

Homeland Perception and Recognition of the Diaspora Engagement: The Case of the Somali Diaspora*

Mahdi ABDILE

University of Helsinki, Finland

Päivi PIRKKALAINEN

University of Jyväskylä, Finland

ABSTRACT

Scanning through the literature on diasporas one finds two opposing views. On the one hand diasporas are promoted as having the necessary education, experience and knowledge to contribute towards peace, stability and development, while on the other hand they are concurrently seen as fueling conflicts in their countries of origin. In the literature there seems to be a gap in explaining perceptions of local communities from the country of origin of the diaspora's contributions. This article aims to analyze the interactions between the diaspora and the locals in the case of Somalia. It will be claimed that depending on the position and interests of the locals and the diaspora members, the diaspora's activities can be either recognized or rejected. The perceptions are examined both from the diaspora's and the local communities' points of view and conditions under which the diaspora and the locals achieve mutual recognition are analyzed. This article is based on extensive empirical data which were collected through 144 interviews, 7 group discussions and participant observation in different parts of Somalia, the UK and Finland.

Keywords: *Somali diaspora, local communities, recognition, development, migration.*

INTRODUCTION

The Somali civil war that began in the late 1980s and continues today has forced more than one million Somalis and their descendants to seek refuge outside Somalia (Sheikh and Healy 2009). After being part of the diaspora for decades, some members of these communities have started to return to their ancestral

* We acknowledge the useful and critical comments provided by Cindy Horst, Pekka Virtanen, Petri Hautaniemi, Abdirahman Wandati and Martti Siisiäinen. An earlier version of this article was presented at the 4th European Conference on African Studies in Uppsala, Sweden, on 17 June 2011, in the panel on "Diaspora as a Development and Peace Building Actor in the Horn of Africa?". We are grateful for the comments and questions provided by the participants of the panel. Also, we are grateful for the comments by anonymous reviewers of NJAS, as well as by NJAS editor Axel Fleisch. Finally, we want to thank all the Somali interviewees in all the locations of the fieldwork who have shared their thoughts and information with us.

homeland to start a new life. In most cases, the conditions in which these returnees have found themselves living, the expectations of the local population and the experiences and expectations of these returnees are yet to be documented. Previous research on diaspora engagement has focused on the role of diasporas in the social, political and economic sectors of their countries of origin (see for example Levy and Weingrod 2005; Sheffer 2003; Van Hear 1998; Braziel 2008; Dufoix 2008; Wahlbeck 2002; Pirkkalainen and Abdile 2009). These studies suggest that diaspora members and organizations engage in a variety of activities which aim to influence processes in their countries of origin, but raised questions whether such involvement is constructive or not (see for example Levy and Weingrod 2005; Sheffer 2003; Van Hear 1998; Braziel 2008; Dufoix 2008; Wahlbeck 2002). Actual or long-term outcomes of diaspora activities are very difficult to assess and little is known about what is awaiting diaspora members who choose to return to their countries of origin, either permanently or temporarily, and how they are perceived by local communities.

This article will fill this gap in the literature by analyzing the interactions and relations between the Somali diaspora and the communities they left behind. A key finding of this research is that depending on the position and interests of locals and diaspora members, the contribution and engagement of the diaspora can be either recognized or rejected. To address the phenomena of recognition and rejection, the differing perceptions of the Somali diaspora and of local Somali communities is examined and the conditions under which diaspora members and locals achieve mutual recognition are investigated.

Conceptually, this article uses the notion of *diaspora* as a category for identification and claims making (see Kleist 2007). In this article *recognition* is understood as mutual acceptance and respect between locals and diaspora members. The assumption is that in order for the diaspora to engage with the country of origin constructively, there ought to be a level of mutual recognition.

Structurally, the first section of this article defines the concept of diaspora with a brief outline of the Somali diaspora. The second section describes the empirical data-collection methods used during fieldwork, while the third section discusses homeland – diaspora relations. When discussing homeland – diaspora relations, this article will first offer an analysis of how diaspora members and locals maintain contact and look at the challenges facing the two communities. This is followed by an analysis of how diaspora members perceive their role in the homeland. Then local Somalis' perceptions of the diaspora are critically examined. Both the negative and positive perceptions of diaspora engagement are explained. Finally, the recognition processes are examined and issues that explain the conditions under which the diaspora is recognized or rejected are identified. Lastly, conclusions are drawn.

1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 DIASPORA – TOWARDS A MULTI-LAYERED DEFINITION

The word diaspora is of Greek origin and means “scattering of seeds” (Anthias 1998: 560). Diaspora as a concept has a long history which is not only associated with modern diasporic studies but was initially used to describe the dispersal of the Jewish people from their homeland. Nevertheless, the concept “underwent an amazing inflation that peaked in the 1990’s, by which time it was being applied to most of the world’s people” (Dufoix 2008: 1). Due to this inflation, the word diaspora has gained multiple meanings in contemporary discussions and no longer refers only to the plight of the Jews, but also to the situation of many other groups in exile who have experienced displacement. Most recently, the concept was used to refer to the situation of refugee communities (see for example Wahlbeck 1999; 2002). However, within the literature on diasporas, there are disagreements as to whether the term diaspora should be applied narrowly, to mean communities that have experienced forced migration, or more broadly to include any overseas populations (Dufoix 2008: 1–34). Within the diaspora literature one can find three different approaches to defining the term diaspora. The first approach is to use diaspora to refer to the physically existing homeland and a yearning for it. This view is represented, for example, by Robin Cohen (1997) and William Safran (1990). The second approach is to understand diaspora as a particular form of consciousness or identity. This approach represents a social and cultural condition, and has been named “the post modern version of diaspora” (Anthias 1998: 560). This view challenges the first approach by claiming that diasporas are not always defined by their orientation to a singular national homeland. Instead, the individual’s own narrative and definition of diaspora identity are the issues that matter and define diaspora (see for example Werbner 2000: 15). The third approach, which is closely linked to the second approach, is to examine the claims made in the name of diaspora and to consider diaspora a potential moral community that is based on co-responsibility and that has important material, organizational and institutional aspects (Werbner 2002; Kleist 2007; 2008). In this article diaspora is considered a claims making multi-layered entity in which social class, ethnicity, generation and gender are at play. As noted by Sökefeld (2006: 280):

The development of diaspora identity is not simply a natural and inevitable result of migration but a historical contingency that frequently develops out of mobilization in response to specific critical events. Diaspora... is not an issue of naturally felt roots but of specific political circumstances that suggest the mobilization of a transnational imagined community.

Diaspora communities do not constitute one entity with common aims and interests and with solidarity and cohesion with one another, but diversified

groups with diverse positions and interests (see for example Kleist 2008: 130). Thus even within the same diaspora, groups and individuals may assume different roles and may be mobilized to undertake contradictory responsibilities when interacting with the homeland. Even their perceptions of the homeland may differ. This begs the following questions: who is claiming to be part of the diaspora and to whom are they loyal? As Leroi and Mohan (2003: 611) explain, those who live in complex transnational social fields with multiple locations may have different affiliations and understandings of home. But how has a diaspora's identity and belonging shaped the nature of its support for the homeland? In the literature it is clear that different diaspora groups have different interests, relations and interaction with the homeland. For some in the diaspora, the homeland is portrayed "as a sacred place filled with memories of past glory and bathed in visions of nobility and renaissance" (Levy and Weingrod 2005: 5). For others, "their identities refer to both homeland and host land and the relationship between these identities is not necessarily hierarchical. The quest for original identity need not be measured by their attachment to the homeland or the will to return" (Levy and Weingrod 2005: 105).

The term diaspora has also entered into policy language in recent years and there has been a growing policy interest towards "diasporas as agents of development in relation to their countries of origin" (Kleist 2008: 1128). Thus, diaspora is not only an abstract category in the literature but can be also seen as a potential political actor (Kleist 2008: 1129). Therefore, diaspora as a category of claims and identifications can be related to the wider discussions and political developments related to recognition (Kleist 2008; on recognition in general see, for example, Taylor 1994; Fraser and Honneth 2003; Fraser 2000). Diasporas can be and have been mobilized as collective actors struggling for recognition in the countries of settlement as minority groups as well as actors in their countries of origin. Diasporas have been recognized, both in political and public discourses as well as in literature, as collective actors having a role, either positive or negative, in the countries of origin (Kleist 2008: 1136).

When diaspora members engage with the country of origin, new encounters emerge with local communities. In this article the discussion on recognition is extended to the encounters between local communities and the diaspora by maintaining that in order for the diaspora to be able to positively engage with the homeland, it is important that it gains some level of recognition from the local communities that would allow fruitful dialogue and interaction. In this context, recognition refers to the acceptance and legitimization of the diaspora and its involvement as part of society as "us" and not as an outsider. Acceptance and legitimization become even more crucial in social positioning and power relations. Locals play a role in this positioning process by recognizing or rejecting certain diaspora roles or engagement. But the diaspora also has a role in these processes of gaining recognition as it can, by its activities, build trust among locals. The most desirable outcome of these relations is mutual recognition.

1.2 THE SOMALI DIASPORA

As mentioned earlier, for over twenty years the conflict in Somalia has driven a million Somalis from their original homeland (Sheikh and Healy 2009). Today, Somalis reside in many countries globally and can be found in every major city in the world. The largest populations are located in the UK, Canada, the US and the Middle East, and significant groups are also found in the Nordic countries. Some Somalis are well established within communities in the host countries while others are recent arrivals. The oldest Somali diaspora communities can be found in Italy and the UK. The 1950s and 1960s saw the arrival of Somali seamen in the UK, settling in cities like Sheffield and Cardiff (Sheikh and Healy 2009). These seamen are among the first wave of Somali migrants and represent the most established contemporary Somali diaspora communities.

The second wave of the Somali diaspora is the guest workers that arrived in the Middle East in the 1970s and 1980s during the oil boom period. The third wave consists of the refugees and asylum seekers who left Somalia as a result of the civil war, and were followed by their children and spouses through the family reunion system (Sheikh and Healy 2009). The third wave also includes those born after their parents left Somalia. The majority of the Somali diaspora members in the Nordic countries came during this third wave and can be considered relative newcomers. Even though there are substantial numbers of the Somali diaspora in the Middle East and Africa, especially in Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti and South Africa, in most cases the diaspora refers to those living in the West and “is associated with access to resources as well as exposure to Western culture, including gender and family relations” (Kleist 2010: 189).

During the fieldwork, local Somalis were asked to define the word diaspora. Almost all described the term as referring to those Somalis living outside the country (*Soomaalidda qurba-joogta, janale* or just *qurba-joog*), often referring, as Kleist observed above, to those living in Western countries (see also Ibrahim 2010: 9). As stated by a religious leader in Somaliland, the diaspora is:

Someone or people who have lived in exile for a long period, but who retain an established connection with the homeland. I can classify them into groups: a) those that went to exile as adults (older generation diaspora) and b) those that were born in the diaspora. (Interviewed July 2009).

As this interview quote indicates, there are Somalis living outside their country of origin with differing migration histories and thus differing relations towards their “original home”. Generation, as stated in the interview quotation, is one of the differing backgrounds which also affect the way relations with the country and communities of origin are formed and maintained. Secondly, time spent abroad, the reason for and the time of migration can affect how relations with

the country of origin are maintained or severed. Along the lines of the diaspora definition being “claims-making”, the Somali diaspora is not a homogeneous group of people, but consists of different interests and positions. Somalis take different roles vis-à-vis the country of origin depending not only on their interests but also on resources.

When considering the Somali diaspora’s engagement with its country of origin, one can form three groups. The first group is those members of the diaspora who have historical relationships that are sustained through constant contact. This type of relationship is maintained through regular engagement in the form of social and financial remittances. Hoehne, Feyissa and Abdile (2011: 76) maintain that these forms of diaspora engagement are key to “understanding the political, economic, social and cultural engagement of diasporic actors in their homelands.” In particular, remittances, which account for considerable amount of the national revenue in Somalia, contribute to “household survival” and have the potential to help strengthen political stability, economic growth and institution building (Hoehne, Feyissa and Abdile 2011: 90–91). However, as will be demonstrated, diaspora engagement is not always positive and some diaspora activities can be directed towards financing, lobbying and supporting different groups involved in the homeland conflicts. The second group is characterized by indifferent and non-engagement. Some diaspora members may not be eager or even care to build and sustain a relationship with Somalia. Although this group may have relatives inside Somalia they may not remit or contribute in any way to the development of their country of origin and are comfortable in their countries of residence. Indeed, in some cases non-engagement is due to the fact that the diaspora members’ main concern is their life in the countries of settlement, not in Somalia (Schlee and Schlee 2010: 4). It has been argued that this is often the case for second generation Somalis and women in particular (ibid.).

The third group is somewhere between the first and second groups. This group has an established relationship and is engaged with the country of origin, but their engagement is limited. For instance, they may be concerned about the lack of peace and development, droughts and the general situation of the country but their remitting patterns and contacts may not be regular or sustained. They usually remit and have contact but not consistently. Their limited engagement might be due to discomfort and the fact that Somali diaspora groups are diverse and are differentiated along clan and political lines and “do not necessarily form a common platform to influence their homeland” (Hoehne, Feyissa and Abdile 2011: 78). Therefore, some members of the diaspora are unable to identify ways of engaging with their knowledge, financial resources and skills. They may also be worried that their engagement might be counterproductive and make people become more dependent on remittances (Hoehne, Feyissa and Abdile 2011: 77). A diaspora dependency syndrome may develop into a situation where people rely exclusively on diaspora support. In this article the intention is not to find out the consistency or how numerically significant Somali diaspora engagement

or non-engagement is but rather to examine the phenomenon of the local – diaspora relations of those who engage.

2. EMPIRICAL DATA AND METHODS

When studying the diaspora, whose life is inherently transnational, one needs “to focus on intersection between networks of those who have migrated and those who have stayed in place” as well as “to capture migrants’ simultaneous engagement in and orientation toward their home and host countries” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1012). Multi-sited ethnography is suitable for studying the transnational interconnectedness of Somalis and the different “flows” between the country of settlement and the country of origin, as they are phenomena that cannot be understood by focusing only on a single site (see also Marcus 1995; Falzon 2009).

In his classic article on multi-sited ethnography, George Marcus (1995: 105) writes: “multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of ethnography”. Multi-sited methods are particularly suitable to study networks (Hannertz 2003: 21) as they allow the researcher to study different localities that are connected to each other through several types of flows. The move towards application of multi-sited methods is often discussed in reference to globalization, and the claim is that in this increasingly inter-linked world one cannot understand certain phenomena by focusing on only one location and/or considering it a closed “system” (Falzon 2009; Horst 2009).

This article is based on research which used multi-sited methods. The aim has been to “follow” people and their perceptions in different geographical locations. The empirical data were collected in various locations simultaneously by the authors during different periods over the course of three years. The challenges related to time spent in each location and the ability to gain in-depth data, common critiques of multi-sited methods (see for example Falzon 2009; Horst 2009), were overcome. Fieldwork in Somalia began in the summer of 2008 and continued until January 2011 and includes over 7 months of data collection. Interviews took place in Hargeisa, Bosaso and Mogadishu. In addition to personal interviews and group discussions, the researchers participated in 5 diaspora meetings and conferences to gather general observations. The data collection consisted of open-ended questions and participant observation. The fieldwork on the Somali diaspora was carried out during several periods in Finland and the UK between the summer of 2008 and the spring of 2011, totaling nearly 5 months. In Finland, the fieldwork took place in the metropolitan area of Helsinki (the cities of Espoo, Vantaa and Helsinki) where around 77% of all Somali mother tongue speakers in the country live (Statistics Finland 2011). In the UK, fieldwork was conducted

during a two-week period in 2008 in the cities of London and Sheffield. The data collected consist of semi-structured interviews and participant observation.

In total, 144 interviews and 7 group discussions were conducted in both the country of origin and in the two countries of settlement. 89 interviews and 7 group discussions took place in different parts of Somalia/Somaliland. 16 interviews with Somali diaspora members were conducted in the UK and 39 interviews were conducted in Finland. The interviewees in the UK and Finland were representatives of Somali diaspora organizations. Interviewees in Europe were selected using the snowball method, and all interviewees from the diaspora are first generation migrants. Interviews with diaspora returnees in the homeland include both first and second generation diaspora members as well as locals from all sectors of society including teachers, politicians, religious leaders and traditional leaders. Additionally, participant observation in both countries was carried out at several events, such as fundraising events and seminars relating to Somalia or the diaspora.

3. DIASPORA-HOMELAND RELATIONS

According to the research findings, both the Somali diaspora and those still in the homeland thought it was important to maintain close relationships with one another. Homeland-diaspora relationships are maintained in a number of ways, including regular updates, information about the homeland and indications of how diaspora members can participate in homeland affairs. In order to stay informed, both sides regularly organize meetings and visits. For instance, representatives of the government(s) of Somaliland, Puntland, the South/Central area, members of civil societies and clan elders embark on journeys to major diaspora centers around the world. These visits are aimed at strengthening ties between the homeland and the diaspora, but also at promoting cooperation between the diaspora and the different entities involved in homeland politics.

For the diaspora, the continuous dialogue between diaspora members and the representatives of homeland governments is an opportunity to influence homeland politics. In addition to sending remittances, regular visits to the homeland and lobbying in the countries of settlement on behalf of their country of origin allow the diaspora to benefit from continuous interaction with the homeland. Similarly, skills transfer by way of returning to the homeland to run NGOs or businesses, engage in teaching or take part in homeland politics. Being actively involved transnationally in societal development by setting up organizations and bringing development projects to the country are also seen as a way to maintain diaspora-homeland linkages. Likewise, diaspora-homeland linkages can be maintained through a number of unofficial channels. First, technological developments over the past decades have enabled the Somali diaspora to maintain almost daily contact with the homeland. Today, the availability of fast internet connections and cheap international telephone calls,

which currently cost less than US\$ 20 cents per minute in Somalia, play a major role in maintaining uninterrupted and regular homeland-diaspora contact. The fieldwork data suggest that in Somaliland and Puntland, locals expect members of the diaspora to maintain regular contact with family and friends left behind. The availability of these technologies makes it easier for the diaspora to fulfill such expectations.

Traditionally, Somalis used to stay in touch with diaspora members through writing letters, but DHL is the only postal service that exists nowadays and it is extremely expensive for ordinary people to utilize. Faced with the lack of postal service, Somalis have turned to the internet for solutions. In different parts of Somalia, interaction with the diaspora is mostly sustained through regular emails, phone calls, Skype calls and diaspora visits to the homeland. In addition, Facebook, Twitter and other social networks are tools used to maintain contact. In fact, Twitter and Facebook are revolutionizing these transnational relations. In the evenings, internet cafes in Hargeisa and Bosaso are flooded with people contacting their loved ones, relatives and friends in the diaspora through Facebook or Twitter. Pictures and stories about relatives living both in the diaspora and the homeland are shared on Facebook and Twitter.

Despite the strong connections between the diaspora and the country of origin, the data collected during the fieldwork have identified several challenges which have implications for homeland-diaspora relations and add to the negative perception of the diaspora by certain members of local communities. The first challenge is the perception held by many in the homeland that the diaspora are lacking the strategic vision to engage with Somalia/Somaliland. The lack of the diaspora's vision, focus and coherent framework is seen as a major impediment to the total utilization of diaspora knowledge and expertise. Fragmentation of the diaspora underlies these challenges, as one traditional elder¹ from Somaliland described:

There is no doubt that diaspora members are in a position to do many good things here, but our observation about them is that they are too weak and disorganized to help us to their full capacity. There is a Somali proverb that says: *far keliya fool ma dhaqdo*, meaning a single finger cannot wash a face. I feel obliged to say that without them collectively getting together, the few that are here will not be able to do much. Their strength and power lies in their collectiveness, their togetherness, but this is not happening. Clan loyalties and tribalism pose a major challenge for

¹ In the Somali context, there are two types of traditional leadership. The first is *Oday* and the second is a titled clan leader such as *nabadoon*, *aqil*, *Isim* or *suldaan*. The difference between the two types of leadership is that an *Oday* is a respected elder who is involved in the day-to-day running of clan affairs due to his experience, knowledge and wisdom. He is not elected but his potential contribution is recognized by the rest of the community and its leadership. A titled clan leader is an elected (*Oday la calema saray*) individual tasked with clan leadership. Both types of leadership are represented in all the traditional leadership levels: family (*reer*), sub-clan, clan and inter-clan leadership.

the diaspora. They have to overcome this clannish mentality and be a good example to others. (Interviewed November 2010)

The second challenge relates to the lack of security, which has made a less conducive environment for diaspora engagement. The unstable situation in Somalia, especially in certain regions in South/Central Somalia, has limited the diaspora's access and thus impedes the diaspora's full participation. The representative of a community based organisation in London described the diaspora as part of the civil society in Somalia and described the challenges in conflict-ridden settings as follows:

[Diaspora can contribute a lot] but in the South [Somalia], there are warlords who have troops and guns, and they are stopping anyone who is trying to make improvements. In this context the civil society intellectual level will not have a lot of effect. (Interviewed November 2008)

The third challenge is what some interviewees both in the homeland and in Europe call the 'diaspora's dual role' in the homeland conflict. Some diaspora members perceived certain parts of the diaspora as being part of the problem rather than part of the solution, fuelling the conflict at home. A diaspora returnee to Somaliland from Finland describes the situation as follows:

Diaspora have founded educational institutions and contribute economically, but they also have a negative role. A lot of civil war happened in Somalia and Somaliland when money to buy guns came from the diaspora. They have two hands: one hand is feeding people, another hand killing people. (Interviewed January 2011)

These challenges, which partly derive from the fact that the areas are to a varying degrees conflict-ridden, provide the context in which the diaspora engage. These challenges are in the background of differing perceptions, both negative and positive, by both the diaspora and locals.

3.1 SELF-PERCEPTION OF THE SOMALI DIASPORA

The Somali diaspora is given certain roles and even obligations by different actors: the international community, local communities and by the members of the diaspora themselves. In this sense the diaspora can be seen as "a moral community that can be mobilized at a transnational scale and to whom certain obligations and expectations apply" (Kleist 2008: 1134). According to the data, diaspora members feel that they have a moral responsibility towards their country of origin and thus perceive their role as important, even essential, in a variety of sectors. Some of the areas in which the Somali diaspora members feel they can play a role include sending remittances to support relatives, providing new innovative ideas in peacebuilding and development, and participating in the

political and economic arena. From the point of view of Somalis interviewed in Europe, sending remittances to relatives is seen as the most important role. In explaining how vital their role in remitting is, one representative of a Somali organization in Finland noted that:

If we don't send [money], they die. We try to help them. Diaspora is the resource, one of the most important resources in the whole of Somalia. (Interviewed October 2009)

After remittances, the second most important role that the diaspora undertakes is bringing innovative ideas, experience and know-how to the homeland. Some diaspora members thought that coming back with new ideas and expertise was a way of reversing the brain drain phenomenon, which is a key problem facing Somalia. According to the chairperson of a diaspora organization in Finland:

[The diaspora] can play a role in the reconstruction of the country because they received education while living abroad. When we come to our country, we can do a lot in developing the country, bringing back knowledge and through investments create jobs. (Interviewed April 2009)

The vital roles the diaspora can and has played are highlighted in interviews, but perceptions of how to best realize its potential varied. According to the interview data the role of the diaspora can be described in two ways. First, the diaspora engages proactively but risks being considered a protagonist. Second, it takes on a more supportive role. Based on the data, the diaspora has played these two roles and both have strong support among diaspora members and in the homeland. Those who prefer to see strong diaspora involvement in all sections of society are advocating for the proactive approach. For example, one chair of a diaspora organization in Finland was in favor of the proactive role of the diaspora. He states:

Diaspora could participate more, they have done a lot of projects, but they should participate in politics more, to influence not only by bringing a well or building a school, but to participate in peace conferences as a member of a political group. This would be worth gold. I believe that someone living in Europe has different view on what someone living in Somalia has. Someone living in Europe knows what the welfare state, peace and the functioning state is. These people being less corrupted would have more to give compared to locals. (Interviewed December 2009)

Other members of the diaspora strongly oppose the diaspora taking a proactive role, and in particular the protagonist approach in politics. This stand was highlighted by a diaspora member from the USA, who had returned to Nairobi to run a humanitarian NGO working in Somalia. He advised that diaspora members need to:

Stay away from politics because locals know better than us. When they see us with suits and cash and if you challenge them in power they may kill you. That is why we need to stay away from politics and leave that for locals. We should go out and do the actual [humanitarian] work in the field. (Interviewed in Finland, October 2009)

Those who oppose the protagonist approach perceive the role of the diaspora as being supporting – giving resources to locals. As the chair of a diaspora association in Finland described:

If I go to Somalia and get a position there, I think that is wrong. I should support, not try to get a position. Because many people in Somalia feel that the diaspora is taking all the open positions. It is very good if you support locals, but you should not take anything from there. Also, if you go there with your own interest, you don't have trust [from locals]. (Interviewed October 2009)

3.2 LOCAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

3.2.1 Negative Perceptions of Diaspora Engagement

The various roles and positions of diaspora members are perceived differently by the members of local communities. From an economic point of view, some locals perceive diaspora returnees and their families as straining local resources and predict that the more diaspora members that return to the homeland, the more difficult it will be for locals to compete for jobs and other services with the economically better off diaspora members. However, returnees who were able to invest and create opportunities were not seen as straining local resources (see also Kleist 2008: 1133). A local high school teacher in Hargeisa described it as follows:

I think it's better if the diaspora stay where there are. Those who have saved enough money and want to come back to invest are more than welcome because they will create jobs and other opportunities. Also doctors, nurses and teachers can come back because they will contribute to much-needed services. But it's a bad idea for others to return, because when they are here they will not send remittances as they used to do when they were in the West. Here they want jobs and schools for their children. All of these they can get from where they are in the diaspora. Our resources are limited here. (Interviewed September 2010)

Negative perceptions are usually based on assumptions formed during interaction between locals and diaspora returnees. Such assumptions, in turn, are based on the belief that diaspora members are divisive and clannish, that their habits are different and that the environment in the homeland favors diaspora

participation (both economically and politically) at the locals' expense. Competition for jobs, government positions and the diaspora's ability to influence national politics were seen by Somalis as negatively impacting local-diaspora relations. Interviews with local Somalis indicated that they are fearful of competing with the more educated, networked and qualified diaspora returnees. The study also showed that resource sharing between locals and members of the diaspora has become an issue, as was highlighted by a diaspora returnee from Canada working as a government official in Hargeisa:

When people from the diaspora come with great ideas, locals, many of whom are illiterate, might see it as a threat. Currently in the public sector there are 8–12 ministers from the diaspora. Also, in those projects supported by the international community the diaspora come in and people graduating from local universities become the second choice. (Interviewed January 2011)

Equally, it is perceived locally that the return of a large number of Somali diaspora members and the rise of prices, especially in Somaliland, are correlated. Interview participants protested that schools fees and rental fees have gone up since the diaspora started returning to Somaliland. Research findings suggest that the presence of the large diaspora community in Somaliland and especially in the capital Hargeisa have exacerbated the general belief that diaspora members are able to pay more for rent and tuition fees, as one government employee in Hargeisa complained:

Their presence is making everything very expensive. There are empty houses all around Hargeisa but local people cannot afford them because landlords want to rent to those from the diaspora or to international organizations. In the summer it is even worse. You will not be able to rent a place in the summer because they [diaspora members] come here in large numbers. (Interviewed September 2010)

Locals' negative perceptions of the diaspora are not only limited to resource sharing. Cultural differences have also emerged as a key concern for locals. The perception that diaspora members have stayed abroad a long time and adopted other cultures, habits and ways of life that are different from those in Somalia has earned the reputation of being socially and culturally different. According to a local shop owner in Hargeisa, there is a prevalent perception that the diaspora is bringing back corrupted Western habits and is in need of cultural re-orientation, locally known as *dhaqan celis* (see also Kleist 2008):

They look like us but their behaviors are peculiar and shockingly different from anything we know here. They are too Westernized. They don't have good *aqlaq* (discipline) and are bad examples to others, especially the children. They need *dhaqan celis* courses. (Interviewed September 2010)

Homeland Perception and Recognition of the Diaspora Engagement

The locals' perceptions of the diaspora returnees as 'others', foreigners and too Western applies to both genders but is perhaps more prevalent towards women when it comes to behavior and dress code. Previous research has documented the changing gender relations of the Somali diaspora in the West (see for example Kleist 2010), which is also reflected in this study. According to one of the male diaspora returnees from Finland, adjusting back to the culture in Somalia may be more challenging for women than for men:

Women from the diaspora may face more challenges [than men]. They have to play a role here, they have to respect the local culture and behave in certain ways. We are all brainwashed when we are in the West, we change our culture. For women in particular this may be problematic in terms of adjusting to life here: they should be taught at the reorientation that here they are Somali women, not Finnish. (Interviewed January 2011)

Locals also negatively perceived the diaspora as not having suffered from conflict and being out of touch with the realities on the ground, which leads diaspora members to impose their own "fantasies" (see for example, Anderson 1992). This is related to the perception that some members of the diaspora are too clannish, too fragmented and in some cases warmongers. An example of this clannishness is the role the diaspora has played in the recent Somaliland election, as stated by a local member of the Somaliland electoral commission:

Some people from the diaspora have sent money to his or her clan so that clan elders can boost the voter registration of their clan. The money was spent knowingly to falsify the voter registration and increase the number of the clan members in a fraudulent way. This exacerbated the community tension and encouraged frauds using diaspora money. (Interviewed July 2010)

The diaspora's political influence in the homeland has drawn criticism and appears as the most critical field of engagement (see Ibrahim 2010: 48). Some in Somaliland complained that the existing political climate favors the diaspora over the locals, such as this KULMIYE political party activist in Hargeisa:

Through relatives, clan connection and money, diaspora are having great influence in Somaliland politics. Diaspora have also been supporting individual candidates by providing advice and financial support. (Interviewed July 2010)

Some interviewees thought that groups of returnees included criminals who have been expelled from their countries of residence, or those who have failed to integrate and find decent work in the diaspora, as is described by a traditional leader from Bosaso, Puntland:

My opinion about these *qurbajoog* (diaspora) is quite negative. The other day we heard from BBC that Canada, the UK and Holland and many other Western countries want to expel some *qurbajoog* because they have

committed serious offenses. Now, they come here and pretend that they are good and clean people and want government jobs. I hear that the majority of them are alcoholics and socially mischievous, and failed to achieve anything while in the diaspora. That is my opinion. (Interviewed June 2009)

Many interviewees found the generally perceived superior attitude displayed by some diaspora Somalis toward locals problematic, as stated by a local hotel manager in Hargeisa:

The other day I was having coffee with a friend at the Ambassador Hotel and next to us sat a group of diaspora having drinks. Their discussion was about how local Somalis were ignorant (*reer miyi*) and backward. We were shocked about their attitudes and their lack of local understanding. These young people are ignorant about their culture and think because they lived in the West and learned few skills they are better than us. (Interviewed July 2010)

3.2.2 Positive Perceptions of Diaspora Engagement

Despite the negative perceptions held by some locals in the country of origin towards certain type of diaspora engagement in certain conditions, many of these same local people have positive perceptions of the diaspora in other aspects and conditions. Financial contributions of the Somali diaspora scored high with the locals. Even those who held negative perceptions about the involvement of the diaspora recognized their enormous financial contribution. The potential effect of remittances has generated fascinating debate about the role of remittances as a tool for poverty reduction and an opportunity for development in countries of origin. According to a recent study, the volume of remittances into developing nations is on the rise with estimated amount of "US\$ 221 billion- twice the amount of official assistance developing countries received" in 2006 (Gupta, Pattilo and Wagh 2009: 104). In Somalia, the yearly inflow of private remittances is estimated to be between US\$ 1.3–2 billion a year (Hammond et al. 2011: 4). Thus remittances are of utmost importance to local people, as described by a politician from Somaliland:

The Somali diaspora are the breadwinners of many Somali households. Their financial contribution is far better targeted than those given by donor countries as the diaspora money goes straight to meeting basic needs. The diaspora seems to be playing the government's role. In southern Somalia where there is no functioning government and international organizations have largely withdrawn due to insecurity, remittances sent by the Somali diaspora have played a crucial role in not only supporting families, but the local economy has also benefited. (Interviewed July 2009)

Homeland Perception and Recognition of the Diaspora Engagement

Money sent by the diaspora is received in US Dollars, making the inflow of remittances the largest source of hard currency in a country where international trade is limited. Diaspora members are also seen as essential in bringing in critical services such as support for and the establishment of hospitals, schools and universities. Among the best-cited examples in Somaliland are the University of Hargeisa, International Horn University, Amoud University, the University of Burco and Hargeisa Hospital. Another example is the sizable number of Somaliland diaspora from Europe, North America and the Middle East who are now working in hospitals and universities and have started businesses (such as Mansoor and Ambassador hotels) that created thousands of jobs where unemployment rates were high (see also Hansen 2007).

The study findings showed an appreciation of the skills, knowledge and experience of diaspora members. Interviewees emphasized the importance of diaspora networks and contacts abroad that could bring needed expertise to Somalia. The local acknowledgement of the diaspora's diverse skills and professional experience is also found in recent diaspora studies which describe the skills and experiences as the "abilities and knowledge" (World Bank 2010) crucial in the effort to build strong institutions that are important for the development of a diaspora's country of origin. As one local Somali described:

They brought back knowledge and institutional skills that they learned in host countries where there is system and discipline. In the long term, this contributes to peace because it establishes strong institutions and a knowledge-based society that is based on justice and equality. For example, all the heads of TELESOM Co. are from the diaspora. If you look at the political parties, they have many people from the diaspora as members. This reflects their positive involvement. (Interviewed June 2009)

One of the most critical areas of diaspora engagement, direct participation in political parties, was perceived by some as positive particularly in the sense that diaspora members are bringing in expertise gained abroad, as was mentioned by one member of the Somaliland House of Representatives:

Many of my colleagues in the House of Representatives are from the diaspora. Having studied and worked in different parts of the world they have now come back and are making their skills and experience gained from years of working in the West and the Middle East accessible to their homeland. This I see as a positive thing because other African governments are complaining about brain drain but on the contrary we are experiencing the reversal of such trends. (Interviewed June 2010)

Diaspora members are also seen as people who could bring fresh and innovative ideas that can help accelerate development, institutional and peacebuilding initiatives (see Abdile 2010). Many interview participants highly regarded the involvement of diaspora in reconciliation and peacebuilding processes. This is

echoed in the case of Somaliland by a Deputy Speaker of the Somaliland House of Representatives:

In Somaliland's recent political problems between the government and the opposition parties, members from the diaspora communities were calling their clan elders, members of the government and opposition leaders and other stakeholders to stop threats and confrontations that could exacerbate the situation. Members from the diaspora posted articles on the internet and in newspapers exhorting Somalilanders that they risk becoming like southern Somalia if they don't solve their problems in a peaceful manner. This was their appeal because they have a vested interest in maintaining peace. (Interviewed July 2009)

4. RECOGNITION OF THE SOMALI DIASPORA'S ENGAGEMENT

In previous sections the diaspora's self-perception of its role in Somalia and the locals' perceptions of the diaspora's engagement were described. Several critical issues and challenges concerning diaspora engagement were identified and discussed. As seen, according to some locals in Somalia, diaspora members are perceived as "others" and are excluded. They are not allowed to participate as full members of the society. In this section, perceptions are further analyzed by looking at recognition processes between locals and diaspora members. The conditions under which diaspora engagement is recognized or rejected by locals are analyzed, and the reasons why are explained. This may help to understand how the diaspora gain recognition in various positions.

To start with, it is important to stress that the context under which the diaspora engage in Somalia is challenging. As mentioned, some areas, especially in South/Central Somalia, are becoming increasingly inaccessible to the diaspora due to the conflict, whereas areas in northern Somalia, namely the self-proclaimed Somaliland and semi-autonomous Puntland, are relatively peaceful, allowing the diaspora to return. However, despite the relative stability in Somaliland and Puntland, severe problems remain. Both areas are experiencing high unemployment and a lack of job opportunities. At the same time, local expectations of the diaspora are high.

In this context of poverty, lack of resources and unemployment, a high level of local recognition is given to the diaspora when it plays the role of a supporter; an actor bringing resources such as remittances and setting up critical services. However, it becomes problematic when diaspora members play a proactive role, in particular a protagonist role. Locals' assumptions that the diaspora are taking jobs away, inflating prices or putting pressure on local services and resources create negative reactions towards the diaspora and thus makes the engagement of the diaspora challenging. Locals' perceptions of the diaspora as being too Westernized and thus a threat is adding further challenges to diaspora returnees. One diaspora returnee from Sweden experienced exclusion from the local

community as he and his children are perceived having being influenced too much by the Western culture:

Some local parents don't want our children and theirs to mingle. They think our children are a bad influence on their children. Things are done differently here and parents emphasize a lot about discipline, good manners and obeying one's parents. While I think these are an important part of child's development, it's also important that my children are able to think. Here in Somaliland some see these kinds of values as a threat. (Interviewed June 2009)

The differing and clashing interests of locals as well as diaspora members can explain the negative perceptions. Both the diaspora and local communities play a role in recognition process where positions are considered flexible and negotiable rather than fixed. According to the empirical data, there are three reasons related to the behavior of the diaspora which contribute to mutual recognition between locals and diaspora members.

First, recognition relates to the honesty and motivation of the diaspora members. The initial interaction and exchange between locals and the diaspora is an important contributing factor that influences how locals perceive diaspora members. Determining whether a member of the diaspora has genuinely returned to help or has returned for personal interests is of critical importance because it influences whether s/he is viewed with suspicion or recognized as an important contributor (see also Ibrahim 2010: 40). Diaspora members who manage to gain local approval through their commitment to working for communities and through not seeking well paying positions, glory and personal gain earn recognition more easily. A diaspora returnee from the Netherlands describes her experience as follows:

They [locals] are appreciative. I came here in 1999. There were no mobiles, no electricity, no water. When you come to these kinds of conditions, it is tough. When we started these programs, practically it was tough, we didn't have resources. Locals then saw that when you came to these conditions you really wanted to do something, otherwise you could have stayed in Europe. Even now they appreciate what we have done. (Interviewed January 2011)

Honesty in making community contributions, however, may not be sufficient for "winning the confidence of the society" (Ibrahim 2010: 45). The diaspora members have to work for it.

The second reason relates to the behavior of the diaspora in a culturally sensitive manner. As mentioned earlier, the diaspora members are sometimes locally perceived as "others" due to their presumed acculturation to Western cultures and values. The recognition given to the diaspora depends to some extent on the behavior of diaspora. It became clear in the light of the empirical data that culture and identity are sensitive issues that can easily lead to misunderstandings. If diaspora members perceive themselves as modern and

want to introduce new ideas without being sensitive towards the local culture, they can easily be interpreted as having a superior attitude by locals, and there could be danger of a culture clash. There is a general fear that the mere presence of the diaspora is explicitly or implicitly contributing to cultural change (see also Kleist 2008: 1134). The vicinity of the diaspora members to the country of origin may influence how sensitively they are able to behave toward local culture. Some members living in the West are maintaining very close relations to the country of origin through different means of communication and regular visits, thus staying closely accustomed to Somali culture. The situation may be completely different for others, especially for second generation Somalis who have never visited Somalia. One diaspora returnee to Somaliland from Finland explained proximity to Somalia and cultural sensitivity in the following way:

Another challenge for diaspora members is to become accustomed to this culture, you can't generalize, but some people might have had close relations with Somalia when they were in Europe. For those who have lived here before, they know people here, they speak the language, it's easy. They can transfer experience; they can enrich [the culture]. But on the other hand, if the person does not have that much understanding of Somali culture, thinking that he has been there, civilized, then he clashes with people. Then you are in a trouble, people point at you and you can easily be labeled. (Interviewed January 2011)

CONCLUSIONS

The availability of high speed internet and fast modes of travel have increased diaspora-homeland interaction and contacts allowing diaspora members and local communities to influence each other. However, interactions are complicated by a number of factors such as perceptions from both sides: local perceptions of the diaspora's engagement and the diaspora's self-perception of its role in the country of origin. Differing perceptions, often relating to different interests, lead to challenges in the diaspora's engagement. The diaspora's engagement can be both recognized and rejected by local communities. On the one hand, homeland Somalis have a clear understanding of the vital role diaspora members can play and have played. At the local level, the diaspora score strongly on their financial contributions, followed by their involvement in politics and nation building. The diaspora members are also portrayed as people who are able to bring back know-how, vital contacts and experiences learned while in the diaspora. But although many in the homeland view the diaspora positively, there are aspects of diaspora involvement that locals reject. The aspects of diaspora involvement that are negatively portrayed include straining local resources, competition for jobs, diaspora protagonist approaches in politics, inflating prices to a level that locals are unable to afford, the perception that the diaspora is contributing to cultural change and the general perception of the diaspora's superior attitude.

As the disaggregated approach to the diaspora tells us, there is not only one homeland and there is not only one diaspora. The homeland is differently perceived by different people, and both diaspora members and locals have different interests. As was seen in the empirical data, different members of the diaspora perceive their role differently: some strive for a position in politics, others strictly oppose such engagement and fulfill their moral responsibility towards the country of origin by sending remittances. On the ground in Somalia/Somaliland, one person can perceive certain activities of the diaspora positively and other activities negatively. A local high school teacher can perceive remittances received from his brother in Canada as completely positive, but at the same time be very critical towards other Somali returnees from Canada taking government positions or competing for jobs as teachers, since they might clash with his interests.

The context under which the diaspora engage is extremely challenging in the case of Somalia. In the context of protracted conflict and extreme poverty, diaspora members are easily recognized as resources. More complex recognition processes emerge when the diaspora positions itself to participate in the society, particularly in the role of the protagonist. Diaspora members can, however, build trust among local communities and gain recognition in their various positions by showing their honesty, commitment and cultural sensitivity.

REFERENCES

- Abdile, M. 2010.
Diasporas and their Role in the Homeland Conflicts and Peacebuilding: The Case of Somali Diaspora. DIASPEACE Working Papers No.7. Available at: <http://www.diaspeace.org/wpapers.html>, accessed 13.2.2011.
- Anderson, B. 1992.
The New World Disorder. **New Left Review** 193.
- Anthias, A.F. 1998.
Evaluating “diaspora”: beyond ethnicity? **Sociology** 32(3): 557–580.
- Braziel, J.E. 2008.
Diaspora: an introduction. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Cohen, R. 1997.
Global diasporas: An introduction. London: UCL Press.
- Dufoix, S. 2008.
Diasporas. London: University of California Press.
- Falzon, M.-A. 2009.
Introduction: Multi-sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research. In: M.-A. Falzon (ed.), *Multi-sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research*, pp. 1–25. Surrey: Ashgate.

Fraser, N. 2000.

Rethinking Recognition. **New Left Review** 3: 107–120.

Fraser, N. and Honneth, A. 2003.

Redistribution or Recognition? A Political – Philosophical Exchange. London and New York: Verso.

Gupta S., Pattilo, C.A. and Wagh, S. 2009.

Effect of remittances on Poverty and Financial Development in Sub-Saharan Africa. **World Development** 37(1): 104–115.

Hammond, L., Awad, M., Dagane, A.I., Hansen, P., Horst, C., Menkhaus, K. and Obare, L. 2011.

Cash and Compassion: The Role of the Somali Diaspora in Relief, Development and Peace-building. Report of a Study Commissioned by UNDP Somalia.

Hannertz, U. 2003.

Several sites in one. In: T. Hylland Eriksen (ed.), *Globalisation. Studies in Anthropology*, pp. 18–38. London: Pluto Press.

Hansen, P. 2007.

Revolving Returnees: Meanings and Practices of Transnational Return among Somalilanders. PhD dissertation. University of Copenhagen.

Hoehne, M., Feyissa, D. and Abdile, M. 2011.

Somali and Ethiopian Diasporic Engagement for Peace in the Horn of Africa. **African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review** 1(1): 71–99.

Horst, C. 2009.

Expanding Sites: The Question of ‘Depth’ Explored. In: M.-A. Falzon (ed.), *Multi-sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research*, pp. 1–25. Surrey: Ashgate.

Ibrahim, M.H. 2010.

Somaliland’s Investment in Peace: Analysing the Diaspora’s Economic Engagement in Peace-building. DIASPEACE Working paper No. 4. Available at: <http://www.diaspeace.org/wpapers.html>, accessed 19.3.2011.

Kleist, N. 2007.

Spaces of Recognition. An analysis of Somali-Danish associational engagement and diasporic mobilization. PhD dissertation. University of Copenhagen.

2008 *In the Name of Diaspora: Between Struggles for Recognition and Political Aspirations*. **Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies** 34(7): 1127–1143.

2010 *Negotiating Respectable Masculinity. Gender and Recognition in the Somali Diaspora*. **African Diaspora** 3: 185–206.

Homeland Perception and Recognition of the Diaspora Engagement

- Levitt, P. and Glick Schiller, N. 2004.
Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society. International Migration Review (38)3: 1002–1039.
- Leroi H. and Mohan, G. 2003.
Making Homes: The Ghanaian Diaspora, Institutions and Development. Journal of International Development 15(5): 611–622.
- Levy, A. and Weingrod, A. 2005.
On Homelands and Diasporas: An Introduction. In: A. Levy and A. Weingrod (eds.), *Homelands and Diasporas. Holy Lands and Other Places*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Marcus, G.E. 1995.
Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Annual Review Anthropology* 24: 95–117.
- Pirkkalainen, P. and Abdile, M. 2009.
The Diaspora – Conflict – Peace – Nexus: A Literature Review. DIASPEACE Working Paper No. 1. Available at: <http://www.diaspeace.org/wpapers.html>, accessed 12.2.2011.
- Safran, W. 1990.
Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return. Diaspora (1)1: 83–99.
- Schlee, G. and Schlee, I. 2010.
Limits to Political Engagement: The Case of the Somali Diaspora. Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, working Paper No. 125.
- Sheffer, G. 2003.
Diaspora Politics: At Home, Abroad. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sheikh, H. and Healy, S. 2009.
Somalia's Missing Million: The Somali Diaspora and Its Role in Development. United Nations Development Programme report.
- Statistics Finland. 2011.
Väestörakenne. Available at: http://pxweb2.stat.fi/database/StatFin/vrm/vaerak/vaerak_fi.asp, accessed 13.4. 2011.
- Sökefeld, M. 2006.
Mobilizing in transnational space: a social movement approach to the formation of diaspora. Global networks (6)3: 265–284.
- Taylor, C. 1994.
The Politics of Recognition. In: C. Taylor and A. Gutman (eds.), *Multiculturalism. Examining the Politics of Recognition*, pp. 25–74. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Van Hear, N. 1998.

New Diasporas: The mass exodus, dispersal and regrouping of migrant communities. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Wahlbeck, Ö. 1999.

Kurdish diasporas. A comparative study of Kurdish refugee communities. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

2002 *The concept of diaspora as an analytical tool in the study of refugee communities*. **Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies** 28(2): 221–238.

Werbner, P. 2000.

Introduction: The Materiality of Diaspora – Between Aesthetic and “Real” Politics. **Diaspora** 9(1): 5–20.

2002 *The place which is diaspora: citizenship, religion and gender in the making of chaordic transnationalism*. **Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies** 28(1): 119–133.

World Bank. 2010.

World Bank African Diaspora program. Available at:

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/EXTDIASPORA/0,,contentMDK:22636820~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:4246098,00.html>, accessed

19.01.2011.

About the authors: *Mahdi Abdile* (MASocSc) and *Päivi Pirkkalainen* (MASocSc) are currently finalizing their PhD studies. They have been working on research projects, such as the EU funded DIASPEACE project concerning the Horn of Africa diaspora, since 2008. Ms. Pirkkalainen is currently working in the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä. She is conducting research on Somali associations in Finland and her research interests include forced migration, the Horn of Africa, the migration-development nexus and migrant associations. Mr. Abdile is affiliated with the Department of Political and Economic Studies at the University of Helsinki and is researching the Somali diaspora and Islamic and traditional arbitration systems.