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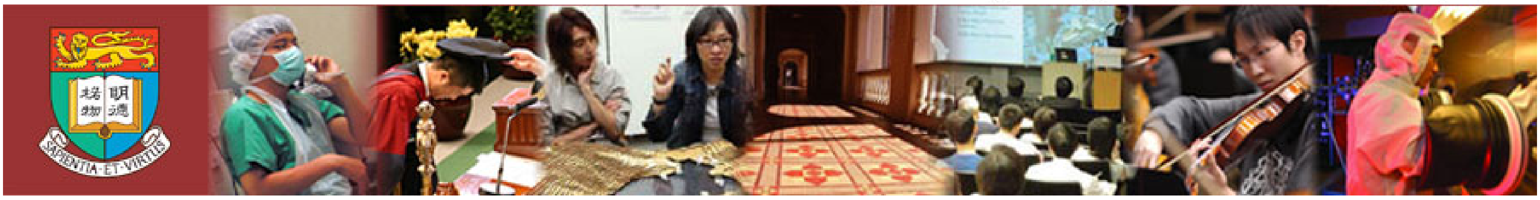

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NARRATIVES AND COUNTERNARRATIVES: SOMALI-CANADIANS ON RECRUITMENT AS FOREIGN FIGHTERS TO AL-SHABAAB

Paul Joosse*, Sandra M. Bucerius and Sara K. Thompson

Recently, the Somali diaspora has found itself at the centre of heightened security concerns surrounding the proliferation of international terrorist networks and their recruitment strategies. These concerns have reached new levels since the absorption of al-Shabaab into al-Qaeda in 2012. Based on a qualitative analysis of interviews with 118 members of Canada's largest Somali community, this article draws upon narrative criminology to reverse the 'why they joined' question that serves as the predicate for much recent radicalization scholarship, and instead explores, 'why they would never join'. We encounter Somali-Canadians equipping themselves with sophisticated counternarratives that vitiate the enticements of al-Shabaab. Particularly, notions of 'coolness', 'trickery' and 'religious perversion' mediate participants' perceptions of al-Shabaab and enable a self-empowering rejection of its recruitment narratives. In particular, we find resonances between the narratives of non-recruits and 'bogeyman' narratives that exist commonly in many cultures. The efficacy of these narratives for resilience is three-fold, positioning the recruiters as odious agents, recruits as weak-minded dupes and our participants as knowledgeable storytellers who can forewarn others against recruitment to al-Shabaab.

Keywords: foreign fighters, radicalization, narrative criminology, resilience, diasporas, violence, al-shabaab, al-Qaeda

Introduction

Recent years have seen an increasing number of scholars agree that the study of terrorism does and should fall under the purview of criminological inquiry (Rosenfeld 2002; 2004; LaFree and Hendrickson 2007), including that which examines radicalization leading to violence. To date, however, the literature on radicalization is dominated by a focus on identifying the often interactive processes through which individual actors become radicalized (Silke 2008; Hamm 2009; Useem and Clayton 2009; Berko *et al.* 2010; Treadwell and Garland 2011; Bouhana 2013). To be sure, the emphasis on risk that characterizes terrorism to date (both within and outside of criminology) is necessary and important. However, as a large and interdisciplinary literature on violent crime more generally has demonstrated, there is also much to be learned by examining the factors that render people resilient to so-called criminogenic forces (see e.g. Richman and Fraser 2001; Aisenberg and Herrenkohl 2008; Martinez-Torteya *et al.* 2009; Howell *et al.* 2010).

A new subfield within criminology—namely, narrative criminology—has emerged to provide valuable tools for understanding criminal involvement (Presser and Sandberg

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forthcoming; Presser 2009; 2012; Sandberg 2010; 2013) and—we propose—resistance to involvement in terrorism. Narrative criminology explores the ways that 'people establish who they are—their identity work—by emplotting their experience' into narratives (Presser 2012: 6). Attention to narrative has been a mainstay across many disciplines, from history, to literature, to psychology and to anthropology, and while narrative criminology derives from these diverse traditions (Presser 2009), it is distinguished by a commitment to an analysis of the ways in which narratives *themselves* are constitutive antecedents of crime. Constructionist in nature, narrative criminology conceives of narratives as an '*ontological condition of social life*' and pushes discursive analysis to the forefront of concern (Somers 1994, cited in Presser 2009: 184), rather than dwelling on Cartesian dualisms implicit in deliberations about the extent to which narratives are artful impositions of subjectivities onto 'real' events, or analyses of how narratives neutralize what is 'actually' morally suspect behaviour.

Such a non-positivist orientation promises a number of benefits when applied to terrorism studies. First, it can imbue analyses with a sensitivity to some of the problems of normativity that have plagued the field thus far (Tilly 2004; Jackson 2007). Indeed, one might revise an oft-repeated (to the point of becoming clichéd) axiom to read 'one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter—*depending* on one's story'. Further, the narrative gaze may open up opportunities for challenging the balkanized division between terrorological and criminological spheres. Sandberg *et al.* (2014), e.g. analyzed Anders Breivik's bombing/shooting campaign (a *prima facie* terrorist attack)[1] in terms of the cultural script of school shootings. Second, although jurisprudential concepts like *mens rea* have tended to locate criminological concern within the horizon of the individual, narrative criminology works toward more collectivist insights as 'stories thematize the points of connection between personal and collective experience' (Presser 2009: 178–9). Turning again to the example of Breivik, we see that although his Manifesto contains strivings toward a unified and coherent individual narrative, these strivings are also inflected by a diverse array of influences that belie such unity while implicating wider social movements (Sandberg 2013; Berntzen and Sandberg 2014). Fourth and finally (and most important for present purposes), narrative criminology paves an avenue for investigating the self-stories of those who have never seriously considered engaging in criminal activity personally. Participation or non-participation in 'foreign fighter' campaigns, e.g. is a phenomenon that can be expected to draw heavily on a narrative imaginary as such activity would involve dramatic, transformational changes in the lives of potential participants.

A narrative criminology would also find direct relevance to questions central to terrorism studies proper. Among the many disadvantages that terrorist organizations face in contexts of asymmetrical warfare, recruitment stands out among the most pressing. In contrast to the state, which enjoys vast conscriptive or otherwise persuasive powers, terrorist groups, threatened by expanding strategies of surveillance and interdiction, often must eschew organized or 'top-down' recruitment strategies (Arquilla *et al.* 1999; Tucker 2001: 1–3; Hoffman 2006: 39–40, 267–72; Sageman 2008; Neumann 2009: 17–21, 56–68), and instead rely on 'supply side' vectors for mobilization and recruitment.[2] This has taken the form of pre-existing friendship or kinship networks (Della Porta 1988), the Internet-mediated self-affiliation of 'wannabes' who travel to join terrorist causes or strike out as lone-actors (Joosse 2007; 2015; Michael 2010; Gruenewald *et al.* 2013) and voluntarism from far-flung diaspora communities (Sheffer 2006; Hoffman *et al.* 2007). In this arrangement, terrorist 'brands' take on a much greater importance (Zelinsky and Shubik 2009), as do 'hearts and minds' campaigns (Crelinsten 2009: 135–57).

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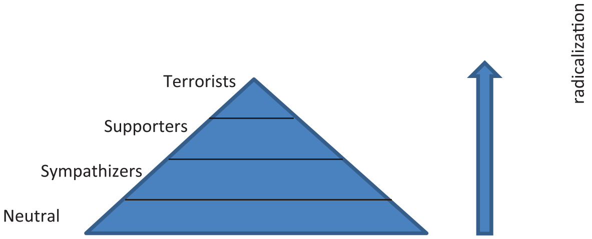
[1] On 22 July 2011, Anders Breivik conducted a dual attack, first car-bombing government buildings in Oslo, killing eight, then travelling to the island of Utoya where he shot 69 people, most of whom were youth members of the Norway's Labour Party. He has been widely regarded as an archetypal example of a 'lone wolf terrorist' (Pantucci 2011; Spaaij 2012; Berntzen and Sandberg 2014).

[2] Marc Sageman makes an apt, if unconventional, comparison to illustrate these 'supply side' vectors. Like Harvard, al-Qaeda [does] not have to recruit. People want to go to Harvard because of its reputation and the rewards a degree from the school brings. Likewise, some young Muslims want to join al-Qaeda because of its reputation (Sageman 2008: 70).

In response to this situation, a growing body of research has begun to devise methods of constructing counternarratives to radicalizing terrorist propaganda (Leuprecht *et al.* 2009; 2010; Payne 2009; Quiggin 2010). Zelinsky and Shubik (2009), e.g. advocate targeting groups' 'titular leadership to decrease the message-sending capabilities of the organization' (Zelinsky and Shubik 2009: 6). Ashour (2011; see also Jacobson 2010) suggest that the best way to learn about devising counternarratives is to consult actual former terrorists, maintaining that, '[t]he current moment is unique; for the first time in the history of Jihadism we are provided with a "critical mass" of former militants who rebelled, not only against the current jihadists' behaviour but also against the ideology that motivates them' (e-text, no page numbers).

In addition to targeting individuals with messaging strategies, larger communal contexts have also increasingly made their appearance in recent conceptualizations of the radicalization process. In particular, we have seen the development of a host of radicalization theories which position 'terrorists' as only the apex of a much broader pyramidal structure (see McCauley and Moskalenko 2008: 416–7; 2011; Leuprecht *et al.* 2009; 2010). In such models, the pyramid runs from the largest level at the bottom, consisting of those who are neutrally oriented to the terrorist narrative, to subsequent levels, each with diminishing numbers, from sympathizers, to supporters and finally, to terrorists themselves. Though different in certain respects, this relationship between diminishing numbers and progressing radicalization is evident in Moghaddam's (2005) 'narrowing staircase' model of radicalization and Halafoff and Wright-Neville's (2009) 'social exclusion' model in which radicalizing individuals find themselves increasingly alienated from their supporting communities as they move towards terrorist deployment.



These models seek to contextualize terrorists within a wider set of ideological predispositions and the broader communities out of which they arise. Insofar as they stress a relationship of 'the many to the few', they bring a much needed corrective to terrorism scholarship, which tends to focus only on 'the few'—that is, those individuals who actually carry out attacks—while ignoring those who ascend only partway up the pyramid, or those (much greater in number) who never even begin an ascent. For example, Leuprecht *et al.* encouraged what they call 'bottom up' approaches to constructing counternarratives that might promote de-radicalization (Leuprecht *et al.* 2010: 53–5) and Halafoff and Wright-Neville write of a

> need to avoid the temptation to perceive counterterrorism as a largely reactive exercise that involves little more than detecting and hunting down those who have already crossed the violence threshold. (2009: 928)

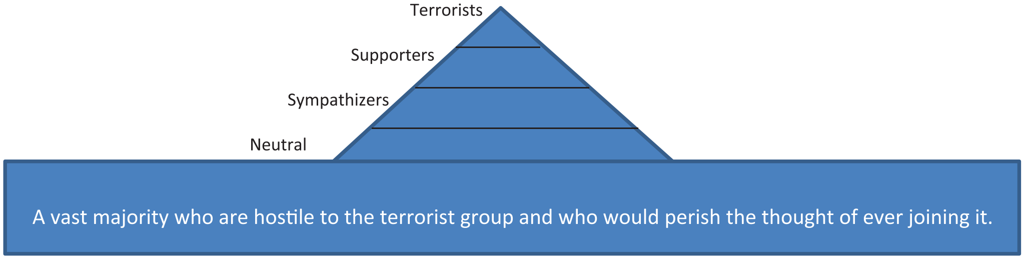
These authors argue that we need to build 'counterterrorism strategies that rob the terrorists of their narrative and symbolic power' (2009: 927), thus addressing radicalization earlier on in the process.

On the counterterrorism side, strategists seem to have been slow to recognize the importance of narrative. According to Alberto Fernandez, coordinator of the US State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, terrorist organizations have been 'setting the narrative', enjoying 'a free shot at the audience for radicalizing people' (quoted in Schmitt 2013). In response, in late 2013, Fernandez's organization pioneered its 'Think again. Turn away' campaign, which distributes messages online, aiming to dissuade members of the English-speaking world from joining Jihadist causes in Syria and al-Qaeda's branches in Yemen (AQAP) and Somalia (al-Shabaab, Schmitt 2013). Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and ISIS's global call for participation in the current attempt to restore the Caliphate through the obliteration of the Sykes-Picot borders speaks to the continued importance of story for mobilization (see countering efforts at https://twitter.com/ThinkAgain_DOS).

Our contention, however, is that the above pyramidal models—as currently formulated—leave little room for a recognition of the *agency* of non-radicalized or pre-radicalized populations. The danger of this 'negative space' of non-recognition is that it can homogenize populations from which recruitment occurs and position them as passive and 'at risk'—vulnerable to the wiles of propagandists—that is, unless they are pre-emptively interdicted by powerful counterframes developed by experts in the counterterrorism field. In Leuprecht *et al.*'s 2010 dual-pyramid model, e.g. the bottom levels are considered 'neutral' (in their 'narrative pyramid') and 'inert' (in their 'action pyramid'). This arrangement seems to foreclose the possibility that people at the lower reaches of the pyramidal structure (or anywhere on it, for that matter) may not be just 'neutral' or 'inert' but rather that they may be staunchly opposed to the group, and have well-defined, counter-radicalizing narratives already in place.

Indeed, this is to be expected. Social movement scholars, particularly those from the framing tradition, have long known that frames and counterframes develop as a matter of course within the dialectic of movement-countermovement interaction (Zald and Useem 1987; Gamson 1992; Peckham 1998; Benford and Snow 2000: 625–7; Rohlinger 2002; Joosse 2012a; 2015). McCauley and Moskalenko, to their credit, also note that radicalization is predominantly a *reactive* process, and that '[t]he same mechanisms moving people toward radicalization and terrorism will operate as well in those who react to radicals and terrorists' (2008: 430).

In this paper, we argue that the most powerful counternarratives that work against radicalization will already be in place within communities, reacting against the ideologies and radicalization strategies of terrorist movements. In short, we find that communities—in this case the Somali-Canadian community—are involved in a narrative dialectic with the activities of al-Qaeda affiliate al-Shabaab, and as such it has already developed narrative tools that render it largely resistant to the radicalization process. To account for this situation, our data would be best rendered in this way:


Terrorists
Supporters
Sympathizers
Neutral
A vast majority who are hostile to the terrorist group and who would perish the thought of ever joining it.

Drawing on interviews with Somali young adults in Toronto, Canada, we argue that community dynamics can play a key role in generating and transmitting counternarratives to terrorist recruitment. Rather than taking the traditional tack on radicalization, which seeks to understand why particular terrorists became radicalized, our goal is thus to perform an exploratory shift of the question. In lineage with Travis Hirschi, we explore why so many Somali-Canadian youth are *not* attracted to the Somali group al-Shabaab, and how, specifically, their counternarratives work to vitiate the enticements proffered by the group. Further, we make the case that counterterrorism strategists, insofar as they are informed by the pyramidal models described above, risk missing out on taking advantage of these pre-made tools when they seek to 'go it alone' with respect to developing countermessages. Based on our findings, we predict that communal input will be key to designing effective counternarratives. Although narrative criminology has remained primarily focused on the criminogenic nature of narratives—that is, how narratives are antecedent to crime (Presser 2012; 2014)—important peace-fostering extensions are possible. Shadd Maruna (2001), e.g. showed the importance of narratives (in this case, 'redemption scripts') to desistance among those with extensive histories of drug and property offences. Further directions suggest that narratives may be '*peace*- or desistance-promoting' (Presser and Sandberg, forthcoming: 1, emphasis added). Our study, which seeks out and tries to understand the self-narratives of those who have never participated in crime, thus seeks to make a third extension, drawing further on the promise of narrative criminology.

We proceed in four sections. First, we provide an overview of our study and methods. Second, we perform a comparative analysis of the al-Shabaab recruitment narrative with counternarratives that have already been developed or are developing among the Somali-Canadian diaspora in Toronto. Third, we develop the concept of 'genre' (Presser and Sandberg, forthcoming: 14–6) to describe the al-Shabaab counternarrative in terms of a 'bogeyman' mythology, which shapes participants' understanding of their relationship to groups like al-Shabaab in terms of a self-empowering rejection. Fourth and finally, we discuss the importance of alliances between researchers and communities for maximizing the efficacy of counternarratives for preventing radicalization.

The Current Study: Context and Methodology

We approached these questions by conducting 118 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 16–30-year-old members of the Somali-Canadian diaspora in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The Somali diaspora in Canada has received much negative media attention in recent years because a disproportionate number of young Somali males have died in homicides (thought to be drug- and/or gang-related) and more recently, a small handful of young Somali-Canadians have left Canada to join al-Shabaab. As a consequence, Somali-Canadian's perceive themselves to be a highly stigmatized group beset with 'three strikes' against them: as newcomers and refugees, as blacks and as Muslims. Indeed, one of our participants pointed out that: 'Somalis are widely viewed as the lowest of the low in terms of immigrant groups, even within the broader Black community; we are the new Jamaicans' (female, 21).

The Somali diaspora in Canada is estimated to have 150,000 members, with Toronto being home to the largest community. The great majority of Somali-Canadians immigrated to Canada in the early 1990s, following the civil unrest and political instability in Somalia. The community is thought to be heavily fragmented by clan divisions even today, making research in the community particularly difficult. To achieve a broader sense of the Somali diaspora, we had to ensure to recruit people from different clans into the study.

Each of our interviews consisted of 71 questions, covering personal background and immigration information and integration experiences, experiences with Canadian institutions and mainstream society, family dynamics and gender roles, religious attitudes, crime and violence in the Somali community and, finally, al-Shabaab. The average interview length was 45 minutes, with our shortest interview being 16 minutes long and our longest interview being 1 hour and 45 minutes long. We designed our interview instrument in continuous consultation and collaboration with our Somali research assistants to ensure that our questions were culturally appropriate and meaningful.

Collectively, we have a wealth of experience conducting research in contexts of difference. Our methodological considerations with respect to building rapport and interviewing in the Somali community developed out of our experiences researching and building rapport with other diverse groups (Joosse 2012b; 2015; Bucerius 2013; 2014; Thompson *et al.* 2013). As a consequence, our research team was diverse; some of our interviewers were Somali-Canadians with strong connections in the Somali community in Toronto, and others were undergraduate and graduate students of non-Somali background. Shah (2004: 556–64) examined the insider/outsider dynamic that pervades all cross-cultural research and argued that insiders can be expected to have a wide range of advantages when seeking to access meaning from participants. Although we are sensitive to this issue, others point to the fact that both sides of the insider/outsider dichotomy experience advantages and disadvantages pertaining to their particular subject positions (for a recent discussion, see Zempi and Chakraborti 2014: 41–7). More specifically, and in line with Bucerius' (2013) work on 'trusted outsiders', a research team that includes members of outsider status may offer a different perspective and gather different data than would be captured by those of insider status alone. By working with a mixed team of research assistants with insider status (by virtue of belonging to the same ethnic and religious community) and those with outsider status (by virtue of not being ethnically Somali), we believe we accessed different perspectives and opened up different avenues for rapport. More importantly, we were able to capitalize on both: the advantages associated with 'insider research' as well as the advantages associated with 'outsider research' (Bucerius 2015). Indeed, although we acknowledge that the concept of *verstehen* has a long and controversial history in the social sciences (Shields 1996), we nevertheless believe that intercultural research[3] is possible, not in terms of accessing a 'truth' that resides in the 'other', but rather via dialogical interactions between

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[3] This presumption is also necessary for the communicative act of writing about research (Spalek 2005: 414–6) and the dissemination of research findings to an audience, which is itself characterized by cultural polyphony.

the researcher and research participant that produce intersubjective syntheses of meaning (Bahktin 1973). These processes of synthesis develop over time, and they can only develop amidst a reflexive sensitivity to the power dynamics that would otherwise lead to the imposition and recapitulation of the researchers' narratives in the interview and analysis settings. This is a 'tricky' process, as even attempts to establish rapport and be empathic can lead to such impositions (e.g. see Spalek 2005).

Given these considerations, we made sure to spend as much time as possible incorporating cultural knowledge into our research method. We did this by researching the Somali community—both within and outside of Canada—extensively prior to fieldwork, by consulting extensively with Somali-Canadian individuals and cultural organizations on an ongoing basis as questions arose, and by diversifying our research team so as to include 'insiders'. In addition to the inclusion of Somali-Canadians on our research team, our team was also comprised of both male and female research assistants, and a majority of our interviewers on our research team were themselves from the age group that we were studying (16–30 year olds). We found that our data benefitted from our diverse team and different researcher personalities (see also Bucerius 2013). Ferrell (1998) pointed out that it would be a mistake to assume that status traits (as discussed by Hughes 1945) such as gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation are immaterial in research process. We, too, had the experience that different researcher personalities yielded different data and thus greatly enriched our overall data set.

To recruit participants into our study, we used a respondent-driven sampling method (RDS), allowing us to take advantage of intra-group social connections (Heckathorn 1997). RDS has proven to be extremely useful in quickly recruiting large numbers of people from hidden, difficult to access populations. We initially planted four 'seeds' (initial interview participants) in geographically different areas in the GTA. By planting different seeds, we were able to ensure that we recruited community members from different clans. Each seed was permitted to recruit two new participants into the study (receiving $10 per referral) and each new referral could equally refer two new people. Although we tried to achieve an equal gender distribution, our sample consists of more males (n = 68) than females (n = 50). This is likely the case because our male participants tended to recruit more often and tended to recruit their male peers, whereas our female participants did not necessarily recruit additional people. Additionally, we organized two mass interview sessions through community partners. Twenty-five interviews were conducted through this methodology.

Overall, recruitment happened over a time period of ten months (February to November 2013). We believe the RDS method allowed us to recruit people into the study who were already familiar with the goals of the study (because they were referred by previous study participants), which made establishing rapport significantly easier. This was crucial given the sensitivity of some of our questions and the fact that the Somali community in Canada has received so much negative media attention, of which they are keenly aware.

In addition to our interviews with young Somali-Canadians, we also attended seven community events, interviewing 26 key stakeholders in the Somali Canadian community in the GTA. These were stakeholders who were in charge of community organizations, NGOs, student-led initiatives and police liaison units that deal specifically with the Somali community. This approach allowed us to triangulate the data we collected from our participants with our own impressions at community events and the narratives of stakeholders in the community.

Through this process, we were able to identify a set of counterterrorist narratives related to al-Shabaab that were already in action within the Somali-Canadian diaspora. Before proceeding to an analysis of these counterframes, however, we will provide a brief background primer on al-Shabaab itself.

Al-Shabaab: A Case Study in International Terrorist Recruitment

A remnant youth wing of the Islamic Courts Union, which ruled much of southern Somalia until 2006, al-Shabaab has seen its influence and power diminish considerably in recent years. African Union forces from Uganda and Burundi managed to push the group out of the capital of Mogadishu in August 2011, and in September 2012, Kenyan and Somali forces launched an amphibious assault that led to the capture of the port town of Kismayo, a crucial conduit of revenue for the group, stemming from charcoal exports (Rembold *et al.* 2013).

Internal struggles within the organization suggest that this lack of success in the domestic theatre may be encouraging the development of a more global jihadist ideology. In 2012, the leadership's bid for membership in al-Qaeda was accepted by Ayman al-Zawahiri, and there are suggestions that there has been a turn in the direction of the 'far enemy'—striking at civilians of foreign nations that supply military support to al-Shabaab's domestic enemies. By 2012, nearly a quarter of its attacks were occurring outside of Somalia in neighbouring Kenya, which is a major ally and military supporter of the Transitional National Government (START 2013: 1). The most notorious of these attacks was the Westgate mall attack of September 2013 through which al-Shabaab reached a globalized level of notoriety, becoming a central feature in the news cycles of international media. The United States designated the group a terrorist organization in 2008 and Canada followed suit in 2010.

But the group is internationalist in another sense as well—as a simple function of the fact that since the late 1980s, Somalia has become a 'diasporised nation' (Menkhaus 2009: 10). In recent years, Somali-Canadians (and members of Somali diasporas elsewhere) have found themselves at the centre of heightened security concerns surrounding the proliferation of al-Shabaab's international recruitment networks. In the Canadian context, it is estimated that 20–25 young men in their 20s have left to join the organization, and it is believed that 40 US Americans are fighting alongside al-Shabaab (International Centre for the Study of Radicalization 2012). According to Shinn (2011), the 85 member executive council includes 42 Somalis and 43 foreigners.[4] The following section will explore the appeal of al-Shabaab to those few who have decided to join, by way of a framing strategy that invokes notions of glory, excitement and what Sageman (2008) has termed 'Jihadi cool'.

Al-Shabaab's Recruitment Frame: 'cool, independent, youthful, warriors'

Olivier Roy suggests that second-generation Muslims in Western nations who face racism, social exclusion and loneliness on a daily basis may find that terrorist groups can offer 'a valorizing substitute identity: members of the vanguard of internationalist jihadists who fight the global superpower and the international system' (2006: 309). Likewise, Cottee and Hayward (2011: 979) suggest that terrorism might be a solution to an 'existential frustration' (a sense that 'one's life is meaningless, directionless, boring, banal, uneventful, anodyne, soulless, aimless, passive, cowardly'). Accordingly, terrorism can be attractive in the sense that it can offer excitement, meaning and glory (966). Nearly a third of our participants who offered a response to our question about why people would make the decision to join al-Shabaab invoked the glory/pride theme, often remarking that al-Shabaab recruits style themselves as pious and glorious religious warriors. Illustrative of this was one particularly eloquent participant who noted:

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[4] Shinn does not specify the percentage of the foreigners that have come from Somali diaspora communities.

> it's immense pride …. a lot of time in the religion people are referred to as heroes and there're so many hero stories … just the name that is used that's shared, Mujahedeen, coming from the word Jihad, like this person is looked up to…. I'm just saying the credentials and the honour that's given to that title. It's like equivalent to like a samurai, what a samurai was in Japan, you know people would want to be that, and so it's glorified (male, 21)

Another mentioned:

> they wanna feel like they're a martyr and they wanna feel like the stories during the Prophet's time when there was something worth fighting for, when you were being attacked you know? And you were defending yourself, you know? (male, 22)

'Coolness' also seems to play a big role in the marketing of violent jihad to young Muslims. Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller remark that 'excitement, exotic landscapes, and guns' carry a special cache for those contemplating joining an international terrorist network (2012: 14–5). Marc Sageman also notes that 'there is a "jihadi cool" and "jihadi talk" [which]…. makes jihad fun and interesting to young Muslims, who join global Islamist terrorism because it's cool and thrilling to be part of a clandestine undertaking' (2008: 159–60).

For present purposes, it is important to look more closely at the attributes of coolness, however. Pountain and Robins's (2000) cross-cultural analysis of what it means to be 'cool' finds that coolness is fundamentally a quality of independence, of setting your own rules in the fashion of a maverick. A crucial addition to this, however, is a non-chalance with regard to this maverick status: cool people are breaking rules (or setting their own), but in this process, they are comfortable, collected and express the attitude of 'it's no big deal'. According to Norman Mailer's definition (which Pountain and Robins use, but which we reproduce at greater length below) to be cool is:

> to be in control of a situation because you have swung where the Square has not…. To be cool is to be equipped, and if you are equipped it is more difficult for the next cat who comes along to put you down. And of course one can hardly afford to be put down too often, or one is beat, one has lost one's confidence, one has lost one's will, one is impotent in the world of action … indeed closer to dying. (Mailer 1957 [1992]: 352)

With this definition, it is easy to see that a young man who strikes out on his own, perhaps in defiance of his parents, to make his way to the horn of Africa for jihad, is enacting just such a role.

True to the theme of coolness, al-Shabaab (which is Arabic for 'the Youth') employs a rebellious and playful framing strategy designed to appeal to young males in diaspora communities. In one al-Shabaab recruitment video, Muhammad Al-Amriki, an American who left Minneapolis in 2007, smiles at the camera and speaks directly to potential recruits in the diaspora: 'if you guys only knew how much fun we have over here—this is the *real* Disneyland. You need to come here and join us' (quoted in Brewer 2013).

This youthful appeal also featured in the videos produced by Omar Hammami, a former University of Southern Alabama student who joined al-Shabaab in 2006 and quickly rose to become the face of al-Shabaab's recruitment efforts in the diaspora. Not shy to accompany his videos with his own rap songs,[5] Hammami's usefulness to al-Shabaab came as no surprise to a former friend in the United States that Hammami had converted to Islam in high school:

> If you look at it, it just seems that he is the right person for the job, you know they're looking for someone who is like kinda cool, that relates to them, and they're looking for someone who is hip, but at the same time someone like who knows a lot about the religion and is very passionate about it. (quoted in Putzel 2011)

Before departing for Somalia, Hammami spent a year in Toronto, married a woman from the local Somali community and formed a friendship network that would later lead others to follow him to the Horn of Africa (Goddard 2010). Hammami's ex-wife also spoke to his 'cool factor': 'He speaks like them, he knows what kind of music they like. He was a youth that grew up in the west, you know, like "he's our guy"' (quoted in Putzel 2011).[6]

Thus, from these few examples, we can see that al-Shabaab styles itself in a way that may very well appeal to second-generation Somalis who perhaps feel that they are languishing in the lower strata of the societies that they inhabit. It is as if recruiters, acting as the 'cool older kid', are extending a privileged invitation, and those who accept can expect religious commendation, glory, adventure and an aura of coolness will accrue to them after linking up with the Shabaab. Fundamentally, the coolness of this choice is dependent on the perceived independence of the choice—these are young, confident, rebels with a cause.

Participants' Views on Recruitment to Al-Shabaab

The reality of the life of an international recruit to al-Shabaab would seem to be one that belies this notion of coolness-though-independence, however. As political scientist Ken Menkhaus writes:

> a young diaspora recruit is, upon arrival in Somalia, entirely cut off socially and therefore in theory easier to isolate, indoctrinate, and control for the purpose of executing suicide bombings. Were this not the case, it would much less risky and less expensive for shabaab to simply recruit locals. From

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[5] Hammami's track *Make Jihad with Me* can be heard at http://www.wired.com/images_blogs/dangerroom/2011/04/Make_Jihad_with_me.mp3. Interestingly, one of the only mildly sympathetic comments on al-Shabaab from our sample came in the form of a recapitulation of K'Naan's (a world-famous Somali-Canadian hip hop star) views on the group.

[6] Another source of al-Shabaab's appeal to second-generation Somalis in the diaspora seems to stem from its rejection of clan-based factionalism (Lederach *et al.* 2011: 24). Twenty-nine of our 118 respondents also expressed dissatisfaction with the clan system, expressing a pan-Somali ethnic identity and laying blame for Somalia's troubled political climate with the clan system.

> this perspective, a young diaspora member who heeds the call by a recruiter to "join the cause" of fighting to protect his nation and religion is not so much a terrorist as a pawn, exploited by the real terrorists, those who are unwilling themselves to die for their cause but who are happy to manipulate a vulnerable and isolated youth to blow himself up. (2009: 11–12)

In our interviews, we found many participants who shared this assessment. These participants had counterframes that problematized the reputed cool, collected, independence of al-Shabaab recruits. This is first evident in a theme of *trickery or brainwashing into terrorism*.

Trickery or brainwashing into terrorism

The trickery theme manifested most poignantly in connection with the supposed irrevocability of the commitment to al-Shabaab. As one study participant warned, '[O]nce you hop on the plane and you enter Somalia they grab you then like, you're basically theirs so you can't do nothing about that…. It basically changes, you know, like they take back their word' (male, 16 years old). Another noted the trap-like nature of the al-Shabaab sales pitch: '[T]hey get into your head then once they take you to the plane and buy you a ticket you are basically theirs. You can't do anything about it' (male, 16 years old). Finally, one participant expressed concerns about recruiters 'scamming them, taking their passport and forcing them to [do] suicide bombings I guess, so it's a scam, the ones that I heard of around Canada' (male, 17 years old).

Instead of bald-faced deception, many other participants thought that the undue influence of al-Shabaab recruiters worked more insidiously, at the level of brainwashing. As one participant commented:

> I think it's a cult really I don't know what minds that you're at to be brainwashed but it comes down to anything like if you are easily, if you meet the wrong person or the people and they easily motivate you, because, I mean, there are people that are very charming in a sense and like they, whatever they're saying you actually believe because they're so passionate about it, and like so driven about it, like you just want to believe. (male, 23 years old)

Another remarked that 'you literally get so warped into it…. I get it when a person says 'you know, I've been brainwashed' - and I really honestly, what makes anyone, you know, susceptible to being brainwashed? I don't know' (male, 23 years old). Finally, one participant simply stated that, 'Al Shabaab actually messes with their minds and controls their minds' (male, 20). The anti-cult movement has long made use of the brainwashing trope to delegitimize alternative religious organizations that seek recruits from mainstream society (Bromley and Shupe 1981: 92–100). The responses by our participants when invoking the brainwashing theme have to be understood as similarly delegitimizing in this context.

Although the idea of 'trickery' and 'brainwashing' places moral culpability on the recruiter, recruits themselves were not exempt from ridicule in the perspectives of our participants. Recruits were viewed as 'weak minded' (female, 29), 'gullible' (male, 23), 'just like little kids' (male, 19), 'lack[ing] knowledge' (female, 22) and without a 'strong backbone' (female, 22). Here, the youthfulness of recruits is not interpreted as 'coolness', but rather it is seen a source of vulnerability:

> […] what's weaker than the mind of a kid? You know 'cause like you're just here you don't know what you're gonna do with your life, you don't know anything…. And then, you know, [recruiters can] mold their mind. First you start off slow, you know you could never rush anybody to say go kill yourself. (male, 23 years old)

Others, without prompting, began imagining themselves as giving advice to other youth who might contemplate joining al-Shabaab:

> You grew up in Canada. You were eating McDonald's. You don't know how to fight, dude. You go there you're gonna get shot, you're not gonna help. As opposed to if you learn something, you study and you actually are able to better yourself, then you can go back there and help your people. (male, 23)

Another urged potential recruits to,

> Have a bigger self-understanding of who you are. I mean, if you know who you are, nothing anyone can tell you can affect you. But people that don't know who they are and are trying to find themselves amidst all this exclusionary societies that, you know, you might be living in…. These al-Shabaab maniacs—this is what they prey on. They prey on young, you know, students or kids that are fed up of their economic status, you know, things that they necessarily didn't even try to work on when they were here, and they prey on these kids…. it's sickening, you know? (male, 24 years old)

Thus, in contrast to the framing which styles joining al-Shabaab as a 'cool' endeavour performed by independently minded mavericks, our participants express the sentiment that 'you may think you're cool, but actually you're a tool'. That is, recruits are seen not only as 'uncool' in the general sense, but also in the more specific sense that our participants depicted them as literally mindless instruments of someone else—the antithesis of the independence and non-chalant self-directedness described in the work of Pountain and Robins (2000) and Mailer (1957 [1992]). As one participant noted, al-Shabaab

> […] uses them as a mine, yeah exactly. So that's the one thing that pisses me off, its why are they using you? Why don't they blow themselves up if they're going to paradise soon? (male, 23 years old)

There can be nothing more uncool than someone who lacks the mental capacity to know that he or she is being used, especially when used for such self-destructive, and (as we shall see in the next theme) profane purposes.

Religious bullshit

Religion also proved to be a major resource for our participants when it came to the construction of counterframes. When it came to our question, 'What role does religion play in your daily life?' 88% of participants who responded[7] claimed that it played a major role. The counterframes we encountered therefore did not take the character of secular rebuttals against the Islamic nature of al-Shabaab. Quite the contrary, al-Shabaab itself was frequently criticized for its secularity, its lack of facility with Islamic concepts and what participants perceived as its cynical use of Islam for recruiting purposes. Almost without exception, the Somali-Canadian youth that we spoke with take the view that al-Shabaab has, through its actions, de-legitimized itself from a theological standpoint.

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[7] All but two of our 118 participants responded to the question.

Indeed, when we asked participants about al-Shabaab's use of religion, the reaction was often one of frustration if not outright scorn. We title this theme *religious bullshit* because the term frequently arose when participants discussed the religious vector of recruitment and radicalization. To wit:

> It could be they actually believe in the bullshit cause that these guys say. Like, they're trying to use Jihad or whatever as an excuse but, killing people is not, you're not, you can't fight each other and call it "Jihad." So, it's just murder…. there's different reasons why people do it. I can't exactly say why, I just know it's stupid. (male, 18)

Another participant commented on the activities of recruiters: 'I guess they go to the Mosque and they just get like, I don't know they just tell them some bullshit. Yeah, they just tell them do this on the name of God or whatever' (male, 17). Finally, another respondent remarked that recruiters '[…] just tell them [potential recruits] 'you're gonna be more religious, blah, blah, blah'. And like, it's all bullshit cause like half the stuff they do is not really in Islam' (male, 19)

Participants also frequently used their own religious knowledge to rebut the claims and actions of al-Shabaab. As one participant explained:

> it's not like regular extremism where you just go extreme with the religion, but [instead] you add things that were never there before, and then you go extreme with that.… I used to be very active in my masjid. I would be there all the time, clean there all the time and then help establish programs and everything, but then I started noticing that the girls … they would take a Hadith and then they would misinterpret it. So like, they would take the premise of like you know, boys and girls not to be mixing, right?[8] Which is true, but in certain circumstances. So they'd like be 'okay, then it's not okay to go to school,' which doesn't make sense, you know what I mean? (female, 22)

Respondents also pointed to al-Shabaab's exploitation of religious guilt as a valuable motivator for recruitment. Crucially, the idea of 'religious guilt' was most often refracted through a dual-themed interpretive frame. Although our participants sometimes conceived of the 'guilty status' of recruits as something that is socially engineered by manipulative recruiters promulgating a facile or doctrinally ill-informed Islamic perspective, at other times, our participants would agree that the recruits indeed stood in need of atonement, even from the perspective of (what they viewed as) correct Islam. Reflective of this first aspect was a female participant, who noted:

> I think religion is that one card that you can play, that can guilt trip people like you know everybody wants to attain heaven and … they want to do right by God kind of thing, so it's easier to use religion to skew, it's easy to use religion to kind of get into their heads and, you know, not make them but convince them that this is what they need to do. (female, 22)

Reflective of the second aspect was one participant, who noted,

> there's a little bit of guilt on like why they're not that religious anymore or falling in and out of religiosity. And so and that, that helps with the push…. [I]f I felt really out of line and I really did believe

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[8] The interviewee is possibly referring to *Sahih Bukhari* Volume 7, Book 62, Hadith # 159: 'Allah's Apostle said, "Beware of entering upon the ladies." A man from the Ansar said, "Allah's Apostle! What about Al-Hamu the in-laws of the wife (the brothers of her husband or his nephews etc.)?" The Prophet replied: "The in-laws of the wife are death itself"'.

> in God, like I would feel the need to do a lot too, but I'm not going as far as saying extremism but… (male, 21)

Thus, although there are many dimensions to our participants' views about the use and misuse of Islam for recruitment purposes, the strongest theme we found pertained to the lack of religious credibility on the part of al-Shabaab recruits and recruiters; the idea, in short, that al-Shabaab is 'a small fringe group of religious nutjobs' (male, 18). Our findings therefore echo those of other researchers who point to Islam[9] as a source of resiliency against the recruitment strategies of militant groups like al-Shabaab (Johnston and Sampson 1995; Hoover 2004; Halafoff and Wright-Neville 2009).

Counternarrative: al-Shabaab as 'bogeyman'

In the course of our research, we went into interviews with some trepidation about asking participants about the serious and often stigmatizing topic of recruitment to al-Shabaab. We broached the subject with care, but frequently we were surprised with the humour and candour with which our participants spoke. For example, take the following exchange about al-Shabaab recruitment:

> A: Do you have the feeling that al Shabaab is actively recruiting new members here in Canada?
> I: …me and my friends we joke about it like, 'al-Shabaab!'
> A: And what do you joke about when you joke about it?
> I: Like, for real, like if we see someone and we're running, 'Oh al-Shabaab, ahhh!' (*laughs*) and we have a weird sense of humour…. when you see like the videos they're like running and like they're holding guns and stuff and like you see twelve year old kids, we do the same thing but like we don't do it we just joke about it. (male, 17)

In this particular exchange, and out of the sentiments expressed in the previous sections, we see the metaphor of the 'bogeyman' emerging as a narrative trope that seems particularly apt for describing the youthful diaspora's comportment to al-Shabaab. In some senses, it would seem culturally inappropriate to impose a Western-sounding narrative structure on members of the Somali-Canadian diaspora, but as Presser and Sandberg describe, a growing subset of narrative criminology will involve asking 'how stories before them compare with standard types of genres' (forthcoming: 14). Indeed, as literary critic and cultural historian Marina Warner has shown in voluminous detail, the 'bogeyman' or 'sack man' is a nearly universal character in cultural lore, and it usually involves some sort of moralizing and motivating story in which symbols of innocence (most frequently children) are stolen by an odious figure ('bluebeards, ogres, child-snatchers…[and] other wandering and hungry spirits') and led away, either to live out an indentured, slave-like existence in a foreign land, or to be devoured (2011: 31; see also Widdowson 1977). Such bogeymen narratives are instrumental in people's attempts to 'name dangers and to draw distinctions between them and us' (Warner 2011: 14). We submit, therefore, that the 'bogeyman' narrative is salient for our participants, particularly because it contains three intertwined notions, all of which are expressed by our participants.

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[9] Obviously, those who subscribe to Islam—like any other religion—cannot be homogenized as 'one community'. Despite belonging to different factions and coming from different nations, however, the vast majority of Muslims do not support terrorist groups, their goals or strategies (see, e.g. Pew Research Centre 2007).

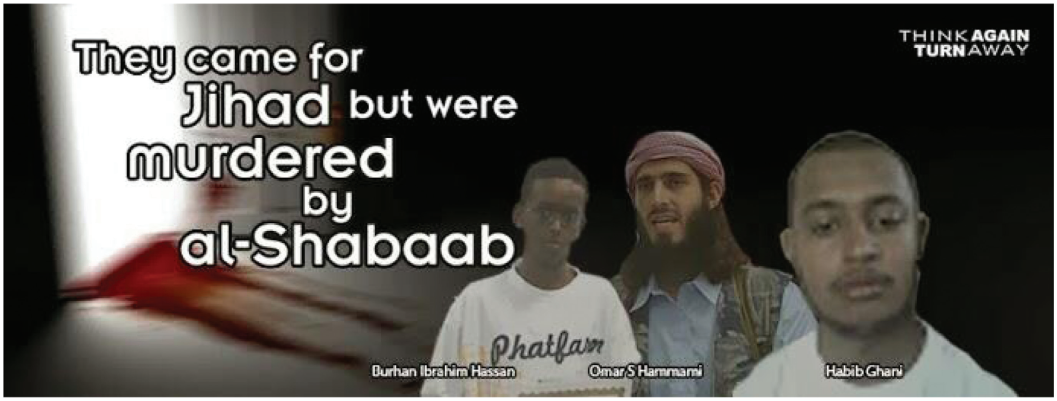
First, there is the repugnant moral standing of the character who tricks or steals children and uses them as a tool for their purposes. In the case of our participants' perceptions of al-Shabaab recruiters, this involves deceit, brainwashing and a 'bullshit' or manipulative use of Islam. Our participants consistently expressed incredulity toward the grinning and sanctimonious promises found in al-Shabaab's messaging, and, equally consistently, they questioned al-Shabaab's moral status.

Second, as expressed by our participants, those who the bogeyman comes for are weak, childlike, vulnerable and helpless—and as such they represent the antithesis of the 'cool' independent actors that recruiters purport them to be. They are, the 'naughty boys' for whom the bogeyman comes and to whom the bogeyman narratives serve as a cautionary tale (Warner 2011: 33).

The third aspect is less apparent because it does not involve characters within the bogeyman narrative *per se*, but rather works on a different order—at the level of the subjectivity of the storyteller him/herself. As we saw, our participants were empowered through their self-positioning, not in the role of the child who is vulnerable to the bogeyman, but instead as the storyteller who knows better ('you don't know how to fight dude' and 'have a bigger self-understanding of who you are'). These participants, because they are able to see through the al-Shabaab recruitment ploys, are able to paternalistically warn would-be recruits, using bogeyman-esque narratives, about al-Shabaab. In short, irrespective of their knowledge of the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen, they are *authors* of the bogeyman theme, and contributors to the bogeyman genre and as such they are active creators of narratives that repudiate al-Shabaab.

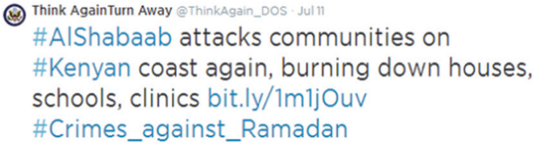
Although on the surface it seems that these narratives are directed outwards, toward other, younger more impressionable youth, it is clear that 'telling the tale' is a form of identity work in terms of self-constitution and self-assurance for the participants themselves. In tale-telling about the bogeyman, these subjects can achieve 'relief from the terror that the thing itself would inspire if it were to appear for real.… [and] discover that they are still alive, outside the tale' (Warner 2011: 6). The rather 'weird sense of humour' mentioned above that accompanied enactments of running away from al-Shabaab recruiters resembles what Warner describes as 'metamorphic humour, which seizes the objects of fear, like beasts, and turns them into something different…a widely and successfully adopted stratagem in the confrontation of fear' (2011: 19). If we apply these insights to the present case, we can see that the narrative-generation of our participants is not merely an incidental by-product of a pre-existing resilience against al-Shabaab. Rather, our participants were extricating themselves from the story of recruitment to al-Shabaab through the very act of taking command of the tale.

Programs like the aforementioned US government 'Think Again. Turn Away' campaign already seem to employ the first two elements of the 'bogeyman' trope described above. This is exemplified in the post from 9 December 2013 depicting Omar Hammami (among others) and captioned by the phrase, 'They came for Jihad but were murdered by al-Shabaab (see below).



(retrieved from https://twitter.com/ThinkAgain_DOS, 10 December 2013).

And tweets, such as the one below, that invoke the 'religious bullshit' frame:


Think AgainTurn Away @ThinkAgain_DOS · Jul 11
#AlShabaab attacks communities on #Kenyan coast again, burning down houses, schools, clinics bit.ly/1m1jOuv #Crimes_against_Ramadan

(retrieved from https://twitter.com/thinkagain_dos, 11 July 2014).

It would seem, however, that current counterterrorism strategies could make better use of the third element, which postulates that, to the extent that community members reach their *own* conclusions and take ownership of condemnatory narratives about a group like al-Shabaab, the more they will enjoy the empowering aspects of being the 'teller of the tale'. Following from this assertion, public policy makers should seek to establish the preconditions for such self-directed ideation and reposition themselves vis-à-vis the communities they supposedly want to address with counterterrorism strategies. But the same is true for scholars: it seems odd that criminologists and terrorism scholars have spent so little attention on what the broad majority of a population has to say about specific terrorist groups—especially when trying to develop specific and targeted policy interventions. This, however, would require a rethinking of theories of radicalization and a greater understanding of how narratives interact with subjectivities. Rather than casting certain communities and/or second-generation diaspora youth as 'at risk', when designing studies or writing grant applications, we might do well to view them instead as sources of resilience. Indeed, and as our study has shown, most members of the Somali-Canadian diaspora have already communally and independently crafted sophisticated and dismissive understandings of groups like al-Shabaab. It is only by asking questions within the Somali diaspora, however, that one can begin to learn how, in recent years, powerful counternarratives are already contributing to and attending the diminution of support for al-Shabaab.

Conclusion

In his study of radicalization toward suicide terrorism, Scot Atran maintains that the last 'line of defense'—intercepting already-radicalized jihadists on their way to targets—is most expensive and the least likely to be successful. Instead, he calls for a 'first line of defense', which would 'drastically reduce receptivity of potential recruits to recruiting organizations' (2003: 1538). Our findings suggest that researchers might be able to better comport themselves to this task by inverting their attempts to understand processes of radicalization. It is not our intention to deny that certain sections of Islamic communities in the West, including Somalis, have been successful at recruiting Islamic extremists and fomenting anti-Western sentiment. However, overall, these remain exceedingly rare. What we do suggest is that rather than focusing on the small handful of individuals who radicalize, we should choose instead to focus on understanding the worldviews of the vast majority who do *not*. John Horgan (2009), in his book *Walking Away from Terrorism*, found that people often leave terrorist groups after becoming disillusioned with the realities of life in terrorist movements. Our study does nothing to call this assertion into question, but rather tables a complementary claim, suggesting that an empowering incredulity towards the mythic elements of terrorist group propaganda has strong potential as an 'upstream' method of preventing engagement. Our discovery of 'bogeyman' narratives within Somali diaspora in Canada suggests that narrative criminology is well placed to conceptualize this form of narrative incredulity. In the case of al-Shabaab and the Somali diaspora in Toronto, Canada, whatever glorified visions may have existed about al-Shabaab have since rung hollow for most youth today, and, as Freeze and Freisen (2013) have noted, the 'Canadian Pipeline to Al-Shabaab has Dried Up'. Indeed, it seems that the very qualities that al-Shabaab purports to offer recruits (independence, coolness, religious correctness), our participants seize for themselves via their *storied rejections* of al-Shabaab and its wiles.

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