

Transnational Connections, Islam and Clans: Somali Refugees in The Netherlands

Anja van Heelsum¹ and Hans van Amersfoort¹

¹University of Amsterdam, Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

a.j.vanheelsum@uva.nl

Somalia's civil war and violence instigated a flow of refugees that ended up in the neighbouring countries in Africa, but also further to South Africa, into the Arab world, Europe, the US, and even as far as Australia. Often people don't stay in the first country of arrival, but moved on, from Kenya to Western Europe, and from Europe to the US. It is easily assumed that Somali's, with their nomadic background, have no trouble at all with another international removal. But what are the consequences of these flexible patterns of settling? In this paper we will look in more detail how the Somali community in the Netherlands is managing in several fields.

The first question that we will look into, is how stable is the Somali community in the Netherlands. We have seen strong fluctuations in the numbers of Somali's in the last 15 years, and we saw quite some movement towards the UK. Why does this happen and is there more to say than some are moving to the UK?

Secondly we investigate to what extent Somali's in the Netherlands are managing to bring their family together? Is the tendency to move around forced by the incompleteness of the families, or is this not considered a problem, since in a nomadic society men are often on the way. Or are certain family members sent to Europe to earn for the others? And what does this mean for children, since we know that many Somali children grow up without their father.

A third question concerns Islam. As we know there is a tendency among some groupings towards a more conservative kind of Islam in Somalia (Al Shabaab). How do Somali's in the Netherlands see this phenomena and does adherence of conservative Muslim groupings spread in Europe, due to the fast movement and communication patterns of the Somali's? Or are Somali's in Europe actually escaping the conservative Islam in Somalia, and more resilient to radicalisation than their troubled counterparts in cities like Mogadishu?

The last question concerns the pattern of associational activity of Somali's. A fast glimpse at the associations shows, that many are involved in transnational activity targeted at development in Somalia. This could indicate that organisations mainly function within sub clans or smaller groupings. What is actually the meaning of the (sub)clan in these organisations? And how successful are organisations that avoid clan identification?