
Conflict in Somalia: International Migration Ramifications

di

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Abstract: Il protrarsi del conflitto in Somalia ha causato un fenomeno migratorio di notevole complessità. La diaspora che ne è risultata si inserisce in una dinamica transnazionale straordinariamente attiva che contribuisce sia alla sopravvivenza economica che al caos nel paese; nello stesso tempo, gli avvenimenti nel paese, attraverso clan transnazionali e obblighi familiari, influiscono sulle vite dei somali all'estero. Inoltre, le condizioni dei paesi ospitanti tendono a intensificare, attraverso l'isolamento culturale, quegli aspetti della società somala che contribuiscono ad intensificare la spirale della violenza in Somalia.

Somalia, a country without a functioning government for almost two decades, represents one of the major security and human rights tragedies of our times. Civil strife and clan warfare have decimated much of the country, forcing the civilian population to flee repeatedly. It has currently resulted in the almost complete evacuation of Mogadishu, where the fragile Transitional Federal Government (TFG) is centered. Much of the country is controlled by radical Islamic factions at war with the TFG.

This protracted situation of generalized violence, beginning with the insurrection against the Said Barre government in the late 1980s and its ultimate fall in 1991, combined with repeated periods of extreme drought, have created a mass migration situation effecting what has been estimated to be about one third of the country's population. From a population of between 7.5 and 9 million, over 1.4 million have been displaced internally, while somewhere between 1 and 2 million have migrated across the political borders of Somalia into neighbouring countries (principally Kenya Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Yemen), or through secondary migration, to other African countries (Libya and South Africa), to Europe (primarily the UK), and to North America¹.

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¹ Demographic statistics concerning Somalia and the Somali emigration are, of course, based upon approximations and very little hard data. Conditions in Somalia, at least for the past 20 years, have not been appropriate for conducting a reliable census. Physical and political conditions in the countries neighbouring Somalia prevent accurate and thorough registration of migrants.

This situation has created a migration of not only biblical proportions, but also one of considerable complexity. Understanding this migration requires reviewing the characters and political forces involved in Somalia's last decades of violence and chaos²; it requires, moreover, a consideration of the specific transnational nature of Somali society that distinguish it, and its migration, from that of other major migrations, even those of other transnational societies³.

As with many protracted African civil conflicts, the war in Somalia eventually involved the active military participation of its neighbours; in 2007 Ethiopia, with Western support and at the invitation of the TFG, invaded and remained in Somalia until early 2009, increasing the level of violence and human rights abuses even further. Since the Ethiopian incursion was intended to prevent an immanent fundamentalist Islamic takeover of the country, and involved a country that was Somalia's historical enemy, it gave a nationalistic and religious dimension to the

The situation concerning figures of Somali populations in industrialized countries is no better. A large proportion of Somalis currently living in industrialized countries are living there out of a regular immigration status; they either have never applied for asylum or another regular immigration status, or have been rejected for such status. Since forced exclusion to a war zone contravenes international accords, most Western countries do not deport failed Somali immigration applicants, and they are simply given written expulsion orders; such people tend to remain in the host country out of status. There is also a considerable amount of unauthorized movement from one host country to another. Statistics on irregular immigration are based upon extrapolations from records of people who have actually been in contact with the police. The multipliers used to produce these extrapolations are highly subject to political influence and do not reflect variations in the intensity with which the police search for and apprehend illegal immigrants; thereby, these figures are more of political than scientific use.

² For a detailed discussion of the political forces leading to the violence and forced migration from Somalia, see Lindley, 2009.

³ Such considerations are not, however, without practical and political implications concerning asylum. The extent of the chaos and tragedy in Somalia is so great that the natural humanitarian response would be to urge international protection and assistance to all Somalis who have fled. Most Western countries will not forcibly repatriate Somalis, in accordance with international agreements not to return people to areas affected by generalized, life threatening violence. Nevertheless, the security situation in Somalia, the multifaceted nature of the emigration from that country, and the transnational nature of Somali society have created circumstances in which conformity of many Somali asylum claims with internationally accepted protection instruments is far from obvious. The asylum adjudication boards or authorities of the various host countries have responded to this situation with understandable inconsistency, from some granting some form of protection to almost all Somali asylum applicants, to others rejecting a significant number but allowing them to remain in the country out of status, to yet others refusing to consider certain cases and deporting the applicants to a third country, where they would allegedly be safe.

Since deliberations leading to decisions on individual asylum claims are not, in most countries, judicial proceedings and are generally not made public unless the applicant contests the decision in court, it is difficult to discuss the rationale behind these decisions or the inconsistencies from country to country. Moreover, since the legal instruments involved have proven themselves to be open to very wide interpretation and the nature of the Somali emigration is so multifaceted, it would be foolhardy to voice an opinion on the rectitude of any particular country's adjudications of Somali asylum claims. While UNHCR has recommended granting some form of protection to all, or almost all Somali applicants (UNHCR 2005, 2009), it is clear that many Somalis represent situations which would contravene granting protection if international and European asylum instruments, all of which have been approved by UNHCR itself, were interpreted and applied strictly.

conflict⁴. In reaction to the foreign, Christian invasion, radical Islamic factions such as the Shabab, with a nationalistic/ Islamist agenda, gained support, and as of this writing they occupy a good part of Mogadishu and most of the country to the south of the capitol. The Shabab has compounded the war related human rights violations with abuses related to fundamentalist Islam and the imposition of Shari'a; it has conducted public extra-judiciary executions, stonings, and punishment of thieves by amputating hands and feet. Furthermore, it has been credibly alleged that the Shabab is connected to Al Qaeda and has an internationalist agenda.

While the Ethiopian troops were in Somalia, much of the violence was centered on the invading foreigners, but after their departure, the clans and the radical Islamic groups who gained prominence during the invasion have turned on each other and on the TFG. The TFG is supported now only by a 5,000-man strong UN peacekeeping contingent; it is generally agreed that if the UN troops were to withdraw, the TFG would fall within hours⁵. Much of the violence resulting in substantial flight of the civilian population involves, however, conflict between clans and competing Islamic groups.

This tragic situation is made even worse by near famine conditions caused, at least initially, by a severe drought wracking central Somalia. The drought is killing off much of the Somalis' grazing stock. Since Somalia is a pastoral, and not an agrarian society, war has a less direct effect on the food supply than it does in societies where planting and harvesting can be interrupted or crops burned, but the pervasive violence and clan corruption interfere with the distribution of aid. Even more significantly, major aid donors, such as the US, have cut down aid supplies because they fear that the food will be channelled to Al Qaeda, who will sell it and buy arms. The war also, of course, interferes with the operations of NGOs providing aid and medical care. The threat of famine is especially serious in a very poor country such as Somalia, where 45% of the population suffers from mild malnutrition even under circumstances not directly affected by either the conflict or the drought.

The Somali response to these cataclysmic events was strongly conditioned by the transnational nature of Somali society, a factor informing almost every aspect of Somali migration and central to Somali society in general. In reference to Somali society, however, the term "transnational" goes considerably beyond what was intended by Randolph Bourne in his essay introducing the concept⁶. For Bourne, a transnational society, with America as the model, was a multicultural society in which each immigrant group could maintain its own culture and emotional links to its country of origin. For Somali society, however, the term implies a society in which ethnic and clan identities supersede legally determined

⁴ For a detailed analysis of the background to the Ethiopian incursion, see Menkhaus, 2007. For the human rights situation up to 2008, while the Ethiopian troops were still in Somalia, see Human Rights Watch, 2008.

⁵ Gettleman, New York Times, 17.09.09.

⁶ Bourne, 1916.

national identities and borders to the point in which legal status, physical barriers, and conventional categories of self-identification are rendered almost irrelevant.

The concept of transnationalism has, of course, undergone considerable transformation since Bourne's 1916 essay. Technological developments during the last century have created transportation and communications possibilities and economic contexts that have substantially changed the significance of national cultures and boundaries. In light of more recent treatments of the concept⁷, Somali society may seem more of a paradigm case than an extreme example. Nevertheless, while the transnational nature of contemporary Somali society has made use of some modern technological developments, the transnational nature of Somali society essentially predates these advances and in its essence, is not dependent upon them. While the internet, cell phones, and air travel have facilitated Somali transnationalism, Somali society has long been transnational not only in a cultural sense, as Bourne's definition of the concept had implied, but also in a political and economic sense, corresponding, *avant la lettre*, to more modern definitions of the concept.

It would be illusory to imagine that discussions of the transnational character of Somali society do not have serious socioeconomic and socio-political implications. The turmoil in Somalia that has, in part, created the Diaspora has a fairly well-documented relationship to international fundamentalist Islamic organizations that have overtly threatened the security of several countries⁸. The intense involvement of Diaspora Somalis in the political affairs of their country of origin, documented on all sides of the conflict, raises questions as to how these repercussions of transnationalism should be viewed.

Moreover, even in terms of the Diaspora society itself, the repercussions of Somali transnationalism are evident and problematic. Poverty and unemployment levels of Somali immigrants are the highest of all immigrant groups in every relevant resettlement country in the industrialized world. While much of this unfortunate situation can be attributed to racism and cultural intolerance on the part of the host society, even with the best and most culturally sensitive intentions, members of a Western, secular society have trouble integrating an immigrant group that rejects secular life even on simply an economic level.

In addition, transnational Somalis have brought the social and political divisions that made life impossible for them in Somalia to their countries of resettlement. For that reason, Somalis have not been able to coalesce politically in order to insist upon rights, access benefits, and form effective ethnically based mutual assistance societies in their host countries.

The transnational nature of Somali society has been manifested, in its most obvious form, by the constant to and fro migration of Somalis across national borders. These movements take place not only between Somalia and its neighbouring countries, but also across continents – from countries of resettlement,

⁷ Because of its extension over several disciplines, the bibliography on transnationalism is immense. A good discussion of the various facets of the concept as applied to the contemporary contexts, and an extensive bibliography, can be found in Vertovec, 2009.

⁸ Ibrahim, 2009; Sobel, 2009; Gettleman, 22.07.2009.

regular or irregular – back and forth to Somalia. In recent years hundreds of thousands of Somali emigrants have returned to Northwestern Somalia (Somaliland), which has been judged relatively safe for return; many of these people, however, maintain the immigration status they had received abroad and travel back and forth between Somaliland and their country of resettlement⁹. There has also been a much smaller but still significant back and forth movement of Somalis between violence-ridden south Somalia and countries of asylum or resettlement¹⁰. Somalis also move, frequently in an irregular fashion, between countries of asylum resettlement, both from camps in neighbouring countries to industrialized countries and between industrialized countries.

The fluid nature of Somali migration is so pronounced that observers have referred to Somalis as “transnational nomads”¹¹. Although 60% of the Somali population has, in fact, nomadic background, the term is, nevertheless, unfortunate not only in that it implies that the nomadic background of Somali society has somehow influenced the migration choices of even Somali doctors, scientists, and university professors; it, more importantly, mistakenly reduces the transnational nature of Somali society simply to a matter of movement.

The transnational nature of Somali society is, in fact, so multifaceted that, in terms of self-identification, the individual Somali’s migration from one country to the next, or his location in any specific country, becomes of only minor importance. Wherever they happen to be located, the large majority of Somalis remain, in essence, Somalis, with their religious, family, and especially clan affiliations and attitudes intact. Moreover, just as these affiliations superseded national identity when Somali émigrés were in Somalia, they remain the lines of primary allegiance for Somalis in the Diaspora¹².

Of course, this forced Somali emigration is, in essence, very new. Although there has been Somali emigration to Europe and the Middle East for more than a century, such migrations were essentially temporary, labor related, male migrations that did not establish Somali communities outside the Horn of Africa; it followed classic labor related migration patterns in which the migrant accumulated capital, which he sent to his family or eventually brought back with him to his country of origin. Somali families did not begin to follow their husbands and fathers until after Somali independence in 1960 and the forced migration caused by generalized violence¹³.

Moreover, since this immigration has taken place, for the most part, during a period of ongoing and extreme turmoil in Somalia, it could be argued that it is only natural that a great amount of the expatriate communities’ attention and energies

⁹ Sheikh and Healey, 2009

¹⁰ Roble and Rutledge, 2008

¹¹ Horst, 2006

¹² For a discussion of clan affiliations and their influence on Somali community organizations in the Diaspora, see Griffiths, Sigona, and Zetter, 2005.

¹³ Kleist, 2004

are drawn to events back home¹⁴. Nevertheless, comparisons with other groups that have migrated under quite similar circumstances, e.g., Afghans and South Sudanese, indicate that the ties that expatriate Somalis have with their country of origin, and with Somalis in other parts of the Diaspora, have a dynamism, persistence, and a degree of activity that distinguish them substantially from those of other migrant groups.

The Somali migration is an authentic Diaspora in which the expatriate community plays an essential role in the lives of both those Somalis still living within the borders of the homeland and those in other parts of the Diaspora. In like fashion, family, friends, and clansmen in Somalia and throughout the Diaspora play a deciding role in the lives of the Somali émigrés. This role is appreciably more complex than simply sending remittances back to relatives in the country of origin, which is the case with many immigrant groups. Not only are these remittances of such dimensions that they are essential to the Somali economy¹⁵, sending remittances is a major factor in the life of the migrant.

This issue of remittances is, in fact, frequently a major factor in the decision as to who migrates. In poverty stricken Somalia it is often the family who decides whom its meager resources will sponsor for emigration, basing its decision upon the capacity of the individual to send remittances to those remaining home or in a camp in a neighbouring country. The decision concerning migration thus is made in a transnational context, with the migrant's ability to sustain on-going, practical

¹⁴ With the exception of a fairly large number of studies dealing with the issue of Somali remittances and some general articles concerning the social service needs of Somali migrants, there has been surprisingly little research on the structure of Somali expatriate communities and how they relate to the situation and population in the country of origin. A good deal of the problem is most likely the result of the unreliability of expatriate Somalis to act as informants or their unwillingness to do so. Somali expatriates quickly understand that there are some important aspects of Somali society that clash with values and attitudes in most host countries, e.g., clan affiliations and loyalties superseding loyalties to the state; the pervasive role of radical Islam; the role of women and the almost universal practice in Somalia of infibulation. It is understandable that it would be difficult to obtain accurate information directly from expatriate Somali informants on these critical matters. Studies on expatriate Somali communities seem to skirt these issues almost completely.

Moreover, a large percentage of Somali expatriates are in irregular immigration status in their host countries. The most significant case is the UK, thought to be the industrialized country hosting the largest expatriate Somali community by far. The generally accepted figure of 101,000 Somali residents is considerably larger than the number that could be in legal immigration status. Many of these people could have migrated from other European states where they had, in fact, legal status; in most cases, however, such status does not give the migrant the right to transfer, without a proper legal procedure, to another EU country. Clearly, access to people outside of legal immigration status is difficult, the accuracy of information they provide may be questionable, and their experience and attitudes are very likely to be determined by their immigration status. Unfortunately, observations gleaned from Somali informants seldom mention immigration status of the informants or deal with these methodological problems.

This study has tried to take these problems into consideration when making observations or drawing conclusions concerning Somali expatriate communities. Despite these limitations, however, there is sufficient reliable, external data to allow valid conclusions concerning the nature and structure of Somali expatriate communities.

¹⁵ In 2006 remittances to Somalia were estimated at \$1 billion dollars, or 71.4% of GNP. (Kulaksiz and Purdekova in Munzele Maimbo, 2006.) See also (Chalmers and Hassan, 2008)

links across borders as the deciding factor. Therefore, it is not always his need to flee that determines the choice of who leaves and who stays; it is also his capacity for helping those who remain. Moreover, the pressure to send remittances is so great that it frequently influences the migrant's decisions concerning country of destination and the choices he makes once he arrives there¹⁶.

The issue of remittances is also related to the fairly large number (as of 2003, up to 250/ month) of unaccompanied Somali minors arriving in industrialized countries. Some of these are war orphans, and some are sent out by concerned parents because of the destruction of the educational infrastructure in Somalia. A large percentage of the parents report, however, that the children are considered investments; they are expected to send remittances upon arrival in a country of resettlement¹⁷.

The percentage of children sent with this purpose is probably much larger than the parents' statements would indicate, since it is preponderantly girls who are sent out; girls are considered more reliable and obedient. Moreover, there is a very large rate of defection from the state mandated children's shelters, indicating a good possibility that the children are entering the illegal labor market. Even children who remain in the care system are expected to remit part of their welfare payments. The Diaspora community sometimes sends children who don't meet expectations back to Somalia¹⁸.

Moreover, unlike migrants from other groups, Somalis in industrialized countries send remittances back not only to Somalia, but also to family and extended family in other parts of the Diaspora, principally to those in adjacent countries (Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Yemen), where Somali migrants are generally restricted to camps. Migrants in those countries subsist on UNHCR and NGO distributed rations and, in some cases, the very restricted pastoral and agricultural activities allowed by the host government. For many, remittances from abroad are essential to their maintaining a living standard suggested by their status within Somali society¹⁹.

As with departure from Somalia itself, frequently a migrant's departure from camp in an adjacent country toward Europe or North America is financed by the extended family remaining in the camp, at times combined also with funds from family members remaining in Somalia and even funds from family in other parts of the Diaspora; the remittances the family receives are considered, as is the case with departures directly from Somalia, a return on that investment. It would, however, be an exaggeration to view all remittances as returns on investments. The sense of clan and family obligation among Somalis is so strong that remittances are sent even when no prior financing has been involved. Somalis born or principally raised in the industrialized Diaspora frequently send money to relatives they have never met.

¹⁶ Chalmers and Hassan, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Hannan, 2003.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Horst, *op. cit.*

The importance of sending remittances, and the extraordinarily large amount of funds remitted, has been treated in most studies concerned with the structure of Somali Diaspora society. On the other hand, these studies and others dealing with Somali integration in the West uniformly conclude that the Somalis constitute the economically least successful among the immigrant groups studied²⁰. Beyond noting that the Somalis' generosity in sending remittances has been accomplished, in very many cases, through great sacrifice and even self-deprivation, commentators have not investigated the factors within Somali society that would impel them to such levels of sacrifice.

Field study methodology to deal with this issue is quite problematic, in that much of the money involved is likely to come from the "black" economy, the destination of the remittance is likely to be determined by clan affiliation, and the sender may be out of regular immigration status. These are all issues that Somali migrants do not discuss readily. However, it appears that a model for this degree of financial obligation and sacrifice can, in fact, be found within traditional Somali society. Clan membership involves a strictly enforced system of financial obligations to cover debts incurred by fellow clan members, generally in the case of blood money compensation (*diya*) owed to member of another clan because of an offense. Each Somali is a member of a "*diya*-paying group," which is responsible for paying this compensation²¹.

The Somali, therefore, is accustomed to an ethic in which he is expected to pay obligations incurred by people even outside his extended family to people he doesn't know and to whom he himself has committed no offense. He has then, strictly enforced financial obligations caused by actions of other clansmen. While the specifics of the situation *diya* payments are different, the principles governing the payments are, in fact, quite similar to those implied by sending remittances. In sending remittances, he is simply acting according to clan responsibilities, and a significant percentage of informants report having, in fact, remit funds to cover *diya* obligations²².

Unlike the financial support sent by other immigrant groups to the country of origin, the Somali remittances at times blur the line between expressions of family solidarity and political action. While most commentators of the subject of remittances have stressed the positive, even vital role that remittances play both for individual families and for the Somali economy in general, those same commentators have had to admit that both warring Somali clans and radical Islamic factions causing the chaos and bloodshed in Somalia receive substantial financial contributions from Somalis abroad. These contributions have been seen as a major factor in permitting the ongoing destabilization of the country²³. Such contributions

²⁰ Waters, Ueda, and Marrow, 2007; Muir, 2003; Sare, 2008; Lindley, 2007; Corbyn, 2004 (ICAR)

²¹ Lewis, 1994

²² Lindley, 2006 (London)

²³ As an indication of the importance of Somali Diaspora involvement, on 30 Sept. 2009, the special UN representative for Somalia, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, addressed a public letter to the Somali Diaspora, urging them to support the peace process. The letter also contained a veiled threat that sanctions may be applied to those who support the insurrection against the TFG, offering also forgiveness and amnesty to those who have changed their minds in this respect. It offered the

may be direct, from clan members or radical Muslim sympathizers in industrialized countries, or they may be even unwitting, with funds sent to help a distant relative being channelled, without the donor's knowledge, to the treasure chest of a warlord or an extremist Islamic organization²⁴.

Since such a great deal of the Somali economy depends on the flow of remittances from the Diaspora, it is, of course, very difficult for Western governments wishing to choke off funds to radical Islamic insurgents or war lords to intervene. In 2001, the US government closed down the operations and froze the funds of Al Barakaat, the major agency through which remittances were being transferred, on suspicion that the agency was transferring funds to support terrorists. While nothing was ever proven concerning the allegations of a link to terrorism, the action caused major hardship and economic turmoil in Somalia²⁵. The scale of the negative effects of the action was devastating. Therefore, cutting off a major line for the transmission of funds does not appear to be a viable tactic for curtailing the sources of income for undesirable elements in Somalia.

The contribution of some Somalis to the political chaos of their homeland has not been limited to simply sending money. Even before the 2007 Ethiopian invasion, young Somali men had been returning in substantial numbers to fight, either on the side of the TFG or with the Islamist factions. A report from the Dadaab camp in NE Kenya from Oct. 2006 stated that 500 young Somalis had left the camp to fight in Somalia in recent months, with more poised to go. In Kenya the return to the fight has not been limited, however, to desperate Somali refugees in the overcrowded camps; young Somali men from Nairobi are returning to join the Islamic insurgents, even after the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops²⁶.

The Ethiopian invasion and occupation produced not only a fundamentalist Islamic reaction within Somalia and in the neighbouring Diaspora; it also caused young men from the more far flung Diaspora to return to Somalia to fight, in these cases almost exclusively on the side of the Islamists. The issue was not as much a Somali nationalist reaction against a foreign invader; it was rather the reaction of Muslims against Christian Ethiopians invading their country to fight a Muslim government. Radical Islamist groups such as Shabab capitalized upon the struggle against the infidel and conducted recruitment both in the camps in neighbouring countries and in the European and North American Diaspora. Even after the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops early this year, however, the Shabab still controls much of Mogadishu and the rest of the country south to the Kenyan border. It also continues to recruit, quite successfully, among young men in the Somali Diaspora.

Shabab's suspected links with Al Qaeda and its successful recruitment of some young men from the North American Somali Diaspora to participate in the

assurance that remittances to the TGF would be monitored. Although the letter does not address the issue of Diaspora support of violent factions directly, it can be safely assumed that if there were not substantial Diaspora support of the insurrection and of violent Islamic factions, such a letter would not have been necessary. See also Dessaynayake, BBC Report 12.04.2008.

²⁴ De Wall, 2007; Horst, *op.cit.*; Horst and Gaas, 2008; Aly, 2009; Sheikh and Healey, *op. cit.*

²⁵ Passas and Munzele Maimbo in Biersteker and Eckert, 2008.

²⁶ Aly, *op. cit.*; Hassan, 2009

generalized violence in Somalia has, understandably, aroused a great deal of attention in the press and in among the US and international security community. The geopolitical implications of Shabab's activities are, of course, beyond the scope of this paper. It is necessary, however, to place these events in the perspective of Somali migration. From this perspective, by recruiting young men from the Diaspora to fight in Somalia, Shabab was doing nothing new. As mentioned above, young Somali men from the Diaspora had been returning, either through recruitment or simply spontaneously, to fight in Somalia even before the Ethiopian incursion and the concomitant rise of the Shabab. Moreover, they continue to return, even after the withdrawal of the Ethiopians and the removal of the nationalistic dimension from the issue.

The active participation of Diaspora Somalis in Somali politics, and in the lives of Somalis in Somalia and in other parts of the Diaspora, cuts across divisions of income, class, and degree of social and economic integration in the host society. While young men who are hopelessly stranded in refugee camps and those who have had a less than successful integration in their country of resettlement undoubtedly constitute the majority of those who return to Somalia to participate in the generalized violence, some unquestionably successful Somali émigrés have also returned for this purpose. Of the much-publicized group who returned from the United States to fight alongside the Shabab, several were considered among the most promising young men in the Somali community²⁷.

Travel between Somalia and the Diaspora for political reasons is not, of course limited to Islamic insurgents. Many successful Somali émigrés have returned to participate in the TFG. Several members of the present and previous TFGs have lived for extended periods abroad as refugees. The current Prime Minister under the TFG, Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, is both a Somali and a Canadian citizen. The current president, Sheik Sharif Sheik Ahmed, spent the two years prior to his election in exile in Kenya and Yemen.

There is also movement to and from Somalia for financial and cultural reasons. Many expatriate Somali businessmen have returned, generally to the much safer north (Somaliland), but also when there seems to be a lull in the fighting in the south²⁸. Perhaps more disturbing, however, is the active traffic back to Somalia by girls in order to undergo infibulation. In Somalia, infibulation is almost universal, and it is a practice still considered essential by many Diaspora Somalis. Understandably, hospitals in Europe and North America refuse to perform such operations, and many Somalis travel back to clinics in Somalia to have the operation performed there, where it is legal²⁹.

Bourne's original discussion of transnationalism assumed that the phenomenon depended upon an essentially voluntary act, the immigrant society's active desire to preserve the culture of its country of origin. The pronouncedly transnational nature of Somali Diaspora society is, however, also enforced by conditions in the host society, and therefore, not fully voluntary. Aside from racism, rejection or

²⁷ Elliott, 2009

²⁸ Ferrett, 2004; Maas, 2001

²⁹ Afrol News, article 26.06.2007

ambivalence on the part of the resident black community, general xenophobia, and growing prejudice against Muslims, all of which contribute to the isolation of the Somali community, there are more neutral conditions that make acculturation of Somalis difficult in the West, thereby strengthening Somalis' transnational ties with their own people.

Many of these problems are related to religion: A Somali woman would have trouble establishing a friendship with an uncovered Western woman; a Somali man cannot go out drinking with his Western colleagues; Somalis cannot accept dinner invitations from most non Muslims or eat in most restaurants, etc. The isolation resultant from such conditions creates a situation in which Somalis have no choice but to reach out to other Somalis both in the country of resettlement and abroad.

Studies in the US comparing the social and economic integration of Somalis and South Sudanese, two groups of black refugees having very similar educational disadvantages and both showing similar degrees of war trauma, have shown that the Sudanese, because they are secularized Christians, have fared much better. Even in situations where Islamophobia is not an issue, the anti-secular nature of the fundamentalist Islam practiced by most Somalis has seriously blocked their ability to integrate into a secular, Western society³⁰.

Even early on in the emigration, among many Somalis, cultural isolation and pressure to assimilate produced a counter-reaction, leading them to increase their adherence to aspects of Somali culture, especially Islam. Even before the rise of a fundamentalist Islamic government in Somalia, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), in 2006, which provoked the Ethiopian incursion in 2007, Diaspora Somalis had tended to emphasize the role Islam played in their lives. Refugee women, who had never worn the *hijab*, or Islamic covering, in Somalia wore it after their emigration³¹. Events in Somalia in 2007, the Ethiopian incursion, defeat of the ICU, and the Islamist insurrection against the TFG have only intensified identification in the Diaspora with fundamentalist Islam. The *hijab*, prohibited by the TFG in Somalia, at least right after the fall of the ICU, became not simply a religiously mandated garment; it is a political statement³². Therefore, the trend within the Somali Diaspora seems not to mitigate the factors blocking economic and social integration, but rather to accentuate these factors.

Perhaps equally responsible, however, for discouraging integration of the Somali Diaspora with the host society is the refugee program itself. In the UK, which is home to the large majority of Somali immigrants in the industrialized Diaspora, the refugee program has offered the Somalis so little in terms of security and demanded so much from them in terms of cultural compromise that it has created a situation in which a large percentage of the arrivals in the last several years have avoided the asylum system altogether, thereby limiting the degree to which these immigrants can integrate, emotionally and socially, if not economically, and keeping them firmly anchored, in this sense involuntarily, in a transnational context.

³⁰ Shandy and Fennelly, 2006; Gilbert, 2009

³¹ McGowan, 1999; Tiilikainen, 2003; Afrol News, 19.02.2007

³² Afrol News, *op. cit.*

Commentators have, without exception, skirted the issue of the immigration status of Somalis in the industrialized Diaspora, simply assuming that Somalis in Europe all applied for refugee status. Comparing, however, even the most conservative estimates of Diaspora populations with the official government figures for asylum applications shows that there is little ground for such an assumption. In the UK these figures indicate that at least 50% of the Somali immigrants arriving between 2001 and 2008 did not file asylum claims³³.

Moreover, the official government figures for asylum applications do not give an accurate indication of the attitude of an immigrant population toward asylum. A considerable number of asylum applications are ultimately involuntary: If an undocumented migrant is apprehended at the port of entry, an asylum application is, for all intents and purposes, obligatory; otherwise, he will not be permitted to enter or will be put in detention and eventually returned to the country from which came. Hence, the official figures concerning asylum exaggerate, somewhat, the preferences of migrants toward asylum³⁴.

Voluntarily attempting regularization, however, is a step that would indicate at least a partial commitment to establishing oneself in the new country, and it is a step that many Somali immigrants have, in fact, made. That more than half of the Somalis arriving in the UK since 2001 have not been willing to make that commitment, indicates, however, that we should perhaps look for something beyond the normal culturally based reasons.

It is, of course, tempting to conclude that the Somalis' frequently foregoing chances for a legal immigration status is simply a manifestation of active,

³³ As stated, it is impossible to compile accurate statistics concerning irregular immigration; it is, however, possible to have an acceptably accurate perception of the dimensions of the issue. In 2001, the OECD database registered 43,532 Somali-born residents in the UK. By 2008, that figure had risen to slightly over 101,000, or an increase of about 57,000 in seven years. Aggregate statistics on asylum applications 2001-2005 register about 22,000 Somali asylum applications. Since 2005, the number of applications has not exceeded 2,000 per year, giving a maximum of 28,000 asylum claims registered for Somalis during this period. That leaves a net increase in the Somali population in the UK of about 29,000 for which we have no indication of application for asylum. In the Somali population in general, immigration through family reunion is most likely exceeded by voluntary return of old migrants, now UK citizens, to Somaliland, which is now deemed safe. In short, it seems to be a safe assumption that a large percentage of the UK Somali population never applied for asylum and is living in Britain out of status.

Representatives of the Somali community in the UK have given figures substantially larger than those cited. If those figures are at all accurate, the percentage of Somalis in Britain who are out of status and who have never applied for any form of regularization, including asylum, is appreciably larger. Since, however, there may be political and fund raising motivations for Somali expatriate organizations to claim larger membership, it is perhaps advisable to work with the more conservative estimates. The point concerning the large percentage of out of status Somalis in Britain is made even with the more conservative figures.

³⁴ This discussion pertains, of course, primarily to conditions in the UK and, by extension, Europe. For geographic reasons, clandestine entry of Somalis into the US and Canada is, although possible, quite difficult. The only practical method for entry in these cases is through an organized refugee admissions program. Hence, the large majority of Somalis in North America are in legal immigration status. Moreover, the lesser forms of protection offered in Europe under subsidiary forms of asylum do not exist in North America. Therefore, the Somali refugee in North America automatically enjoys a much more stable immigration status than that accorded to most Somalis in Europe.

voluntary transnationalism: For a “transnational nomad” coming from a failed state, the relationship between the individual and the state, in Somalia, hardly existed; hence, the Somalis’ lack of concern with legal immigration status. The Somalis’ traditional placing of clan, family and religion above relationships to the state obviously has contributed to some degree to their decision not to apply for asylum, but a great part of the cause may well be the nature of the refugee program in the UK.

The type of asylum offered to almost all Somalis in the UK and, for that matter, in the EU in general, is one that encourages them to envisage an eventual return to Somalia and to adjust their lives accordingly. While a very large percentage of Somali asylum claimants are granted some form of protection, and those who fail are seldom deported or detained, the protection accorded to Somalis in Europe is generally not that accorded under the 1951 Geneva Convention, but rather a much more limited asylum that must be periodically renewed and can be revoked if the authorities deem that it is possible for Somalis to return to their country of origin³⁵. Somalis are thereby urged by the immigration system to weigh the consequences of acculturation and, indirectly, to resist aspects of European culture that would make re-entry into Somali society difficult. Therefore, the European immigration authorities must bare some of the responsibility for discouraging Somali integration in the long term and for the maintenance of attitudes on the part of Somalis that are inimical to integration into European society³⁶.

Not only does the type of asylum offered the Somali immigrants fail to provide them with a secure position in the new society, in the UK it also demands that to apply for it, a Somali has to risk his position in his own society. This serious disincentive for Somalis to present an asylum claim is the policy, initiated by the Home Office in 1999, of dispersal of refugee processing. This asylum procedure in essence requires that many Somalis, in order to apply for asylum, disassociate themselves, at least in part, from the British Somali community. Upon applying for asylum in the UK, the applicant is assigned to a processing center generally quite distant from London, where 78% of the UK based Somali Diaspora is located (2001 census). His housing accommodation will be close to the processing center. The applicant has no choice or influence over this assignment.

Under this system Somali potential asylum seekers are forced, therefore, to live in a place where there is, at best, a reduced number of Somalis. In these smaller cities and towns there are public funded refugee community organizations (RCOs) to provide the diverse refugee groups with basic services, and for other refugee groups, the RCOs may be sufficient. The Somali Diaspora community is, however, highly fragmented along clan lines, and there is, under this system, a good possibility that he may be placed in a town with few, if any of his clansmen.

³⁵ The EU is currently discussing granting a more permanent residence status to refugees who have had subsidiary protection for 5 years, but as of this writing, no decision has been made. If such a ruling is put into effect, it will improve the legal status of a large percentage of the Somali asylees in the UK.

³⁶ The Italian immigration system is, in this respect, much more generous than that of other EU countries. It is possible, under the Italian system, if the asylee has a stable work contract, to convert subsidiary asylum to a work related permanent status.

Moreover, some of the RCOs themselves are associated with specific clans and, therefore, may be of only limited use to some Somalis³⁷.

For many Somalis, therefore, applying for asylum in the UK involves weighing the benefits of legal immigration status against cultural isolation. Many may prefer to live out of status with friends and clansmen in a city and neighbourhood of their choice than to live with strangers from different clans, even if those strangers are Somalis, in a city to which they are assigned by the immigration authorities.

In addition, the housing provided in the UK for asylum seekers in the outlying cities has been widely criticized as been sub-standard, and the weekly government stipend of £ 35/ week is hardly enough to keep the asylum seeker out of poverty. In addition, asylum seekers in the UK do not receive free English lessons, intensifying even further their isolation. Moreover, it could be argued that it is not only to a Somali immigrant's cultural advantage, but also to his economic advantage to avoid the UK asylum system.

Just as it is very difficult to access, and thereby study, out of status immigrants, it is equally difficult to study the "black," or illegal economy and the participation of irregular immigrants in this economy. It is, however, a safe assumption that a sizable percentage of the UK Somali expatriate community depends upon work in the illegal economy³⁸. The areas of the country to which asylum applicants are dispersed by the authorities are by design economically depressed areas; it goes to follow that the possibilities of finding work in the "black" economy in a depressed area would be much more limited than they would be in a major population center. Hence, while applying for asylum would give an asylum seeker £ 35/week, it would practically negate possibilities for earning substantially more in the "black" economy. Hence, at least in the short term, many Somalis in Britain would understandably be discouraged from applying for asylum³⁹.

Even in reference to the long term, the economic advantages of applying for asylum are not clear. Unemployment figures for Somalis in the UK seem to indicate, in fact, that immigration status plays less of a role in this vital element of integration than would have been anticipated.

In London, where, 78% of UK resident Somalis live, over 70% of working age Somalis are officially economically inactive⁴⁰. These figures, taken from government sources, can reflect the situation pertaining only to those Somali immigrants who are in legal immigration status and, of course, reflect participation only in the legal labor market. The figures do indicate, however, that even among those Somalis in legal status, the level of their participation in the legal economy is very low.

³⁷ Griffiths, Sigona, and Zetter, *op. cit.*

³⁸ For a general statement concerning the relationship between irregular immigration and the "black" economy, see Moreno Sanchez, 2007.

³⁹ The Somalis are not alone in refusing to apply for asylum because of the difficulty it causes for them to enter the "black" economy. Afghan immigrants to the UK, who are also under strong pressure from relatives to send remittances, report that they avoid applying for asylum in the UK for the same reason.

⁴⁰ ICAR, *op. cit.*

In fact, it is not immigration status, but rather generally the low education level and lack of language skills of the Somali immigrants that is used to explain the serious unemployment problem. Another contributing factor may be the cultural resistance of Somali women, who comprise over half of the migrant community, to enter the work force⁴¹, or the very negative attitudes of Somali men concerning working women⁴². There are, of course, the additional problems of employers' not willing to hire fully veiled women, not wanting to hire men who require time off from work to wash and pray during the working day, or who will refuse to handle pork products⁴³. These situations pertain to Somalis both in regular and in irregular status; hence, labor opportunities are not a clear incentive for a Somali to apply for asylum.

In terms of ability to remain in the host country, for Somalis, remaining out of status has fewer repercussions than it would have for immigrant groups whom the host government could easily send home. Because of the degree of generalized violence in Somalia, the UNHCR has recommended strongly against forced repatriation to any part of that country⁴⁴. In addition, countries of transit in Africa that could be considered safe have serious problems with the Somali influx and are not likely to reaccept Somalis expelled from Europe⁴⁵; hence, the Somalis cannot be removed to those countries. The only out of status Somalis who could be easily removed are those who have received status in another European country or for whom there is documented proof of transit through another European country.

Technically, out of status migrants who cannot be returned to a country of origin or transit can be put in closed detention centers for up to 18 months. In the case of the Somalis, however, the UK authorities have chosen not to detain such people. There are very few Somalis in detention centers who have not been guilty of non-immigration related violations. Hence, for most irregular Somalis, forced removal is not a clear and present danger. Moreover, if the irregular Somali is apprehended, he can always apply for asylum at that point. His previous irregular presence in the UK cannot, legally, influence the adjudication of his asylum claim. Hence, at least in terms of ability to remain in the UK in the near term, filing an asylum claim shortly after arrival would present few advantages.

Hence, for Somalis, an asylum application has more attitudinal, emotional, and intellectual implications than practical function. For the reasons stated above, applying for refugee status seems to imply important immediate social and even economic disadvantages, and while it may open the door to economic upward mobility in the long term, in many, if not most cases that upward mobility does not

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Hassan, 2002

⁴³ See, for example, University of Minnesota, 2004; Serres, 2008.

⁴⁴ The UK Home Office has officially rejected this recommendation. Nevertheless, it has repatriated very few Somalis to south Somalia.

⁴⁵ Since 2007, Kenya has actually closed its borders to Somalis, in violation of its obligations under the 1951 Geneva Convention; nevertheless many Somalis succeed in fleeing to Kenya by bribing corrupt Kenyan border officials. See Human Rights Watch, 2009; although Somalis are recognized as refugees in Yemen, the Yemeni coastguard frequently shoots at boats carrying Somali potential asylum seekers, trying to prevent them from landing. See Medecins sans Frontieres, 2008.

seem to have been realized. Moreover, as stated, failure to apply for asylum, in the case of Somali immigrants, does not place them in immediate danger of detention or exclusion. In addition, since the type of protection almost all Somali asylum applicants receive in the UK is temporary and can be revoked, the British immigration system encourages Somalis to maintain cultural characteristics that will facilitate reintegration into Somali society in the event of a return to their country of origin⁴⁶.

Under these circumstances, it is not difficult to understand why at least 50% of the recent Somali arrivals in the UK have opted to remain in irregular status. Of course, because of language difficulties, education levels, religion, and social customs, integration and acculturation into European society would present problems even more serious than those experienced by other African immigrants. Because of these factors, it is fair to say that the transnational nature of Somali society is in part voluntary, or at least an integral aspect of Somali society itself. On the other hand, because of the weaknesses in the type of protection offered to the Somalis and the cultural and economic sacrifices necessary even to apply for that status, Somalis are encouraged to maintain and even strengthen their international ties. In this sense, a certain amount of Somali transnationalism has been forced upon them.

This involuntary transnationalism caused by current migratory circumstances should, however, be put into perspective. There is ample evidence to support the position that the transnational nature of Somali society is not a product of recent mass migrations, but rather is inherent to Somali society itself and that Somali society was transnational considerably before the late 1980s, when the Said Barre government began to disintegrate and large numbers of Somalis began to emigrate. While generalized violence and famine have sent hundreds of thousands of Somalis across national borders and even to distant continents, the pre-existing transnational nature of Somali society has determined the social, political, and economic context in which this migration has taken place.

The present borders of Somalia, which were fixed through post-WWII UN negotiations, left a substantial portion of the ethnic Somali population outside the country: in Djibouti, the Ogaden in Ethiopia, and the Northern Frontier District of Kenya; in all these areas ethnic Somalis constitute the large majority of the population. With the exception of the Ogaden War with Ethiopia of 1977, which was at least as much a product of Cold War manipulation of two client states, the political machinations of two dictators (Haile Miriam and Said Barre), and a general, historically based antagonism between Somalis and Ethiopians exploited by Said Barre, as it was an expression of Somali national solidarity, national borders separating them from their ethnic brothers do not seem to have been a major problem for most Somalis⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the complex and sometimes contradictory relationship between transnationalism and refugee status under the 1951 Geneva Convention seen as a permanent solution, see Van Hear, 2006.

⁴⁷ Before independence there were attempts by the Somalis to negotiate incorporation of the Somali populated areas of Kenya and Ethiopia into Somalia; such attempts failed primarily because of the very effective leadership of Kenya and Ethiopia during that period. See Pansomalism in Metz, 1992.

Moreover, even despite periodic attempts by the various governments concerned to close borders, these borders, mostly running through under-populated and rather rough terrain, have been very porous⁴⁸. Traditionally, Somali herdsmen have disregarded borders when looking for grazing lands. School children from Somalia regularly attend classes in the Kenyan city of Mandera, across the border; Mandera also provides the market for the sale of Somali and Ethiopian cattle. To most Somalis, therefore, a border is merely a sometimes bothersome administrative detail; it does not define the limits of an entity with which he identifies culturally or practically.

The unwillingness to regard national borders as an important defining factor also finds expression on an official, legal level. The Somali citizenship law, established two years after independence, in 1962, goes considerably beyond *jus sanguinis*. It bestows citizenship rights on anyone who, “by origin, language or tradition belongs to the Somali Nation” even if he does not reside in Somalia. He need only renounce any other citizenship⁴⁹. Technically, he need not ever have been to Somalia nor do his parents have to have held Somali citizenship. A residency requirement is applied only for those who are not ethnic Somalis.

The transnational nature of Somali society is confirmed even further by its acceptance of political leaders who were born in Somali communities outside the borders of Somalia. Said Barre was, in fact, born in the Ogaden, and the previous president and current speaker of the parliament under the TFG, Adan Mohamed Nuur, was born in the Northern Frontier District of Kenya.

The Somali national flag, actually designed and flown for the first time several years before independence in 1960, is, in fact, a telling indication of the ambiguous nature of national borders for the Somali people. Its blue field refers to the UN, the international organization that created the Somali state, and its five-pointed star refers to the five regions populated by the Somali people: Somalia (former Italian mandate), Somaliland (former British mandate), Djibouti (former French mandate, now independent), Ogaden (now in Ethiopia), and the Northern Frontier District (Kenya). It is the flag of a transnational people, not of a political entity.

Ironically, the factor contributing most strongly to the transnational nature of Somali society and the Somali’s indifference to national borders is also the major source of conflict in Somalia and one of the most limiting and confining aspects of

The last Somali leader who advocated extension of the borders of Somalia to incorporate the Somali populations in Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya was Said Barre, in conjunction with the Ogaden War in the 1970s. In fact, the tendency has been in the opposite direction, towards fragmentation. The ethnic Somali population of Djibouti voted successfully, in 1977, to form their own state, separate from Somalia; since the early 1990s, the ex British part of Somalia, Somaliland, has been trying to break away from the rest of the country. Recently, the idea of “Greater Somalia” has gained currency among Somali Islamic extremists, but it seems that their motivations are less nationalistic and more concerned with carrying the jihad to Ethiopia and Kenya. See Olad Hassan, Associated Press Report 19.11.06.

⁴⁸ Filkins and Lacey, 2002

⁴⁹ This aspect of the Somali citizenship law does not go so far as to disallow dual citizenship. A Somali may keep his Somali citizenship if he emigrates and then acquires a second nationality. The aspect of the law requiring renunciation of other citizenships applies primarily to Somalis who were born abroad and were first the nationals of the country of their birth.

that society – the Somali clan system⁵⁰. Before the Ethiopian incursion, the majority of the conflict in Somalia was in the form of clan warfare, and despite the religious element that was added during the incursion, clan warfare is still a major contributor to the generalized violence in Somalia.

While the clan-based war in Somalia is, in itself, a good indication of the priority that clan loyalty has in that country over national identity⁵¹, examining the structure of the Somali clan system sheds even further light upon how this system works to enforce a transnational orientation in Somali society. Somali society is organized into clans determined by patrilineal lines. Clans are arranged in a hierarchy of power and authority, with the noble clans dominating a group of intermediate clans, and a group of lower clans that suffer severe discrimination and even persecution⁵². The clans are further divided into sub clans, which can come into violent conflict with each other even if they are members of the same main clan. Somali populated lands are divided into territories belonging to each clan or sub clan and extend beyond the national borders of Somalia into the neighbouring countries. While some exceptions do exist, in general, each Somali is confined to living in the territory belonging to his clan or sub clan, and even in the most desperate circumstances he would not venture without permission into another clan's territory⁵³.

While most Somalis speak the Somali language, many clans have their own dialect of Somali, and some of the minor clans speak what may be classified as a separate language. Most Somali clan dialects are readily inter-understandable, but there are some which cannot be easily understood by other Somalis⁵⁴. In Somalia, because of language and territorial divisions, one's clan is generally apparent; in the Diaspora, since clans do not have any specific physical characteristics⁵⁵, this vital information cannot be directly solicited, since asking about one's clan affiliation is considered very impolite. The information must be obtained indirectly⁵⁶.

A Somali's allegiance to his clan supersedes any other connection except that to his family, which is, in essence, a sub set of his clan. This allegiance is cemented together by the concept of group, and not individual culpability. If an individual commits a crime against a member of another clan or familial line, his entire kinship group is considered guilty and the potential target for vengeance by any of the aggrieved person's kinsmen⁵⁷. It is not difficult to understand how this

⁵⁰ An excellent analysis of the relationship between the Somali clan system and conflict is given in the chapter "Lineage Segmentation and Civil War" in Metz, 1992.

⁵¹ An extensive discussion of the conflicts in Somali society between clan and national identity can be found in Lewis, *op. cit.*

⁵² Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 1991

⁵³ Meehan, 2008; Perlez, 1992

⁵⁴ Metz, Language in *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ The lack of uniform physical features in clans is most likely a result of Somalis having preferred, up until the recent level of violence made it impractical, marriage outside the clan.

⁵⁶ Perlez, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ Metz, Lineage Segmentation and Civil War, in *op. cit.* 1992

institution of being “his brother’s keeper” binds the individual inextricably to his kinship group.

The clan system undermines the idea of the national state, therefore, by depending upon social entities that supersede, for Somali society, the idea of a state. The clans are, in fact, mini states, with set territories, separate languages – or at least dialects and even laws. Equally important, moreover, is that the clans themselves are transnational. The territories of several clans extend over into the ethnic Somali areas of Djibouti, Ethiopia, or Kenya. In case of necessity, a Somali would rather move into his clan’s territory in a neighbouring country than move into the territory of another clan within Somalia⁵⁸. Hence, it is the territorial division of the clan, and not the political borders of Somalia, that is a determining factor in the life of most Somalis.

Because of the transnational nature of the Somali clans, the clans are, of course, one of the major elements in promoting the transnational orientation of Somali society. Moreover, the clans are a key element in Somali self-identification not only in the Horn of Africa but also in Somali communities in the European and North American Diaspora. Although little has been written on the maintenance of clan identification in the industrialized Diaspora, most likely since Somalis are reluctant to discuss clan affiliation and loyalties with outsiders⁵⁹, the continuing importance of the clan can be documented both through a limited amount of direct testimony by Somalis⁶⁰, and by indirect means.

Clan ties are not simply an issue of self-identification and emotional allegiances; the clans recognize no national boundaries and continue to influence the everyday life and decisions of Somalis in the Diaspora, as is documented in studies concerning family life of Somali émigrés. Somali marriages are generally exogamous in reference to clan, and while in Somalia there would be no question that the activities of the family should be linked to the husband’s clan, in the Diaspora, both clans press the couple for remittances. Since, in the Diaspora it is frequently the wife who finds work and is the major source of financial support of the family, the question of which clan to support is a frequent source of serious family disputes. The transference of clan conflict in Somalia to exogamous families in the Diaspora, and the problem of which clan to support politically and financially is a major factor in the high divorce rate among Somalis émigrés⁶¹.

Studies concerning the sources and recipients of remittances provide an indication of the lasting importance of clan ties. A 2002 UN study on internally displaced people in Somalia determined that many depended on remittances sent not by immediate or even extended family, but rather by clan, or sub clan members in the industrialized Diaspora⁶². The *hawala*, the international system by which Somalis in the industrialized Diaspora transmit remittance funds to Somalia and to

⁵⁸ Meehan, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ Perlez, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ Bahar, 2007; Horst and Gaas, *op. cit.*

⁶¹ Affi, in Gardner and El-Bushra, 2004

⁶² United Nations Coordination Unit in Somalia (UNCU), 30 July 2002, UN Report on Internally Displaced Persons in Somalia.

other parts of the Diaspora, is centered, in the case of Somalia, around clan affiliations and depends upon the trust relationship Somalis have with their clan⁶³.

In addition, the transnational nature of the clan is also a factor in determining Somali emigration. Somali parents are willing to send their children to Europe even if they have no personal contacts there, simply because the clan is established in the intended country of destination, and there is confidence that the clan will assure that they are cared for. Although such confidence is frequently somewhat misplaced, in that the clan in the Diaspora is sometimes more interested in collecting the child's social welfare payments than in providing care⁶⁴, it is nevertheless an indication of the importance of the clan system even in the Diaspora, and of its influence on migration decisions. Moreover, although this relationship of the transnational clan to migration decisions has been documented in the case of unaccompanied Somali minors, there is good reason to believe that clan relationships and expectations also play a significant role in migration decisions among the adult Somali population as well.

The Somali migration caused by the two-decade-long period of extreme generalized violence differs, therefore, from most other recent mass migrations in that the transnational nature of the resultant diaspora was not caused exclusively by the recent emigration itself. Somalis have traditionally placed transnational ethnicity, clan, and family rather than nation as the deciding factors in their self-identification. The present Somali migration, rather than having produced a transnational society, has taken place within the context of Somali transnationalism.

In cases of conflict caused migrations, the Somali migration presents a unique situation. Because of the intensely transnational nature of Somali society, the actions of the Somali émigrés have a considerable and not always positive effect on the course of the conflict that has caused its emigration in the first place. The international community has been most concerned with the threat that the transnational aspects of Somali society may have in exporting Islamic fundamentalist connected terrorism; nevertheless, while there has been wide recognition of the role of the Diaspora in promoting the violence in Somalia itself, aside from the open letter the UN special envoy to Somalia has sent to the Somali Diaspora, there has been very little outreach to the community to elicit its support in the peace process. In view, however, of the decisive role clan and religious relationships play in Somali Diaspora society, it is questionable as to how much can really be accomplished in this regard. Trying to negotiate with the Somali Diaspora concerning the peace process, given the pervasive transnationalism of Somali society, is likely to be essentially the same as negotiating with the warring parties in Somalia itself.

Moreover, the situation of Somalis in refugee camps in neighbouring countries is extremely difficult, and because of local prejudice, culturally insensitive immigration procedures, irreconcilable cultural problems, and the transnational character of the Somali immigration, the Somalis have not resettled successfully in

⁶³ Hamza, 2006; Shaare, 2003; Nenova and Harford, 2004; Lindley, 2006

⁶⁴ Hannan, *op. cit.*

Europe or North America, either economically or socially. In all relevant Western countries, the Somalis register the highest levels of poverty and social isolation of any immigrant group. Recent developments in Somalia, which have produced a fundamentalist Islamic reaction throughout the transnational Somali society, have only accentuated this important factor that has hindered not only social integration in the host communities, but also their access to employment markets.

Because of the intensely transnational nature of Somali society, Somalia seems to be caught up in a seemingly unending cycle of violence. Clan feuds and political Islamic extremism in Somalia have driven literally millions of Somalis across borders into the Diaspora. Diaspora Somalis, because of their family, clan, and religious ties, send remittances that, directly or indirectly, help to fuel the violence that had caused their exile. Political and social developments in Somalia combine with prejudice and administrative short sightedness in countries of resettlement to create reactions in the Diaspora isolating it further from the host society and intensifying its transnational characteristics. Given this situation, the plea of a Somali commentator, Ali Bahar, in an aptly titled article, "Finding a Way Out"⁶⁵, for the Diaspora to forget clan and religious politics and unite behind the TFG, seems unlikely to be followed. Because of the inherently transnational character of Somali society, Mr. Bahar's plea might just as well be directed to the residents of Mogadishu.

Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia, October 26th, 2009

⁶⁵ Bahar, *op. cit.*

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