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LIMITS TO POLITICAL  
ENGAGEMENT:  
THE CASE OF THE  
SOMALI DIASPORA

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# Limits to Political Engagement: the case of the Somali diaspora<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The Somali diaspora in Europe is highly segmented, not only along lines of clanship but also in terms of national origins (Somalia, de-facto independent Somaliland, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya) and period of arrival, namely before or after the escalation of the civil war in the late 1980s and the demise of Siad Barre in 1991. A complicating factor also is that self-identification in regional or clan terms is often affected by policies of the receiving countries. The paper addresses the context of the DIASPEACE project, which studies diaspora engagement in political processes in the countries of origin. It examines the factors that limit this engagement. Especially in the case of Somali, who arrived in Europe or other parts of the Global North after 1991, a tendency to be mainly concerned with problems posed by the new residential environment and its institutions can be discerned. These affect gender and generational roles. While some members of the elder generation are absorbed by problems with or in their new environment, others take an active part in peace or development related activities in the Horn of Africa. The younger generation, however, tends to turn their backs completely on Somalia or Africa, for that matter. A distant nationalism or a presence of the country of origin in collective memory, of the kind which has provided an element of cohesion to the Jewish diaspora for two millennia, is not expected to develop in the Somali case.

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was presented at the 3rd European Conference on African Studies, Leipzig, 4 to 7 June 2009 in the framework of a workshop organised by Markus Hoehne on the DIASPEACE theme (*Diasporas for Peace: patterns, trends and potential of long-distance diaspora involvement in conflict settings. Case studies from the Horn of Africa*, DIASPEACE, funded by the EU under its 7th framework agreement, <http://www.diaspeace.org>). I thank Oliver Tappe and Dereje Feyissa for useful comments on a later version.

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## The Context of this Paper

There are two contexts in which this paper can be located. The first is a project that was developed in Bielefeld in the late 1990s. This project focuses on concepts like “globalisation” and “knowledge” and aims at comparing diaspora groups from different African countries in Europe and tries to differentiate between migrant specific forms of knowledge (what you need to know if you are a migrant with a precarious status) and cultural dispositions migrants bring along from their places of origin.<sup>3</sup> In that project outline, the Somali and Ghanaian cases are treated in a contrastive manner. Ghana has had long traditions of precolonial statehood and a long exposure to effective colonialism, Western education, and market integration. The Somali case is at the opposite extreme or close to it. Here, all these factors were weak. The part of the project that dealt with Ghanaians was taken over by Boris Nieswand. He finished his thesis two years ago (Nieswand 2008) and it is about to appear as a book (Nieswand forthcoming 2011). The systematic comparative evaluation of the two cases has only begun. We are making our first contribution to it in an article we plan to submit to *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* (Schlee and Schlee, in preparation).

In the meantime, the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology has become involved in the big EU-funded project DIASPEACE (*Diasporas for Peace: patterns, trends and potential of long-distance diaspora involvement in conflict settings. Case studies from the Horn of Africa*). This project has now provided a new framework for our work on the Somali diaspora, and we here re-focus our research questions to address issues studied by DIASPEACE. These revolve around the question what role diaspora organisations in Europe play in peace processes in their countries of origin.<sup>4</sup> It started with collecting names and addresses of such diaspora organisations and then tried to establish contacts with them to identify those active in peace building. It therefore has an in-built selectivity: it only looks at organisations, and among these organisations focuses on those having some impact on politics “back home”. Moreover, the name itself, which stands for “Diaspora for peace”, has a normative ring. It presumes that the diaspora is working for peace or should be working for peace, for instance by stopping activities that are not conducive to peace such as supporting militias. Also with regard to Somali in Europe, on which the present contribution will focus, such an approach implicitly attributes a high degree of agency in the political and military events in Somalia, which are somewhat ironically called “the peace process”.

Other researchers from our team know better than us, which types of activities by members of the diaspora one can find in Somali politics and how to assess these in terms of conduciveness to peace. Our arguments are based on observations on the Somali diaspora in Germany and England. Günther Schlee also visited Somaliland and Somalia on various assignments and was a “resource person” at the 14th Somalia Peace Process in Eldoret and later Nairobi, Kenya, in 2002/2003 where he could also observe diaspora activities (Schlee 2008: 107–169). Within the DIASPEACE framework, Markus Hoehne (2010a, 2010b, forthcoming 2011) has done much more up-to-date research on the role of the diaspora in Somalia/Somaliland, while Petra Mezzetti has been collecting data about Somali in Italy. The data on Germany and England were collected jointly with Isir Schlee (wife to the other author), who is a Somali (from Kenya), or by her alone.

<sup>3</sup> An exposé can be found at <http://www.eth.mpg.de/people/schlee/pdf/project01.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Partners in the DIASPEACE project comprise the University of Jyväskylä, BICC – Bonn International Center for Conversion; International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO); Academy for Peace and Development (APD), Hargeysa; CeSPI – Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale, Rome; Forum for Social Studies – FSS, Ethiopia; African Diaspora Policy Centre, the Hague; and the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale.

## Waves of Migration and Categories of Migrants

The paradigmatic case of a diaspora, the one from which the concept has been expanded to all other “diasporas”, is, of course, the Jewish diaspora. The spiritual connection of the Jews to the Holy Land has never ceased to exist. The homeland is, in fact, what defines a diaspora. How can there be a dispersal – that is all “diaspora” means – without a source? The Somali diaspora is composed of people who identify with Somaliland, others which identify with a unified Somalia that includes Somaliland, and of numerous people from Djibouti, Ethiopia, or Kenya.

Asylum seekers from Somalia before 1991 might have claimed to be Ethiopian Somali. The Eritrean war of independence established for them the plausible claim to have been drafted into the communist Mengistu Army and to have been discriminated or mistreated in the army as an ethnic Somali. This provided them with a strong case to apply for asylum. Since the breakdown of the Mengistu Regime in 1991, this ground for asylum no longer exists. In 1991, however, the fact that a civil war raged in Somalia finally dawned on the international community. Of course the civil war began long before, but in the 1980s it was ignored. What happened then in the 1990s attracted international attention. This change in perception offered the opportunity to Somali from Kenya, for example, to claim asylum in industrial countries presenting themselves as refugees from the civil war in Somalia. At the same time, i.e. since 1991, Somalian Somalis managed to attain Kenyan ID-Cards through local Somali chiefs who agreed to certify that they stem from the area so as to avoid being confined to refugee camps. While some Kenyan Somali acquired a Somalia identity, some Somali from Somalia acquired a Kenyan identity. The trans-national Somali community thus is composed of groups of many different official and actual origins and these official and actual origins might often be at variance with each other.

Especially among Kenyan Somali and even non-Somali Kenyans who look like Somalis or have Somali friends, we have come across many who claim victim status as members of one or the other persecuted group in Southern Somalia. So, from the start, instead of one homeland we have many homelands, official and unofficial ones. This causes a general climate of illegality and mistrust, which does not make it easy for a European researcher to get into contact with Somali. In the 1980s, a white person who speaks Somali would mumble a greeting in Somali when passing someone in the street, who looks like a Somali. If that person was a Somali he would turn around, answer the greeting, and inquire “where have you learned your Somali?” Mutual introductions would follow. Now that person would suppress any expression of surprise, pretend not to have heard anything, and look straight ahead. White people who speak Somali have become regarded as a danger.

Somali who have been in Germany for a long time are aware of these changes and partly blame the later arrivals for them. We heard statements like “We have been here all the time and we have not done illegal things and we are sending our children to school. Either we have got a job or we have tried to get one, and if we receive welfare payments we do so only in one place. And everything was all right before the large numbers of asylum seekers came after 1991. These now register in Belgium, in Holland, in Germany or in three different *Länder* (federal states of Germany) and collect welfare payments in different spots and they spoil our name with all these illegal things they do.”

Apart from not having one homeland but many, real and fake, the second difference to the classic case, the Jewish diaspora, is the stability over time. While the Holy Land of the Jews provided a stable element of identification over millennia, whatever identification there may be, in the Somali case(s) tends to be a one-generation issue. At the peace conference at Mbagathi, Kenya, a member of the Somali diaspora in Finland, who had come at his own expense and took a great interest in what was going on, told me with regret that his children had become “Finns”.

To assess what is really on the mind of the Somali in Europe and how much space is left there for anything going on in Somaliland or Somalia, one has to talk to them, repeatedly, so that they open up. These talks have to take place without a questionnaire or too much of an interview guideline, so that their own assessment of the importance of different issues shines through. My wife has done many such interviews and we hope to publish them one day as a book. It is on the basis of this experience that I now want to address the DIASPEACE question about the role of the diaspora in peace building at home. It will become apparent that statements about such a role have been very cautious, because diaspora Somali have plenty of other problems on their minds. Some of these will form the subjects of the following sections.

### **Is it Peace at Home or What is on Somalis' Minds?**

This paper is about what Somali in Europe talk about when you come to know them a bit better. It is necessarily impressionistic, because we have not talked to all Somali and there is no way of representative sampling, given the often illegal status and the multiple real and claimed identities of the people in question. The rather personal problems diaspora Somali tend to have also do not lend themselves to a quantifying, questionnaire-based approach.

By putting the focus on all the other things, which appear to be on the minds of these Somalis, I do not intend to deny that there are important political activities by Somali from the diaspora, which have an effect in Somalia. But these have been in the focus of the DIASPEACE project and my research colleagues will have much to say about these activities (see Hoehne et al. 2010 for first results). I see the role of the present paper as complementary to that. It tries to put the political involvement of the Somali diaspora into perspective by showing which energies are absorbed by other things, namely by having to redefine one's person and gender role and generational role in the host countries. All these are factors that limit diasporic engagement in the country of origin.

My wife has mainly talked to Somali women and it is quite clear that their main concern is not Somalia politics but the life of their families in Germany and England. In England, where the consumption of *qaad*<sup>5</sup> is legal, men frequently spend their evenings and nights in the *marfish* (a frequent corruption of the Arabic term *mafrish* – “the place laid out with cushions”, the *qaad* chewing place), an apartment with cushions spread on the ground. Welfare recipients spend a significant proportion of their incomes on this stimulant and an even larger proportion of their time.

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<sup>5</sup> The scientific name of *qaad* is *Catha edulis*, the form of the name mostly used in English is *khat*. The initial consonant in Arabic (and in Harrari, the city language of Harrar, Eastern Ethiopia, from which those who defend the spelling *khat* derive the term) is an emphatic /k/ sound (one of two k-like sounds in Arabic), the one which is usually transcribed as /q/. Often, and for good reasons, the name is therefore rendered as *qat*, or *qaat* (taking vowel length into account), *qaad* being the Somali variant. Often, *khat/qaad* has been called ‘a mild stimulant’. Changing patterns of use and conflict-related problems like trauma or unfulfilled ambitions to migrate, however, have caused debates about harmful effects of *qaad*. Recently, this was the theme of a conference on “The Changing Use and Misuse of *Catha Edulis* (*Khat*) in a Changing World: Tradition, Trade and Tragedy”, organised by the European Science Foundation and the Linköping University, held at Linköping 5–9 October 2009.

Chewing their bundle of *qaad* they may be going again and again through events of the Somali civil war, but these talks tend to be repetitive and inconsequential. If the pun is permitted, they can be said to be chewing the *qaad/cud*: to be ruminating.

The influence of diaspora Somali men on their children tends to be limited. *Qaad* chewers sleep a lot during daytime, and schoolchildren tend to do so at night. Apart from that there is a gender problem, or more specifically a problem with being a man. Unemployment affects Somali men more than women, because women tend to play a more domestic role anyhow. Often, women in the Somali diaspora are the heads of the family. Authorities and welfare institutions tend to assist women and apartments and bank accounts are in the name of the wife. This may be motivated by the – probably quite realistic – assumption that assistance to the mother is more likely to benefit the children, that the mother is the stable element of the family, that men come and go and might not be of much use even while there.

In case of domestic violence or quarrels in Somalia, the wife would leave and seek refuge with her father or brother. The husband is left with the children and tries to cope for a couple of days. Then he will go to get his wife back. She might not consent immediately and can specify her conditions. Also her male relatives will ask her husband for explanations, might demand apologies, and make him promise betterment. In Europe, by contrast, the wife can turn out the husband, if necessary with the help of the police. The husband will have to look for a sleeping place at a friend's, and his prospect may be that nobody comes to fetch him back.

Anecdotes illustrating the new gender relations abound. One is about a man who comes back home late from the *marfish*. He finds a big plastic bag in front of the apartment door and concludes that his wife has turned him out. With a sigh he picks up the bag and goes to the house of a friend. Between night and dawn he rings the bell and succeeds in waking him up. Inside the house, he opens the plastic bag to take out his pyjama. But the bag is full of kitchen waste. It is only now that he understands that this time his wife has not turned him out but just wanted him to take the rubbish down to the dust bin.

One can hear many such jokes about men in the Somali diaspora. Men seem to have turned into comical figures. The crisis of manhood is connected to a crisis of patriliney, the organising principle of Somali society. Especially in England, couples sometimes claim not to be married so that they are allocated two apartments (community housing) of which they can then rent one out. Children then take their mother's father's name as a surname. In addition, to meet the criteria for recognition as refugees, Somali (and even non-Somali) often claim to belong to the persecuted minority groups in Somalia. The children must then remember their real clan affiliation, their fictive clan affiliation, their official genealogy, their real genealogy, and what to say to whom. More often than not they react rebelliously to all this and prefer to claim ignorance in all these matters. With which clan or movement should these children then identify when it comes to Somali politics? They are clearly lost to any Somali cause. Their future, very often at the lowest end of society, is in England or Denmark or any host country.

Somali seek each other out, live close to each other, or visit each other on the basis of clan affiliation. The youths born in England, also known as "fish and chips", may be aware which clan they are. The street gangs they form primarily reflect neighbourhoods, but as the neighbourhoods, due to the ways in which Somali aggregate, have majority clans, there is also a clan element in the identity of these youth gangs. However, London born Somali youths neither know nor are they interested to know what the bitter fighting between their clans in Somalia was or is all about.

## Identity and Genealogy

As Lewis (1961) described in his classic monograph, the Somali way to talk about social relationships and to map them is “the total genealogy”. All Somali fit into one genealogy. There is one eponymous ancestor called Soomal. Although not all Somali claim to descend from Soomal in uninterrupted patriline, they all derive their descent from him in one way or another. Some claim to be of noble Arab ancestry, of the Quraysh, the tribe of the Prophet, but such Arab ancestors are reported to have married a woman from a group derived from Soomal, and that woman then became the mother of a new clan. So at least through such uterine links all Somali stem from Soomal.

It is the mother’s task to teach children their position in that society. This knowledge is important not only for legal responsibilities and security arrangements, but it also involves marriage options and status considerations, which inform these options. The genealogy of the Somali being patrilineal (apart from the few strategic uterine links between one patriline and another), the genealogy that matters most for the children is, of course, that of the father. Thus the mother does not teach the children her own genealogy but that of her husband, which she has to learn and memorise herself first. It is not a small task, but Somali mothers carry it out diligently. It is important knowledge and the children learn lines of up to 25 names, i.e. up to their patrilineal forefathers 25 generations ago. Father, grandfather, great-grandfather – back to the time of the Prophet, to Aqil Abu Taalib ibn Abdul Mudaalib ibn Haashim, the grandfather of the Prophet, are learned by heart. And closer or remoter patrilineal relationships are reckoned in terms of the number of forefathers (generations) you have to count in your own line of ancestors and that of the other person until you meet the same name. Narrower and wider groups bear the name of the shared ancestor closest to them. The clan structure and the lineage structure refer to these eponymous ancestors at higher or lower levels. Social standing, marriage prospects, and many other aspects of life depend on one’s place in this genealogy. That is why every Somali in Africa knows his or her genealogical position.

For Somali in Europe the matter is more complicated. Many of them have to disclaim their real identities. They claim to be somebody else. Our asylum law demands that you prove individual persecution. Pointing to a tough situation at home or a generally bad security situation is not enough, you have to give specific reasons. That is why Somali seeking asylum often claim affiliation to one of the despised casts or minority groups. These are groups like Midgan, Yibir, or the various groups called Bon (plus a clan name, like Bon Marrexan<sup>6</sup>). Many Somali who in Europe claim affiliation to these groups would not even talk to members in Somalia and they themselves would hide their identity wherever they can, because there is something ritually bad about them. Some of these groups are believed to have powerful blessings and an equally potent curse, they are said to have pre-Somali and non-Muslim origins. A frequent tale that justifies the inferior ritual status of a group is that an ancestor of that group ate from the carcass of an animal that had not been slaughtered according to the proper Islamic procedure, while his God-fearing companions, although they were not less hungry, managed to resist the temptation. Inter-marriage with these groups is avoided. The resulting forced endogamy makes the designation of these groups as “caste groups” plausible. One would normally not claim such a despised origin, but in the Global

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<sup>6</sup> The /x/ in Somali stands for an emphatic /h/.

North such claims may provide one with a history of persecution, which might be useful in claiming rights of residence. Other Somali claim to belong to a ritually clean but small and powerless group like the original city dwellers of Mogadishu, the Reer Xammar. Of course these claims require genealogical adjustments. It is not enough to invent a name for yourself, your father, and your grandfather. That line also has to meet the ancestors of those clans and to fit into their genealogies in some plausible fashion.<sup>7</sup>

Among migrants, this matter is further complicated by the administrative practice in many countries of registering children with their mothers. Spouses often do not bother to get a civil marriage certificate and the Muslim marriage is not recognised by the authorities, or the authority is assuming automatically, and with some reason, that Somali marriages are very instable, as has been explained above. Normally, the second name of a person is the name of his or her father. As European standards demand a family name, the second or third name (that of the father's father) would be treated like the family name. In the case of registering the children with their mother, the name of their mother's father becomes the surname of the children. At this point, the reader is free to guess as what a child, who is not named after his or her father but after his or her mother's father, would be regarded in Somalia. The answer is bastards, as children born out of wedlock. This is the only explanation which would occur to people in Somalia for this pattern of naming if it occurred in Somalia.

One incentive which leads to the same results, namely marriages not being registered by the state and children taking the name of their mother's father as a surname, is that in some countries like England and Sweden separate welfare checks are often higher than family ones. Thus people do not marry officially. They of course undergo a Muslim marriage, which is the only marriage that is of any moral relevance to them, and they feel perfectly legitimate in the social context that matters for them. If you ask Somali whether it is not shameful to be born out of wedlock, or for a mother to claim a wrong identity, or for someone to claim to belong to a despised clan group, etc., they would always reply that this is only for the *kufaar*, for the infidels. All these identities do not really count because they are only made up for the Whites. "We know our real identities", they would say, "we know that the couples in question are properly married, we know the real parents of both spouses, that they have the proper clan affiliation and do not come from a despised group," etc.

But for how long will all this be remembered? Remembered by different people in the same way, so that there is agreement? It is not enough that one of two or more interlocutors remembers the "correct" version of a genealogy. For it to be a social fact, it needs to be agreed upon. The whole system of social identification and belonging is based on shared knowledge. It needs to be remembered by different, even mutually hostile, people in the same way. We admired already the memory of Somali children who have to memorise one line of ancestors of 25 names at a very young age. What if they are growing up in Britain or Sweden and they have to remember their real and fake genealogies of both parents, and their real and fake clan names, and in which situations to use the real identity and in which situations the fake one? They have to keep up both versions all the time. The same applies to the real and fake genealogies of your spouse, your friends ... You better know about everyone you care about not only who they are but also who they claim to be in their dealings with the "host" society, in order not to give them away inadvertently. After how

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<sup>7</sup> Social workers and asylum officials in Great Britain, apart from acquiring genealogical knowledge themselves by interaction with Somali, also consult elders from groups to which affiliation is claimed. There appears to be variation in the generosity with which such claims are acknowledged. "In Somalia, they wanted to have nothing to do with us and here everyone wants to belong to us", is one attitude uttered by members of such caste groups one may encounter.

many generations will all this get mixed up in a hodgepodge of bits and pieces of mutually contradictory information and become valueless? If these children of nobody ever venture back to Somalia, will there be a place for them to fit in?

In Canada, the UK, the US, and occasionally even in Germany, some Somali manage to acquire citizenship. However, they achieve this often under a different name, as another person. Their status is legalised but only as long as they stick to their fake identities. If they tried to change their names and personal data back to the real ones, they would expose themselves as having acquired their status by fraudulent means. They are trapped in their wrong identities for some time.

“Somali” in Europe include a Rendille woman who had worked for some time in Somalia with an NGO, Burji from Kenya who had a Somali grandmother, Somali cousins who helped them craft a plausible hardship story, and, of course, many Kenyan Somali from perfectly respectable clans who have learned a great deal about Somali history and claim to be from persecuted minority groups within Somalia. In one case, the fake biography had come to replace the true one to such an extent that it even became a reality in the contact with close acquaintances. The story goes as follows: Isir visited an old school mate from Kenya, who had made her way to Britain. Isir asked her friend how she got to Britain and her friend started to tell her about her flight from Somalia. Isir interrupted her and told her to tell the truth. “I know who you are, we went to school together!” Only then did the woman, in a hesitating manner, start to recollect the history of her Kenyan self and how she actually came from Kenya to Britain. There is a lot of conditioning to these imagined selves, which almost become real.

Getting one’s paperwork in order and harmonising one’s legal status with one’s actual life is also a problem to Somali who have no fraudulent intentions at all. To whom you are married and from whom you are divorced is known to everyone in a Somali rural community back home. If you need a certificate, you will find witnesses and a local authority that certifies whatever is the case. In Europe it is not reality that is documented, but rather the documents constitute the reality. You are married to or divorced from one person or another according to what your documents say.

## **Alienation**

Can anyone blame Somali migrants of the second generation for being fed up with all these complications and focusing on being Finnish, British, or any host nationality, if they have a legal status secure enough to do so? First generation migrants, however, bitterly resist the loss of the Somali identity of their children. The interviews conducted by Isir Schlee abound with stories of children who had been taken against their will to Somaliland.

We vividly recall the attitude of a sixteen-year-old boy we knew from Münster, Westphalia, and whom we met again in Hargeysa, Somaliland. He regarded his stay there as a waste of his school vacation. He took no interest in his environment and stuck to the television set in his hotel room. He insisted that later his mother would have to pay for a trip for him to England, because having been to Somaliland was not a proper school vacation, and therefore she still owed him a holiday.

Children who grew up in Germany complain about the dirt in Somali towns. To have vast areas littered with waste and to have plastic bags blown everywhere by the wind, in the riverbed, in the streets, and in the tree tops, does not fit the standards of environmental ethics they have adopted in Germany. While the sixteen-year-old from Münster reacted with boredom to his Somali

environment, others react with quite eloquent rejection. For them, Somaliland is not an inhabitable place.

Parents are sometimes worried about their children becoming too westernised and about exposure to sex and alcohol. They send their children back to relatives in Somaliland. Such children are known as *dhaqan baran*, “those who learn the customs”. Some are sent directly to the Somali hamlets, while others meet at clubs in Hargeysa. That is where they are forced to speak Somali, unless they meet enough other kids with whom they can speak Swedish, English, or German. Girls have to stay in the compounds of their host families.

Somali who have been to Europe or North America for some time tend to be immediately recognisable to other Somali. In the market, their strides are longer, they walk faster. The girls and women do not quite know how to wear the *dirac*, the semitransparent coloured cloth wrapped around the body on top of the other garments. Somali women just pull it up a little bit and hold it in their armpit on one side, so that it does not drag through the dirt. Women who have been to Europe have different watches, different accessories, etc. For the trained eyes of the traders at the market, there is always some indication that betrays a person who has been abroad. The diaspora is thus turned into a kind of “cultural” group with a particular set of identifying features or identity markers.

There are many stories of *dhaqan baran*, who tried to escape and get back to Europe. They make their way to Addis Abeba or some other proper capital with embassies and complain to the embassy of their former country of residence to have been abducted against their will. Whatever problems social workers complain about, the difficulties of integrating Somali in Europe seem to be small in comparison to those of integrating youngsters, who have been to Europe, back “home” in Somalia (Schlee 2004).

Our findings on gender and generation specific perceptions and aspirations in the context of the reproduction of ethnic and religious identities at the micro level, within families, resonates with Barth’s observations about Pakistanis in Norway (Barth 1994: 14f, 22f) “(...) each such family unit, though it is a key node of ethnic recruitment, will also be a crucible of cultural difference and contention” (Barth 1994: 15). Barth also observed rebellious wives, (some) parents who do not want their children to be visited by Norwegian schoolmates, daughters who on the onset of puberty are sent back to a presumably more protected social environment in Pakistan. He rightly warns against a projection of “culture” as a homogenous unit, to be defined by its spokesmen, male elders. Even the minimal subunit of such an entity, which (potentially) comprises all age and gender roles, the nuclear family, is as much a unit of reproduction as an arena of cultural contestation.

To move on from the micro level of the family to the meso level of regional development and the global level: Remittances by individual families add up to an economic factor and a political issue. Hargeysa and other Somali towns are changing rapidly. There is a building boom which is primarily financed by remittances from the diaspora. Some disturbances in the flow of payments were caused by the Americans who outlawed al-Barakaat, the major *hawaala* (money transfer) institution in November 2001, assuming that money transfers to or from al-Qaida might have taken place through this channel. Soon after, new institutions like Dahab Shil took over the money transfer business (Reno 2003; Schlee 2006, 2008).

Many families have entire sets of siblings abroad and many elder parents, more often mothers, depend on them sending monthly amounts. Many individuals, as well as the economic development

in general, depend on the continuity of this flow of remittances. Our findings about the attitudes of the younger generation, however, suggest that the remittances might end with the death of the parental generation. The present generation of grown-ups will not have as many responsibilities after the death of their parents and the present young people might well disclaim any and all links to Somalia or Somaliland. Cynics might say that the source of remittances will dry up unless Somalia emits new waves of refugees.

In the rhetoric of the “International Community” and all the donor-driven initiatives that respond to the expectations of this “community”, strong claims are made for the necessity of involving the Somali diaspora and to make them come back to help rebuilding Somalia, using the skills and the political culture they are believed to have acquired while in Europe or America. The same people, who tell the diaspora to come back to Somalia, tend to stress the importance of remittances, and few people worry about the inherent contradiction in this. Remittances will, of course, only continue to flow if the Somali diaspora stay where they are.

Not only Somali youths from Europe and America turn their backs on Africa. Large numbers of young Somali go to other African countries and from there try to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. Others try to cross the Gulf of Aden to go to Yemen. The numbers of them who perish at sea are unknown. (Ciabbari and Bozza 2007, films). Many others end up in precarious forms of existence and will not be of much help to the relatives they left behind.

To come back to the research question of DIASPEACE, namely the influence of the diaspora on peace building or politics and development in general in Somaliland and Somalia, we can only conclude that the interest in Somali affairs tends to be limited to the first generation of migrants. Somali tend to lose their interest in their country of origin fast. In terms of persistence and importance of the memory of the country of origin, they might be found at the opposite end of the scale from the paradigmatic case of a diaspora, the Jews and the Holy Land. Many of those who preserved an interest in what is going on in Somalia, live unproductive lives and do not amass wealth and power that would enable them to have noticeable influence in Somalia. All this is not meant to imply that the Somali diaspora in Europe and North America<sup>8</sup> is of no importance to peace building in Somalia. However, there are factors which limit this importance and these are what this paper has explored.

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<sup>8</sup> The Somali communities in neighbouring African countries would need to be examined separately. In Kenya, apart from Somali communities that have been there longer than the Kenyan state has been in existence, we also find different waves of Somali immigration mirroring, to some extent, the waves we discussed in connection with Europe. There are refugees fled from the Barre regime (prior to 1991), refugees fled from the civil war (since 1991), people who have profited from the civil war and have invested their loot in Kenya, and most recently people who invest ransom money for ships in connection with the now globalised piracy business. Laundering money from Somalia caused a real estate boom in Kenya. Recent migrant waves pushed longer-term residents out of lucrative business niches, and social relations between these groups are correspondingly distant. The activities of these Somali groups in neighbouring countries may be much more closely interwoven with what goes on in Somalia than those of the communities of the distant diaspora discussed in this paper. Recently, Tabea Scharrer (2010) has taken up research about Somali in Kenya with a focus on religious convictions.

## Appendix: Three excerpts from an interview

Isbedelka nololeedka Familiga Soomaaliyed ee Yurub ku nool.

### Changing lives of Somali families in Europe

Interview with Saado Abdi and Shamis, Borgholzhausen, 03.10.1999

Interviewer: Isir Schlee

Transcription: Hussein Abdi, Isir Schlee

Translation: Hussein Abdi, Isir Schlee, Günther Schlee

From this interview, three passages, §§ 1-8, §§ 20-25, and §§ 38-43 have been selected because they illustrate the changing gender roles discussed in this paper.

*Questions in italics.*

Somali text in ordinary characters.

**English translations in bold.**

1. *Isir: Maxaa iska bedeley nolosha reerka Soomaaliyed kadib markii Yurub la soo galey?*

***What changed the life of the Somalis later, after they came to Europe?***

2. Saado: Dumarka ayaa waxay heleen xorriyyad badan. Wey u fiicantahay in kasta oo aanay dhaqankooda ahayn. Taas marka layis weydiiyo gees waa ka khalad, markaad kulturkaaga [dhaqankaaga]<sup>9</sup> ka tagtid. Geesna ragiibaa khaldan oo leh: Naagtu maxay wax u maamulaysaa? Magacii faamliga reerwalba naagtii baa ku qoran, immika aniga oo kale Cabdi baa ku qoran, famliga, caruurta, lacagta, guriga, biyaha iyo laydhka.

**Saado: The women got too much freedom. It is good for them but it is not Somali culture. So if we ask one another we think it is wrong, if you leave your culture. On the other hand the men are wrong, [asking] ‘why is this woman ruling?’ The family gets the name of the wife, like in my case, everything is under my name Abdi, the family, the children, the money [bank account, welfare], the [rent of the] house, water and electricity.**

3. *Isir: Maxaana taa keenay?*

***What caused this situation?***

4. Saado: Iyagu waxay yidhaahdeen dumarkaanu anagu aaminsanahay, marhadii ninku aanu nin shaqaysanaya aheyn, dadkuna ay qoxoonti yihiin markaa priorityiga [mudnaanta] iyagaa la siinayaa. Qusuusan magaalooyinku wey kala jiraan, ragga soomaaliyeed qaarbaa ka dooday oo yidhi annaga wadankayaga wuxuu dhaqankiisu yahay in uu ninku ku qoraado kuriga. Waxay yidhaahdeen anaga wadankayaga naagta ayaa caruurta ku qoran. Qofka caruurta ku qoran baana annagu waxkasta masuuliyadii saaraynaa. Markaa magaalooyinku wey kala jiraan, qaarbaa ka yeelay immika magaalo ay ka soo guurtey Mulki oo Lipstat la yidhaa iyadaa ku qoreyd isagaa u

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<sup>9</sup> Insertions in edged brackets in the Somali text contain the ‘proper’ Somali words where actually a European loanword or in one case an Arabic loanword were used. This may reduce confusion for Somali readers and be helpful for a closer analysis of the choice of register.

tegey wuxuu yidhi ha laygu wareejiyo magicii wey yidhaahdeen faamliga kii doona ayaa magaca qaadan kara.

**Saado: They [the authorities, social workers] said they trust the women, since the men are not working and they are all refugees, all the priority is given to women.’ Regrettably the cities differ from one another, there are some men who argue and said this is not our culture, in our country everything is under the man’s name. They [the officers] said: ‘in our country it is different, we register the children and everything in the woman’s name.’ The one in whose name the children are registered is responsible for everything. Yet, the towns are not the same, [for example] there is a town where Mulki used to live and was registered called Lippstadt where she was registered, and he [her husband] went and said, ‘change everything to my name’ and they [the authorities] said ‘the family can take the name they want’.**

*5. Isir: Soo ma shaqayneyn ninku?*

***Was the man working or not?***

6. Saado: Wuu shaqayneeyey, isaga oo shaqaynaya ayey iyadu ku qoreyd. Hadda Munister waxay ku leeyihiin annagu shaqaba kuba lihin ninkii magaciisa wuu ku jirikaraa meesha laakiinse qofka horeeya ee waxkasta aan kuqoraynaa waa naagta. Markaa problemadaa [dhibaatooyinkaa] ayaa iska horkeenay dumarka Soomaaliyeed iyo ragga. Ragiina ma ogola in naagtii ku qoraato. Iyagoo aan waxba meel kalatageyn ayey ka dhaadhacsantahay wey kibirtey.

**Saado: He was working, but despite that everything was under her name. Now in Münster they say ‘it is not our business, the name of the man can be there but the person whom we list first and in whose name everything is written is the woman.’ Now the problem is that this [arrangement] sets up Somali wives and husbands against each other. The husband does not agree to be registered under his wife’s name. Even without any other disagreement the husbands say that the wives have become conceited.**

*7. Isir: Sidii Soomaaliya maaha miyaa?*

***This is not like the [situation in] Somalia, isn’t it?***

8. Saado: Maaha. Soomaaliya biilbaa la siinjiray, ta labaad Soomaaliya ninku waxbuu maamulijiray, isagoo maal leh oo wax leh ayuu biil siinjiray lacag masruuf ah. Oo uu leeyahay masruufkaa qaado intaas uun bey wax ku laheyd. Haddase waxaweeye waxkasta oo dhaqaale ah oo uu shaqeeyo wey la ogaan kartaa Soomaaliya waxaa jirtey boqolkii reer reerbaa ku jiray ninka iyo naagta ay isla shaqaystaan waxoodana ay isla ogyihiin. Laakiinse majooratiga [inta badan] ninka wixiisa naagu may ogeyn. Kenya in ay ka jirtaan u malayn.

**Saado: It is not. [First] in Somalia they get [household money] every month, and, secondly, the man is in charge, the wealth [finances, fortune, animals] is his, and he has got to give her something every month for the livelihood [of the uterine family]. He says ‘have it’, ‘take this household money’; that is all what he owes her”. Now she might know everything about his habits and his work, [but] in Somalia there is one family in a hundred in which husbands and wives work together and share knowledge about everything. But in most cases the wives do not know about the things of the husband. I think in Kenya it is the same.**

[...]

20. *Isir: Dumarka Yurub ayaa u nolol fiican miyaa?*

***For the women, life is good in Europe, isn't it?***

21. Saado: Haa, Yurubna dummarkii ayey siisay prioritygii [mudnaantii]. Ragii soomaaliyeedna maskax ma hayaan. Si markaan u eego ragga ayaa gardaran, waxa loo baahan yahay in waddan hadii aad timaado dhaqankiisii wax ka qaadatid. Halkan naagta ayaa guriga mas'uul ka ah oo wax kasta ku qoran. Markaa hadii ay ninka iyo naagtu islaayaan ninka ayaaa baxaya oo naagta ayaa guriga u hadhaysa.

**Yes, in Europe they give the priority to women. The Somali men have no brains. The way I see it, the men are wrong [insisting on their culture]. To some extent you have to follow the customs of the place you have come to. Here, the woman is responsible for the house and everything is in her name. Now, when husband and wife quarrel, the man leaves and the woman gets the house.**

22. Soomaaliyana ninka yaa guriga mas'uul ka ahaa markaa marka leysqabsado naagta ayaa iska tagi jirtay. Soomaaliya waa laysku dili jiray, laakiin waxay leehiin Yurub ayaa dhibaataada keentay. Naagahayagii Yurub, Kanada iyo Maraykan ayey ku kibreen, waa khaladka la kala fahansan yahay. **In Somalia the husband is responsible for the house, and when they quarrel, the wife leaves. In Somalia they fight [as well], but they [the men] say that Europe brings the trouble. 'Our women become arrogant in Europe, Canada and America', that is a common [but nevertheless] wrong statement.**

23. Dad kala aargoosanayaana wey jiraan. Qof soomaaliya ku soo xumeyn jirey naagta, oo ay naagtuna halkan kaga goosanayso. Markaa problemka faamliga soomaaliyeed aad buu Yurub ugu badan yahay. Caruurtii iyo naagtii halka dhex yimmaado, had iyo jeer hooyadii waa u jajabantahay caruurtii.

**These people [the women] are taking their revenge. Someone who used to mistreat his wife will be given trouble by her when they come here. Now there are many problems Somali families face in Europe. He [the father] interferes between the wife and the children, every now and then the mother gets hurt by the children.**

24. Haduu yidhaahdo meelbaan ku yara ciyaarayaa, haduu *disco* barto hooyadii waxay jeceshahay in ay qariso, laakiinse aabihii wuxuu leeyahay 'maxaad u samaynaysaa? Ilmo cad ma raacikartid,' qarkood. '*Disco* ma tagi kartid', ilmuhu markuu *teenager* [qaan-gaadh aheyn] lix iyo toban ilaa sideed iyo toban intuu ku jiro wey isku dilayaan.

**When they say they want to go out and play a bit, [and] when they have got used to the disco the mother wants to hide it, but the father says 'Why are you doing such things? You cannot go with white children', some of them say. 'You cannot go to the disco', when the children are teenagers, sixteen to eighteen, they quarrel.**

25. Waxaa weeye ileyn halkaneynu keenee in aynu sasabno mooyee in aynu ilmihii debeda u eryin. Problemkaa labaadna wuu jiraa oo caruurtana wey isku dilaan. Markaa aad iyo aad ayey soomaalidu ugu dhibqabtaa, qusuusan faamligii waxaa ku dhacay bur-bur, marka aabihii iyo hooyadii kala tagaan caruurtii waxa laga yaabaa in ay hooyadii ka xoogbataan.

**We are the ones who have brought them [the children] here, so we just have to talk to them patiently and not to throw them out. There is also another problem: they quarrel also with the children. Now the Somali have very, very serious problems, for example, when the family is disrupted, when father and mother separate, it is possible that the children become too strong for the mother [to manage].**

[...]

38. [About Sweden] Soomaalidu waa kala degaan waxay sameeyaan markay kala degaan lacagtii ninkii gooni buu u qaadanayaa, guri gooniya ayaa la siinayaa. Famligiina lacagtii ay qaadan jireen ayaa la siinayaa, markaa kuwaasi waxay ka eegaan iqtisaadi [dhaqaale] si ay wax ugu kordhaan.

**The Somali separate so that the man gets money and an apartment of his own. And also the family still receives the money they used to get, in such a way they expect the income to increase.**

39. *Isir: Laakiin way wada joogaan miyaa?*

***But they [really] stay together, don't they?***

40. Saado: Haa, way isu yimaadaan, oo laysku qabtaa, la ashtakeeyaa oo dhibaato soo gashaa.

**Yes, they come together and get hold of each other, and when they are reported to the authorities, that is when the trouble starts.**

41. *Isir: Jarmal laakiin waxaasi ma jiraan miyaa?*

***But in Germany there are no such cases, right?***

42. Saado: Maya majirto, waa *very rare* [way yar tahay]. Sweden bay u badan tahay iyo Skendaneefiankaba, Hollandna way jirtaa. Markaa dadkaa naftoodu dee magacii Soomaalida ayay xumeeyeen. Joornaal soo baxay oo markaan tagay walaalkey akhriyeyey ayaa wuxuu yidhi xisaab baa la sameeyaa sanadkii Sweden inta caruur aan aabo lahayn dhalata, Soomaalida ayaa u badatay sanadkii dhaweyd oo joornaalka ayay ku soo qoreen.

**No, there aren't, it is very rare. It happens often in Sweden and in [all of] Scandinavia, it also happens in Holland. Now these people themselves are spoiling the name of Somalia. One newspaper which appeared when I was there [in Sweden] and which my brother was reading said that in a yearly count of the children without a father born in Sweden, the Somali were the majority just last year.**

43. Waxaa la yidhi Soomaalidu waa dad Muslim sheegta caruurta aan aabaha lahayna iyaga ayaa u badan. Waxaa weeye naagtii iyo ninkii waa kala separate dowladii buu lacagtii gees ka qaataa, naagtiina sanad kasta way dhalaysaa. Waxay leedahay saaaxiibkey baa iga dhalay.

**It was said [in the newspaper] that the Somali are a people who pretend to be Muslims and that there are many fatherless children among them. The reason being that wife and husband separate according to state law so that he gets his own money, and the wife has a child every year. And she says my boyfriend begot them.**

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