



THE DYNAMICS OF MIGRANT DIASPORAS: COMPARING THE AFGHAN AND SOMALI EXPERIENCE 21 AND 22 NOVEMBER 2005

MONDAY 21 NOVEMBER

M. Michel Carton, Director of the IUED, welcomed the participants.

Denise Efonayi-Mäder of the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies (SFM) welcomed the participants and provided an overview of the SFM project on the Somali diaspora.

Khalid Koser from GCIM and Markus Reisle from the Swiss Direction de Développement et de la Coopération (DDC) also provided a welcome and introductory remarks.

1. The Afghan diaspora

Peter Marsden, Special Adviser, British Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG), UK

The importance of regional diaspora to the Afghan economy

Peter Marsden's presentation can be found in the separate document The importance of regional diaspora to the Afghan economy (www.gcim.org).

Discussion

Alessandro Monsutti disagreed that the extra-legal economy only benefits the economic elite: the Afghan economy is inherently extra-legal – *most* goods in Afghanistan are smuggled. He also disagrees with the comment about lack of security since the US intervention – it depends on the region, and states that the situation *feels* better now; perhaps the situation is only worse now for expatriates rather than Afghans themselves. He further disagrees with the point about support in the refugee camps: it depends on the definition of extended family/neighbours – there is a new emphasis on matrilineal family (the situation has adapted but continues to use the old resource of family).

Peter Marsden responded by countering AM's second comment – both expatriate and Afghan staff are less secure – the insecurity is different, entailing vulnerability and a lack

of self-protection. Responding to the third comment, he stated that the *extended* family could no longer be relied upon.

Edwina Thompson, University of Oxford, UK

The role of Afghanistan's 'money men'

Edwina Thompson's presentation can be found in the separate document The role of Afghanistan's 'money men' (www.gcim.org).

Unfortunately, Edwina was obliged to leave the session and was unable to take questions.

Ceri Oeppen, University of Sussex, UK

A diaspora of Afghan professionals?

Ceri Oeppen's presentation can be found in the separate document A diaspora of Afghan professionals (www.gcim.org).

Discussion on the Afghan diaspora

The chair for the session, Markus Reisle, introduced the discussion session by asking what development the diaspora could participate in. He also referred to power differentials, both within Afghanistan and globally.

The discussant, Khalid Koser, pointed to the patterns involved in the Afghanistan situation in terms of the tradition of diaspora, and its complexity (refugees, economic migration, return etc.). He then spoke briefly about the process of migration with particular reference to the push factor of insecurity, and the potential role for post-conflict reconstruction.

He then talked about the difficulty of defining diaspora – whether it is voluntary or involuntary, local or global, short-term or long-term. He referred to the tendency in literature on diasporas to celebrate them, and warned of the need for reserve, referring to the potential negatives of diasporas (including the pressure to remit; the contribution of certain diasporas to conflict maintenance; the construction of elites).

He drew a link between the policies of both receiving and sending countries and the diaspora, and emphasised that diaspora support is not a replacement for development assistance.

He went on to pose the following questions:

For Peter Marsden:

- What are the policy restrictions in Iran and Pakistan?
- Are there remittances from refugees?
- What are the benefits, if any, of smuggling as an investment?

For Ceri Oeppen:

- Is she going to tackle the diversity of the diaspora?
- What is the link between distance and resources – what about resettlement?
- What is the role of second generation migrants (for example in reconstruction)?

Peter Marsden began his response by referring to the link between hawâla and trade (“big fingers in big pies”) and wondering how people break into this complex area (drugs etc).

- Restrictions have been in place in Iran and Pakistan for a while – there is no pressure from donor governments for Iran and Pakistan to treat Afghans better and they are being very heavy-handed.
- There are few remittances from refugees (although more from Pakistan) – occupations in Iran are menial and there are therefore fewer opportunities to remit
- Smuggling is clearly a good use of money – although it is questionable whether it significantly improves the Afghan economy.

Ceri Oeppen responded as follows:

- Her research is concerned only with professional group, and is therefore not representative of the entire diaspora.
- Resettlement is mainly in India – these migrants are not the ‘poorest of the poor’
- She conceded that it might be easier to talk to second generation migrants.

Alessandro Monsutti referred again to power, stating that there was a group missing from Ceri Oeppen’s account (new elites; United States; Afghan government), and that Ceri should be wary of what her research subjects want from her. They will have their own agenda(s), which is/are likely to be highly political.

He also referred to the fact of migration as a step in young men’s lives – as a rite of passage: migration, with all its risks, can become a proof of adulthood or masculinity. He compared this to the situation in Somalia and Albania.

He then mentioned the fact that migration of men can be a way of empowering the women who are ‘left behind’ as they are forced to enter the masculine sphere (since many of the men are absent).

Cindy Horst responded by querying whether any Afghan women migrate, and what the role of gender is in Afghan migration.

Marc-Antoine P de Montclos said that, post-war, Afghan is a ‘nation of widows’, and that women are more able to participate in public life and take on responsibilities for reconstruction.

Dina Ionescu wondered whether there is a negative perception of women who have migrated when they return to Afghanistan, as the home structures haven’t changed but the migrating woman may have. Peter Marsden supported this point.

Alessandro Monsutti referred to Levi-Strauss' theory of the 'circulation of women' in terms of what women are wanted as wives by Afghan men: the 'traditional' woman versus the 'educate'/migrated woman. He said there was a difference between Afghanistan and Iran and Pakistan.

Markus Reisle suggested a possible topic for future discussion might be to investigate the governmental perspective, and the issue of legal versus illegal money.

2. The Somali diaspora

M. A. Pérouse de Montclos, Institut de recherche pour le développement, France

The political role of the Somali diaspora in a war-torn country

A report of M. A Pérouse de Montclos' presentation can be found in the separate document The political role of the Somali diaspora in a war-torn country (www.gcim.org)

Discussion

Dina Ionescu said that the capacity of a diaspora is also related to the level of organization in the host country (e.g. the legal status of migrants).

MAPM responded that the diaspora nevertheless requires an organized homeland in order to be organized enough to take advantage of the host country's organization.

DI raised the issue of the difference between formal and informal organization – in a war-torn state or dictatorship, the population will have experience of informal organising and therefore the diaspora may also.

MAPM then referred back to the host country, and new restrictions in place, querying their effect on the diaspora – and also how effective they are (and how new).

Miriam Fugfugosh wondered what the definition of organization was – the definition will depend on the aim of the organization (for example, humanitarian assistance from the diaspora is very organized), to which MAPM replied that he was referring to political organization.

MF responded that in the case of the Somali diaspora, the definition of organization depended on the definition of Somali, as this could be along clanlines rather than according to a notion of a one 'Somali' identity.

Cindy Horst referred back to the central project or organization of the diaspora and Simone Baglioni and MAPM responded that if this meant a shared political project, then it did not exist in the Somali diaspora.

Farrah Hussein reiterated that the organization depended on the focus or agenda – if we are speaking of organization for development purposes, then this exists; of organization for nationbuilding, then it does not.

Cindy Horst, University of Amsterdam

***Buufis* amongst Somalis in Dadaab: the transnational and historical logics behind resettlement dreams**

Cindy Horst's presentation can be found in the separate document *Buufis* amongst Somalis in Dadaab: the transnational and historical logics behind resettlement dreams (www.gcim.org).

Discussion

Peter Marsden wondered whether the *misrepresentation* of life abroad led to *buufis*, to which CH responded that, while misrepresentation does exist (to enhance the status of the migrant), those at 'home' sometimes don't believe the truth.

PM then asked whether the isolation of the camps, which reduces the possibility of refugee livelihoods also contributes to *buufis*. CH answered that there is a lot of movement in and out of camps (for example to and from Nairobi).

Joëlle Moret said that *buufis* might lead to opportunities to resettle, through the fostering of hope and asked who doesn't want to leave a camp? CH said that elderly people, those with children in school and those with high status within the camp, as well as those with a great fear of change and with strong ties to Somalia (agriculture and business) might not want to leave.

Khalid Koser asked:

- what *buufis*-seekers actually know about the resettlement destinations
- whether misrepresentation by the migrant might lead to demands for higher remittances
- whether more than one resettlement solution was envisaged

Cindy Horst responded:

- those at 'home' have a general idea of life abroad, with no detail – the Internet could help to improve this (lack of) perception but first-hand experience works best
- difficulties with remittances are not recognized, either by Somalis in camps or by NGOs
- multiple resettlement solutions are not discussed in camps but do happen in reality

François Piguet wondered whether *buufis* was focused on the West and referred to Egypt and Addis Abeba as a 'waiting room' for migrants heading west; he also asked whether refugees were turned towards the Gulf States (as in the 1980s). CH said that *buufis* in the

camps was not particularly oriented towards the Gulf States (except as business opportunities).

Edwina Thompson asked if there was a dream of return as well as resettlement, and disappointment *on* return – as in the Afghan case, where resettlement is seen as a temporary solution. CH stated that there is also a lot of talk of return among Somalis, and of projects (in Somalia and Somaliland) to buy land and build on it in order to materialize the return. However, these projects are problematic in that returnees therefore have a better lifestyle to return than those who have remained, which creates conflict.

PM asked whether the ‘war on terror’ and the idea of the ‘decadent west’ have affected attitudes towards resettlement, to which CH responded that these issues are ambiguous; her research was too long ago to determine whether they have changed the general view.

MF said that Somali men in particular, and older men especially, have difficulty in integrating, with guilt at leaving etc. leading to a ‘madness of return’ – CH said that *buufis* was also used to describe this madness in Minneapolis.

Farrah Hussein, Kenya

Protracted suffering: the plight of Somali refugees in Djibouti

A report of Farrah Hussein’s presentation can be found in the separate document Protracted suffering: the plight of Somali refugees in Djibouti (www.gcim.org).

Discussion

Edwina Thompson asked who was responsible for the situation in the camp; FH answered that the host government is, in theory, but don’t take action – which leads to tension with UNHCR.

Kirsi Vaatamoinen (UNHCR) stated that the refugees are refusing to be counted and put up violent resistance; UNHCR needs support from the Djibouti government which is not forthcoming. Local people also have refugee ration cards, and so do not want the recount. UNHCR suspects that there are actually more ration cards than people, and that therefore there is no malnutrition.

FH responded that only certain sectors of the camps possess extra ration books, and that the researchers were not allowed reports on malnutrition because the camps are funded by UNHCR who do not want bad PR. She also stated that there is corruption – although limited – in the camps.

Cindy Horst was interested in the manipulation of figures by the organizations (UNHCR), refugees and locals and wondered whether this was part of the survival strategy – it is not in the refugees’ interest to declare remittances.

Joëlle Moret suggested that there are differences between camps, and the situation might not be the same in Kenya/Ethiopia etc.

MAPM attributed the reluctance to declare remittances to the war on terrorism and said that people re-entering the camps to be counted would lead to over-stating of the numbers. He then asked:

- whether aid reduction because of increased security in Somaliland has led to repatriation, and whether the food sanctions are designed to provide a disincentive to stay
- apathy exists but patterns of food distribution are affecting migration patterns (see the difference between Kenya and Djibouti)

FH responded that

- because the conflict is clan-related, remaining clans still feel the need to remain in the camps and so are refusing repatriation
- remaining individuals are not urban but rural (pastoralist) so their livelihood is not reduced (possibly improved) so they do not have as much desire to move

KV stated that the reduction in rations is due to the unreliability of numbers in the camps and is not a discouragement to remain; rather, UNHCR is trying to encourage return by improving conditions in Somaliland.

Discussion on the Somali diaspora

Julian Hottinger, the discussant, reiterated the issues of *buufis*, sense of community and the importance of clans and sub-clans to the diaspora, partly in terms of continued danger and insecurity (although he also referred to the possible role of business as a method of cross-clan organization). He also talked of the organizational ability of Somalis, their adaptability and recognition of structure.

MAPM restated that he was speaking of political organization from a Western point of view – and development in terms of public/universal bodies.

Miriam Fugfugosh reminded us that many of the Somali refugees are pastoralists, so when they lose their herd they lose their livelihood. She asked where they would go back to (the situation would be worse than their current situation in the camp), and what project they would have to go back to.

Farrah Hussein said that a minimal repatriation package was provided, and that not all repatriation destinations were accessible or appropriate (clan identities may be too strong to permit repatriation to a different area).

François Piguet rejected the idea of a single Somalia and referred to problems relating to repatriation and livelihoods: land issues, restocking of herds, stampdown on contraband over the Somaliland/Ethiopia border.

FH described the split in the Djibouti government which, while using the rhetoric of repatriation (particularly in relation to the war on terror), needs to keep the refugees in order to keep the financial assistance provided for them. This led to a debate between FH, MAPM, KV and FP about the legal framework of repatriation.

KV emphasized the need to bear in mind Somalia's capacity to absorb returnees, as well as the necessity to provide sustainable livelihoods for them.

Peter Marsden wondered how this would be possible, given the fact that there is no sustainability in Somalia, and compared the situation to that in Afghanistan: neither country's economies could sustain a mass repatriation of migrants.

FP reminded us that a crucial issue is that of how to reverse rural-urban movements.

TUESDAY 22 NOVEMBER

3. Comparative perspectives within the diasporas

Anne-Grethe Nielsen, the chair, provided an overview of Convention Plus, with an emphasis on irregular secondary movements. She spoke of the need for concrete projects (e.g. registration), capacity building and responsibility sharing, and emphasized that it was no longer time for theory but for actual protection.

Afghans: Alessandro Monsutti, IUED

A report of Alessandro Monsutti's presentation can be found in the separate document The Afghan diaspora: an overview (www.gcim.org).

Somalis: Joëlle Moret, SFM

Joëlle Moret's presentation can be found in the separate document Secondary movements of Somali refugees and states' responses thereto (www.gcim.org).

Discussion on the comparisons

Peter Marsden made the following points in response to Alessandro Monsutti's presentation and to begin the comparison between the diasporas:

- the development of the mobile phone network affects the communication of diasporas
- what effect will the establishment of a (transnational) banking system have on the hawâla system?
- whole families have left (Afghanistan) and are spread across the world
- what is the effect the location of refugee camps on employment opportunities, means of leaving, security (and therefore motivation to leave)?
- scattering also occurs in Afghanistan

- emphasis on education
- Europe is less welcoming to both Afghans and Somalis – does this put greater pressure on their home economies and reduce their sustainability (these economies cannot survive without migrants)

Returning to Joëlle Moret's presentation, François Piguet said that clan/sub-clan representatives provide a structure for new incoming Somali migrants. He also wondered whether the ease (or otherwise) of obtaining Ethiopian nationality may form part of Somali migrants' strategy.

Joëlle Moret responded to FP, saying it is comparably easy to live a peaceful *undocumented* life in Ethiopia.

Aninia Nadig, the discussant, introduced the discussion by noting that both Afghanistan and Somalia are of great interest to Western states. They also have the following points in common:

- Harsh climates, which lead to poverty and complex survival strategies which are socially embedded
- Conflict – failed/collapsed states
- A large diaspora population including refugees, who are very visible
- The countries are in a reconstruction stage – the West wants to stabilize them (war on terror, etc.) and therefore repatriate migrants but the countries are still overstretched
- The international community is imposing top-down solutions and encouraging the myth of sustainable return, showing a lack of respect for/knowledge of their social organization and power structures
- Those in power may have instrumentalised international assistance

She went on to ask what role the diasporas can and do play, for example in reconstruction – citing the problem of conflict produced by multiple diasporas (e.g. clan/sub-clan or ethnic groupings).

She also pointed to the fact there is a lack of engagement with the actual population under discussion – an engagement which is difficult but necessary – and called for further research into both diasporas.

She then queried whether there were more similarities than differences between the two diasporas, citing only the role of religion and the stage of the state-building process in the latter category. This led her to wonder whether it might be useful to compare one or both of the diasporas to an entirely different situation.

Peter Marsden said that the international community should not look for durable solutions, but recognize that both Afghanistan and Somalia need safety valves – i.e. migration strategies – as their economies are so marginal.

Rosita Fibbi wondered whether there is a need to keep people unstable so that they can remit and that therefore this is a temporary situation; PM responded that the situation is an ongoing reality.

Simone Baglione had several questions for Alessandro Monsutti:

- What does he mean by power? What of civil society?
- What is the role of trust in hawâla?
- Is ‘migration as a way of life’ really a better way of conceptualizing migration – surely it is only applicable to certain types of migration and we still need an understanding of motivation (e.g. in the case of refugees)?

François Piguet talked of family splitting – in Somalia this is normalized, with a clan-before-family culture and, because the population is pastoralist, a tradition of herd-splitting (men travel with herd; stop in urban areas where there are markets and social support). He asked AM how the strategy of family splitting is important in Afghanistan.

AM reiterated that he wasn’t rejecting interviews entirely, but that observation was also needed. In response to SB’s questions, he said:

- Power and civil society: civil society can be mobilized for the common good – ‘apolitical activists’ – as in state-building and reconstruction. In Afghanistan, the World Bank used civil society to create local councils and thus bypass commanders – however, the commanders also protect some aspects of society.
- Social capital can be variously defined, either as social ties which can be mobilized (Bourdieu) or as the density of social relationships (World Bank, Putnam). Afghanistan is a society full of trust – but it is ‘face to face’ trust, not ‘institutional’ trust

Edwina Thompson responded that there are also mistrust and tension in the Afghan hawâla system – for example where migrants are betrayed by smugglers (even from their home town); people are therefore putting more trust in large, more removed institutions which are not based on the kin network but rather where trust is based on reputation.

AM said that the kinship structures in Afghanistan are very complicated, based variously on maternal and paternal links, as well links through wives. In response to SB’s third question, he said that the idea expressed by Afghans that ‘we are travellers’ indicates a conception of life as travel (from birth to death) and that therefore the ‘how’ of travel – the strategies of travel – is more important than the ‘why’ (motivation). These strategies are multilevel and intent on diversification.

Cindy Horst responded to AM and agreed with his comments about ethnographic work, but wondered how this could be linked back to policy. With regard to Joëlle Moret’s presentation, she commented on the role of nomadism in the Somali diaspora that there is a confusion between self-representation – the nomad as an independent traveler or free spirit (despite the lack of regard for nomads themselves) – and the role of nomadism in *movements*.

Joëlle Moret responded that nomadism can be seen as a proof of identity by the respondent – a way of trying to make a mobile or refugee situation positive – and that the concept is nuanced.

3. Comparative perspectives between the diasporas; policy and programme implications and future research priorities

The outcomes from the afternoon's discussion can be found in the separate document Comparative Perspectives between the Afghan and Somali Diasporas (www.gcim.org).

Nina Allen, GCIM