Inside/Outside Somalia

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ABSTRACT

The contextualization of Somali diaspora studies requires an understanding of the international dynamics of the conflict and its effects. For the international community trying to restrain Islamization on the one hand and warlordism on the other, it has been convenient to limit state power in Somalia. As a consequence, non-state actors and international organizations have a major role in the implementation of development and peace building policies in Somalia. This situation opens up different spaces for the diaspora to have a role in Somalia. It is useful to analyze these with an interdisciplinary approach both in Somalia and outside.

Keywords: *Somalia, diaspora, conflict, development.*

INTRODUCTION

The role of diaspora in transferring identities, ideas and the boundaries of nation states is a prominent new topic in African studies and politics. The African Union (AU), for instance, considers the diaspora to be the sixth region of Africa, noting quite optimistically that it "consists of peoples of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent" (African Union 2005). Yet we know that diaspora's roles are ambiguous, not always positive or even relevant with regard to development. Unclear legitimacy of authorities in a situation of state failure like the one in Somalia makes this role particularly significant. For diaspora research, Somalia can be seen as a "critical case", which can "yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" (Quinn Patton 2002: 236). It is also a challenging case to analyse, due to the state failure. Interdisciplinary and multisided approach, represented by the articles in this special issue, is useful to clarify this complexity.

1. SOMALI STATE AND ITS LIMITS

Nation-state failure has led to the dispersal of Somali refugees throughout the world. This failure stems from Somalia's divisions during the colonial era and beyond, cold war competition and regional power politics. Contemporary Somalia was divided between British and Italian rule. The French Somali Coast

got its independence as Djibouti. During the cold war, competing political elites negotiated support from the rival US and Soviet blocks interested in strategic influence in the area. Neighbouring Ethiopia, in turn, has played a volatile role as regional hegemon throughout the decades. The power vacuum after the end of the cold war in 1991 led to a well-known inter-clan conflict and a humanitarian crisis.

Somaliland, which had been a British colony, had already seceded in 1991 with arrangements for power sharing between the clans and religious authorities. In 1998, the North-Eastern part of Somalia also established itself as the *de facto* state of Puntland. Neither of these has been officially recognized by the international community, but this has not prevented international and governmental development aid organizations from working there. Foreign governments have also supported election observation in Somaliland, most recently during the presidential election in June 2010.

Most of Somalia has not been stabilized and people continue to be very vulnerable for disasters like drought. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG), established in 2004, is internationally supported but it is still a weak effort to set up a legitimate authority and rule of law. On the one hand it is threatened by warlords; on the other hand by radical Islamic groups, which are also fighting each other. In June 2006, warlords who were powerful in the Mogadishu region were defeated by the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which took control of the capital. Islamization then was a pragmatic way to bring law and order as an alternative to warlordism. But this led to an Ethiopian invasion in December 2006 and eventually to the collapse of the ICU regime (see Møller, 2006). Ethiopian troops left the country in January 2009 and the moderate ICU joined the TFG making it in practice an Islamist government, although a tolerant one towards non-Muslim members in the cabinet and Parliament.

As a consequence the Somali diaspora was also divided along these lines: some were active in TFG but others backed the ICU, although probably more due to anti-Ethiopian feelings than to any strategic plans to establish an Islamic state in Somalia (Menkhaus 2006). This resulted in a political struggle between the moderate Muslim Brotherhood and radical groups like Al-Shabaab, also supported by the diaspora. In April 2009 the TFG even decided to implement *shari'a* law. For Al-Shabaab, the TFG's good relationship with Westerners and neighbouring countries was still unacceptable.

Islamic extremism, terror attacks and piracy off the coast of Somalia have made this continuing instability an imagined or a real global security challenge. Yet it has not resulted in coherent policies by the international community. To a certain extent this reflects Somalia's "otherness" and deviation from the modern and organized international system. Approaches towards Somalia seem to vary from indifference to humanitarian compassion addressing Somalia's chronic need of aid and focusing on the visible effects of the crisis. Somalia represents the more general image of Africa that "does not have meaningful politics, only humanitarian disasters" (Dunn 2001: 1). Shortsighted initiatives to transmute Somalia into a modern state have followed one another. Since the outbreak of

civil war in 1991, there have been at least fourteen international attempts to reconstruct governance in Somalia, all of which have failed (CIC 2010: 59). A fifteenth attempt is underway, as the EU is offering TFG support "to begin rebuilding security"[1], including a European Union military mission to contribute to the training of Somali security forces (EUTM).

International development actors have adjusted amazingly well to the condition of a failed state. For example Somalia has been a member of the most important group of development partners of the EU: the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of states (ACP) since its formation.[2] The war in 1991 did not mean an end to this cooperation. Although the EC Delegation in Mogadishu had to be closed, the EU disaster and relief operations continued through the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO). By 1993, the Commission established a special Somalia Unit headed by a Special Envoy within its delegation to Kenya in Nairobi. This EU Special Envoy soon represented Somalia in several international settings, sometimes unofficially known as the "honourable representative of Somalia". "Acting on behalf of the Somali people",[3] he assumed the role of the National Authorising Officer, the representative of the partner government with which the EU itself signs agreements under the ACP-EU partnership. The EU came up with a whole set of innovative legal measures enabling the release of funds from past EU-funded cooperation programmes – officially under the deceased sovereign state of Somalia, while strategic planning and programming was done by the EC Somalia Unit and the Directorate-General for Development in Brussels (Bayne 2001).

In addition to international organizations (like the EU, the UN, the AU and IGAD), non-state actors and their organizations have become pivotal in the implementation of the governmentally financed development and peace building projects.[4] There are hundreds of international multi-stakeholder projects in Somalia and the diaspora is increasingly visible in them (see EC 2009). Paradoxically Somalia, because it is such an extreme case, in many respects represents the more general patterns of international approach toward Africa.

In the mainstream comparative research on Africa, this approach is reflecting a concern over corruption and illegitimate rule. Different ranking lists utilizing

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[1] EUTM Somalia, Council of the European Union, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.aspx?id=1870&lang=en.

[2] The Italian part of Somalia was covered by association arrangements in the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Ex-British Somaliland was included after independence in 1960. From 1964 to 1975, relations between the European Communities and the ACP, including Somalia, were governed by the Yaoundé Conventions, and from 1975 to 2000 by the Lomé Conventions. The Cotonou Agreement, which is currently in force between the EU and the ACP, was signed in 2000.

[3] EU & Somalia, Delegation of the European Union to Kenya, http://www.delken.ec.europa.eu/en/information.asp?MenuID=3&SubMenuID=12.

[4] A good example is the Somali Civil Society (SCS) website, administered by Oxfam Novib in Nairobi and financed by the EC Somalia Unit. See http://somali-civilsociety.org.

quantitative data like the "Index of State Weakness in the Developing World" by the Brookings Institute (Rice and Stewart 2008) or the "Failed States Index" by *Foreign Policy* (2010) unanimously show that the problem is most prominent in Africa. Also studies of the political economy of "new wars", i.e. post-cold war ethnic and religious conflict spreading across the borders of nation states, have concentrated in Africa. Instead of the bi-polar confrontations in the context of cold war superpower rivalry, attention is paid to "non-territorial network war" (Duffield 2001: 14).

Apart from massive help to address the humanitarian crisis, international intervention in Somalia has attempted to restrain Islamization on the one hand, and warlordism on the other. This has led to the creation of a "limited state" in Somalia. Touko Piiparinen, referring to Michael Barnett's notion that "peacebuilders fear resuscitating a predatory state" (Barnett 2010: 149), calls such a policy "organised hypocrisy": "the rhetorical pledge to support and strengthen state sovereignty, which, however, is not followed through in practice, whenever it is suspected that this could give rise to states which do not completely adhere to the liberalist norms and values." (Piiparinen 2010.) It is not in the interest of the international community to strengthen the central sovereign state of Somalia if this was immediately transformed into a rogue state by radical Islamists.

Al-Shabaab has publicly stated that it has been working with Al-Qaeda in Mogadishu in order to remove the TFG. With a massive foreign presence and involvement it is perhaps more accurate to speak about the limits of state rather than state failure in Somalia.

2. DIASPORA AS AN AGENCY

The more general picture of Somalia's international position also clarifies attention towards the diaspora's role there. Mary Kaldor, for instance, has noted the diaspora's direct and indirect support of new wars, including the misuse of remittances sent to families and money laundering as well as ideas, know how, skills and new techniques for wars (Kaldor 2001: 7, 85, 102–3). It has also been noted that the diaspora can raise money and influence public opinion and international interventions to support warfare (Brinkerhoff 2006: 27). The articles in this issue also point to the diaspora's role in peace and development.

Seeing the diaspora as part of the problem and part of the solution apparently provides space for it as a free agency. And indeed, control, regulation or exploitation of this agency has become a major concern for the international community – the more so the less effective the efforts to end the war in Somalia have been. Simultaneously the international limitation of the state in Somalia counteracts the diaspora's freedom. I would argue that the international community has not been able to recognize the actual motives, successes and discontents of the diaspora's involvement in Somalia. The potential of the

diaspora to play a role is huge, but the reality, as clarified in the articles below, point towards contradictory expectations, incoherence and rapidly changing premises in the behaviour of even one individual, not to speak of larger groups.

It is known that parts of the Somali diaspora support terrorist activities of Al-Shabaab. It is known that the diaspora has supported conventional battles between warring clans and warlords, at least since the struggle against Siad Barre's regime in 1988–1991. But it is also known that there has been a lot of frustration both towards military attempts to solve the situation and towards frequent failures in peace negotiations during the past twenty years.

Rather than wars, be they new or old, the immediate experience of most diaspora members, as well as the identity and belonging of the diaspora, stems from settlement in multiple locations and the idea of one "homeland." Mahdi Abdile and Päivi Pirkkalainen show how the homeland motivates the Somali diaspora's activity, but creates neither a homogeneous community nor a monolithic movement. Global interconnectedness and communication through Internet, Facebook, Twitter and Skype, have made the mobilization of the diasporas easy, but also eclectic and volatile. Links among the diaspora groups and individuals are easily built and maintained, but they can also quickly vanish or become part of campaigns pursuing completely different goals than those related to the fate of the homeland. Rather than being politically united groups, the diasporas are "cultural communities" that can be mobilized for different goals (see Axel 2004). Clan, generation, gender and integration in the new home country contribute to the variation as well as the pattern in which the diaspora links with the homeland.

This diversity is exacerbated by the fact that the Somali diaspora is relatively recent and large. Racism and high unemployment rates have made its integration in the host countries challenging and have supposedly contributed to a fertile ground for radicalization. At the same time, however, there are well-educated individuals who have skilfully advocated their concerns and have influenced the policies of their host governments.

The diaspora's role thus is not determined by the circumstances in host countries or the traditions and rules inherited from the communities in the home country, but it is not arbitrary either. Generational issues, failure to fulfil the families' expectations, political competition and the perceptions of local communities towards the returning diaspora help understand the opportunities and constraints within which diaspora members make choices.

Petri Hautaniemi has looked at the experiences of second generation Somalis in Finland and their understanding of the problems and needs in Somalia. Their views towards clan disputes are revealing. These are also significant as the diaspora is accused by the Somalis in Somalia to be "clannish" (see Abdile and Pirkkalainen in this issue), and the diaspora's support for the armament of the clans as well as peace negotiations and peace making has been crucial. Most conflicts in Somalia occur between clans and concern the use of pastoral land, i.e. disputes over grazing areas, water sources, animals or farming lands. They are solved by contracts between the clans or sub-clans and include obligations to

protect and rebuild a herd, take care of vulnerable people etc., but most importantly compensation. When a conflict occurs in the territory of a certain clan, it establishes a committee to respond to the situation. It is here that the diaspora has an important role, because the main task of this committee is to mobilize clan and sub-clan members in the diaspora to organize the reception and distribution of funds for the resolution of conflict. The first necessity is to cover the costs of the negotiation assembly, and if an agreement is reached, then the compensation (Horst 2008: 329). According to Cindy Horst, in large conflicts the funds raised by the diaspora can total several hundreds of thousands of dollars. Confidence and the level of organization is high: during the process funds can be borrowed from the Somali money transfer *hawala* companies and paid back after all the money is collected. (Horst 2008: 330, 332.)

Hautaniemi has interviewed a young Somali man who left Somalia as a child and has lived in Finland ever since, who argued that compensation is a mechanism of reproducing violence because it means that the perpetrators of violence are not punished. His choice was to support charity instead of the clans' political fighting. This same attitude appears in the findings of Abdile: the second generation is refusing to accept the pressures by clan elders to support the struggle between the clans (Abdile 2010).

This critical attitude towards clan pressure can also feed into more radical responses. Although the young Finnish Somali man interviewed by Hautaniemi referred to Al-Shabaab as an example of a "gang" he was not willing to support, there are Somalis who have joined the global *jihad*. For example Hizbul Islam, one of the groupings within Al-Shabaab that campaign against the TFG, was founded by a Swedish-Somali. At least Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Australian and US Somalis have been prosecuted and many more nationals, including a Finnish Somali man and a woman in 2011, accused of funding, planning or participating in attacks targeting the TFG. The Special Representative for the UN Secretary-General for Somalia, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, in his letter to the members of the Somali Diaspora referred to the December 2009 suicide bombing in the Benadir University of Mogadishu by noting:

> It was particularly troubling that the man responsible for so much carnage was a Somali living in Denmark. And he was not the first to return to Somalia, after being given sanctuary abroad to spill the blood of his countrymen and women. The suicide bomber in Bossasso in 2008 was a Somali-American from Minnesota. And we have since seen the attempted assault carried out last week in Aarhus, Denmark by a Somali living in the country.[5]

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[5] United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS), Letter to the members of the Somali Diaspora (No. 21), Nairobi, 06 January 2010.

3. OPPORTUNITIES AND ESCAPE

The diaspora can also participate in the political struggles in the homelands, because of the opportunities this involvement gives. Abdirashid Ismail investigates how the diaspora has used its human, financial, and social capital in order to attain political power in Somalia, and how this has related to the regional geopolitics. Even in the context of a continuing conflict, assisting one of the parties can yield a return. Those who support a government-in-the-making have an advantage when new posts are filled or when the government negotiates contracts with private companies.

This has been evident in Somaliland, which was stabilised without official international involvement. The diaspora has been pivotal in the formation of the *de facto* state, including the promotion of uniting national narratives and symbols (Hoehne 2011: 321–322).

A prominent candidate in the 2010 presidential elections was a Finnish-Somali, who had established the first opposition party in Somaliland, the Justice and Development Party known as "the diaspora party" (Pirkkalainen and Abdile 2009). Although he lost to a local opposition politician, it is interesting to note that the diaspora members were nominated to all key posts in the new government: energy, information, planning, foreign affairs and fisheries ministries were all led by returnees from the US, UK and Canada (Somaliland.org, 25.10.2010.) However, the diaspora's success in Somalia is also seen as a threat by the locals. Abdile and Pirkkalainen show how the diaspora's political activities can be easily rejected if these clash with the interests of the locals. On the other hand, perceptions tend to be positive with regard to financial support and contribution to professional services.

Many donor organizations are actively using the Somali diaspora. The EU, for example, requires the participation of Somalis in its capacity-building activities and in practice these have been representatives of the diaspora. The EU has not been able to establish contracts with local Somali NGOs due to the lack of a legal system there. Thus all financing is channelled through intergovernmental agencies or international NGOs, with whom it has framework agreements. And for these it is easier to engage with diaspora members than Somalis living in Somalia,[6] even though the logic of these requirements is to ensure local ownership of the programmes in a situation where the state is weak. According to the projects manager of the Somalia Institutional Development Project (UNDP), "Somalis are resistant to outsiders coming and telling them what to do". The conflict has lasted a long time, and outsiders have often tried to

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[6] Interview by J. Reyes with Paula Vaszquez-Horyaans, Head of Section Rural Development and Social Services, Somalia Operations Unit, Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Kenya, Nairobi 28.4.2010.

influence it.[7] Without local level backing and acceptance, development efforts can hardly become sustainable.

The connections, however, work also in the other direction. Diaspora groups are directly engaging with and lobbying their host governments and international organizations. In this they have some advantage when compared to the local Somalis: according to a UNDP official "they often speak the language that very much resonates with us. They can refer to accountability and transparency and human development, and the language is sophisticated. So, it makes them more approachable."[8] Worthy of note are personal motives, which relate to career development, professional recognition of the diaspora's cultural skills as well as to the unique work experience that can be obtained from the field. According to a diaspora member from Australia:

> I just graduated from university and wanted to gain work experience. I thought Somalia was ideal place for me because I could do two things at the same time. Firstly, I wanted to help my people who have gone through great suffering and secondly, I wanted to gain work experience. (Abdile 2010, 17).

For the international community the dilemma is obvious. In the words of the UNDP Country Director:

> I don't think that at this stage we have an answer to what it is we would like to do with the diaspora. We know that they are an essential ingredient to any better development inside Somalia, but how to mobilize them based on the toolkit, the rules and procedures and goals of UNDP, I think that is something that we need to find an answer to first… But also the negative side, why have some diaspora youth become suicide bombers when they presumably have good opportunities in other countries?[9]

The diaspora is returning to Somalia also for reasons that have nothing to do with the developments there and therefore cannot be instrumentalized for the political struggle. Marja Tiilikainen has investigated the stories of those returnees who have been motivated or forced to come back to Somalia because they have been unsuccessful in their host countries or become ill. The families might argue that only return to their own traditions and religious healing could heal them, if modern medicine and treatment does not help. Use of drugs and alcohol and criminality represent also corrupted western behavior and problems that cannot be solved in the West.

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[7]　Interview by J. Reyes with John Kiyaga-Nsubuga, Project Manager, Somalia Institutional Development Project (SIDP), UNDP Somalia, Nairobi 28.4.2010.
[8]　Interview by M. Tiilikainen with Alvaro Rodriguez, Country Director, UNDP Somalia, Lund 4.6.2010.
[9]　Interview by M. Tiilikainen with Alvaro Rodriguez, op.cit.

To conclude Somalia is also a place to escape from the West. Religion and the clan remain the most important ingredients of rule and order in the society. However, in the divided and Islamized Somalia, educated diaspora members are gaining ground. The diaspora's relations cross clan boundaries and it consciously use the available opportunity structures to their own advantage. Diaspora is represented in all levels of social and political organization, in the government and in the opposition. All of this fits the wider international policy approach to support development in a limited state in Somalia.

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