

## **Sussex Migration Working Paper no. 22**

**Abstract**

This paper explores the phenomenon of secondary movement amongst a group of Somali refugees who have obtained Danish citizenship and subsequently migrated to Britain. It analyses how the Danish Somalis'



1998) and that nomadism is continuously questioned and negotiated among the Somalis making the diaspora diverse. The phenomenon of secondary movement opens up questions of a more general character regarding settlement and movement amongst migrants. What consequences does the idea of movement – instead of only settlement - as an integral part of people's life have for typologies of *temporary* and *permanent* migrants? Moreover, what effects does this have on notions of *sending* and *receiving* societies, which have often been the focus in studies on transnationalism?

## **Diaspora, transnationalism and migration choice**

### **Diaspora**

Originally a concept referring to the dispersion of Jews, diaspora is now used in a variety of contexts in the literature on migration (Schwartz, 1997: 256; Van Hear, 1998: 47; Cohen, 1997: 21). Unlike many other scholars in the field of migration, Cohen attempts to approach a thorough definition of diaspora, which is a rather complex phenomenon. In his list of criteria characterising a diasporic community, the following aspects are of particular interest for the case of the Danish Somalis: dispersal of a people from an original homeland to two or more foreign regions, a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time based on a sense of distinctiveness and a common history, a troubled relationship with host societies, a sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement and the possibility of a distinctive enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism (1997: 26).

Not disagreeing with Cohen's idea, Brah amplifies the components of journey, settling down and change inherent in the notion of diaspora. Central to a diaspora is the image of a journey or a movement, but at the same time "...diasporic journeys are ... about settling down, about putting roots 'elsewhere'" (1996: 182). To give meaning to the concept of diaspora, the journey must be historicised. That is, instead of looking at *who* travels, one has to consider *when, how and under what circumstances* people travel (1996: 182). Are the migrants for instance fleeing civil war or are they migrating for employment?

Just as the reasons for departure are important to

consider, so are the circumstances of arrival and settling down in a host society. According to Brah it is important to analyse how the group is positioned within the social relations of class, gender and racism in the society. Whereas the journey of a diaspora in fact includes a multiple of journeys of both individuals and groups to different countries, there will be differences between the members in terms of how they are situated in their respective host societies. However, what is important in the analysis of a diaspora is how the journeys of, for instance Somalis, to countries in the Middle East, in Europe and in North America configure into one journey consisting of a collective memory of history and fate between the co-ethnics in exile and at 'home'. The concept of diaspora thus refers to what Brah and also Vertovec characterise as 'multi-locality' within and across territorial boundaries (Brah, 1996: 182-184, 197; Vertovec, 1999: 450). However, while a diaspora consists of a 'we', it is at the same time important to stress that diasporas are contested spaces consisting of persons of different class, gender and age. The diaspora is not a fixed entity, but is constantly negotiated and redefined by its members. There Tj.5614Tj 162 0 T/gerent countriesTIHw

framework of nation states but are at the same time reacting to the conditions of subordination that the nation states impose on them. Transnationalism can thus both be seen as an accommodation and a resistance to a global capitalist system (1992:12), and - one could add - in particular to the global migration regime, as understood by Van Hear (1998)

While asylum seekers' choice of destination is relevant to consider, it is at the same time important to stress that for people fleeing persecution there is often a limited choice of countries due to the often chaotic situation, visa restrictions and carrier sanctions (Barsky, 1999: 128; Crisp, 1999, Zavodny, 1999). Therefore, it is interesting for this particular study to see if there are any differences in decision-making when the main reason for migrating is no longer a question of safety. Many of the Somalis came to Denmark by mere chance as asylum seekers fleeing civil war. Now, with Danish citizenship, the Danish Somalis are able to migrate again and resettle in another EU country<sup>5</sup> and many of them have therefore decided to migrate to Britain. The question is how their transnational social network influences this decision both in terms of its presence in Britain and regarding the information it communicates to the co-ethnics in Denmark. The study focuses on the nature of the information about Britain, the Somali diaspora communicates, and how this is evaluated by the Danish Somalis.

## Historical context of the Somali diaspora in Britain and Denmark

To understand the linkages between Somalis in Britain and Denmark, it is relevant to examine the historical context of the migration to these two countries. Therefore, firstly, the historical background of the Somalis in Britain is examined, followed by the context of Somalis in Denmark.

### Somalis in Britain: Labour migrants, students, refugees and EU nationals

As a colonial ruler in the northwestern part of Somalia in the British Protectorate of Somaliland, Britain has historically been closely connected to Somalia and because of this, there has been a long tradition of Somalis settling in Britain (Daahir

and Duale, 2002: 67-68; Lewis, 1984). According to Griffiths the migration of Somalis to Britain can be divided into four phases. The first phase refers to Somali seamen settling down in the British Docklands areas of Cardiff, Liverpool and London by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Somali seamen worked in the British Merchant Navy while their wives still lived in Somalia. The second phase was marked by the run-down of the Merchant Navy in the 1960s. The Somali seamen changed employment to industrial occupations and were joined by wives and family. The Somali women who began to settle and set up community organisations in the British cities mainly marked the third phase. The last phase from the early 1980s witnessed the beginning of civil war in Somalia resulting in large amounts of Somali refugees fleeing the conflict of power between different clans in Somalia which led to the collapse of the state in 1991. Refugees continued to arrive in Britain until the mid 1990s. The migration of Somalis to Britain is, therefore, characterised by complexity and overlaps between successive waves of arrival (Griffiths, 1997: 9 and 2002: 77-79; see also El-Solh, 1991; Farah, 2000: 96-113, Gundel, 2002: 256-257; Summerfield, 1993).

Even though it has yet to be thoroughly documented, I will argue that a fifth wave of Somalis migrating to Britain can be added to the waves mentioned by Griffiths. That is the considerable number of Somalis with EU citizenship who has migrated to Britain from the Netherlands and the Scandinavia within the last few years (ICAR, 2003; Daahir and Duale, 2002: 4). The number of arrivals of EU nationals is uncertain, especially because the 'EU Somalis' are registered as citizens of a particular EU country and not as Somalis. Nevertheless, as will be shown by focusing on the case of Danish Somalis, it is indeed a tendency that the Somalis themselves discuss and which is experienced by social workers in both Britain and Denmark.

The Somalis are not registered as a separate group in the British statistics on ethnic minorities (Census, 2001), but according to the largest estimates, there are around 75,000 Somalis in Britain (Monclos, 2003: 44).

### Somalis in Denmark: a recent group of refugees

Compared to the long tradition of Somalis in Britain, the period of Somali migration to

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<sup>5</sup> The legal movement of the Danish Somalis has to be seen within the framework of EC law. According to article 17 of EC law "Every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union" and article 18(1) stating that "Every citizen of the Union shall have the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States, subject to the limitations and conditions laid down in this Treaty..." See also articles 39, 42, 43. (Foster, N: *Blackstone's EC Legislation 2002-2003*. Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Denmark is rather short. In the 1980s, a relatively small group of Somali intellectuals who had criticised the dictatorship of Siad Barre fled Somalia and subsequently applied for asylum in Denmark. However, the majority of the Somalis who live in Denmark came as asylum seekers fleeing civil war in Somalia in the early 1990s (DRC, 2003; Bejder, 1996). The Somalis in Denmark number around 17,000 persons, most of them with refugee status. Furthermore, several are currently obtaining Danish citizenship (DRC, 2003; DST, 2003). The number of Somalis is, however, decreasing since many (some say every fourth Somali) have left the country to move to the UK, USA or Canada travelling as Danish citizens. This development has accelerated in the last year<sup>6</sup>.

## Field Study

Researching a transnational phenomenon such as the secondary movement of Danish Somalis requires consideration of how to delimit the field of study because the units of the study are spatially dispersed (Hannerz, 1998: 247). The phenomenon of Somalis migrating to Britain is widely discussed among the Somalis in Denmark. Therefore, other persons than solely the Danish Somalis who have migrated to Britain are part of the process. This study has thus adopted the approach that Marcus designates a *multi-sited ethnography* where the researcher needs to "...keep in view and mind two or more ethnographically conceived sites juxtaposed" (1998: 4). In a multi-sited study the researcher traces a cultural formation, a people or a phenomenon that does not restrict itself to one site such as is the case with the secondary movement between Denmark and Britain (Marcus, 1995: 90-92). One disadvantage of this approach is however that breadth of the study is prioritised at the expense of depth (Hannerz, 1998: 248).

To understand the motivations of the Danish Somalis for migrating to Britain or others' decisions not to, the most appropriate method of data collection is interviews. According to Kvale, interviews are particularly suited for "...studying people's understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world" (1996:

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12 years and have subsequently obtained citizenship, to live in Britain. One social adviser for Somalis in Aarhus (Denmark) estimates that about 3-400 Somalis with Danish citizenship have moved to England from Aarhus within the last 1-2 years, while a Somali man, who has moved himself, believes that more than 1000 Somalis have moved from Copenhagen and Aarhus to England within the last year. Though the precise number is unknown, the tendency is clear. As one informant, who has moved to Leicester, puts it:

“As an EU citizen you can move everywhere, that’s what the Somalis do now. It’s not only from Denmark. They move to England from Holland and Sweden as well...and also from Norway and Finland”.

Hence, while the focus here is on the Somalis moving from D

respondents who have moved to Britain had visited the country before, often on holidays visiting family or friends. In these visits the Danish Somalis had the opportunity to obtain a brief impression of the li

are allowed to stay at home looking after their children but are instead forced to do language courses and job training as part of the Introduction Scheme in which all migrants have to participate during the first three years of their stay in Denmark in order to receive social benefits.<sup>11</sup> Several of the respondents complain about this control. Moreover, some of the respondents feel that the Danish society intervenes in their religious practice and general way of life by continuously questioning veiling and other Muslim habits, in contrast to Britain where there is in general not so great a focus on minority religious groups: *'In Britain you are free to live as you like'*, one respondent explains.

A flexible education system and better employment opportunities are furthermore what most of the respondents emphasise about Britain. With regard to education many families prioritise the future of their children and find the British education system better suited for Somalis who might return to Somalia or move to another country, because the structure of and the language in the British education system is considered more international. As one respondent, who moved with his family, explains:

'With regard to employment, the Danish Somalis, both the ones who have moved and the ones still living in Denmark, generally think it is harder to get a job in Denmark than in Britain.'

One young male respondent, who is waiting for a Danish passport in order to move to Britain, clarifies.

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Britain to inspect the conditions themselves. Transnational social networks in Britain have, however, also proved to be an important incentive *per se* for the Danish Somalis to move to Britain especially for the respondents who have close family members such as siblings in the country. Ibrahim's example is suitable to describe the variety of reasons which can influence the decision to migrate to Britain. In talking about the bad image of the Somalis in Denmark, he comments:

'I think I have been struggling for the last 7-8 years in Denmark. It has not been easy being

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Nevertheless, at the same time as the Danish Somalis act within the nation state, they are also escaping the control of their lives executed by the Danish nation state. In the words of Koser and Pinkerton the onward movement of refugees can be considered as '...a way of exercising at least some control over their own destinies' (Koser and Pinkerton, 2002:12). Other scholars adduce that migration in some cases can be characterised as a mode of resistance in the way that the migrants somehow dissociate themselves from where they live (see Vertovec, 1999; Gardner and Osella, 2002). According to Vertovec, even in the transnational relationships there is a 'refusal of fixity often serving as a valuable resource for resisting repressive local and global situations' (1999: 451). Is the secondary movement a resistance to the nation state? Perhaps the Somali diaspora should not be seen as a field entirely separated from the nation state but rather

not to be considered as a form of resistance to the nation state. Despite the hegemonic power relationship between the Danish nation state and the Danish Somalis, the nation state is actually a place, which can provide them with an instrument to be able to move on. As Olwig stresses, 'many people combine various national and transnational elements in their lives, depending on their particular circumstances' (Olwig, 2001: 10). So do the Danish Somalis who can be said to live both within and beyond, not solely two, but several nation states at the same time as they are acting in a transnational space.

**Movement: a natural aspect of life trajectories?**

Perhaps the Danish Somalis are to be characterised as a 'travelling culture' (Clifford, 1992 and 1997), in the way that they can only be

time as we are in an era of free movement, we

transnationalism often acknowledge the presence of more than one country of exile, the relationship between the people in these countries is rarely discussed (see e.g. Glick Schiller et al, 1992: 1-2; Basch et al, 1994: 7). The question is whether important social processes amongst exiles in different countries are not thereby neglected when focus is restricted to encompass only the sending society and one country of exile.

Moreover, when focus is on both movement and settlement as in this example, what influence does it have for assumptions of *sending* and *receiving* societies which are often taken-for-granted terms in studies on transnationalism? Is Denmark a sending or a receiving country in the example of the Danish Somalis? The two terms seem too static to encompass the back-forth-and-onward movements taking place, which at the same time address the question of the relevance of other typologies such as *temporal* versus *permanent* migrants. The meaning of movement to the Danish Somalis also makes it misleading to talk of a 'diaspora lifecycle' that consists of a predictable migration process of dispersal, settlement and return to a homeland as Koser (2003: 8) does.

This case shows that refugees do not necessarily wait passively in their country of asylum until the situation at 'home' has changed, but act according to the situation and its opportunities. This has somehow been neglected in studies of refugees that often perceive this group to be more passive due to their sudden flight than is the case with migrants who are considered to take the active choice of leaving their country in order to follow opportunities elsewhere. The two groups are not necessarily that different from each other in terms of agency despite different contexts of migration.

In connection to this, when acknowledging movement as essential to the life of a group of people, it calls into question assumptions of settlement as the natural state of being. What consequences does this have for the notion itself? For the Danish Somalis who have moved to Britain and perhaps onwards to yet another country, permanent settlement may not be the aim. Several of the respondents are constantly on the move making Britain solely one stop on their route. However, somehow they still feel attached to the places where they have lived, making their reference to movement and settlement rather complex. The two notions are not mutually exclusive and the Somalis can to some extent be

said to be settling in their movement (cf. Clifford).

At the same time as the phenomenon of secondary movement calls into question issues of movement and settlement in the migration process, it is also an example of the diversity and dynamic processes existing in a diaspora. This aspect is rarely taken into account in the literature, which has a tendency to focus more on common origin, common history of dispersion and mutual solidarity in exile, which are all features that characterise the diaspora (cf. Cohen). The result is that diaspora appears as not only a homogenous but also a static concept without the capability of encompassing conflicts, negotiations and movement. This assumption is unrealistic and it is thus more useful to focus on the dynamic aspects among the diaspora members.

Among the Somalis, issues of nomadism, place, and belonging are constantly considered and challenged by the individuals who, as one respondent says, on the one hand are part of a 'copying' society but on the other hand consist of persons with different experiences and aims. In relation to place and movement the diversity of the Somali diaspora means that some Somalis never left Somalia, some have for the moment chosen to stay in their first country of exile and others are moving on. The diaspora is constantly defined and redefined, and it is therefore more relevant to talk of a process of diaspora formation. This sample has been too small to analyse diversity in terms of gender, age, class and experiences in different countries of exile, but for5f exile, but

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