

3 | Diaspora returnees to Somaliland: heroes of development or job-stealing scoundrels?

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One evening in June 2012, I was asked to give a talk to a group of development studies students at the University of Hargeisa on the role of the diaspora in relief, development and politics in Somaliland. The topic was one on which I had recently concluded research. I began by asking those gathered – a roomful of mostly men in their early to mid-twenties, but also a sizeable minority of women – what they thought were the benefits and disadvantages to diaspora involvement in Somaliland. The room became emotionally charged, and dozens of hands went into the air. ‘They take our jobs.’ ‘They drive house rent prices up.’ ‘They come looking for wives that they can bring back with them to their homes in America or Europe.’ ‘Sometimes they send their children who have gotten into trouble while living outside to live here, and they are a bad influence on our society.’ These were a few of the objections people raised.

I asked how many people were receiving support from people abroad for their studies. Nearly every hand in the room went up. I then asked if there were any positive aspects to people returning. ‘They bring skills and investment with them when they return.’ ‘They have experience working in democratic countries and can help us build our political system.’ What followed was a fascinating discussion on the contentious subject of diaspora involvement and the influence of returnees on life in Somaliland, as seen from the perspective of people who had, with few exceptions, remained in the state all of their lives. This exchange was both nuanced and heated. Everyone, it seemed, had an opinion about the large number of returnees coming back to Somaliland. And everyone could see that this was not a clear-cut issue, but that the returns had both positive and negative implications.

In this chapter I explore some of the perceptions of return, from the perspective of both those returning and those in the local society. The arguments draw on a research project that I led in 2010 which considered the role of the diaspora in relief, development and peace building in Somali areas. This project, funded by the United Nations Development Programme in Somalia (UNDP-Somalia), included research in six diaspora hubs – Dubai, London, Nairobi, Minneapolis, Oslo and Toronto – as well as in Somaliland, Puntland and South Central Somalia. The research team, made up of seven research-

ers with long experience working in Somali areas, focused on the impact of the diaspora on local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), social service providers (SSPs) and private investment in the areas being studied (see Hammond et al. 2011). The chapter considers a subsection of the data collected during that project, particularly quantitative and qualitative data that we collected concerning those who had returned to Somaliland. A total of 159 individuals were interviewed from these sectors, including 72 representatives of local NGOs, 47 SSPs and 40 private investors. The sample included significant numbers of returnees (although respondents were selected at random) (*ibid.*). The chapter also includes data concerning the interaction between diaspora and local populations gathered during visits to Somaliland in 2012 and 2013 (Hammond 2013b; 2013c) and from my long-term research with Somalilanders and the Somali diaspora (from 1998 to the present).

To set the context, I begin by providing a brief history of migration out of Somaliland. This process began during the British colonial period but accelerated as the area descended into conflict during the late 1980s. Returns began with the end of the conflict in the early 1990s; they have increased as the peace has been strengthened and the capacity of the government has improved. I describe the ways in which returnees to Somaliland have become involved socially, economically and politically in their country of origin. I first examine their returns through a largely positive lens, considering the ways in which they have tried, and in many ways succeeded, to contribute to the post-war reconstruction of Somaliland. I then consider the main challenges that they have encountered, both individually and in the face of tensions that have been wrought by their interactions with wider society. I argue that return should be seen not as the end result of a migratory life story, but as the further development of the transnationally connected post-war society that Somaliland has become.

The returnees to Somaliland whom I discuss here are global citizens with a high level of mobility, strong social networks that span the globe, and very often with considerable resources to commit both to their personal return and to the development of their homeland. They are, to borrow from Horst's aptly titled book, 'transnational nomads' (Horst 2006). Having lived outside Somaliland for several years, they face significant challenges on return. Most take considerable time to feel their way, exploring an environment that has been radically changed in the years since they went into exile. Not only is the physical environment different, the social networks are also transformed. Indeed, their own return contributes to that transformation in significant ways, as I describe below. Returnees are subjects who are often carving out a new relationship to their country of origin, and towards Somaliland society, even as they maintain active ties to one or more of the countries in which they have been living since their emigration from Somaliland. My analysis

challenges the notion that migration is necessarily a linear process of movement from one point to another, of adaptation or integration into a single new place. It calls into question the idea that a returnee or migrant need necessarily have a single place to which he or she feels primarily attached, and considers returnee participation in post-war reconstruction as a creative use of resources borrowed from multiple locales, often for both individual and collective benefit. I also consider the Somaliland government's attempts to adapt its development strategies to take into account diaspora and returnee engagement, seeking to harness the positive potential of both financial and human capital.

Taken together, the different sources of data considered here paint a complex picture of interaction between people living outside Somaliland and those inside it. However, rather than being a binary relationship between insiders and outsiders, the reality is much more fluid, and is closely tied to the shifting presence of returnees – people who left the country and gained permanent residence or citizenship in another country, only to return several years later to Somaliland. Returnees are not a discrete category, however. They include people who come and go, spending significant portions of the year in one or more other countries while simultaneously maintaining a home, family ties, a business and often community involvement within Somaliland. Such returnees, whom I refer to as 'part-time diaspora' (Hammond et al. 2011) and whom Hansen calls 'revolving returnees' (2007), have had an enormous impact on social, economic and political life in Somaliland.

Who is a returnee?

During our research, which considered the role of the diaspora in relief, development and peace building, we had difficulty trying to determine to whom exactly we should apply the term 'returnee'. Reflecting on the mobility and livelihood practices of those with transnational ties, we opted to define as members of the diaspora anyone who spent three months or longer per year outside Somaliland on a regular basis. Our reasoning was that people who left Somaliland for shorter periods were likely to be embarking on family visits or holidays, whereas someone who was abroad for three months or longer was probably engaged in business, study or other activities as a resident of another country. Using the same logic, the term 'returnee' was used to refer to diaspora members who spent three months or more per year in Somaliland – they might have residence and maintain lives and immediate family members outside Somaliland, but they are also involved in the social, economic or political life inside the territory in a way that holidaymakers or others on shorter visits would not be.

As discussed below, returnees tend to settle in Somaliland's cities. They bring with them professional training and expertise, new ideas about what

government should prioritise and how it should relate to its citizens, and what their own place in society should be. At the same time, many who return find it difficult to adjust to being back, not only because of the more limited infrastructure and services available, the more conservative society, and the often slow and complicated process of establishing themselves and their businesses, but also because they are met with resentment, hostility or just plain bewilderment by local residents who often see them as outsiders and as a source of competition for jobs and other resources.

Background to migration out of Somaliland

Migration out of Somaliland began during the British colonial period, which started in the 1880s and continued until 1960. The first international migrants from Somaliland were traders and merchant seamen who established themselves in cities such as Aden and Sanaa, across the Red Sea and Gulf of Oman. Many later travelled further afield to the United Kingdom, Dubai, and other places. The next wave of Somali migrants to travel to Europe were students, selected for further education after having attended British schools in Somaliland. In the UK, where Europe's largest population of Somalilanders is settled, there are large and well-established Somali communities in the seaports of Cardiff and Liverpool and in Manchester that were founded by these first-comers (Change Institute 2009: 24). The post-World War Two economic boom brought more migrants from Somaliland to the UK; the large Somali community in east London was established during this time (Bradbury 2008: 175).

Refugees began fleeing Somaliland en masse during the late 1980s as civil war between the Somali National Movement – a liberation movement formed by the Somali diaspora in London – and the government's military engulfed the territory. Somalia President Mohamed Siad Barre ordered the national air force to bombard the capital city of Hargeisa, its planes taking off from the city's airport in repeated sorties until most of the city had been destroyed. The siege drove more than 600,000 people westward into Ethiopia, with smaller numbers seeking refuge in Djibouti, Kenya and Yemen. A small proportion of those with the greatest financial resources or with relatives who had already migrated out of the region eventually made their way further afield, most settling in Europe, North America and the Middle East. Today, in addition to the UK, there are large Somali communities throughout Europe – including large numbers of Somalilanders – in the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Italy.

The collapse of the government of Somalia in Mogadishu in 1991 brought an end to the worst of the fighting in Somaliland, and paved the way for the establishment of a de facto independent state that year in the former British protectorate, even as the fighting continued throughout much of the rest of the country. The peace was temporarily shattered in 1994–95 with the outbreak of

the 'Airport War', a clan-based dispute in Hargeisa, but since that time peace has prevailed, for the most part. Despite operating without international recognition for 23 years, the government of Somaliland has established a bicameral parliament with a clan-nominated house of elders, or *guurti*, and an elected council of representatives. It has successfully held two presidential elections, the more recent of which in 2010 involved the smooth transition of power from the incumbent, Dahir Riyale Kahin, to his opponent, Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud, better known by his nickname 'Silanyo'. The government has developed the ability to provide rudimentary basic services in most parts of Somaliland, including free primary education and healthcare for all.¹

As the conflict ended and peace returned to Somaliland, refugee outflows to the camps and cities in neighbouring countries were gradually reversed. Large-scale assisted return from Ethiopia during the late 1990s saw approximately 200,000 refugees returning (Ambroso 2002). Many of these returnees have been settled in camps on the outskirts of the city of Hargeisa and two decades later continue to live in precarious and hazardous conditions. They lack access to clean water, adequate housing and basic services such as education and healthcare. In 2014, the government of Somaliland, with support from the Danish and Norwegian governments as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN-Habitat and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), sought to relocate some of the returnees in more permanent housing (Sabahi Online 2013). This is a process that is long overdue, but at the time of writing it is too soon to know how successful the scheme will be.

The refugees who had moved further from Somaliland – to Europe, North America, Australia and Asia – have been slower to return and are fewer in number, but it can be argued that they have had more of an impact on Somaliland society than their poorer compatriots. It is these returnees who are the subject of this chapter.

The Somali diaspora – including those from Somaliland as well as from the rest of the territory now recognised as Somalia – is estimated at roughly 1 million to 1.5 million people. Exact numbers are difficult to come by given that many destination countries keep records only of people of African origin, or, if population figures on Somalis are available, they include those from Somaliland, Puntland and South Central Somalia as a single category. Figures also typically include only those born within Somalia, and do not include children born to refugees and migrants outside the country. Over time, this makes any attempt at determining the real number of Somalis living in the

1 Despite the fact that primary education is free, a lack of schools, poor infrastructure and the extreme poverty of communities has resulted in a net enrolment level of only 49 per cent in 2010, the most recent year for which statistics are available (Republic of Somaliland 2011: 262).

diaspora extremely difficult. Does one count the children of someone who came to the UK as a refugee or a student if those children were born abroad? Does one count those who were born in the refugee camps of Kenya or Ethiopia and then later resettled in Europe and are now young adults? In the United Kingdom, current estimates of the number of Somali residents range from 95,000 to 250,000. The Office for National Statistics gives a total for the number of people living in the UK but born in Somalia as 115,000 (APS 2011), but this figure does not include those who were born outside the country. Nor, of course, does it count those who lack legal status and are therefore likely to have opted not to be counted. According to UK Census figures from 2001, 89 per cent of all UK Somalis were living in London. This percentage is almost certainly lower now as a result of a dispersal policy introduced in 1999 as well as considerable secondary migration of Somalis from other EU countries, in particular the Netherlands (there is a large Somali-Dutch community in the city of Leicester; see van Liempt 2011). Large Somali communities have subsequently formed in Bristol, Birmingham and other cities. People tend to settle mostly, though not exclusively, among their clan relatives, upon whom they can depend for social and economic support.

Evidence from multiple countries in Europe and North America suggests that a sizeable proportion of Somali migrants plan to eventually return to Somalia or Somaliland. Data from a survey of living conditions in Norway indicates that 30 per cent of Somalis in Oslo 'expect to return to the country of origin' (Government of Norway 2007). People move between the UK and Somaliland easily. There is a Somaliland consulate in London, while regular flights to Hargeisa via Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Dubai or Nairobi (Kenya) make such travel easy, if expensive. A 2013 survey of remittance senders found that 25 per cent of relatives who sent funds were located in the United Kingdom; this was the largest representation of any country, and many of these relatives not only send money to their relatives, they come back regularly for extended periods as well (Hammond 2013b).

While people are attracted by the idea of returning to Somaliland now that the environment is safer, many are reluctant to act on that impulse until they have regularised their immigration status. Only once they have secured permanent residence, and in some cases full citizenship, in their country of resettlement or immigration do they feel willing and able to return to Somaliland. This may be partly explained by the fact that Somaliland passports are not recognised internationally; it is also difficult to travel on Somalia passports if they are still valid, since they are easy to forge. People prefer, therefore, to travel once they have a European or North American passport. Having a European passport also enables them to leave Somaliland if their planned re-entry does not go as well as they hope it will. The documentation also entitles them to establish a mobile livelihood, moving to and fro between two

(or more) places, maintaining homes and business activities in those places. They usually keep their children in schools in the diaspora country while one or other parent spends time in Somaliland.

The protracted nature of the asylum and settlement process in most countries where Somalis emigrate means that it usually takes many years before an individual or family receives permanent residence. Legally recognised refugees are prohibited from returning to the country from which they have fled, although in practice people with multiple passports may be able to circumvent this restriction by travelling on a passport other than the one associated with their refugee status. I have argued elsewhere that, whereas opponents of migration may claim that quick and/or easy settlement processes can act as a pull factor and encourage more people to seek to settle in a destination country, facilitating faster regularisation could have the counterintuitive effect of enabling people to return to their country of origin sooner (Hammond 2013a). I have interviewed many individuals who have said that they are merely waiting in Britain for their citizenship papers to come through, and then they plan to return to Somalia or Somaliland for at least part of the year. Some say that they intend to return permanently.

Return to Somaliland

Beginning in the late 1990s, the number of returns from Europe and North America to Somaliland began to increase. Some came first for short visits to test the waters, to check on the condition of their property, and to look for business opportunities. The two largest cities, Hargeisa and Burco,² had been almost completely destroyed, so those who wanted to return either had to find new housing or renovate or rebuild their damaged homes. I spent a year living in Hargeisa in 1998; at that time there was no public electricity or water supply – these resources were available only for a fee from private suppliers. Most houses lacked roofs, and people who had returned were just beginning to rebuild.

Fifteen years later, the city has undergone a dramatic transformation. Gone are the rubble-lined streets and people living in temporary shelters outside the ruins of their stone houses. Freshly painted homes of all sizes spread across the city, including into new areas that were previously scrubland at the edges of the city. Some of these houses are like small palaces – very large structures with enormous walls surrounding a compound. One neighbourhood, on the southern side of the city, is referred to as ‘Half London’ in recognition of the many returnees who have come back to the city from the UK. Several new hotels advertising themselves as being of ‘international standard’ have opened, one of the largest being owned by a returnee from the UK. The political elites gather at the Maan-Soor and Ambassador hotels (the only two places certified

² Pronounced Burao.

as having the necessary security protection to enable international aid workers to stay, but also attractive to the Somali elites of the city) – the choice still largely depends on which clans they belong to – but diaspora returnees also fill the likes of the smaller and slightly more modest Safari and Oriental hotels.

Hargeisa in particular is being transformed by the short- and long-term return of people from the diaspora. During the summer months the city is booming with weddings, conferences and cultural events. Restaurants compete for the business of returnees – the young, hip ‘*dayuusboro*’ or ‘*qurba-joog*’ (diaspora returnees) gather at the Summertime restaurant, or at Fish and Steak (which specialises in fresh fish from Berbera – fish having become more popular among returnees than with local residents – as well as pizza), while those with young families head to the swings and slides at Gulaid Park or one of the playground centres on the edge of the city. In the summer, diaspora returnees host house parties for their friends who have also returned from the same countries – the Danish Somalis, Dutch Somalis, or ‘Fish and Chips’ (as British Somalis are known) seeking out others like them to compare notes on their return visits and talk about life in their other home.

While some people return only for their summer holidays to visit their relatives, others have returned for longer periods, and increasing numbers are making the move permanently. Suldan, who worked for an international organisation for many years, decided to return to Somaliland after his retirement; he now works as a part-time adviser to one of the key ministries and lives close to other members of his family who have also returned from abroad in houses they have built recently. He says that he is happy to be back in Somaliland. He is reunited with his old friends and relatives, and has been able to contribute to the development of his homeland.

Many older Somalilanders say that, after years away, they were eager to return to the place that they came from, where people *know* them – to know someone is to have been a child with them, to know their family members and their history – and where they are respected and valued.

Dhaqan ceelis and changing cultural norms

While older people are returning to Somaliland to retire, or to work for a few more years before they retire, another group of younger Somalilanders is also returning, though not always voluntarily. Some diaspora parents are sending their teenage children to go to school in Somaliland in order, they say, to learn about their heritage and to instil in them a stronger respect for cultural and religious ideals. Many of these young people have run into trouble with gangs, substance abuse or poor performance at school in their diaspora homes. They are referred to as *dhaqan ceelis*, or young people who have lost their culture and are sent back to Somaliland to live with their extended family or to attend boarding school. Abaarso Tech, a secondary boarding school founded in 2008,

reportedly has several children in attendance who have returned from the UK. While some of the youth have embraced being sent back, many see it as a punishment and are eager to leave.

Despite the influences from the returning diaspora, Somaliland society has in some ways become more conservative than it was when I first lived there. Women's dress and behaviour are more conservative. Whereas previously more women wore brightly coloured *dirac* – long, gauzy dresses with short sleeves – more women now wear black *abayas* that cover them completely, and they are more likely to wear full *hijab* – a covering over their hair, neck and shoulders, and often even covering their faces as well when out in public. This trend towards conservative behaviour may be seen as the result of the increased impact of religious practice in daily life due to imported influences (from outside the Horn of Africa as well as from other Somali territories) and a greater embrace of religion as a way of providing order and security in an environment in which the relatively weak state has not been able to provide these basic functions.

Somali families in the diaspora face some of the same challenges: youth often lack effective male role models because their fathers are permanently or periodically absent, while girls are considered to be at risk of abandoning honourable Islamic practice. Returning their children to Somaliland is seen as a way of reinforcing positive cultural influences.

Support to civil society organisations

Many people return during the summer holidays, not only to immerse themselves in Somali culture and visit relatives but also to volunteer their services at hospitals, in government offices, and with local NGOs. The Hargeisa International Book Fair, a cultural extravaganza of free poetry readings, appearances by Somali and international authors and musical performances, has been held every year since 2008 and draws hundreds of people each day for a week. The book fair is the product of Ayan Mohamoud, based in London with Dutch citizenship, and Italian Somalilander Jama Musse Jama. Each year, dozens of diaspora returnees volunteer their time to host the event. International diplomats time their visits to coincide with the book fair, and for a week the city is transformed into a place of culture and fun. So successful have the organisers been that they have recently secured funding to open a cultural centre in Hargeisa, with a library and performance space, to be able to work on an ongoing basis.

Many who return from the diaspora seek to become involved in the development of Somaliland, often through involvement with civil society organisations. These organisations provide paid and voluntary work opportunities, entry points for entrepreneurial activities, and outlets for political participation that are attractive to diaspora returnees. The Edna Adan University Hospital,

a private hospital opened by Somaliland's first trained midwife in 1998, hosts several Somali volunteer and trainee health professionals at any given time. Many Somalis, including those youth who left the country when they were small children, have chosen to study fields that prepare them for practical work in healthcare, education, business administration or development. They say that they have done so at least in part so that they can have a skill to bring back to Somaliland. Indeed, this appears to be one of the reasons why people return – to find more fulfilling work and to escape the marginalisation and exclusion that many Somali migrant communities are exposed to in societies where they have resettled.

Our 2011 survey considered three kinds of civil society actors: local NGOs, SSPs, and private investors who run medium- to large-scale businesses. In our study of diaspora-supported organisations, we found that all three kinds of institutions were benefiting from in-kind support given by people who have returned either temporarily or permanently. Forty-three per cent of local NGOs reported that they received in-kind support from people in the diaspora, mostly through people returning to work with them. Thirty-three per cent said that they had staff from the diaspora. In the private sector, just over half of the respondents said that they had spent time living abroad. Civil society institutions reported that returnees provide advice, leadership, training and other human assets in their organisations.

The motivations of those who return to provide such technical support appear to be mixed. One businessman who had returned from the USA commented:

I think we teach people values that are perhaps lacking here at this particular time. It's all there in our tradition, but much has been lost in the transition from rural to peri-urban to urban living. Values like hard work, commitment, and good and consistent work ethics are inherent in our tradition. I find it rather ironic that I'm importing these values from the USA. Without these values, pastoralism would never have seen the light of day and we all know what pastoralism means to this country and its people.

When asked what challenges he had faced in returning to Somaliland and beginning his business, he said:

this place is full of challenges. Aside from the bigger things like the lack of the many conveniences that have made my life abroad so much easier, most challenges are very personal. I returned to a place that is completely different from the way I left it. The land is different, the social and political landscape is different, and even the environment is different. The days of enjoying listening to the *galool* (*Acacia bussel*) whistle in the wind are long gone. I too am not safe from the perils of metamorphosis; returning with a new perspective and personal identity is part of the challenge. Naturally, the result of all this is a

clash of ideals and nostalgia and a new reality spawned by the legacy of war. Trust and understanding are two very difficult things to achieve when engaging with the locals. This could only mean that I too am benefiting from all of this, learning from the locals.

This reference to the process of learning from locals is an important one. In multiple conversations with local and returnee Somalilanders, we were told that the tensions that exist between returnees and locals – which will be further discussed below – can be minimised if returnees take the time to listen to locals and to try to understand their perspectives and priorities rather than imposing their own judgements on them.

Returnees starting up or working for local NGOs Many local NGOs in Somaliland, including the biggest and most successful, have been started or managed by those returning from North America and Europe. Typically, returnees receive some form of financial support from relatives and friends living abroad when they set up the NGO, and they then try to find support in the long run through grants for particular projects by other donors, including international aid agencies. For many years people have returned to Somaliland and have engaged with local NGOs that are involved in the development of the region. Previously, returnees tended to stay in Somaliland for – at most – only a couple of years and then would leave again to return to their homes in the diaspora. Respondents said that increasingly people are settling in Somaliland more permanently. As the infrastructure improves, they are also bringing their spouses and children with them. Several private primary schools offering English-language education have opened, with teachers brought from Kenya and Ethiopia as well as Somali returnees. Although these schools charge fees that are prohibitive for most locals, they are easily affordable for returnees with access to foreign currency.

Returnees engaged in local NGOs typically have educational, language, IT and management skills from the West that are important assets when applying for funds, communicating with donors and setting up and running a development or relief organisation. Moreover, besides having formal skills, they often have an inside understanding of how the development field works and what kinds of projects are likely to get funding, as many of them also have work experience with international development organisations. In this sense, diaspora returnees have an advantage vis-à-vis the local population, which typically lacks these kinds of skills. Besides being able to work within their field of expertise, bring back skills to Somaliland and participate in the development of their homeland, many also seek employment with local and international NGOs in order to be able to earn a comfortable salary. Locals somewhat cynically refer to these self-made development professionals as ‘laptop cowboys’.

The many temporary volunteers from the diaspora also bring important human skills to local NGOs. These include expertise in communication, language teaching, workshop and conference organising with non-Somalis, reporting to donors, and so on. They typically have up-to-date IT competencies that are used, for example, to set up homepages targeting the diaspora. Many have studied development or social science at a Western university and use a visit to Somaliland as a means of gaining some practical research or development experience. In addition, diaspora volunteers reportedly help create a bridge between local NGOs and potential supporters living abroad by advocating for the work of the NGO in terms that funders recognise and value.

Several sponsored voluntary return programmes have sought to place Somali professionals in temporary employment for periods ranging from a few months to more than a year (see Horst et al. 2010 for examples of programmes supported by European governments). Perhaps the longest running of these is the Qualified Expatriate Somali Technical Support–Migration for Development in Africa (QUESTS–MIDA) programme, administered by the International Organization for Migration and UNDP–Somalia. This project places people for periods ranging from a few to 18 months in positions in the government administration. Participants are paid a salary and it is hoped that they will train national staff to take over from them by the time their placement ends. Some participants in the project have stayed on in Somaliland once their placements are over, working in the private sector. However, many say that they are not able to stay because they do not feel they can resettle their family back in Somaliland or because they do not think that the infrastructure is adequate.

Political participation Diaspora returnees engaged with local NGOs say that they believe they are contributing to the development of Somaliland. They also believe that, by engaging with and strengthening civil society, they can play an important role in challenging the political establishment. Many speak out in public forums or, through their connections with diaspora communities, provide an independent monitoring function that helps further the causes of democratisation and human rights. Women heads of organisations also stressed that they are able to challenge traditional gender roles in Somaliland by becoming leaders within civil society. They lobby the political establishment and international development community to promote the rights and opportunities of women in Somaliland society. However, despite women’s involvement in civil society, they have not yet been a significant presence in formal politics. Only a few women have served as cabinet ministers and very few have served in parliament or on local councils.

During political campaign seasons, many people have returned to Somaliland to work for their preferred candidates and parties. With links to fundraisers in the diaspora, they are able to help set up campaign offices and prepare

publicity materials, but they also influence the formation of political platforms and campaign strategies (see Hammond 2012). In the 2010 election, the Kulmiye party of Somali British candidate Silanyo won the presidency; Kulmiye was widely considered to have the strongest diaspora support base. President Silanyo's cabinet included several prominent returnees, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Planning, both of whom relocated from London to take up their posts. One-third to a half of the presidential cabinet is typically composed of returnees from the diaspora, some of whom are selected even before they have returned. During 2011 fieldwork in Somaliland, informants estimated that between 20 and 30 per cent of members of parliament were from the diaspora, and fully one-half of President Silanyo's first cabinet were returnees.

Settling in the cities Thus far, most returnee diaspora activity in Somaliland has been focused on Hargeisa, and to a lesser extent Burco. Even those returnees who are originally from other areas have come to these cities when they return. This is due to the more developed infrastructure and more vibrant business climate. One returnee from the Sanaag region of eastern Somaliland explained why so few people were returning to those areas:

I don't think Sanaag has a diaspora at all. I mean, it does and there are many people from this region who have migrated to all corners of this globe ... but where are its diaspora? You look at the diaspora of Hargeisa and Awdal and you wonder has no one left this place [Sanaag] to return, to help, to even look back? Many of the region's returning diaspora are based in Hargeisa and other regions. Many of the diaspora who are active in the development and reconstruction of this country as a whole are actually originally from this region. Government officials, prominent development workers, and private investors are all from this region originally. But what have they done for this region specifically? You look at many of the institutions, civil society and private and public clinics and you are bound to find individuals from this region who are either leading these initiatives or making significant contributions. It is very sad, however, that their home region continues to fall further behind as a result of their efforts. All in all, the diaspora of this region are not involved ... Don't get me wrong, though, they do help out. Many families live on the remittances sent by their sons, daughters, brothers, sisters and relatives.

He explained, however, that very often even those who receive remittances from relatives living abroad use the money they receive to relocate closer to the urban centres:

It's somewhat ironic that while at the family level remittances were sustaining the lives of many households, remittances encourage recipients to move to other regions looking for better education and health services. That's the difference they are making, inadvertently further depopulating this region.

Short-term returns: a resource for development Return visits are important catalysts for support. One such example is an orphanage in Hargeisa that has received support from diaspora returnees who came to Somaliland to visit. Having seen the needs of the orphanage, these visitors felt they should do something to support it. Previously, the diaspora had supported the orphanage by sending funds to buy food and equipment, but according to one woman who had returned on a part-time basis from Canada and who was involved in supporting the orphanage, once in Somaliland they realised that there was more they could do by working with the local community to also provide support. They started to inform the local population about the needs of the orphanage and initiated a discussion about how local people could help rather than waiting for assistance from abroad. They collected funds from local business people and secured support from the local government in Hargeisa to engage professionals (such as doctors and accountants) to bring their expertise to the orphanage. They also set up a 'sponsor a child' scheme for local benefactors, and recruited local women to wash clothes and clean the orphanage for free. More than simply bringing funds, goods and services to the orphanage, the diaspora returnees said that they feel they have helped bring a new mentality to the local population of Somaliland – that they can do something themselves, that they should not sit back simply waiting for remittances or support from the international community, but that they should take responsibility themselves. In the opinion of one supporter, the transfer of values and practices from the diaspora to Somaliland (i.e. the transfer of social remittances) is even more important than the transfer of financial remittances or the sending of charity, as it directly affects local cultural values such as gender roles, ownership over development, patriotism and entrepreneurship.

Private investment: a partnership between local, diaspora and returnee investors

In our survey of private investors in Somaliland, a little more than half (53 per cent) said that they were returnees from abroad. Returnees own most of the larger hotels and restaurants. They are major shareholders in the money transfer and telecommunications companies. In addition, they have opened franchises of large businesses such as Coca-Cola (begun by a returnee who attended university in the United Kingdom). These businessmen and -women are part of a significant trend that is bringing increasing investment into the area. Their actions, however, may have multiple motivations, including personal ambition or a desire for profit, the aspiration to help promote recovery and development in Somaliland, or a combination of both. An investor who had returned from the UK to Sanaag explained:

I often hear people raving about the level of investment that's happening here from abroad. Well, it is most often a favourable conscious decision that the

diaspora make for themselves first and foremost: this is the easiest place we could do this. It would take twice, thrice even, the effort, time and financial prowess to do the same in Virginia [USA]. If it's making a difference, that's an unintended positive outcome. But I don't think the two are that interrelated.

Another man who had returned to Erigavo from the USA was more positive about his motivations, although he agreed that there were advantages to working in Somaliland over the US:

You have to keep things in perspective: I employ 13 people; I provide monthly assistance to a dozen households or more; I'm squeezed for money almost every day by relatives, friends, and complete strangers alike. That's big. I'm needed here and I'm making a difference in the lives of so many people. In the USA, I would be just another number. I try to keep that reality at the forefront of my overall outlook on this place and my people.

Private investment in Somali areas has traditionally operated on a share company basis, with individuals contributing a share of the overall start-up costs for a business and then collecting a share of the profits once they start to accrue. Many companies and businesses in Somaliland, like some of the NGOs, involve shareholders from both inside and outside the region. Some are based predominantly or exclusively in the diaspora; others are returnees; still others are local business people who have never migrated. These kinds of partnerships can also involve a sharing of technical skills – diaspora and returnee partners contribute their skills and fresh ideas, but they find that businesses must also rely on the skills, social networks and cultural capital of local business people. Effective partnerships are those that successfully manage to tap into the different skills of all the different kinds of shareholders.

The Somaliland government's efforts to attract returnees As noted above, the Somaliland administration is no stranger to courting the diaspora and encouraging the return of both people and capital. The government has increasingly become involved in trying to influence investment and remittance flows in order to fulfil its development goals. In 2012, Somaliland established the Somaliland Development Corporation (SDC) with assistance from the UK government and several prominent members of the Somaliland diaspora to attract investment from Somali and non-Somali sources. The Somaliland government has also established a Somaliland Diaspora Liaison Office (SDLO), which provides advice to would-be investors, hosts trade fairs, and lobbies on behalf of the business interests of those who have returned as well as those who want to invest while remaining abroad. The Somaliland *National Development Plan for 2012–16* (Republic of Somaliland 2011) includes a section dedicated to diaspora engagement. The plan commits:

To further facilitate the flow of Diaspora capital and know-how, the government will encourage Diaspora engagement by: (i) Establishing [a] National Diaspora development trust fund, (ii) Developing private investment funds that target the Diaspora, (iii) offering special tax exempt savings accounts for the Diaspora, (iv) Supporting Diaspora community development organisations, (v) Initiating Diaspora youth and professionals volunteers exchange and placement schemes, and (vi) Promoting Diaspora cultural tourism.

In a further attempt to capitalise on the large flows of remittance money being sent to Somaliland and to direct them towards the government's development priorities, the *National Development Plan* includes a scheme to ask Somalilanders living abroad for a US\$1 voluntary contribution for every remittance transaction sent to Somaliland. According to the plan:

The Diaspora will be asked to contribute just US\$1 for every send transaction to a special trust fund. Annual remittance from the Diaspora is estimated to be in the order of US\$500 to US\$600 million. Average remittance is about US\$300, which implies 1.8 million transactions per year on average. Assuming that only 25% of the remitters comply in the first year and that an annual 10% increase thereafter is realized, achieving 65% compliance by 2016, contributions in the first year will amount to US\$0.45 million and are expected to rise to US\$1.17 [million] by 2016. The trust fund will be managed by a trust board with members representing the government, the private sector and civic societies. The fund will be used exclusively to finance capital projects within the five-year National Development Plan. The government will also encourage the Diaspora to invest in the country and will provide the necessary incentives to entice them (ibid.: 320–1).

In 2012, the Minister of Planning, Sa'ad Shire, presented the *National Development Plan* to a mixed group of Somali diaspora, UK law makers, other government staff and members of the public at a briefing held in the House of Commons in London. Members of the diaspora welcomed the Minister of Planning's announcement about the voluntary contribution but asked him why the government did not make the payment obligatory. 'We do not want to force people to pay,' he replied. 'We are confident that if we ask people to make the contribution, they will do so freely.'

These vehicles for channelling investment are experiments that have yet to be proven to be effective. If the Somaliland diaspora and part-time returnees can be persuaded to invest through the SDC or the SDLO, then the government may be able to harness more of the economic benefit of the diaspora. However, while some returnee investors may seek to take advantage of these services, it is likely that most returnee investors will look first to their own family and clan networks to identify business opportunities.

So far, the picture painted here of returnee involvement in Somaliland

shows it as having many positive aspects. One local business leader remarked: 'People from the diaspora have prestige – people here see them as competent. Those from the diaspora can make a difference. They have experience in other countries. They are [also] less ruled by clannism.' While such positive perspectives are widespread, they are not held by everyone, and even some of those who are positive about some aspects of returnee contributions to development are critical in other ways, as will be discussed below.

Diaspora as scoundrels

I began this chapter by suggesting that the return of people from the diaspora constitutes not only an opportunity but also a challenge for Somaliland society. I turn now to consider this more problematic nature of returns.

In recent years, as the number and rate of returns has increased, the impact on urban life in Hargeisa has become more pronounced. While new businesses catering to the consumer needs of the diaspora have opened and have created new jobs for many local residents, there is still a widespread public perception that too many jobs, particularly those requiring high-skilled workers, have been taken up by returnees. Local graduates of the many universities in the city complain that they have to compete with returnees for jobs and often lose out to them, even if the returnees do not have as strong a skill set or understand the local context as well as they do. They see that those who have left Somaliland, even if they have not done well or have returned without money, are accorded greater social status than those who have remained behind. This encourages young people to aspire to leave the country. Yet without travel documents, and very often without much money, the journey out of Somaliland is perilous. Many people travel to one of the port towns and try to buy a place on a dhow travelling to Yemen. These overcrowded and often unseaworthy vessels, as well as unscrupulous smugglers, have been responsible for the deaths of thousands of refugees and migrants. Others try to travel northwards to the north coast of Africa to travel across the Mediterranean Sea, another extremely hazardous journey. Despite hearing about the dangers of these routes, many young people still seek to try their luck with one of them.

Many returnees have prepared for their return by having houses built for themselves and/or their families in Somaliland before they actually arrive back to take up residence. Some of these buildings, as noted, are extremely large, and the families rent them out to international organisations or to commercial users, using the rent as an income source. Some local residents complain that the rent of even basic one-room dwellings has gone up due to the demand from diaspora returnees.

There is a perception among some local Somalilanders that returnee politicians are in fact not as skilled or as knowledgeable as they would like others to believe. Some informants said that they think that many returnee politicians are

only in Somaliland because they are unable to make a living in the diaspora, and as such have returned because of their lack of qualifications and personal capacities. Moreover, some returnee politicians are said to be ignorant of local values and political practices. Like their younger compatriots, they are often referred to as *dhaqan ceelis*, and accused of having ‘lost their culture’. Thirdly, returnee politicians are often thought to be arrogant towards locals in that they do not take time to learn from them about their problems, or to learn from local politicians about how to go about their political work. Also, they are often not physically in Somaliland very much, spending a great part of the year abroad with their families. This gives the impression, whether justified or not, that they are not really committed to Somaliland. Fourthly, and related to the above, some returnee politicians are said to be less pragmatic and opportunistic and less open to local political support through the clan system.

Some returnee politicians are said to openly use and inflame clan antagonism and loyalties to secure their own political careers. However, in the eyes of many local Somalilanders, the idea that a politician would defer to his clan’s interests in all matters is in reality out of sync with how the clan influences politics. Clans regularly make compromises and alliances between each other, and these shifting dynamics are the stuff of which daily political practices are made. In fact, some argue that because local politicians have been through war and mediation together, and have worked together to forge a new state in the aftermath of the conflict, they are accustomed to finding compromises with one another and therefore display a more open political culture than returnee politicians who are often more idealistic and ‘radical’ in their political stance. Returnees are said to often take the clan as a more rigid structure than necessary, and not to engage in clan matters as flexibly as those who understand how clan structures work in contemporary Somaliland. Finally, the fact that political parties are largely funded by the diaspora means that returnee politicians (as well as some locals) are not primarily accountable to the local population in Somaliland, but instead see other members of the diaspora as their main constituency.

Returnees as threats to society Not only do parents of misguided young people worry about the influence of diaspora countries, many local residents complain that diaspora returnees – not just the *dhaqan ceelis* but more broadly – bring with them harmful influences. Returnees are accused of bringing alcohol, drugs and promiscuity into the community and posing a threat to the religious fabric of society. Women’s roles are said to have been affected in inappropriate ways by women who have spent time living abroad and then return to Somaliland expecting to be able to live in the same way or to influence other women to also defy social mores. While it may be true that many women living abroad have been influenced by their experiences, it has also been my observation over the past 15 years, and as noted above, that gender roles have become

much more conservative in recent years. This is therefore not so much a clash between tradition and modernity, but between competing influences on gender norms.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that diaspora return constitutes both an opportunity and a challenge for the returnees themselves as well as for wider Somaliland society. Whereas government and some international actors have tried to guide the influence of the diaspora and of returnees' financial and human contributions in order to maximise their impact on development, these efforts do not appear to have had much success. Where returnees have made a huge difference has been in their own interactions with local residents. This impact has been largely positive, but not entirely so. Their engagement with locals in Somaliland society is sometimes welcomed, but also sometimes resented, particularly where diaspora returnees are seen to be taking away the chances of others, whether in employment, marriage, the securing of affordable housing, or accessing political power.

Those returnees who have been most successful in their return process have achieved this by moving slowly, learning from local people, and coming to understand people's interests, priorities and worries. By gaining the trust of local residents, they have come to be accepted and are seen as having integrated back into Somaliland society. Development investments that have worked best have been partnerships that exploit the resources of both returnees and locals most effectively. Returnees have brought about an accelerated emergence of a wealthy class, and this is not universally welcomed.

Whether, and in which direction, returnees from Somaliland's diaspora will continue to influence their society of origin will depend on their ability to garner this trust and be welcomed and accepted. This will also depend on returnees treading a careful line between cosmopolitanism and loyalty to the social and political identity of Somaliland. Somaliland as a territory has a great deal to gain from harnessing the potential benefits of diaspora and returnee engagement, but such a positive outcome should not be taken for granted.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank her collaborators on this research: Mustafa Awad, Ali Ibrahim Dagane, Peter Hansen, Cindy Horst, Ken Menkhaus and Lynette Obare. Much of the research that forms the basis of this chapter was part of a project commissioned by UNDP-Somalia on diaspora involvement in relief, development and peacebuilding. The views expressed here are entirely those of the author, and should not be taken as the positions of either UNDP-Somalia or the other collaborators in the research.

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