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EDITORIAL

Forced Migration and Displacement in Somalia and Somali-Inhabited Territories

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Introduction

As the guest editor for this special issue, Forced Migration and Displacement in Somalia and Somali-Inhabited Territories, I am equally energized by engaging in dialogue on the plight of internal uprooting and dislocation in Somalia as well as disheartened that 22 years after the beginning of the civil war in southern Somalia (1991) we are still having this conversation. The reason I wanted to bring together scholars to publish a special issue that focused on Somalia was twofold. First, there are strong misperceptions in North America, where I am located, of the civil war in Somalia that focus mainly on the internal processes and events that instigated and prolonged the war (see Fellin this issue). In tandem with this narrative is that Somalis are either represented as perpetrators or victims of violence in the North American media (Stachel 2012) with the effect of undermining the strengths of Somali individuals and families in resistance movements, reconciliation and peace building, development initiatives, and post-war reconstruction (see Saggiomo this issue, Zizzola this issue). Second, through the course of my own doctoral research I found a lack of literature on the actual experiences of the conflict, the related environmental disasters, and the uprooting and movement of Somali individuals and families both within Somalia and Somali inhabited regions, including Ogaden in Ethiopia and the North Eastern Province in Kenya. From my own readings, ethnographic fieldwork and interviews that focused on memories of colonialism, anti-colonial resistance movements, and independence, I learned that generations of Somalis have experienced often multiple displacements from their homes and villages throughout colonialism, during resistance movements and conflicts over

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disputed territories. The literature on Somalis actual experiences of these, however, was largely lacking. As a result, I hope this dialogue does not end with this special issue, but energizes others to carry out research, write or record their own memories and present day experiences of dislocation, conflict, migration, resistances, grass-roots movements, peace building and reconciliation processes. I believe the *Journal of Internal Displacement (JID)* is one forum where this dialogue can take place, as it is open-access and freely accessible to anyone who signs up as a member. Other places such as *Somali Heritage and Archaeology*, *Somali Library*, and the *Digital Somali Library* at Indiana University, Bloomington are also looking to collect and preserve the history of Somalia for future generations. It is my hope that through these and other avenues we can continue to build upon the papers presented in this special issue.

Somalia Today

In the months of August and September 2012, Somalia experienced a turning point, an important historical moment. Somalia's chief justice swore in over 200 members of the new parliament (MPs) on August 20, 2012, which ended the eight-year Transitional Federal Government (TFG) (Khaleej Times 2012, Middle East Online 2012). One hundred and thirty-five traditional elders who represented all of Somalia's clans chose the MPs (Forum on China–Africa Cooperation 2012, Middle East Online 2012). A committee denied approximately 70 MP candidates to run due to their links to warlords or for having committed violent acts. There are several women lawmakers and a high number of university graduates who make up the new parliament (Forum on China–Africa Cooperation 2012, Khaleej Times 2012).

On September 9, 2012, Somalia's MPs elected a new president, Hassan Sheik Mohamud who won the election against the departing President Sheik Sharif Sheikh Ahmed of the TFG (Bayoumy 2012, Guled 2012). The new president worked as a professor at the Somali Institute of Management and Administration Development founded in 1999 with hopes to rebuild the country. In 2011, he started a new political party called Peace and Development (Guled 2012).

Despite these positive changes there continues to be major issues affecting the human rights of IDPs in Somalia. The new President has planned to relocate the tens of thousands of displaced persons who are currently living in Mogadishu by August 2013. Human Rights Watch (2013b) is concerned with the relocation and urges the government to adhere to international law by relocating the population only voluntarily while ensuring their safety and dignity during both the transition and in the new relocation sites. Somalia has signed the *African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa* (2012), a regional convention that is aimed to prevent displacement, protect and assist IDPs, and find durable solutions for IDPs (Human Rights Watch 2013a). The country, however, has not ratified the *Convention*.

According to UNHCR (2013), there are 1,373,080 internally displaced persons in Somalia. Recent heavy rainfall in April 2013, destroyed crops, homes and businesses in the urban areas, and IDP settlements resulting in approximately 30% of the residents to be displaced (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2013). As of October 2012, there are also 2,200 refugees and 8,500 asylum seekers mainly from Ethiopia living in the urban centres of Somalia. This group faces mistreatment and discrimination in the country (UNHCR 2013). In addition, particular Somali minority groups are facing human rights abuses. In a report on IDPs following the 2011 famine in Somalia, Human Rights Watch (2013a) found that there have been a large number of human rights abuses to IDPs in Mogadishu, including sexual and gender based violence, beatings, ethnic discrimination, forcible evictions, diversion of food aid from IDPs,

control over resources by gatekeepers with the aid of militias, looting, arbitrary arrests, and reprisals against IDPs for complaints (see Human Rights Watch 2013a for the detailed report). The report suggests that IDP settlement has become “big business” with the famine thought of as a way for people to profit from the emergency assistance coming into the country (Human Rights Watch 2013a). The groups that are most affected by these abuses are the Rahanweyn or Digil-Mirifle, a clan-family part of the Somali lineage system but not considered to be one of the “noble” Somali clan-families. The group has also been marginalized by the “noble” and often pastoral clan-families for their livelihood strategies as agro-pastoralists and farmers. The other group that has been affected is the Bantu who are not part of the Somali lineage system and a significant number are descendants of former slaves and are also to a large extent farmers (Besteman 1999, de Waal 2007). Both groups are mainly from the Bay, Bakool, and lesser extent the Lower Shabelle and Middle Juba, the areas most affected by the famine (Human Rights Watch 2013a). From these reports it becomes apparent that more needs to be known about the extent to which clan identity and diaspora networks (two factors that are argued to contribute to the Rahanweyn and Bantu’s vulnerability) have been fundamental in protection against adversity in Somalia throughout the armed conflict (see Horst 2006, Human Rights Watch 2013a). As such there is a need for more dialogue on the experiences of IDPs in different regions and from different clan-families in Somalia.

In addition to IDPs, there are approximately 1,136,143 refugees and 32,978 asylum seekers who are originally from Somalia. Approximately a half of a million Somalis live in Dadaab camps, which has the capacity for 90,000 residents. Ethiopia houses about 215,000 refugees from Somalia, mainly in Dollo Ado that reached its capacity of 170,000 residents in October 2012 (Refugees International 2013). Overcrowding, lack of security, sexual and gender based violence and access to food, clean water and medical care are common issues in these camps. As we will see in the papers in this issue, only 10% of the estimated total Somali population of 9.1 million live in the West (Horst 2006, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2013), but they are the main contributors to the Somali economy and the development of infrastructure and businesses albeit not without their problems. As a result, there needs to be more research on the contributions of the Somali diaspora in the rebuilding of Somalia’s infrastructure and the development of the economy.

Conclusion

With these issues in mind the dialogue on the plight of IDPs in Somalia continues with this special issue. I would like to thank all of the contributors and authors of the articles for choosing to engage in this conversation. A special thank to all of the people for which this research is based. Finally, JID needs to be acknowledged for maintaining its mission to be open and accessible globally and providing a space to be critical of the issues that affect those who have been forcibly displaced from their homes, villages and livelihoods throughout the world. I encourage scholars, practitioners, and those who have experienced forced migration to submit their research, field reports and stories to JID in order to work towards creating positive changes that will affect the lives of refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and internally displaced persons worldwide.

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