


# MATERNITY & MIGRATION

## *AMONG SOMALIS IN NAIROBI, KENYA*

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*My fieldwork took place in the Somali-dominated neighbourhood Eastleigh, an area of Nairobi commonly referred to as 'Little Mogadishu'. The Kenyan refugee encampment policy means that the residents of Eastleigh live in a legally ambiguous context, facing frequent police harassment, including regular raids on streets and in homes. Very few people considered Kenya a permanent settlement, rather they saw it as a transit point while they tried to migrate to another country. My thesis focuses on maternity as a site to examine the effects of displacement and concern for onward migration among Somali women in particular. It will look at how desires for high fertility, as an intrinsic element of what it means to be a woman and particularly a wife, are shaped within a context where marriage is of even higher importance in terms of security and possibilities for onward migration. There are over half a million Somali refugees in Kenya, a source of public fear and hostility as they are portrayed as a security threat, inextricably entwined with piracy and Islamic fundamentalism. Simultaneously, many Somalis live in Eastleigh because it allows them to live their lives away from the scrutiny of the government, the UN, and NGOs. As a result, they have built their own 'city within a city', largely invisible to outsiders. *

**PUBLIC** (Figures 1 & 2): These photos are from two ‘refugee’ events, one on World Refugee Day with a group performing traditional Somali songs and dances. In the second photo, Waayaha Cusub (‘New Era’), a Somali rap group who

have been threatened by Al Shabaab due to their songs calling for an end to the conflict in Somalia, perform at a UNHCR-organised event intended to promote tolerance of refugees in Nairobi.

FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3

**PRIVATE** (Figures 3 & 4): These photos were taken on the street I lived on, so they both remind me of ‘home.’ The effect of 20 years of conflict and forced migration as an ongoing process was evident in the widespread dislocation of families. In the first photo you can see how Somalis appropriated Eastleigh, buying and building property and setting up businesses, often naming places after a location in



FIGURE 4

Somalia, in this case Mogadishu. The second photo is from just across the street. All of my informants had relatives in other parts of Kenya or abroad, and most still had family in Somalia. Staying in contact was incredibly important for maintaining relationships and providing support through remittances. This is also where I went to phone my Mum.