that such aspirations may be complex for students without the middle class cultural capital –as in the case of Somali second generation youth whose parents have come to Canada unintentionally and have struggled to find means of survival for their families.

Similar to their immigrant parents, second generation youth have difficulties with employment. A recent study titled “*Race, ethnicity, immigration and jobs: labour market access among Ghanaian and Somali youth in the Greater Toronto Area*” by Shaibu Ahmed Gariba (2009) looks at the experiences of Ghanaian and Somali youth in Toronto’s labour market. Gariba’s (2009) findings corroborate with Galabuzi’s (2001) study that found race and ethnicity to be significant factor in the labour market access in Canada. In Gariba’s (2009) study, a majority of the participants came from large immigrant households with incomes under the poverty line. Even with high school diplomas or university degrees, Somali male were unemployed. Furthermore, some of the parents of these youth were university graduates from Somalia without a job in Canada. A Somali male respondent wrote “I think high youth unemployment has something to do with our color. Employers don’t tell you directly but you know it” (quoted in Gariba 2009: 225). Moreover, being Muslim appears to pose as an additional challenge for Somali male youth. Another respondent wrote “having a Muslim name and being a Black does not help you in finding a job... I think since 9/11 getting a job is becoming harder for Muslims (quoted in Gariba 2009: 226). Therefore, due to poverty and the lack of employment opportunities, many of the youth chose idleness which usually leads to a life of crime (Gariba, 2009).

Since unemployment is a significant barrier for the young Somali community, Alberta’s economic boom in 2005 until present has attracted a large number of Somali families and their children. As a result, many Somalis have migrated west to take advantage of the various

positions in the labour market in Edmonton, Fort McMurray and Calgary. In a 2007 needs assessment research, the Somali Canadian Education and Rural Development Organization (SCERDO) interviewed Somali families about their post-migration experiences to Alberta from Ontario. According to the survey, 83 percent of the interviewees were Canadian citizens, 15 percent of them were permanent residents and 6 percent were refugee claimants (Ahmed et al. 2007: 15). Most of the families migrated from Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia because of employment opportunities (85 percent), or to join their families (65 percent) in Alberta. Others mentioned that their reason for relocation was because of the Somali community that was already living in Alberta (Ahmed et al. 2007). Respondents from this research, however, indicated that they remain in “survival mode” because they have not been able to profit from the Alberta economy since many Somalis are underemployed. For example, CBC’s Fifth Estate documentary titled *The life and death of Abdirasir Dirie* shed light on the stories of Somali youth who shared similar challenges of unemployment and racial discrimination upon arrival to Alberta. One youth in this documentary expressed his frustration as he told reporter Gillian Findlay that “there’s always that stereotype that exist. If I call for a job just because I don’t have an accent the woman would be like yes the opportunity is still open, come, but when they see me it’s a totally different story, they’ll tell me the job is filled” (quoted in Anderson, 2010). As a result of this discrimination and unemployment, many of the Somali youth that were interviewed in the SCERDO study stayed home and did not work nor did they go to school (Ahmed et al. 2007). Some of the youth dropped out of high school even before completing their diploma. For those that did complete their high school diploma, they did not earn the grades they needed in order to apply for post-secondary education and thus were left with little opportunity upon graduating. As a result, youth became prey to criminal activities that are associated with youth violence.

Black youth culture (identity and systemic racism)

Gariba (2009) explains that participants in his research had conflicting identities as most of them used several identities to define themselves. Puzzled by their newly acquired identity, Somali participants in Forman (2001) research suggested that in their place of birth, they may not be identified as “Black”. Once in Canada, the offsprings of Somali families are not always conscious of the racial bias and the historical background of racism in their host countries that

construct them as “the other”. Forman (2001) suggests that Black identities are affiliated with hip hop culture and are therefore portrayed in the popular lyrics and videos of rap songs which usually illustrate gangster images, the use of guns, misogyny, coming from “the hood” or the “ghetto” which subsequently becomes accepted in the minds of the youth who are also racialized. Forman (2001) explains that these representations are significant for the Somali immigrant and refugee youth who are faced with low economic status, and raised in low priority neighbourhoods which are usually communities that consist largely of Black Canadian families. Forman (2001) also points out that the effects of cultural encounter with North American racial ladder are not only in the schools where policies undermine their opportunities, but also outside when Somali youth (in the Canadian schools) experience discrimination when they are approached by white police officers for no apparent reason. Forman’s (2001) findings support Galabuzi’s (2006) study which reports that Black youth are three times more likely to be stopped by police when compared to any other youth group in Canada. Black youth are also exposed to criminalization at earlier ages in their lives (Galabuzi, 2006). A 1999 survey by *The Toronto Star* reported that Blacks, both Caribbean and African community felt more discriminated against than any other group in the city. This survey revealed that racism is the main distress for 71 percent of the Blacks that were interviewed (Carey 1999). Therefore, it seems that racialized communities such as Somali refugee families and their second generation male youth are discriminated against based on their race and religion.

The literature reviewed in this section identifies a number of challenges that Somali families and their second generation youth face in metropolitan Toronto and now in Alberta. The literature reveals that immigrant families, especially racialized immigrants, face a plethora of barriers that make it difficult to integrate into the Canadian society. Somali immigrant families are underrepresented in the labour market and face discriminatory challenges in the housing sector. Second generation Somali male youth, coming from immigrant households in a low income economically depressed neighbourhood, identified to as “visible minorities” due to race, and face similar challenges because of their parents’ unsuccessful integration and settlement challenges associated with the refugee determination process. Unsurprisingly, many Somali youth feel discriminated against because of their ethnicity, religion and skin color. Furthermore, barriers that have hindered the integration of these youth such as discrimination and

unemployment in Toronto have motivated them to migrate to Alberta in hopes of economic prosperity. However, too many Somali male youth find the same challenges in securing a job upon arrival to Alberta.

Murders in Alberta

Young Somali-Canadian males have recently migrated to Alberta after moving out of their families' home in hopes of finding employment opportunities in Alberta. The reality is quite different. Over the past five years, 35 young Somali men either born or raised in Ontario were murdered in Alberta. Most of these cases remain unsolved as the Alberta law enforcement seems to still be collecting evidence. After the Alberta oil boom in 2005, many of these young Somali-Canadian men migrated to Edmonton, Calgary and Fort McMurray only to end up in criminal activities and eventual deaths. Sadly, a cemetery in Edmonton contains row after row of the bodies of these young men (according to CBC News). This tragic situation has been overwhelming for the Somali community, especially for the families who have lost their sons and brothers. Some mournfully have lost their only sons, while others lost the eldest son whom for many single mother families was considered "the man of the house".

Several of these youth moved to Alberta with their parents who previously faced an unemployment rate of 22 per cent in Toronto, the highest of any ethnic group (Aulakh, 2010). Upon arrival, the parents found high-paying jobs while their children were presumed to have been linked to criminal elements. It is believed that many of these youths were murdered because of these particular ties to crime. Unfortunately, some of them were merely at the wrong place at the wrong time, caught in crossfire or killed due to mistaken identity since many have common names such as *Mohamed, Ahmed, Abdi or Omar* (Aulakh, 2010).

Despite the astounding number of deaths that have occurred, the media has strangely reported or produced little outcry and awareness of the murders. It seems that the larger audience in mainstream society is still oblivious to these tragic cases and to the ongoing experiences of the Somali-Canadian male youth. While I was gathering research for the development of this paper, I have on many occasions seen startling looks—many expressing disbelief as they did not know any of these murders were occurring nor did they truly understand the issues facing the Somali-Canadian youth. It seems that the Canadian government and media establishments place little

significance on the killings of these young Somali-Canadian men. As a consequence, media coverage of the murders has been quite sparse. However, if you compare the media exposure and uproar of the mainstream community about cases involving violent deaths of members of privileged groups, one would see that headlines are different, full coverage is given to the issue and law enforcement establishments make an effort to find the perpetrators of these horrible crimes. Viewed from this perspective it seems that violent deaths involving Somali-Canadian youth are being treated as an “immigrant” problem when in reality it is very much a Canadian one, as most of these young men were born and raised in Ontario. I would argue that a closer understanding of the experience of Somali-Canadian male youth is much warranted.

Ahmed Hussien, head of the Canadian Somali Congress, in an interview with CBC News stated that most of the victims had migrated from the Toronto area to northern Alberta in hopes of securing high-paying jobs in the booming oil and gas sector. Hussien, who spent about 10 weeks in Alberta in order to understand the complex situation that is facing the Somali-Canadian youth, states that “our people are no longer immigrants...they’re Canadians who are having a difficult time integrating into the mainstream” (CBC News, 2010). Perhaps, the stories of young Somali-Canadian men and their families are also a reflection of a system that has failed them as integration is not a one-way process. Presently, there are no clear answers to these senseless deaths but what is evident is that many of the Somali-Canadian male youth who went out west for employment never made it back home creating much grief in the Somali-Canadian community.

According to the Edmonton Sun, out of those victims, 11 have been killed in 12 shootings in Northern Alberta since August 2008 (Roth, 2011). Many others have been imprisoned or wounded in violent activities. Nearly all of these young men were originally from Toronto and upon arrival to Alberta, some of these youth found themselves without formal employment opportunities and were attracted by the “easy” money of illicit activities involving crime – and ultimately leading to their deaths. Many families are struggling with the loss of their children, and are shocked and unable to understand why some of these youth have chosen the wrong path when their initial plans were to get legitimate jobs.

Most of these murder cases remain unsolved. The media depicts almost all the cases as drug related without providing the context of why and how these youth ended up in a life of crime and eventual murders. The only salient feature the media provides is that these unsolved murders are all from the same ethnic background; from the Toronto area, and are second generation Canadians from an immigrant household. This commonality, however, does not explain to the public the challenges of integration and settlement that these youth and their families have experienced over the years and the governmental neglect of their settlement and integration needs. Only a handful of the murderers have been sentenced and many cases have been closed.

The stories are tragic. Hassan Mohammed Yusuf, 41, a father of seven was stabbed to death and then crammed in the trunk of his cab after picking up three customers. Yusuf migrated from Africa in the 1990s as a refugee and later sponsored his wife and children to Ontario before moving to Edmonton in 2004. According to CBC news (2010), Yusuf spoke five languages and held two university degrees in the field of science. Even with his impressive credentials, Yusuf was a taxi driver in Ottawa but was not getting enough hours to provide for his family, so he migrated to Edmonton without his family to continue the same job. He worked extra shifts and was saving up to have them join him in Edmonton in the spring of 2005. Sadly, Yusuf was killed before he could reunite with his wife and children. The perpetrators of this horrible crime, Deidre Renne Baptiste, 23, and Ronald Adrian Crane “Junior”, 27, were found guilty of first-degree murder, unlawful confinement and robbery, and Blair Strongman “Scooter”, 25, was found guilty of manslaughter. The media coverage of their sentencing included a mention that they were well known to the police (CBC News, 2010).

Mohamed Ali Ibrahim, 24, died from a single gunshot on August 30, 2008 on the Enoch reserve at River Cree Casino west of Edmonton. According to the Edmonton Sun, this murder was an “*execution style*” as Ibrahim was shot in the back of the head (Roth and Bocari, 2011). Ibrahim had been living in Edmonton for about a year before he was killed and his family was living in Toronto. Adam Michael Brown, 21, and Alexander Edward Colin Reid, 20, were both charged with first-degree murder and attempted murder with no possibility for parole for 17 years. Police have not revealed whether they consider Ibrahim’s murder to be associated to the drug trade or other criminal activities (Roth and Bocari, 2011).

Mohamed Farah Khalif, 20, was shot on April 26, 2009 at Hermitage Park and was said to be Edmonton's tenth homicide victim of the year. An Edmonton newspaper suggested that Khalif was kidnapped by two Somali-Canadian men, Abdikadir Mohamed Abdow, 22, and Mohamed Abdilla Awaleh, 36, who were both charged with first-degree murder along with robbery and kidnapping (Zabjek, 2011). Police said they responded to the scene after receiving information from the local Somali community. Mustafa Warsame, 26, is one of the few witnesses to testify in this homicide. Warsame, who was told to get into the car that morning along with Khalif, leaped into the nearby pond after Khalif was shot. He told the court, that earlier that day the two killers became hostile towards Khalif at Abdow's apartment. According to previous police reports, Warsame was taken to a hospital against his will because of supposed threat to his family and so his mental state was questioned (Zabjek, 2011). Here was a person who came forward to testify but was brushed away as being mentally incapable based on what could be baseless accusations.

Edmonton's first homicide victim of 2011 was Mohamud Mohamed Jama, 23, fatally shot in front of Papyrus Lounge downtown after celebrating New Years. Jama was married and his wife is expecting this June. He was free on bail and was awaiting his sentencing for stabbing a man in October 2007. Sources affirm that he was involved in the drug trade (CBC News, 2011). Another 26 year old man was wounded in the same occurrence that night and was hospitalized. Yet, no arrests have been made in Jama's death and police have no suspects.

More recently, Yusuf Abdirhim, a 20 year old Somali-Canadian was beaten to death by a group of young men (according to CBC News). Abdirhim was found unconscious in Edmonton on May 19, 2011 and died a few days later in the hospital. Abdi Ali, 30 years old, killed in Edmonton. According to CBC News Ali's "body was discovered face down in an alley with a large bloodstain that had soaked the back of his shirt". Witnesses reported hearing gunshots and screams during the time of the incident. Sadly, Ali was married and was a young father.

The latest homicide this year was 25-year-old Ahmed Ismail-Sheikh who was found unconscious and wounded from a fight that took place in Edmonton on July 15, 2011 (Cummins and Ibrahim, 2011). According to Edmonton Journal, Ismail-Sheikh moved from Toronto,

Ontario this spring after he just completed his third year of University of Toronto in hopes of finding employment in Alberta.

The “no snitching” rule seems to be a code of silence reminiscent of the old “*cosa nostra*” mafia code. No one wants to be associated with the incidents that have occurred even if it means putting away killers who are capable of perpetuating these similar acts. The Edmonton police have assigned two community liaison officers to the city’s gangs and drug squad. Sergeants Patrick Ruzage and Ken Smith, both Black men, have sought to create trust and rapport with the young Somali community by organizing soccer games. Despite their ongoing efforts, Smith (quoted in Aulakh, 2010) acknowledges that the youth are not stepping forward with information as he says, “people are terrified of being snitches and then getting targeted.”

On the other hand, the Somali community is frustrated with police officials who constantly ask for only Somalis to step forward. Recently, following the death of Mohamed Mohamud Jama (in front of Papyrus Lounge), detective Bill Clark made a comment that offended the Somali community. According to an Edmonton newsprint article, Clark told the media on January 2, 2011 that there “are a number of people that witnessed it...it’s a reasonably narrow group, but they know who they are...absolutely no cooperation” from witnesses (quoted in Sands, 2011). This comment upset the Somali community because Papyrus Lounge is an Ethiopian establishment and it seems that the police detective is grouping all East Africans together when in fact there was an array of East Africans celebrating that New Year. Officer Clark also added that the parents and community leaders were turning a blind eye to the criminal activities in the youth community and that many of the Somali-Canadian youth who have been killed since 2005 were known to the police (Sands, 2011). His comment generated a public response from Mohamed Accord, the president of the Edmonton’s Alberta Somali Community Centre, and Ahmed Hussen, head of the Canadian Somali Congress. Shortly after, Edmonton’s police chief apologized in writing to the Somali community and the apology was accepted by the president of the Somali-Canadian Cultural Society, Hassan Ali and Abdul Hussein of the Somaliland Cultural Association of Edmonton (Sands, 2011).

Later on, Mohamed Accord, president of the Edmonton’s Alberta Somali Community Centre, explained in an interview that the murder circumstances are complex and certainly

racism has a role to play. He stated that, “this community is going through a painful transition. It’s like an airplane that’s flying and we are trying to fix it at the same time” (quoted in Brunschot, 2011). He also discussed that although many Somali youths have witnessed the murder of Jama, they have yet to come forward as this murder took place on New Year’s Eve, a night where most of them were drinking. However, Accord pointed out that drinking alcohol is forbidden for Muslims and thus a taboo in many Islamic cultures such as is the case with Somalis (in Brunschot, 2011). For this reason, many of these youths feel ashamed to come out and explain all of the details of what occurred that night. Accord also suggested that along with the “no snitching” code, many have not come forward due to their own involvements in criminal activities (Brunschot, 2011).

The Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) has produced two documentaries on the Somali community. The first documentary titled ‘*A place called Dixon*’ explored the tension between Somali refugees and long-time non-Somali residents, who were predominantly White. Dixon Road is an area located in Etobicoke, Toronto that it is often referred to as “little Mogadishu” in a reference to the capital of Somalia. This area has been populated mostly by immigrant groups from Africa and South Asia. Somali families who were living in the Dixon area in the late 1980’s faced xenophobia from the Dixon Corporation homeowners. The CBC documentary discussed the xenophobic reactions of non-Somali residents against their Somali neighbours. Many homeowners complained and made racist, misinformed comments such as “the Somali community... [is] a tribal community... a tribal community should have not been dumped into a condominium corporation community. You don’t mix oil and water”. Somali communities were acutely portrayed in a negative light. Qualified as backward and violent immigrants, the racism led to surveillance and the hiring of security guards for safety purposes. Somali male teenagers were particularly scrutinized and made to feel like they were dangerous. The CBC documentary illustrates the attitudes of the dominant society towards the Somali immigrant group, their culture and religion. One of the security guard that was hired called his guard dog *Mohamed* referring to the last Prophet of Islam, which further exposes the intolerance and xenophobia of the Dixon Corporation’s staff. Many years have passed and Somalis are still frequently portrayed in the same light; as recent immigrants, who come from a violent country and face challenges adapting to the Canadian life.

A decade later, the second CBC documentary examines the death of Toronto's Abdirisak Dirie in an apartment in Fort McMurray on April 21 2010. The documentary entitled "*The life and death of Abdirisak Dirie*" aired on The Fifth Estate. The documentary focused on the story of Dirie but also documented the lives of other young Somali-Canadian male who left for Alberta's alleged lucrative job market. The association of Somalis and violence is highlighted in this documentary as well. The opening scene shows the shattered and debilitated infrastructure created by the ongoing civil war in Somalia, even though most Somali-Canadian youth have either no connection what so ever with the civil war or little or no memory of it. From a Somali perspective, this is peculiar as the documentary was supposed to be about young Somali-Canadian men who have died in the recent years, and who were either born or raised in Ontario and therefore have had no real connection to the physical Somalia. For these youth, Somalia was an abstraction and a reference point to where their parents came from. Like the CBC documentary "*A place called Dixon*", the Fifth Estate documentary's emphasis on violence condemned the Somali community as violent immigrants.

Popular Somali-Canadian hip hop rapper/poet K'naan, also known as "The Dusty Foot Philosopher," joined in on the discussion of the troubles facing the Somali youth community. K'naan who grew up in the Dixon area described how he imagined Canada; a place of no war, with a fairly good standard of living, great culture and educational opportunities (in CBC News, 2010). Yet for K'naan, "these dreams are relative in Canada and do not always belong to everybody, especially if you are a Black immigrant with no means...when your parents don't come with a certain education or you don't come with wealth and you're running from war...you have nothing" (quoted in CBC News, 2010). As a young Somali man, K'naan struggled with the pain of losing close friends to violence, to deportation, or incarceration. The hip hop rapper/poet also admits that he has had challenges growing up as a Somali male youth, and sometimes had trouble with police officers as they raided his family's Jamestown house in Rexdale. In the same interview, K'naan stated that he was once even stopped while crossing into the Canada-United States border because he apparently looked "violent" (CBC News, 2010). This is a sad indication of the prevalence of racial profiling targeted at young Black males including Somali-Canadian youth.

Overall, the cases of the 35 young Somali-Canadian men who have died in Alberta have received very limited coverage by mainstream media and therefore in public debates. The fact that the media overlook these deaths is the reason why I have specifically named some of the murder victims. Since 2005, few journalists have covered the stories and issues of young Somali-Canadians. Somali community leaders have advocated for justice but still no one has tied the whole problem together to try and understand the root causes that have led these youth to move to and die in Alberta. Moreover, what is particularly offensive to the Somali community is that some of the media stories are not documented correctly, names are constantly misspelled, facts such as timelines are incorrect and references and headlines are frequently misleading. Yet the words race and racism are almost always absent in these stories. The media give a preconceived notion of the issues affecting the young Somali community, where both the audiences and creators interpret and attach meaning, thus formulating the idea of race, stereotyping and misrepresentation.

Cultural theorist Van. Dijk (1992:89) explains everyday racism in the media 'elite discourse' by arguing that the prevalent discourse can be the most damaging discourse of denial because it continues to create the dominant white consensus. Therefore, when the larger audience reads headlines about the Somali youth community constantly associated with criminal activities, the general public attitudes of the Somalis inevitably become negative. Moreover, limited media coverage of many of the Somali deaths that have occurred in the past five years, focused on the murders as an abstract without providing any context about real personal accounts of the young Somali-Canadian community. As argued by Van Dijk (1992), limited and biased media information becomes the evidence that people accept as true.

The recent deaths of Somali-Canadian youth are a crucial and complex issue in the Somali community in Canada and therefore should be of great concern for the larger Canadian society. What is evident in media coverage but not directly highlighted is that young men went to Alberta either with their families or on their own with friends and were murdered. Upon arrival, a few landed legal jobs while some gained illegal money from selling drugs and taking part in other criminal activities. Most of the media does not provide enough background of Somali-Canadian male youth, the exception being an article in SEE Magazine entitled '*Edmonton's Somalis: a community in transition.*' What is revealed but again not emphasized is that most of

these young men grew up in a single mother household because some of the Somali fathers died in the civil war, stayed back when their families migrated to host countries or have separated from their wives (Brunschot, 2011). Also, fathers like Hassan Mohammed Yusuf, moved to Alberta to work while his wife and children stayed back in Ontario.

Media coverage misses why and how we have failed these youth. We have failed these youth in formal and informal labour markets. As mentioned, according to TDSB data, Somali students have a high dropout rate in schools. Other research also shows that there is a lack of integration and settlement approaches available to these youth at a young age. Therefore, some of these youth are not receiving enough support, especially during crucial periods in their education because sometimes mothers are unable to speak English or are working long hours. Ultimately, a number of youth do not succeed in school possibly for that reason or because the curriculum does not apply to their realities. Even those who have completed a university degree are disheartened by the types of jobs they obtain. Take Mohamed Hersi, 25, as an example. His family immigrated to Canada when he was a child and he was arrested at Pearson International Airport in Toronto, on March 29, 2011 due to suspected involvement with Al Shabaab, a radical Islamist group in Somalia. Despite having a science degree from the University of Toronto, he worked as a security guard and lived in a rundown public housing unit with his widowed mother who had raised four children (cited in *Toronto Star*, 2011). It may be that these are the types of challenges that motivate Somali-Canadian men to go out west or get involved with illicit activities. But not shedding light or reporting partly on these realities reproduce the individual and structural racism faced by Somali-Canadians.

In Reaction to the Murders

Given the alarming number of deaths of young Somali-Canadian men, families have demanded justice. Community leaders and families organized *Journey for Justice* events in Winnipeg, Calgary, and Ottawa and other events are expected to be organized in Toronto in the coming months. The *Journey for Justice* event is a place where mothers have created the opportunity to have their voices heard about their experiences of losing their young sons.

Participants have also included a few youth and a handful of fathers. The objective of this event was to enable more evidence into the community on what has been happening in Alberta over the past years which has created a violent atmosphere for some youth. The event was also to support and strengthen the voices of the families who have lost their young ones in Alberta over the past years and establish relationships with people outside of the Somali community with the quest for justice. Evidently, the event was successful as families received psychological support from their community. However, the event did not accomplish the goal of recruiting communities from outside to support these families. Only one young Canadian journalist female outside the community participated whose research interest is on the cases of these young Somali-Canadian male youth.



Journey for Justice, Ottawa 2011

Image by Somali-Canadian Amin Amir

The organizers of the event Mohamed Accord and Ahmed Hussen have frequently represented the families in media, providing context and background of the Somali-Canadian experience in Canada. Though it is positive to have leaders who have made connections with police authorities and government officials to speak about these cases and the challenges of the Somali community; a question of representation arises with having two older male voices

articulate on behalf of the Somali community, especially the youth. That the Somali community cannot speak with one voice due to their unique differences (i.e. migration patterns, family dynamics, youth culture, complexities of gender etc.) remains a major concern that mothers have attempted to expose during the *Journey for Justice* event.

Meanwhile in Alberta, the provincial government recognizes the problem and has granted \$1.9 million in May 2010 to support community organizations that assist the Somali community in Alberta. \$1.3 million of this serves for a “wrap-around programming” that will assist new Canadians integrate into mainstream society. In addition to that programming, the Alberta government will spend \$400,000 on mentoring programs and \$202,000 to offer educational support and after-school programs for Somali-Canadian youth (CTV News, 2010). According to Alberta Justice Minister Alison Redford, funding for after-school and mentoring programs is intended to keep youth out of gangs and occupy their time with positive activities (in Iltan, 2010). Representatives from the Somali community, however, feel that this support is too little and, too late. They demanded a public inquiry by all levels of government to find out why these youth are being killed, why most of the perpetrators of the crimes have not been apprehended, and what the root causes of all these criminal activities are, instead of creating bandage solution programs. The frustrations of the Somali community is well expressed by Mohamed Accord who feels that money will not help the problem at hand now because “[I]t’s a medicine that they’re prescribing but they don’t even know what the disease is” (quoted in Iltan, 2010). Therefore, the Somali community has advocated for Alberta to create a government led taskforce to investigate the murders of Somali-Canadian young men. This proposal was said to be modeled after a taskforce investigation in Manitoba in August 2009 to probe cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in that province (Ogilvie, 2010). The Alberta Minister of Justice rejected the suggestion of a taskforce as being too time consuming and too costly (in Wingrove, 2010).

3. VOICES FROM SOMALI FIRST AND SECOND GENERATIONS

My interviews sought to better understand how the Somali community was coping with the murders of young Somali men, and the experiences of other second generation young males. In

order to better understand the experiences of the second generation in Alberta, I needed to understand the experiences of the first generation and how they were coping with their youth leaving and dying in Alberta.

Voices from First Generation Somali

Interviews with first generation Somali revealed a consistent response as to why Somali migrated to Canada. The majority of the Somali families, many headed by females, migrated to Canada in the 1990's specifically because of the access to opportunities for their children and to live peacefully. This commonality can be related to the civil war in Somalia that forced some of the families to migrate to neighbouring countries. The following excerpts illustrate this point:

I came to Toronto for a better life and for my kids to be better than me (Farhia, single mother).

I came for a better and safe life and future of my children...education, health, everything. I wanted them to be educated, go to university, help themselves, and help me and their countries (referring to both Somalia and Canada). If someone is educated anywhere he can work with their skills, you have future but if you don't have knowledge you are nothing...you work in labour (Amina, single mother).

Parents interviewed did not have a high educational background which resulted in lower levels of economic resources. Though this community came to Canada in hopes of opportunity, my interviews reveal that this ethnic group faces financial, employment and language barriers, resides in economically depressed neighbourhoods in the GTA, and are now facing the effects of tragic deaths of their sons and other young Somali male youth in the community who were either born or raised in Canada.

Many Somali families are headed by females —mostly single mothers whose husbands were killed in the civil war or who stayed behind while their wives and children relocated (Scott 2001). However, other families have separated in Canada due to personal reasons which have resulted in continuing challenges in the family structure for these single mothers entirely responsible for the household, and who have to raise children in the west without father figures.

When participants were asked about the challenges they faced, their answers revealed relevant factors that may affect the immigrant family structure at home. For example, one mother stated:

Difficult language, no work, if you are newcomer it's hard. You miss your family back home. Also if your single mother it's hard. When I came here, I was single mother with four kids... it's hard to raise four kids (Amina).

Similarly, another participant expressed the difficulties of being a single mother when she said:

It's difficult, like I'm mom alone, children different school, age, grades... I was facing a lot of things but we survive it (Farhia).

Not only are these mothers committed to financially supporting their children who they hope to integrate but they also value education and try to stay involved in their children's schooling in a number of ways. However, one participant explained her frustration as a single mother working long hours, when she was asked about her involvement in her children's education. Her response was:

Library, homework, tutor...but when I was working my first son he dropped out of school, so when I quit my job my three children, one graduated from high school and the other two will this year and want to go to university. But when come from work tired, it's so hard to go these places (Amina).

Amina then revealed that her first oldest son who dropped out of school was murdered after he moved out to Alberta. One other participant explained that her status as a single mother raising six children (all born and raised in Canada) affected her children as they faced differential treatment in public schools which would not have happened had their father been involved in their education. Even when she continued to be an active parent, attending all of her children's school meetings, school officials streamed her children into non-academic courses such as English as Second Language (ESL). She opined:

I communicate with my children all the time but one day they said, mom we in ESL class, they put us in ESL class. When I find out I went to school, I said "don't put my kids there". They said your child English is not very good... but they born here. Some Somali students they go in ESL classes and don't know when they have exam for other class, so they dropout after and parents don't know (Farhia).

A classic pigeonholing of students from marginalized and poor families is operationalized here. Despite being Canadian citizens, born and raised in Canada, some Somali students are streamed

into non-academic courses based on their race, culture and the fact that they come from an immigrant household. Furthermore, this streamlining confirms Reitz and Sommerville's (2004) argument that the roles of immigrant parents are devalued in the school system. As a result parents are unaware when their children are streamed. However, the respondent mentioned above demonstrated a keen awareness of what was going on in her children's education because of communication with them and also because unlike Amina, Farhia at that time was self-employed and was selling cultural items in her own basement and was involved in her children's education. It is evident here that the disconnect between parents and youth increases in situations where single mothers are forced to be away from home for long hours so that they can provide for their children. For example, Amina further explained,

I went to work to survive. What my children did I did not know because at work and then you lose your children. What is going on outside environment we don't know because not the same culture, here and back home, different society (Amina).

Other comments about the family structure emerged in the interviews with Somali community leaders who strongly agreed that the immigrant family structure at home affects the youth. For example, leaders explained that there is a lot of poverty in the Somali family units which then limits the social mobility of Somali-Canadian youth. Furthermore, leaders mentioned how the roles of the parents and children shift once in Canada and how their level of poverty is also related to their financial contribution to loved ones back home. The following comments indicate some of these issues:

Power shift at home because parents who are head of the household become handicapped by the challenges they face (for example language skills). The children pick up the language first. Also parents' skills are not recognized and parents' concern is having a roof over the head becomes a priority. Parents then work long hours and are absent from children, not because they intend to but due to work. The kids encounter the Canadian culture first and do not get enough support and dissociate with the family. Not being supported by family and perhaps they are going in potential hazard- gangs, drug dealing, and recruitment at this stage (Mohamed Accord, Alberta Somali Community Centre).

The parents are still dealing with the tragedy that is still existing back home in Somalia...they tend to assist their loved ones back home. They still want to be with their loved ones and if they were to bring them here it is hard because of frustrations with immigration bureaucracy. So...when you have your mother or father dealing with that and you see them as a child your parents depressed, it affects you psychologically,

mentally and eventually affects you physically (Abdifatah Warsame, Center for Youth Development and Mentoring Services).

Somali community leaders in different interview sessions also felt that systemic racism was working against the Somali community, especially the youth. The leaders reflected on the prevalence of discriminatory attitudes in Canada, whether in the labour market and the education system. Leaders noted:

We are still categorized as Somali, Somali, Somali just like the Jamaicans. Still, I see racism within the system and until the system changes its going to be very difficult. (Abdifatah Warsame, Center for Youth Development and Mentoring Services).

There is racism of low expectation from mainstream community for example in schools they tell you go here, to this subject etc. They identify them [32 Somali boys] with culture first, "Somali" but others are not referred to as "British" or "Ukraine" (Mohamed Accord, Alberta Somali Community Centre).

A significant observation here is that, in spite of being in Canada for some time and the children of these parents entrenched in the Canadian culture, all respondents suggested that they were discriminated against both in their home city Toronto as well as in Alberta. In three cases, Somali mothers shared their experiences or the experiences of their children of discrimination. Overall, the majority of interviewees reported that they felt discriminated against on the basis of skin color, ethnicity, religion, gender and the fact that they are categorized as visible minority immigrants in Canada. As one mother sad:

Yes, for sure. In schools, teachers, getting pulled over... my son use to get pulled over by cops all the time because he was Black, young, male. (Fartun)

Another participant mentioned that she and her family felt discrimination even in London, Ontario, prior to moving to Toronto and then in Alberta. Her response suggested that discrimination is more prevalent in London and Alberta than in Toronto as she said:

I used to live in Edmonton, different than Ontario. Big discrimination like look for a job. I worked in a factory, that place Indian, Cambodian, Ethiopian use to work with me. I quit because it's hard time for me. Even in London Ontario, I use to live there I never find a job. I apply. I use to volunteer to get future job but always who get the job? Someone who is not me. I have experience but its color (Farhia).

Another participant who came to Canada in the 2000's mentioned that she only felt discrimination after the death of her son, as she said:

That time I didn't face any discrimination but now I feel it because I see my children... my son was innocent and nobody helped me. Wrong time, wrong place (Amina).

One mother further noted that the media discriminates against Somalis and portrays them negatively. She went on to explain:

Media, they lie about us...make some innocent boys look like criminal (Farhia).

Perhaps, after seeing subjective media, some members of the Somali community question their identity and where they belong in Canada. Both Galabauzi (2006) and van Dijk (1992) agree that the media as an institution with its own logic can create images of certain groups which become the realities of racial minorities. As Galabuzi (2006:198) points out, these racialized groups are portrayed as invisible in the media when it comes to success; however they are often overrepresented in crime cases like the cases of these young Somali-Canadian men. Like Farhia expressed, those Somali youth who have passed away have been lumped into one category — immigrant youth involved in the drug trade, thus this generalization leads into differential treatment of youth.

Voices of the Second Generation Somali

Study participants consider themselves Somali but they also defined themselves as Canadian since most of the youth were born outside of Somalia and for those who were, they have never been back to Somalia, much less to Africa. According to majority of the respondents, belonging to Canada entailed living and growing up in Canada. Furthermore, the participants felt at ease with both aspects of the Somali culture and the Canadian one. Yet there was a marked ambivalence about their identity as a result of having to negotiate between different cultures. Adam, for example said,

Yes, of course. Also Canadian, a part of me is...I grew up here, it's what I know the most. I do feel that I belong to society...I don't have any problems with anyone. I fit in sometimes and sometimes stereotyped.

Two other youth described their identities as Somali. For instance Abdinasir, stated:

I ... describe my identity as first Somali; basically I am Somali-Canadian. It always starts with Somali first though. I feel like obviously I belong to the Canadian society because I was raised here, I never went back home so pretty much...in a way I am part of the Canadian society.

However, it was Mohamed who gave a more different description as he said:

A year ago, I would say no, I am Canadian. I used to hide the fact I was Somali or African because I didn't see them as good people in society, and I mean that as no successful middle class Somali families. No cops, no pilots, nothing to pride myself with. I didn't want to associate myself. The reason why I changed my train of thought is, growing up now... I've realized to see the struggles that my parents have gone through when they first came here not knowing the language, not knowing the culture, not knowing the people, the streets and how to adapt to the west; it was as though they were thrown in the middle of China not knowing the language and culture...you get what I am saying? That's what changed my train of thought to how Somali people are in the west.

Mohamed identified himself as Somali and also acknowledged and addressed the effects of immigration-related factors that have affected his parents like many other immigrants.

Many male youth in their interviews touched on some of the immigrant-related barriers that effect the family structure for the Somali community, for example, financial challenges, interaction with police officers because of the inner city neighbourhoods they resided in as both factors that motivated them to head to Alberta in the first place. One participant said:

In Toronto, we had no vehicle, we lived in government housing and we were in debt. Alhamdulillah (Thank Allah) when we moved to Edmonton we paid off our debts which were in the thousands (Mohamed).

He further explained his family's experience living in high priority neighbourhood in Jamestown, when he said:

In 2005 when we moved this was our lifestyle. Our house was getting raided in the 2005 Jamestown, Rexdale raid. Everyday interaction with police and this is not an environment that you want or your family to be in even though we weren't criminals we were being treated as criminals (Mohamed).

Unemployment among the Somali male youth is attributable to their lower levels of education. In this study, participants discussed their experiences with education and their reasons for not completing high school or university or for completing university degree and not being able to work in their home city. Some of the barriers that have affected the completion of high

school and university were due to financial challenges, for example contributing to the family household meant taking on full-time jobs with the intention of coming back to their studies. Another participant took time off of university because of a financial predicament he got into with Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) and mentioned that he did not receive proper information from the school he was attending which caused him to head to Alberta to save up for his tuition. Participants noted:

I was a nerd back in the day, like throughout high school I was getting straight 80's...the reason why I dropped out wasn't cause like I was trying to act cool or anything. I had an amazing job when I moved to Alberta. I was getting paid 22 bucks to walk dogs and it was very stupid of me to drop my education to have this full time job but when all I seen was money, money, money and I don't know growing up in government housing and not having a lot of money...when I was introduced to that job and making a lot of money like close to 3-4 thousand dollars a month...that's a lot for a 17 year old...so I was just like Alhamdulillah (Thank Allah) screw this school, I'll continue it later but little did I know that you're gonna get lazy and I am not gonna go back (Mohamed).

I was in school and then I stopped receiving student loans so in that case if you don't receive student loans you have to figure out another means of paying for school. I dropped a certain amount of courses and then they said if you drop this amount of courses (and I had no idea about that) it meant I would not receive any student loans. I did not know this information. I found out last minute. So the idea of Alberta came up and my brother was already out there, living there so he's the one who basically told me to come live with him (Abdinasir).

Two out of the five participants shared their goal plans of pursuing trades such as electrical foreman and electrician. One out of the five said that he would go back to finish his university degree once he has earned enough money to pay off his tuition and one participant who completed his degree explained that he was not looking to further his education with a master's degree or PhD but rather was looking for certificate programs that would give him more practical skills in the workforce. In general, they all believed education or pursuing some sort of professional skills to be important for their future as one participant reported:

When you are in the work field you realize that the more education you get the higher you get paid, more wages you can earn (Abdinasir).

However, one participant answer was evidence that some immigrant families have low levels of economic resources and thus Somali-Canadian youth have responsibilities of also contributing to

the household, especially when living with their single mothers. For example, Mohamed whose highest level of education is grade 11 said:

As of now, I don't plan on it [going to school]. I work full-time, it's just me and my mom and two little kids (siblings) and you know I just help around the house, so I have no plans (Mohamed).

In addition to education barriers, employment opportunities in Toronto (as well as Ottawa as one participant mentioned) seemed to be scarce and participants reported having difficulties landing a job. Conversely, one youth noted that finding employment in Toronto was not a challenge; however the jobs he was referring to were unstable labour jobs. Thus, it was clear from the answers echoed that most of these youth migrated to Alberta under financial circumstances because of unemployment in Toronto. One youth mentioned his frustration finding employment in Toronto before and after he came back from Alberta. His response was:

In Toronto, I find it huge challenges of employment here cause I guess the population is so high here and there limited amount of jobs. It took me forever to just find a decent job. Like right now I work as a screening officer at Pearson airport. My whole time in Toronto I never really seen wages or pay cheques compared to what I am receiving right now (Abdinasir).

Another youth who recently came back from Alberta reported:

Right now I am currently looking for a job and having hard time finding a job right here (Omar).

One youth explained his challenges in finding employment in Ontario and Ottawa prior to migrating to Alberta as he said:

Yes, had challenges finding employment due to lack of experience in the field. Ottawa is predominately French region, government, capital, so most jobs that are stable are government ones and they require you to speak French or have a lot of experiences...Took me a year to get a job, there are no entry level jobs...and no one would give me a chance (Ahmed)

Mohamed however mentioned that he did not have difficulties in finding employment in Toronto as he said:

I did not find no problems looking for a job... I must have just been lucky... I was working on and off labour jobs...but I did not find it difficult (Mohamed).

However, for many youth the experience with discrimination carries over with their migration to Alberta in the labour market, when interacting with their landlords, police officers and people who generalize Somali youth because of the deaths that have occurred over the past five years. One participant shared his experience with discrimination when he said:

Alberta is different, no urban culture. Urban culture is not big. You have to change your lingo, the way you dress; you have to be able to dress professional, differently in order to not get trapped into the stereotype. It kind of ruined us of being comfortable with our own style. If I see my landlord, I will dress a certain way just because that stereotype not on me. (Adam)

One respondent said that in Alberta, he noticed discriminatory practices by employers and addressed it thus:

A lot of employers will see your skin color, Black, Muslim and 30% of the time they'll say "I don't need this person" based on race, religion. (Ahmed)

Another respondent stated that,

There's a lot of racism, a lot of racism, that's what people don't mention that. There is a lot of Lebanese people and white people and they are very racist towards Somalis and we're looked down upon. (Mohamed)

Mohamed further noted, perhaps the reason why some people discriminated against Somali youth was because they felt threatened that they were migrating to Alberta, "to their areas, to their income, their whatever they felt they needed to protect".

Similarly, Abdinasir noted that in Alberta Somali youth are stereotyped because they looked a certain way, and automatically were assumed to be involved in the drug trade when random people would approach them. He stated:

I came out there and I was literally walking down the street, two different people came and asked me, asking if I'm selling, if basically I'm a drug dealer and they were basically looking for some stuff (Abdinasir).

Harassment by police (both in Toronto and Alberta) is a common complaint for Somali male youth who feel that they are randomly searched, asked to provide identification and interrogated for no reason other than that ostensibly fit the description of a particular. For example, Adam felt that Somali males are being often times generalized as he said:

The harassment from cops is as a result of what other Somalis have done, you get generalized because of what has happened in the past 3 years. Now more than ever before Somalis are getting more hated on because of the hype, the deaths, dark life style... they are hated on by the public (Adam).

Overall, participants' perception of racism and discrimination was negative and this was illustrated through experiences in varying ways, in the media, and interactions with people of authority such as police officers, in the education system and in the labour market which results in participants' difficulties in finding employment both in Toronto and now in Alberta.

Youth also suggested that some Somali youth they know were at one point involved with crime and therefore found it much more difficult to land a job once in Alberta. For example, one participant explained:

They were held back because they had previous charges. So those charges held them back from getting legitimate jobs. I do know one person whom I seen all the time he was struggling with his parole officer. Like all the time the parole officer used to check up on him and he used to tell him "I can't find a job, this place won't hire me". So... he still had to put food on the table.... pay for rent so he had no other choice but to join the drug trade and you can see personally he didn't really want to do it but it was basically his only means of survival. And that's not only him that happens to a lot of youth. Some of my friends like when they were younger they had charges. Now that they are older they really need to get legit jobs, it's like a step back, a lot harder for them (Abdinasir)

More directly another one adds:

A problem for relocation is finding jobs, I know that was a big one for Somali youth 'cause some had criminal records, umm... some weren't educated as well as they shoulda been (Mohamed).

The experiences of some of these youth and their perceptions remind us that to deliver some sort of reintegration program for youth who are engaged with criminal justice system is relevant to racialized working-class communities like the Somali-Canadian males, especially since most of the youth as one of the community leaders put it, "were charged with petty crimes, petty theft, and stupid crimes". Moreover, there seems to be a negative relationship between Somali youth and police officers which has resulted in some youth not coming forward with information that could be used as evidence in the event of crime incidents.

Making Sense of ‘Cashberta’

When study participants were asked why they and other young Somali-Canadian male were heading out west, their answers varied. Most of the mothers reported that unemployment in Toronto, interaction with police officers and discrimination in mainstream Canada were the main factors that pushed Somali youth out of Toronto. Somali youth expressed their financial difficulties in Toronto and explained that for some Somali youth peer pressure induces them to migrate as they have friends that had already migrated. Others suggested that it was a way to become autonomous and experience the world on their own. Somali community leaders however believe that migration to Alberta has been beneficial to some Somali youth who found meaningful jobs and careers there, while others have been lured into the drug trade which has led to eventual deaths of many youth. Below are some of the answers reported as to why these young men are leaving:

To make money. Easier to get job over there than here. Discrimination is also a reason in Toronto. When you are looking for a job, harder for Black male to find job than white guy (Fartun).

A mother added,

First they are looking for a job, second when they are here every time they go outside... the police catch him, ask him information and most time they arrest them.... If police are outside driving and they see five white youth male they don't stop. But they see Somali or Black like Jamaican or African... they stop, check and investigate all the time. All our community youth, most are in jails, and others are in their grave... they are destroyed and nobody know reason. For example, my son only left here for three weeks and after three weeks the police came to my house and said we found your son's dead body. Over here there are no jobs... but they are drop outs, they don't have high school diploma, so they can't get work here so I think that's the reason why they are leaving. And over there they got jobs; most of them are labour jobs (Amina).

With the exception of one youth, all of the Somali-Canadian males said that financial barrier and their families circumstances contributed to their migration to Alberta. One participant's main reason for moving out was because he wanted to use the skills gained from his university degree in a professional job. Consider the following examples:

My reasons and it's the same as other is all based on financial reasons. There is really no other reason for a person to go to Alberta. Any other aspect Alberta doesn't compare to Toronto. The only thing it beats Toronto by is the financial stand point. There's way more

employment out there, job opportunities and basically people are looking in the wrong place when they go out there (Abdinasir).

They go there because of financial situation, everybody in Toronto is having hard time finding a job over here and the wages is so much better in Alberta... plenty of opportunities over there that Alberta has that Toronto does not have, that's basically the reason why I went there. I had my sister there and her husband (Omar).

Independence...that's what everyone wants. A lot of Somali youth left Toronto so only way to leave is to convince your parents that you're going to work. A chance for them to explore the world themselves. Also to get jobs. Toronto is nice and all but you can't get nothing done, not a productive place (Adam).

For the same reason I migrated. We have...and I say this with all due respect we didn't have shit out here. We had no education, we had no money, we lived in government housing and if you were in this state, in mine and you were told that Alberta is the promise land, you can have a good job, you're gonna have a good life, small communities, government actually cares and lah lah and all of this, you would want a piece of that pie, you could so call it (Mohamed)

One of the interesting findings that emerged from the interview data was evidence that one Somali-Canadian youth despite systemic racism or the fact that he came to Canada at a young age from an immigrant parent, he landed a well-paying job in the technology and engineering field. This success was related to his educational qualifications which allowed him to gain upper mobility in the labour market in Alberta. Although Ahmed did not have the cultural capital like middle class mainstream members to assist him in negotiating the system, he certainly showed high aspirations and determination, so much that he held two employment positions,

I work as a field engineer at a medical company where I install x-ray equipment's and I also work at a shop, so yeah, two jobs (Ahmed).

Community leaders assert that there have been many successful Somali-Canadian youth after relocation to Alberta,

Many of our Somali youth in the community are succeeding despite the poverty, the drugs, the violence, and the areas in which they live...they are still making it (Abdifatah Warsame, Centre for Youth Development and Mentoring Services)

Alberta has been a mixed blessing. On the one hand, thousands of young and old Canadian Somalis have benefitted from legitimate jobs and opportunities.... On the other

hand, it is undeniable that Alberta has become province where...Somalis have lost their precious lives (Ahmed Hussen, Canadian Somali Congress).

We can either deny the fact that youth are leaving to Alberta and be in denial and say there is job opportunity or tell it as it is. For sure there are a good number of youth who go for good reason—employment and education. And there's also another number of youth that goes to Alberta because of making easy money-the drug trade. So if a youth drops out of school and is headed there that means that youth is up to no good, there's gotta be a reason why he's going (Abdifatah Warsame, Centre for Youth Development and Mentoring Services

Over the last five years, the increase in the influx of Somali youth to Alberta has become trend. It appears that the majority of the youth have moved out west in search of economic opportunities given the fact that their employment prospect in Ontario was bleak. Unfortunately a number of them got lured into the criminal underworld as they did not have proper education and marketable skills. While some youth and families have profited from the Alberta economy, many have dropped out of school, ended up unemployed, got involved in criminal activities and sadly have been killed, sometimes due to mistaken identity or caught up by negative influence. When participants were asked about what the term “Cashberta” meant to them and what their perception of the latest trend was, there seemed to be a disconnection between some of the parent’s response and the youth and leaders. For example, one mother answered,

What they know and we know is different (Farhia).

Another mother answered:

I never heard “Cashberta”, first time I hear it now... first time. I think easy way getting money; youth go there, see other youth getting money, that or labour (Amina).

Male participants noted that “Cashberta” had two meanings. On one hand it was a place of riches where people could go to earn an honest living. On the other hand, some of the participants mentioned that the environment is a place that can sometimes lead Somali youth astray and get them involved with the drug trade and engaged in alcohol and the Alberta party scene. Interestingly, participants mentioned that although they grew up in some of Toronto’s toughest neighbourhoods where violence and drugs took place, it was only until they moved to Alberta that they were exposed to this kind of life. Participants echoed:

When I went out there every person that I chilled with had no parent figure out there, they had nobody out there. Nobody to tell them “yo, this is wrong, what you’re doing is wrong, you gotta stop”. Every night was like a party night for them. So they are not ready for what they are going out for, that’s why they get deceived, that’s where deception comes from (Abdinasir).

I left from Toronto a good kid. I went to Alberta, I had an amazing job, I was making amazing money but... I was hanging around the wrong crowd, bad friends... we were doing stupidity... cause everyone has money and you don’t know what to do with it. It’s not like here in Toronto where you have extracurricular activities... so you’re gonna go to drugs, alcohol, you get what I’m saying? There’s a lot of good that came out of it [cashberta] which was jobs, paid off our debts. There’s a lot of bad that came out of it you know the deaths, seeing a bunch of friends jobless, they went into the drug trade. Me, myself I started arguing with my parents, I became a totally different human being. I remember I grew up in Jamestown, the worst neighbourhood in all of Toronto where shootings happened even in front of my house... I’ve never seen drugs, I only use to hear about these things that was going in my community. I went to Edmonton and this is where I first held a gun, seen drugs, tattooed my body... doesn’t that shock you? When kids leave this bad environment in Toronto but they weren’t exposed to this lifestyle but they go to other province and they are exposed....to me it was kinda bizarre. I thought it was going to be the promise land, the one that unites our family, takes us out of poverty... now looking back at and knowing what I know about Alberta... where people are just dying and families are being ruined and people are being introduced to drugs, guns and life of crime (Mohamed).

On the same theme, both mothers and Somali leaders suggested that the “Cashberta” trend was also a result of bad relationship between parents and their youth. This trend appeared to have an effect on the way Somali males interacted with their parents. Some of the following comments indicate that the “Cashberta” environment has ruined the immigrant family structure,

We have some bad Somali youth and some good one like every community but no respect for parents sometimes, back home part of our culture to respect and listen, and if you get kicked out they don’t have no shelter, food but here they can get it anywhere. When you are 16 you get freedom and have right to leave your parents, you can’t control your child. Government also controls how you raise your children here. When 16, 18 they can leave home and the proof is when they leave to Alberta where the money is easy money. And no family there to look at what you do. Back home it’s different. (Amina)

One community leader shared a similar sentiment and his response was:

They address elders in a disrespectful manner (Mohamed Accord, Alberta Somali Community Centre).

Participants' answers also revealed that some youth were/are impacted by the negative environment that surrounds them which affects the family. In Toronto, Somali parents sheltered their children from the negative activities in some of inner city neighbourhood often referred to as the "ghettos". However, some youth lacked the family structure in Alberta as Mohamed explained,

In Toronto we were more family oriented but in Alberta... everyone's working so there would be a good 3, 4, 5 days that I would never see my mom. She's working night shift, she's working another job in the morning... I was going to school in the morning and I was working full time at night and I couldn't handle it so I dropped out and went full time work. So, whenever I am at work, they are at home sleeping and whenever I am home and sleep they'd be at work. So, no interaction with family, that's where I think the problem started... then you turn to your friends, than this life comes you know (Mohamed).

The common pattern that runs through all of these participants' responses is that the reason why they migrated to Alberta was predominantly due to financial barriers faced in Ontario; however they did not always foresee the challenges of unemployment, discrimination and the negative influences waiting for them in Alberta. Their descriptions suggested that it was a place of "deception" where they were exposed to shady elements that they have never experienced in Ontario. As illustrated, this is because most of the Somali male youth were without parental supervision once they arrived in Alberta.

Conclusion: Next Steps

The patterns and themes that emerged from the responses of participating youth, families and leaders demonstrated insight as well as variations, as to the challenges facing the Somali-Canadian community and the reasons why so many Somali male youth have left Ontario to find employment in Alberta. Findings show that first generation immigrant parents have come to Canada to build a better opportunity for their second generation children. This opportunity in most cases is linked to education and employment. Education in many of these families was believed to be the key to a successful integration and future. This was encouraged by parents who were unable to pursue their education and continue to face challenges with employment in Canada. Also, the responses of participants support the literature review of barriers facing the Somali community, such as low levels of social capital because of Somali families unintended migration journey and the fact that some families are headed by single mothers who reside in

high priority neighbourhoods in the GTA and have had numerous experiences with discrimination on the basis of their skin color, culture, gender and immigrant status. All of these challenges seem to impact Somali male youth integration in Canada. However, financial barrier was reported as the common reason why many of them have left.

Second generation male youth identified themselves as Somali and felt they belonged to Canada. However, they still expressed feelings of racialization from the Toronto community. As illustrated, discrimination also continues to be a factor once Somali youth migrate to Alberta. This discrimination affects their interactions with landlords, police officers, mainstream society and employers. Interestingly, study participants revealed that it was only after leaving in Alberta that they engaged in shady activities because they confirmed that they lacked that family structure that sheltered them when they were living at home.

Community organizations in Toronto and Alberta have assisted numerous Somali-Canadian youth with regards to mentorship programs, afterschool programs, employment assistant programs and some settlement services for their families. Furthermore, they have engaged in Canadian media to promote positive image of the Somali community. More recently, the Edmonton's Somali-Canadian community launched several initiatives that will hopefully reduce the crime in the community. For example, counselling for at-risk youth and youth who are already in the criminal justice system. Also a poster campaign was created to encourage community members to submit information to police to help with murder investigations (Ibrahim, 2011). Still, the findings among the Somali leaders indicate that youth have difficulties integrating into mainstream society. According to Mohamed Accord of the Alberta Somali Community Centre,

Integration is a challenge. Lack of opportunity and acceptance from mainstream society. There are no programs for our youth (Somali youth who born here, or came at a young age). Resources and money available are not services in our interest but instead are associated with mainstream society. Programs such as recreational programs and afterschool programs, I call them path up solutions. Right now we are advocating on their behalf, we need to incorporate real issues into services.

Although change is difficult, the need of it is tremendous. Many respondents agree that change must come from the Somali community, especially the Somali-Canadian youth,

Youth need to accept responsibility. They need to understand the importance of education and aspire to continue their post-secondary education (Abdifatah Warsame, Centre for Youth Development and Mentoring Services).

Youth need to accept ownership. They need to get involved in their country (both Canada and Somalia); it does not only belong to first generation but also to the second generation. Some of them think that it is not their responsibility, and they expect elders to take on the role like myself, but who will take on my role after? (Mohamed Accord, Alberta Somali Community Centre)

Leadership and responsibility of the youth is significant in the progression of the Somali diaspora. But in order for such ownership and leadership to develop, the community needs some additional research and actions in order to alleviate the numerous integration barriers. Research about the Somali refugee experience is vital in the academic field as well as understanding of the cultural and socio-economic background of particular groups and the role of education in their lives in the pre-migration and post-migration context. More research is needed to further develop our knowledge of Somali-Canadian male youth and their experiences in the labour market, education, discrimination, and interaction with police officers in particular and settlement and integration challenges. As well, research on Somali-Canadian female youth and their experience during migration to Alberta would certainly contribute to the ongoing conversation within Canada about integration, immigration and multiculturalism.

Specific action/research is also needed to develop a crime prevention committee with Toronto police and Alberta police to improve the relationship between officers and urban youth in the inner city neighbourhoods of both cities. More mentorship programs where Somali youth have the opportunity to interact with progressive Somali young adults are also needed. Overall, a critical examination of the current settlement models of integration, and the extended role of Somali community organizations need evaluation and support, especially

in regards to youth clients in order to perhaps develop new alternative models that better integrate or support Somali families and youth. To this end, it might be important to customize settlement models for immigrant families, like Somalis, that come flee from civil wars and from refugee camps that are already traumatized by the experience –especially as human and environmental devastations persist in Africa.

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Appendix I

List of those interviewed

Ahmed (2011). Phone interview with Sagal Jibril. January 31, 2011.

Mohamed (2011). Personal interview with Sagal Jibril. February 13, 2011.

Abdinasir (2011). Personal interview with Sagal Jibril. February 18, 2011

Omar (2011). Personal interview with Sagal Jibril. February 18, 2011.

Adam (2011). Phone interview with Sagal Jibril. April 12, 2011.

Fartun (2011). Phone interview with Sagal Jibril. April 10, 2011.

Farhia (2011). Personal interview with Sagal Jibril. March 1st, 2011.

Amina (2011). Personal interview with Sagal Jibril. February 15, 2011.

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Appendix II

Sample questions for respondents interviewed

Somali-Canadian Youth

Were you born in Somalia? If so, when did your family migrate to Canada?

How would you describe your identity (do you define your ethnic background as Somali)?

What is the highest level of education you have obtained? Do you have any specific trade skills within a profession?

Are you planning to pursue higher education? Why?

Do you have any challenges in finding employment in Toronto? Are you currently working?

What are the reasons (or what are your reasons) why many Somali male youth migrate to Alberta?

What motivated them/you to go there?

In what way has your financial situation impacted your decision to leave?

What have been the challenges of such relocation? Or what do you expect the challenges of relocation to be?

Tell me about your experiences upon arrival to Alberta? What were the challenges you faced in finding employment in Toronto and Alberta?

What is your overall impression of “*Cashberta*”? What does *Cashberta* mean for you?

Overall, do you feel that you belong to the Canadian society?

Somali Families

Why did you choose to come to Toronto?

What are the challenges you faced with settlement in Canada?

Have you experienced any form of discrimination upon arrival? If so, explain.

What are the challenges you face and do you think the challenges you face affected your children? How?

Have you been active in your children’s education (i.e. homework, parent-teacher interview etc)?

What are some reasons that have prevented you from being active in their education?

Have any of your children ever had ‘problems’ in or with school?

What are the opportunities who had hoped for your children in Canada?

Where do you access information and resources that you and your family need?

Why do you think your son /and/or many Somali male youth are leaving Toronto to Alberta?

What is your overall impression of “*Cashberta*”?

Representatives/Service Provides/Community Organizers

What is your role in the Somali community?

How have you assisted Somali refugee families and their children?

What do you think are the challenges faced by Somali second generation youth (male youth in particular)?

What are some examples of programs are in place to assist them with these challenges?

What barriers would you say is most common for youth in your community?

Do you think the immigrant family structure at home affect the youth? If so, in what way?

Why do you think youth are leaving to Alberta?

What are your concerns? What measures do you think need to be taken in this case of the Somali male youth?

What are the impacts of the recent wave of crime on the community?

What are the measures needed for youth?

What is your overall impression of “*Cashberta*”?