

Between Recognition, Obligation and Social Control: Local and Transnational Community Involvement among Somalis in Denmark

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This paper examines senses of belonging and processes of inclusion and exclusion among Somalis in Denmark. The about 16.500 Somali nationals and descendants living in Denmark constitute the biggest African group in Denmark and have been a highly visible – and contested – group in the country since the mid 1990s. The paper specifically focuses on Somali diaspora associations, exploring why and how Somalis engage themselves in ethno-national associations and other kinds of local or transnational community involvement, including contributions to reconciliation and reconstruction in Somalia. It examines which senses of belonging and processes of inclusion such involvements spur, arguing that associations and other kinds of community involvement offer spaces of recognition where it is possible to make a difference and be recognized as a respectable person. Finally, the paper addresses the question of youth radicalization in relation to belonging and (mis)recognition in Danish society. The paper is based on fieldwork among Somalis in Copenhagen in 1999, 2003-2004, follow-up interviews in 2010 as well as short trips to Somaliland and London in 2003 and 2004.