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Belonging on the Move

The question of clan amongst Somali migrants

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Abstract

Contemporary migration literature still often takes for granted the idea migrants continue to hold a deep attachment to their home countries and those in them – with such attachments compelling them to assist future migrants, send remittances or dwell transnationally. In reaction to this, much of the diaspora literature has rejected the idea of innate attachments to homelands, instead conceptualizing diasporas as political formations. However, this in turn misses the very real and compelling sense of attachment migrants sometimes – but not always –do feel. To overcome this impasse, I suggest focusing on the notion of belonging; the idea that subjecthood and a sense of ontological security arise only out of situated engagements within particular contexts. When contexts change – as they often do in the case of migration – migrants experience a fundamental need to reconstitute a sense of belonging, and this shapes the particular transnational attachments and engagements that they pursue. I elaborate this point by examining the role of clan identities for Somalis, both in Somalia and the UK diaspora. Though often presumed to be innate, I show how clan identities are variously deployed in response to the changing possibilities Somalis face for establishing and maintaining a sense of belonging.

Keywords: Diaspora; Subjectivity; Belonging; Somali; Clan

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1 Introduction

This paper unpacks a simple claim: that migrants' attachments to their homelands are not fixed within them, automatically enduring through migration. This isn't to suggest that migrants leave with nothing in their hearts, as it is. Rather the idea is that this sense of attachment is created by being situated within certain contexts, and therefore must be reproduced or reinvented when these contexts change. If, following from the publication of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, we have cultivated a rich understanding of how national or ethnic identities are not innate but the product of daily experiences of simultaneity and embeddedness, there is still a need to apply this notion critically to experiences of migration. What is required is a better understanding of how movement relates to, and may even be productive of, particular forms of embeddedness. Here I focus on clan identities amongst Somali migrants to the UK, examining what happens to these identities and their concomitant attachments across the event of migration, as well as the way in which new attachments are forged. The idea that clan identities are somehow at the heart of what it means to be Somali has been prevalent amongst writers on Somalia and the Somali diaspora. By examining the broader context within which clans are given salience, and tracing their transformation over time and space, I hope to challenge this notion.

To do so, I frame my discussion throughout in terms of 'belonging' – relating to the experience of subjecthood as constituted within, and intertwined with, a particular environment. I unpack this idea of belonging in Part 1, and relate it to other key ideas, including 'diaspora' and 'identity'. In Part 2 I take a historical overview of the key modes of belonging in Somali life, and examine the impact of the civil war on these modes of belonging. In Part 3, I take a look at everyday life in the UK, and how belonging arises out of everyday experiences. Here I examine experiences of continuity and change, focusing on clan, but also touching on other forms of belonging.

2 Diaspora and belonging

It has become commonplace to refer to the global population of Somalis living abroad as 'the Somali diaspora'. Indeed, 'diaspora' is a term that has been widely taken up by Somali migrants themselves, as well as those in the Somali territories¹ (Kleist 2008a, b). In many ways this is unsurprising – Somalis fit many of the key features invoked in classic attempts to define diaspora (e.g. Safran 1991; Cohen 2008).

However, in recent years, the concept of diaspora has been shown to be increasingly problematic – with critiques focusing on two interrelated shortcomings. Firstly, the usage of the term has proliferated to refer to almost any experience of dispersal in space. Even with attempts to define key features (e.g. Safran 1991) or analytical dimensions (e.g. Vertovec 1999), the diversity of cases which both fit within, yet often also transcend, these definitions has served to reduce the descriptive and analytical utility of the term (Brubaker 2005). For instance, the diversity of experiences of 'dispersal,' and ways in which this is made meaningful, make it difficult to talk about why or how 'dispersals' are necessarily important for defining a group. Relatedly, the second critique has been that that any notion of diaspora necessarily essentializes the complex lives it hopes to capture. By talking about collective identities in terms of diaspora, we reify group identity as somehow intrinsic, vis-à-vis a shared primordial attachment to a particular homeland, from which departure is necessarily highly consequential (Anthias 1998; Brah 1996). Indeed, Somali histories illustrate both these shortcomings:

¹ Here taken to refer to the territory of Somalia before the 1991 civil war.

most Somalis claim to trace their lineage back to a succession of Arab ancestors – purportedly descended from the Prophet Muhammad’s family – who once lived in the Middle East. These ancestors are often said to have fled persecution on the basis of their Islamic faith. Yet, despite putting significant moral weight on this ancestry, most Somalis do not identify as diasporic Arabs, but as Somalis (Cassanelli 2010; Mukhtar 1995), suggesting that histories of dispersal come to acquire salience in complex and ambivalent ways.

In response to these criticisms, a number of writers have proposed reconceptualising diaspora not as an empirical phenomenon, but as a political project entailing, deployed in performance to create a particular identity (Axel 2004; Brubaker 2005; Sökefeld 2006; Kleist 2008b; Cohen 2008). As Axel (2004) notes, conceptualizing diaspora as a political project bypasses the need for a substantive definition of diaspora. Rather than entailing particular sorts of dispersals, homeland orientations and boundary-maintenance, diaspora political formations are characterized by the combination of narratives of dispersal, ties to the homeland and salient boundaries, and practices which seek to articulate these narratives (Brubaker 2005).

Such approaches take into account both critiques outlined above, but productively invert them. With regard to the anti-essentialist critique, viewing diaspora as a political project allows us to understand diaspora as an act of strategic essentialism, rather than relating to an innate ethnicity. Likewise, with regard to the broader critique of analytical vagueness, if diaspora is an ambiguous, open-ended and polysemic construct, then it works all the better as a concept to deploy for encompassing a diverse range of subjectivities and experiences within a single conceptualization of identity; the ambiguous nature of the concept of diaspora allows for it to be inhabited in diverse ways.

Viewing diaspora as a political project, as these authors do, conceptualizes it as a discursive construct deployed to frame and mobilize group identity. For example, in trying to account for the widespread idea of a Somali diaspora, Kleist (2008a, b), argues that:

claims of diaspora can... be seen as reflecting political aspirations and identifications, aiming to mobilise and link people to certain histories of displacement, suffering, and community. Diaspora thereby becomes a concept of a political identity that might at once be claimed by and attributed to different subjects and groups. (2008b: 1130).

In this reading, the idea of the Somali diaspora is a particular, largely instrumental, framing of identity, encompassing diverse subjectivities and experiences, but held together by common – though vague – themes of transnational orientation and moral connection to Somalia and Somalis in the homeland. A polysemic construct, it is able to encompass experiences both of suffering and dislocation and of transnational agency and inclusion. This polysemy allows migrants with diverse experiences to negotiate their own identity within this discourse, while also enabling them to claim recognition from a diverse range of groups – their ‘host’ societies, international organizations and those within the Somali territories. This ‘recognition’, in turn, becomes the grounds for social agency, and encourages further use of the discursive formation (see Kleist 2008b).

While I find this approach useful, there is something lacking. In this reformulation, in order to encompass diverse experiences and subjectivities, diaspora is reimagined as something fairly superficial – discursive constructs which are deployed to negotiate personal identity, ultimately having little to do with the ‘inner worlds’ of migrants. While successfully avoiding essentialization, this formulation abandons something valuable from the older conception of diaspora; a concern with deeply felt senses

of attachment that seem to endure across time and space. If we are interested in this deep and durable attachment then, we must look beyond the concept of diaspora, and examine the underlying personal and interpersonal dynamics which animate it as a political construct – something which many discourse-focused approaches fail to do.

There is good reason to pay attention to these inner worlds: many migrants do seem deeply compelled by a sense of enduring attachment to an idea of home. If evidence of this affective weight is required, we need look no further than many Somalis, who send back remittances – to support not only immediate family, but extended kin or friends – even when barely surviving themselves (e.g. Horst 2006a; Lindley 2009); who make costly trips back to Somalia so that their children can grow up in the ‘right’ culture (e.g. Sporton and Valentine 2008); who fly back to Somaliland to have Somali sheiks and healers attend to bodily ailments through communal rituals (e.g. Tilikainen 2012); and so on. All this points to an identity that has gone beyond being a discursive framing of personal experience to being compelling in its own right – it reveals, not a separation, but an embedding of identity and agency within a compelling sense of belonging.

This argument requires some unpacking. A useful starting point is Bateson’s (1972) seminal work in phenomenological anthropology. Arguing that subjectivity emerges out of situated engagement with the world – that we understand our selves by dint of how we interact with the world around us – Bateson argues that our experience is one not of being, but of being-in-the-world. In short, particular experiences of subjecthood come to be deeply felt when their parameters play out in the environment of everyday life.

From here, it follows that to have a sense of stable and continuous subjecthood we need some sense of continuity in the context in which it is constituted - indeed, this is at the centre of Bourdieu’s notion of habitus (1990). This is the case for three reasons. Firstly, because if we are to act as agents, we must be able to anticipate the consequences of our actions, and to have faith that these consequences will obtain over time (De Certeau 1984; Giddens 1990: 92). This entails not only confidence that we will be able to shape our environment, but to have confidence that others within this environment will recognize and respond to our subjecthood (Taylor 1994). Secondly, relatedly, if we are to engage with others intersubjectively, we must be able to understand the meanings they are deploying and to anticipate their own reactions and mental state (Gay y Blasco and Wardle 2007: 68). Finally, to be able to ascribe meaning to our experiences of the world, we have to be able to situate these experiences and ourselves – to understand our position and experience in terms of broader patterns of meaning (Hannerz 1996: 22; Anthias 2006: 20). Moreover, these three imperatives are inseparable from each other – for each to be realized, the other two are also required (Bourdieu 1990; Hannerz 1996 Anthias 2006).

In short, as our experiences and action become premised upon particular expectations of the world playing out, our subjecthood comes to feel tied-up in particular contexts, with certain experiences and social encounters feeling resonant with, and constitutive of, this subjecthood. The consequence is that engagement within a particular social and environmental context comes to feel like much more than “just a question of identification,” but is likely to evoke a deep sense of “resonance” (Anthias 2006 21-22) – of belonging. Indeed, we are likely to experience a sense of ‘ontological insecurity’ when our expectations of our world and our place within it no longer hold true (Giddens 1990). Crucially, then, our subjecthoods only feel ‘real’ and ‘stable’ by dint of their performance in relation to particular social and material environments. Throughout this paper, I refer to this intertwining of subjecthood and the context within which it is constituted as ‘belonging’.

This notion of belonging in turn presents a vision of agency: In this perspective, agency can be directed in three non-exclusive ways: acting within one's present situated context; acting on the context in which one is situated, either to transform or reproduce it; or re-situating oneself elsewhere, or otherwise to remain within a changing context (De Certeau 1984). However, in either case, agency is something emergent from our current positionality, a property of subjects who are always-already situated – making us engaged in a constant movement between being and becoming, within which subjecthood is reproduced and transformed (Bourdieu 1990; Wise 2011). Likewise, just because personhood is a 'situated' endeavor, this does not stop it from being multiple or fragmentary – one person can be familiar with and disposed to act within multiple arrangements of meaning and relations – there is no requirement for a single, coherent life-world. However, without feeling situated in some way in the first instance –without having a sense of belonging in the way discussed here – we are unlikely to feel secure in ourselves, our experiences or our agency. This understanding of action as necessarily grounded in and emergent from particular contexts is central to the analysis of Somalis' lives throughout this paper.

This gives us a rich concept of belonging – as encompassing the possibilities for agency, recognition, intersubjectivity and meaning that situated subjecthood entails. Importantly, this is something different from, but related to, identity which I take here to be socially recognizable discursive constructs, entailing particular repertoires of meaning and performance, which we map onto our experiences of subjecthood – but which only ever partially capture this underlying subjecthood. By enacting particular identities, we can come to inhabit them – to connect them up with, and make them evocative of our experiences of subjecthood. In turn deploying particular markers of identity often allows us to situate ourselves socially in ways which allow us to constitute a deeper sense of subjecthood. Thus, over time the performance of identity – of group boundary markers, in Barth's sense (1969) – can overtime cultivate a more fundamentally felt 'difference in kind' (Sahlins, 1999), and come to have "resonance with stability of the self" (Anthias 2006: 21).

Turning to diasporas then, it is clear that the act of migration does not a diaspora make. At first, diaspora serves as an identity, as a socially-recognizable category, but not as a locus of belonging. However, as Werbner (2002) notes, in deploying discourses of diaspora, we come to enact this identity – and thus begin to situate ourselves in diasporic ways. Enacting transnational connections and continuities in our daily lives, these have the potential to become the context in which we dwell and constitute ourselves (Massey 1994; Hannerz 1996). Thus, the political project of diaspora is able to take on a deeper resonance – to become something compelling, and felt as fundamental to one's sense of self. Here, it is important not only to distinguish between diaspora as a political discourse, and the drive to constitute a more fundamental sense of belonging, but to pay attention to the interplay between these two phenomena.

At the same time, it is vital to bear in mind that diasporic identity is only ever one outcome of attempts to situate oneself and thereby constitute a sense of belonging. If the fundamental (but not necessarily sole) goal of constituting belonging is to attain a secure sense of situated subjecthood, then diasporic belongings are richest when they offer the richest possibilities for embeddedness. However, even then they are not totalizing. Again, people negotiate their belongings in complex ways, so that being diasporic can both be a fundamental part of who they are, and only ever part of the picture. Moreover, if each person constitutes a sense of belonging within a different positionality, we cannot expect diasporic belongings to entail the same experiences and meanings for different people, even as they may share a strongly felt sense of collective belonging. In this sense, the idea of diasporic belonging is, on one level, always a discursive construct – encompassing a diversity of experiences. At the same

time, diasporic identities hold the potential to mobilize a deeply-felt sense of belonging, with their symbolization and performance potentially resonating quite widely, evoking each individual's personal situated sense of belonging.

Throughout this paper then, I explore the complex ways in which Somali migrants constitute their own belonging, and how this relates to particular ideas and experiences of attachment. To start with, I first look at the dynamics of affiliation and belonging prevalent throughout Somalia's recent history, and the role that clan has played in this belonging.

3 Somali belongings

Before examining what clan has come to mean in the Somali diaspora, it is important to unpack its role in Somali social life throughout recent history. Given that many of the arguments that have been made about the social transformation which have occurred in the diaspora, and especially about the resurgence of clanship, are grounded in a simplistic reading of Somali social and political life, this section serves as crucial context for the examination that is to follow of the complex identities that have formed in the diaspora.

In the north of Somalia, livelihoods have traditionally been characterized by nomadic pastoralism – sustaining some 60% of Somalia's population – and in the Southern regions, by a combination of pastoralism and seasonal farming (Mansur 1995; Abdi Samatar 1994). Throughout Somalia, social and political life centred on the 'segmentary lineage' system. There are six large, patrilineal clan families – the *Dir*, *Daarood*, *Isaaq*, *Hawiye*, *Digil* and *Rahanweyn* – each professing descent from a mythologized founding ancestor. However, the precise age of the clan-family, the nature of its genesis, and the make-up of its lineage will vary in the telling (Lewis 1994). Clan-families are divided into a number of clans, clans into lineages, and lineages into '*diya*-paying groups'. *Diya*-paying groups, known as *jilib*, were the primary unit of political life, and were collectively responsible for their members' political actions, from paying *diya* (reparations) to the everyday political organization and action of the group overall. However, political alliances were formed at every level of the segmentary system, in response to the exigencies of particular situations – from negotiating for grazing or water rights, to conducting livestock raids on rival groups, to organizing trading activity. Thus, two *jilib* involved in a feud over one issue, may nonetheless come together for other purposes at the level of their shared lineage or as part of a broader conglomeration at the clan level (Lewis 1994).

There has been a tendency amongst writers on Somalia (e.g. Lewis 1994), and its diaspora (e.g. Griffiths 2002; Harris 2004; Horst 2006a) to take segmentary clanship as a fixed principle of affiliation – something with "compelling power because of its ostensibly inherent character 'bred in the bone' and running 'in the blood'" – which has predominated in directing the course of Somali history (Lewis, 1998: 233). While it's certainly true that clan identities have proven particularly compelling, the idea that this is because they are somehow innate or fixed clashes strongly with ethnographic accounts – including those of Lewis himself. Rather, such accounts reveal clan as important precisely for its flexibility. In this reading, the clan system facilitated a mode of flexible social organization that sought to balance between stability and a dynamic ability to adapt to social and political exigencies. Herein, belonging was not simply a matter of static affiliation, but something constituted, and continually transformed, in the ongoing negotiation of allegiances and rivalries.

While kinship (*tol*) did indeed form the predominant basis of social life and identification, *tol* is best understood as encompassing a set of dynamics rather than fixed relations. While closely related groups were commonly understood as being bound to mutual support, while more distant as opposing,

and sometimes combative, rivals, in practice this ideal was was “often more honoured in the breach” (Mukhtar 1995: 14). Rather, relatedness was typically the product of inter-group negotiation. Genealogies were framed in processual terms – as *abtirsiinyo*, one’s “reckoning” of ancestors (Lewis 1994: 19). In this reckoning, claiming descent from particular ancestors – associated with particular wars, alliances or events – served to assert both one’s own virtue as well as moral claims of affiliation or rivalry with others, within and beyond the clan family (Cassanelli 2010; Mohamed 2007; Mukhtar 1995; Mansur 1995 Lewis 1994). In turn, this facilitated flexible constellations of collective affiliation, situated within common histories, values and projects, and thus for the ongoing movement of groups through physical and social space.

Beyond the patrilineal affiliations of *tol*, marriages – typically between different clans – provided a means of forging inter-lineage solidarity by forging further obligations and ties (Lewis 1994: 25). Though such obligations were secondary to those of clan, marriage nonetheless held significant moral weight, with the ties it forged held as the grounds for peace after feuds, and for enduring intergroup cooperation (Keynan 2001; Lewis 1994).

On top of this, kinship was strongly governed by the principles of contract and customary law – collectively termed *heer*. Critically, membership in the *jilib* was not seen as innate but as produced by members entering into a contract (Lewis 1994: 21), as were many other key social institutions – from households, to businesses, to lineage-allegiances. More broadly, *heer*, alongside certain (often-hybridized) Islamic practices, offered a general framework of values which governed social interactions (Mohamed 2007; Ahmed Samatar 1994; Lewis 1994). This entailed principles such as equality before the law (as established by contracts); recognition of the primacy of contracts; and recognition of the human origin of the law, and thus its negotiability (Lilius 2001). While these values varied across time and space, and could even be a source of conflict between groups, they nonetheless strove to project an overarching moral universe that encompassed all Somalis, providing a broad context for the recognition of personhood and permissible action, and for collective the collective negotiation of meaning. In Ahmed Samatar’s assessment *heer* gave the Somali people a social “center of gravity...managing intersubjectivity and offering ... continuity” (1994: 111).

Contracts and the *jilib*’s political strategy were negotiated at political councils – *shir* – which were led by elders, but open to all married men, with their relative power and position established by their perceived virtue. In turn, one’s virtue was established – never inherited – through accumulation of livestock, participation in political life, and performing deeds indicative of honour, courage and wisdom, including livestock-raids on rival clans, the negotiation of contracts, and participation in public acts of oration – from political speech, to poetry, to sharing valuable social information (Mohamed 2007; Kusow 1995; Olden 1999). Migration and exploration were also important in acquiring virtue; seen as a journey to far afield to secure and bring back resources – whether finding fertile pastures or bringing back the benefits of a foreign education – migration framed in terms of a narrative of discovery, appropriation and return, that enriched both the individual and their relations (Rousseau et al. 1998). Overall, ideal male personhood can be seen in terms of an idiom of negotiation and acquisition that valued the careful balancing between conflict and stability, so as to secure resources and recognition from others. Conversely, marginality entailed being excluded from social regard and cut off from participation.

In contrast, idealized female personhood could be understood in terms of ‘embodiment’ – of the virtuous status and resources that constituted the household. While women also worked to manage livestock or farms, they did not participate in the inter-group negotiations that made this possible. As

such, traditional female personhood was seen in terms of managing resources, and the household itself – with women as repositories of the family’s virtue and well-being. The right to divorce meant that this was not a passive embodiment, but an active reflection of a sense of wellbeing in the marriage. The departure of a wife was seen not only as a failure of the inter-group ties the marriage embodied, but also of the man himself (Lewis 1994; Kapteijns 1994).

Overall, the dynamic possibilities of kinship and contract, alongside the practice of Islam, provided the basis for the notion of a broader Somali identity. Despite the absence of the ethnic unity or cross-cutting horizontal ties, by which we often conceptualize nationalism, (Anderson 1991), this identity was a source of pride – invested in the dynamic system of mutual support and regulated rivalry, and the potential for personhood therein. As Healy (2010: 373) notes, this was

a social system that results in, and enshrines, structural precariousness as a norm. Fractious and divided as the system was (and remains), it nonetheless provided a commonly understood system that belonged to all the citizens in the country, beside extending to communities outside its boundaries.

Though certainly variable amongst groups, times and regions, and with its own patterns of marginalization and contestation (see Besteman 1995; 1996a), broadly this dynamic provided an situated sense of belonging grounded more in a flexible mode of practice, than a fixed repertoire of meanings and relationships – though it also entailed particular forms of reification, particularly in the division of gender roles.

The era of colonialism initiated a transformation in this system. Growing urbanization and the expansion of international trade provided new opportunities to accumulate wealth and power. As young, unmarried men were drawn by these opportunities, the ability of elders to accumulate wealth and prestige through employing such young men as camel herders, was disrupted. The rule-by-proxy approach of both Britain and Italy not only led to the appointment of certain clan elders to positions of governance, but reified group identities in the process – as clans, and ‘typical’ livelihoods of pastoralism or agro-pastoralism were used to demarcate groups, forming the basis for governance into the future (Besteman 1995). Overall these transformations created new possibilities for power, transforming it from a fluid property of inter-group relations, and a matter of social recognition, into something which could be securely accumulated, and a matter of recognition by the state (Mohamed 2007; Kapteijns 1994). As power became fixed within key nodes, action became oriented towards capturing these nodes.

With independence and especially under Siyaad Barre’s dictatorship the consolidation of power by state and bureaucratic authorities continued. At the same time there was no attempt to form other institutions of participation that could have cultivated a sense of common civic-investment (Ahmed Samatar 1994; 2001). Emerging class and racial divisions were subsumed within the idiom of clan – which went some way to provide a redistributive framework, but largely served as a legitimating discourse (Ahmed Samatar 2001; Kapteijns 1994; Menkhaus 2010; Besteman 1995; 1996b). Meanwhile, the ambivalent handling of clan by the Barre administration further contributed to its reification. On one hand, couched in a discourse of modernization and official anti-clanism, *diya* payments and the payment of bridewealth were abolished, while attempts were made to undermine the significance of the *heer*, limiting key institutions of cooperation and dispute resolution. At the same time, Barre courted those clan elders and leaders which he saw as influential – pursuing a strategy of divide-and-rule – again, incentivising the ‘capture’ of the state by clan leaders (Hesse 2010; Ahmed Samatar 1994; 2001). In turn, as clan politics lost their fluidity, other forms of collective negotiation emerged. For example Anderson et al. (2007; c.f. Klein 2007) note that it was around this time that the

custom of men gathering in cafes and homes to chew khat and discuss politics – a kind of informal *shir* council – spread from the south to the rest of the country.

These changes were exacerbated by, the ill-fated Ogaden war (1977-1978) – intended to recapture the Somali-dominated Ogaden territory from Ethiopia – which led only to defeat and an inflow of refugees into Northern Somalia. Soon after the North became militarized as the government deployed militias to better control the refugees and especially the accompanying inflows of foreign aid. Meanwhile, in the South, further attempts by the state to consolidate its governance saw the appropriation and redistribution of farmland as well as attempts to resettle the nomadic clan-families of the North, often on this state-appropriated land (Besteman 1996a, b). Though driven by Barre's desire to consolidate state power and governance, and to pursue his particular vision of modernization, these events significantly exacerbated both the reification of clan and a growing sense of inter-clan division (for more detailed accounts see Lewis 1994; Kapteijns 1994; Menkhaus 2010; Ahmed Samatar 2001 and Besteman 1996a,b). While transforming the nature of the clan system, these developments also introduced or cemented other lines of division and principles of organization. However, many of these were subsumed within the idiom of clan – due partly to attempts by clan elders to reconstitute their authority within the framework of the state, and partly to the Barre government's attempts to re-frame the challenges of the time within a divisive idiom of inter-clan conflict. Given all this, it's no surprise that the reaction against the state, and the outbreak of civil war in 1989 was framed in clan terms – indeed that stark divisions between clans became the predominant dynamic of Somali politics (Menkhaus 2010). At the same time, it's important to understand that the clan identities mobilized at the time of the war, and often haunting refugees into the diaspora, were part of a gradual – and never complete – fragmentation and reification of a much more complex way of life. To Somalis today, clan is both this former dynamic of relation, and the newer 'tribalized' identities given terrifying salience during the civil war.

For most the experience of war was one of violent disjuncture; an abrupt collapse and subversion of the context within which everyday belonging was constituted. Many describe experiencing a sort of incredulity – hearing fighting, witnessing soldiers, or hearing stories of theft, killings and rape, but being unable to understand how such events could come to bear on the mundane routines and exchanges of their daily life (Farah 2000; Roble and Rutledge 2008; Hussein 1997). There was a commonplace understanding that the conflict was centered around inter-clan divisions but nonetheless this understanding often jarred with everyday experience. At the same time, despite the disjuncture they evoked, narratives of clan also helped Somalis navigate the conflict – as the most viable means of imposing predictability on a dangerously unpredictable situation. Amal puts it:

Some people of my clan [Mijerteyn] they made an attempted coup ... All the Mijerteyn who were in the city were paying for that attempted coup. All the Somalis were against these people. They say, 'uh, uh. You are Mijerteyn so you have to pay'. *We suffered but we didn't want to leave because we said 'why, I am not this expectation to be near our home but I will do my living'... we expected after the civil war, 'ah huh, you were the people who were suppressed for twenty years, now will come people who will understand your problem' (pause, laughter).* We had to leave our houses, our things... [Griffiths asks: 'who was running after you?'] Not only Aideed really but anyone who was of that clan [Hawiye]. *That clan was thinking that...they have the power to destroy everything.. At that time they were saying: 'This is your clan, you take the power and you make everything'.* (Griffiths 2002: 98-99, emphasis mine).

This experience of disjuncture and incomprehension resonates through the stories of countless refugees (Farah 2000; Rutledge and Roble 2008). Throughout all this, clan may have been a thin essentialization of a richer belonging but this very thinness allowed it to offer some sense of continuity and comprehensibility in an otherwise disjunctive and volatile world.

For many fleeing their homes, the experience of refugee camps only served to deepen the insecurity they felt; life in the refugee camps was characterized by a pervasive uncertainty, and despite refugees' resourcefulness in securing their day-to-day survival, for the most part they were confined to the responsive 'tactics' of daily life, rather than the 'strategies' which could re-establish a *durable* sense of security and situated subjecthood (Farah 2000; Horst 2006b). Facing a generalized insecurity which conflated physical danger, threats to livelihoods, and threats to a mode of life (Lindley 2009; Richards 2005) – many Somalis dreamt of moving elsewhere to rebuild all three.

Today around 2 million Somalis, or over 20% of the population, are estimated to be living abroad (Horst 2006a, b) – with around 5% of such migrants living in Europe (Barou et al. 2012). The UK hosts the largest Somali population outside of Africa, with numbers estimated between 100,000 and 200,000 – the vast majority of whom arrived after the outbreak of civil conflict (Aspinall and Mitton 2010; Rutter 2006).

The UK has long been a compelling destination for Somalis, becoming woven into the Somali social imaginary. Today, the size of the Somali community and the comparatively open multicultural environment help make the UK an appealing destination. However, more important are the stories told by earlier migrants themselves, who strove to depict themselves as adventurers in a land of opportunity, where they nonetheless led 'Somali lives' (see Bang-Nielsen 2004; Kleist 2010; Van Liempt 2011). These impressions intertwine with a broader imaginary of life in 'the west', transmitted through international media, pop culture, the presence of foreigners, and return migrants (Horst 2006a,b; Hansen 2007), to create a rich vision of life in the UK. Indeed, such visions shape the trans-national relationships between migrants and those left behind to such an extent that enacting them often becomes a priority for migrants. Tellingly, even though many migrants live in poverty, and experience sending remittances as a significant burden, they will often insist they are doing well to their relations abroad, and use their meagre resources to send remittances as proof of this (Horst 2004; Lindley 2010; Hammond 2010).

With the dislocation of the civil war, these images became a key element in how Somalis have re-imagined their futures and the possibility of reconstituting their lives. Going abroad is not only seen as a way to escape present insecurity, but as a way of (re)gaining and even enhancing a sense of agency and personhood in novel ways. Having seen the impact of remittances on the lives of those around them, Somalis may associate such a position with heightened agency and community regard. As Zeinab, who had been ostracized for having a baby out of wedlock, put it, "The only solution for me is to go overseas with my husband and daughter. Then I will send my family money every month so that they will realize their mistake" (Horst 2006a: 150). Oftentimes entire communities will invest in the migration of individuals – both personally and in terms of resources – with such support cutting across clan lines (Rousseau et al. 1998). Likewise, in transit there is a strong traditional norm of collective hospitality, grounded in *heer* and the nomadic tradition (Rousseau et al. 1998; Al-Sharmani 2007b). In this way personal and community investment in a vision of migration can be a way of constituting both the individual and the community, at least in part, beyond the prevailing inter-clan divisions. More fundamentally, even while the UK is imagined as very different, its incorporation into Somali imaginaries informs an underlying expectation of ontological continuity – that it is part of the same life-

world. However, migrants quickly find that this continuity cannot be taken for granted, but is something they must struggle to re-create, especially given the limited, and limiting, resources they have available.

4 Clan and Belonging in the UK

By now it should be clear that Somalis do not hold clan to be “ostensibly inherent”, and indeed that the complex lived experiences underlying clan identities have changed significantly over time. Nor is there a singularity of experience informing clan identities today; while they have taken on stark new implications, especially after the war, these implications are only ever part of what Somalis experience clan to be. Nonetheless, it has been argued that clan divisions remain highly salient within the UK, and have become one of the main factors underlying the continued social and economic marginality of the Somali community. This claim has been made both from within the Somali community (see: Griffiths 2000; Farah 2000; Hassan et al. 2009) and – tactfully – in much of the policy and academic literature on the Somali community (e.g. Adfam 2009; Griffiths 2000; Hopkins 2006) in a way highly reminiscent of Lewis’s claim that clan is experienced as part of Somalis ‘blood and bone’. While not denying the powerful force and salience given to clan identities amongst the UK diaspora, in this section I hope to shift the focus to the processes by which clan becomes ‘ossified’ and by doing so to better unpack the specific salience, possibilities and limitations of clan identities today.

Two themes colour this section. The first is the idea that constituting belonging is a driving imperative for migrants. If we accept that particular subjecthoods are situated within particular contexts, then clearly migration can be destabilizing to one’s fundamental experience of self. Reproducing, or re-inventing a situated sense of belonging then becomes a key focus of migrants’ daily lives, with an intent to recapture a sense of continuity of self and experience – a sense of ontological security. Hence I argue that clan identities are themselves a product of this impetus towards belonging, played out in a particular context. The second theme is the close relationship between the forms of belonging which do emerge, and the particular experiences of ontological insecurity – i.e. of ‘non-belonging’ – which permeate migrants’ daily lives. The argument here is that migrants’ situate themselves locally or transnationally in various ways based on their ability to access and reproduce particular modes of belonging (c.f. Ralph and Staeheli 2011). To argue that migrants ‘work with what they have’ may seem a bit obvious, but the upshot of this is that migrants’ lives and engagements need to be seen in a more holistic light than is usually presented. Taking these themes together, the key implication is that the dynamics of belonging are *necessarily* prior to local and transnational engagements, and the way identities come to be constructed and deployed.

Before looking at everyday experiences of belonging and how they inform clan identities, it is helpful to take a broader overview of Somali life in the UK. Today, Somali migrants have come to settle in Birmingham, Leicester, Brent, Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool, Cardiff, and Bristol, but the majority live dispersed across London. Despite a long history of migration (see: Farah 2000), the present community faces a number of notable difficulties. Somalis have persistently had the highest unemployment rate out of immigrant groups in the UK (Aspinall and Mitton 2010; Rutter et al. 2008: 51). The hourly pay of Somalis is likewise low – likely the lowest amongst migrant groups. While income disparities and rates of employment are fairly even between genders, extreme poverty is widespread with 28% of Somalis earning less than £99 a week (Rutter et al. 2008: 53-58). Even more qualified migrants struggle as they face a general unwillingness of employers to acknowledge qualifications and experience obtained in Somalia, forcing them to start ‘from scratch’ in menial and poorly paid jobs.

More fundamentally, a lack of language and literacy skills have hampered the community's ability to navigate life in the UK, often turning otherwise mundane tasks, such as shopping or home-repair, into significant struggles (Sakyiwah 2012; Harding et al. 2007). Moreover, the resources to address such challenges – such as ESOL classes – are widely considered to be under-provided (Harris 2004; Adfam 2009). Experiences of an authoritarian state, and the greater trust placed in oral communication – which allows for the speaker to be evaluated alongside the statement (Arthur 2004; Olden 1999) – has also led to some distrust of state services, and thus an under-awareness of entitlements and an under-utilization of services (Hassan et al. 2009; Adfam 2009).

Finally, the fact that most Somalis enter the UK as asylum-seekers has a significant impact upon their lives. Their legal status and the widespread dependency on social housing has served to limit the ability of Somalis to control their residence or mobility, especially with the scarcity of social housing allowing little room for choice (Warfa et al. 2006; Cole and Robinson 2003; Rutter et al. 2008). In turn this has made it difficult for the community to pool resources or to create robust institutions of mutual support and to participate in civic and social life, whether with other Somalis or the wider British population (Bloch 2002). Most importantly, with the majority of Somalis who have arrived since 1991 only being granted 'exceptional leave to remain', everyday life is characterized by an insecurity which has made it hard for Somalis to envision, plan for, or act on a future in the UK (Aspinall and Mitton 2010).

Overall, the conditions faced by the Somali community are widely reported as informing a deep sense of marginality, isolation and even insecurity, which, in turn, shapes the possibilities for belonging in profound ways. In this context, familiar modes of personhood become surprisingly difficult to inhabit, and life in Britain becomes highly disjunctive. Unemployment affects men the most, upsetting their accustomed role as providers for the household (Adfam 2009; Harris 2004) and making it hard for them to inhabit the narrative of migration as adventure, enrichment and return discussed above. Both the literature and personal accounts are replete with claims that men now simply sit around the house, or else become fixated with chewing the traditional stimulant, *khat* in cafes, sleeping all day and spending most nights in *khat* fuelled discussion of Somali life. In turn, this can perpetuate the further loss of familial status and roles (Harding et al. 2007; Harris 2004; Griffiths 2002; Anderson et al. 2007). The situation for women is often more ambivalent. Many women may feel personally empowered by the greater autonomy and economic importance that welfare support enables, but at the same time often frustrated with the disintegration of what they feel are valuable family structures and traditions, and may often vie to recreate some sense of community belonging from their new position as heads or joint-heads of households in a less-than-familiar country (Ali 2001; Sakyiwah 2012; Whittaker et al. 2005; Harris 2004; Adfam 2009). Overall, even today, many Somalis tellingly claim that they still feel "like a new community", needing time to settle (Hassan et al. 2009: 12).

For many commentators, clan identities – understood as a fixture of Somali identity – have divided the community in a way which prevents adaptation, and perpetuates marginality. Indeed clan divisions have remained salient within the UK, both within daily life and in shaping how the community views itself and pursues collective projects (Griffiths 2000; 2002; El Solh 1991). This has not only weakened the potential for pooling resources and providing collective support, but has also led to a reduction of outside support for the community, based on the impression that community organizations are just using public resources for self-serving ends (Adfam 2009; Hopkins 2006). Moreover clan divisions are seen as melding with, and perpetuating other problems. For example, those men who spend much of their time and income chewing *khat* often do so while in fervent discussion of interclan politics in Somalia and the UK. Here, their fixation on clan identities and politics is implicated alongside their

chewing habits by those who bemoan the ‘unproductive’ and isolating activities of these men (Anderson et al. 2007; Klein 2007; Griffiths 2002). This divisive and marginalizing impact of clan has been well documented – most notably by David Griffiths (2002; 2000; see also Hopkins 2006).

However, while Griffiths and some others are sensitive to the idea that clan identities do not innately define Somalis, the tendency has been to focus on the emergence and interplay of other formulations of identity and belonging alongside clan. This approach remains problematic in that, while arguing for multiplicity and diversity, they nonetheless take the *persistence* of clan identities for granted – as “ongoing attachments” “inherited from the home country” (Griffiths 2002: 97, 94) – rather than focusing on *how and why* they are reproduced and acquire salience abroad.

Indeed, there is no reason to assume that clan divisions *ought* to be salient. As noted, norms of cross-clan support and hospitality in migration often supersede clan divisions. Indeed, Somalis in Egypt, emphasize the need for unity and cooperation, explicitly contrasting this to the ‘un-Somali’ state of clan conflict in Somalia (Al-Sharmani 2007b). Likewise, the more economically prosperous and politically powerful community in Minneapolis has little in the way of clan divisions – even when people only tend to remit to their particular networks and areas of origin (Horst 2004; 2007). Finally, accounts of the older Somali community tend to mention a broad spirit of mutual support, that transcended clan lines (see Farah 2000).

In this light, my argument is that divisive clan identities need to be seen in the context of the breakdown of a mode of being in Somalia –detailed above – coupled with the particular possibilities for constituting a sense of belonging in the UK, which encourage many Somalis to pursue transnational forms of belonging. Consequently, clan dynamics in the UK must be seen not as an endemic division within the Somali community but as a multifaceted response to the broader possibilities for identity, agency and meaning that they face, locally and transnationally.

Given the difficulties many migrants have in establishing a sense of belonging grounded in the UK – especially for the first generation, for whom clan identities are most salient – many migrants strive to constitute belonging transnationally. Transnational engagements – from remittances to phone-calls – and the sharing of information and opinions pertaining to Somalia, serve to intertwine the lives of migrants and those in Somalia (Lindley 2009; 2010; McGown 1999). Such transnational engagements not only embed migrants within familiar contexts, but also allow them to perform and thus inhabit a sense of personhood which is both familiar and empowering. Sending remittances, following events in Somalia, talking about daily life and engaging in familiar practices – all these serve to create a sense of mutual recognition and collectively shared meaning which allow migrants to feel a sense of belonging through their transnational engagements.

Importantly then, for Somalis, transnational belonging is not vague and generalized, but *mediated through specific relations* whose lives are effected by the changing circumstances in Somalia in differing ways – a dynamic better described as ‘translocal’ than transnational (see Brickell and Datta 2011). Because migrants’ transnational relations are always situated in particular ways *vis a vis* the broader conflict, these situated particularities are reproduced in migrants own lives; events affecting kin and relations can jeopardize the basis of their transnational engagement. As one woman put it, “Everything that goes wrong out there... it affects us over here. Because we are not... We are here, still, not emotionally” (Griffiths 2002: 97). For example, McGown (1999) relates an instance where British members of a clan were asked for money to raise a militia by relatives in Somali, so as to reclaim control over their local area. Initially hesitant, the would-be benefactors were swayed not by appeals to

clan affiliation, but ultimately by a video which showed the hardship of friends and relatives' lives under the occupying soldiers, creating a personal connection to the need for a militia. Here, an outcome further reifying clan divisions was mediated through more immediate personal connections.

Likewise, in recounting or debating events in Somalia which play out along clan lines, migrants have to be aware of others' clan, not only to avoid offence or conflict (Bjork 2007), but also to participate in the sharing of information, and exchanges of public oration, that constitute them as transnational Somali subjects. Hence, replicating the lines of division in Somalia facilitates transnational belonging even as it may cause divisions in the UK. As another one of Griffiths' respondents claimed:

“All the Somali, their body is here but their mind is in Somalia. Everybody, young or old is talking about politics in Somalia. There's nobody talking about what's going on in Tower Hamlets. This is the amazing thing. I suppose, they forget there and try to establish here, not talk about politics in this country [Somalia], then they can do something and come together... But everybody is talking about in Somali, what's going on there. What happened yesterday. Do you have a phone number Somalia? What information do you have?” (97)

This constant talk isn't proof of a persistent attachment, as Griffiths presents it, but a *reproduction* of transnational identities, and with it, the divisions of clan.

At the same time, while inter-clan divisions remain salient because of the fallout from civil conflict, Somalis also hold other images of, and aspirations for, clan identities. As I was told in an interview:

“I think what happens is when people fight and people died and the children are told your parents are dead because of that clan – there's a lot of hate...there's been no reconciliation...Somebody said once 'clan only became evil when democracy was introduced'. It's so important to understand... clan was a support network.” (Mohamed, April 2013)

Indeed, transnational engagements may also be experienced as costly and limiting. Many Somalis are critical about the intra-community divisions which sending remittances, participating in clan-based organisations, or sharing stories, may perpetuate. Likewise as Lindley (2009; 2010) notes, sending remittances can often put a severe strain on family finances, harmony and wellbeing, as well as on the autonomy of the remitters – limiting their ability to become better established and provide better support for their relations in the long term. Similarly, as noted, a devotion to chewing *khat* and debating politics can have significant consequences for men – in terms of their income, ability to work, family harmony, and even their ability to send remittances. In all these cases, migrants not only sacrifice some ability to participate in life in the UK, but also forgo other possibilities for engaging transnationally, whether that be investing in Somali enterprises, visiting Somalia, sponsoring relatives' to join them or saving up to return. The fact that migrants nonetheless pursue such engagements and incurs such costs, then, strongly reveals a compulsion to (re)constitute a stable sense of belonging, even at the expense of other aspects of their lives.

In this regard there is also a strong desire within the community to find ways of 'being Somali' that go beyond the challenges posed by clan politics, *khat* chewing, and the material stains of sending remittances. For example, those working at community organizations that provided support across clan lines framed their work as truer to 'Somali values', invoking a broader Somali identity in the practice of mutual support (see Al-Sharmani 2007a,b). However, it is typically those who can go beyond the

salience of clan divisions in their own lives – through finding other ground for belonging – who are happiest to contest clan’s present nature and salience (Farah 2000).

For some, Islam has emerged as this new ground of belonging. As McGown (1999) details, Islam offers British Somalis a multifaceted identity that allows for mutual engagement and recognition within the wider Muslim community, as well as a way of re-situating familiar ‘Somali’ meanings and practices within a stable broader context. Mohamed Sheik Osman’s experiences illustrate this nicely. As he relates:

“When I came to London there were many Imams who were quoting hadiths that are not authentic... We challenged them... Now in the mainstream Sunni Muslim mosques the authentic sources are used. We have made a huge impact...” Later, he adds, “There is no Somali tradition of women going to the mosque... It was unthinkable for women to go to the Mosque, but in the days of the Prophet women went to pray in the mosques. Now this is changing, both in Somalia and here” (McGown 1999: 38-39)

Such Islamic identities are not only multifaceted and versatile – able to be inhabited in diverse ways – but also deep – able to create a sense of fundamental belonging. For example, Asad goes clubbing (and maybe even drinks!) against the wishes of his parents, wanting to share the lives of his British-born peers. At the same time, he nonetheless feels secure in his Muslim identity, claiming:

“you’re Muslim and it’s something you can’t change. Not something you can buy, something [that] is always going to be there for you. And you’re always going to know you are a Muslim, and there’s one Allah and his prophets.” (Sporton and Valentine 2009: 746-747)”

In short, Islamic identities allow for the negotiation of non-clan-based modes of belonging within the Somali community (McGown 1999). Today, Muslim values are often cited as grounds for condemning the factional situation in Somalia, for pursuing a wider, mutually supportive Somali community in the UK, and for providing humanitarian support in the Somali territories (McGown 1999; Hassan et al. 2009).

Meanwhile, for others an alternative sense of belonging has simply arisen out of life in the UK. This is especially the case for the second generation, who may still feel fundamentally ‘Somali’ and not like, or accepted by, other Brits, but nonetheless situate their experiences of being Somali within their lives in the UK, and in the hybrid experiences arising therein. Indeed, for such youth, ‘return’ visits to Somalia can feel profoundly alienating, as can the behaviour of new migrants (Sporton and Valentine 2008; 2009). For such youth, like the community workers and those who emphasize Muslim identities, factional clan divisions do not reflect their own experiences of being Somali, and they are more likely to condemn or dismiss such clan identities (Hammond 2013; Sporton and Valentine 2008; 2009 c.f. Hassan et al. 2009). Ultimately, the ability for all three groups to move beyond clan identities lies in the development of an alternative, more powerful, sense of belonging, just as it is the impulse to constitute a sense of belonging in everyday life that underlies clan’s continued relevance.

5 Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I want to unpack some of the broader implications of the argument laid out here. I have split these into two categories – those pertaining to the idea of ‘diaspora’ and those ensuing from a focus on ‘belonging’.

5.1 Diaspora

First, diaspora identities are not predominantly about orientation towards a ‘primordial’ vision of the homeland. Rather – as an identity capable of mobilizing migrants to action, while being inhabited in diverse ways – they function to situate diasporans at the *intersection* between past and future; mobilizing both a sense of grounded, situated belonging and a future-oriented agency which emerges from this belonging. Building on Clifford’s argument that “Diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension” (1997: 312), diasporic identities are not about looking backwards, but about the negotiation of change.

Second, diasporic identities do not automatically result when members of an ethnic group are dispersed in space, but are shaped by the circumstances they face in places of resettlement. Diasporic identities have to be seen as one potential outcome of the interplay between migrants’ experiences of dislocation, and their present material and social circumstances which shape the possibilities for constituting a sense of belonging. Indeed, many of those who maintain the ‘purest’ attachments to Somalia – who send remittances regardless of personal circumstance, or remain fixated on life in Somalia – are those with the least capacity to further actualize these attachments, as such fixations limits their agency within the British context. In this light, an approach which focuses on the situated dynamics of belonging is also more attuned to power-dynamics, than approaches to diaspora or especially transnationalism which tend to simply celebrate the complexity of migrants identities (e.g. Kleist 2008a, b; Olwig 2004). In this light, diaspora politics do not simply entail mobilization, but necessitate a politics of *appropriation*; of using localised context to make transnational selves.

Third, migrants’ attempts to create a sense of continuity in their sense of identity and belonging does not necessarily make them diasporic. As in the case of Somali youth, belonging can be re-situated in space and in social and material context, so that being ‘Somali’ becomes a belonging which, for some youth, is more successfully constituted in the UK than in Somalia. Just because migrants engage with some idea of a homeland, this homeland does not necessarily predominate their present orientations.

This points to a fourth, broader point – one initially stated in the first section, but which bears repeating – that even when migrants constitute a sense of diasporic belonging, this is only ever a part of their overall sense of belonging, of being-in-the-world. While it may be true that circumstances serve to position, and address migrants as diasporans – creating a diaspora both ‘of itself’ and ‘for itself’ (Van Hear 1998: 210) – this positioning cannot be celebrated as wholly empowering; it must be seen as only ever capturing part of migrants broader experiences of belonging and thus as enabling certain possibilities for subjecthood while limiting others.

5.2 Belonging

We have witnessed an increasing awareness in the Social Sciences of the diversity and complexity of lived experience – something which, in the Western experience, has been brought home by the busy realities of contemporary globalization (Massey 1994). This complex picture affords no space for ideas of people as fundamentally ‘of’ a culture or ethnicity, or as fixed within time or space. Instead, there has been a shift in focus to how humans navigate this complexity. In this approach, still prevalent in many ways, collective identities are not given but produced by particular discourses and practices – which serve to situate the self within a field of difference. However, as argued in the first section, one consequence of this approach is to hollow out the idea of collective identities – to implicitly deny that they were in any way ‘deep’. Ironically then, for an approach which purports to be truer to daily experience, the ways in which people *felt* collective identities to be continuous in space and time, and

deeply compelling, were neglected. Framing everyday life in terms of belonging allows for us to move beyond this impasse – being able to talk about deeply-felt attachments and subjecthoods, while retaining notions of diversity, agency and change. Most crucially thinking in terms of belonging – of the mutual constitution of subjecthood and the environment within which it is situated – allows us to move beyond the commonplace approach of only defining identities in the negative, in terms of difference and excluded ‘others’.

A shift in focus to ‘belonging’ also allows for a rethinking of power and marginality. In particular, it reveals how people who are subject to the same relations of power can nonetheless be affected differently and respond differently – this is possible because each subject is constituted differently in the first place. Moving beyond the Foucauldian admonition that power is everywhere, and that there cannot be power unless the subjects are free to act – this approach allows us to understand exactly what the possibilities for and limitations on action are within particular relationships of power. Likewise, it allows us to think of marginality not as a uniform condition, but as something which interacts with, and is contingent upon, the ways in which people are already situated. For Somali men, for example, welfare dependency is disempowering – ontologically damaging even – while for women, this same position of reliance is experienced as empowering and creates the possibility for new subjecthoods emerging from it. Crucially, what this draws our attention to is the fact that the possibilities for agency, and for broader political change, are constituted within the mundane experiences of everyday life - those experiences which entail the daily inhabitation and thus reproduction or transformation of particular subjecthoods. In short, it’s the little things that often matter the most.

Finally, thinking in terms of belonging allows us to re-think movement itself. This is not an entirely novel idea. Indeed, Massey (1994) has famously argued that just as people do not occupy the same social position, even if they share a particular space, so does migration entail various sorts of movements – from and into differentiated social positions. Similarly, Appadurai (1990; 1996) has argued that movement is always experienced as relative to the global ordering of the constituent elements of human life: images, social relations, knowledge, finance and so on. In short, the point is that movement through space is not necessarily significant; what matters is movement *in the way in which one is situated* (c.f. Ahmed et al. 2003). Indeed, for the Somalis, with a long nomadic tradition which not only frames the group as constantly on the move, but also frames migrants as adventurers who journey to strengthen both the group and themselves, movement in geographical space can be experienced as the opposite of disjunctive. The idea of belonging, adds further nuance to this reconceptualization. If belonging is about a sense of being-in-the-world, a sort of ontological holism that is greater than the sum of its parts, then it follows that a change in its parts does not necessarily relate to an all that meaningful change overall. Change in the way one is situated can be gradual – as part of a narrative one can continuously inhabit – or it can be more disjunctive when, at any one moment, the resonance of social and material context with one’s embodied subjecthood is undermined. Ultimately then, the idea of belonging gives us a way to mediate between how people experience change and how they experience continuity – allowing for both as real and compelling possibilities within people’s lives.

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