

Book Review: Diasporas, Development and Peacemaking in the Horn of Africa, edited by Liisa Laakso and Petri Hautaniemi

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The volume presents a stimulating overview of the varied positions, such as peacebuilders, investors, and civic members, that members of diasporas hold, as well as extant gaps related to diasporas such as theoretical frameworks and host country institutional incorporation and engagement. This is an enriching book, writes Evan Easton-Calabria.

Diasporas, Development and Peacemaking in the Horn of Africa. Edited by Liisa Laakso and Petri Hautaniemi. Zed Books. 2014.

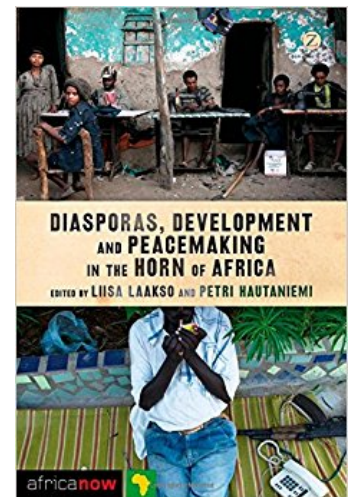
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The message of *Diaspora, Development and Peacemaking in the Horn of Africa*, edited by Liisa Laakso and Petri Hautaniemi, is simple: the role of diasporas is complex. This volume rejects the reductionist and persistent bifurcation of diaspora members as either agents of conflict or of peacebuilding. Instead it focuses on how, in which ways, and with which intended and unintended consequences, members of diasporas – seen as more than just exiled populations – engage as important non-governmental actors within both their country of origin and their host country.

A primary aim of the book is to present systematic research on the political transnationalism of migrants from countries experiencing conflict, in an effort to counter the mainly speculative and anecdotal research on the topic. In this regard, the volume succeeds; the nine chapters it comprises present specific and often novel case studies examining various aspects of diasporic engagement. These are presented within the book's three primary sections: 'Contextualizing the Horn of Africa and the diaspora', 'Case studies from the Horn of Africa', and 'European approaches to diaspora engagement'.

Throughout each of the book's three sections are theories examining different levels and area of diasporic engagement. Diasporas have traditionally been under-theorised, and politics and International Relations (IR) theories in Africa are sparse overall. To contribute to filling this theoretical gap, Chapter 1 utilises the model of multi-level governance (MLG) to analyse how different levels of governance interact, and examines the role of the non-governmental actors (including diasporas) within them. Through employing this model alongside that of loosely coupled systems, Liisa Laakso finds that diasporas' role in the Horn of Africa contribute to development and peacebuilding instead of state-building. As such, she argues that diasporas must be further recognised in IR as playing a pivotal role in civil society.

Another interesting theoretical framework is presented in Chapter 7, entitled 'Interactions between Somali organizations and Italian and Finnish development actors'. Petra Mezzetti, Valeria Saggiomo, and Päivi Pirkkalainen conduct a fascinating comparative analysis of the mechanisms and processes through which members of the Somali diaspora and institutional actors in Italy and Finland interact. They examine these interactions through a conceptual framework drawn from the 'contentious politics' theory, which accounts for the dynamic elements of engagement between diaspora actors at the local as well as international level. Through doing so, they highlight the active role of diaspora groups, the challenges they face in becoming formally recognised as organisations and political actors, and the creative alternatives they often find in order to become 'certified' (formally approved) in their



host country in order to contribute to the country they come from.

One of the volume's most intriguing case studies is presented in Chapter 3, 'Rebuilding Somaliland through economic and educational engagement'. Authors Markus Virgil Hoehne and Mohamed Hassan Ibrahim focus on the development of Somaliland, unique in that the country is not recognised as a formal state and has as a result received little international aid. Instead, it has mainly been rebuilt by members of the Somaliland diaspora, thereby evidencing the importance of non-state actors in development and peacebuilding. The authors argue for the identification of two stages of peacebuilding in Somaliland, the first occurring through ceasefire and peace agreements, and the second (the chapter's focus) emerging due to activities instilling physical security as well as economic and social stability in the country. This is illustrated through two case studies of hotels that proved to be social as well as economic investments in the capital city Hargeysa, as well as two case studies of universities that promoted education as an alternative activity to fighting. Hoehne and Ibrahim provide pertinent background information on peacebuilding in Somaliland as well as analyses of how peacebuilding was achieved through economic and social means.

Running throughout the chapter is the theme of trust – the authors argue that economic investments infused areas with a sense of social cohesion and confidence. This was reified by local populations eager to take part in, for instance, a public competition to name one of the hotels. The majority of the six hundred suggested names connoted development and peace, demonstrating that the hotel's significance transcended simple construction and instead demonstrated a reconstruction of normalcy and stability in war-torn Hargeysa.

Although the volume is focused on the Horn of Africa, and the majority of case studies examine diaspora engagement in the region itself, various other chapters highlight the actions of diaspora groups resettled in Europe. Chapter 9, 'Norwegian collaboration with diasporas', by Rojan Ezzati and Cindy Horst, for instance, utilises the Norwegian experience to examine how European non-governmental actors interact with diaspora individuals and organisations in aid, development, and peacebuilding activities. By analysing these so-called 'engagement politics', the authors find that although diaspora members are described as contributors and even partners within policy documents, neither valuable knowledge exchanges between diaspora members and Norwegian institutions nor their involvement as true stakeholders in development activities manifests in practice. Instead, as one young diaspora member shared, it is rare for a Norwegian organisation to be '[i]nterested in us not as refugees...[b]ut as a resource...' (Ch 9, p 215). Ezzati and Horst therefore conclude that the implementation of diasporas as 'stakeholders and resources' – a transition from 'on-paper' to 'in-practice' – takes both time and trust (also discussed in Chapter 8).

The biggest strength of the volume is also its weakness: due to the localised focus on the Horn of Africa, the chapters become repetitive, as many discuss Somalia and the same host countries in Northern Europe despite the fact that diaspora groups from the Horn exist all over the globe. The introduction provides a succinct contextualisation of the issue and region, yet this is rendered essentially obsolete by the conceptual and historical background provided in many of the ensuing chapters.

This book, therefore, is ideal for those specifically interested in this region, or wishing to obtain detailed case studies of diaspora engagement at a variety of levels. The volume presents a stimulating overview of the varied positions, such as peacebuilders, investors, and civic members, that members of diasporas hold, as well as extant gaps related to diasporas such as theoretical frameworks and host country institutional incorporation and engagement. Overall, this enriching book is aptly summarised through the name of the Somaliland hotel that the diaspora owners eventually settled on in chapter three: *Maansoor* – 'Mind feeder'.

Evan Easton-Calabria studied for a Master's degree in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies from the University of Oxford. She is a writer and consultant focusing on refugee livelihoods and international development. [Read more reviews by Evan.](#)

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