

Diasporic Life of Somalis in Asia: The Cases of Kuala Lumpur and Penang, Malaysia

Yusuf Abdulazeez¹

¹Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology, Sokoto, Nigeria

azeez4ever2002@yahoo.com

The Somali diaspora are scattered across the Horn of Africa and beyond as citizens, immigrants and refugees. Their status as diasporic population is precipitated by the artificially created borders that cut them off to Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. Further, their quest for works, social outings, pursuits of knowledge outside home and the prevailing insecurity of lives and properties that are situated on clan and sectarian affinities pushed many out of Somalia. Seeing the growing number of Somali diaspora around the globe and the relatively dearth of literature about them, including little, if not none empirical and theoretical studies about their life ways in Asia, this paper explores the gaps in the lives of Somali diaspora, the changing nature of their social relations, coping strategies and their gains in Malaysia. In doing this, Kuala Lumpur and Penang were selected for their large volume of immigrants, including Somalis in Malaysia. Through 40 (28 in Kuala Lumpur and 12 in Penang) sessions of in-depth interviews, qualitative data were elicited from Somalis, who were purposively selected, because they possessed the required information and are ready to divulge it. The study found that most Somalis in Malaysia depend on monies and materials sent by their relatives from home and abroad, except few that survive on aids, as government's labour laws created no space for them to get paid jobs. It is reported that weather, Malaysian Muslim foods, drinks, wears like "Ma'awis," and Islamic faith are not quite different from the ones, which the Somalis are used to back home, hence gave them some reliefs. Yet, the study revealed that distance from families and friends; inability to be employed; being aliens; harassments by law enforcement agents; and differences in some cultural ways are few of the missing links in their lives. The study reported that Malaysians' friendliness, maintenance of clan and sectarian neutrality are few of the forces that promoted harmonious interaction among Somalis and between them and others. It is found that modifying tastes, cutting down personal budgets, being meticulous in spending, including sharing apartment with friends irrespective of social differences are adjustment tools. This study revealed that access to tight security; relatively sound and cheap education; modern facilities; and social exposure are gains to Somalis. The peaceful relations existing among Somalis of different clans and creeds in diaspora ought to be a model for managing the protracted conflict, which engulfed Somalia over the years.

