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Diaspora and Peacebuilding in Post-conflict Settings: Insights from Somaliland

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Abstract

The Horn of Africa is one of the most complex and conflicted regions in the world. Countries from the Horn are experiencing processes of state collapse, state formation, and the dispersal of people. Particularly, this latest issue has captured the attention of academics and policy makers that are trying to assess the impact of diasporas activities on conflict settings within their homelands. The current literature debates on the subject focus on whether diaspora involvement exacerbate or moderate conflict dynamics. However, this dualistic paradigm is by far too simplistic and does not explain the complexity of the diasporic engagement. This paper seeks to analyze how the transnational activities of diaspora communities originating from Somaliland affect the post-conflict settings within their country of origin, by analyzing the economic, political and social dimensions of their engagement. It uses field research data as well as secondary data deriving from the literature on diasporas, conflict and peace to illustrate the complexities of diasporic involvement in the peacebuilding process. Peacebuilding is understood here as a context-related process that embraces a wide range of activities aiming at constructing a confident social environment. Thus, the concept of peacebuilding adopts different meanings depending on the specific situation to which it refers. In the Somaliland discourse, peacebuilding is seen as being closely related to development and translates into working for a democratic society built on equity and justice for all its members. Somaliland is a post-war society still characterized by the absence of strong institutions. In this context, public assets receive minimum attention from the de facto state. In addition, Somaliland still lacks international recognition, thus external support from governments is absent. This paper aims at assessing that, in these circumstances, diaspora's involvement in terms of economic and social remittances plays a crucial role for the reconstruction of the country. Meanwhile, as peacebuilding is intertwined with other factors such as the creation of viable political, economic and social institutions, diaspora initiatives in the education and health sectors are indirectly contributing to peace. However, diasporic initiatives entail some controversial implications that will be also analyzed in this paper.

1. Introduction

Over recent years, diasporas have gained momentum in the political and academic arena. From a policy perspective point of view, within the globalisation of markets, politics and culture, diaspora communities have been largely recognized as powerful actors whose long-distance activities affect the economic, political and social dynamics of their countries of origin. Here discourses about the impact of diaspora engagement in their homelands have tended to swing back and forth like a pendulum, shifting from complete negative visions of diasporas as negative security risks, especially following the 9/11 events, to complete optimistic views of diasporas as peacebuilding and development actors in recent years (de Haas 2008, 5). This contradiction is also reflected within the academic arena. Here, researchers have been stuck in a dualistic paradigm which sees diasporas either as conflict-escalating or conflict-mitigating actors, focusing on whether their involvement exacerbates or moderates conflict dynamics at home. However, this dualistic view is by far too simplistic and does not explain the complexity of the diasporic engagement. Only recently, researchers have tried to explore the complexity which lies behind these generalizations.

In recent years, the concept of diaspora has received growing attention in the field of social sciences. The proliferation of the term provoked what Brubaker has called a “Diaspora Diaspora”, a scattering of its meanings in semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space (Brubaker 2005, 4). As Bruneau (2004) points out, if each diaspora is the result of a migration process, not every migrant or ethnic minority belongs to a diaspora community. Not every form of exodus or exile leads to the constitution of a diaspora, at least not initially. Diaspora communities differ from migrants in the sense that the former maintain significant allegiances and practical connections to a homeland or a dispersed community located elsewhere and the stability of these political, economic and identity connections is fundamental in resisting the normalizing processes of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing (Shuval 2000: 43). For long, diasporas have been perceived as culturally homogenous communities, completely strange to the culture of the host society. Thus, one aspect that has been neglected by the dominant literature is the heterogeneity nature of diaspora groups. Diasporas are not unitary actors: they are differentiated according to class, gender, age, ethnicity, religion and political aspirations (Smith and Stares 2007). Moreover, diaspora communities do not maintain a single position vis-à-vis their homeland; on the contrary, they can reflect different vision of change according to their different political goals (Sokefeld 2006; Zunzer 2004). The ways in which diasporas influence conflict dynamics are very context-specific and the impact can change over the course of the conflict and through changes in the political contexts as well (Berdal 2005). Since the early 1990s, attention has been putted over issues of fragmentation, multiple social relations which migrants establish within their host and home countries and transnational networks. The focus of current theories of transnationalism is on borders and the management of flows of people, goods,

objects and practices across them. From this point on, researchers have been dealing with the transnational activities of migrants and the way they express themselves as ‘transnational actors’, thus encompassing both their home and host countries, outlining the multidimensional aspects of diasporic initiatives.

This paper analyzes how the transnational activities of diaspora communities originating from Somaliland participate in the transformation process within their country of origin by analyzing the economic, political and social dimensions of their engagement in terms of financial and social remittances. Particularly, it highlights the complexities of diasporic involvement in the peacebuilding process. The main research question addressed in this paper is the following: how do diasporas affect the post-conflict reconstruction process in Somaliland and which implications their activities entail for peacebuilding? Peacebuilding is understood here as a context-related process that embraces a wide range of activities aiming at constructing a confident social environment. Thus, the concept of peacebuilding adopts different meanings depending on the specific situation to which it refers. In the Somaliland case, peacebuilding is seen as being closely related to development and translates into working for a democratic society built on equity and justice for all its members. Somaliland is a post-war society still characterized by the absence of strong institutions. In this context, public assets receive minimum attention from the de facto state. In addition, Somaliland still lacks international recognition, thus external support from governments is absent. In these circumstances, diaspora’s involvement in terms of economic and social remittances plays a crucial role for the reconstruction of the country. Meanwhile, as peacebuilding is intertwined with other factors such as the creation of viable political, economic and social institutions, diaspora initiatives in the education and health sectors are indirectly contributing to peace. However, these diasporic initiatives seem to have a double-edged sword, entailing some controversial implications in terms of power relations, growing inequalities, instrumentation and dependence.

Data collection for this paper draws both on secondary and primary data generated from field research. The desk study is based on existing theories concerning the relationship between diasporas, conflict and peace. The fieldwork was conducted in Hargeisa, Somaliland, in two different periods, March/April 2009 and in April/May 2011. In the field, data was collected through in-depth interviews with three different groups of people: diaspora returnees, government and international/local organizations representatives, and locals. In order to capture the perception of different segments within the local population in Hargeisa, people were selected according to their age, gender, education, and profession. A focus group discussion was conducted with students of Hargeisa University with the aim of capturing the feelings and perceptions of the local young

generation. By the same token, elders were also part of the informants. Most of the interviews were conducted in English; the rest was conducted in Somali with the help of a local assistant.

The study is divided into five parts. The first part discusses the diasporas-peacebuilding debate, providing a basic understanding of the diasporic engagement in the peacebuilding process within the diasporas' countries of origin. The second part presents the Somaliland context, outlining the historical background for diaspora formation and engagement. The third and main part of this work provides an analysis of contemporary diasporic engagement in the economic, political and socio-cultural areas of intervention, with some examples from the fieldwork. The fourth part discusses the implications that these activities entail for the social transformation process of the country, outlining the contradictions that arise from diasporic engagement. Finally, some conclusions are presented in the last part of the paper.

2. Diasporas and peacebuilding

Until the early 2000s, the literature on the role of diasporas in security and conflict concentrated on their support for insurgencies and their contribution to political instability. We have seen the development of a wide literature and policy papers on the link between diasporas, long-distance nationalism and conflict, with the scope of analysing the role that members of diasporas play in providing support for armed conflicts. (Anderson 1992; Kaldor 2001; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Lyons 2004)¹.

On the other side, we have noticed since then the emergence of a new strand of research which is trying to explore the potential contributions of diasporas to peacebuilding and development within their homelands. The central argument is that the ways in which diasporas influence conflict dynamics are very context-specific and that the impact can change over the course of the conflict and through changes in the political contexts as well (Berdal 2005). This balanced analysis takes into account the developmental facet of diasporic contributions through financial and social remittances. Financial remittances can take the form of individual or collective contributions. Individual remittances mostly serve for family subsistence and are directed towards their living expenses. In countries recovering from the distress of war, individual remittances often represent the main source of income for most households. In a collective way, remittances can meet particular community needs such as investments and trade initiatives, and serve “vital humanitarian functions” (Berdal 2005) in post-conflict societies².

¹ For an in-depth literature review on the subject see Pirkkalainen and Abdile (2009).

² The debate about the impact of remittances on homeland reconstruction is still ongoing. According to a review of the literature, remittances are often underreported and a large proportion of remittances flowing to conflict areas is transferred through informal channels (Collinson 2003).

Social remittances refer to ideas, values, norms, and concepts (Levitt 1998) migrants transfer to their homelands. They comprise civic-oriented activities such as community development and business investments. Diaspora organizations often contribute to grassroots level activism, strengthening the civil society's role within their countries of origin (Mohamoud 2005). The phenomenon of diaspora organizations in their countries of settlement is an interesting example of the role diasporas can play in the development of their homelands. Some diaspora communities decide to create organizations that provide development and humanitarian aid especially to deprived areas not easily accessible. An important consequence of this type of involvement is the transfer of knowledge and skills to the local population, which may be particularly important in countries where much of the educated population has left (Cheran 2003). Development initiatives made by diasporas in order to support particular projects, such as the building of schools, roads, or hospitals, can also offer a platform for dialogue on which conflicting interests are translated into common needs (Orjuela 2006). However, it is important to remember that these development initiatives may also create new disputes and disagreements, exacerbating inequalities and frustrations among the population.

Direct political involvement in their countries of origin and advocacy and lobbying within countries of residence can also be considered as social remittances. Thanks to their experience abroad, diasporas are willing to transfer new political practices and perspectives to their homelands. Even when they do not directly participate in the political process, diasporas can offer their expertise to peace negotiations as facilitators and mediators between the conflicting parties (Mohamoud 2005) and act as bridges between their home and host societies (Shain and Barth, 2003). Advocacy and lobbying are instruments used by diasporas to bring issues concerning their respective countries of origin to the international agenda (Abdille, Pirkkalainen 2009, 34). This way of staying engaged takes different forms: as Horst (2007, 6) points out, it could be a matter of raising awareness, organizing demonstrations for certain causes and promoting public education and relations. The lobbying usually takes place in the country of settlement, but it may be that diasporas manage to network with international agencies, regional organizations and NGOs.

The existing literature on the diasporas-conflict-peace-development nexus has shown both the conflict-exacerbating and the conflict-mitigating sides of diasporas' involvement in their countries of origin. However, what has emerged from the current debate is that it is fundamental not to make generalizations about diasporas' transnational involvement. Studying transnational diasporas' activities requires to adopt a flexible perspective which outlines the multidimensional aspects of diasporic communities and the multitude of strategies they adopt vis-à-vis their homelands and other networks. Over the past ten years, the literature has stressed the importance of locating migration within transnational processes in terms of global economic connections and the

formation of transnational migratory networks. The literature on transnational migration provides essential new insights into contemporary forms of migration and also raises general conceptual issues about ways of understanding migration in a global context. A transnational approach consents to study the transactions among migrants crossing state borders and the movement of goods, money and ideas between nation-states, thus focusing the attention to cross-border agency (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Faist 2010). However, this does not mean that states have lost their power. According to Brubaker (2005, 8), the question we should ask is if terms such as diasporas and transnationalism mark an epochal shift from the age of nation-states to the age of diasporas.

Obviously, the world has changed (...) Over the course of the nineteenth and, especially, the twentieth centuries, states have gained rather than lost the capacity to monitor and control the movement of people by deploying increasingly sophisticated technologies of identification and control including citizenship, passports, visas, surveillance, integrated databases and biometric devices. The shock of 9/11 has only pushed states further and faster along a path on which they were already moving (Brubaker 2005, 9).

Despite their transnational activities, diasporas are still embedded within local spaces in which the role of states remain vital. According to Hoehne (2010, 9), states can actively engage or co-opt diasporic and/or transnational actors in their sometimes aggressive, imperialist politics. Global politic and international legal frameworks do have an impact on diasporas' capacity to engage in their home countries. Smith (2007) argues that in order to assess the peacebuilding potential of diasporas, it is necessary to analyze both their capacities (agency) and the transnational opportunities, in both host and home countries, available to them (structure).

In sum, diasporas are heterogeneous groups which have different political goals in the common homeland. Diaspora groups do not maintain a single position vis-à-vis their homeland. On the contrary, they can reflect different visions of change according to the different components within the community (Horst 2007; Sokefeld 2006; Zunzer 2004). According to Kleist (2007) and Østergeerd-Nielsen (2006), the objectives and strategies adopted by diasporas are not unchangeable over time. There always is a plurality of voices within the diasporas, especially when different waves of displacement are taken into account. Fragmentation within diasporas often reflects the social and political division in the homeland. However, it also originates in the different ways diasporas experience life in their host countries. Diasporas are often described as transnational communities whose members can have multiple identities. The question of identity is of crucial importance in understanding diaspora involvement in conflict or peace. The identities of members of a diaspora group are not cemented and can sometimes change. Furthermore, these identities are always negotiated within social relations (Vertovec 2001). Thus, the relationship within the diaspora and with the homeland and the host country may therefore also change. The generational gap is an equally important element to take into account. Locals in the homeland may have a

different feeling about the younger generation in the diaspora due to the latter's new ways of life, which does not match with the traditional culture in the homeland.

3. Somaliland and its diaspora

The Republic of Somaliland has its origins in the war that led to the collapse of the Somali state. Once a British Protectorate, Somaliland was granted independence from colonial power in June 1960 and merged with Italian Somalia to form the Somali Republic, with the aim of bringing together all Somali-speaking communities under a Greater Somalia. But this union did not last for long. As a consequence of Siad Barre's despotic regime, which governed the country from 1969 to 1990, Somalia's economic and social situation decreased while poverty and external debt increased more and more. Barre's political campaign against livestock traders, who were predominantly northerners, finally caused the outbreak of what would have been one of the most violent internal conflicts in Somalia. Between 1988 and 1991, Somalia experienced an intestine war between Siad Barre's government and the Somali National Movement (SNM), which occupied Somaliland. This internal conflict eventually culminated in 1991 with the downfall of Siad Barre's regime and the collapse of the Somali Republic. On 18 May 1991, the SNM declared the independence of the Republic of Somaliland and opted for reconciliation with the non-Isaaq clans (Dhulbahante, Warsangeli and Gadabursi) who had collaborated with the regime. This reconciliation process was based on the traditional system of conflict resolution through the peacemaking capacity of the elders³. Between 1991 and 1997, around 35 peace conferences took place in Somaliland. Apart from the bloody inter-clan conflict amongst Isaaq sub-clans between 1994 and 1996, the situation was rather stable.

Nowadays, the image of Somaliland is that of a country in constant activity. Hargeisa looks like a city that never sleeps. It has achieved a degree of stability that exceeds that of the other Somali territories and has set the bases for a genuinely pluralistic democracy. The system of governance has evolved from a *beel*⁴ system to one of multi-party democracy, in which clan affiliation continues to play a significant part. By the end of 2005, Somaliland had most of the attributes of a democratic state: a constitution, democratically elected institutions, a government with an executive and a legislative controlled by two different political parties as well as active civic organizations (Bradbury 2008). From an economic point of view, Somaliland has been recovering from years of famine and violent conflict. Today, telecommunications, transport, money

³ Somali society is accustomed to resolving conflict through a code of conduct called Xeer, a customary law agreed amongst clans in each area, and dependent on the deliberations of elders (APD 2005).

⁴ *Beel* refers to a temporary settlement of nomadic pastoralists, a community and "clan family". In this context *beel* refers to the equal representation of clans in the government.

transfer services, airlines, hotels, education and health services are established. The livestock sector represents an important pillar of the economy, providing livelihoods to an estimated 60-65% of the population (Bradbury 2008, 142). Remittances represent the main source of income for most households. Education services have been developed in an impressive manner. The number of primary schools more than doubled between 1995 and 2003; enrolment has increased more than tenfold, and the number of children attending primary school is about 88% (UNICEF 1999). Civil society associations⁵ have also played an important role in the development of Somaliland by providing welfare services by being active in education, human rights and environment.

However, some political, economic and social problems continue to persist. Between mid-2008 and mid-2010, presidential elections were continuously postponed by the government. The political crisis was only resolved on 26 June 2010, where the Kulmiye party candidate and leader of the opposition, Ahmed Siilyaanyo, was elected new president. The lack of international recognition and the country's longstanding dispute with neighboring Puntland over the Sool and eastern Sanaag regions constitute another impediment to the democratization process (Hoehne 2006, 401). Institutions remain weak and lack experience, funds and human resources. In the economic field, unemployment is one of the biggest challenges for Somaliland. The scarcity of jobs creates frustration especially among the young population, whose only solution seems to be migration. Qaad⁶ consumption is another encumbrance for the country's economy. Even if it constitutes an important source of subsistence, especially for women, consuming qaad has negative impacts on people's health and productivity at work, and therefore on the economy as a whole. In addition, the efforts made by the business community are not sufficient to develop a real market economy, at least while foreign investment is scarce and security issues persist. Thus, most of the investments in the country continue to be made by Somalilanders in the diaspora.

Around one million Somalis, accounting for roughly 14% of Somalia's total population, are now living outside the country as a diaspora community (UNDP 2009, 6). Migration has always been a remarkable feature of the Somali society. As a consequence of nomadic pastoralism, mobility is a vital element of the way of life in which the traditional Somali society is rooted: droughts, the search for pasture and water for livestock, and sometimes the search for peace during times of conflict, were all factors that caused internal and temporary migration among Somalis. It is possible to distinguish different waves of migration: During the 1880s, Somalis from the northwest

⁵ Civil society in Somaliland includes traditional institutions such as committees of elders, community-based organisations, professional associations, Islamic charities, religious organisations, organisations formed around issues such as the rights of women, children and minorities.

⁶ Qaad is a plant whose leaves and stem tips are chewed for their stimulating effect. It grows in Somalia, Djibouti, Yemen, Kenya, Madagascar, Tanzania down to south-eastern Africa. The consumers get a feeling of well-being, mental alertness and excitement. The after effects are usually insomnia, numbness and lack of concentration. The excessive use of qaad may create considerable problems of social, health and economic nature. (Elmi, A S 1983, Journal of ethnopharmacology -Aug; vol 8, issue 2)

region of Somalia, particularly people from the Isaaq and Darod clans, had settled in the UK, mainly in the major port cities of Liverpool, Cardiff and London, to work as seamen. This early wave was composed of male migrants that were later followed by their families, thereby laying the foundations for the Somali communities that are still growing today in the UK (COMPAS 2004, 7). After its independence in the early 1970s, a long season of drought stroke Somalia, causing major losses of livestock. This resulted in the second big wave of migration to the Gulf region and particularly Saudi Arabia, where the oil boom was taking place. With the outbreak of the civil war in the late 1980s, there has been an incessant exodus of refugees from Somalia, initially only to neighbouring countries, but also to Europe, North America and Australia at a later stage. Today, the largest concentration of Somalis is to be found in neighbouring countries and within the wider region. Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, South Africa and Yemen are among the countries with the largest Somali community⁷. Big communities can also be found in the UK, the Netherlands, Norway, Scandinavia, Italy and Germany, as well as in Toronto, Minneapolis and Sydney.

4. Diasporic engagements of Somalilanders abroad

The engagement of the Somaliland diaspora dates back before the outbreak of the war against Barre's regime and has been crucial for the formation of the Somali National Movement (SNM), which originated in 1981 from a group of Somalilanders living in London. The SNM had both military and political wings, proclaimed itself as a nationwide opposition movement and tried to enlist the support of non-Isaaq clans. Prior to establishing itself within Somalia in 1988, the SNM had remained a small-scale rebel force between 1982 and 1988 (Bradbury 2008, 61). According to Bradbury (2008, 70), the support of the rural Isaaq communities in Ethiopia, the Somali diaspora communities in the Gulf states and Western countries, as well as Isaaq business people were among the SNM's major sources of military aid. Given that there was no system for taxing diasporas, money was collected through SNM committees created abroad. After 1988, however, funds were collected in a different way: each clan started mobilizing resources for warring parties by acting as fundraisers for clan militias. This system also persisted after the war had ended and contributed to the intensification of divisions during the inter-clan fighting which took place in Somaliland in the aftermath of independence (UNDP 2001, 132). According to Horst (2008), the diaspora financed the clan disputes during the inter-clan fighting and set up committees inside and outside Somalia in a very structured manner.

⁷ For more in-depth information, see the complete UNDP report on "Somalia's Missing Million: Somali Diaspora and its role in Development", 2009.

However, diasporas involvement is not a one-sided commitment. It seems that Somalilanders from abroad have also contributed to resolve the civil conflict that broke out between 1994 and 1996⁸. This has not been limited to shutting off the resources that fuel conflict, but has also involved funds to invest in local reconciliation. The case of conflict resolution in Somaliland was unique due to the collaboration between diasporas and the local communities led by a strong and committed traditional leadership inside. The expertise and knowledge of diaspora members have been used to mediate in national reconciliation conferences and workshops around the country. One example is the “Somaliland Peace Committee”, an informal and spontaneous team of largely expatriate Somalilanders who have joined forces using their own personal resources in a commitment to peace. The group involved members of all the main warring clans and disbanded once the peace agreement was achieved. The aim of the Committee was threefold: 1) to achieve a cease-fire; 2) to prepare a framework and venue for dialogue; 3) to prepare a report on lessons learned that could be useful in preventing or mitigating similar conflicts in the region (Bryden and Farah 1996, 35). In this context, the contribution of diasporas was fundamental in settling the conflict and restoring the peace among clans. Their commitment signalled the first step in a reconciliation process that is still ongoing. From active supporters of conflict, diasporas have become actively engaged in promoting peace, by acting as facilitators and mediators.

At certain moments we were fighting, from 1994 to 1996. In that period, the outside diasporas organized themselves and sent committees consisting of members of different clans in order to bring people together to mediate. These were, in the past, important occasions for the diaspora. When there is some crisis here there is always a voice from outside that brings people together and talks about peace. Diasporas have been contributing to the peace process through financial resources, individual participation of skills and organization of committees from outside to bring together different factions. (Interview, Hargeisa 2009).

The Somaliland diaspora has certainly played an important role to unify the various local groups, but not without a personal interest. Diasporas are political actors with a political project. In this case, the project was to bring together different factions within Somaliland at the expense of Southern Somalia, with the aim of reinforce Somaliland visibility at the international level and acquire recognition from the international community. People in diasporas actively engaged in the homeland are part of an elite that represents the major voice in Somaliland politics. Their claims can be understood as part of a broader context where they struggle together with other actors to gain influence. Comparing to locals, diasporas have financial means to exercise their power, sometimes even at the expense of marginal people.

Today, diasporas’ involvement in Somaliland takes different forms, from personal and extended family networks to non-governmental charitable associations, business partnerships and

⁸ Interviews with diaspora representatives and locals, Hargeisa 2009.

political parties (Bradbury 2008, 176). Their engagement concerns all aspects of daily life and intervenes in the economic, political and socio-cultural sphere of Somaliland. Using some examples from recent fieldwork, this paper now shows how diasporas participate in the transformation process within their country of origin through financial and social remittances.

4.1 Financial remittances

Financial remittances are the most common way through which diasporas engage with the homeland. Up to 60% of Somaliland's income is based on remittances. They are used for different objectives: livelihood, investment in housing and property, investment in business and, in a collective sense, investment in education and development projects. Small-scale industries, telecommunication systems and construction are the sectors in which diasporas engage the most. According to interviewees, the significance of diaspora contributions to the economy of Somaliland is vital.

Diasporas are supporting the economic development of Somaliland. As a matter of fact, business as a whole has been developed by the Somaliland diaspora and all the important business sectors, like construction, communication and money transfer agencies have been founded by them. So they contribute quite a lot to the well-being of the country (interview, Hargeisa 2009).

Diasporas are considered to be the “backbone” of Somaliland economic development. All the interviewees agreed on the fact that, in the absence of foreign direct investment, the entire business and private sector have been developed by diasporas.

We get around 2 billions dollars per year in terms of remittances and this is what helped us to overcome the reconstruction process. I don't think that many of us would have overcome it without the economic help from diasporas. This money is not really invested but it helped to start also some business. We don't have the World Bank or other financial institutions or foreign investments, so all what has been constructed here came from the diaspora. It is the backbone of this country (Interview, Hargeisa 2011).

Individual remittances also contribute to improve the livelihoods of many families, especially the poorest ones. Considering the unemployment rate and the absence of direct foreign investment, remittances have been crucial to Somaliland. According to King⁹, around \$5 million are sent to Hargeisa on a monthly basis. Two-thirds of this sum contribute directly to the livelihoods of more than a quarter of households in Hargeisa. Economic and social inequality is very evident in Hargeisa. Disparities in the distribution of economic assets and income prevent large parts of the population to access social goods such as housing, health care and education.

⁹ King, Alexandra. 2003. Hargeisa Urban Household Economy Assessment (FEWS Net, FSAU, Save the Children UK, Municipality of Hargeisa and Candlelight) Online at: <http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2003/fews-som-16may.pdf>

We don't have a middle class. People here are either rich or poor, so remittances represent the lifeline for the poor families. You will find women who sell vegetables in the market, milk, qaad but this is not enough. They need something to help them paying the electricity bills, the rent or the school fees for their children. And this is how remittances are used for. When the dollar came down, lot of children left the school and the university because their families were unable to pay the fees. Some families were forced to leave their houses and settle in tents because they couldn't afford the rent (Interview, Hargeisa 2011).

Since individual remittances serve mostly for family subsistence, it is difficult to state that they are used to finance conflict. This seems to be particularly true in the Somaliland context, where the civil war has destroyed economic livelihoods and basic public services and thereby created high unemployment. In such a context, people's needs seem to be of primary concern for Somalilanders living in the diaspora (Interviews, Hargeisa 2009). Individual remittances serve also for personal interests. The number of small-scale businesses, such as restaurants, supermarkets, beauty salons and transport companies, is rapidly increasing in Hargeisa. As emerged from the interviews, returnees consider Somaliland more and more as a country of opportunities where to invest their savings. With the growing political stability and security in the region, two important conditions for continued diaspora investments have been fulfilled. Another sector where diasporas have been involved is construction. Investment in housing and property is very common in Somaliland. People in the diaspora used to buy plots of land, especially in major cities. Especially in Hargeisa, many beautiful houses and buildings have mushroomed, which certainly helps to bestow an image of "modernity" on the country.

Diaspora financial contributions come also in the form of collective remittances, even if their value is estimated to be less significant than that of individual ones (Lindley 2006; Mohamoud 2005, 23). However, their impact in terms of development seems to be more important for the country. Collective remittances consist of donations for community projects and are sent by diaspora associations. In the last decade, a growing number of non-governmental charitable associations have formed within countries of settlement of the Somali diaspora, aiming at investing directly in specific sectors such as education and health. Somaliland boasts today more than one hundred schools, from elementary to high-school level, various youth and vocational training centres and at least five universities. Most of these schools have been established through financial contributions made by diasporas, which also pay an important share of school fees and provide for most of the school staff. The initial idea for most of these institutions came from the diaspora (Hoehne 2009). Before Somaliland's independence, Mogadishu had been the centre for business and education. The highest level of education in Somaliland was secondary school. After independence, the idea evolved to create universities in the region. In 1998, Amoud University opened its doors. Amoud and Burao Universities were co-founded by diaspora representatives and

the local population. The University of Hargeisa started in the same way¹⁰. It opened in September 2000 thanks to the collaboration between a steering committee of diasporas in London and an interim council in Somaliland composed of elders, government ministers, local business people and local mayors. For the occasion, Somalis in Sweden provided 750 chairs and tables; Kuwait-based Somalis sent computers. In the project's second year, the Somaliland Forum, a cyberspace-based global network of Somalis, formed taskforces to tackle specific elements, raised money, maintained email groups and hosted real-time e-conferences (AFFORD 2000). As regards the number of students, the University of Hargeisa is the largest in Somaliland. Around 3,000 students are currently enrolled. The university houses faculties of law, medicine, business administration, natural sciences, education, Islamic studies and humanities and social sciences.

The relationship between diasporas and education in Somaliland is an evident example of diasporic involvement in the homeland peace. This allows the flow of skills and knowledge that, together with local skills, is essential for social change. Since education is the driving force for development, it also plays a role in building peace. In the context of Somaliland, the young generation did not even have the chance to go to school due to conflict. Instead, children grew up in a climate of violence, often imitating adults' fighting¹¹. Today most children have the opportunity to go to school. And, more importantly, they have access to higher education, which can provide them with alternatives to war (Hoehne 2009). The creation of universities has contributed to the return of students from abroad to study in their home country. It has also given high school students the opportunity to stay in Somaliland for higher education. It therefore seems that institutions supported by diasporas are acting as a vehicle for peace and development, by building confidence and restoring hope after years of war (Hoehne 2010). However, it is impossible to determine how much of these remittances fund community development and how much contribute to conflict escalation. There is no information about the exact value of remittances sent to the country, nor how this amount is distributed among the population.

4.2 Social remittances

Financial aid is not the only way through which diasporas engage in their homeland. Most of the returnees interviewed had acquired social remittances through formal education and training, professional expertise in the work place and socialisation in the host country. The contributions of the diaspora's social remittances are more visible in the construction and empowerment of Somaliland's civil society. This is especially true if we look at the growing number of civil society

¹⁰ Interview with Hargeisa University Director, April 2009.

¹¹ Interview, April 2009.

organisations (CSOs) and local NGOs mushrooming all over Somaliland. Most of these organisations are created or supported by diaspora members. In fact, some diaspora communities set up CSOs first in their countries of settlement and then established a local branch in their homeland. One example of this is the Doses of Hope Foundation (DOH), a non-governmental development foundation established in the Netherlands in 1997 by a group of five Somali women. The idea came from Ms. Fadumo Alin, a Somali refugee who fled Mogadishu in 1991. DOH is formed by two institutions, one in the Netherlands and one in Hargeisa, which operate separately, the former as an international liaison and fundraising office and the latter with responsibility for implementation in the field. The foundation focuses on micro-finance and rehabilitation services for the disabled community. Over the years, the program has incorporated other activities such as a Vocational Training Centre (VTC), an HIV/AIDS awareness project and special needs education. From 1999 to 2007, the micro-finance unit has generated employment for 5,900 direct beneficiaries, and has indirectly benefited 41,300 people, 80% of which women with low incomes. The rehabilitation project led to the creation of the Orthohope Rehabilitation Centre (ORC) in 2003. Since then, it has provided specialized assistance for physically disabled persons. DOH can be seen as a case in point in the discourse about the diasporas-peacebuilding-development nexus. In terms of development, this association is creating jobs, alleviating poverty and helping to reduce the high unemployment rate in the country. All these components are fundamental for maintaining the local peace. In this sense, diasporas seem to contribute indirectly to peacebuilding, taking into account the underlying issues that sustain peace and taking care of the problems which affect the community. Moreover, there is a direct transfer of organisational know-how, administration skills and financial management to the local community that is essential for structural social change in the homeland.

Diasporas political involvement also falls within social remittances. Transfers of new political practices and ideas which Somalis in the diaspora experience can be very useful in reframing the political system at home, especially in the post-conflict phase.

Diasporas live in different countries peacefully and have already experienced democracy. These other realities and the way they have experienced it will contribute to change the reality here (Interview, Hargeisa 2009).

Contributions from diasporas are especially evident in the state building process. It is remarkable to consider the number of returnees in the country's political institutions, contributing in the formation of a multi-party democracy. One third of the Ministers are from the diasporas; two out of three political parties in Somaliland are also led by diaspora members. In turn, the government encourages the return of diaspora members, especially qualified people with professional skills.

Political activism can also take the form of advocacy and lobbying from abroad. One example is the Somaliland Forum, a virtual space where Somalilanders can take action. Major

issues that they advocate for are international recognition, elections and the peace process. The Somaliland Forum is very effective in bringing people together to talk¹². Since its inception, the Forum has organized a number of conferences and panel discussions about the education system and the development process in Somaliland. These meetings have been fundamental in addressing issues such as education. Between January and February 2000, an online conference on economic and social development was hosted by the Forum. Another example is Somaliland Focus (UK), which was established in London in 2005 by a group of individuals with an interest in Somaliland. Founding members include a number of people having worked as International Election Observers at the Parliamentary Elections held on 29 September 2005, as well as members of the Somaliland diaspora in the UK. Somaliland Focus has been lobbying decision-makers in the UK, through occasional public and private meetings and other activities, to raise awareness on issues such as the democratization process, press freedom and, in particular, international recognition for Somaliland. In fact, diasporas are playing an important role in the quest for international recognition.

Diasporas engage the politicians, the international community, they have so many websites putting Somaliland on the map, putting Somaliland development on the table, so in terms of recognition and teaching, in terms of advocacy and talking, they are extremely active. I would say that the face of Somaliland outside is the diaspora. They are all ambassadors of Somaliland.

It is important to bear in mind that, despite these positive effects that Somalilanders abroad can have in reframing the political debate, both at the national and international levels, advocacy can be a double-edged sword. Most diaspora websites are replicating the same divisions that are present on the ground and some of them are specifically created to support their political party back home. The problem is that their views always reflect those of a certain political party, so that diasporas are not working as a coherent group. In this regard, Somalis in the diaspora may be seen as “tribal lobbyists” striving on behalf of their own clans or political factions.

5. Emerging issues and relevant implications of diasporic engagement

Diasporas are obviously playing an important role in the reconstruction of Somaliland through financial and social remittances. Projects sponsored by diasporas are helping to restore health centers, create schools, empower civil society, include vulnerable people in the community and create income-generating activities. They are addressing some of the economic and social aspects of the conflict by setting up community and welfare projects at the local level that are dedicated towards the rehabilitation of public assets. Considering that Somaliland lacks international recognition, and thus external support from governments, diaspora’s involvement in terms of

¹² Interview, April 2009.

economic and social remittances seems to play a crucial role for the reconstruction and peacebuilding processes of the country.

However, although a certain optimism concerning Somaliland progress in the upcoming years, the situation in the country is still critical. With regard to economics, Somaliland experiences severe economic crises of low living standards, under employment and unemployment, resulting from money volatility, lack of economic diversity and poor social physical infrastructures. In terms of politics, government institutions are still weak and lack resources, skills and human resources. Socially, *qaad* consumption is not only collapsing the country economically, it is destroying family relations and the perspectives of the youth generation.

The government takes care of the peace; the society takes care of the economy. The private and non-governmental sector are growing and increasing, while the public sector still needs to be improved. I know that it is not an easy job to keep the peace in the region; it is not an easy job to feed the police and the army (...)

Most of the teenagers just think about and look for how to find *qaad*. They do not think about their own future, or to improve their lives. This is the strongest disease we have here (Interview, Hargeisa 2011).

In this context, diasporic initiatives seem to entail some controversial implications. Their political action and growing influence in Somaliland decision-making processes are changing the local balance of powers. Due to the lack of resources and weakness of state institutions, diasporas are becoming stronger than the Somaliland government. The fact that one third of the ministers are from diasporas should be regarded as a significant phenomenon of the fact that diasporas are contributing to the transformation of political relations within the society. Their engagement must be understood in a broader context where diasporas are, together with other actors, active players in political games both at the local and global level. From this point of view, their involvement must be analyzed as embedded in a dense network of actors which compete to increase their influence on the ground and not only as qualified persons with skills and know-how. In fact, not everybody welcomes the participation of diasporas in government politics. Interviews with the local population show that some people perceive them as opportunists profiting from the more stable situation but still maintaining the opportunity to return to their host countries in case of renewed conflict. Most of the returnees deciding to engage in homeland politics still have their families in the country of settlement, so they spend part of their time abroad. Moreover, some Somalis fear that having a big portion of diasporas in the government can lead to a sort of “government in exile”, with ministers and leaders spending more time seeking diaspora support rather than working on policy at home or engaging with Somalilanders (SOPRI 2006). Another critical aspect courting controversy is clanism. Even in diasporas, Somalilanders are still organized along clan lines. Even though this link is not as strong as it may be in the country, it represents a limiting factor for the smooth functioning of a government.

A further issue concerns the relation between diaspora organizations and international development actors. The rise of diaspora organizations in European countries makes us reflect on the fact that, to be operational and receive financial aid, these organizations must adhere to certain standards laid down by the international community. In order to get these contributions, diaspora organizations align themselves with international standards and indicators, thus losing their original aim.

As a consequence, they can lose sight of the real needs of the people they pretend to represent, their activities reflecting international and policy interests rather than local Somali ones.

Interviews with locals show that diasporic activities in the homeland are perceived as being fundamental for Somaliland development, particularly in terms of economic remittances and lobbying for international recognition. Nevertheless, there is certain resentment towards diasporas in terms of socio-cultural transformation within the society. Locals perceive diasporas as perilous actors which are eradicating Somali cultural values by bringing immoral conducts, including social misbehavior.

Culturally they bring some problems; they bring behaviors that are not known here. Also there is another issue left behind the diaspora. Women here just look for a man who comes from outside, such as Europe or America. When a man comes from abroad, then every beautiful woman competes to have this man. Maybe there is the same welfare and good-looking man here, but she only wants the abroad one. Her father supports the option, because of money and passport. This practice is also valid for women in the diaspora. They are called “leaving Visa”, so you find the same competition among local men to get this woman (Interview, Hargeisa 2011).

This cultural divide is especially felt towards the second generation in the diaspora. What has emerged from the fieldwork is that the first generation is largely welcome and perceived well by the local population because they still have memories of the country and the conflict. In contrast, members of the second generation are perceived as foreigners. They do not integrate into the community and do not know the traditions and the history of the country. They come in with “western cultures” that are not appreciated by the locals, challenging local customs. This distinction between first and second generation in diasporas tells us more about the way diaspora contributions could evolve in the future and the level of integration that new generations are acquiring. In fact, most Somalis belonging to the first generation have not integrated well in their host countries. An unsuccessful integration could have influenced the decision of diasporas to engage in their homelands. On the other hand, a well-conducted integration and socialization of the second generation in host countries may explain the lack of will and interest of these second generation Somalis to engage in their parents’ countries of origin. However, it is impossible to predict if contributions from Somalis abroad will diminish in the future. This leads us to another concern,

which is dependency on remittances. Somaliland is among the countries with the most significant value of remittances. Almost every household has someone abroad, making it a recipient of remittances. In the long run, this could lead to the creation of a new form of dependency discouraging efforts to build up local production.

Even the physical return of diaspora members represents a big problem for many locals. The high rate of unemployment in the country generates frustration among the population. This frustration is worsened by the fact that, due to their experience abroad, returnees have more chances of finding a job, compared to locals. Diaspora investment in construction also brings along negative consequences - the price of land has increased phenomenally over the last ten years. Today, land-based conflicts are a big issue in Somaliland. Disputes over land have become frequent, especially due to the absence of an enforced legal system¹³. Certainly, the absence of strong government institutions has been an important factor in the growth of the private sector in Somaliland. The government is mostly concerned with security issues and allocates most of its resources into security expenditures. This does have some negative consequences, as the boom in the unregulated private sector contributes to an increase in inequalities and speculation.

Finally, another issue that has emerged from the fieldwork concerns the diaspora's role in the *Tahriib*¹⁴ spike. Because of the high rate of unemployment, many young educated professionals are wandering around the streets of Hargeisa with nothing to do. The young generation is fascinated by diaspora money and lifestyle, considering the opportunity to go abroad as the best solution. Somalis see *tahriib* as an investment more than a gamble. Thus, immigration to Europe by way of Ethiopia, Sudan and finally Libya in searching of job opportunity and a better life has become the zigzag root to agony for the majority of young Somalilanders. Unfortunately, it has become a practice for several families to support their children to go through irregular migration with financial means.

6. Conclusion

The case of Somaliland perfectly depicts the complexity of diasporic engagement. What has emerged from this study confirms that it is not possible to categorize diaspora intervention as either bad or good. The involvement of the Somaliland diaspora in the homeland dynamics has shown to have many facets and requires a broader approach than the dichotomous vision of diasporas as supporting either conflict or peace.

The case study examined in this paper shows how significant diasporic engagement is in Somaliland development. Diaspora actors have acquired an important role in the economic, political

¹³ See Peter Hansen "Revolving Returnees in Somaliland" in "Living Across worlds: Diaspora, Development and Transnational Engagement", IOM 2007, 141.

¹⁴ *Tahriib* originates from an Arabic term akin to smuggling. In Somali refers to the process of "illegal" migration.

and social life of their homeland. Somaliland is a post-war society still characterized by the absence of strong institutions. In this context, public assets receive minimum attention from the de facto state, making them dependent on external support. As argued by Zunzer and Mohamoud, diasporas are addressing some of the economic and social aspects of the conflict by setting up community and welfare projects at the local level which are dedicated towards the direct rehabilitation of basic and social needs. Social remittances appear to be crucial for the reconstruction of the country, particularly in terms of diaspora human capital in sectors such as education and health. All these activities are requisites for peace. Peace is not a separate component; rather it is intertwined with other factors such as the creation of viable political, economic and social institutions that reduce violence and guarantee stability and peaceful social relations. In this sense, diasporas are positively contribute by taking into account the underlying components that support peace.

However, this engagement comes with some concerns in terms of power relations, growing inequalities, instrumentation and dependence. Diasporas are transforming the local balance of power often using their status and prestige to interfere in clan politics and influence government decision-making. Diasporas often promote their personal interests, thus questioning the sustainability of the existing peace. Dependency on remittances and tensions between diaspora new generations and locals also dare the long-term stability of the country.

Fragmentation within the diaspora remains a challenge for positive contributions. People in the diaspora maintain original clan lines and most of the time this is counterproductive for positive, joint efforts. Sometimes, internal divisions can compromise their positive involvement. Fragmentation causes lack of coordination and harmonization among diasporas' different communities which in turn produces a dissipation of resources and social capital that could be invested in the homeland. Nevertheless, it seems that there are attempts by some diaspora organisations to bridge this "clan divide". Somalilanders abroad are trying to establish transnational networks and collaborate with other diaspora associations from different clans, but have not yet succeeded in bridging the divide.

Poor infrastructures and government lack of regulation and policies also represent a big challenge for diasporas intervention. However, what it is important to remind is that diaspora capital should be regarded as a useful addition to the development of socio-economic and political strategies in the country rather than a substitute of the government. In Somaliland, state institutions are very weak, thus making diasporic intervention necessary. At the same time, however, diasporic intervention is hampered by the lack of government capacity to put in place the necessary mechanisms. In this context, diasporas have to deal with the double burden of providing basic services to their families back home and taking into account security risks linked to their activities.

Thus, an active governmental policy toward diasporas might contribute to balance the controversial diasporic engagement.

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