

Somaliland – Under the Shade of the Meeting Tree

Introduction

This paper focuses on the representation and function of traditional structures within the Democracy forged by Somaliland's sub-clans in the wake of the civil war against the military dictatorship of Siyaad Barre, and the relapses into internal violence in the 1990's. A main part of the discussion focuses on social change in the shape of gender relations within the traditional structures. Though overlapping and interpenetrating substantially, for the purposes of this paper "the traditional" does not include religion. The role and functions of the religious sphere is in part different from the traditional structures of power. Its role is also potentially shifting, but it is on a very different trajectory than traditional structures. The political power granted to traditional society by the constitution is not given to religious leaders but to clan representatives. The Sheiks or *Waadad* have traditionally not held any political power other than in exceptional times.¹

The Fieldwork

The research in Somaliland was confined exclusively to Hargeisa and undertaken throughout four weeks in July and August 2009. The interviewees were offered anonymity in order to facilitate a free and open discussion, an offer that was declined by all but one of the Somali respondents. This was in stark contrast to the internationals interviewed. There were 15 in-depth interviews made, averaging 1.5 hours and the questions were relatively open, focusing on social interaction. The purpose was to get the respondents to provide personal reflections on the issues addressed in the interview with additional questions emerging during the process. In addition to this there were a number of conversations with people encountered adding what I feel is a thicker description of Somaliland from different perspectives.

Hargeisa is a city vibrating with discussion, opinions, and fleeting 'truths' of varying accuracy. While almost all respondents of Somali origin expressed a willingness to appear with name some interview statements have been made anonymous at the initiative of the researcher because of potential negative reactions against the respondent. Of the internationals interviewed none wanted to appear by name and their anonymity was offered as a precondition in the interest of facilitating a constructive, open and honest discussion. Statements originating in such interviews have therefore also been made anonymous.

History

Somaliland announced its independence in 1991 when the state of Somalia collapsed². It has since then been developing of its own state structure and institutions with little to no outside help.

Somaliland is currently a multi-party democracy under development and it is the fact that it has been an internal process of transformation rather than an externally applied one that is of main interest. The international relative indifference towards the situation has had the effect of allowing Somaliland to resolve its internal problems without developing dependence on foreign assistance,³ allowing the local political and reconciliation processes to take their course without being controlled by outside agendas.⁴ The Somaliland experience is very much shaped by its history of colonization, failed post-independence Democratisation, and 21 years of military dictatorship. This is evident in any political discussion.

After independence in 1960 Somaliland entered into a union with the other Somali territories. The initial integration with Southern Somalia constituted a Western-style democracy that proved poorly adapted to the clan-based nature of Somali politics.⁵ The discourse may have been nationalistic but the over-riding principle of social organisation and the main support-base was still the clan.⁶ Widespread corruption and failure to meet the expectations of different groups bred deep discontent. In 1969 the Somali state was seized by General Siyaad Barre who maintained power with the help of superpower backing in a highly centralized and authoritarian system. With the 1978 defeat in the war against Ethiopia, the discontent evolved into a civil war that led to the Northern clans defeating the Barre forces in 1991 and declaring independence from the Somali state⁷. As the Somali state declined until its collapse in 1991 clan identity resurfaced as the main channel of political and economic security after this period of active repression. Those disadvantaged by Barre's patronage policies turned to an increasingly informal economy,⁸ further weakening the state.

The North-Western clans, i.e. those in what today *de facto* constitutes Somaliland, had been engaged on different sides during the civil war which left a considerable amount of tension and mistrust. The 1991 Grand conference of traditional elders in Burco did not settle all these grievances but managed to terminate active hostilities and create a common political framework that endorsed reconciliation, independence and a two-year transitional government with representation also from clans outside the largest of the clan-families, the Isaaq⁹. The peace did not last long and in 1992 fighting broke out within the ruling Somali National Movement (SNM). In 1993 it was estimated that there were 50,000 armed militia-men that needed to be addressed and in 1992 it was quite possibly the initiative by the government to disarm the militias and create a new national army that triggered new fighting¹⁰. The SNM vision for the newly proclaimed Somaliland had been a rejection of the inherited central state model and an open acknowledgement of the clan system as the root of political stability, social cohesion, and economic activity¹¹. In their two years of government they however failed to consolidate and establish any significant control and function. There were public protests against the outbreaks of violence in 1992, organized and carried out largely by women. As a

result elders from all regions convened to mediate¹². The violence was halted by the *Guurti* leading to a ceasefire and an agreement on another conference. This was the 1993 Grand Borame Conference which lasted for five months and involved 150 voting elders and an estimated 2,000 participants. The conference agreed on a peaceful transfer of power from the interim SNM government to a civilian, *Beel*-based system¹³. It also elected a president and a vice-president, adopted a national charter and a peace charter to serve as the basis for the state- and peacebuilding to be undertaken during another two-year period. As part of the *Beel*-system it also appointed a parliament of 150 members divided into a bicameral system of the House of *Guurti* and the House of Representatives with the institutionalization of the role of the elders acting as a check on the elected representatives and the executive branch.¹⁴ However, new fighting erupted in 1994 in a series of smaller localised conflicts also referred to as the 'Brothers' War'.¹⁵ Until 1996, there was little progress in peace talks and it was only after five months of deliberations in Hargeysa that a peace agreement was reached in February 1997 that included a provisional constitution and a decision to move towards a multi-party democracy after a transition period that ended in 2001¹⁶ when a national referendum approved the provisional constitution which also was taken to signal approval of the move from the *Beel*-system to a multi-party democracy¹⁷. The Somaliland experience is interesting for several reasons but the most important one concerns legitimacy. The transformation has been a process that has also managed to maintain internal legitimacy, demobilise, and to counter and resolve outbursts of violence through traditional channels and structures. It has been a process to which the participants have largely stuck through the years resulting in a relatively stable but resource deprived popular democracy. There is a belief that stability will prevail as a result of the pride felt over the peace and the role of the elders¹⁸ in addition to an ever-present 'esprit of reconciliation'.¹⁹ Since 2005 Somaliland has been able to exhibit most of the attributes associated with a democratic state²⁰. From a Western perspective it may lack in several departments such as wider female representation²¹, but on the whole it is an interesting example of what appears to be successful societal transformation *without* the 'costly and ineffective'²² involvement of the international community. Worryingly the latest crisis in Somaliland comes in the wake of an increased international engagement that exerts its own influence on the traditional. There is also a rising concern that the outside influence is creating a hand-out mentality of aid dependency.²³

Social Conditions and stress

Social Structures

The pre-colonial political structure of Somalia lacked a central authority and each clan-family, segmented into clans, sub-clans, and *diya*-paying groups²⁴ regulated their own affairs. There was no

central administration of the clans²⁵ and clan is still seen as the main source of rights and obligations.²⁶ The *Shir*, or council of elders, of each clan played an important role in managing both internal and external affairs based on *Xeer* (Common law) and *Shariica* (Islamic law)²⁷. The *diya*-paying group was the basic political and jural unit²⁸ under a headman who had a representative rather than authoritative function²⁹. These concepts and roles are still a big part of Somaliland social structures. I.M Lewis described the organisational situation as one where '*few societies can so conspicuously lack those judicial, administrative, and political procedures which lie at the heart of the Western conception of Government*'³⁰. During British colonial rule, the role of the traditional chiefs was politicised by incorporating them into the 'indirect rule' as salaried representatives, a practise that has damaged the relationship between the elders and their clans³¹.

Kinship provides a structure for inter-group relations and governance as well as a means to regulate conflict and organising trade.³² In the rural areas people live with their sub-clan or in-law's sub-clan sharing grazing land and wells while in the towns they also tend to group together and rarely mix³³ to any larger degree. The clan system regulated life before there was a state and it has done so when and where the state has been absent or weak. One respondent described the clan as a 'fact' and 'Somalilander' as a 'conscious identity'³⁴. The importance of the clan is repeated by many respondents with descriptions of it as for example your security, your insurance, and your retirement plan.³⁵ While the clan system is voluntary³⁶ it is also the case that if you reject it you will be isolated and the next time you need help you will get none.³⁷ The role of the elder is important in both family and community and its functions do not require a unified society.³⁸

The clan structures continue to be the dominant principle of social organisation in Somaliland and have been a guarantor for peace, stability and security. According to some it is a source of political problems through its interpenetration with national politics.³⁹ Nevertheless, tradition is still considered to be the legitimate system⁴⁰ firmly based on the units of family and sub-clan, and supported by religion.

Environmental factors

The territory that today *de facto* constitutes Somaliland is around 137,600 square kilometres in size and with varying estimates of population ranging between 2-3 million.⁴¹ Some 60-70% of the total Somali population across the Horn is nomadic⁴² and moves across what is considered traditionally Somali territory. Somaliland has three main topographical features;⁴³ the *Guban* is the narrow coastal region which is hot and humid with desert-like vegetation; the *Oogo* dominated by the Gollis mountain range; and finally the *Hawd* which stretches into Ethiopia and is rich on pastures but has no permanent water sources. During the dry season, migration traditionally occurs primarily

from the very hot *Guban*. This also used to be true in the *Hawd* but because of permanent underground water reservoirs, *Berkado*, this is no longer necessary. While the Western parts are largely a settled agricultural area, the major source of income is the livestock industry. Through attempts to integrate it into a market economy, it is now expected to support a growing urban population and the state instead of merely rural livelihoods.⁴⁴

The war with its mass displacements and refugee camps added additional stress on the pastoral environment and traditional social support structures as it is the clan that provides in times of hardship.⁴⁵ A major stress-point and source of conflict is the increased sedentarization which has increased with the almost unchecked proliferation of waterholes. Any attempt to regulate the proliferation of these is hampered by the lack of capacity by the judicial system. Instead, conflicts are often settled by or in cooperation with local authority like elders.⁴⁶

The incorporation of the pastoralists into the market economy has contributed to the erosion of the traditional structures and a cohesive pastoral society. The spirit of cooperation and collective responsibility is being replaced by individualism, greed, mistrust, and competition.⁴⁷ Though the move towards individual interests is seen as a positive by some, there is also concern what will happen if the influence of the elders weakens.⁴⁸

Another problem is the practise of land-grabbing and building of illegal enclosures. The fact that most records were destroyed in the civil war and the low capacities of the central government provides ample opportunity to make false or true claims about land. This has over-burdened the justice system and caused friction between and within clans. There is an ongoing project which issues photo-ID title deeds for their land.⁴⁹

Land-based conflicts concerning grazing and water access rights are the main conflict generator in society and a point of competition between the traditional nomadic structures and the often illegal privatization of grazing lands and water points⁵⁰. The exclusivity of the enclosure will often be defended by force and can cause inter-clan conflict to erupt. Private individual interests are increasingly in competition with community interests and customary law. Traditionally interests are pursued as clan interests in a reciprocal relationship⁵¹ to avoid conflict. One respondent made the point that land used to be divided among the clan by the *Diya*-group but that it was now '*hegemonised by those with money*'.⁵² These resource conflicts have a potential to spread and expand quickly through the prevailing socio-political structures. They are also indicative of the central government's weakness both in that they can arise through the illegal occupation of communal land, and that once initiated the central government is hard pressed to stop them. There is a fear of such conflicts gaining momentum and spreading through the clan structures, widening beyond the localised rural nature it originates in and into the population centres.⁵³ The move towards individual

interests is a clear break with traditional perspectives. The traditional system is held by respondents to observe individual rights but to encourage the pursuit of collective interests⁵⁴ and there is also relative cost distribution among the *Diya*-paying group where the rich have to pay more.⁵⁵ This practise is weakening which will arguably lead to bigger social division and continued intra-clan fragmentation.⁵⁶ The increased focus on individual ownership has generated conflicts also within clans and families.⁵⁷ There is also the issue of deeds being sold for land that traditionally came under the control of a specific sub-clan. Such deeds will often not be recognised as they consider the land to be theirs and the state does not have the capacity to enforce them.⁵⁸

Specific Factors in Traditional Society

There are a number of factors in traditional Somali society that exert a strong influence over the social and political spheres. During the fieldwork, three stood out as having exceptional importance. Religion has been left out of this paper in part to avoid confusion with political Islamism but influences from the latter are slowly establishing themselves in Hargeisa and the researcher had opportunity to observe several Madrasas funded by external money. The state is seeking ways to control it.⁵⁹

Xeer refers to customary law, or social contract, that regulates the reciprocal behaviour between clans of a specific area dependent on deliberations of elders.⁶⁰ In the absence of centralised institutions, *xeer* has been part of a system where kinship and collective social institutions has aided in preserving relative order by defining collective rights and responsibilities.⁶¹ *Xeer* is a dynamic and adaptable concept, evolving through interpretation and adaptation⁶², but the civil war in the 1990's presented situations it could not handle. Apart from the rejection of clan authority by some militias, there simply was no precedent for the scale of crimes and violations of social norms perpetrated in the war.⁶³ An important foundation of the reconciliation was the principle of *Xaladahay*, clean slate, employed when the costs and reparations are deemed incalculable.

Guurti is a gathering of elders for deliberations and fills an important role in Somali culture. In Somaliland it is an institutionalised function in the shape of the House of *Guurti*. The *Guurti* role is inherited⁶⁴ and traditionally the intended heir would be trained for this role from an early age. Immediately after the SNM victory in the North and during the relapses into conflict the *Guurti* had acted as *ad hoc* local governments, administering justice, mediating in disputes, managing militias, raising revenue and dealing with the international organisations active in their respective areas⁶⁵. This function continues locally today where the central state lacks capacity to project its authority into the rural areas as the elders are stronger when the state is weak.⁶⁶

The concept of *Diya* can be translated as blood-money. *Diya* has a great social impact in the absence of a capable state as the *Diya*-group provides both insurance and security. There are no insurance companies in Somaliland today and should someone accidentally kill or injure someone else the principle of *Diya* provides the foundation for settling the issue. In order to be able to meet such a payment the individual is dependent on the *Diya*-paying group, thus presented with an incitement to maintain the clan connection. Similarly the *Diya*-group provides social benefits e.g. if your livestock dies or the starting capital of your new family when you get married.⁶⁷ The *Diya*-group carries obligations and protection but also accountability and policing where none is available.

An example of the *Diya* principle in effect was the clan-based Deydey groups that established themselves as local governments. These groups were largely predatory on other clans and enjoyed an uneasy support from their own as they also functioned as a protective militia.⁶⁸ As the banditry grew worse, the *Diya* function turned the Deydey into a liability as the plunder and killing perpetrated by them was a shared responsibility of the clan. It thus came to a point where the Deydey had to be stopped in order to protect the interests of the clans. At the 1993 Boorame conference, their political power was replaced by nominated local authorities⁶⁹ and their military capacity was countered by their own elders. Where there was non-compliance it sometimes even turned into such extreme measures as the Deydey leader being eliminated in order to protect the clan⁷⁰.

The Role of the Traditional

Elders retain a valued and important space in Somaliland society both as part of the central administration and locally. The *House of Guurti* is a clan-appointed second house of parliament that serves multiple purposes among the not least important is to act as a link between traditional socio-political structures and the centralised government. At the local level the elders are a replacement for the otherwise very weak central state capacities. It has been suggested that utilising these traditional structures for land-issues and similar concerns may be a way of taking the pressure off the already weak central institutions and '*ensure the accessibility of effective dispute resolution mechanisms, synchronized with the norms, customs and language of the disputants*'.⁷¹ A weakness of the traditional system is that it is a consensus dependent framework that lacks *independent* judicial enforcement capacity. This may be overcome by institutional overlap where state security forces ensure the implementation of elder decisions.⁷²

The British colonisers introduced a Western-based state model into Somaliland that was adopted at independence. There was however a clear mismatch between that system and a kinship-based

society⁷³ but the British and their system were constant points of reference in interviews with politicians and intellectuals during the field research⁷⁴. It is obvious that it has left an imprint.

During the Barre regime the traditional social structures were directly challenged. Under a banner of 'Scientific Socialism' Barre introduced massive literacy campaigns, gender equality drives, self-help schemes, and social development projects.⁷⁵ The vision demanded the dismantling of traditional clan-based organisation, informal economic networks, and political order that many Somalis were dependent on. It was a case of deep social engineering where culture, religion, and social structures were targeted for reform or denounced outright. Behind the scenes however, clan-politics were being played out.⁷⁶ Though an outspoken enemy of the clan-system, he became increasingly reliant on clan support to maintain power, turning to a vicious targeting of predominantly the Northern *Isaaq* clan-family that he perceived as enemies of the state.

In 1991 as the Somali National Movement found itself standing victorious in the North the Somali state structures had completely broken down. In the subsequent North-Western peace conferences, the *Beel*-system was adopted⁷⁷, a conscious hybridization between Western democratic institutions and traditional society. The core of the *Beel*-system was clan representation but the nomination process was highly susceptible to manipulation and power-sharing was a problem between and within all clan-groups. Several problems were present including the unequal distribution of resources in the country and while pastoralists constitute a majority in the population, the urban representatives dominated the parliament⁷⁸.

Based on the interview responses, the conscious attempt to hybridize appears grounded in a recognition of the influence and power of the traditional structures, couple with a rejection of the policies introduced by Barre, but also that in order to be recognised internationally, the aspiring state needed to adapt to some expected international standards. However it is important to remember that the foundations of the constitution are tradition and *Shariica*.⁷⁹

The Current Political Structures

In response to a lack of educated and trained professionals under the clan appointment system, the country adopted a new constitution through referendum in 2001, the public vote confirming a move towards a more mixed system with an appointed House of Elders and an elected lower House of Parliament. The House of *Guurti* as it is defined by the 2001 constitution⁸⁰ is composed of 82 voting members who are nominated from different clans for a six-year term. Their duties are generally geared towards legislation on the issues of security, defence, religion, and culture and members of the house are to consult with "traditional heads of the communities" when advising the government on these issues⁸¹. The role of the *Guurti* is important as they are credited with much

conflict reconciliation concerning thefts, killings, and land disputes in all regions of Somaliland⁸² in lieu of effective state control. The fact that they are chosen by their clans supposedly strengthens the ties between local clan politics and national politics and how they will be chosen in the future remains a question left open by the constitution⁸³. Some concerns are being raised about the literacy and education of the elders in the House of *Guurti* and their independence from the executive.⁸⁴

The House of Representatives is an elected body of the same size as the House of *Guurti* with the representatives coming from the three allowed parties.⁸⁵

Politics in Somaliland is intimately linked with clan⁸⁶ as the informal society is dominated by it⁸⁷ and formal society is weak. There seems however to be an expectation that this is how politics are to be conducted at this stage. One respondent likened it to building a cell-phone tower in which case you need to distribute shares to the clan in control of the land. Political support is secured in much the same way which explains the large cabinet.⁸⁸ During a coffee break in downtown Hargeisa I spoke to a man who described himself as 'one of those ministers without a ministry', a clan representative who was there as a concession to his clan by the President.⁸⁹

In word there is an ongoing project of formal decentralization of the Somaliland state but there has been little progress despite widespread support⁹⁰, in part because of an unclear definition of what the term will mean in the specific context of the Somaliland state formation. Yet this process is considered important because of the historical experience with the highly centralized Mogadishu regime of Barre as well as in respect to local political culture. Problems include taxation and equity, both of which are subject to clan-politics and risk being exacerbated by a serious decentralization of government. The balancing of clan interests at both the local and the national level is perceived as an obstacle to decentralisation.⁹¹

The 'Clan of Women' – Dynamic change in a Traditional System

The role of women in Somali society is complex but one of the most interesting and tangible areas of change. It also demonstrates a capacity of the traditional system for dynamic change and adaptation to the socio-political reality. While the society is distinctly patriarchal and patrilineal⁹² a secondary effect is also that women have a dual allegiance and belonging to the clan of both their father and their husband. This has made it possible for them to act as messengers between clans in times of conflict and to exert a dual pressure,⁹³ but conversely also makes them subject to suspicion of possible treachery.⁹⁴ Though women may seem completely without power there are examples of them creating their own sites of resistance and influencing aspects of conflict. Several such examples can be found in the Somaliland peace conferences of the 1990's. According to some observers,

women mobilise cross-clan and there is a shared notion of being the 'clan of women'⁹⁵ within which they can create their own political space spanning across societal fissures.

While it could be possible from a Westernised perspective to focus on structural inequalities and sometimes injustices in gender relations in Somaliland, there are indications of a changing social, political and economic environment that perhaps should enjoy greater attention. There are also issues with the approaches and methods chosen by international organisations engaging in gender issues in the Somali context. Several respondents addressing gender issues argued that the strategies employed by external organisations were not adjusted to the Somaliland context. Ideas of local needs are often donor-driven and lack connection to the local reality.⁹⁶ One (male) respondent described the exclusion of women from the decision making process as 'a contribution to retardation' but also saw the Western strategies as incompatible with local society.⁹⁷

The discursive practises by internationals in relation to gender relations are problematic. Barre's 'Scientific Socialism' employed this discourse which corrupted its meaning and associated it with oppression and opposition to the traditional.⁹⁸ By employing the word gender, there are locally held connotations that provoke suspicion and wariness.

Women are in majority in the Somaliland electorate at 55%⁹⁹ and there are now a larger number of female-headed households. According to some international sources around 40% of Somali (in all of Somalia) households were headed by women in 1996.¹⁰⁰ The sexual division of labour in Somali society is further reinforced by a machismo honour-code¹⁰¹ but there are an increased number of female breadwinners.¹⁰² The exclusion of women from the decision-making process is recognised as a problem by the constitution but unlike some other countries there is an active discussion on the role of women in Somaliland. Respondents of both genders indicated that they believed that women needed to be included¹⁰³ but that it needed a context-specific approach and discussion. The overwhelming impression from the discussions on this subject is that it needs to be framed in a Quranic and traditional framework within which the debate on gender roles can be held and that this is where their own discussions are located.¹⁰⁴

There are conflicting images as the woman as a peacemaker with an active and strong capacity to influence,¹⁰⁵ and the woman as socialised into a silence¹⁰⁶ and invisibility in important decisions. While both of these may be true at this point depending on the circumstances, the fact is that there are clearly observable indicators of a social change for women in Somaliland. The current circumstances of Somaliland society are driving an emancipation of women¹⁰⁷ that appears to have its own logic and legitimacy within the local context and appears to be seen as compatible with traditional society.¹⁰⁸ There is a Somali-run training programme to teach young women to vocalise their issues in order to break the socialisation into silence.¹⁰⁹ There is also a pilot project with female

'peace councils' that meet and debate parallel to the all-male traditional councils, a project that has been well received according to the female Somali organisation that designed and implemented it. A point was made of approaching the elders first to make sure there were no misunderstandings of the purpose and role of these councils. They have gradually gained a voice in clan affairs either as a parallel structure being consulted or sometimes invited to participate. Despite the funding running out, the councils are still active and a similar project in a new region is now being considered.¹¹⁰

The socio-economic structure of Somaliland is changing as well. There is an increasing practise of the men working a fewer number of hours per day, partly due to the wide-spread practise of chewing *Qaad*. A late morning start of work is followed by the after lunch chewing sessions during the hot hours of the day. This has forced women to take a larger role in bringing income to the household. While it is an added burden as the women also take care of the household duties, it is beginning to yield an increased influence and general acceptance of women in business and politics.¹¹¹

Despite the majority of voters being women there are only two females in the House of Representatives. The respondents that addressed this explained it in part with the socialisation into believing that women are not good enough. There is however now also a female representative in the House of Elders, the *Guurti*, which to this observer indicates a very big social step. The office of elder is traditionally all male without exception. The female *Guurti* was chosen to represent her husband's sub-clan after he was killed in the October 2008 bombings in Hargeisa and has been generally well accepted.

Taken together, there are several aspects of Somaliland society that are changing into something that can be called an emancipation of women. However every single Somali respondent regardless of gender stressed that this takes time and that it has to be done with a close eye on the Quran, Shariica, and tradition, something it is felt that the external strategies do not. It appears that traditional society, patriarchal as it is, is adapting to these changes and that it is able to incorporate these new influences without losing its cohesion or capacity for social influence. It is the impression of this observer that this is largely owed to the internal legitimacy the change in gender relations has been given by the socio-economic dynamics and the work done by Somali women rather than any gender education programme by Western organisations.

The Externals

When I arrived in Hargeisa my first week was spent trying to understand the security environment as the FCO advises against all travel to the area. When I approached the FCO travel advice service prior to departure they told me they make no political or trade considerations when issuing their advice. The UN security level was at phase four, one step under war, while the level in Afghanistan

was phase three. The internationals I met at the hotel I was staying in were telling me it was not advisable to go out after dark. I was provided with stories of attacks that no one could date and of unprovoked stone-throwing against female internationals when walking in the neighbourhood. On the other hand the Somalis I was working with told me the complete opposite. It was very confusing and I struggled with a conclusion.

By observation, I gradually came to realise that there was something askew in the representation of the security situation provided by the internationals. In pure facts, the number of terrorist classified attacks in Somaliland total since 1997 has been four separate incidents. This is a very low number compared to e.g. London alone. Yet the impression I had was one of Apartheid where the internationals, of all colours and creeds, only travelled in vehicles between their armed guard- high walled-concertina-wire-compounds to their almost identical work compounds. In the first week I saw only four guns in total on the street that did not belong to compound guards or Special Protection Units (escort) that follow the internationals around (the four guns belonged to police). While it may be a misrepresentation in reality, I will not judge on that, the distinct impression was one of separation where the local was seen as something dangerous to be kept out. This was further exacerbated by the practise of keeping Somalis out of expat parties. While there may be reasons for this ranging from security concerns to being awkward while drinking alcohol in front of Somalis in a Muslim country, the distinction between welcome and not did not seem lost on the local population. In all, my impression was one of the international community separating themselves from the local population and possibly missing their legs as they were usually on wheels.

I decided to go out with Somali friends and while many we met were curious in a friendly way who the 'white skin' was, the most aggressive encounter was an approximately seven-year old Oromo boy who yelled 'bitch' when I did not cave in to the puppy-eye begging routine.

There is substantial international involvement in Somaliland though the nature and extent of the involvement differs with perceptions. The World Bank and UN have a Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) for all of Somalia. According to this programme the UN and the World Bank bring a mix of 'capacity, neutrality, credibility and technical expertise'.¹¹² This is a bold claim to make in this area, especially for the UN as it has a bad history in Somalia with e.g. the July 1993 killing of 50 elders. While carried out by the US forces, the bombing was referred to by respondents as a UN action and this is in the North 16 years later. The UN has also taken a political stance in the South which traditionally rhymes very badly with neutrality and credibility. In addition it does not recognise Somaliland which in no way endears them to the local opinion. Though founded

on apparently good intentions, it would seem that any project is starting from a distinctly less optimistic point than the strategy would have it to be.

The RDP actually mentions specifically the resilience and social organisation capacity of Somali society and advocates for a rule of law '*drawing on the strengths of the existing traditional, shari'a and secular systems*'.¹¹³ In reality however, the internationals interviewed and spoken to during this research did generally not represent this position. The programmes seemed more driven by assumptions and political agendas along ideological lines than a serious attempt to understand and build on local existing structures. One international who felt that adaptation was necessary bluntly admitted to projecting one image for the donors while doing something very different on the ground in order to be able to get anything done at all.¹¹⁴ They also seemed to be subject to political pressure to pursue certain objectives and prioritise not so much to the actual situation but to what is perceived as *politically* important in the donor countries. One Somali respondent working closely with internationals noted that 'ideas about the local needs are often donor driven and lack connection with the local realities'¹¹⁵ while one international worker described how projects corresponding to donor-driven value-bases were prioritised in selection.¹¹⁶ Some of these projects also seem to lack in realistic time-scales and in how thought through they are stopping short of analysing potentially negative outcomes of an otherwise well-intended project. The engagement in Somaliland is more benign today than it was in the South in the early 1990's but the outcome of some projects risk further developing the stress put on society. A Somali respondent observed that '[w]hen the international community gets involved there are conditions and demands that cause friction'.¹¹⁷ The proliferation of mechanical wells and underground water deposits created to counter the water shortage has reduced nomadic movements which in turn has increased grazing land deterioration. It has also led to a system of charging for water where not everyone is convinced that they should pay or understand why they are supposed to. One international worker told me that they build wells and then train some of the locally settled people to operate and manage it.¹¹⁸ They are then expected to charge for the use of that well. Of course to a nomad this may appear somewhat novel and hostile, especially if it is on traditionally communal land. Similarly projects addressing the illegal encroachment of land are rejected by some international organisations because of their complexity and viability in favour of projects corresponding to a Liberal value agenda.¹¹⁹

According to the Crisis Group, Somaliland receives a proportionally larger total of foreign assistance than any other Somali region.¹²⁰ The perception most advanced by the respondents was one of most support going to the tumultuous South and very little ending up in Somaliland. The fact that much of the aid destined for Puntland and Ethiopia is unloaded in Berbera port on the

Somaliland coast probably adds to this impression as anyone present can compare the influx with the local distribution. This then spreads among the population also adding to the opinion voiced by several respondents that the money intended for Somaliland ends up in the pockets of the international organisations and their employees.¹²¹ According to some observers there is also a public notion that the international community is there to corrupt their values and society.¹²² An international worker expressed the concerns that social mapping and capacity analysis was done at a minimum level, thereby reducing efficiency, but also that projects were failing because donors insisted on imposing their will.¹²³ This discrepancy between donor-driven projects and the on-the-ground reality has generated a perception among some that the West as an accumulated system with different social dynamics, is interrupting the hybridisation process of Somaliland.¹²⁴

Conclusions

The Somaliland state in the Westphalian understanding of it is weak and has a clearly limited capacity and influence. The legitimacy of its institutions appears to this observer to be based mainly on a wish for it to succeed on some level rather than actual capacity and their real influence. The state appears to be a fully separate part of society described by one respondent as the 'child of the people' that is shown the tolerance for mistakes and behaviour that a parent would show its child¹²⁵. Clan is prevalent as a factor within the state system as well and politics are largely formed around clan principles. The coherence of the state and its institutions thus stand and fall with the agreement of the sub-clans to participate. While state institutions have an influence, the state appears more to be perceived as a resource base that can be accessed by the individual and his or her kin through the means of politics. The state is more a resource to be controlled than a social force vying for control. Decentralisation has been an important point of discussion throughout the Somaliland transition and would arguably move accountability closer to where it traditionally resides; the sub-clan. One respondent argued that a politician that failed should have to go home and face his sub-clan rather than being in Hargeisa.¹²⁶ This has however failed to materialise throughout the years and is unlikely to be driven by those controlling the central power at any given time.

The Somaliland state cannot afford to disregard traditional society as it is what is providing cohesion and social control. Informal society in the shape of traditional structures is very much stronger than the state even in the urban areas, and during the field research there was a strong sentiment expressed that the central state should be as reduced as possible, essentially to taxation and security. While it could be possible for the state and the market to provide alternatives to the functions performed by the sub-clan today in due time, it is something that should be viewed with a

timeframe of around 20 years in the opinion of this observer. The clan as protector, insurance, social net, provider, and source of identity is not something that can be replaced in a brief span of time.

Somaliland as a nation lacks direction today. The problem is not hybridisation in itself, but appears more to be a case of focus having been moved from the traditional to the 'modern' state, seemingly leaving the traditional parts as some sort of appendix to a 'real' state envisioned by others. There is also an issue of traditional support structures losing ground to individual greed where clan is used by the individual to motivate his or her extraction of resources. It is not a too wild guess that the shift in focus may be connected to the international organisations and the amounts of external money currently and increasingly involved in the Somaliland process. More importantly however it seems to be the result of there being a lack of determined direction on the part of the Somaliland politicians. There appears to be no real plan beyond peace and recognition as an independent state.

The peace processes of the 1990's are rightfully a source of deep held pride in Somaliland. The pain the people went through and the astonishing acts of reconciliation displayed are quite impressive. Together with the continued legitimacy of traditional structures the weakness of the state and complete absence of it in a Westphalian understanding was of little to no importance. With a majority nomadic population, informal society has always been strong in the Somali region and the notion of the Pre 1991 Somali state as exercising any meaningful everyday authority in the rural areas of Somalia was challenged by respondents during this research. It is however not enough if Somaliland is to be able to move forward as a nation and meet the expectations of its people.

Recently the Somaliland democratic system has undergone a complicated constitutional crisis where a very careful balancing act by all involved tried to deal with the allegations of fraud in the voter registration process and the apparent repeated attempts by the minority president to prolong his term in office without an election. This strategy has been successful before but was strongly challenged this time. While the crisis developed during the research period, it also continued after its conclusion and accurate information has been hard to come by from outside of the context. It appears however that after a repressive response to a peaceful demonstration in which several people was shot by the police, the House of Elders stepped in and leveraged an end to the bickering and escalation. It remains to be seen whether the consensus agreement on elections is honoured, but it is interesting to see that it was the authority of the elders that apparently put an end to the increasingly dangerous developments. Donor countries have applied a lot of pressure but considering that they have done so with no result for some time, and considering that the President has declared that he would not cave in to them, it is more likely that internal structures have had the final influence. The House of Elders has been accused of being bought and of having failed their duties, but when their role was obvious, they did indeed step in to defuse a bad situation. Not only does this

say something about the status and importance of the traditional in the modern state formation of Somaliland, but while clan interests penetrate national politics, and while they do occasionally generate conflict, the traditional system is also what is providing coherence and stability. If that is removed to make way for only a modern state it should be done gradually and over a very long time to ensure peace. If they are weakened in favour of an individualist pursuit of greed then chaos is very likely to be the result. The international engagement seems supportive of the local structures at the strategy level, but in the uncoordinated and somewhat haphazard efforts on the ground, another image emerges. This has obviously also been picked up on by the Somaliland population resulting in a less than flattering image of the internationals, their motives, and their sincerity.

There appears to be an honest attempt at the strategy level from the international community to engage with the Somaliland society in a constructive way, but somewhere along the road it turns into a remodelling to fit a preconceived format. There is a sense of disconnect which provides an opportunity for other forces. With a weakening of the legitimacy of the traditional, as has been the case in the South since the Italian colonial time, a window opens for e.g. religious or exploitative economic mobilisation of an exclusive group. It takes time to build legitimacy and maybe the total replacement of the traditional is not the way to go.

The changing role and influence of women indicates a traditional society that is able and willing to adapt *on its own terms*. Maybe we should stop and listen to those terms. Who is to say that the resulting framework of a determined, honest, and successful hybridisation where the Somali structures are given more room does not surpass individualist social orders? Whatever the approach it will take time,¹²⁷ something that seems to be a major resource deficiency in the international perspective.

One of the Somali respondents reflected on the political situation as one where the current leaders have lost sight of the vision and are pursuing their own interests.¹²⁸ The image of the politicians in the shade under the meeting tree may increasingly be replaced by an image of everyone reaching up and grabbing for the fruits. The modern state is testing how far it can go and the social system may at some point hit back.¹²⁹ It did so against Barre.

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- ¹ Bradbury, Mark, 2008, pp.19-20
- ² Henceforth in the text, the territory and state structures claimed by Somaliland will be referred to by that name.
- ³ WSP International, 2005, *Rebuilding Somaliland: Issues and Possibilities*, Red Sea Press, p21
- ⁴ Bradbury, Mark, 2008, p93
- ⁵ WSP International, 2005, p.10
- ⁶ Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, p.54
- ⁷ Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, p60
- ⁸ Bradbury, Mark, 2008, *Becoming Somaliland*, Progressio, p45
- ⁹ WSP International, 2005, pp14-5
- ¹⁰ Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, p61
- ¹¹ Bradbury, Mark, 2008, p63
- ¹² Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, p62
- ¹³ The *Beel*-system is further discussed in the section addressing institutions
- ¹⁴ Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, pp64-5
- ¹⁵ Elmi, Hodan Hassani, Nagaad Women's Network, interview in Hargeisa 27 July 2009
- ¹⁶ WSP International, 2005, p16
- ¹⁷ Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, pp68 and 71
- ¹⁸ Elmi, Hodan Hassan, Hargeisa, in interview 27 July 2009
- ¹⁹ Gabobe, Yusuf, Hargeisa, in interview 23 July 2009
- ²⁰ Bradbury, Mark, 2008, p218
- ²¹ Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, p74
- ²² Lewis, Ioan M., 2008, p.1
- ²³ Elmi, Hodan Hassan, Hargeisa, in interview 27 July 2009
- ²⁴ *Diya* is translated as "blood-money" and the *Diya*-paying group is the group tasked with entering into and honouring the *Xeer*, social contract or common law, that regulates crime, punishment, inheritance, etc (see e.g. Lewis 1961, pp6 and 176).
- ²⁵ Abdilahi Ibrahim Habane, General Secretary of the House of Elders, Hargeisa, in interview 25 July 2009
- ²⁶ This view was expressed by a vast majority of the respondents
- ²⁷ Jimcaale, 2005, p51
- ²⁸ Lewis, I.M., 1961 (1982), *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*, Africana Publishing Company, p5
- ²⁹ Lewis, 1961, p7
- ³⁰ Lewis, 1961, p1
- ³¹ Jimcaale, 2005, pp51-2
- ³² Bradbury, Mark, 2008, p.15
- ³³ Mohamad, Mohamad Saeed, in interview 9 August 2009
- ³⁴ Gabobe, Yusuf, in interview 23 July 2009
- ³⁵ Hodan Hassan Elmi, Hargeisa, in interview 27 July 2009
- ³⁶ Mohamad, Mohamad Saeed, Hargeisa, in interview 9 August 2009
- ³⁷ Elmi, Abdulkaer Hashi, Hargeisa, in interview 8 August 2009
- ³⁸ Abdilahi Ibrahim Habane, Hargeisa, in interview 25 July 2009
- ³⁹ APD, 2009a, p.13
- ⁴⁰ Mohamad, Mohamad Saeed, Hargeisa, in interview 9 August 2009
- ⁴¹ WSP International, 2005, p.5
- ⁴² Lewis, Ioan M., 2008, *Understanding Somaliland*, Hurst Publishers, London, p.3
- ⁴³ WSP International, 2005, pp.5-6
- ⁴⁴ Gaani, Maxamed Xaban, 2005, *Regulating the Livestock Economy of Somaliland*, p.201, in WSP International, 2005, *Rebuilding Somaliland*, The Red Sea Press, pp.189-268
- ⁴⁵ Mohamed, Saeed Mohamed, Hargeisa, in interview 9 August 2009
- ⁴⁶ APD, 2009a, *No More 'Grass Grown by the Spear': Addressing Land-Based Conflicts in Somaliland*, Land-Based Conflict Project, Somaliland Report, p.9
- ⁴⁷ Gaani, Maxamed Xaban, 2005, p.211
- ⁴⁸ E.g. Hagi-Dahir, Said, Hargeisa, in interview 6 August 2009

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- ⁴⁹ Cadastral Surveys Ltd is doing this in cooperation with the Somaliland Government. Cadastral is run by Mr John Drysdale who first came to the country in 1943. Drysdale in conversation 22 July 2009
- ⁵⁰ APD, 2009a, p.15
- ⁵¹ Elmi, Abdulkaer Hashi, Hargeisa, in interview 8 August 2009
- ⁵² Abdilahi Ibrahim Habane, Hargeisa, in interview 25 July 2009
- ⁵³ APD, 2009a, p.9
- ⁵⁴ E.g. Gabobe, Yusuf, Hargeisa, in interview 23 July 2009
- ⁵⁵ Elmi, Abdulkaer Hashi, Hargeisa, in interview 8 August 2009
- ⁵⁶ Abdi, Jamal, Hargeisa, in interview 3 August 2009
- ⁵⁷ APD, 2009a, p.16
- ⁵⁸ Mohamad, Mohamaed Saeed, Hargeisa, in interview 9 August 2009
- ⁵⁹ Abdilahi Ibrahim Habane, Hargeisa, in interview 25 July 2009
- ⁶⁰ APD, 2009b, *Peace in Somaliland – An Indigenous Approach to State-Building*, The Search for Peace, Somali Programme
- ⁶¹ Bradbury, Mark, 2008, p.16-7
- ⁶² APD, 2009b, p.11
- ⁶³ Bradbury, Mark, 2008, p.19
- ⁶⁴ Abdi, Jamal,, Hargeisa, in interview 3 August 2009
- ⁶⁵ Bradbury, Mark, 2008, p86
- ⁶⁶ Abdilahi Ibrahim Habane, Hargeisa, in interview 25 July 2009
- ⁶⁷ Mohamad, Mohamad Saeed, Hargeisa, in interview 9 August 2009
- ⁶⁸ Bradbury, Mark, 2008, p.88
- ⁶⁹ Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, pp.90-1
- ⁷⁰ Bradbury, Mark, 2008, p.88
- ⁷¹ APD, 2009a, p.20
- ⁷² APD, 2009a, p.20
- ⁷³ Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, p.50
- ⁷⁴ Multiple interviews in Hargeisa July and August 2009
- ⁷⁵ WSP International, 2005, p.10
- ⁷⁶ WSP International, 2005, p.11
- ⁷⁷ Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, p.50
- ⁷⁸ Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, pp83-4
- ⁷⁹ Ibrahim Habane, Hargeisa, in interview 25 July 2009
- ⁸⁰ An English version of the Somaliland Constitution is available at http://www.somalilandforum.com/somaliland/constitution/revised_constitution.htm#Index
- ⁸¹ Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, p75
- ⁸² Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, p76
- ⁸³ Bradbury, Mark, 2008, p224-5
- ⁸⁴ Interview in Hargeisa, identity withheld
- ⁸⁵ The three party limit was imposed in order to counter a too large party number going down to sub-sub-clan level. It was never intended to be the same three parties over and over again but that has been the effect. Mohamad, Mohamaed Saeed, Hargeisa, in interview 9 August 2009
- ⁸⁶ Respondents ranged between stating that all politics are clan related to saying that they are not always separated. The only voice saying clan had nothing to do with politics was a member of parliament.
- ⁸⁷ Several respondents expressed this view stating that clan is the most important part of Somaliland society
- ⁸⁸ Mohamad, Mohamaed Saeed, Hargeisa, in interview 9 August 2009
- ⁸⁹ Identity withheld
- ⁹⁰ Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, p87
- ⁹¹ Jimcaale, Cabdiraxmaan, 2005, p.97
- ⁹² Cabdi, Sucaad Ibrahim, 2005, *The Impact of War on the Family*, in WSP International, 2005, *Rebuilding Somaliland*, The Red Sea Press, pp.269-325
- ⁹³ Walls, Michael, 2009, *The Emergence of a Somali State: Building Peace from Civil War in Somaliland*, p.377, in African Affairs, 108/432, pp.371-389
- ⁹⁴ Mohamad, Mohamaed Saeed, Hargeisa, in interview 9 August 2009
- ⁹⁵ E.g. Hodan Hassan Elmi, Hargeisa, in interview 27 July 2009

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- ⁹⁶ Hodan Hassan Elmi, Hargeisa, in interview 27 July 2009
- ⁹⁷ Abdilahi Ibrahim Habane, Hargeisa, in interview 25 July 2009
- ⁹⁸ Hodan Hassan Elmi, Hargeisa, in interview 27 July 2009
- ⁹⁹ Kinyanjui, Mary, Dr., 2008, *The Second Assessment of the Socio-Economic Status of Women in Somaliland*, Nagaad Umbrella Organization, Hargeisa Somaliland, p.28
- ¹⁰⁰ Cabdi, Sucaad Ibrahim, 2005, p.280
- ¹⁰¹ Lewis, Ioan M., 2008, p.13
- ¹⁰² Nagaad Umbrella Organization, 2007, *Women's Political Participation in Somaliland: An Evaluation of the 2005 Parliamentary Elections*, Nagaad Umbrella Organization, p.8
- ¹⁰³ E.g. Mohamad, Mohamaed Saeed, Hargeisa, in interview 9 August 2009; Hodan Hassan Elmi, Hargeisa, in interview 27 July 2009
- ¹⁰⁴ Hodan Hassan Elmi, Hargeisa, in interview 27 July 2009
- ¹⁰⁵ At the Borome peace conference in 1993 there were five female observers. They were allowed to only listen but also vocalised their concerns in writing which was read out to the delegates. There are numerous accounts of how women protested and influenced the different peace processes during the 90's including the decision to not allow the UN forces to deploy to the North which constituted a revoking of the original decision made by the elders.
- ¹⁰⁶ Mohamed Ahmed Mohamoud SONYO Executive Director, Hargeisa, in interview 30 July 2009
- ¹⁰⁷ Abdi, Jamal, Hargeisa, in interview 3 August 2009
- ¹⁰⁸ Mohamed, Ahmed Mohamoud, Hargeisa, in interview 30 July 2009
- ¹⁰⁹ Mohamed, Ahmed Mohamoud, Hargeisa, in interview 30 July 2009
- ¹¹⁰ Hodan Hassan Elmi, Hargeisa, in interview 27 July 2009
- ¹¹¹ A woman I spoke to was routinely consulted by the elders of her sub-clan on issues. Identity withheld.
- ¹¹² UN and World Bank, *Somali Reconstruction and Development Programme – Deepening Peace and Reducing Conflict*, Volume I, Draft, January 2008, p.iv
- ¹¹³ UN and World Bank, 2008, p.xii
- ¹¹⁴ Identity withheld
- ¹¹⁵ Identity withheld,
- ¹¹⁶ Identity withheld
- ¹¹⁷ Identity withheld.
- ¹¹⁸ Identity withheld for ethical reasons. The subject came up in conversation not as part of a n interview.
- ¹¹⁹ Identity withheld
- ¹²⁰ Crisis Group, 2004, p.28
- ¹²¹ The existence of this opinion was advanced by several respondents, both as a personal comment and as a critical comment of a popularly held belief.
- ¹²² Hodan Hassan Elmi, Hargeisa, in interview 27 July 2009
- ¹²³ Identity withheld
- ¹²⁴ Abdilahi Ibrahim Habane, Hargeisa, in interview 25 July 2009
- ¹²⁵ Interview in Hargeisa, Identity withheld.
- ¹²⁶ Abdilahi Ibrahim Habane, Hargeisa, in interview 25 July 2009
- ¹²⁷ A number of Somali respondents intimated that any move away from clan influence had to be allowed a long time frame and had to be replaced by something that comprehensively replaced all its functions.
- ¹²⁸ Identity withheld
- ¹²⁹ Comment made by respondent, identity withheld.