

Chapter 7

‘Mum, I Sleep Under a Bridge’: Everyday Insecurities of the Families of Rejected Asylum Seekers in Somalia



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7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the impact of family separation on the everyday security of left-behind family members of Somali asylum seekers in Europe. Somali youth are driven to flee the regions of the former Somali Republic by the perilous fragility of state institutions, political instability, human rights abuses and a lack of livelihood opportunities. Their migration to Europe is often irregular. Based on data collected in the regions of Somaliland and Puntland,¹ I examine everyday insecurity in terms of the adverse effects of securitizing moves by European states on the everyday lives of left-behind families. I show that the everyday insecurity of left-behind families increases as a result of the consequences of forced migration for their family members who have migrated to Europe and are living there without a legal permit.

By separating loved ones across borders, international migration tears families apart. This separation is often associated with material and emotional costs for family members, both migrants and those left behind (Silver, 2014). Therefore, forced family separation is a source of everyday insecurity. Yet, family members migrate with the hope that the accrued benefits of migration will offset these costs, and most migrants live up to their obligations to help their families by providing both material and emotional support (Castañeda & Buck, 2014; Chap. 6). Migrants fulfil family obligations through financial remittances, visits and communication (Ismail, 2019).

¹Somaliland and Puntland are autonomous states of the former Somali Republic. Puntland is a regular member state of the Federal Republic of Somalia. Somaliland has claimed independence and functions as a de facto independent country. For simplicity and to strengthen the anonymity of the participants in this chapter, I use the ‘Somalia’ to refer to all these areas.

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However, these options are not always feasible due to structural constraints. Migration laws and policies constrain the ability of forced migrants to live up to their family obligations and thus worsen the consequences of separation (Castañeda & Buck, 2014). The legal status of migrants is central to the material and emotional wellbeing of both migrants and their families left behind (Abrego, 2014).

The irregular migration process from the Horn of Africa involves sophisticated human trafficking networks whose purpose is to generate massive profits by recruiting, abducting and torturing vulnerable migrants, including children. The migration process is costly and may take years, subjecting migrants to horrific human rights abuses (van Reisen et al., 2012; Micallef, 2017). If migrants are lucky enough to finally reach Europe, they often face further prolonged separation from their families because family reunion is highly unlikely in the short run, as both temporary visits and reunification in the receiving country are impossible without legal status. In addition, irregular migrants often face harsh everyday insecurity in destination countries, including a lack of opportunities, exploitation and powerlessness (Ismail, 2021; Bloch & Schuster, 2002; Crawley et al., 2011). This irregularity adversely affects the emotional wellbeing of family members left behind as well.

In the receiving contexts, irregularity means not only a lack of access to the labour market, but also limited access to social security benefits, both of which could help to materially support the families left behind. In addition to supporting the material wellbeing of left-behind families (for example, by providing upward mobility and schooling for children and siblings), financial remittances also improve the emotional wellbeing of migrants and their families (Abrego, 2014), as sending money can be a way of showing feelings and sharing emotions (Mckay, 2007). Although material support is not the solution for the ills of family separation, sending money, like maintaining close contacts, may reduce the pain of prolonged separation and enhance emotional wellbeing. By blocking migrants' possibilities to materially support their families, lack of status further intensifies the emotional consequences of family separation. Findings by Akhigbe and Effevottu (see Chap. 6) support this argument.

Transnational family research has delved into how the immigration laws and policies of receiving countries affect the transnational ties and practices of migrant families (Abrego, 2009, 2014; Menjívar, 2000, 2012). In addition, there is a growing literature on the impact of new restrictive European migration regimes on the everyday lives of irregular migrants in Europe (Crawley et al., 2011; Innes, 2014; Parker, 2017). However, we know very little about the implications of these policies on the lives of the families left behind (see, however, Ali, 2016; REACH, 2017). Several studies deal with transnational Somali families (e.g., Ismail, 2019; Al-Sharmani & Ismail, 2017; Tiilikainen, 2017; Hautaniemi, 2011; Al-Sharmani, 2010; Horst, 2006), but academic research on Somali families within Somalia is scarce. This chapter aims to address this research gap by scrutinizing how the experiences of irregular Somali migrants in Europe affect the everyday lives of their families in Somalia.

I employ the concept of *everyday security* as framed by Crawford and Hutchinson (2016) as a guiding analytic framework. In their framework, temporality, spatial

scale and emotion are the three essential dimensions of everyday security (for more on everyday security, see Chap. 1). This approach works well with understanding everyday family life (Daly, 2003; Rönkä & Korvela, 2009; Morgan, 2020). For Daly (2003, p. 771), the everyday life of the family is shaped by a complex intersection of material, health, moral or spiritual, temporal, spatial and relational dimensions. Similarly, Rönkä and Korvela (2009, p. 88) state that in addition to temporal and spatial dimensions, everyday family life is shaped by material, mental and social means.

A central feature of many Somali families is that they operate collectively; one of their primary functions is to serve as a social protection and insurance system for their members, including members of the extended family (Lewis, 1994). Mobility is a vital way of dealing with insecurity among Somalis, and migration was already a main channel for social mobility long before the Somali civil war (Gundel, 2002). In addition, making the decision to migrate and financing a family member's migration are perceived as collective responsibilities of the family (Al-Sharmani, 2010). As a result, the Somali family is highly transnational, with Somali migrants striving to fulfil familial obligations towards their relatives in the Global South. Migrants' contributions to their families' wellbeing back home are often significant, with migrants' financial remittances forming one of the most reliable sources of regular income and material security for families left behind. Naqvi et al. (2018) recently found that 36% of households receiving remittances fall below the poverty line, compared to 55.8% of households that do not receive remittances and 47% of households that have an earned wage as their primary income source. Female-headed households, mostly headed by widowed and divorced women, make up most of the households receiving remittances.

After the outbreak of the Somali civil war in the late 1980s, a large number of Somalis left the country, primarily as refugees or asylum seekers or through family reunification. This exodus was typically irregular (with the exception of family reunifications), as there were no formal channels for mobility. A relatively recent type of irregular migration from Somalia is known as *tahriib*, which refers to the emigration of Somali youth to Europe, primarily across the Mediterranean Sea (Ali, 2016, p. 7). Besides family reunification, *tahriib* has become almost the sole type of migration from Somalia to the Global North over the past two decades. *Tahriib* differs from previous Somali migration practices, in which the decision to migrate was made by the whole family; in *tahriib*, family members are usually not involved. Many Somalis consider *tahriib* a 'national disaster', rather than a social mobility strategy. It often leaves the family with devastating material and non-material consequences (Ali, 2016).

The experiences of families left behind in Somalia today are closely connected to two interrelated trends. First, over the past 10 years, many young people have migrated from the Horn of Africa, and in particular, from Somalia. In addition to the factors pushing Somalis to migrate, such as the failure or fragility of state institutions, security concerns and the search for a better life, there are also other socio-political developments in the region that have encouraged irregular migration, including the impact of the Arab Spring and the fall of Muammar Gaddafi and the

chaos in Libya, which has made room for traffickers to operate in the area. Second, the European Union and its member states have adopted increasingly restrictive migration policies designed to deter migrants.

In the sections that follow, I will first present my data and methods before exploring how prolonged family separation produces everyday insecurity among families left behind in Somalia. Drawing on the literature on everyday family life, I will study the everyday security of left-behind families through four broad domains – emotional, health-related, material and social – before ending with my conclusions.

7.2 Methods and Data

This chapter is based on 42 semi-structured in-depth individual interviews with 34 left-behind family members of irregular Somali migrants to Europe.² The data were collected in March–April 2019 and January–February 2020. During my second visit to Somalia, I conducted follow-up interviews with 8 of the 34 interlocutors I had spoken with during the first visit; seven of these follow-up interviews were face-to-face, and one was conducted by phone, as the interviewee was in a remote area.

The interviews were conducted in Hargeisa, Burao and Borama in Somaliland, and in Garowe and Bosaso in Puntland. Four local partner universities facilitated the fieldwork: the University of Burao and University of Hargeisa in Somaliland and East Africa University and Puntland State University in Puntland. At each university, two research assistants (one female and one male) supported the fieldwork by recruiting interlocutors and facilitating interviews. I also used my local networks for recruitment, and a contact in Finland helped me to recruit one interviewee. All interviews were conducted in Somali, and all, except five, were audiotaped and transcribed. Thirty-two of the 34 interviewees said that their family member had travelled to Europe via tahrīb. Some interlocutors were family members of multiple irregular migrants in one or more European countries: Germany was the most common destination country, followed by Sweden, France and Italy.

Table 7.1 presents the profile of the interlocutors. Although more than half lacked formal education, about one in four were university students or graduates. Two were university teachers. Despite our efforts to attain gender balance in our data collection, we ended up interviewing 22 women and 12 men. There are several possible explanations for our difficulty recruiting as many men as women, such as: many young migrants left behind a female-headed household; young women seem to be more closely connected to family issues than men; and it is the young men who left,

²This chapter is part of the study ‘The New Migration Regime in Finland and Transnational Somali Migrants: Strategies and Lived Realities of Survival’, which is a substudy of the larger research project ‘Family Separation, Migration Status and Everyday Security: Experiences and Strategies of Vulnerable Migrants’, funded by the Academy of Finland and led by Dr. Marja Tiilikainen.

Table 7.1 Profile of interviewees in Somalia and their relation to family members in Europe

Interviewee					Migrated family member	
No.	Relation to family member in Europe	Age	Family status	Occupational status	Number of migrated relatives	Gender
1	Father	56–60	Married	Unemployed	2	2 male
2	Father	51–55	Married	Unemployed	1	Male
3	Mother	60+	Married	Self-employed	3	2 male/1 female
4	Aunt	36–40	–	Self-employed	1	Female
5	Brother	21–25	Single	–	1	Female
6	Son	18–20	Single	Student	1	Female
7	Sister	18–20	Single	Unemployed	1	Female
8	Wife	18–20	Married	Unemployed	1	Male
9	Brother	26–30	Single	Employed	3	3 male
10	Sister	35–40	Married	Unemployed	1	Male
11	Wife	26–30	Married	Unemployed	1	Male
12	Mother	46–50	Divorcee	Unemployed	1	Male
13	Mother	61–65	Married	Self-employed	3	3 male
14	Mother	46–50	Married	Self-employed	2	2 male
15	Father	56–60	Married	Unemployed	2	2 male
16	Father	60+	Married	Employed	2	1 male/1 female
17	Mother	51–55	Widow	Unemployed	2	2 male
18	Sister	21–25	Single	Unemployed	1	Female
19	Husband	21–25	Married	Student	1	Female
20	Daughter	18–20	Single	Unemployed	1	Female
21	Wife	26–30	Married	Unemployed	1	Male

(continued)

Table 7.1 (continued)

Interviewee					Migrated family member	
No.	Relation to family member in Europe	Age	Family status	Occupational status	Number of migrated relatives	Gender
22	Sister	18–20	Single	–	1	Male
23	Wife	18–20	Married	Unemployed	1	Male
24	Sister	18–20	Single	Student	1	Male
25	Mother	51–55	Widow	Unemployed	1	Male
26	Father	60+	Married	Employed	1	Male
27	Wife	21–25	Married	Unemployed	1	Male
28	Mother	56–60	Widow	Unemployed	1	Female
29	Mother	46–50	Widowed	Self-employed	1	Male
30	Father	60+	Married	–	2	2 male
31	Son	21–25	Single	Unemployed	1	Female
32	Daughter	21–25	Single	Unemployed	1	Male
33	Father	60+	Married	Unemployed	1	Male
34	Sister	21–25	Single	Unemployed	1	Male

while young women stayed. For instance, only 11 out of 46 migrated family members were female. The remaining 35 were young men, many of them underage.

Ethical issues were taken into consideration during data collection, analysis and dissemination. I tried to ensure that no harm was caused to the interlocutors or their family members in Europe. When conducting the interviews, I sought to ensure that participants felt respected and safe. I conducted the interviews in places participants considered safe, such as their homes, university classrooms and meeting halls, and hotel meeting rooms. I conducted one follow-up interview in my hotel room, accompanied by a research assistant who was an acquaintance of the interviewee. My research assistants gave potential interlocutors an overview of the research project during the recruiting stage, and before the actual interviews, I informed interlocutors about the background, aims and nature of the research and how the data will be used. Only then did I ask them to give oral consent. I have tried to guarantee the anonymity of my interlocutors throughout the research process, for example by using pseudonyms and obscuring some details of their backgrounds.

7.3 Everyday Insecurities of Family Members Left Behind

7.3.1 Emotional Insecurities

My data illustrate that the costly tahriib, prolonged separation and the precarious everyday life of rejected asylum seekers in Europe have serious emotional implications for the everyday security of family members in Somalia. Hufan, a widowed mother of ten, was struggling with the consequences of the migration of her two eldest sons. She was living with the rest of her children in an abandoned building, as she had sold her home to obtain the release of her two sons from *magafes*. *Magafe* is a name used to refer to the ruthless human trafficking networks in the region.³ Hufan had been suffering severe pain due to kidney stones. Her only regular income was obtained by buying a goat, slaughtering and butchering it, and selling the meat to her neighbours on Fridays, when people are resting. She occasionally received USD 50 or 100 from the younger of her two sons in Europe and sometimes received small financial or in-kind assistance from her neighbours. She was happy that her smaller children were at schools where the fees were either waived by the school or paid by others.

However, during my first visit, Hufan was facing emotional challenges. She was worried about the situation of her younger son in Europe, who had developed mental illness and was institutionalized. (The son was probably hospitalized, but Hufan thinks he was jailed.) Hufan felt helpless because there was nothing she could do from a distance. Like some other interviewees, she quoted a version of a Somali saying, '*Ood ka dheeri kuma dhaxan tirto*' (A distant fence cannot shelter you from the cold) and added 'I can't visit him [...] I can't help him in any way. I pray for him.' She also felt sad about the behaviour of her older son, who chose not to contact her. 'He is not who I wanted him to be [...] I ask myself, "Why he is not contacting me?" If he had sent fifty [USD] to me, it would have been good. I am not happy about his lack of communication' (Interview, 8 April 2019).

During my second visit, Hufan's situation had become worse, as her younger son had been deported from Europe few days earlier after his mental health had seriously deteriorated. Earlier the same day that I met her, she had taken him to a *cilaaj*, a religious healing clinic. Hufan told me: 'Now he is chained up.'⁴ I cried today in a way that I have never cried in my life. If the person dies, you accept the death. They attached chains on all parts of his body!' (Interview, 4 February 2020).

When irregular migrants in Europe are able to make remittances to their families in the Global South, their left-behind families may prefer them to stay in Europe

³Some of my interlocutors mistakenly think that *magafe* is a particular Libyan human trafficker. *Magafe* literally means 'one who never misses a shot'.

⁴In Somali territories, like many parts of the developing world, mentally ill patients are often kept in their homes or in extremely under-resourced mental health clinics in dismal conditions. In both cases, chaining is commonly used to prevent harm to the patients and to others. See Tiilikainen (2011) for more on the treatment of the mentally ill in Somaliland.

(see Chap. 6). Many of my interlocutors, however, wanted to be reunited with their loved ones, even if it meant doing so in their home country. However, no one was happy to see their family members deported back to Somalia. Hufan's story is an extreme case of how family reunification through deportation can be a threat to the everyday security of the family left behind in the Global South. She not only lost the badly needed funds that her son used to remit to her while in Europe, but his return in bad condition has overburdened her meagre material and emotional security.

Other family members, such as spouses and siblings, also feel the emotional insecurity generated by prolonged separation. Young adults often associated their everyday insecurities with the absence of their mothers. Hagar, a 23-year-old single man who lives in his paternal uncle's house, explained:

When you live in your mother's home, you live like a king. When you are an overburden to another household, it is difficult to even oversleep in the morning. If your mom is present, you come home whenever you want and wake up whenever you want to. (Interview, 4 April 2019)

He used the term 'overburden' (*dulsaar*) to signify his sense of insecurity in his uncle's household. Hagar feels that being in his uncle's household is not natural and thus perceives himself as a burden. Interestingly, he described his mother's everyday insecurity as an irregular migrant in Europe in the same terms, characterizing her life there without legal status as an 'overburden' to another society. Left-behind young adults also talked extensively about their feelings of familial incompleteness and their perceived lack of love, care, status and personal development. Even those who were doing well socially and materially were affected by family separation. Hagar, who holds an undergraduate degree and does not face material insecurity in his uncle's household, noted:

Your mother's farness is always out there. Even if you are not missing anything, your feelings of your mother's absence are always in your mind and are an integral part of yourself, and I think that never cools until you regain your mother. (Interview, 4 April 2019)

Others felt the pain differently. Hodan, an 18-year-old woman, felt loneliness due to the absence of her older sister, who was in Europe: 'I feel a lot of things. I feel the lack of a companion! We two are the only children of my mother, so I feel lonely. You don't have somebody at home with you' (Interview, 23 March 2019).

My data showed that left-behind family members face a number of emotional insecurities due to migration and prolonged separation. Emotional insecurity arises when they feel that they lack peace and harmony. This is particularly apparent with youth, who miss their parents and siblings, and spouses, who miss their life partners. For parents, emotional insecurity primarily emerges when they are uncertain about the situation of their children in Europe and are not able to help. Emotional insecurity also arises when parents feel that their children have abandoned them and are not willing to fulfil their familial obligations.

In contrast, Geeddi, a father in his 60s, found separation from his son stressful but not unbearable because his son had received necessary medical treatment and material support in Europe. In addition, Geeddi was financially secure in Somalia and not dependent on his son (Interview, 24 March 2019). Here, the improved

material security of the migrant and better financial situation of the left-behind family had a positive influence on the emotional security of the left-behind family.

7.3.2 *Health-Related Insecurities*

A majority of the interlocutors mentioned that left-behind family members in Somalia suffered from mental and physical health problems. In addition, they often associated the deterioration of their own health and the health of family members with migration, particularly with the horrific torture at the hands of magafes and the prolonged separation. Previous research findings have suggested that migration may adversely affect left-behind family members' health (Silver, 2014; Scheffel & Zhang, 2019). For example, family members may experience anxiety and emotional stress, and as a result, negative health consequences, if migrants travel without legal documents or face insecurity in destination countries (Antman, 2016). Legal residence status in the new country, remittances and regular visits to left-behind family may alleviate these adverse effects (Böhme et al., 2015).

Guuleed, a father in his late 50s, was a herder, and he and his family had lived a nomadic life. However, after his herds and nomadic lifestyle were heavily hit by harsh cyclic droughts, he decided to move to an urban area to educate his seven children. Working as a truck loader at construction sites in the city gave Guuleed a chance to send his children to school. However, after graduating from school, his oldest son left for tahriib in 2014, and a year and a few months later, the next-oldest son followed suit. Both left without Guuleed's knowledge. The magafe network abducted both sons and held them hostage in Libya for ransom. Currently, Guuleed's sons are in two different countries in Europe, and neither has a residence permit.

According to Guuleed, his sons' migration has dramatically changed the family's life and created new insecurity. He stressed that after his wife was informed that her son was at the mercy of magafes, her already-elevated blood sugar worsened, seriously damaging her brain and partially paralysing her. Later Guuleed's wife's condition developed into complete paralysis. During my first visit, Guuleed was not working and was instead taking care of his wife. During my second visit, I learned that Guuleed's wife had passed away only a few months after I first met him (Interview, 10 February 2020).

Samatar, a father in his early 70s, was struggling with the consequences of the irregular migration and prolonged absence of his daughter and son. He had sold four pieces of land and a house and paid more than USD 30,000 to magafes for their release.

It affected me psychologically. You see me, I had a stroke, and I developed high blood pressure. This is after they left. You are not able to sleep, and you become stressed and diabetic. I was even taken to Mogadishu and operated on in Erdoğan Hospital. (Interview, 8 April 2019)

Samatar's wife also developed severe illness, including high blood pressure and diabetes. She could no longer stand on her own and needed her sister's regular care. During my second visit, I learned that Samatar's stroke had developed into paralysis, and he was using a wheelchair.

According to a systematic literature review and meta-analysis, long-term separation from migrant parents can result in serious health-related insecurities, including conduct disorder, for left-behind children (Fellmeth et al., 2018). Research findings also show that for left-behind children, the caregiving practices and health status of their caregivers contribute to health insecurities (Lu et al., 2019). Suudi, an 18-year-old high school student, and his younger brother had been in their maternal grandmother's custody since their mother's migration 10 years ago. Suudi told me that his younger brother, who was barely a toddler when their mother left, had recently died (Interview, 18 March 2019). In an informal discussion, a neighbour noted that the grandmother's advanced age was a factor in Suudi's hyperactive brother being placed in a rehabilitation center. According to the neighbour, the harsh treatment he received there contributed to his sudden death.

Mental health issues were quite common among left-behind family members. Hani's mother-in-law became mentally unstable after Hani's husband went into *tahriib*. Hani noted that she often saw her mother-in-law endlessly pacing in the yard in the middle of the night. Hani also said that her mother-in-law, who was the head of their household, 'may go out without a *googarad* [underskirt]. I have to try to make sure she is properly dressed before she goes out' (Interview, 7 April 2019).

Although children are not immune to health-related insecurities, in my data, it was parents, particularly the elderly, who were the primary victims of health insecurities. There may be several reasons for this. First, the majority of those who migrated were young, and, as Table 7.1 illustrates, 15 of the 34 informants were parents. Second, it is parents, mostly mothers, who take the main responsibility for freeing their children from *magafes*. Ransom collectors often call the mothers of their victims to inform them that their child is in captivity. Sometimes the victim is being tortured and screaming when the mother is called. These experiences have serious emotional consequences for mothers. Samatar noted that when dealing with *magafes*, 'you become very soft' (Interview, 8 April 2019). It is also quite apparent that the role of young spouses, including husbands, is very limited in the ransom process, as they have limited financial resources and social networks. Third, many of the parents were of advanced age, had serious health issues or were impoverished even before their child's migration. However, I should note that although most of my interlocutors highlighted the adverse health impacts of migration on left-behind families, not everyone reported negative health consequences. Geeddi's example highlights how improved material security may balance the negative aspects of migration.

7.3.3 *Material Insecurities*

Sahra, a 21-year-old single woman and the third of seven children, completed high school in 2015 with a plan to pursue a university education. In 2014 her father, the sole provider for the family, became disabled in a road accident. Since then, the family has financially depended on the children's maternal grandfather. Her older brother, as a first-year university student, used to work part-time to cover his university expenses. Unfortunately, at Sahra's graduation, her brother suddenly disappeared. He later called his family from Sudan, informing them he was in the hands of a magafe and needed their immediate help for his release. The grandfather took responsibility for paying the ransom money and other costs of her brother's journey, totalling more than USD 9500.

Sahra understands her brother's decision. His employer's business had not been doing well and had moved to another city. Consequently, her brother lost his employment and was therefore unable to continue his schooling. He ended up staying at home for 4 months. His own and his family's situation, particularly that of his father, had prompted his decision to depart: 'When he sees his father lying in the house, *wallahi* [I swear to God], nobody can stay! [Voice quivering and fighting back tears.] You can tell that it is that challenge that made him decide to depart', she said (Interview, 5 April 2019). As in many other cases, there were everyday security issues in the family's life even before migration, as the father's situation generated material insecurity and impacted the family's emotional security.

Sahra's grandfather became indebted as a result of paying the ransom, and he could not bear the cost of university fees in addition to supporting the family. Sahra lost her dream of going to university, as did her younger sister. However, referring to culturally prescribed gender and generational roles, Sahra was more concerned about her younger brother's future:

Regarding the education of the family, the boy who is younger than [my] sister is now in the 12th year [the final year in high school] [...] Look, we are girls, but the other boy in the family will probably not get a university education [...] I am not studying, my younger sister is not studying, and this boy has already started worrying about ending up in a similar fate. (Interview, 5 April 2019)

Sahra believes that her undocumented brother in Europe should have filled the role of their ailing father because he is the eldest son. However, Sahra associates the family's insecurities with her brother's absence and his irregular status in Europe more than with his decision to migrate.

If he had stayed and completed his education, he would have paid for our universities. He is the eldest in the family, he should take the biggest responsibility in the family. As our father is ailing and weak, the one who is expected to take the responsibility is [my brother]. [...] He can't help us. He lives in uncertainty. He cannot help himself and has nothing because he is without legal status! (Interview, 5 April 2019)

This case reconfirms that *tahriib* generates an enormous material crisis for left-behind families. Many of my informants had lost their homes, land and other assets. In most cases, all money from these sales goes to the magafes for ransom. In

addition, as Ali (2016) has noted, their assets are usually sold at prices that are very much below, sometimes only half of, the prevailing market price. Families need the money on short notice to release their loved ones from the horror of the magafes and have no choice but to accept a reduced price from the opportunist buyers that have emerged in the main cities. For example, Cambaro sold her small house for USD 5000, and after a short period, the buyer resold it for USD 16,000 (Interview, 27 March 2019). Some, like Hufan, after selling their houses, were living in a *kharaabad*, an abandoned building (Interview, 8 April 2019).

Like Sahra, other interlocutors frequently emphasized the impact of migration on left-behind family members' educational opportunities. Irregular migration can also have a wider impact on the material security of left-behind families. In one case described by Batuulo, her deceased brother's entire family, five children and their mother, were forced to return to a semi-nomadic life with no educational or employment opportunities as a consequence of the migration and lack of status of her niece in Europe (Interview, 27 March 2019).

Left-behind families suffer when migrants cannot help them materially due to lack of status and access to entitlements in Europe. Only a few of my informants received occasional small remittances from family members in Europe. Some migrants had been the providers of their families before migration, while others would have been expected to contribute materially to their families had they stayed in their home country. In Batuulo's case, her niece in Europe cannot remit anything to her mother and siblings. She believes that had her niece stayed, she could have supported the family by, for instance, helping her mother with the household chores so the mother would have time for income-earning work. An income would have enabled the younger children to access schooling (Interview, 27 March 2019).

Barni, a mother of eight in her late 40s, was emotional when talking about her 22-year-old son in Italy. Although he had recently received a residence permit, he was still struggling with the consequences of long-term irregularity, and she was concerned about his living conditions. 'He tells me, "Mum, I sleep under a bridge" [...] I tell him to go to the [Somali] embassy and surrender himself.' Sometimes, she sends money to him, 'Fifty dollars, thirty or one hundred dollars... In the evenings, I ask myself, "Look, you are having your dinner, but he is starving out there." It touches you deeply.' (Interview, 23 March 2019). In addition to the emotional consequences of migration, the son draws on the family's meagre financial resources for his survival in Europe.

These cases illustrate that left-behind families face both financial and non-financial material insecurities. Economic insecurity rises when families lose their properties and other assets, when they fail to receive expected remittances from migrants, when they lose the potential contribution of the migrant had he or she stayed in Somalia, and when they send financial contributions to their migrant family members in Europe. Non-financial material insecurities, including lack of housing and access to education, primarily arise as consequences of financial insecurities. These are, directly and indirectly, related to irregular migration and prolonged separation from family members in Europe.

7.3.4 *Social Insecurities*

Habboon, a 20-year-old single woman, was living with her father, who was suffering from chronic heart disease, and three younger siblings. Habboon had been responsible for the household chores since her mother migrated to Europe in 2015. According to Habboon, her father's illness and the family's economic challenges had prompted her mother's decision to migrate. Although they live in their own house and are supported financially by Habboon's maternal aunts, the family faces financial hardships. Habboon also noted that their life is full of stress and sadness due to her mother's absence. However, Habboon's main concern was that her mother's prolonged separation had disrupted family roles, with Habboon now fulfilling her mother's role in the household. 'My father's illness is more of a burden on me than other household chores', she explained. 'When I see Dad, I do feel my mother's absence. Had she stayed, she would have helped him.' She continued:

It is my responsibility to raise [my siblings] well so they will be responsible people in the future. [...] I help them to succeed in education, putting my schooling aside and cooking for them, making sure they are on the school bus in the morning. I prepare lunch for them and help them eat after their return from school at noon. (Interview, 5 April 2019)

Habboon also mentioned that these changes had obstructed her own ambition for higher education. Thus, her mother's absence worsened the family's material and mental insecurities and generated social insecurities in the family's everyday life.

Like parental absence, spousal absence also alters roles and responsibilities within the extended family. Hani is a mother of two in her late 20s whose husband was in Europe without a residence permit. Before he departed in 2015, he and his mother were responsible for running the household, including providing an income for the family. After Hani's husband left, his mother assumed that role. However, in order to provide for the family and pay the heavy debt she accrued for her son's release from the hands of magafe, Hani's mother-in-law had moved to a rural area and established a small grocery for nomad shoppers. Now, it was Hani's responsibility to run the family, including serving as the primary caretaker of her ailing father-in-law and her two kids.

Before, when [my husband] was around, he was the head of the family. Whether he finds [a source of income] or not, it was his responsibility! After he left, his mother assumed the responsibility of providing for the family's needs. Now he is not here, and his mother moved to a rural area, and being head of the household is my role. In addition to that, I am the caretaker of his sick father. It is a big burden on me! (Interview, 7 April 2019)

Younger siblings have to take on additional family responsibilities due to their older siblings' migration, absence and lack of status in their destination countries. In some cases, the material insecurity of the family transforms the social role of young women, who become financial providers. Cosob, a young female university graduate, had taken on several gigs, including part-time cleaning, to help her family survive (Interview, 4 April 2019).

Hilowle explained that his wife and young daughter's absence due to migration had affected his social status as a father and husband in several ways. Hilowle was

not working, and his wife was unable to send him remittances. According to tradition, husbands are expected to support their wives materially, rather than hoping their wives will provide for them. Thus, by mentioning that his wife was not helping him, Hilowle was deviating from his traditional role as husband and father. However, in post-civil war Somali society, women are the sole providers in many families where husbands are unable (or in some cases, unwilling) to provide for their families (El-Bushra & Gardner, 2016).

Prolonged separation from his wife and daughter had also affected Hilowle's relationship with his daughter:

You know, for this small child, when you are with her, wake up beside her, hug her and play with her, it is only then that she can feel that you are different for her than others. [...] The role of fatherhood is absent. (Interview, 5 April 2019)

Hilowle also explained that his wife's absence had contributed his downgraded status within his extended family and the larger society. He noted that he had been living a recently established family life with his wife before her migration. Now, he said, 'I have moved back into my parents' house [...] I went back to the life of singlehood.' Returning to 'singlehood' in his father's house meant downward social mobility: 'You know, after you have established your separate household, to leave from the top and return down is a powerful downgrading, and I felt it!' He noted that having one's own family gives respectability in the eyes of others: 'You are a person with social standing! And you are counted on.' Now, however, 'You are back to the youthhood context, nobody is asking you anything. That creates a problem' (Interview, 5 April 2019). In Somali society, both age and establishing one's own family are sources of social status (Kapteijns, 1994). In fact, the inability to materially contribute to one's family and kin, and the associated loss of social status, respect and trust, is considered a factor pushing young Somali men into irregular migration (Ali, 2016).

Prolonged separation further hampers the stability of the family in several ways, including creating conflict and misunderstandings. Hilowle felt that his relationship with his wife had become strained and noted that virtual communications, such as WhatsApp calls, are no substitute for physical proximity and face-to-face discussions. He also stated that traditional means of conflict resolution, such as family mediation, cannot be used due to the spatial separation. Sometimes it was even difficult for him to find a way to apologize to his wife: 'She just turns off her phone' (Interview, 5 April 2019).

Long-term forced separation may even destroy families. Sagal, a 22-year-old mother of two, complained that her husband, who was living without a residence permit in Europe, had abandoned her and their two children. She attributed this to the geographical distance between them and felt that it was Europe in particular that made him abandon them. She highlighted that before his migration to Europe, he had always called and been concerned about them when travelling within Somalia (Interview, 8 April 2019). Another interviewee, Saado, a 20-year-old mother of two, wanted to divorce her husband in Europe because she did not want to bear the emotional consequences of spatial and temporal separation. Unlike Sagal's husband,

Saado's husband called her, occasionally sent money and was keen to maintain their marital relationship. When I asked why she wanted to divorce him, she said: 'He has been away a long time, and the two countries we are in are far away from each other.' She felt that he could no longer live up to his promise to support her and her two children, and that his failure to provide for her financially was the main challenge they faced (Interview, 23 March 2019).

In addition to creating emotional, health-related and material insecurities, migration and prolonged family separation shape social roles, negatively affect social status and generate additional obligations for left-behind family members. They also affect the family's harmony and stability, and may even lead to the dissolution of the family.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the impact of prolonged family separation on left-behind family members' experiences of everyday security. The findings show that tahrrib and irregular status in Europe have severe repercussions on left-behind families in Somalia. Tahrrib often takes a long time, up to 3 years or even longer. The migrant's journey is very painful and has long-term implications on everyday securities of left-behind families. Further, because of their lack of access to entitlements in their destination countries, migrants live a precarious life in Europe. In addition, they are unable to live up to their obligations towards their left-behind families, who are devastated by their decision to migrate.

My findings have shown that forced family separation affects the everyday security of families in Somalia through four broad dimensions of family life, namely emotional, health-related, material and social dimensions. As Stewart (2005) has observed, everyday (in)security is multidimensional and also cumulative, with the presence of one insecurity often increasing the likelihood of others. For instance, migration may generate serious material insecurities, and these material insecurities may further increase social insecurities.

The findings also indicate that material security, whether provided by the migrant or the left-behind family, may contribute positively to other dimensions of the family's everyday security but is no substitute for physical proximity. These findings corroborate other research indicating that 'the joys of physical contact, the emotional security of physical presence, and the familiarity allowed by physical proximity are still denied transnational family members' (Parreñas, 2005, p. 333).

This chapter brought to light that migration policies in Europe can have serious implications for vulnerable families in sending countries. Most interlocutors emphasized the consequences of irregular migration and the absence of their family members, primarily associating their everyday insecurity with difficult migration routes and the lack of opportunities for their loved ones in Europe. There are clear signs that these factors primarily affect women and youth, but in different ways. Many of those who decide to migrate are young men, including a significant number of

underage boys. Among left-behind women, divorced or widowed mothers in particular are adversely affected by the consequences of irregular migration.

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