

Somalis in Kenyan Cities: Some Thoughts about Using the Term Diaspora

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After the breakdown of the political system of Siad Barre in 1991 around 400.000 people from Somalia, almost exclusively Muslims, fled to Kenya, a predominantly Christian country. Most of them went to the Muslim parts of Kenya in the north and at the coast. Up to 100.000 refugees from Somalia live, very often illegally, in the urban centres of Kenya. Simultaneous to the migration of people from Somalia to the Kenyan cities Somalis from the North Eastern Province also moved to these regions. In the cities both migrant groups came across already settled Somalis who moved there from British Somaliland during colonial times. Since several years a forth group of Somali migrants is visible in the Kenyan cities - people ‚coming back’ from Western or Arab countries. The boundaries between these different groups of Somalis are often blurred, but nonetheless pointed out time and again by people associated with them. The Kenyan majority society on the other hand often discusses Somalis as one single group of migrants or outsiders.

The focus of the proposed paper lies on cities as fields of interaction between Muslim Somali migrants and Christian as well as Muslim Kenyan citizens. Additionally to looking at the impact of Somali migrants on the local communities the focus of this paper lies on the interaction between the different groups of Somali migrants and citizens and their distinct ways of integration into the local communities. In the proposed paper the first research findings from an anthropological fieldwork in Kenya will be presented. It will be discussed if and how the term Diaspora can be used when talking about Somalis in Kenyan cities.