

# Examining the Differing Roles and Contributions of First and Second Generation Somalis in their Country of Origin

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## Introduction

The role of the Somali diaspora has been intensely debated both within and outside the country. In these debates the potential contribution of Somali diaspora is presented in two forms. Firstly, within and outside the academic circles, Somali diaspora is described as potential contributors to the ongoing conflict in Somalia and as spoilers. There are several reasons for this assertion. One is the enormous size of remittances sent by the Somali diaspora to their country of origin coupled with the lack of oversight and absent of monitoring capabilities of these remittances both at the sending and receiving ends. Hawala system used for sending such money can also easily be used and manipulated by warlords, clan militias', pirates and terrorists. for waging wars or terrorists activities. There are also growing fears in the Western capitals about the increasing radicalization of some section of the Somali diaspora. These fears grew as evidence emerged of young Somali men in the West going to Somalia to fight for Al Shabaab. Western security officials are concerned that these young men would return to their homes in the west to spread terror or stage terrorist attacks. Secondly, there has been an attempt to offer a more balance view of the role of Somali diaspora. This view takes into account both the potentially negative role diaspora could play but also the growing recognition about the potential contribution of the Somali diaspora not only in peacebuilding but also development and reconstruction in their country of origin.

The purpose of this essay is firstly, to test the hypothesis that the role of Somali diaspora is both good and evil; that is they are both contributors to conflict and peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts in their country of origin.

The case of Somali diaspora is emblematic of the complex issues of which diaspora generate; and although commonly associated with the large-scale dispersion following the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, diasporic experience dates back to the late pre-colonial era. When discussing the Somali diasporic experience, majority of recent studies on Somali diaspora tend to focus more on the new threats they posed and less on their possible positive contributions to their homeland. However, such a banal conclusion does not capture the full picture of the potential role Somali could play.

One challenge for research is the lack of data on Somali migration predating the colonial era (and to some extent post-colonial period). Available data on Somali diaspora are very recent and tend to put more emphasis on issues of Somalis in the West or those in refugee camps in neighboring countries (e.g. the studies featuring in Farah, Muchie, and Gundel, 2007). For instance, little data is available on the large Somali communities in the Middle East and their history. This leads scholars to certain distortions and emphasizes on negatives like the disasters driving Somalis to seek asylum abroad and the threat of radical Islamism.

The arrival of Somalis in the West in 1970s and 1990s and in light of the fact that children born in the diaspora constitute a growing constituent, generation differences seem to be emerging. There are two core constituents or groups within the Somali diaspora in the West. The first group is led by the colonial era seamen who settled in British cities like Cardiff, London and Liverpool and includes the economic migrants of the 1970s who went to the Middle East, and those forced abroad by the civil war. In this study, I refer this group as the first generation. The second group comprises those born in the diaspora, or those born in Somalia but who relocated abroad with their families in their teens or toddler age. I will refer to this group and their children as the second generation. The importance of this division to this study will be highlighted in later sections but two points are worth mentioning here. The first point here is that there are variations in perception between second and first generation Somalis engagement in the home country. Secondly, the two groups differ in their desire to help and contribute in the home country or their ancestral homeland.

In order to better understand the relationship between the diaspora and the homeland and explore the attitude and perceptions towards the diaspora engagement, the study examined the views of a number of relevant actors to the role of Somali diaspora. These actors included diaspora returnees, local administration staff, religious and traditional leaders who were working PIP staff.

To address this issue, the study examined the roles and contribution of Somalis of the diaspora in their country of origin. Beginning with the assumption that the diaspora has a peacebuilding role to play but also be spoilers, this study seeks to answer several research questions: 1) what roles do Somali diaspora play in peacebuilding and conflicts; 2) what reasons explains the choice to intervene or to not intervene in peacebuilding activities and/or to support other

development work in Somalia, and; 3) what is the nature of their involvement when they do intervene? In order to answer these questions, two types of case studies were selected. The first case study involves a peace building program initiated and implemented by Somalis in the diaspora. The second comprises two examples of returnee engagement that aggravated long-standing inter-clan conflicts.

The study is divided into several sections. The first section following the methodological observations immediately below provides background on the Somali diaspora, discusses political, economic and social limitations in the home country constraining diaspora involvement in their homeland. It also examines the Somali diaspora's links with the homeland and how they relate to those left behind. Discussion focuses on the questions why the second and first generation Somali diaspora have different attitudes towards homeland engagement. The third section centers on the roles of diaspora (both negative and positive) and provides a case study to analyze their engagement. The final section focuses on the opportunities and challenges facing the Somali diaspora.

### **Methods and data**

Activists, researcher and practitioner were some of the roles I played as I conducted this research. Initially, like many other members of the Somali diaspora community in Finland my aim was purely to lobby the Finnish government and NGO's to become more involved in Somalia. While this kind of participatory angle has provided valuable insights to my research I am also aware of the possible conflicts of interest related to it.

Throughout the field research, I have played several roles. On the one hand I was affiliated to the University of Helsinki and the PhD research I was undertaking before and during the field study. I was also a member of the Diaspeace research team. My role in the Diaspeace project was to study the peacebuilding role of diaspora from the Horn of Africa in their countries of origin. More specifically I was given the task of conducting field research looking on the involvement of the Somali diaspora community. On the other hand, I also was working for the same NGO that I have been lobbying and encouraging to get engaged in Somalia. I began to work for Finn Church Aid (FCA) as a consultant and later on became their advisor to Somalia, a position I hold until today. My role was to oversee the implementation of the Peace Initiative

Program (PIP) on behalf of the FCA. At the time, PIP was one of the very few diaspora led peacebuilding initiatives operational in Puntland, Somaliland and South Central Somalia. I found myself studying the same project I was called upon to manage and thus, had to formulate ways to devise both the organizational role and research role.

In early 2007, four men (including myself) and a woman from the Finnish diaspora community met with the Finn Church Aid (FCA) director to ask why the FCA, the largest development organization in Finland was not working in Somalia at a time when the Somali people were in their greatest need. One of the diaspora delegates asked the director whether the FCA's lack of involvement has to do with the fact that Somalia is a Muslim country and the people who are suffering are Muslims. The meeting led to several follow-up meetings, and the above-mentioned peace building program PIP was initiated. In the past three years since we first met with the FCA director, the FCA has increased and harmonized its humanitarian aid and peacebuilding programmes in Somalia. At the time of the study, twenty staff including six expatriates were working for the PIP program, which is funded by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The PIP initiative aims to help resolve and prevent inter-clans conflicts in Somaliland, Puntland, and central Somalia with some ad-hoc activities in Mogadishu.

For this study, I interviewed some of the PIP staff, together with two other groups of Somali diaspora professionals who have returned to Somaliland and Puntland. The second group of professionals consisted of a group of health professionals from Finland who worked in an International Organization for Migration (IOM) funded project. The professionals were conducting a short-term assignment of between two weeks and six months. Whereas the PIP expatriate staff members are formally employed, the IOM professionals work on a voluntary basis. This means that, for example, a doctor or a nurse in diaspora will take a leave of absence from his permanent employment and volunteer to work in Somaliland or Puntland.

The third group of people who were interviewed included government representatives such as local administrative staff, representatives of the three main Somaliland political parties (UCID, UDUB, KULMIYE); employees of national and international organizations (IOM, FCA, UNDP, Interpeace); founders of the International Horn University; employees of Telesom and Telecom, and religious leaders. The study also included individuals who were working in South and Central Somalia, but who had relocated to Somaliland due to security concerns.

All interview participants were current or former members of the Somali diaspora in Britain, Sweden, Finland, Norway, North America, Australia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE); some were permanent returnees, while others were in the country on a temporary assignments and were either born in the diaspora (3 interviewees) or had lived in the diaspora for 15 to 35 years. About 70 per cent of the informants hold European, North American or Australian passports. Although some of them considered their return to be permanent or semi-permanent, all were still registered as residents in their host countries. About 30 per cent were UAE residents

The background of the participants varied in terms of gender, age, education, and profession. The informants included 14 females and 26 males, and ranged between 28 and 64 years of age, and 19 with bachelor degrees, 12 with masters, five with doctorates, three high school certificate holders and one with no formal education. Most had work experience prior to their return.

Table 1. Background data for the three groups of interviewees..

<b>Case study</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>number of years spent abroad</b>	<b>Level of education</b>	<b>Type of work</b>	<b>Gender</b>
PIP (FCA) (5)	28-40	2 born in the Diaspora 3 spent 18-20 years in the Diaspora	3 Bachelor 2 Masters	Peace Building	2 Females 3 Males
Somali diaspora professionals (12)	29-47	All spent 15-23 years in the Diaspora	5 Bachelors 4 Master's 3 Doctorates	Health	3 females 9 males

Other key informants (23)	32-64	1 born in the Diaspora 2 spent 17-35 years in the Diaspora	11 Bachelors 6 Masters 2 Doctorates 3 High school Certificate 1 No formal education	Social science, Engineering, health, laborers	9 Females 14 Males
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During the fieldwork, I held four focus group discussions of 4-7 people each with the diaspora returnees who were working in different sectors. I then complemented the focus group discussions with follow-up in-depth individual interviews with 40 key informants (14 women and 26 men, see Table 1). All names have been changed in order to protect the security and privacy of the interviewees. The interviews were conducted in Somali between January 2009 and January 2010, mostly in Somaliland but also in Puntland. The fieldwork data was tape recorded, transcribed in Somali and translated into English. The majority of the interviews took place in public places such as restaurants and hotels. A few interviews were conducted at the interviewees' homes or places of work. One key criteria for selecting the interviewees was that they have worked and gained experience in their respective countries of settlement and are currently working or have worked in the home country. Some of the interview participants were people that I had already met in the diaspora or while working earlier in Somalia. A few were recommended by other diaspora or by the current interviewees. In total, I collected 108 hours of interviews.

### **Political, economic and social restrictions in the home country towards diaspora involvement**

Fieldwork data shows that although Somali national and regional governments have through the past 20 years encouraged diaspora involvement, diaspora's ability to freely interact with their homeland is subject to some government restrictions that limit diaspora involvement. Data collected indicate that - with the exception of Somaliland - initially diaspora did not receive enthusiastic reception in national or regional political processes and until recently they

were sidelined or given lukewarm reception in the many peace processes. There were several reasons why diaspora were excluded or have excluded themselves, at least at the beginning of the 1990s. First, diasporas lack of political space and opportunity to contribute to the ongoing political discourse have allowed the old Somali political elite who served under Siad Barre or were long-term opposition figures, such as Abdullahi Yusuf and Somaliland's first President Mohamed Egal, or warlords such as General Aidid, were quite dominant and drew almost exclusively the attention of both their clans and the international community. Secondly, most of the Somali diaspora were quite new in their host countries, and thus their main preoccupation was to establish themselves in the exile. Additionally, many did not have travel documents or enough money to pay for participation in the usually protracted Somali peace conferences. Furthermore, in the 1990s the status of the Somali diaspora was quite different from today: they were at first seen as individuals who would send money home and not actors who could set agendas for peace and the political processes. Thirdly, there were no incentives for meaningful political participation of the diaspora. Even those who did find reasons to participate in the political process found themselves struggling against government practices and policies, which restricted their participations. Somali diaspora holding non-Somali passports even have to pay the same fee for their entry and exit visas as non-Somalis.

On the private level, the Somali returning from the diaspora to their country of origin appear to be well received by their communities. They are seen as people who can contribute positively to the development of their communities. On the public level, however, there are a number of challenges faced by the diaspora returnees. There is competition between the older political elite and the members of diaspora who aspire to enter into politics. The old political elite are quite fearful of being made redundant by the experienced and educated diaspora who might have access to money and connections both outside and inside of the country. For example, during the fieldwork I was told a story involving the former Somaliland President Egal and two of his political rivals. According to the story, in 1997 the former was afraid of losing the presidency to two politically influential diaspora returnees, Saleban Mohamud Adan and Abdillahi Omar. The president introduced therefore a number of conditions that restricted and eventually disqualified the diaspora candidates from participating in the presidential election. At the time, the Somaliland constitution was in the process of being formalized and the country



was governed under a National Charter, which had been enacted in the 1993 Borama conference.

At the time, there were no specific rules or conditions in the National Charter about the procedure for electing the president, and the Guurti (the House of Elders) was the main body responsible for overseeing the election. According to some informants, in order to ensure his control over the electoral process President Egal nominated members to the Electoral Commission with the understanding that in return they would come up with certain rules and conditions on the eligibility of presidential candidates. These rules and conditions were later incorporated into the National Constitution. Thus, Article 82 of the Constitution (The conditions for eligibility for election as President or Vice-President) states that *“to be elected as President or Vice-President...” the candidate “...must be a citizen of Somaliland by birth, and, notwithstanding residence as a refugee in another country, must not hold any other citizenship.”* Additionally, the rules stipulate that candidates *“...must be apprised of the realities of the country, having been resident in the country for a period of at least two years before the date when the election is scheduled to take place.”*

Both these conditions automatically disqualified Mr. Omar from running for presidency, as he had a British passport and had just returned from the diaspora. A third condition, which was meant to exclude Mr. Saleban’s from running, stated that the candidate’s spouse *“must be a Muslim”*. At the time, Mr. Salebaan was married to non-Muslim person. These conditions were included in the National constitutions and remain enforced even today. Similar restrictions can also be found in the Constitution of the Transitional Federal Government, although there are diaspora ministers in the TFG and many of the parliamentarians are from the diaspora. Moreover, although the above mentioned restrictions still exist, participation of the diaspora in the political, economic and social sphere seems to be improving.

### **Linking the host country and the home country**

The fieldwork data shows that Somalis in the diaspora interact differently with the home country. The first generation Somalis feel compelled to get involved in the country of origin, but their engagement is usually biased and often directed towards their own clan areas or regions. In times of war, contributing to one’s clan to maintain its dominant status or to help off-set the

balance of power in favor of one's own clan against previously dominant clans is seen a Somali's duty. Well-established connections to the homeland are required to maintain one's position. For many first generation Somalis the homeland linkage is the most critical determinant of their identity, and this leads them to maintain strong ties with Somalia. For instance, first generation Somalis are unlikely to miss the BBC Somali Service news and commentaries, and if they do miss it they will go around and enquire "*BBC maanta maxaay sheegtay?*" (What did the BBC say today?)

The difficulties in adapting to the host countries – such as cultural barriers, high unemployment, fear that their descendents will lose their Somali culture and identity, and the frustrations and despair associated with their state of social exclusion – have encouraged first generation to preserve close connection with their country of origin (Danso 2001, 3). One interview participant underscored this point:

*"I think many among the older Somalis feel responsible for the fact that their children have adopted so many non-Somali ways and feel it is their duty to try to keep the Somali culture strong...and ensure the connection to the homeland is constant and strong. However, the pressure on young people to stay true to their Somali roots can seem like a cultural tug-of-war and this can have a huge negative impact on the life of young Somalis living outside Somalia."*<sup>2</sup>

Besides the issues mentioned above, the first generation close connections to Somalia serves several other purposes. Firstly, their regular contacts with clan members and friends keep them up to date with what is happening there. Secondly, such contacts allow them to act as go-betweens for clan elders and political leaders and the members of the Diaspora. Thirdly, their connections both in the diaspora and inside Somalia have generated interest in the donor communities. The lack of security inside the country has made international travel to and from Somalia precarious, and this has forced the donor countries to increasingly rely on contacts in the diaspora for information on what is happening in the country, and issues affecting the implementation of programs.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mohamed, a Somali father of six from Sweden, interviewed November, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> This is why some major donor organizations in Somalia (Mercy Corps Somalia, Norwegian Refugee Council, and IOM) are now headed by members of the Somali diaspora.

### **Why the first and the second generation diaspora have different attitudes towards homeland engagement?**

The first generation Somalis are more politically involved than the second generation. Yet, their involvement cannot be characterized as positive or negative, as it depends very much on the circumstances in which the engagement occurs. One thing that clearly emerged from the interviews I had with first generation Somalis is that most of them thought it was obligatory to assist their clans during conflicts with other clans. As one interviewee pointed out *“when I receive a call for help from my clan elders and they tell me there has been a fight between our clan and another clan and they need help, I feel it’s obligatory for me to answer that call. I am far from the fighting while other clan members are putting their lives on the line for me, so the least I can do is to help with financial so that they can buy food.”*<sup>4</sup>

However, the first generation is quick to question assistance that transcends clan issues. A Finnish diaspora member noted that *“If I raise money for lets say, drought appeal in Mogadishu, I don’t know if the money will be used by clan militias or not and because I am not 100 per cent sure where the money will go, I rather send it to my family or relatives. That way I am sure the money will be well spent. Besides, there is a need everywhere, so it doesn’t matter where you send the money to.”*<sup>5</sup>

The second generation’s interventions in Somalia are more targeted and less tied to clans. The members of the second generation who took part in the interviews emphasized the collective needs and suffering of the Somali people. They did not feel it was necessary to blindly support their clans and thought it would be better for them to find solution to the inter-clan conflicts rather than support a particular clan. Apart from helping and contributing to the collective welfare of the Somali people, there often are also personal motives for their intervention. Most said that gaining work experience contributed to their interest to return. *“I just graduated from university and wanted to gain work experience. I thought Somalia was the ideal place for me because I could do two things at the same time. Firstly, I wanted to help my people who have gone through great suffering and secondly, I wanted to gain work experience.”*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bashir a diaspora from Norway. Interviewed June, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Abdi, a diaspora from Finland, interviewed June 2009

<sup>6</sup> Mohamud, a diaspora from Australia. Interviewed November 2009.

Whereas clan identity and politics are the entry points for the first generation, second generation involvement seems to combine the desire to help the home country with personal interest, such as career development. However, this doesn't mean that clan identity does not matter for the second generation, or that they are apolitical. The majority of the second generation Somalis interviewed were educated, ambitious, and wanted to establish a stable foundation for themselves. The connection to their parent's homeland exists, but it is often attenuated or very remote. For the second generation, their parents' birthplace or homeland is somewhat imaginary, and home is associated with a variety of places. While the first generation is happy to consider themselves as part and parcel of the Somali diaspora, most second generation diaspora found that the concept of diaspora delimits their experience and makes them aliens in the eyes of the host community. One of the interviewees protested by pointing out that *"there is something foreign and negative about the concept of diaspora. When you label someone as diaspora you are telling him or her that you are foreigner and that you don't belong to the host country. It makes you feel you are different and outsider"*.<sup>7</sup>

Many of the young Somalis I interviewed think of themselves as British Somalis or Somali-Swedes or simply British or Swedish — and not Somalis in the diaspora. Samatar, a thirty-five year old Somali-American, complained that the concept of diaspora reminded him of the pictures of women and children fleeing from conflicts and people in refugee camps in Africa. *"I don't have these experiences"* he said<sup>8</sup>. These young people are identifying themselves with roots that are not defined by one particular place or experience but by multiple homelands. Nasra, a 25-year old woman from the UK, argued that *"in terms of ethnicity I see myself as Somali but having grown up in the UK, culturally and in terms of nationality I view myself as being a mixture of British and Somali"*.<sup>9</sup>

Such contrasts between the first and second generation help us understand the different motives at work, and why some members of the Somali diaspora may or may not intervene in the politics of their country of origin. Generally speaking, Somali diaspora contributions to the home country come in the form of direct or indirect assistance. These include a commitment to

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<sup>7</sup> Essa, a diaspora from Sweden, interviewed December 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Samatar, a diaspora from America, interviewed July 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Nasra, a diaspora from the UK, interviewed, February 2010.

send remittances to families and relatives, and support for humanitarian and peacebuilding projects.

## **Diaspora Contributions Compared**

### ***The Negative Role of Diaspora***

In the absence of a strong government coupled with a large Somali diaspora abroad, and insurgent movements which exert a significant attraction for certain individuals, it is not surprising that current debates on the role of Somali diaspora center on whether their contribution to the homeland is positive or negative. As Mohamed, a lifetime member of the Somali National Movement (SNM) and one of my oldest informants explained, Somali diaspora have previously played a crucial supporting role for the insurgent movement:

*“I spent 28 years in United Arab Emirates (UAE) before I came back to Somaliland... I was a lifetime member of the SNM (Somali National Movement). The UAE tolerated our activities and as a result, we had many activities supporting the SNM. For 15 years, I was a political chairman for the Somaliland diaspora in the UAE. We collected money, organized political meetings and arms for the SNM... we had regular contacts with SNM commanders in the field, who use to update us on the political situation. SNM was very much dependent on the diaspora... SNM and the diaspora were like car and petrol. For a car to move it needs petrol, for SNM to do anything they needed the diaspora.”<sup>10</sup>*

Diaspora support for insurgencies and opposition movements can come in many forms: arms, and money, as well as political support through fundraising, publicity, and propaganda. When asked for the main support the Somali diaspora seemed to be providing, Hersi, a diaspora man from the UAE, took the SNM as an example and explained:

*“When SNM entered the country on May, 27<sup>th</sup> and May 31<sup>st</sup> 1988, we decided that the best way we can take part in the struggle was through financial contribution. Men and women used to contribute their complete salary at times. We used to send medicine,*

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<sup>10</sup> Mohamed, a former diaspora from the UAE, interviewed September 2009.

*cars and medical equipments. There were some who used to get about \$7,000 per month and contributed their whole salaries. As chairman, I remember when the contribution was a million (USD), in one month. Our role was to collect contributions and send the money or what we bought to the homeland.”<sup>11</sup>*

Such support can help insurgent movements and opposition groups to better recruit and fund their activities. For example, the Somali diaspora have played a role in helping the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), Hisbul-Islam, and Al-Shabaab with financial assistance, fighters, and continue to act as political representatives. These groups’ ability to appeal to members of the Somali diaspora and their representations may have helped them to raise their profile, given them diplomatic advantage, improved their recruiting base, and made them operationally more effective.

However, as the arrests of Australian and Danish nationals of Somali origin in 2009 indicate, Western policy makers view the potential for recruiting members of Somali Diaspora into groups such as Al-Shabaab as a major security problem. Regional governments in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia are also worried about the threats emanating from Al-Shabaab. It is argued that Al-Shabaab and other insurgent groups could not have sustained their current level of hostility without outside support, and that the diaspora's involvement is also fueling the power struggle between the government and the opposition groups.

Jama, a Somali from Finland who supports one of insurgent groups in Somalia offered a glimpse into the opportunistic stance of some diaspora groups:

*“During the Asmara meeting when the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) was formed, and also during the current Djibouti negotiations, we met regularly, presented our point of views to the ARS negotiating team. Our aim was to show them that while we support them, we wanted to be consulted and our ideas and perspectives were conveyed to the mediators... During the Asmara negotiations, they listened to us but in Djibouti, we felt they had betrayed and abandoned us... that is why we are not supporting Sheikh Sharif's government. Our ideas are now closer to*

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<sup>11</sup> Hersi, a diaspora from the UAE, interviewed September 2009.

*Hisbul-Islam. We will not raise money or lobby for Sharif government anymore and we will oppose them.*"<sup>12</sup>

Among them are highly skilled professionals who could contribute to the humanitarian, peace building, and developmental efforts with a primary focus on conflict resolution, health, and education; and through the formation of non-profit organizations throughout Somalia. They also have the necessary contacts in their countries of residence to fundraise and lobby for the home country, to organize public and private events in support of regional and national governments, and to help publicize humanitarian and human right problems in Somalia.

### **Two case studies**

During a period of 15 months between December 2008 and April 2010, I followed two diaspora intervention programmes that have led to conflicts. The two brief examples appearing below illustrate the negative roles played by the Somali diaspora returnees, and how they can directly aggravate existing frictions. Both examples indicate the complexities of Somali conflicts and the blending of "tribalism", personal rivalries and the role of natural resources (notably water and grazing land) in the Somali conflict.

While conducting a conflict mapping study in Eastern Somaliland in early 2009, a friend of mine who works for the PIP brought to my attention two conflicts that were taking place in the region. Both cases involved members of the Somali diaspora. The direct contribution of one of the returnees to an already tense and volatile situation was clearly intended to expand his clan's territory. The other case illustrates the unintended consequences of a well-intended project. The two conflicts were interesting also because the PIP had taken both cases as part of its conflict resolutions intervention. Both those fueling the two conflicts and those trying to resolve them are members of the Somali diaspora, and this makes for a good case study, which demonstrates both the negative and the positive involvement of the Somali diaspora in homeland affairs. The two conflicts involve two Somali returnees: a man from the UK, and a man from the United States representing Dhulbahante and Sa'ad Yonis sub-clans respectively.

### ***The Galgal case***

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<sup>12</sup> Jama, a former diaspora from Finland, interviewed July 2009.

Some years ago the Dhulbahante man sent money to Somaliland and asked his relatives to build a house and a borehole in his home town Galgal in Eastern Somaliland. Galgal is an expanse of dry land with a few wells that is inhabited by the Dhulbahante, a sub-clan of the Darood Harti clan, and the Habarjeclo, who are a sub-clan of the Isaq clan. It should be mentioned here that the Harti, the dominant clan of Puntland, and the Isaq, the main clan of Somaliland are party to a long-running border dispute. Many of the disputes in Galgal arise over the ownership of settlements and water sources, and Galgal is the site of many past conflicts between these two clans. One of the most famous battles between the two clans took place in 1952 over the ownership of a water well. Thirteen people were killed and many more wounded. Since then, the Dhulbahante have always sought to establish their authority and claim over Galgal; the Habarjeclo clan favors co-ownership of the area. After the 1952 fighting, the British colonial administration passed a decree banning the construction of any buildings or wells in Galgal. The ruling also stipulated that the existing wells were to be shared between the two clans. After independence the Somali government continued to enforce the colonial administration's decision. No incidents were reported for 56 years, until the decision by the Dhulbahante man to build the house re-ignited the hostility, pitting his clan against the Habarjeclo. The Habarjeclo saw this as a Dhulbahante attempt to reinforce their historical claim to the town.

Tradition dictates that the first clan to dig a well or construct a house in a location has the right to claim ownership of the area, but in Galgal the Dhulbahante and Habarjeclo are unable to agree on who owns the existing water wells and who were the first to settle Galgal. Anticipating a hostile reaction to the house construction project, the Dhulbahante brought their militias to secure the site and to ensure successful completion of the project.

The Habarjeclo responded by launching an attack to prevent the construction, but their efforts proved unsuccessful. Having failed to prevent the construction, a local man from the Habarjeclo clan began to work on a well not far from where the Dhulbahante man was building his house. Successful completion of the well would have automatically strengthened the Habarjeclo's historical position that the town belongs to both clans. However, the Habarjeclo man was



unable to complete the project due to lack of funding. It is reported that the man migrated to Europe, where he is raising money to ensure Habarjeclo clan co-ownership of Galgal.

### ***The Oog case***

While the stand-off between the Dhulbahante and Habarjeclo militias continues in Galgal, a similar conflict was developing in Oog, a town located between Burao and Lasanod in the Sool region in Somaliland inhabited jointly by the Sa'ad Yonis sub-clan of the Habar Yonis and a Habarjeclo sub-clan, the Mohamed Abokor. In the course of establishing an agricultural project in Oog, the Sa'ad Yonis man from the United States unknowingly fenced off an area of disputed grazing land outside Oog. Given the lack of food in Somaliland, one might consider an agricultural project like this as a blessing and not a source of clan antagonism. But water and grazing land ownership remain a major source of conflict between and within clans; if such conflicts are not resolved quickly they can easily degenerate into a circle of revenge killings.

Construction of water wells, dams, and establishment of farms — especially in disputed grazing lands — require careful negotiations and consensus by all clans that inhabit the area. It is unclear whether or not the diaspora man from the United States knew that the area he surveyed and identified was in fact a disputed clan border. What is known is that in 2008 the man returned to Oog with excavators and a plan to establish a farming business, and that without consulting the locals, he proceeded to fence a large area with the intention of establishing a maize and sorghum farm.

The Mohamed Abokor naturally objected to the initiative and immediately mobilized their militia and threatened to prevent him from going ahead with the project. They argued that the farm was situated in a disputed area between the two clans and was a grazing land shared by both clans. Over the decades, the site had been a centre of numerous claims and counter-claims by both clans over the control of the grazing land areas. Constant disputes and competition characterized the relationship between the clans, and the control of Oog and its surroundings areas continued to be a source of tension and conflict. However, local people — and especially the Sa'ad Yonis — argued that the man just wanted to produce food for his people, and that he was unaware of the deep-seated rivalry and competition between the two

clans. Yet, the man was originally from the area and had been able to build several houses for himself in Oog before he returned. This is an indication that he could not have been totally ignorant of the existing clan tensions and disputes.

Moreover, the Mohamed Abokor felt that the farming initiative was an attempt by the Sa'ad Yonis to expand their territorial claim over the disputed area, and as a result of mobilization by the Mohamed Abokor, the Sa'ad Yonis responded by mobilizing their own militia in support of the US diaspora man's project and to assert his right to establish farming in the area.

Although well intended, the project revived the deep and bitter hatred between the two sub-clans and became a new flash point reactivating the simmering hostility between two clans who share a long border. The clans are also traditional political rivals, each supporting one of Somaliland's two main political parties, UDUB and Kulmiye. Furthermore for many decades, fencing grasslands for commercial or personal use has been a problem in Oog area, and local pastoralists have long resisted such commercialization for fear of losing pasturelands. The tension between the two clans is high. The Sa'ad Yonis man from the US was reportedly lobbying the Somaliland government to issue a farming license in an attempt to legalize his claim over the disputed land.

In the case of Galgal, the returnee from the diaspora knowingly inflamed the situation on the ground, but intervention by the PIP helped defuse the conflict. In the Oog example, the returnee clearly remained cognizant of basic opportunities to invest in his home area, but his 'local knowledge' of the dynamics on the ground had atrophied during his years in exile.

### ***The Positive Role of Diaspora***

When debating the linkage between diaspora and violent conflicts, the focus tends to be on providing funds for insurgent and opposition groups, political support through publicity, and lobbying for militants and insurgent groups, and recruitment for the latter (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003, 3). As the Galgal and Oog cases demonstrate, the diaspora's involvement can be destructive, while the Somali diaspora's potential for positive involvement remains largely untapped. Unfortunately, the absence of unified and organized corps of Somalis in the diaspora

combines with a lack of resources and political will to engage the conflicting parties and makes tapping on the Somali diaspora's potential a major challenge. However, the PIP case study below shows that systematic engagement of highly skilled diaspora in peace building activities can be successful.

### ***The Peace Initiatives Program***

The PIP is one of the few diaspora-initiated peace-building programs in Somalia; its core mission is to respond effectively to inter-clan conflicts through collaboration with religious, traditional and regional leaders and use direct and indirect methods of conflict resolution. The program started in 2007 as a pilot project. In 2009 the PIP started working on eight inter-clan conflicts (five in Somaliland and three in Puntland), two of which have already been successfully mediated.

The PIP team main role was to assist the warring parties to agree to mediation and to nominate a mediating and facilitating teams composed of religious and traditional leaders. The PIP then organizes joint workshops on methods of conflict resolutions, forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace. Such seminars and workshops allows the leaders of the conflicting parties to informally network; stay at the same hotel where mingle with each other. At times, when the courses of the issues are complex and the parties are unable to share the same space, mediating team meets the warring parties separately. Most of the diaspora members working with the program have had no formal training in peacebuilding techniques, but were able to develop practical techniques based on their local knowledge and use religious and Somali customary law (*Xeer*) to solve conflicts.

### ***The PIP engagement in Galgal and Oog***

In early 2009, PIP started a conflict mapping initiative and concluded that both Dhulbahante and Habarjeclo on the one hand and Mohamed Abokor and Sa'ad Yonis were raising money to strengthen their respective claims to ownership of Galgal and the disputed grazing land which was to be turned into maize and sorghum farm in Oog. *"It's clear that both Dhulbahante and Habarjeclo in Galgal and Mohamed Abokor and Sa'ad Yonis in Oog are arming their own militias*

*and collecting money from clan members in the diaspora. It is a pity that members of our Somali diaspora community are collecting money from fellow clan members in the diaspora for the continuation of conflict in Galgal. This is unfortunate because those who are contributing to this conflict have themselves fled overseas because of the conflict, where they continue waging war from their comfort zone”, explained Salim, a PIP staff member.<sup>13</sup>*

As a result of the conflict mapping, the PIP decided to mediate the Galgal and Oog conflicts. Between 2009 and 2010 the PIP team brought together a mediating team composed of religious and clan elders and local administration officials from the two opposing clans. In Galgal, the Dhulbahante clan submitted a proposal urging the Habarjeclo clan to cede ownership of Galgal to the Dhulbahante clan. The Habarjeclo elders rejected the proposal. However, with the help of the PIP, clan elders and religious leaders, the parties agreed to demilitarize Galgal and Oog and to stop any construction until a final agreement is reached. The parties also appointed a monitoring and implementation team and planned to meet again in May 2010. Although there were no breakthroughs, the PIP was given the mandate to facilitate mediations and a series of mediation meetings in 2010. The PIP also organized conflict and mediation training for the mediating team, and several mediation and conflict resolution interventions for the mediation team took place in 2010.

While the Somali diaspora subsumed the capacity to make a significant contribution to rebuilding the war-torn country, the two case studies clearly demonstrated that the potential impact of individuals and groups was contingent and depended upon their awareness of traditional social protocols and local politics. Additionally, the PIP case showed that organized interventions had to partner with traditional leaders to be effective. For Somalis, proper grasp of their society’s group dynamics remains the key prerequisite for participation in grass-roots affairs for the foreseeable future

This also highlights the role of the Somali diaspora members as agent of change in their communities. In the case of PIP, their influence and the potential impact of their peace building

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<sup>13</sup> Interviewed October 2009.

role seemed to derive from their societal knowledge, which also conditioned how returnees were perceived within their communities. For the most part, the domestic opinion of the Somali diaspora was positive; these imbue the Somali diaspora with the legitimacy critical to engage in peace building. Unlike non-Somalis experts whose presence was considered temporary, members of Somali diaspora are members of their communities who have a stake in their daily struggles. Such ready acceptance is also due to the fact that the majority of Somalis outside the country have lost loved ones, or know of someone who has been killed, raped, or witnessed atrocities in the civil war. This gives them the moral authority to speak against the continuation of the conflict: as one member of the Somali diaspora observed, they have the experience, skills and the commitment to *“turn the tide of conflict and mistrust between conflicting communities upside down”*.<sup>14</sup>

The past 20 years have witnessed intractable conflict, humanitarian crises, and human rights abuses. The cyclical violence and unrelenting tension have made Somalia a difficult place to work. Members of the diaspora interviewed for this study had left their comfort zones in Europe to help restore peace in their communities with full knowledge that they risked their lives.

### ***Challenges to diaspora involvement***

There are numerous of challenges that can limit diaspora engagement in Somalia. Interviewees reiterated that security was a major challenge. Even in relatively peaceful areas such as Somaliland and Puntland, there are restrictions on expatriates' (such as the PIP team) movements within main towns such Hargeisa and Bosaso; the restrictions are even tougher when traveling outside main towns where security guards are needed. Especially those diaspora working for international organizations in Somaliland and Puntland have to follow strict security guidelines. In Somaliland at least one security car with an armed Special Protection Unit (SPU) car has to accompany diaspora expatriates visiting program areas. In Puntland two SPU cars are required. Since the cars of the international organizations can be distinguished by red number plates, there are fears that diaspora members working for them can be an easy target. Some INGO's operating in Somaliland and Puntland have also a

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<sup>14</sup> Abdul, a diaspora from Denmark, interviewed November 2009.

requirement that the organization's and sometimes also the donor's logos must be placed on their cars.

“When you are implementing human rights, advocacy or peace building programmes, people tend to question your motives. It's even more complex when you are mediating inter-clan conflicts... and the picture becomes even messier, if the root causes of the conflict you are trying to mediate are many, such as the Oog conflict, where in addition to inter-clan rivalries there is a political dimension. If you want to be successful in your mediation, you have to behave neutral to all parties involved.”<sup>15</sup>

It can be argued, however, that the situation has changed and the region has become more conducive to diaspora engagement than before. Since the strong men that served under Siad Barre and the warlords who dominated much of South-Central Somalia have either passed away or lost influence, educated and experienced diaspora members seemed to be gaining ground. Local and international attitudes were slowly changing and diaspora was represented in all levels of government, in the opposition and in the civil service.

Another embedded challenge derived from the fact that the Somali are deeply divided along clan-lines. The wounds of Somalia's inter-clan conflict were fresh, and the bitter memories standing in the way of the Somali diaspora's wish to unite and speak with one voice. This problem was aggravated by the fact that a sizable number of Somalis in the diaspora had personally experienced the civil war and thus retained memories of clan atrocities, making it difficult for them to trust other clans. Suspicion, hatred, and rivalries between clan members in Somalia continued to divide Somalis in the diaspora making it difficult for them to plant the seeds of any viable diaspora networks or institutions. As a result, there were few lobbies or pressure groups that could effectively organize, address, and work for peace either in the host country or in Somalia. A large section of the Somali population benefits from remittances from the diaspora, estimated in 2003 to have been one billion USD annually (Pérouse de Montclos 2003). The financial contribution of the diaspora was not complemented with unified lobbying and publicity efforts, to influence leaders in Somalia and the policy makers in the host countries.

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<sup>15</sup> Osman, a PIP staff member from Finland, interviewed January 2010.

The negative perceptions associated with diaspora were another problem. My discussion with Raqia, a diaspora from the US highlighted the difficulties facing diaspora in adjusting and blending with the mainstream. She told me that:

*“...the irony is that the Somalis here started to criticize my weak Somali connection. I said to myself: why they are criticizing me while people here are killing each other. They all have this romanticized notion of Somalia, even my dad wanted to come back for a long time ... When I went back to the States, I was very frustrated and angry about the situation and things that I witnessed and I wanted to do something. I started reading about the war. When I was growing up, we used to talk about clans, politics, and the war in Somalia at home but I never understood it. Coming here three years ago, was a culture shock...I do not have any other way to describe it. But the culture shock is now behind me, and I have come to see what I can do to help. I have some relatives and extended family members here and I have been supporting them, sending them money since I met them three years ago. But while sending a few hundred dollars every month really helps individual families, I wanted to do more. I am a nurse and with my skills I can reach and help more people. That is why I am here.”<sup>16</sup>*

Raqia's story is similar to the stories of other young Somalis who have come back to their homeland to learn more about their culture and identities while also contributing something. Some of them returned after a long stay in the diaspora, for others it was their first time. For those who chose to return, fitting in has not been easy. In an interview for Wales Online Salma Ali, a twenty-two years-old woman from Cardiff, recalled her experience when she returned to Somaliland after sixteen years in the UK: *“People immediately see you’re different. They think we walk too fast... no matter how much we try to dress traditionally; they can tell we’re from abroad. You can’t blend in, so you get teased but not in a nasty way... we get called the ‘in-betweens.’”<sup>17</sup>*

Another interviewee added that: *“Being a Somali of the diaspora is a bit like being displaced, you do not really feel as though you truly belong anywhere. You are not quite accepted fully by the host country: even if you're born there you would still be viewed as a foreigner. Similarly,*

<sup>16</sup> Raqia, a diaspora from the US, interviewed February and March 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Wightwick, Abbie, Having two countries is the best, *WalesOnline, South Wales Echo*, Monday, 18 May, 2009.

*you are also not fully accepted by Somalis back home".*<sup>18</sup> Combined, all these factors limit the power of the Somali to actively engagement.

## **Conclusion**

Members of the Somali diaspora can make and have been making significant contributions to developments in their home country. Drawing on the interviews with the Somali diaspora, a number of conclusions can be made. As the Galgal and Oog cases illustrate, diaspora can play a negative role. Their involvement can trigger new conflicts or re-ignite old tensions. But they can also play positive role. The role played by the PIP staff demonstrates their potential for constructive engagement. Nevertheless, diaspora's peace building activities are restricted by a number of issues. Lack of security was considered to be the main challenge War has divided the country into clan enclaves. Due to the clan rivalries and hostilities it was difficult to establish or verify diaspora engagement in areas outside the main cities, such as Hargeisa, Bosaso, and Buro. The situation was most difficult in the South-Central region, which was inaccessible. Additionally, the lack of credible incentives to attract diaspora participation by either the TFG, Puntland or Somaliland governments coupled with political restrictions such as the requirement Somaliland that the spouse of a potential presidential candidate must be a Muslim and the candidate must have resided in the country for at least two years were clearly intended to limit the diaspora's engagement in politics.

Moreover, the generation gap translates into differing priorities for the first and the second generation in the diaspora, who seek to influence the Somali politics in different ways. Some of the conclusions offered here show that the first generation diaspora feel a sense of loss, isolation and threat by the cultural values of the host countries, and remain dedicated to an eventual return to the home country. For the second generation diaspora, things are not as simple or straight forward. They described themselves as having diverse roots and hybrid identities. Almost all those interviewed reported a combined sense of loyalties to their parents' homeland and to their homes in Britain, Canada, the US, and Finland, making their sense of loyalty more complex and their stance on the issues straddling their multi-national birthright more complicated and nuanced.

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<sup>18</sup> Ismail, a Canadian diaspora, interviewed June 2009.



Therefore, the social bases of identity construction will continue to be a factor both at home and abroad. As the data presented here indicates, this hypothesis cannot, however, be taken for granted. For the Somalis of the diaspora who have successfully adjusted to conditions in their new homes or have grown up accepting the benefits of their dual nationality, this remains a realistic objective.

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