



In a world marked by constant displacement, where does one truly find home?

Studied through My Somalia vs. My Parents' Somalia

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Fig. 1. Mogadishu, My Somalia (2015)

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Introduction

In the tapestry of human history, few threads are as profoundly woven as the impact of conflict. Somalia, a nation marred by decades of strife, stands as a poignant canvas on which the narrative of war and resilience has been painted across generations. In this turbulent history, my journey, encapsulated within 'My Somalia,' diverges starkly from the experiences in 'My Parents' Somalia.' Their recollections are etched with memories of pre-war (a more peaceful land) and following the war, there was a subsequent period characterised by war-induced displacement while my perspective, shaped by a different era, carries the weight of inherited narratives.

This research embarks on a journey through the complex landscapes of constant displacement, aiming to unravel the elusive concept of 'home'. I aim to explore this concept through many viewpoints like Susan Stewart's (1984) exploration "On Longing". It delves into how the experiences of 'My Somalia' and 'My Parents' Somalia' have molded our perception of 'home' across three generations: my grandmother, my mother, and myself, each in chronological order amidst the backdrop of ongoing conflict and displacement. As we undertake this exploration, a fundamental question guides our path: In a world marked by ceaseless displacement, where does one discover the essence of 'home'?

Literature Review

Conversations

According to Maurice Halbwachs (1992:46) in his book "Collective of Memory" when an individual happens to reopen a book from their past a flurry of memories and a rebirth of some sort happens on the inside. We are incapable of remembering everything that has occurred in our lives, just as one would carefully examine each puzzle piece, I will carefully reflect on the memories I do have and see if the missing parts can be put together through interviews with family members, mapping, timelines, and journaling as the information becomes overwhelming or as my memory becomes hazy. I have also studied some of the items I carried with me daily like my Quran. The interviewing style was more conversational and was held at different points that spanned over the course of three to four months, some were over the phone while the majority were in person. To optimise the value of the conversions, I used photographs that I have found around the house and introduced memories as I remembered them. I wrote down the main question that was asked or kept arising: How did you feel living in an atmosphere like that? How did it feel when you had to move away? What items did you always take with you to your next home?

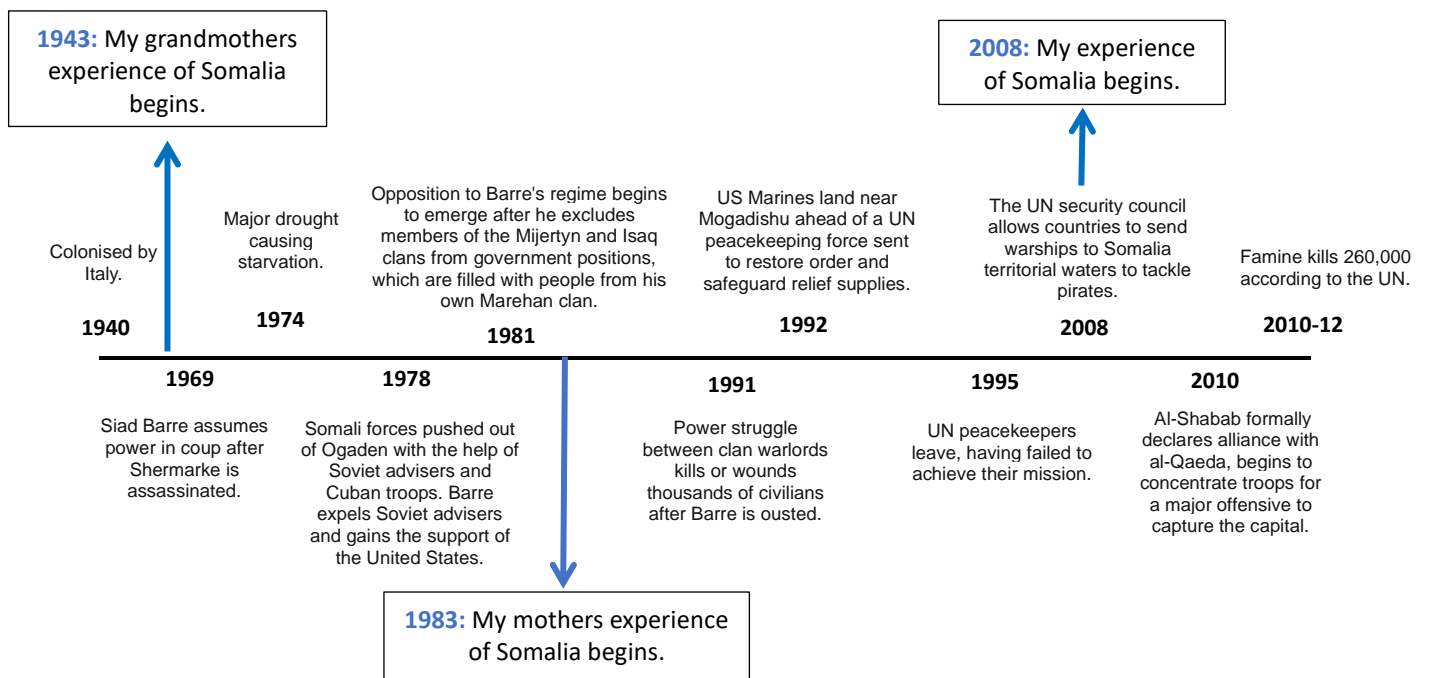
Research Context

In supporting this endeavour, I delved into literature that illuminates Somali culture and examines how displacement profoundly impacts the quest for a sense of belonging and a place to call home. Through this exploration, it became evident that displacement transcends mere physical relocation; it is a multifaceted journey influenced by the interplay of diverse factors, some of which are deeply personal. During civil wars, civilians frequently face violence emanating from conflicting factions. Adhikari (2012) underscores that this war-related violence does not just harm individuals; it also devastates infrastructure and diminishes economic prospects. Consequently, the compelled migration of civilians, a frequent repercussion of such conflicts, thrusts individuals into daunting circumstances, compelling them to deal with unfamiliar governance systems, legal frameworks, and societal expectations. This cycle of violence not only inflicts immediate harm but also disrupts the fabric of communities, forcing individuals to adapt to new environments amidst the ruins left by conflict. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2022) highlights how people's political rights, resource access, and overall control over their lives can undergo major transformations, significantly altering their circumstances. It unfolds as an emotional shift due to the rupture from familiar surroundings and relationships that can lead to a mental transformation as an individual may grapple with stress, anxiety, and trauma while they navigate unfamiliar environments and cope with the challenges of adapting to new circumstances.

War-induced displacement presents a global challenge. For instance, consider Sudan, where conflict recently flared up due to mounting tensions in April of 2023. The redeployment of Rapid Support Forces (RSF) was perceived as a threat by the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) after months of tensions between military chief General Abdel Fattah Burhan and RSF commander General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo. While the narrative appears to revolve around control of key sites, with each faction orchestrating a military coup that disrupted Sudan's path towards establishing a democratic system (Magdy.S, 2023), much of the chaos unfolds in cities, unintentionally harming civilians (BBC, 2023). There has been a notable rise in the number of individuals forcibly displaced, whether within their own nations or beyond borders, in recent years. As of August 2022, the invasion of Ukraine led to the displacement of around 6 million people, creating Europe's largest and fastest displacement crisis in decades. In the same vein, Russian missile strikes damaged city infrastructure, depriving citizens of essential services like shelter and electricity, underlining the urgency and scale of this issue (The IRC in the EU, 2023). These damages highlight the extensive and enduring repercussions of war, revealing its far-reaching impacts. For example, the outbreak of war in Ukraine has caused food, fuel, and fertilizer prices to skyrocket, disrupted supply chains and global trade, and roiled financial markets, potentially leading to a global food crisis. War, regardless of its scope, sets off a domino effect that disrupts the lives of innocent people.

Within the realm of these crises, my research delves into the personal repercussions of war-driven displacement on the idea of 'home'. I believe this is crucial as it focuses on the far-reaching consequences of war-induced displacement, particularly in reshaping the fundamental idea of 'home'. While numerous studies have investigated this subject, there is a notable gap in the exploration from a deeply personal dimension of these challenges—an angle I have embraced as an insider. By positioning myself as a representative of those who have directly experienced such displacement, this research aims to offer a more nuanced understanding and aims to fill a critical void in comprehending the emotional, psychological, and social complexities faced by those affected by conflict-induced migration.

A Timeline of Somalia



(BBC,2011)

The Family

While delving into the family archives, I encountered a challenge in locating photographs featuring all or even a subset of family members. Nonetheless, the collection boasted numerous individual snapshots captured over the years.

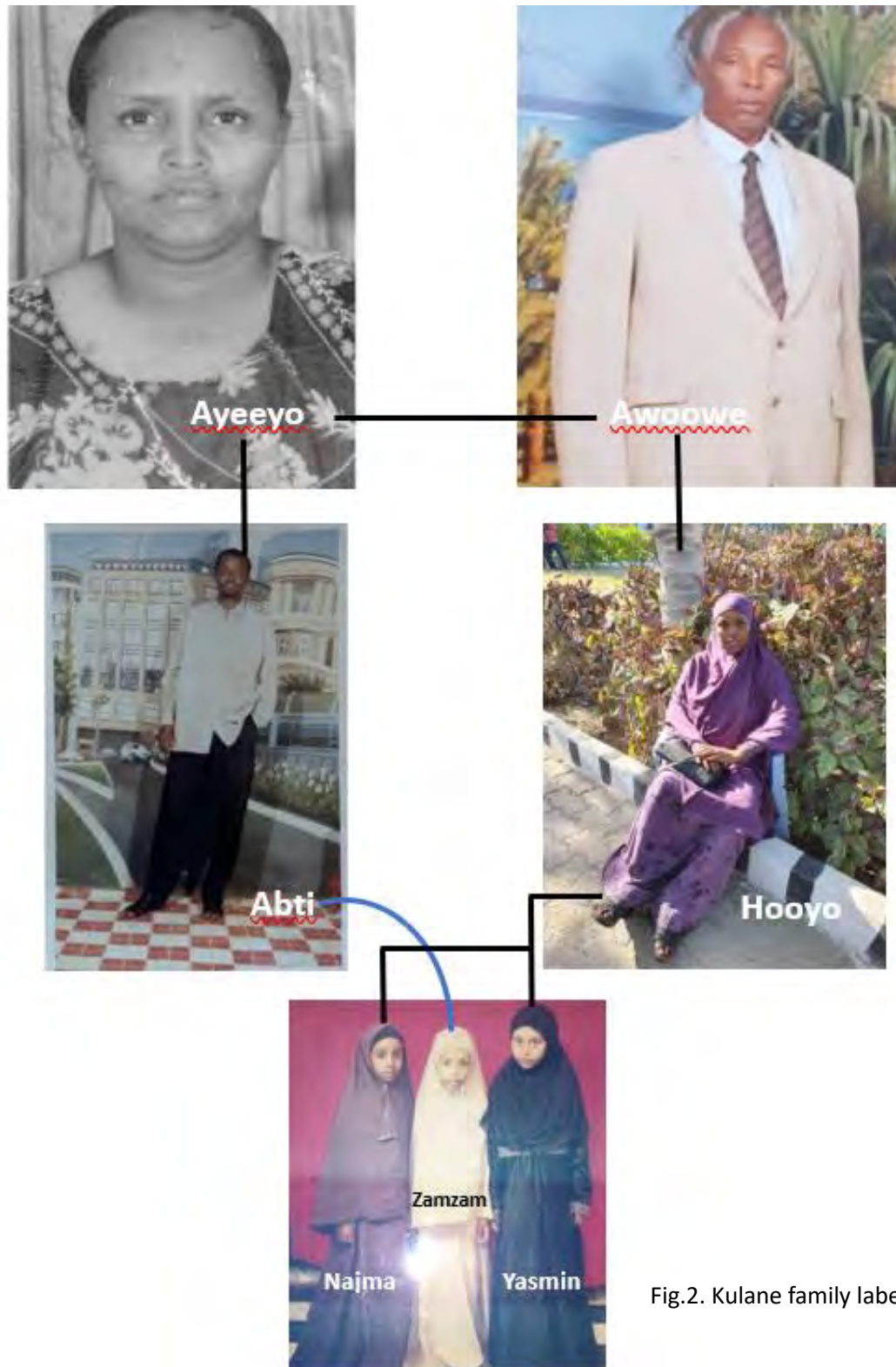


Fig.2. Kulane family labelled (2023).

My grandparent's Somalia

The background

As Abdi Samatar (cited in, Somalia: The Forgotten Story Al Jazeera World, 2016) aptly noted, the external perception of Somalia due to the tragedy of the civil war over the last 30 years is likened to an orange with a damaged peel that conceals the richness of history and heritage within. Among my family, *Ayeeyo* (grandmother in Somali) was the only one who experienced the sweetness and cultural richness of this land.

I lived with *Ayeeyo* from 2008 to 2012, and the recollections I draw upon originate from the tales she shared during my childhood as well as a few things I witnessed. She was the only girl from a family of eight on her mother's side, although sometimes it felt like a family of seven due to her father being absent much of the time with his three other wives (Abdi & Kulane, 2023). She spoke to me about farm life and tradesmen. Her stories painted vivid pictures of farm life (which brought light to her face), the roles of tradesmen, and the enduring significance of the nomadic pastoral culture within the Somali community as shown in Figure 3. For centuries, this nomadic pastoral lifestyle has been the livelihood of the Somali people in the Horn of Africa (Ahmed and Herbold Green, 1999:2). According to (Cassanelli LV, 2016), pastoralists are usually isolated minorities living in territories remote from the central government and their deep-rooted tradition of self-sufficiency and self-rule was often seen as a direct challenge to the authority of central governments, posing a perceived threat to the overall stability of the nation because of this, farmers would attach themselves to powerful nomadic clans or seek military security as many local Somalis associated farmers as descendants of slaves. Her family came from Jamamo which is 362 km from Mogadishu (Distance Calculator: 2015), as shown in Figure 4 an area that is considered as part of the countryside where nomadic pastoral culture was prominent. Contradictory to the consensus, her household were one of the more affluent families in Jamamo. For *Ayeeyo*, home was an expansive land abundant with flocks, fresh air, thriving crops, and a diligent community working the land alongside them, at first.



Fig. 3. Pastoralism in Jamamo (2018)

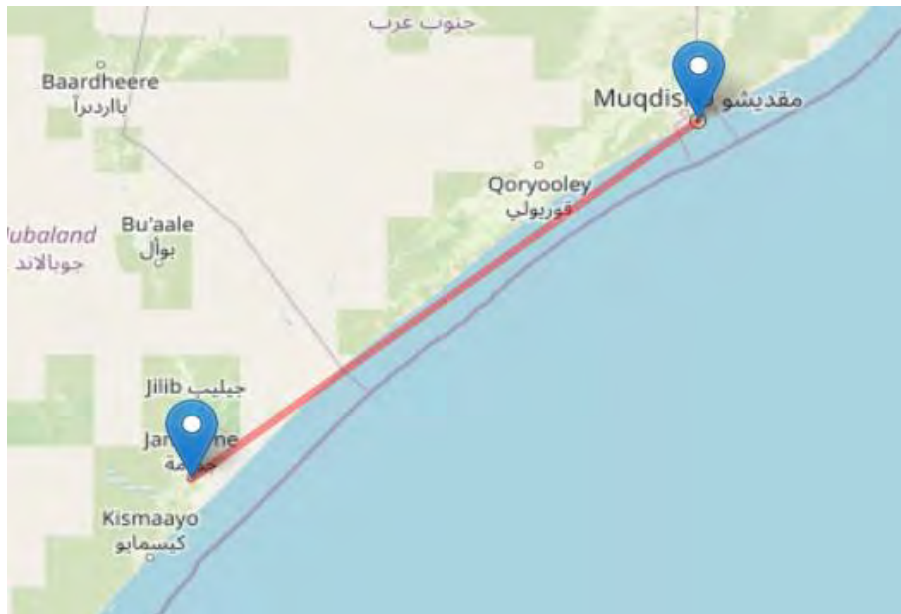


Fig. 4. Mogadishu to Jamamo (2023)

The Marriage and The Business

At the young age of 16, *Ayeeyo* was introduced to *Awoowe* (granddad in Somali), originally from Xar-redeeray (a region in the west of Somalia). *Awoowe* had migrated to Mogadishu and joined the army. His military service led him to Jamamo, where he crossed paths with *Ayeeyo*. Their marriage was arranged by *Ayeeyo*'s father in 1959, but after some refusal, she finally agreed to marry him. However, even post-marriage *Ayeeyo* still refused to be near him as a result "he went back to Mogadishu and married another woman. After some time, *Ayeeyo* accepted him, and he returned to Jamamo to start a family with her". However, *Awoowe*'s army duties and concurrent marriages posed challenges to their union (Abdi & Kulane, 2023).

There seemed to be an inheritance of characteristic traits from *Ayeeyo*'s father, who had several wives, which may have influenced her decision to choose a husband who mirrored similar traits, as a result of a subconscious desire to fill a void or come to terms with her father's absence. This could be seen as a manifestation of the psychological phenomenon known as repetitive compulsion. This effectively showcases the notion that the transmission of collective memory is influenced by the effects of trauma and its potential for intergenerational inheritance, which entwines biological and psychological elements into the shared memory fabric (Simply Psychology: 2022).

Awoowe's army duties and the constant deployment meant that starting a family became expensive so *Ayeeyo* "started a business to support the family, while still living in Jamamo" (Abdi & Kulane, 2023). Her new business was a fabric retail company, where she served as a vendor and provided the community with an array of fabrics that they used to create their everyday attire. The business was on a steady course between 1940-1979 and even exceeded her expectations to the point where she planned to sell and export her fabrics to customers worldwide in "India, Dubai, and in Kenya she managed to reach Dubai" (Abdi & Kulane, 2023). However, in 1980, things took a turn for the worst. The business progressively deteriorated over the following decade, until it ultimately collapsed. An important turning point was the outbreak of the Civil War in Somalia which caused people's priorities to shift from buying clothes to ensuring their survival, leading to the demise of the business. Another cause of the business's downfall was the need for *Ayeeyo* - after having three children- and her husband to move from the rural area to the city of Mogadishu. The stability of the business was further impacted by this difficult transition as she struggled to adjust to the new environment and the ensuing changes. Her challenges were made even more difficult by her husband's second marriage, compounding the difficulties as the family expanded. The country's deteriorating economy further intensified their financial woes. Amidst this turbulent period, she faced her own battle, solidifying her determination never to depend on assistance from others (Abdi & Kulane, 2023).

Poetry

Whenever *Ayeeyo* spoke about work, or her family life she would often burst into song. These songs seemed to perfectly match the topic or evoke memories of similar situations to what she was occupied with. It felt like she had a song for every possible scenario. Her songs were not only poetic but also emotionally charged, often expressing love and heartache, all presented in an eloquent form of Somali that I struggled to fully comprehend at the time.

(one of the poems, annotated is available below)

Song: Ahlan wasahlan by Axmed Gaceyte, Marwo and Shamso diidan

Dahir

Ahlan wasahlan diidan

Waa kulanti Dahabee diidan

Alle ha yna daayee diidan

Ama diidan ama dunida

Damacaygii Qaadde diidan

Nafta maas daweesid diidan?

Deeqa

Ahlan wasahlan Daahir

Anigaa diyaaree Daahir

Aan is Daadaheynee Daahir

X 2

Ama Daahir amaa dunidaa

Ruuxi wax dudsiiya Daahir

Nabsibaa duljoogee Daahir

Nabsibaa duljoogee Daahir

Friend

Ahlan wasahlan Deeqa

Hadal Aanan dooneyn Deeqa

Anigaa Iska Diidee Deeqa

X 2

Ama Deeqa amaa dunidaa

Waxa la igu dayayaa Deeqa

Anna duguugu maagiye Deeqa

Anna duguugu maagiye Deeqa

Translation

You refuse to accept my hello.

It's a golden meeting

May God let us live a long life

Its either you or the world

I took my love away

Why Don't you treat my soul?

Hello Dahir

I am ready Dahir

Let's be romantic Daahir

X 2

Its Either Dahir or the world

A soul that hides thing Dahir

Is a person who never rest Dahir

Is a person who never rests Dahir

Hello Deeqa

I refuse to listen to things I don't want to hear

Deeqa I don't want to her this conversation

X 2

Either Deeqa or the world

I am being imitated by Deeqa

I don't want to grow old listening to this Deeqa

I don't want to grow old listening to this Deeqa

(MAADEYS, 2020)

This spoken poem, originally in an archaic Somali, unfolds as an emotionally charged exchange between two individuals, Dahir and Deeqa, with a recurring motif of their names highlighting the personal and intimate nature of their conversation. The poem delves into themes of love, longing, and the complexities of their relationship, captured through a dialogue rich in cultural and emotional depth.

Dahir's initial lament over Deeqa's refusal to acknowledge his greeting sets the emotional tone for the poem. This moment reflects his deep desire for her recognition and signifies his yearning for a connection with her. At this point, he constantly refers to her as "*diidan*" and the absence of Deeqa's name symbolises that he is trying to emotionally detach himself and refuses to acknowledge her directly. He is trying to distance himself from rejection and the pain associated with it and by not mentioning her name, he is showcasing his own agency, by trying to regain control over the situation. The phrase "golden meeting" used by Dahir emphasises the preciousness of their relationship, suggesting that their interaction holds immense value and significance. His prayer for a long life together highlights his aspiration for a lasting and meaningful connection, a wish for their relationship to endure over time. The line "It's either you or the world" conveys the intensity of Dahir's emotions. Throughout this process, it appears as if he presents Deeqa with a choice, indicating his decision to withdraw his love due to her prior rejection. His question, "Why don't you treat my soul?" reveals his longing for an emotional connection and understanding, underscoring the depth of his feelings. Deeqa's response signals her readiness for romance, echoing the theme of choosing between an individual and the world, highlighting the profound significance of their relationship. The ensuing dialogue explores concealed emotions and the inner restlessness that arises from hiding true feelings. Where he refuses to mention her by name, she does the complete opposite. The constant repetition of his name signifies her desire to maintain a connection and emphasises his presence in her thoughts.

The poem then shifts to the perspective of Deeqa's friend, who expresses deep concern about Deeqa's idealisation of Dahir and her perception of him as potentially unsuitable. The friend presents Deeqa with an ultimatum, asking her to choose between their friendship and Dahir, symbolising the "world" within the poem's context.

Remarkably, the poem introduces a linguistic and thematic irony. Dahir's name, meaning "clean," contrasts with the friend's argument that he may not have a clean heart, suggesting a discrepancy between his outward appearance and true character. Additionally, Deeqa's name, signifying "very giving," which creates an ironic contrast since she appears to give her heart to anyone, possibly alluding to her vulnerability or naivety in relationships. The hidden themes within the poem adds layers to the emotional exchange, exemplifying the intricacies and subtleties inherent in Somali poetry, which often conveys profound meanings and reflections through carefully chosen names and idiomatic expressions.

The intricate layers in this poem mirror the complex layers of *Ayeeyo's* life, beginning with her life-altering marriage and later enduring the continual upheaval caused first by the marriage and then by the war. The poem effectively encapsulates *Ayeeyo's* experiences, chronicling her path of transformation, adaptation, and resilience, much like Deeqa's journey. With inner turmoil and external obstacles, she faced trials and setbacks that resonate deeply with her life. *Ayeeyo's* story unfolds as a delicate balance between accepting marriage and yearning for personal space, evoking a profound sense of resilience, vulnerability, and tenacity. Upon reflection, it becomes clear that *Ayeeyo's* constant engagement with poetry served as her anchor of stability, her version of 'home' . Despite lacking a physical form, poetry emerged as the singular constant in her life. This intangible yet profound connection to the art form adds a layer of depth to her narrative, illustrating the potent ability of art to offer stability within the turbulent currents of life.

As time passed, the internal battle persisted, and amidst this struggle, *Hooyo* (Mum in Somali) was born three years later, adding yet another layer to the tapestry of *Ayeeyo's* life...

My mother's Somalia

In contrast to *Ayeeyo's* rural origins, *Hooyo* was born in the capital city in 1983, enjoying a relatively stable early life shielded from the adversities that marked *Ayeeyo's* experiences. This deliberate protection can be seen as a demonstration of a mother's instinct, aiming to spare her daughter from the harsh realities of life. However, this period of relative calm lasted for only seven years before tumultuous times ensued. Despite the family's initial stability, *Hooyo's* formal education faced a blockage due to tribal conflicts and the subsequent unrest in the country in 1990. The collapse of the Somali state, following twenty-one years of oppressive dictatorship under Siad Barre since October 1969, led to a brief democratic system exercise in 1990. However, the opposition forces were ill-prepared to maintain law and order, failing to restore state institutions. As highlighted by Abdi Dirshe (2013), the resulting chaos witnessed each faction independently declaring triumph over the regime, leading the nation into a state of civil war.

For *Hooyo*, a pivotal day remains etched in her memories as she and *Ayeeyo* set out to the market in Kamsuumo (still within the borders of Jamamo) to start a new business venture. However, this day turned out to be far from ordinary. On their way back, the atmosphere thickened with tension, eventually erupting into a symphony of chaos shouts, gunfire, and the piercing echoes of violence, taking over the whole street. Amidst this pandemonium, *Hooyo* and *Ayeeyo* found themselves forcibly separated. *Hooyo's* world, at the tender age of eight, suddenly transformed into a frightening maze as she navigated through the mayhem, her heart pounding with fear. "This period was horrible," she recalls, "wandering around trying to find refuge". In her quest for safety, *Hooyo* sought refuge with *Ayeeyo's* cousin, whom she had met only once before. However, resentment simmered within *Hooyo* due to the cousin's costly smoking habit, which deprived the young entrepreneur of her hard-earned money in a place lacking any economic stability. Undeterred by adversity, *Hooyo*, molded by *Ayeeyo's* entrepreneurial spirit, initiated her venture, selling tea, sugar, bananas, and cigarettes. The sourcing of materials became a ritual, involving chasing an old man every early morning, spending all day in the markets, bargaining, and resting at a local home that was known to everyone as a resting place. Unbeknown to both, *Hooyo* and *Ayeeyo* found refuge for washing up and prayer, though at separate times (Abdi & Kulane, 2023).

In the evenings she would return, carrying the load of merchandise on her small shoulders. To safeguard her earnings, *Hooyo* devised a resourceful strategy by burying her money in the sandy embrace under her pillow, a symbolic gesture of hope for her mother's return every night, just so that she can give it to her. *Ayeeyo*, on the other hand, faced her tribulations with a dying daughter to tend to and the relentless anguish of searching for her missing child amidst the turmoil. The separation imposed a heart-wrenching challenge on both, each battling their demons against the backdrop of societal upheaval. "This agonising separation persisted for six to seven months", an eternity marked by uncertainty and heartache where *Hooyo* convinced herself that *Ayeeyo* had passed away and unfortunately would never get to see her again. The reunion, sparked by whispers of a resilient young girl reselling materials, unfolded with bated breath. *Ayeeyo*, guided by the familiar details, waited in the market overnight with a heart heavy. As *Hooyo* emerged, frozen with disbelief, the emotional crescendo reached its peak a moment of reunion, where words proved insufficient to capture the depth of relief, joy, and sheer astonishment (Abdi & Kulane, 2023).

Following this story, I inquired of *Hooyo* whether having gone through such experiences in Somalia, she would choose to reside there. Her face lit up with eagerness as she replied, "Of course! Somalia is a beautiful land that is improving, and I wish I could live there now." Despite her romanticised vision of returning, it sparked intriguing questions about the nature of her attachment to the homeland. She highlighted a prevalent misconception about constant fear emphasising that, while fear was certainly present, one eventually becomes accustomed to it and at a young age there was an eagerness to investigate whenever they heard gunshots or commotion—instead of fleeing, they would often run towards it.

My Somalia

Upon my arrival in Somalia back in 2008, I discovered that majority of my family had already established their settlement in *Ceelasha Biyaha*. Curious about the name, my initial searches proved to be unsuccessful until I unearthed its origin of being “a name coined by the settlers after the Ethiopian War” (Abdi & Kulane, 2023). Nestled between Afgooye and Mogadishu, as depicted in Figure 5, *Ceelasha Biyaha* initially presented a stark picture - a barren, desolate, severely dry landscape. In Somali, '*Ceelasha*' translates to 'well,' while '*biyaha*' means 'water'. The name encapsulates the area's significance, intimately linked to a primary well that sustained the settlers with its water source. Overtime, this once-overlooked terrain has evolved, earning recognition and its place on contemporary maps.



Fig.5. Google Maps: [Content created by users] - *Ceelasha Biyaha* (2023)

The surroundings

My initial encounter with this landscape remains etched vividly in my memory. Upon our arrival from the airport, the car came to a halt in the thick, humid air that enveloped the surroundings. Ahead of us, a seemingly infinite sandy road extended into the distance, setting the tone for the vastness of this terrain. As my gaze surveyed the surroundings, houses emerged, crafted predominantly from corrugated metal sheets as shown in Figure 6 - a resilient testament to the settler's resourcefulness. Each structure stood grounded, firmly anchored in the earth while windows devoid of glass were adorned with a loose cloth, serving both as makeshift blinds and curtains, illustrating the adaptability ingrained in the community's lifestyle.

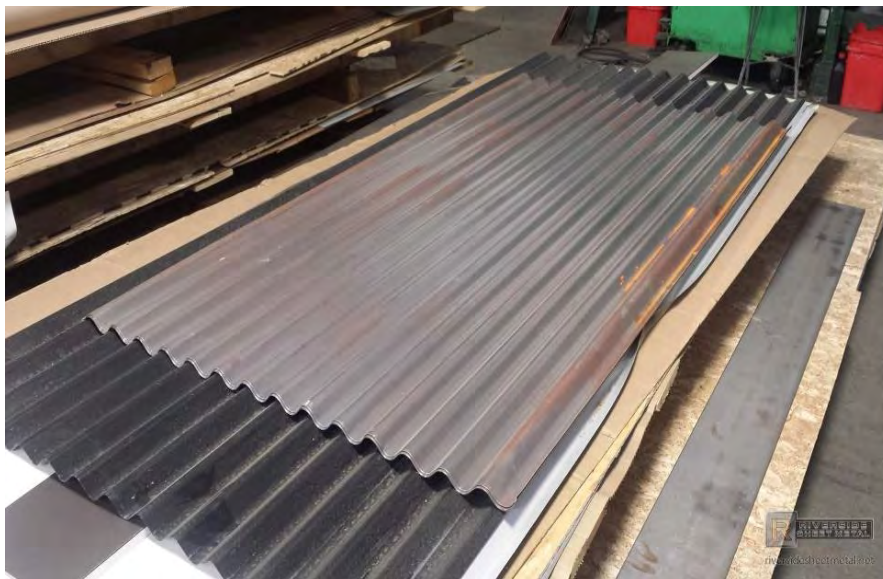


Fig.6. corrugated metal sheets (2023)

Approaching my new home, a surge of shock and disbelief washed over me. It dawned on me that this place, gilded with its corrugated metal exterior, would be a place that I would now call my new home. Recollections of the property revealed an absence of foundations beneath the metal sheets, creating a surreal sense that the metals were planted in the sand like sturdy plants. The interior unfolded revealing certain sections crafted from concrete, particularly the bench like structures against the wall, which felt strangely foreign to my senses as illustrated in Figure 7. The floor layout appeared enigmatic as I ventured further onto the property, encountering an open expanse that served as a front sandy garden, conspicuously lacking any overhead covering.

To the left, an isolated hut unveiled itself as the toilet. Continuing my exploration, the unfamiliar layout branched into two distinct parts. To the left, *Abti's* (uncle in Somali) growing family claimed their space, while on the right, *Ayeeyo*, her eldest daughter, her other son, along with his family, and now us, occupied the other part of the house. Each segment featured its own *Barando* (living room area) and three bedrooms behind it, a surprising configuration as living room areas are typically separate. This unique layout created a sense of segregation within the shared abode but also nurtured a strong, tightly knit community among the residents of each section.



Fig.7. Illustration of the floor plan – *Ceelasha Biyaha* (2023).

The architecture of this place, a striking juxtaposition of corrugated metal and concrete, is engraved into my memory as a tangible representation of the unfamiliar and the unexpected. Accustomed to homes constructed with robust materials like bricks, steel, timber, and glass, the transition was particularly startling. What intensified this sense of astonishment was the absence of conventional furniture instead, a vast carpet crafted from straw adorned the floor, inviting inhabitants to gather and sit directly on the ground.

After settling in, *Hooyo* remained with me for approximately two weeks before returning to the United Kingdom (UK).

Dugsi

After this, the days seemed to blur into one another, and I found myself losing track of time, dates, and even the year. Following a period of relative inactivity, my family collectively decided it was time for me to attend school. We explored different schools, only to learn that I could not enroll unless I completed and memorised the Quran. So, that is what we focused on.

I was enrolled in *Dugsi* (Quran school).

The day I began my journey to the *Dugsi* was serene, a prelude to the storm of emotions awaiting me. Nervousness took over my whole body, a common sentiment for anyone stepping into a new environment. Approaching the *Dugsi*, a harmonious chorus of students reciting the Quran reached my ears, creating a melodic symphony. Both male and female voices blended, yet the harmony seemed disrupted, taking on a chaotic quality as I drew closer. It was as if the sounds were conveying a message, foreshadowing the scene that awaited me - a small hut supported by sticks, corrugated metal adorned with hanging plastic bags similar to Figure 8. Once again, I found myself thrust into another culture shock.



Fig.8. Interior of *Dugsi*.

Over time, the initial shock dissipated, and my daily routine settled into attending *Dugsi* six days a week, from morning until evening. This structured schedule included five breaks synchronised with the prayer times.

I used to carry my Quran in a resilient blue and white checkered die-cut plastic bag until it stretched thin and eventually tore. Despite its relatively petite size, the bag provided ample space for carrying the two essential books I required, enduring the hot weather during my journey from home to *Dugsi*. Its strength, durability, and longevity were remarkable, considering that the smallest size of die-cut plastic bags measures 31cm x 38cm.

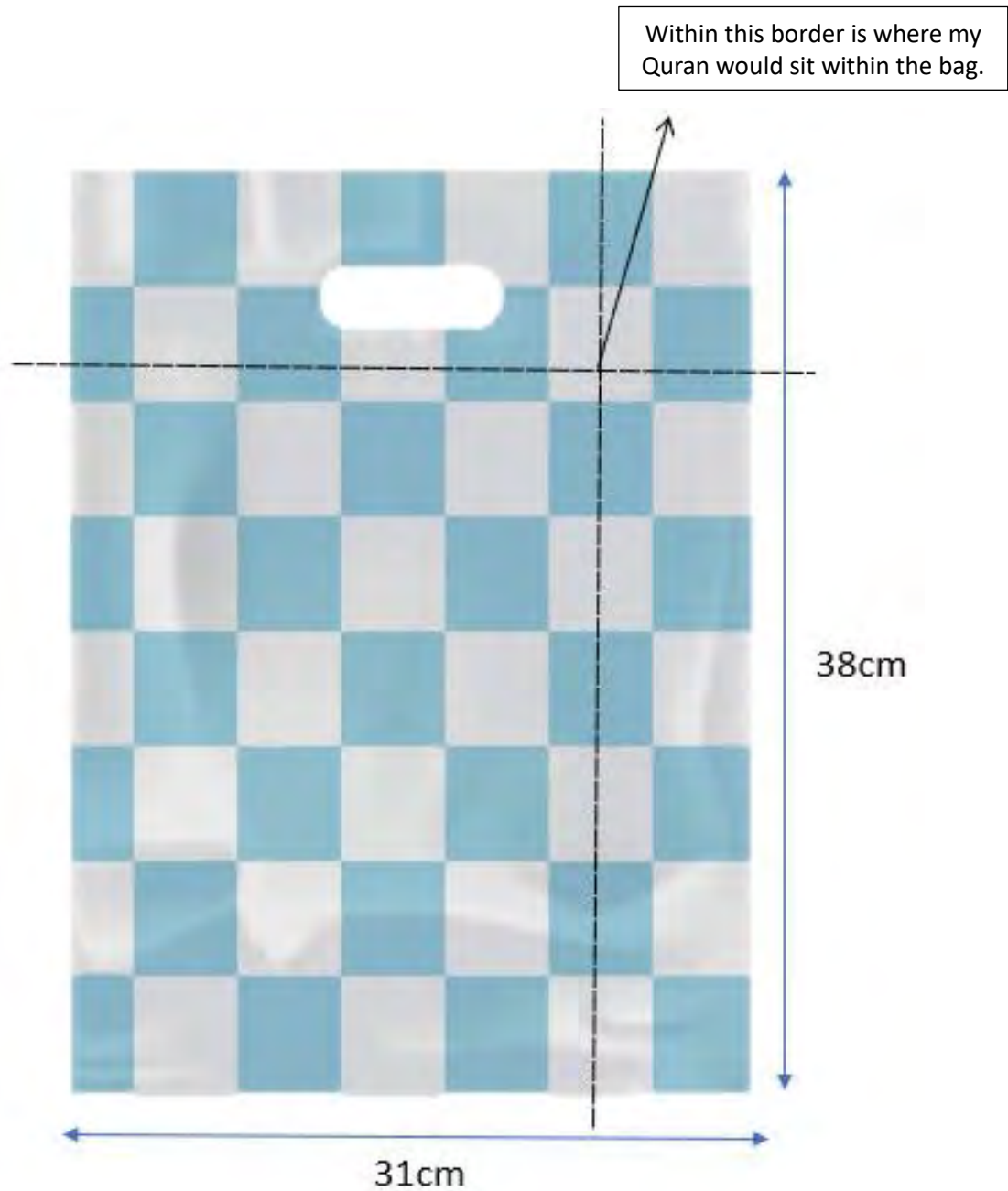


Fig. 9. Illustration of the die cut handle plastic bag I carried my Quran in (2023)

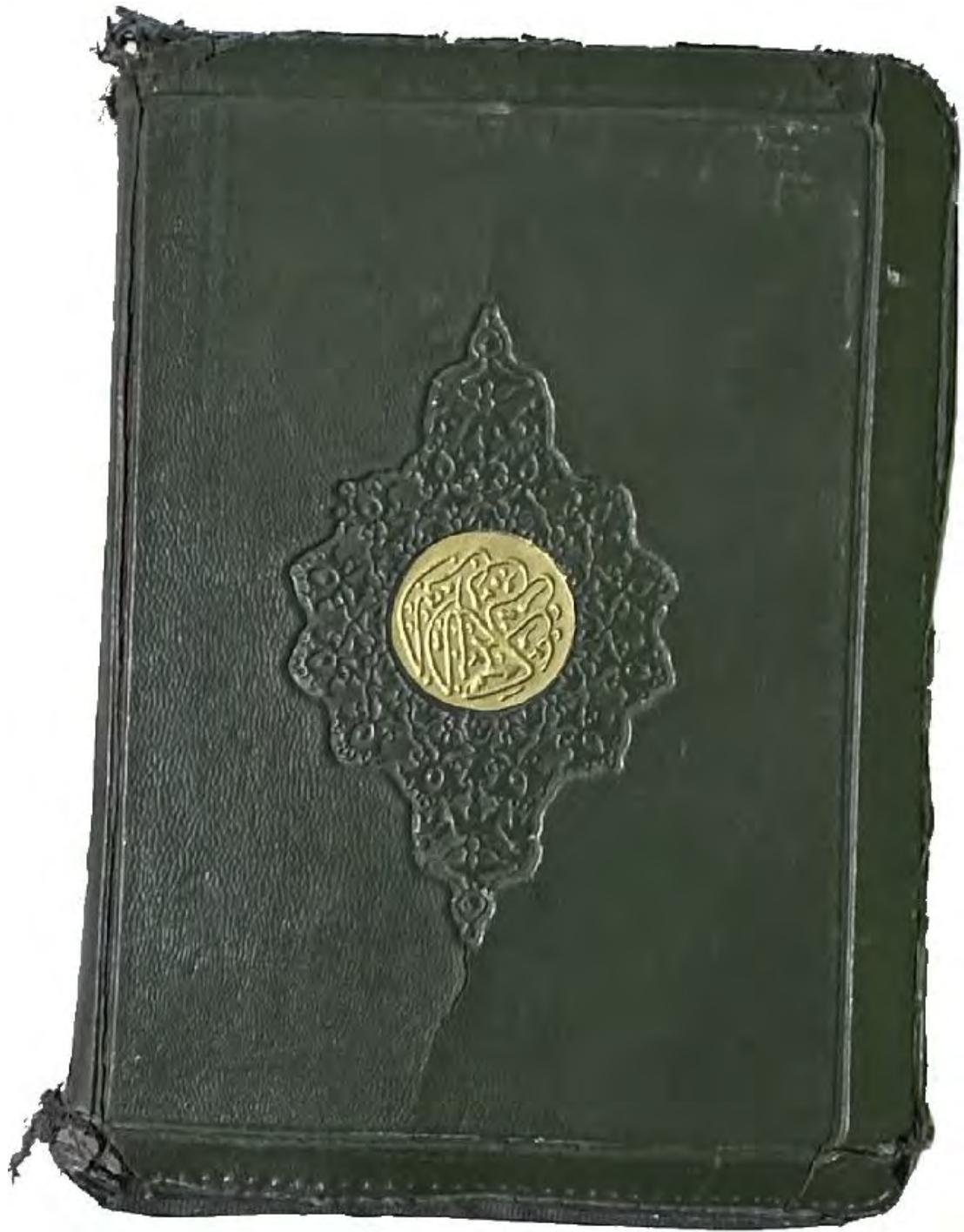


Fig. 10. My Quran (2023)

As the months passed, I found myself nearing the completion of memorising the Quran, with only eight pages left. On my way back home from *Dugsi* one day, I sensed an unusual atmosphere. I was used to seeing armed men around the area carrying these larger-than-life weapons but, on this evening, there was a lot more, almost an army. Upon entering our house, I noticed a departure from the usual routine everyone was already in their rooms. I was swiftly led to the bedroom by *Abti*, where I was greeted by a full room, with almost the entire household gathered in one place, all shrouded in darkness. Even my usually calm aunt seemed unusually anxious and fidgety. In hushed tones, I overheard my uncle whispering to *Ayeeyo* about hearing a shot fired. Suddenly, a loud crash reverberated through the air, and the floor beneath me trembled. Following the tremors that shook the floor, *Ayeeyo* instructed everyone to go to sleep, but the attempts at rest were disrupted by the sounds of men outside the house. Their frantic running and screaming suggested they were desperately seeking a place to hide. In this chaos, my heart and mind raced rapidly, consumed by a singular thought - would I see tomorrow?

In a daze, I drifted into an unexpected slumber, as if the intensity of emotions had overwhelmed me into unconsciousness. Upon awakening to a surreptitious scene, *Zamzam* (my cousin) and *Yasmin* (my sister) delicately manoeuvred around me, swiftly gathering clothes, bags, and books, vanishing like shadows. My instincts had led me to follow them subconsciously, only to discover the entire household in a synchronised ballet of movement. The main door opened and closed incessantly as belongings were loaded into a rusty white van. *Abti* directed me to gather my possessions, and I distinctly remembered clutching my Quran, my *baati* (Somali pyjama), and a counterfeit phone *Hooyo* had purchased for me in the market.

That morning we moved to Mogadishu.

Living in Mogadishu was like stepping into a time capsule for me as we moved into the very house where *Hooyo*, had spent her formative years. It was almost as if I had the chance to tangibly relive fragments of her early life. The transition felt like an upgrade from the familiar metal sheets to something sturdier and more spacious as shown in Figure 11. Stepping into the new abode, I sensed a fleeting delight, perhaps imagining myself in a fortress sheltered from the outside world. In that moment, a silent epiphany surfaced I did not hold *Ceelasha Biyaha* as my true home. Unlike the nostalgia many feel when departing from their roots, I experienced relief. It struck me that, my concept of home was not tethered to a specific geographical location but was rooted in the concepts of security and shelter. Perhaps my constant movement prevented me from attaching myself to any single location. Although experiencing a sense of relief, the euphoria was short-lived as *Abti*, broke the news of our imminent return to *Ceelasha Biyaha*. My *Dugsi* teacher had called, instructing my return to complete the Quran. At that moment, a wave of distress washed over me, and I yearned to cry, wishing for the ground to swallow me or for my mother to appear and rescue me.



Fig.11. Ayeeyo and relatives in the Mogadishu home (2011)

The impacts of the continual relocation are evident in the marks and blemishes imprinted on my Quran.



Fig.12. The scars on my Quran (2023).

The scars left from the years of holding it from both ends.

A few mistakes I made while reciting to my dugsi teacher

My attempts at piecing the pages back together

Physical scars Imprinted scars

Fig.13. The scars on my Quran annotated (2023).



Fig.14. More Scars left on my Quran (2023)

The patches of dried dust on the cover of my Quran imply a journey of resilience, a testament to the places it has seen and the challenges it has weathered. Each speck of dust becomes a silent witness to the varied landscapes, both physical and emotional, that my Quran has encountered. The accumulation of these particles symbolises the enduring spirit of the Quran, marked by its ability to withstand the trials of displacement and time, embodying a narrative of strength and perseverance.



Fig.15. Closer details on my Quran (2023)

This portion of the Quran, detached from the rest of the book, served as a source of comfort, preventing excessive contemplation during Quran recitations to my teacher or during my journey between locations. It represents a mark I unintentionally made on one of my cherished belongings. The visible attempt to mend the fragmented sections with the use of loosely applied Sellotape narrates the journey it has undertaken, accumulating traces of various places in the form of dust and dirt.

The return to Ceelasha Biyaha

As we left for Ceelasha Biyaha, our journey was punctuated by stops, each encounter with armed men, some even young boys fully armed. They cornered *Abti*, bombarding him with questions, yet he remained strangely calm, as if accustomed to such encounters. All I could focus on was the tight grip of his hand, and an unexplained urge to cry welled up at each checkpoint. Was it the strength of his grip or the sheer fright I felt? I could not discern.

Upon our arrival in Ceelasha Biyaha, the once-vibrant yellow sandy roads now seemed dreary, almost black. The tree opposite our vacant home appeared lifeless, and the lively noises of families bustling about their days were replaced by an eerie silence. The very ground beneath seemed to resonate with the distant echoes of bombs. Desperate, I pleaded with *Abti* to call *Hooyo* for me. Her soft voice, when I spoke with her, brought a soothing balm to my soul. She reassured me, explaining that *Abti* and I would only spend that night there. By morning, I would have completed the Quran, and we would return safely to the family. Her certainty provided a sliver of solace amidst the chaos.

We returned the evening after I completed the Quran to Mogadishu and remained there for what seemed to be another two years before emigrating to the UK.



Fig.16. Yasmin and I to Somalia (2008).



Fig.17. Yasmin, Zamzam and I after returning from *Ceelasha Biyaha* (2010).

Ayeeyo still lives in Somalia.

Hooyo migrated to the UK at the end of 1999.

I returned to the UK in 2012.

Conclusion

In the tapestry of 'My Somalia,' the concept of home emerges as a fluid and abstract notion, shaped by the perspectives of three generations.

Ayeeyo's idea of home, deeply rooted in a patriarchal context and the nomadic traditions of the past, reflects a connection to the land, community, and a way of life that has evolved through time, anchored within the bonds cultivated throughout her life. *Hooyo*, on the other hand, constructs her idea of home from the fragments of memories, a repository of moments that transcend physical spaces. Her home is woven with the threads of resilience, entrepreneurship, and the enduring bonds that withstand the tumult of displacement. As for myself, navigating the landscape of war-induced displacement, home becomes a sanctuary sought for security (a haven tragically elusive). In this quest, the items clutched tightly, the remnants of familiarity, become the building blocks of a new home. It is a space cobbled together from the fragments of a shattered past, a makeshift sanctuary where security is sought amidst the chaos.

Hooyo and I left Somalia however *Ayeeyo* stayed behind. Her steadfast decision to stay in the war-torn land, despite the challenges it posed, raises many questions about the psychology of attachment to a place ingrained with memories and identity. Was it a reluctance to embark on yet another journey of rebuilding life elsewhere, or did she harbor a fervent desire to witness her beloved homeland thrive once again?

While *Hooyo* and I chose the path of departure, seeking stability and security in lands beyond Somalia's unrest, *Ayeeyo's* choice lingers as a silent testament to the complexities of human connection to place. In her decision to weather the storms within her familiar surroundings, one can discern a profound attachment to the roots that run deep, even in the face of adversity. It prompts reflection on whether, for *Ayeeyo*, the very act of staying became a form of resilience, a quiet protest against the forces of displacement that sought to uproot the essence of her identity. This decision, though seemingly at odds with the pursuit of peace, stability, and prosperity, adds another layer of nuance to the evolving concept of home. Perhaps, for *Ayeeyo*, the idea of 'home' transcended the immediate comforts of peace and prosperity, encompassing a commitment to the land she knew intimately, a commitment not solely rooted in personal comfort but embedded in a collective hope for the revival of a nation scarred by conflict.

In contemplating *Ayeeyo's* steadfast presence in Somalia, one may find a different facet of the abstract notion of home, one that goes beyond the individual quest for security and delves into a communal yearning for the resurgence of a once beautiful land. The interplay of personal and collective aspirations within the broader narrative of 'My Somalia' sheds light on the intricate dynamics that shape our understanding of home, making it a narrative not only of personal journeys but also of the collective soul of resilient people.

Throughout this, one can conclude that the personal artifacts clung to in times of displacement, and the people around take on the role of a comforting blanket, providing warmth, familiarity, and a semblance of stability, just like the objects from "Gulliver's Travels", that came home with him from Lilliput. Even though it was a fictional story, they transformed the unfamiliar into the familiar, creating a sense of belonging in uncertainty (Jonathan Swift, 1970). In the dance of displacement, these cherished items become the constants, the anchors, and the essence of 'home' an abstract construct, ever-evolving and adapting to the realities of each generation.

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Topics of Convocations

Hooyo

Where were you born?

How was your childhood?

Did you see much of *Awoowe* growing up?

How did you guys get to Mogadishu?

Did you ever manage to see the place *Ayeeyo* lived in Jamamo?

How long were you and *Ayeeyo* separated?

How did you feel?

What items did you take with you to your next home?

Have you experienced a moment where you questioned seeing the morning?

How did you feel?

What was your reaction to that?

Why was it always a business that had to be started?

Did you sleep, ever?

Do you think you can remember the number of homes you resided in?

Is there a place you formed an attachment to?

Would you go back and live in Somalia after such experiences?

Was there a specific item you always took with you?

Where do you think home is?

Yasmin enters.

How did you feel?

Would you go back to Somalia?

How were you feeling when Abti and I had to go back to Ceelasha Biyaha?

Do you think it was too fast-paced for you?

What do you think a home is?

Do you think Somalia can be that home you desire?

Abti

How was your childhood?

Do you remember the time we had to go back to Ceelasha Biyaha?

Why were you so calm?

Why were there so many young boys armed?

You did not react, was this normal to you?

Did I say anything to you out of fear?

Do you remember the date?

So, was it okay with you?

How many times did you move?

Were all of them during peaceful times?

How was *Ayeeyo* throughout these times?

Do you think it changes you?

When do you feel safe?