

VOLUME 6

# Somalia

## Current Conflicts and New Chances for State Building

A Publication on Promoting Democracy under Conditions of State Fragility

**Dirk Spilker** Somalia on the Horn of Africa. National and Regional Lines of Conflict in the Past and Present  
**Ken Menkhaus** Understanding State Failure in Somalia: Internal and External Dimensions  
**Mohamed Hassan Ibrahim** and **Ulf Terlinden** Making Peace, Rebuilding

Institutions: Somaliland – A Success Story? **Jabril Ibrahim Abdulle**  
Civil Society in the Absence of a Somali State **Shukria Dini** Gender, Society, and Politics in Somalia **Axel Harneit-Sievers** The Heinrich Böll Foundation in Somalia: Engagements and Experiences





# SOMALIA



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Current Conflicts and New Chances for State Building

Volume 6 (English Edition) in the Publication Series on Democracy

A Publication on Promoting Democracy under Conditions of State Fragility

Concept and editing: Axel-Harneit-Sievers and Dirk Spilker

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WRITINGS ON DEMOCRACY  
VOLUME 6**

# **Somalia**

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## PREFACE

In spring 2008, Somalia once again is projecting images of war and humanitarian crisis. The country, however, seems to have almost disappeared from the world news and the concerns of international observers. In all the military escalations, innocent civilians – some already displaced by and fleeing from the re-emerging conflicts – have lost the foundations of their livelihoods, not to mention their hope for change. The situation today has all the ingredients of a disaster that compounds Somalia's already endemic human insecurity.

The country has endured seventeen years of complete state collapse and we can recount at least fourteen failed reconciliation conferences. Somalia has “resisted” a whole series of external interventions to bring about peace and stability and to reconstitute the state:

Since 1991, when the regime of Siyad Barre collapsed and its institutions were dismantled, clan-based factions filled the gap but failed to unite. They attacked each other and provoked a war that caused the deaths of an estimated 250,000 people and drove hundreds of thousands out of the territory. In December 1992 a “massive peace enforcement intervention” began, first led by the United States and later handed over to the United Nations in an attempt to re-establish a central government. This was the first of several efforts by the international community to provide Somalia with the kind of centralised state structure that most external actors associate with “proper” governance.

The year 2006 brought a dramatic turn with the short-lived rule of the Council of Islamic Courts, used amazingly to re-establish some degree of security (at least in Mogadishu). But all security disappeared after six months when the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), with the help of the Ethiopian army (and US support in the background), removed the Courts from power, leading them and other opponents of the TFG to pursue an escalating insurgency. The “military success” of the TFG will, however, be of no avail if no political solution is found for one of Africa's most complicated conflicts. Any failure will haunt first the Ethiopian forces, but also the troops deployed by the African Union – and in the meantime, the Somali people will continue to suffer. The African Union's intervention needs to be coupled with new and creative political initiatives in order to achieve a solution.

But how to go about creating such initiatives? Who should be involved and in what way?

This publication tries to shed some light on the history and present reality of prolonged state collapse in Somalia with a specific focus on the possible reasons for the failures of the many attempts to rebuild the state so far. It takes a closer look at the internal and external actors taking part in such efforts and suggests paying more attention to Somali civil society and gender dynamics in particular.

The first two chapters provide an introduction to the historical background of the Somali conflict (Dirk Spilker) and its more recent dynamics that have proved to be virtually intractable (Ken Menkhaus); both authors stress the interplay between local actors and the wider political environment of the Horn of Africa region and beyond. In chapter 3, Mohammed Hassan Ibrahim and Ulf Terlinden look at Somaliland – the breakaway republic in Somalia’s north-west that has made remarkable progress in making peace and re-building basic structures of statehood and democracy in the absence of international recognition. Jabril Abdulle, in chapter 4, describes the development of civil society structures within the difficult realities of the Somali situation. He analyses the multitude of contributions to the survival of Somalia’s people in everyday life, and reflects on the attempts made by civil society to promote peace and create structures to provide governance in the absence of functional statehood. The role and special plight of women in the Somali situation – and the particular contributions of women’s organisations within Somali civil society – are analysed in chapter 5 by Shukria Dini. Finally, in chapter 6, Axel Harneit-Sievers sketches the activities and summarises the experiences made by the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF) in its work – largely focussed on civil societal structures – in Somalia and Somaliland over the last decade.

As a German political foundation affiliated to the Green Party, the Heinrich Böll Foundation is active in several countries and regions of the world that are suffering from violent conflicts and, as a result, are experiencing a severe weakening of the institutions of statehood and governance. The spectrum extends from Afghanistan through to Somalia and Lebanon. The root causes and realities of the conflicts and fragile (or collapsed) states differ greatly, but all of them have in common a long history of external interventions “to re-establish peace and stability”; many of those have failed – some of them dramatically so.

As part of its engagement in these countries, HBF is involved in studying the experiences of international actors in the area of peace and democracy. HBF’s publication series “Promoting Democracy under Conditions of State Fragility” wants to contribute to a more precise analysis and understanding of specific local situations in particular regions and countries. At the same time, it aims to take each case as a “lesson to learn” about existing risks and opportunities, workable approaches, and no-go areas when working under conditions of fragile or collapsed statehood.

This volume focussing on Somalia would not have come about without the conceptual inputs, writing, and editing of my colleagues Dr Axel Harneit-Sievers and Dirk Spilker. Sincere thanks also to the other authors, whose knowledge and understanding of the situation on the ground allows us to view the current disaster not as fate but as a state to overcome. Finally, let us not forget that it is the people of Somalia – deserving security and prosperity – who will have to choose what kind of system and governance suits them best.

Berlin, April 2008

Kirsten Maas-Albert

*Head of the Africa Department, Heinrich Böll Foundation*

**DIRK SPILKER**

# **Somalia on the Horn of Africa**

## National and Regional Lines of Conflict in the Past and Present

### **1 Introduction**

The East African state of Somalia is unique in many respects. At the same time, large parts of the Western public are at most familiar with its name. The country has lacked a functional central government for nearly 20 years, and it is avoided by most foreigners. Also, it is rarely the focus of international news coverage. Somalia lost its geo-strategic significance when the Cold War ended, and after the failed UN operations in the first half of the 1990s the world community – apart from a handful of stalwart aid organizations – virtually left Somalia to its own devices. Only after September 11, 2001, in the context of the US “War on Terror”, did international interest in Somalia revive: a new kind of attention that was not necessarily to Somalia’s advantage.

There is little public concern in the Western world about the suffering of the Somali population. Internationally, reports of ongoing fighting, hundreds of thousands of refugees and the recurrent threat or reality of humanitarian catastrophe are ignored or largely shrugged off. Those scholars and practitioners who are interested in Somalia tend to focus mainly on the aspect of advanced state collapse; it is widely regarded as a textbook example of a failed state.

In Europe and the US, as well as in much of Africa, there is limited public awareness of the major factors that have shaped Somalia’s politics, history and society in the past, and continue to determine them today. Yet in many regards Somali society is so unique that without a minimum of background information, analyses of the current situation and the existing options for taking action will generally fall short – a problem that manifests itself from time to time in the current policies of external actors.

This introductory chapter points out the most important functional foundations of Somali politics and society, those crucial to understanding the country’s history and current situation. At the same time, it embeds Somali history in that of the “Horn of Africa” region. It shows how developments in the region have affected Somalia in the past, as well as the other way around.

On the one hand there is the Somali social order, which is unique in the region and probably worldwide. It is based on several crucial, formative factors: first and foremost Somali Islam (tensely situated between Sufi mysticism and Islamist instrumentalization); Somali nationalism, which repeatedly flares up and is stirred up for political reasons; and the clan system. The give and take between these factors is indispensable to an understanding of Somali politics and society.

### *The “Horn of Africa”*

*There are a number of different definitions of the region, none of which has so far achieved dominance. Here the “Horn” refers to the four countries of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti. The “Greater Horn” is generally regarded as including the states of the regional organization IGAD, i.e. including Uganda, Kenya and Sudan as well as the four states mentioned above.*

A knowledge of the historical and current regional lines of conflict is also necessary for understanding the situation in the Horn of Africa. In particular, to this day a deep-rooted enmity between Somalia and Ethiopia plays a significant role in explaining regional politics. The role of external actors must continue to be thematized as well; even before the colonial period, but especially since then, they have repeatedly had a crucial – and generally negative – influence on the development of the Horn of Africa in general and Somalia in particular.

## **2 Politics and Society in Somalia: Determining Factors**

The name Somalia is used to refer to the de jure existing state “Republic of Somalia”. In its present-day form it consists of the Republic of Somaliland in the northwest (see the essay by Mohammed Hassan Ibrahim and Ulf Terlinden in this volume), the autonomous region of Puntland in the north and northeast as well as a third part known as Southern Somalia or South-Central Somalia. There are also significant Somali populations in present-day Djibouti and northeast Kenya. Taken together, the five regions represent the five historical parts of Somalia, still symbolized by the five-pointed star on the national flag, a recurring source of anxiety for the neighboring states.

Somalia lies on the Horn of Africa, which marks the intersection between the Gulf of Aden with its access to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, and the Indian Ocean on the East Coast of Africa. The bordering states are Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. According to the most recent available estimates, Somalia currently has around 8 million inhabitants. Two thirds of the population lives from nomadic livestock breeding, 99% are Sunni Muslims, around 95% are classified ethnically as “Somali” and speak the language of the same name. There are only a few small minorities of Arab, Indian and Pakistani origin.<sup>1</sup>

### **2.1 “Lineage” and “Clan” as Features of Somali Society**

Oral historical tradition locates the origins of the Somali people in a union between African Bantu groups and immigrants from the Arab Peninsula. According to scientific sources, the emergence of Somali settlements on the Horn of Africa dates back quite

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1 The remarks in this chapter regarding the foundations of Somali politics and society are based largely on a number of standard reference works. Worthy of special mention are Lewis 1980, Lewis 1998, and Samatar 1988, Lata 2004. The German-language reference works are Touati 1997 (specifically on Somalia) and Matthies 1992 and Matthies 2005 (also covering the Horn of Africa).

far; the history is generally presumed to go back at least two thousand years. The area settled by the Somalis was characterized by a pastoral economic system in which each household or each family was highly autonomous. Families were loosely connected via clan relationships (or “lineages”) that would be called on especially in economic emergencies. These clan relationships brought families together to help one another, as in the case of violent distribution disputes (for example over water), which were quite frequent.

Over the centuries this gave rise to a differentiated social system: families joined to form sub-clans, which in turn formed clans and ultimately clan families.

### **Segmentary Societies**

*This term, originally coined by Emile Durkheim, describes a form of social organization that consists of largely similar segments (clans) determined by lineages. These segments are divided into sub-segments of differing size and significance, which can be influenced not only by lineage but by other (e.g. local and economic) factors.*

*The interplay of the (sub-) segments provides for quite far-reaching political self-regulation without involving a central state authority. In the relevant literature, segmentary societies are often referred to as “acephalous” (stateless).*

*Culturally speaking, segmentary societies are relatively homogeneous: conflicts are always waged within a common historical, cultural and mythological value structure. This factor distinguishes conflicts in segmentary societies from ethnic conflicts.*

Lineage systems permitted the formation of large units, while conversely enabling the segmentation of society through back reference to a concrete or fictitious lineage. Though on the one hand this segmentation is a characteristic feature of Somali history, it is also subject to ongoing dynamics. Lineages manifest themselves more or less strongly in different situations, whether as political, economic or social units. In addition, in the event of conflict alliances form that always relate to a specific conflict. This leads to situations in which two hostile segments may easily form a short-term alliance against a mutual enemy if a new conflict emerges – only to resume their bilateral conflict afterwards. This policy of shifting alliances – a common characteristic of segmentary societies – leads in aggregate to a balance of powers: the position of the individual segments with respect to one another is constantly changing, but the overall balance is maintained. It is the consequence of constant negotiation processes, and is definitely not created by means of permanent political institutions – such a notion is generally foreign to segmentary societies.

Somalia’s oral mythological tradition reflects a “top down” system of segmentation: according to the mythology, the original Somali clan gave rise to the two clan families Samaale and Sab. The latter split into the Digil and Rahanweyn clans, which live in the south, mainly as farmers and fisherman, and have not had a crucial influence on Somalia’s politics. This role has so far been reserved for the Samaale. For

long periods of history the Darod clan (whose area of influence mainly covers a region in the southwest of the country) was most influential, the most important sub-clans being the Majertain and Marehan (to which e.g. the dictator Siyad Barre belonged), along with the Ogadeni and the Dulbahante. The clan family of the Samaale also includes the Isak, with their main area of influence in present-day Somaliland, and Hawiye (areas of influence in the south around the capital of Mogadishu and in the southern coastal regions) with the sub-clans Habar Gedir and Abgal. When it comes to clans within a family, the Somalis' collective memory allows them to determine connections going back for many generations.

To create a connection between the Sab and the Samaale, the "lineage" must be traced back to the time of Mohammed; on this abstract level the Somali all regard themselves as "children of the prophet". At the same time, this creates a connection between "lineage" and religion, which has an important integrating function in segmentary societies.

## 2.2 Religion in Somalia

Almost the entire population consists of Sunnis, making Somalia one of the most religiously homogenous countries in Africa. The Islamic influence came about through trade contacts with the Arab Peninsula, as well as reciprocal migration, which has been established as beginning in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. From the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards Mogadishu was initially a trading colony ruled by Somali-Arab tribes; in the 13<sup>th</sup> century it developed into the first Sultanate ("Muzaffar") on Somali soil, which was to last for several centuries. Not until the 16<sup>th</sup> century did Muzaffar gradually begin to lose its importance as an economic center, later vanishing in the process of European colonization.

### ***Sufism in Somalia***

*Sufism is often referred to as "Islamic mysticism". Its adherents (the "Sufis" or "Dervishes") strive toward an ardent union with God by renouncing their own wishes and desires. God is experienced as "the beloved" or as pure love. This core of Sufism, the inner relationship to God, makes it largely apolitical. Sufism reached its theological zenith around the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, for 400-500 years its development was simultaneous with the spread of Sunni Islam in Somalia. Somalia's three most important Sufi orders are Qáderiyyah, Ahmaddiyyah and Sálihiyyah. Qáderiyyah, the oldest Sufi order in Somalia, originated in the 15<sup>th</sup> c. in the city of Harar (Ogaden Region). Ahmaddiyyah and its later spin-off Sálihiyyah emerged toward the end of the past century in the southern part of Somalia. To this day the majority of Somalis practice traditional Sufism.*

This represents an 800-year historical tradition of Arab-influenced sultanates in the territory of Somalia. Coastal centers such as Mogadishu offered especially favorable conditions for anchoring and spreading Islam in society, as these fixed locations provided bases from which the constant nomadic migration movements

could systematically spread Islam into the backcountry. To this day Sufism, which also began to spread from the coastal centers in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, has had a formative influence on Somalia. Sufi brotherhoods were, and continue to be, deeply rooted in the society.

Traditionally, relations between Sufis and clan-based actors were complementary: secular power lay in the hands of the clan leaders, religious authority in the hands of the Sufis. In turn, the latter were respected by the clan authorities because they had no political agenda of their own.<sup>2</sup>

Somali historical lore offers indications that the invocation of religion can alleviate clan differences: as mentioned, if the traditional “lineage” is traced back to the time of Mohammed, a connection can be made between the clan families Sab and Samaale. Lewis (1998: 6f.) speaks of a “solidarity [that] transcends all sectional interests and divisions, including that between Somaali and Sab and represents a real consciousness of common nationality and religion”. In Somali history the Sufi brotherhoods have in fact had followings that transcended clan boundaries.

### 3 The West Begins to Intervene: Colonial History and its Ramifications

As early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century there are reports of fighting between Christian Amharic populations in the Ethiopian highlands and Muslim Sultanates in the eastern lowlands (present-day Somalia). The arrival of the European colonial powers further complicated relations.<sup>3</sup> The region’s Somali inhabitants felt increasingly hemmed in by the colonial protectorates and simultaneously cheated by treaties between the colonial powers and clan leaders. By contrast, the Ethiopian ruler Menelik II. was open toward the Europeans as long as they did not impede his own territorial expansion, and maintained friendly relations above all with England and France. In 1887 he occupied the city of Harar in the Ogaden region and announced his territorial claim to the entire region, a claim recognized by the colonial powers. Ultimately, in 1897 the Somali settlement areas were divided up into Italian, British and French Somaliland; one part of the area went to Kenya and Ogaden went to Ethiopia.<sup>4</sup>

***The Horn of Africa in the Grip of the Colonial Powers***  
*Europeans began focusing on the Horn of Africa in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, France’s interest in the region (France had a port on the Gulf of Tadjoura) increased dramatically after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. After 1869 the “Grande Nation” drastically expanded its possessions*

- 2 This factor explains much of the aversion which large parts of the Somali population have traditionally had toward political manifestations of Islam.
- 3 Discussions of the region’s colonial history can be found e.g. in Kollmer & Mückusch 2007 and Matthes 2005. A more detailed analysis of Somalia’s colonial history is offered by Touati 1997. Sheik-Abdi 1993 specifically examines the role and significance of the Somali national hero Hassan.
- 4 Italian Somaliland covered the area of what is now Puntland and Southern Somalia, British Somaliland covered the Republic of Somaliland, which declared its independence in 1991, and French Somaliland covered the present-day state of Djibouti.

*on the coast of the Horn of Africa until by the end of the 1880s they also included large Somali nomad areas. This meant that the cornerstone for several 20<sup>th</sup>-century territorial conflicts was already laid. In the year 1884 Great Britain also established a protectorate over areas of what is now northern Somalia (Somaliland) as a base for supplying its troops in Aden. Italy gained control over the area of present-day Eritrea in 1889.*

The partition was experienced as a humiliation. To this day it has served as the source of a pan-Somali nationalism which propagates the reunification of the five parts (instrumentalized chiefly by Siyad Barre; however, pan-Somali rhetoric is also encountered in the vocabulary of the Somali Islamists). It also cemented the enmity between Ethiopia and Somalia at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; ever since, Ogaden has been a continual bone of contention and potential *causus belli* between the two countries. Thirdly, in the Somalis' collective memory the intervention of external (western) actors is associated with catastrophe and met with skepticism and sometimes rejection. Furthermore, a militant anti-colonial resistance emerged in the Somali regions; this can be regarded as the birth of Somali nationalism and Islamism.

### 3.1 The Anti-colonialist Resistance as Somalia's First Nationalist-Islamist Movement

The traditional clan elders had made a number of peace treaties with the colonial powers. The religious elites found it harder to accept the white, Christian colonial rulers – whereby the centuries-old rivalry with Christian-dominated Ethiopia probably played an important role – and they fell back on religion as the element that created unity among Somalis.

***Said Mohammed Abdullah Hassan***  
*stands to this day as the most important Somali national hero and cross-clan identification figure. He came from the spiritual tradition of Sheikh Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab, who founded Wahhabism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a conservative Sunni movement (in 1744 the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded on the basis of his teachings). One of the central concerns of Wahhabism has been to prevent all foreign influences and innovations in Islam. This includes the rejection of the Sufis' cults of graves and holy men. Hassan initially preached the revival of the religious spirit and the rejection of materialism and consumption, but became increasingly radical toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, in 1899, he began the fight against the British colonial rulers and declared Jihad on all non-Muslims.*

The most political brotherhood around the turn of the century was the Sálihiyyah, which spread mainly in the north of the country under its leader Hassan. Beginning in 1901, and with the support of the Italians and the Ethiopians, the British undertook



several campaigns against Hassan and his “Dervish movement”<sup>5</sup>. For domestic political reasons, however, they were unable to fully commit themselves, giving Hassan room for diplomatic maneuvering. He managed to conclude a peace treaty with Italy (1905) that resulted in the establishment of an autonomous territorial structure (the “Dervish State”). For the time being, the British withdrew from the country’s interior. Over the following decade Hassan established his centralistic and hierarchical Dervish State as a parallel authority tolerated by the Italian colonial administration, and he governed it with an iron fist. Shortly after the end of World War I the British put an end to Hassan’s experiment with targeted bombardments of his positions. He fled to Ogaden (where he died in 1921), and the remaining Dervish units were swiftly crushed, bringing Somalia’s most important anti-colonial resistance movement to an abrupt end.

To this day Mohamed Abdullah Hassan is regarded as Somalia’s most important national hero. His achievement lay in his ability to make use of several contemporary trends: he successfully positioned himself to equal degrees as a political and a religious authority, aspired to independence from the colonial powers and simultaneously propagated the unity of state and religion. Thus, under Hassan Islamism and nationalism formed one single whole, mutually dependent, two sides of the same coin.

Under Hassan clan hostilities did break out repeatedly, but due to his charismatic personality he managed to keep these centrifugal forces under control for a long time. The external actors, i.e. the colonial powers and Ethiopia, provided Hassan with objects of both nationalist *and* Islamist rhetoric, as the struggle against external oppression was linked with a Jihadi element of the struggle against “unbelievers”. The Dervish movement can thus be regarded as Somalia’s first national and first Islamist movement.

#### **4 The Cold War on the Horn: Dictators, Changing Partners and Shifting Alliances**

##### ***Geostrategy on the Horn of Africa***

*The fundamental geostrategic significance of the Horn of Africa during the Cold War arose from its position at the end of the Red Sea and opposite the Arab Peninsula. It lies on the intersection of the Suez Canal Route and the Cape Route, which connect the Persian Gulf, South and Southeast Asia with the USA and Western Europe. During the Cold War the USA also discussed using locations on the Horn of Africa as a base of operations and deployment zone for the Near East. The USA feared that an increased Soviet influence in the region could lead to the interruption of commercial shipping lines toward the west and access to the oil reserves of the Near East.*

5 The term is derived from the Persian “darvish” for “ascetic monk”. In European languages, members of Sufi orders were often generally referred to as Dervishes. European authors used the term for several different anti-colonial resistance movements (among others in Sudan and Somalia).

Beginning in the 1940s the Horn of Africa was seen as belonging to the sphere of influence of the USA, which entered into broad military cooperations with Ethiopia, building it up into a continental power. Especially after the Egyptian coup d'état in 1952, Ethiopia became the largest recipient of US military aid in sub-Saharan Africa, a situation that lasted until well into the 1970s. Ethiopia's emperor Haile Selassie saw the cooperation as a way of securing his hegemonic position in the region in the long term, especially against Somalia.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, relations between Ethiopia and Russia could be traced far into the past: beginning as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century orthodox monks had created contacts between the Ethiopian empire and Tsarist Russia (for Russia, Christian Ethiopia was a natural ally in a Muslim-dominated region). The Soviet Union's interest in Ethiopia revived during World War II, leading to the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1943. These contacts lay dormant after Selassie's involvement with the west, but intensified once again during the 1960s. However, at the exact same time (1963) the Somali leadership also accepted an extensive offer from the Soviet Union to train their army.

#### 4.1 Somalia after World War II: The New Partitioning and the Semi-Democratic 1960s

The defeat of the axis powers in World War II meant that almost the entire Somali region came under British administration (the exception was French Djibouti). In 1946 Great Britain proposed the reunification of all the Somali subterritories, but this was rejected by France, the USA and the Soviet Union. One reason for this was the fear that the unified Somalia would de facto fall to Great Britain as a new, large colony. However, equally important was the lobbying of the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie, who asked the US government to ensure that Ogaden would remain under his rule. Here the USA was guided chiefly by geopolitical interests. At that time the USA was negotiating with Selassie regarding the establishment of a US military base on Ethiopian territory. Great Britain realized that its position was hopeless and ultimately agreed to let Ogaden remain Ethiopian, once again sealing the partitioning of Somalia.

The UN put Somalia under Italian trusteeship in 1949 and in 1959 recognized its independence in the borders of the former British and Italian Somaliland (i.e., the present-day regions of Somaliland, Puntland and Southern Somalia); the Ogaden region had been formally transferred to Ethiopia in 1954.

Somalia's independence rang in a decade that is occasionally referred to as the "golden democratic phase", though it was more of an attempt at democracy on a clan basis, not entirely unlike the later negotiations for the transitional governments after 2000. The clan basis was reflected in the composition of the transitional government and the parliament; posts were allocated to the clans via a quota system.

<sup>6</sup> The international standard reference work on US Cold War policy toward Ethiopia and Somalia was presented by Lefebvre in 1991. Patman (1990) contributed an analysis of Soviet policy. An early overview – relevant for the period until the 1970s – is that of Ottaway (1982). In the German-language literature, Ghebresillasse (1999) offers a detailed analysis in *Äthiopien und Somalia im Spannungsfeld der Supermächte 1945-1991*. A comprehensive overview of the Cold War in Africa is found in Marte (1994).

In foreign policy, 1963/64 saw a move toward the Soviet Union, which soon began to arm and train the Somali army. One often-cited reason for this is the already-profound hostility toward the USA, which had played a key role in arming Somalia's archenemy, Ethiopia. The neighbors repeatedly skirmished along their shared border, and forces in Somali politics and above all in the Somali army advocated the realization of a Greater Somalia by military means.

## 4.2 The Time of the Putschists

Over the course of the 1960s a number of conflicts, resignations and cabinet reshufflings caused a severe decline in popular support for the democratic experiment. Toward the end of the 1960s extreme economic problems (mainly due to the closure of the Suez Canal) caused the domestic political situation to become increasingly unsettled.

On October 15, 1969, the democratically-elected president Abdirashid Ali Shermarke was assassinated. Subsequently a revolutionary council headed by General Muhammad Siyad Barre was founded, and quickly began strengthening relations with the Soviet Union, which seized the opportunity to consolidate its position on the Horn. Regulated by military treaties, by the mid-1970s the Somali army had been rearmed to such an extent that it was presumably superior to Ethiopia's.

While the Horn of Africa was relevant to the Soviet Union as one front in the Cold War, Barre's own agenda was dominated by the desire for a nationalist Greater Somalia. The USA wanted to avert the creation of a Greater Somalia, fearing the expansion of the Soviet sphere of influence, while of course the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie worried mainly about losing Ogaden.

But Selassie's days as emperor were numbered: in 1974 Ethiopia experienced the beginning of the "creeping coup": general social and economic discontent, strikes and mutinies in the army that ultimately led to Selassie's deposition by a military administrative council, which was to achieve notoriety under the name "Derg" (Amharic for "committee"). The new leader, Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, espoused increasingly aggressive left-wing rhetoric.

For pragmatic reasons, however, in early 1975 the Derg turned to the USA with a request for additional military aid. In the USA the *Realpolitiker* prevailed, hoping to exert a moderating influence on the Derg. This led to two ironies of the Cold War: in April 1976 Mengistu proclaimed the People's Republic of Ethiopia and reviled his main arms supplier as "white imperialists" and "reactionaries", until the US government ultimately lost its patience and cut off its military aid in 1977. As he had simultaneously signed a military aid treaty in Moscow in 1976, the Soviet Union was now providing military support to the two bitterly feuding neighbors, Ethiopia and Somalia.

## 4.3 The Ogaden War and its Ramifications

In early 1977 the revolution in Ethiopia entered a phase of "red terror", an extreme campaign against opposition members and critics, coupled with public unrest and overall instability.

Siyad Barre saw his chance to establish a Greater Somalia, and in mid-1977 Somali troops began infiltrating into Ogaden. At the same time, in light of the Soviet-

Ethiopian cooperation, in early 1977 the Carter administration had attempted a rapprochement with Somalia, in July 1977 agreeing to deliver defensive weapons. However, when it became known that Somali troops presumably already controlled 2/3 of Ogaden, the USA stopped delivering weapons to Somalia. The Soviet Union also ceased its deliveries to Somalia shortly thereafter. The war took a devastating turn for Siyad Barre: the USA demanded a complete withdrawal from Ogaden in return for further cooperation, and the Soviet Union and its allies provided key military aid to Ethiopia; at times circa 10-15,000 Cuban soldiers were deployed. On March 9, 1978 Barre was forced to announce withdrawal from Ogaden.<sup>7</sup>

As far as the relationship between the two neighbors was concerned, the military conflict of 1977/78 branded itself into the collective memory of Somalis and Ethiopians and to this day remains a crucial factor in their deeply-felt mutual antipathy.

## 5 No “Third Wave of Democratization” – Somalia after the Ogaden War

### *The Third Wave of Democratization*

*The term was coined by Samuel Huntington (e.g. in *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, 1991) to refer to the wave of democratization that began in the mid-1970s with the end of the military dictatorships in Spain and Portugal, reached Latin America in the 1980s and prevailed in Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia shortly thereafter.*

The social and economic problems in Somalia – then, as today, one of the poorest countries in the world – had become severely exacerbated by the war. 1.5 million people who could not be reintegrated due to the tense relations with Ethiopia lived in refugee camps. Material aid provided by international organizations did initially save most of the refugees, but further damaged the Somali economic cycle. Moreover, Somalia's economy is strongly dependent on the nomads' freedom of movement, and from 1977/78 their traditional migration routes could only be used at great risk.

### 5.1 From the Ogaden War to Civil War

In 1978 Somalia became almost entirely dependent on foreign aid. The economic crisis resulted in a new potential for conflict, namely the shadow economy: for instance, the Isaaq clan controlled the khat trade<sup>8</sup> in the north, leading to distribution conflicts with the Darod-dominated central government under Siyad Barre. In the government, corruption and nepotism exploded. At the same time, in the 1980s the society's “clan” orientation began to intensify.

<sup>7</sup> After a transitional phase, a new rapprochement took place between the USA and Somalia, while Mengistu's Ethiopia remained firmly on the side of the Soviet Union. For this reason the episode of the Ogaden War is also known as the “reversal of alliances” on the Horn.

<sup>8</sup> Somalis traditionally chew the leaves of the native khat plant as a mild anesthetic and narcotic.

Siyad Barre had often placed himself in the tradition of charismatic national religious heroes, repeatedly emphasizing his traditionally-established kinship with the national hero Hassan. However, this rhetoric served mainly as the basis for Barre's aggressive nationalism. Barre depicted the clan system as an obstacle to development, and had introduced a de-tribalization campaign to eliminate clan-based nepotism. In effect, however, he had actually encouraged it by repeatedly playing clans against each other for reasons of power politics. This was one reason why social cohesion had already begun to wane in the first years of his rule, while tribalist and religious currents gained in popularity. In other words, for decades Siyad Barre's policies instrumentalized and encouraged the tribalization of Somali society.

### ***Resistance to Barre: SSDF and SNM***

*Beginning in the late 1970s, several militant resistance movements arose with Mengistu's support, the key ones being the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) under Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, the current president of the Transitional Federal Government, and the Somali National Movement (SNM, led by Hawiye and Isak). After initially coordinating their actions, in 1986 the two organizations underwent a schism. In the process the former lost Ethiopia's support; its leader Yusuf was arrested and was imprisoned in Ethiopia until Mengistu's overthrow in 1991.*

Due to the military defeat, at the end of the 1970s Somalia was once again in a weak position with respect to Ethiopia. The remnants of the army were busy fending off attacks by guerillas and individual Ethiopian units. Against this background the (sub-) clans openly vented their displeasure, exacerbating rifts in Somali society that had previously been suppressed by Barre's authoritarian rule and pan-Somali visions. However, in the 1980s Barre continued to pursue a policy of "divide and conquer" in an attempt to prevent the formation of united opposition, heightening clan antipathies and playing them against each other. For example, he gave political and military posts as well as money and weapons to members of marginalized sub-clans.

The open outbreak of the Somali civil war was triggered by the peace treaty between Somalia and Ethiopia. The Soviet policy of détente initiated by Gorbachev led to a retreat from the Horn. This decreased the strategic significance of the region for the USA, and in April 1988, pressured by the major powers, Ethiopia and Somalia signed a peace treaty that put an end to both sides' support of guerilla units.

As a result Ethiopia cut off its support to the SNM, which, deprived of its base, pulled together for a military strike in the Isak region in Northern Somalia, starting an open civil war. Mutinying Ogadeni and Hawiye engaged the Somali army on further fronts. Ultimately, by 1989 the Somali army controlled only a few larger cities and the area around the capital, which gained Barre the nickname "Mayor of Mogadishu" On January 27, 1991 Barre fled to the area of his Marehan sub-clan in the southwest of the country, later escaping from there to Kenya.

## 5.2 How the World Left Somalia to Its Fate

After Barre's flight, bloody battles for supremacy broke out in Mogadishu between the militias of the most powerful warlords, Ali Mahdi and Mohammed Aideed. In 1992 a ceasefire was signed and was supposed to be monitored by a UN peace mission; however, the fighting went on unabated in different parts of the country. That spring famine spread, especially in the southwest, as fields and livestock could not be tended in the combat zones. The International Red Cross's food aid program, which the UN started to support in May 1992 as part of UNOSOM I, was faced by a major problem: up to 80% of the food shipments were being plundered. A flourishing war economy developed, consisting among other things of tolls, protection money and plundering to the point of freezing the bank accounts of the aid organizations (in Somaliland). By the end of 1992 the food aid program was virtually paralyzed; UNOSOM I was regarded as a failure.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Somalia as a Testing Ground for Third-Generation Peacekeeping***

*Previous peacekeeping missions before 1989 consisted of neutral troops lightly armed for self-defense whose mandate was to monitor a peace negotiated by all the parties to the conflict (first generation). With the end of the Cold War, the functions of the UN troops were significantly expanded (humanitarian aid, conducting elections, etc.; second generation). While UNOSOM I was conceived as a first-generation mission, the mandate of the UNITAF (and later UNOSOM II) included military functions for peace enforcement, i.e. intervening in an acute conflict. This approach was known as "robust peacekeeping" or peacekeeping of the third generation, and marked a turning point in the history of peacekeeping.*

In August 1992 the decision was made to establish an airlift under the direction of the Pentagon in accordance with Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The operation UNITAF (United Task Force) was also known as "Operation Restore Hope", a term coined by President George Bush Sr. By January 1993 Mogadishu and other large cities were in fact secured, supply routes were opened, mines were cleared and convoys were escorted without any significant military confrontations ensuing.

The situation in Mogadishu soon deteriorated again, however, with numerous clashes between US troops and local militias, especially those belonging to Mohammed Aideed. One crucial factor was that the American soldiers, who had initially enjoyed the good will of the local population, lost sympathy due to their aggressive conduct. For his part, Aideed positioned himself as the protector of

<sup>9</sup> Debiel (2003) provides an overview of the UN peace operations in Africa. Analyses with a specific focus on the UN in Somalia are offered by Lyons & Samatar (1995), Hirsch & Oakley (1995), Lewis (1997), Herrmann (1997) and Rezwaniyan-Amiri (2000). A comprehensive chronological list of events can be found in Krech (1996). Metz (1994) describes the events surrounding October 3, 1993 in detail.

Somalia, using anti-American, nationalist rhetoric to mobilize support against the “western imperialist” intruders. The antagonism between Aideed and UNITAF/ UNOSOM II culminated in a bloody clash on October 3, 1993 in which 18 Americans, 1 Malaysian soldier and presumably far more than 300 Somalis were killed.

The next day TV images of a dead US soldier being dragged naked through the streets of Mogadishu by a jeering crowd were broadcast around the world. This footage triggered a devastating media response and precipitated an immediate policy shift for the USA, which decided to withdraw its troops. Other states followed suit, and the remaining UNOSOM II was helpless to prevent the complete “re-Somalization” of the civil war. In March 1995 the last Pakistani UN soldiers left the port of Mogadishu, which was immediately plundered. Thus Somalia was left to its fate, practically unnoticed by the international public, which was now focusing on the Balkans. After the experiences of the colonial period, this anchored one further image of external forces in the Somalis’ collective memories: they come, act with profound ignorance of the circumstances, make the situation worse and then withdraw again.

Since Barre’s expulsion, and especially since the withdrawal of the UN troops, no central state power has existed in Somalia. Today the country is divided into three areas. In May 1991 members of the Isak had already proclaimed the independent Republic of Somaliland, which has since seen fairly positive development, though it is not internationally recognized. In the northeast the autonomous region of Puntland formed, and has been self-administered since 1998. The third part, South-Central Somalia, has suffered especially severely from violent clashes between clans, marauding militias, warlords and a warlord economy<sup>10</sup>, arms smuggling, piracy and an extremely high rate of violence overall. In the second half of the 1990s international intervention was largely restricted to humanitarian aid to the extent permitted by the security situation. Numerous attempts by neighboring countries to help negotiate a peace solution have failed.

## 6 Developments in the New Millennium

Around the turn of the millennium two developments shaped political events in Somalia: the massive anti-terror measures which the USA conducted in the region, and the negotiations, initially promising, which led to the formation of a transitional government.<sup>11</sup>

### 6.1 In the Counter-Terrorist Crosshairs

After the withdrawal of the international community, Somalia briefly entered the US radar screen again in 1998 due to the attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Beginning in 2001, however, the USA interpreted the regional situation through the lens of the “War on Terror”. Though Somali groups had demonstrable connections

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10 For a very vivid account of the war economy see Grosse-Kettler (2004).

11 Somalia’s role in international terrorism is discussed by Bryden (2003), de Waal & Abdel Salam (2004), Menkhaus (2005) and the International Crisis Group (2005a). The peace processes at the start of the millennium are described by Paffenholz (2003) and Kamudhayi (2004), among others.

to al-Qaeda, whose members used Somalia as an area of sojourn and transit, there was no proof of al-Qaeda bases. Ethiopian intelligence reports regarding Islamist activities in Somalia proved to be exaggerated, likely reflecting Ethiopian interests more than anything else.<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless, the USA drew up plans for military intervention, but backed away from deploying ground troops in view of the experiences of 1993. Instead, for the time being they focused on intensive surveillance in cooperation with the intelligence services of Puntland and Somaliland. Against the backdrop of the war on terror, Somalia experienced more severe international isolation than ever before: in 2001 the Somali passport became completely useless, making international travel into a privilege enjoyed by a small elite with foreign passports. The semi-informal Somali financial institutions that handled a large portion of the money entering the country from the diaspora were severely disrupted, as were many aid organizations. The USA exerted particular pressure on humanitarian organizations from the Arab world; the Saudi Arabian “al-Haramayn” left the country and closed its orphanages.

Thus, as in 1993, the impression gradually but tangibly developed that the USA was interfering to the disadvantage of the Somali people. At the same time, the perception spread that local warlords were becoming henchmen of the new imperialism due to their cooperation with the USA.

## 6.2 Diplomatic Stillbirths

A clan-based negotiation process launched in Djibouti led to the convening of the Transitional National Government (TNG) in August 2000. However, one of the weak points of the Djibouti process was that several key actors were excluded. For instance, crucial warlords were not invited, and the interests of some neighbors were not taken into consideration. Subsequently, with the support of the Ethiopian government, the excluded warlords formed the Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC) in opposition to the TNG, only exacerbating the violent clashes in the country. The political leadership of the TNG under Abdiqassim Salad Hassan was regarded as corrupt by large parts of the population, and it never managed to extend its territory to include significant parts of the country (Somaliland and Puntland had stayed out of the negotiations anyway).

On the initiative of the regional organization IGAD, new negotiations were begun in Kenya in 2002, and in 2004 a transitional parliament and a new transitional government were finally formed. This time, following a proportional system that included all relevant clans and warlords among the delegates, a total of 275 representatives were selected. Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, former leader of the SSDF and later leader of the Puntland region, former resistance fighter against Siyad Barre and ally of the Ethiopian regime under Meles Zenawi, was elected as Somalia’s new president in October 2004. A year later the new government decided to move to Baidoa, northwest of the capital near the Ethiopian border (February 2006). Large portions of the population regarded the new TFG with great mistrust as well, and it was unable to consolidate its territory.

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**12** In addition, it is at least doubtful whether and to what extent collapsed states such as Somalia are suited as safe havens for terrorists (Menkhaus 2005).



2006 brought a shift that surprised many observers: the emergence of a new force that drastically altered the power relations and almost established itself permanently as the new rulers of Somalia: the Islamists of the Islamic courts.

## **7 The Interregnum of the Islamic Courts, Their Expulsion and the Ramifications**

At about the same time as the new TFG was forming in late 2004, an organization emerged that first became known as the Supreme Council of Sharia Courts in Somalia. It was intended to function as an umbrella organization for Somalia's Islamic courts. The first Islamic courts had emerged in the first half of the 1990s after Barre's fall as local attempts to impose at least a minimal amount of order on the growing anarchy.<sup>13</sup>

In 2004 Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, a well-known figure in Somali politics, entered the scene and secured a crucial influence in the Supreme Council. While the chair of the Council, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, was regarded as moderate, Aweys has always been one of Somalia's Islamist hardliners. By the end of 2005 a total of eleven courts had come together in Mogadishu under the umbrella of the Supreme Council. Several courts provided soldiers, forming a powerful armed militia over the course of 2005.

### **7.1 Easy Come, Easy Go? The Rise and Fall of the Islamist Courts**

Perturbed by reports, the USA encouraged its allied warlords in Mogadishu to unite – once again sealing the failure of its policies in Somalia. In February 2006, responding to pressure from the US State Department, the “Alliance for Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism” (ARPCT) formed. That very same month saw clashes with the militias of the Islamist courts.

Ultimately street fighting for Mogadishu developed, and the warlords were driven out of the city. At the end of June 2006, a good week after the victory in Mogadishu, Sheikh Aweys became the chair of the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC, the new official name), rapidly expanding his sphere of influence to control large parts of Southern Somalia by September 2006. Though initially there had been some regional attempts to negotiate between the TFG and the CIC, in the second half of 2006 it became clear that nearly all Somalia's neighbors were involved, taking the side of one party or the other. On the one hand, Aweys' profoundly nationalist rhetoric calling for the unification of the five regions of Somalia disturbed the neighboring states. In particular, the Ethiopian government headed by Meles Zenawi felt forced to react to the Islamist-nationalist rhetoric. On the other hand, Ethiopia's secondary concern was and still is the hostile Eritrea, which attempted to open a proxy front in Somalia, as in the 1998-2000 Ethiopian-Eritrean War.

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**13** The International Crisis Group (2005b) provides a detailed overview of Islamism in Somalia (until shortly before the Islamic Courts' seizure of power). On the rise and fall of the Islamic Courts and a comprehensive examination of the significance of (fundamentalist) Islam in Somali history since the colonial period, see Spilker (2008). On Somalia's recent political history see Menkhaus 2007 and his essay in this book.

At the same time, the Islamists of the CIC were supported by a number of Arab-dominated countries in the region. Apart from Eritrea, Djibouti, Egypt, Libya, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the Lebanese Hezbollah supported the Islamic Courts' militias at times. The TFG was supported by Uganda as well as Ethiopia; in addition, rumors persisted regarding direct financial support and arms deliveries by the CIA.

**Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys**

*Originally a colonel under Siyad Barre (in the Ogaden War, among others), Aweys later served the warlord Mohammed Aideed, who in 1993 expelled the Americans from Mogadishu, before defecting to the Islamist group al-Itihaad al-Islamiya.*

*Not only had al-Itihaad twice attempted in the 1990s to establish an Islamic emirate in Somalia; the organization and Aweys personally were repeatedly reported to have connections to al-Qaeda. After the expulsion of the Islamic Courts Aweys fled Somalia; later, since 2007, he has headed an opposition movement against the TFG that was founded in Eritrea.*

In the second half of 2006 Aweys's hardliners evidently gained the upper hand within the CIC; to the accompaniment of offensively nationalist-Islamist rhetoric they proceeded to advance on the TFG headquarters, immediately causing Ethiopia to feel that its security interests were threatened. After numerous clashes between the CIC militias and the Ethiopian military toward the end of 2006, on December 24 Prime Minister Zenawi officially declared war on the Islamists.

Subsequently TFG government troops and Ethiopian units advanced rapidly upon Mogadishu, meeting with virtually no resistance. By the beginning of January 2007 the militias of the Islamic courts were expelled from the city; some scattered, mingling with the civilian population or fleeing to Kenya. Alongside Mogadishu large parts of the south were quickly brought under the control of the government troops and Ethiopian units, and at the start of 2007 President Yusuf was actually able to move his government to Mogadishu for the first time.

## 7.2 The Significance of the Interregnum for Somali Politics

After surprising many with their seizure of power, the leadership of the Islamic Courts succeeded to some extent in setting itself up as a mass movement, a popular uprising against the warlords, as it were, at the same time positioning themselves as the protectors of Somali interests against Ethiopian and western (Christian) influences. The population of Southern Somalia (especially in Mogadishu) definitely harbored sympathies toward the Islamic Courts, based above all on the desire for peace and order. At the same time, the leaders of the CIC tied the popular desire for public order to Islamist propaganda and nationalist and pan-Somali rhetoric.

At the same time it is undeniable that the Islamic Courts movement functioned largely according to clan logic. From the very beginning the CIC and the entire movement was heavily Hawiye-dominated, and the political actions of its leaders could be directly interpreted according to clan affiliation. Thus the strong support for the movement in Mogadishu can be explained in large part by the fact that since

1991/92 (i.e. since the “exodus of the Darod” following Barres’s expulsion) the city has been dominated by the Hawiye.<sup>14</sup> The leadership of the CIC – especially Sheikh Aweys – is regarded as being intimately involved with clan affinities; thus, despite the movement’s Islamist-nationalist rhetoric, it was unable to provide an example of pan-Somali integration, instead having a polarizing effect.

In addition, a decidedly Jihadi doctrine of the kind espoused by Aweys was probably rejected by most adherents anyway. Thus the initial popular sympathy was already stretched to its limits when the more fundamentalist elements in the courts began to restrict public and social life. In particular, the prohibition of khat and the introduction of the Sharia penal code was met with some resistance.

The question of the extent to which the fundamentalist policies of the CIC would have been compatible with the traditional apolitical interpretation of Sufi Islam in Somalia, and whether a strengthening of the moderate forces within the CIC might have opened up opportunities, has become obsolete by the intervention of the Ethiopian army. It remains unclear whether and in which direction a regrouping of the CIC leadership with any relevance for power politics will develop, and especially how the hardliners will position themselves in future. However, since the interregnum of the Islamic Courts, political Islam has returned to the Somali political agenda, and for the foreseeable future it will be impossible to ignore.

### 7.3 A Relapse into Chaos?

After the rapid expulsion of the Islamic Courts some observers believed that the opportunity for a reconciliation process already existed; however, the disappearance of the courts initially meant only the return of the warlords, and the familiar clan-based and militia-supported power politics returned to Mogadishu.

In 2007 armed resistance against the presence of the TFG, and above all against its Ethiopian support, emerged in several quarters and is sweepingly referred to as a “complex insurgency”. It included militias of the Hawiye, who felt marginalized, local warlords, some businesspeople and parts of Islamist militias. In Asmara the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) was founded as an official opposition movement against the TFG, covering a broad spectrum from Islamist hardliners such as Aweys to non-religious actors, held together mainly through their hostility toward the TFG and Ethiopia. However, so far it has not played a crucial role in power politics.

The current humanitarian situation in Somalia is beyond catastrophic. When fighting broke out with renewed ferocity in Mogadishu at the end of November 2007, over 200,000 inhabitants were forced to flee. A total of as many as a million internally displaced persons is estimated. With the numbers of direct victims already reaching the thousands, famine is now looming on an enormous scale. Some observers are reminded of the disastrous situation in 1992.

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**14** The clan logic can also be seen in certain details. For instance, the leadership of the CIC was heavily dominated by a sub-clan of the Hawiye, Habar Gedir-Ayr, which clearly explains the Islamic courts’ backing in different parts of Southern Somalia: large parts of the Hiraan region (Habar Gedir-Ayr) north of Mogadishu had quite a favorable view of the CIC. By contrast, further to the east a heavy proportion of the sub-clan Habar Gedir-Saad impeded the advance of the Islamists.

At the beginning of 2008 the circa 2,000 soldiers of the African Union's AMISON peace troop had just enough force to secure a few central locations such as the presidential palace, the harbor and the airport. Original plans for a much stronger and more potent force had already proved illusory over the course of the previous year.

## 8 Summary

Clan relationships have been and for the time being will remain one – if not *the* – crucial element that shapes Somali politics. At the same time, clan affinities are not decisive on their own, nor are they static: they are subject to constant renegotiation and change. Clan sympathies and antipathies can be heightened, tempered or temporarily overcome by external influences and manipulations – as for instance by the aggressive nationalist rhetoric of a Siyad Barre in the past, or the nationalist and Islamist rhetoric of the Islamic Courts today. Pan-Somali nationalism should not be underestimated as a determining factor that has repeatedly shown its effects when stirred up. Historically and currently, the threat of aggressive nationalism has usually been increased by the intervention of external forces. The profound mutual hostility toward neighboring Ethiopia, cemented for centuries, is a significant aspect of this regional conflict constellation. The Islamists of the CIC have also tried with definite success to play the nationalist card. For the time being the Islamist hardliners of the CIC have been defeated and expelled, but ever since the brief takeover by the Islamist Courts, Islamism, which had been suppressed and marginalized for many decades, with minor local exceptions, has reemerged as a determining factor in Somali politics – partly and particularly in opposition to western influences that are perceived as hostile.

In Somalia at least one generation has now grown up almost entirely in a situation resembling civil war. For many young men of this generation the marauding militias are a way of life, and the memory of peace and stability has virtually vanished. Mogadishu is quite probably the city with the highest handgun density in the world; the overall propensity to violence is inconceivably high.

At the same time, the devastating and often hopeless-seeming situation must serve as a reason and occasion to take action in Somalia and on its behalf. Any action must be based on a scrupulous analysis of the conditions on the ground, the crucial political and social determining factors and their reciprocal significance. There are some rays of hope, such as the positive role of the civil society, the intellectuals and the clan elders. On closer examination, the proverbial “agents of change” can be found, albeit far from adequate in number and power. Also, some lessons could be drawn from the comparatively positive development of Somaliland. First, however, one must show why external intervention is unpopular among Somalis: external actors come equipped with inadequate knowledge, make the situation worse and leave. For this reason, what is recommended is a careful, cautious approach with a long-term temporal and goal horizon; that is, a long-term commitment on the part of the external actors.

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*Mogadishu, October 2006*

# Understanding State Failure in Somalia: Internal and External Dimensions

“Diagnosis first, prescription second” is an admonition often voiced by analysts explaining the high failure rates of external peace-building efforts in Africa’s prolonged civil wars. The axiom is equally relevant for domestic and international efforts to promote state-building in zones of protracted state failure. Far too often, well-intentioned agendas to revive functional, democratic governance are doomed from the start because they are founded on misplaced assumptions and weak diagnoses of the crisis.

This claim certainly holds true in the case of Somalia, which has endured seventeen years of complete state collapse and which has proven impervious to a series of often robust external efforts to revive the central state. The most dramatic and costly of these efforts was the 1993–95 UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM), which not only failed to revive a central Somali government but which constituted a major setback for broader UN ambitions to play a peace enforcement role in the post–Cold War era. Most recently, the 2003/04 initiative by the InterGovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) helped to produce a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Somalia. But the TFG has faced major problems of legitimacy and capacity from the outset and has never been able to establish itself as an effective government. As of late 2007, the TFG appears likely to join the long list of stillborn governments declared in Somalia since 1991.

This chapter examines the internal and external forces which have helped to prolong Somalia’s extraordinary period of state collapse. It concludes that the factors which created and then prolonged Somalia’s state of collapse have changed over time. The first years of state collapse in Somalia can largely be attributed to internal economic and political interests in promoting conditions of lawlessness and armed conflict. Over time, external actors – especially regional states playing out rivalries, hegemonic ambitions, and security policies in Somalia – have increasingly become an important factor in frustrating state revival in Somalia. The study also finds that throughout Somalia’s period of state collapse, the combination of social, economic, and political obstacles to state revival have been considerable, but not insurmountable. At several points, especially since 2004, important opportunities to sustain successful state revival efforts in Somalia have been missed due to myopic leadership and poor decision-making by both national leaders and foreign powers.

Close assessment of Somalia’s prolonged period of state collapse also reveals that local communities have adapted by forging a variety of systems designed to provide a modicum of security and rule of law. This phenomenon of “governance without government” across Somalia ranges from simple neighbourhood-watch systems to



reliance on customary law to more formal municipal or regional administrations, and has rendered Somalia somewhat less anarchic than is commonly presumed. Finding ways to integrate this messy mosaic of grass-roots efforts at governance into a revived central government has been an enduring challenge in Somalia. This is an especially salient question given the extremely weak state of the Somali economy, which means that a revived central government will have to be very modest in size and capacity, at least for the near future.

Finally, the chapter underscores the importance of risk aversion and risk management in a context of prolonged state collapse as an explanation of both domestic and external actors' calculations of their interests and options in Somalia. For a number of key actors – Somali businesspeople, militia leaders, and neighbouring states, among others – revival of the Somali state is simultaneously a highly desired outcome and a very risky proposition. In some cases, this leads actors to undercut state-building initiatives that they feel may threaten their security, powerbase, or economic activities. Importantly, these interests are not fixed but can and do shift over time. That provides an entry point for political strategies designed to build broader constituencies for a revived Somali state.

### **The Initial Collapse of the Somali State**

The rapid disintegration of the Somali central government in the late 1980s was the result of a combination of factors which simultaneously weakened the capacity of the state while emboldening liberation movements seeking to dislodge it. Two elements were especially important: one international and the other domestic.

The domestic factor was the predatory, repressive, and clannish nature of the government of Siyad Barre. The brutality and corruption of the Barre regime was hardly unique in Africa in the 1980s, though a strong case can be made that it was worse than most. The regime was built on a narrow clan coalition, engaged in harsh crackdowns on any hint of opposition, used the coercive power of the state to expropriate land, businesses, and other resources from communities outside the narrow coalition, and devoted most of its energy to diverting the enormous sums of foreign aid flowing into the country into the pockets of well-placed elites in the regime. Following the disastrous defeat of the Somali army in the 1977/78 Ogaden War against Ethiopia, two liberation movements emerged in the north of the country: the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), led by Col. Abdullahi Yusuf, and the Somali National Front (SNF). Both insurgencies were based in Ethiopia, and neither initially posed a serious threat to the Barre regime. When civil war exploded in the north-west of the country in 1988, pitting the Somali National Movement (SNM) against government forces, the government responded with a massive and indiscriminate attack against the entire Isaaq clan, which was the core support of the SNM, resulting in 50,000 casualties and 400,000 refugees (Gersony 1989; Africa Watch 1990: 10). Popular grievances against the government mounted across the country, providing easy recruits for new liberation movements which formed after 1988. Unfortunately, every armed movement opposing the besieged government was clan-based, a reflection of years of political manipulation of clannism by Barre. That inability to overcome lineage divisions was a factor in the opposition's failure to unite to form a government once the Barre regime was ousted (Lyons and Samatar 1995: 19).

The international factor prompting the collapse of the Somali state was the impact of the thawing and eventual end of the Cold War in the late 1980s. That reduced Somalia's strategic importance to the West and provided political space for donor states – led by the United States – to freeze foreign aid to the Barre government on human rights grounds. Prior to 1988, Somalia had enjoyed one of the highest per capita rates of foreign aid in the world. This gave the Barre regime ample resources with which to engage in patronage politics, producing a bloated civil service and one of Africa's largest standing armies. By 1985, 100 per cent of the state's development budget, and 50 per cent of its recurrent budget, was funded by foreign aid (Rawson 1993; Menkhaus 1997: 124–49). The Somali state was a castle built on sand. When aid was frozen, the Somali state's capacity quickly evaporated. Amidst widespread defections and the breakdown of the army into autonomous clan units, the government lost control of most the country. In early January 1991, Barre and his supporters fled the capital.

The subsequent failure of the various liberation movements to unite in a transitional government began the long and tragic saga of Somalia's collapsed state. Instead of reaching a power-sharing agreement, faction leaders redirected their attacks on rival clans, leading to a massive flight of Darod clansmen out of Mogadishu and ushering in a destructive two-year civil war. Much of the heaviest fighting occurred when factional militias split over leadership and sub-clan disputes. Tensions within the United Somali Congress (USC) (and within the Hawiye clan-family), for instance, culminated in a horrific war in late 1991 which reduced much of central Mogadishu to ruins (Omaar 1992: 233–9). Worse still, the various clan militias were unpaid and uncontrolled. Initial rounds of looting targeting government buildings and foreign embassies quickly spread into generalised criminality and the complete dismantling of anything of value. Protracted looting of the countryside eventually produced a major famine in which an estimated 250,000 Somalis died and hundreds of thousands more fled as refugees to Kenya and Ethiopia (Hansch 1994). Public outrage in the West over looting of food aid intended for famine victims eventually helped to prompt a massive peace-enforcement intervention in December 1992, initially led by the United States and later handed over to UNOSOM in May 1993 (Menkhaus and Ortmyer: 1995).

Blame for the failure to pull together a unity government has been levelled at many actors. Myopic leadership of the clan factions was certainly a major factor – had Ali Mahdi and General Mohamed Farah Aideed of the USC settled their competing leadership claims, it is conceivable that the USC could have imposed a peace over Mogadishu and parts of South-Central Somalia and revived some level of government. That administration would have faced insurgency activity from the other factions, but at least would have kept the central government more or less intact. Siyad Barre's successful attempts to stoke distrust and animosity between clans in the last days of his regime have also been cited as a cause (Lyons and Samatar 1995: 14). The recruitment of large numbers of young pastoralists into the clan militias has also been blamed by some observers, who interpret the destruction of Mogadishu as a tale of a city overrun by marauding nomadic raiders with an abiding animosity towards central authority. The easy availability of cheap small arms – due to the capture of government armouries and the flow of weapons out of Ethiopia in 1991 when the Mengistu Haile Mariam regime was overthrown there – made control over clan militias and criminal gangs all the more difficult.

Finally, the complete absence of efforts at mediation by the international community contributed to the crisis. This indifference to Somalia at a critical juncture has been attributed to several factors. The first was widespread disillusionment with Somalia on the part of Western embassies, which had grown deeply frustrated with the corruption and manipulation of the Barre regime. A second was international preoccupation with the momentous events of that era – from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the Gulf War of 1991 and the end of the Soviet Union. Somalia was, by contrast, of virtually no strategic or political importance. As former US Ambassador to Somalia Frank Crigler later described it, the US and the international community “turned out the lights, closed the door, and forgot about the place” (Clark 1993: 115). International indifference was compounded by an absence of ideas about how to approach what was at the time an unprecedented situation of complete state collapse. External unwillingness to mediate the Somali crisis in its early phase – before the destruction of Mogadishu, massive displacement and high casualty rates hardened factional positions and rendered the conflict much more intractable – was later described as a “missed opportunity” by UN Special Representative to Somalia Mohamed Sahnoun, a view shared by many other observers (Sahnoun 1994; Menkhaus and Ortmyer 2000: 211–37; Zartman 2005: 121–60).

But the failure to establish a post-Barre government in Somalia must also take into account the broad structural challenges that a state-building enterprise faced in 1991. In the absence of Cold War levels of foreign aid, and in a context of a completely collapsed economy, would-be leaders had virtually no resources to pay militia and civil servant salaries and to maintain patronage-based loyalty to the state. The question of resource scarcity has remained a significant obstacle to state revival in Somalia, especially when leaders attempt to rebuild the kind of bloated government they recall from the Barre era. That is a model of state-building in Somalia which is now far out of synch with the economic realities faced by the country.

## The Protracted Collapse of the Somali State

Theories which help shed light on why the state initially collapsed are less helpful in explaining why state revival in Somalia has remained so elusive for seventeen years. Other countries have endured brief periods of total state collapse, while many more have struggled with partial state failure. But none has remained in a state of complete collapse for such an extended period of time. Somalia is unique in this regard

Recent attempts to explain why some civil wars and instances of state failure are so intractable place considerable emphasis on the problem of war economies. According to this school of thought, armed opposition motivated initially by communal grievances against the government gradually mutate into “greed”-based wars in which both the insurgents and often government forces devote most of their energies to illicit economic activities made possible by the collapse of effective rule of law – including looting, extortion, kidnapping, trade in illicit goods, land occupation, diversion of emergency relief, and coercion of labour.<sup>1</sup> Protagonists no longer fight to win, but to create “conditions of durable disorder” within which they can engage in their illicit plundering with impunity (Keen 2000: 19–41). This theory helps to explain

<sup>1</sup> This theory is critically explored in a variety of works, including Berdal and Malone (2000).

the logic in what otherwise appears to be irrational wars, by focusing on the economic interests of protagonists in promoting armed conflict. For our purposes, the theory is important in that it highlights the fact that conflict constituencies acquire an interest in promoting armed conflict in order to prevent effective state revival and perpetuate a state of lawlessness.

A related set of theories emphasises political rather than economic motives of local actors who sabotage reconciliation and state revival – the so-called spoiler problem (Stedman 1997: 5–53). Political actors whose powerbase rests on a state of fear and communal tensions and who risk being marginalised or even arrested in a normalised political setting seek to torpedo national reconciliation talks and measures to rebuild the government. They typically achieve this by fomenting distrust and staging security incidents designed to unravel fragile accords. Entire social groups can play the role of spoiler if peace and a revived government structure threatens their control over valuable resources won in war.

Both the “war economy” and “spoiler” theories are helpful in explaining the protracted period of state collapse in Somalia.<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt that an economy of plunder developed quickly in Somalia, creating a wide range of actors – from unpaid militiamen to rich businessmen – who earned a livelihood in the chaos that followed the collapse of the state in 1991. A primary driver of the war economy was the fact that the factional militias which had been recruited by clan elders to fight the Barre regime were unpaid gunmen. That meant that their “salary” was whatever war booty they could secure by looting. Once the Barre government fell, the quest for war booty continued, with civilians in South-Central Somalia as the principal victims. This was an especially devastating practice in the settled agricultural areas of south Somalia, where villagers were repeatedly attacked and looted by rival militia, eventually producing a major famine in late 1991 and 1992. Most of the gunmen were pastoral youth, generally illiterate and in possession of no skills that would yield a job in a peacetime economy. More than one militiaman interviewed by journalists observed that “my gun is my job”, arguing that they were responsible for feeding an entire family. Anecdotal evidence suggests that they did not enrich themselves, but only eked out a dangerous living stealing and extorting money.

By contrast, at the commanding heights of the Somali war economy, a small number of militia leaders and their financiers and other conflict entrepreneurs made sizable fortunes off of the conditions of lawlessness. Those in a position to control the export of scrap metal made millions of dollars overseeing the dismantling of Somalia’s factories and infrastructure. Arms dealers did especially well in Somalia’s brisk trade in small arms. A host of other illicit activities, ranging from people-smuggling to export of charcoal to the drug trade all flourished in the context of state collapse. But the most lucrative activities of all were linked to exploitation of the famine which the civil war and looting produced in southern Somalia in 1991–92. By mid-1991, most militia and business activity was focused on profiteering from international relief operations. This included: systematic diversion of food aid for sale on regional markets; control of main seaports, airstrips, and road corridors, where taxes on aid deliveries could be levied; and monopolisation of transport, security, housing, money

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2 Elsewhere, I have explored both theories in the Somali context; see Menkhaus (2006/07: 74–106).

exchange, and other services required by the growing number of international aid agencies arriving on the scene (Menkhaus 2004a: 15–36). Though some aid agencies were able to broker arrangements that reduced the diversion of food aid in their local area of operation, international famine relief became a central component of an economy of plunder, fuelling the fighting that caused the famine in the first place. Not surprisingly, many of contemporary Somalia's leading business figures made their first fortunes as contractors or employees in the enormous famine relief efforts of 1991 and 1992.<sup>3</sup>

Actors making a living off of war and state collapse were not, however, the biggest obstacle to state revival. As is discussed below, both businessmen and gunmen proved capable of adapting to more legitimate livelihoods over time. The more serious obstacles were political spoilers, who viewed – and continue to view – efforts to revive the central government as a threat to their interests. These political spoilers fall in several broad categories. One is a set of militia leaders who can arguably be described as “warlords”. These individuals are wary of any attempt to rebuild a state which could re-establish rule of law. Some fear that they will eventually be held accountable for war crimes. Others calculate that their powerbase rests on a continued state of fear and communal tensions, requiring their constituency (i.e., their clan) to rely on them as a source of protection. A second set of spoilers are entire clans or sub-clans in Somalia which have occupied and laid claim to valuable property over the course of the war and who fear that a return of rule of law could involve return of property to original owners, as well as local elections which will empower groups with larger numbers, not those with superior firepower. General Aideed's successful mobilisation of his sub-clan again UNOSOM in 1993 was stoked in large part by fears that the lineage, which came to control valuable real estate in Mogadishu and along the Shabelle river valley, would be marginalised by elections and return of rule of law.

Years later, Somalia continues to host a variety of “conflict entrepreneurs” who appear committed to blocking state revival to protect their own narrow economic or political interests. But an important evolution of interests has occurred throughout Somali society since 1993, when the UN intervened with 30,000 peacekeepers to stop the war and promote reconciliation. Specifically, over the past fifteen years a growing percentage of Somali business people, including militia leaders in possession of their own businesses, have shifted into more legitimate sectors of the economy, and now have invested in fixed assets – including hotels, telecommunication buildings, warehouses, light industries, and airstrips (Menkhaus 2003: 405–22). This trend is critical. It imbues in a growing section of the political and commercial elite a much greater appreciation for basic law and order and avoidance of large-scale communal violence which could threaten their assets and the flow of commerce. While it is important not to exaggerate this shift from “warlord to landlord” in Somalia – competing business cartels still use violence as a tool against their business rivals, and many businesspeople still support armed groups and engage in illicit activities like charcoal exports – there is no doubt that Somalia today enjoys a much greater

3 It is important to stress that not all Somalis who served as contractors to aid agencies in the famine were complicit in perpetuating the famine or in diversion of food aid. Many were legitimate contractors undertaking difficult tasks of transporting and safeguarding food and money.

level of support for rule of law and conflict management than it did in 1992. Ironically, this trend may well have been driven by the considerable sums of money spent by UNOSOM on procurement and construction during its two-year period in Somalia from 1993 to 1994. This provided new opportunities for merchants to shift from an economy of plunder to contracting business with UNOSOM.

A similar shift is discernible among the young gunmen who make a living from looting and extortion in lawless Somalia. Early on, evidence began to accumulate that many of these gunmen preferred less risky, more respectable work as hired security guards for businesses, neighbourhoods, or Shari'a courts rather than remaining on the street as unpaid gunmen. The rapid expansion of private sector activity in Somalia since 1995 has helped in this regard, by generating thousands of jobs for security guards. By the turn of the century, some of the largest militias in Mogadishu were linked to businesses. Likewise, the expansion of neighbourhood Shari'a courts in Mogadishu and surrounding towns absorbed hundreds of gunmen into Shari'a police units.

The critical point here is that conflict constituencies in Somalia (and presumably elsewhere) have interests, and that interests are not fixed, but can and do change over time. Analysis which focuses on the interests of key actors (rather than treating them as immutable categories of "spoilers" or "warlords") is thus much better able to explain changes in the preferences and behaviour of actors in zones of state collapse (Menkhaus 2004b: 149–65). Interest-centric analysis can thus help to render "greed" and "spoiler" theories of protracted war and state failure more dynamic, those theories capable of explaining both why crises of state collapse can endure for so long and how they possess internal dynamics which can lead to conditions more conducive to revived rule of law.

To make the case that the interests of key Somali actors have shifted in favour of greater appreciation for public order does not, however, imply that Somali actors are "rational actors" in predictable pursuit of their narrow economic interests. On the contrary, evidence suggests that Somali actors are driven by risk-aversion in a context of very incomplete and unreliable information, and make calculations about the costs and benefits of a revived central government accordingly.

Crucially, businesspeople and others in Somalia make a strong distinction between promotion of public order and revival of the central government. This is a distinction which is frequently lost on external peace-builders, who conflate public order with the state. Yet it is possible to seek public order while fearing and even taking steps to block state revival. While most businessmen and others gain immediate advantages from conditions of improved public order – which reduces security costs for commercial traffic, protects investments, and improves quality of life for households – the prospect of a revived central state carries much greater risks. As noted earlier, the historical experience of the central state in Somalia has not been of a structure devoted to promoting rule of law and an enabling environment for private enterprise. It has instead been an instrument of expropriation and repression, monopolised by one set of clans to dominate the rest. Put another way, while promotion of public order is a positive-sum game in Somalia, state revival appears to many Somalis to be a zero-sum game – and a game with very high stakes. While nearly all Somalis agree that they need the core services provided by a functional central government, the risk that that government could fall into the hands of rivals, or could

develop coercive capacities and engage in predatory behaviour against the private sector, makes the enterprise of state-building too risky for some Somali groups to support. The recent experience with the TFG, which has extorted millions of dollars from Somali businessmen while providing no services or security in return, has likely only reinforced this perspective. If so, that will make it still harder to convince Somali businesspeople to back state revival in the future.

In fact, it can be argued that attempts to revive a centralised state have actually exacerbated armed conflicts. State-building and peace-building are two separate and, in some respects, mutually antagonistic enterprises in Somalia. It is not the existence of a functioning and effective central government which produces conflict, but rather the process of state-building in a context of state collapse that appears to exacerbate instability and armed conflict in Somalia.

Despite all this, some Somali businesspeople have on at least a few occasions appeared willing to support a revived state. The most direct example was the business support provided to the short-lived administration controlled by the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) in Mogadishu in 2006. While it is true that some of the business community agreed to provide financial backing under duress, it appears many others were committed to a state-building project under Islamic authority. One of the many tragedies of the Somali saga is that just at the point when a constellation of local interests seemed poised to accept and promote state revival, external factors (specifically, Ethiopia) began to intrude on and undermine those efforts (Menkhaus 2007a).

## **Governance without Government**

Faced with state collapse, Somali communities have vigorously pursued alternative systems to provide themselves with essential services normally associated with the state – first and foremost security and public order.<sup>4</sup> These local systems of security and order are varied, fragile, and prone to sudden setbacks, but the general trend throughout Somalia (up until 2007, when the Ethiopian occupation shattered previous trends) has been incremental improvement in security since the early 1990s. It has been through these informal systems of governance that some Somali actors have pursued public order without necessarily promoting state revival. The evolution of informal systems of governance and security has largely been invisible to external aid agencies engaged in promotion of rule of law and state-building, most of whose energies are devoted strictly to formal state structures. External state-building initiatives have at times undermined rather than promoted public security and order, by undercutting existing informal security and governance systems.

The single greatest source of household and community security in Somalia is deterrence – the threat of retaliation by entire sub-clans in response to an attack on a member of the lineage. But that mechanism is also the source of cycles of revenge killings and communal violence, and is inherently unstable. Fortunately, the threat of reprisal killings is only a part of a wider range of customary law to manage theft, injury, and homicide.

<sup>4</sup> This section of the chapter is derived from a more detailed version of the thesis; see Menkhaus (2006/07).

Much of Somalia's informal governance relies on so-called traditional sources of governance in Somali society – customary law (*xeer*), blood payment groups (*diya*), and lineage or clan affiliation (and the collective action taken by lineages to defend group interests). These systems have been honed over centuries to manage “pastoral anarchy” prior to the arrival of the colonial state. Though customary law and traditional authorities have often been politically manipulated or overwhelmed by the scale of violence in contemporary Somalia, they still managed to play a useful role throughout the colonial and post-colonial era. The formal judicial system in independent Somalia was never the main source of adjudication of cases; a learned sheikh's compound was typically crowded with parties to disputes, while the district court office sat empty. Since the collapse of the state, *xeer* and blood payment groups have assumed an even more important role in informal systems of rule of law.

But Somali communities have not just relied on traditional mechanisms of rule of law. Informal systems of security in Somali settings are generally hybrid arrangements, involving complex and constantly renegotiated alliances between a combination of traditional clan elders, local political elites, business leaders, civic (NGO) leaders, and religious figures. They draw on traditional sources of conflict management but blend them with contemporary political tools in innovative and pragmatic ways. These hybrid security arrangements have in some cases constrained or co-opted armed youth, militia leaders (“warlords”), and others with a political and economic interest in perpetuating conditions of lawlessness and insecurity.

That local communities are not passive victims in the face of state collapse, but actively forge systems of governance and security, is not a contested observation in Somalia. But whether these local governance systems ought to be recognised and supported by external actors as grass-roots building blocks for state revival is a matter of debate. Some argue against engaging non-state systems of governance on the grounds that they are merely temporary coping mechanisms which will quickly be abandoned once the formal state structures are revived. Others argue against legitimising informal governance systems on the grounds that they collide with constitutions and universal human rights. Virtually all of the local security arrangements in Somali-inhabited portions of east Africa are at least to some degree “illiberal” – that is, the justice they dispense and security they provide do not conform to international human rights standards, and provide very unequal and “patchy” levels of security to different community members (especially women, members of weak or low-caste lineages, internally displaced persons, and the poor). Where these sources of public order co-exist with a formal state structure (in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somaliland), they collide with constitutional rights as well. Not surprisingly, externally-funded rule of law and other state-building programmes in Somalia have tended to privilege the formal state while ignoring informal governance systems.

Yet a case can also be made that these are not coping mechanisms, but rather a reflection of a more organic, community-driven governance-building that has the potential to serve as building blocks for state revival. From this perspective, local governance structures are the only source of security at the household and community levels, and therefore aid agencies at a minimum must respect the “do no harm” principle. Others suggest that local-level governance systems could help



usher in the birth of a new, post-colonial state and need to be given space and limited assistance to develop.

In northern Kenya and Somaliland, weak state authorities have had to negotiate with these hybrid Somali polities to exercise indirect political control over local populations, in arrangements which can be described as a “mediated state” (Menkhaus 2007b: 67–98). The evolution of a mediated state arrangement is an intriguing as well as problematic form of co-existence between a weak state and informal security complexes in its periphery. A strategy for state-building which allows an emerging state structure to co-exist with and complement informal security arrangements – some variation of a “mediated state” model – may be unavoidable, at least as a short- to medium-term approach to state revival in Somalia. Although government efforts – first by the Islamist authorities in Mogadishu in 2006 and then in 2007 by the Transitional Federal Government – to suppress and supersede local governance structures suggest that formal state actors in Somalia are likely to view non-state local authorities as a threat.

### **Contemporary Somalia: Domestic Actors and Interests**

The nature and composition of key domestic actors in Somalia have changed significantly since the early 1990s, reflecting the contested nature of authority in stateless Somalia and the fluidity of coalitions. “Factions”, for instance, were the central political actors through the first half of the 1990s. Most were led by a militia leader and represented a single clan. They monopolised representation in national reconciliation talks only to fade into irrelevance. Regional and municipal polities have at times assumed importance, though rarely at the level of national peace talks. Since the late 1990s, an array of loose coalitions have served as principal actors at the national level. From 2000 to 2004, for instance, the Ethiopian-backed Somali Reconstruction and Reconciliation Council (SRRC), led by Abdullahi Yusuf, served as an effective coalition against the Transitional National Government (TNG). In 2005, the “Mogadishu Group”, bringing together a collection of militia leaders, Islamists, civic leaders, and businesspeople mainly from the Hawiye clan, was a short-lived but powerful coalition opposing the Ethiopian-backed TFG. The broad Islamist coalition housed in the CIC took control of Mogadishu and much of South-Central Somalia in 2006 before being routed in an Ethiopian military offensive in late December of that year.

In a few instances political actors have emerged and have earned a permanent place on the Somali political game board. These are generally groups which exert considerable power and influence in Somalia (and hence must be accounted for in peace talks) but which are poorly organised and divided, hence not “actors” in the strict sense of the word politically. One such group is the robust Somali business community, which controls considerable resources and private militias and is sought after as an ally by governments and coalitions. The business community enjoys impressive cross-clan partnerships but is invariably divided over its political fealties, and has generally been reluctant to jump directly into the political arena. The business community’s typical response is to negotiate with whoever is in control of seaports and towns to maintain access to markets. Another emerging group is the large Somali diaspora, now numbering over one million. The diaspora is the most

important part of the Somali economy, sending between \$500 million to \$1 billion in remittances to Somalia annually. It provides significant financial and other support to political movements, and is increasingly a vital pool of leadership for political groups in country.<sup>5</sup>

While specific factions and coalitions have come and gone in Somalia since 1991, two broad groupings have endured in various guises. The purist expression of these two coalitions was the SRRC (2000–04) and the Mogadishu Group (2005). The SRRC was backed by Ethiopia, anti-Islamist, dominated by the Darod clan, based largely in regions outside of Mogadishu, and committed to federalism. The Mogadishu Group was the exact opposite – it was fiercely anti-Ethiopian, close to Gulf states and Islamic interests, inclusive of Islamists in its coalition, centred around powerful sub-clans of the Hawiye clan family (especially the Haber Gedir/Ayr), based in Mogadishu, and more inclined to support a strong central state, not a federal system. These two coalitions have assumed different forms – currently the SRRC dominates the TFG, for instance – but have endured in one form or another for a decade. In between these two coalitions are a host of “floaters” – opportunistic militia and political figures who move back and forth between the alliances and who are trusted by neither. The floaters give external observers the false impression of political movement and significant coalition-building when in fact the Somali political scene has been locked into a relatively fixed conflict between the two coalitions.

At present, the main domestic political actors include the following:

**The Transitional Federal Government.** The TFG has from the outset been a very weak actor in Somalia, despite its formal role. Its weakness is due in part to its low legitimacy in the eyes of most Somalis, who argue that TFG leaders were selected in a disputed process and are puppets of Ethiopia. In the two and half years since its creation, the TFG remains a woefully underdeveloped administration, and has made almost no progress on key transition tasks. Making matters worse, the TFG has been actively complicit in the very heavy-handed counter-insurgency campaign led by Ethiopian forces in Mogadishu. Far from being a source of public order, TFG security forces are the principal sources of insecurity for the Mogadishu public.

The TFG’s low legitimacy levels have been exacerbated by the fact that the government, which was intended to be a government of national unity, is instead founded on a narrow clan coalition excluding important lineages from top positions in the government. The transitional parliament, which in theory is the repository of Somali sovereignty and the embodiment of proportional clan representation, was purged of opposition figures in 2007; some, if not most of the current members of parliament cast votes on the basis of payments rendered from the executive branch, making parliament somewhat less than an ideal embodiment of the democratic process. Malfeasance by MPs pales in comparison to the allegations of corruption and lack of accountability in the executive branch, where Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Ghedi was accused of extorting money from businesspeople in the guise of “taxation” and pocketing most of the proceeds. Ghedi was eventually pressured to resign as

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5 For detailed treatment of the diaspora in Somali state-building, see Farah, Muchie, and Gundel (2007).

Prime Minister in November 2007 and has been replaced by Nur “Adde” Hassan Hussein. Nur Adde was immediately confronted with multiple crises: aging President Yusuf’s health emergency, which required hospitalisation in Kenya; resignation of four cabinet members over Nur’s cabinet reshuffle; and rejection by the opposition in exile of dialogue with the new PM.

What we today call the TFG is in reality a collection of increasingly autonomous armed factions led by different TFG officials who are seeking to shore up their own powerbases and control of parts of the capital. That level of internal division makes it difficult to speak of the TFG as a monolithic actor. Many of the TFG’s top political figures appear to be driven by very short-term profit-taking, hoping to seize whatever funds they can before the entire TFG enterprise collapses. This reflects what William Reno has described as the “shortened political horizon” of political actors in “shadow states” (Reno 2000: 45). In addition, a split has emerged in the TFG between a moderate, pro-reconciliation coalition centered around new Prime Minister Nuur Adde, and the many hardliners and autonomous paramilitary groups comprising the TFG security forces. By mid-2008, Nuur Adde’s moderate wing of the TFG had more in common with moderate elements of the opposition than they did with hardliners in their own government.

**The opposition.** Most Somalis deeply oppose both the TFG – which they view as an illegitimate puppet of Ethiopia – and the Ethiopian occupation, so this category encompasses an enormous range of groups with virtually nothing in common except a shared desire to evict Ethiopia from Somali territory and block the TFG from becoming operational. The Somali opposition cannot be considered in any way a coherent group, and even those who formed the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) in Asmara (Eritrea) in mid-September 2007 are a very loose and strained coalition including non-Islamists and Islamist hardliners. These tensions within the opposition became an open split when in May 2008 moderate members of the ARS signed a peace accord with the moderate wing of the TFG. Hardliners in the ARS rejected that accord and, along with al-Shabaab, have pledged to fight until Ethiopia withdraws.

Opposition to the TFG and Ethiopian occupation consists of two distinct categories of actors. One is a core set of Somali groups with interests profoundly at odds with those of the TFG and Ethiopia (described above as the “Mogadishu Group”); the second is a set of opportunistic or situational opponents whose fealty to the TFG and the opposition has shifted over time and who have concluded the future lies with the opposition. The “core opposition” won control of the TNG in 2000, which was successfully opposed and derailed by the Ethiopian-backed rejectionist group, the SRRC; it was also the main source of support for the short-lived administration set up by the CIC in 2006.

**The al-Shabaab militia.** The al-Shabaab (“the youth” in Arabic) militia was originally a special armed unit of the Shari’a court system in Mogadishu, established sometime after 1998 by Islamist hardliner Hassan Dahir Aweys. Aweys sought to create a well-trained, well-equipped, multi-clan militia which answered to the top leaders of the Islamic Courts. At that time, all other Shari’a militia in Mogadishu were clan-based, only loosely dedicated to the Islamists, and limited only to the local jurisdiction

of their sub-clan's Shari'a court. By contrast, al-Shabaab was a sort of Somali mujahideen, composed of young fighters committed to a radical Islamist agenda. By 2004 al-Shabaab are believed to have numbered about 400 fighters, and were led by a veteran of Afghanistan, Aden Hashi 'Ayro. al-Shabaab engaged in a "dirty war" of political assassinations against opponents of the Islamists, including civic leaders but especially Somali security personnel suspected of linkages to Western intelligence agencies. Already by 2004, speculation arose that al-Shabaab was an autonomous and radically violent force, no longer controlled by Aweys (ICG 2005a, 2005b). The relationship between al-Shabaab and the Islamist leadership has remained a topic of speculation. When Ethiopian forces invaded Somalia in December 2006, al-Shabaab took heavy losses – 'Ayro himself was injured – and for a time was thought to be a spent force. But remnants of the militia regrouped in Mogadishu, and form the core of the increasingly robust insurgency against the TFG and Ethiopia. In the few public pronouncements it has made, al-Shabaab insists that it is leading the insurgency, and that opposition outside the country "supports" them. This contradicts the public statements of the Islamist opposition in exile, which claims it directs the insurgency. All this points to the fact that al-Shabaab cannot be assumed to be spoken for in any peace talks involving the TFG and the opposition in exile. It is also not clear that anyone can "marginalise" al-Shabaab, as is often discussed. The future dispensation of al-Shabaab is one of the most difficult long-term challenges in Somalia.<sup>6</sup>

**Business community.** The business community, as noted above, is a major player on the Somali political scene, mainly as a pivotal source of revenue for political movements and governments. The business community's interests are divided, and the group as a whole tends to be ill-equipped to deal directly with politics. Businesspeople have little choice but to provide "taxes" to whomever controls a government or seaport. Efforts to bring the business community more directly into peace talks to revive a central state are increasingly believed to be essential.

**Civil society.** Somali civil society has grown in importance over the past decade, and is an important force for peace and state revival. However, the political violence, assassinations, and crackdowns by both the TFG and the Islamists in the past two years has severely weakened civil society. The independent media has been especially hard hit.

## **Contemporary Somalia: External Actors and Interests**

**Ethiopia.** No other actor is as decisive to the outcome in Somalia as is the government of Ethiopia. Its military occupation of southern Somalia is the main catalyst for the armed insurgency; its troops constitute an essential source of protection for the TFG, without which the government would quickly be driven out of the capital; and it enjoys direct backing by the United States. The prolonged occupation of Mogadishu by the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) is costly to Ethiopia on multiple

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<sup>6</sup> In March 2008 the US government designated al-Shabaab a terrorist organization, and in May 2008 the US launched a missile attack on a safe house in central Somalia, killing al-Shabaab leader Aden Hashi Ayro.

levels – financially, diplomatically, and in terms of mounting casualties. But the strain of a prolonged and inconclusive counterinsurgency campaign has to date proven to be a manageable burden on the government of Ethiopia. The ENDF is sub-Saharan Africa's largest standing army and can absorb the strain of simultaneous deployments in Somalia, eastern Ethiopia, and along the Eritrean border. If the war and casualties in Somalia are unpopular in Ethiopia, the Meles Zenawi government faces little threat of domestic unrest after its draconian crackdown on opposition parties in 2005. Its ally the United States has shielded the Meles government from much of the diplomatic criticism it could have faced, especially in light of the horrific humanitarian crisis linked to its counter-insurgency tactics.

In sum, Ethiopia is caught in a quagmire in Somalia, but not a “hurting quagmire”. Most of the costs of the current insurgency and counter-insurgency are being shouldered by the Somali people, not Ethiopia. This gives the Meles government the option of continuing the war if better options do not present themselves. By all accounts, the current crisis in Mogadishu – the failure of the TFG and the persistent and worsening insurgency – is costly to Ethiopia, deeply frustrating to Ethiopian officials, and not at all a scenario they prefer. But if the only alternative is withdrawal and a subsequent victory by the insurgents over the embattled TFG, the Meles government is likely to stay the course in Mogadishu.

This raises the issue of what it is precisely that the Meles government wants in Somalia, and what outcomes it is willing to live with. This question is critical to a mediated outcome in Somalia, and is the subject of considerable debate. Most diplomats following Somalia – including US officials who enjoy closer ties to Ethiopian decision-makers – express uncertainty about Ethiopian policy objectives in Somalia. Many angry Somali pundits argue that Ethiopia is committed to perpetuating a state of warlordism and chaos on Somalia, and that Somalia can never be at peace until the Ethiopian state is brought down. Others claim Ethiopia will be satisfied with nothing less than a puppet government in Mogadishu, replicating in Somalia its authoritarian rule over the nominally autonomous ethnic federal states within its own borders. Still others accuse Ethiopia of being unwilling to accept any role for Islamists in Somalia, a position which guarantees perpetual conflict given the ascent of political Islam as a major force in Somalia politics. Ethiopian officials interviewed point to Ethiopia's relations with the government of Sudan since the 1990s to argue that the Meles government has demonstrated it is both willing and able to work with Islamist governments, provided that the government respects Ethiopian security concerns. They argue further that they have sought to dialogue with Somalia's Islamists both before and after the offensive of December 2006, blaming hardliners in the movement for derailing talks, making irredentist claims on Ethiopian territory, calling for jihad against Ethiopia, and sponsoring armed insurgencies against the Meles government.

Uncertainty about the kind of government Ethiopia is willing to accept in Mogadishu is likely to remain. But a few points about Ethiopian interests and positions are clear, and serve as points of departure for more effective diplomatic strategy. First, since the late 1990s Ethiopia has been a key actor in the Somalia crisis. This point is obvious, and yet Ethiopia has never been brought directly into reconciliation talks, which have always focused only on Somali actors. For all the many conflict drivers exacerbating Somalia's prolonged state of collapse, the most important has been Ethiopia's prolonged struggle against the coalition of anti-Ethiopian groups based

in Mogadishu. Ethiopia has worked against this “Mogadishu Group” indirectly, through its Somali clients (until 2004, via the SRRC) and now directly in its military occupation of southern Somalia. Resolution of the Somali crisis will, at some point, require that Ethiopia and this Mogadishu-based coalition reach a modus vivendi. That the previous decade of diplomatic work on Somalia has not focused on bringing these two main protagonists in the conflict together for direct talks underscores the weakness of the conflict analysis informing past diplomacy in Somalia.

Second, Ethiopia has legitimate security concerns in Somalia that must be recognised and addressed by the Somali opposition if Ethiopia is to accept a negotiated settlement in Mogadishu. The temptation in Somali opposition circles to dismiss Ethiopian security needs is a non-starter. If a Somali government or political movement embraces irredentist policies against Ethiopia, provides logistical support to armed insurgencies aimed at the Ethiopian government, allows itself to be used as a platform for radical Islamists, or pursues close relations with Ethiopia’s regional rival Eritrea, the government in Addis Ababa can be expected to work against that government. The need to recognise Ethiopia’s security imperatives is a painful but essential concession that Somali political movements of all types must accept if Ethiopia is to support a revived Somali central government.

Ethiopia is arguably the only external actor with both vital interests in the political outcome in Somalia and with the military power and capacity to act in pursuit of those interests. By contrast, other external actors tend to dabble opportunistically in Somalia, either because Somalia is of secondary importance or, in the case of states like Kenya, because they like the capacity to play a robust role inside Somalia. This is another reason Ethiopia’s interests must be placed at the centre of realistic political solutions in Somalia.

Ethiopian leaders have clearly been taken by surprise at the persistence and strength of the armed insurgency and have been deeply frustrated at the inability of the TFG to become functional. There is no question that Ethiopia miscalculated when it opted to occupy Mogadishu, misreading both Somali politics and the willingness of other African leaders to supply peacekeepers to the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). The current situation is unquestionably not the outcome Ethiopia expected or wants in Somalia. But the lack of clearly preferable alternatives from Ethiopia’s perspective means that the Meles government is likely to continue with the same course of action – including its preference for heavy-handed counter-insurgency tactics involving collective punishment and disproportionate response. If it is true that Somalia is not a “hurting quagmire” for Ethiopia, then Ethiopia is very likely to continue its current policies in Somalia until one of two things happen: a more attractive set of options presents itself (in the form of concessions and security guarantees from the Somali opposition), or the costs of continuing the counter-insurgency begin to mount and reach an unacceptable level for Ethiopia.

**Eritrea.** Eritrea sponsors the Committee for the Re-liberation of Somalia, providing it a base in Asmara and logistical support. It has also provided arms and training to the CIC when it held Mogadishu, and now is believed to funnel arms to the insurgency fighting Ethiopia in Mogadishu. Eritrea’s aims are clear and simple: to use armed groups in Somalia, both Islamist and non-Islamist, as proxies against its rival Ethiopia. Eritrea is hoping to keep Ethiopia bogged down in a quagmire in

Somalia, and is willing to support hard-line Islamists to that end despite the fact that the government of Eritrea is a secular government that has cracked down on both Christian and Muslim leaders in its own country. Eritrea has little interest in seeing a negotiated peace which would allow Ethiopia to extricate itself from Somalia. In terms of state-building, Eritrea was a strong supporter of the CIC and its short-lived governance efforts in 2006.

**United States.** The United States government has pursued a policy in Somalia informed principally by counter-terrorism concerns. That led the US to support an alliance of militia leaders in Mogadishu who were eventually defeated by the CIC in 2006. Since that time, the US has backed the TFG and Ethiopia in their efforts to build a government and defeat the complex insurgency in Mogadishu. The US has pressed hard for an African Union peacekeeping force to replace the Ethiopians, on the understanding that the continued presence of the Ethiopians is the main catalyst for the insurgency. The US has also pressed the TFG leadership to engage in negotiations with the opposition to create a more inclusive government. But the US has consistently blamed the armed opposition for the crisis in Mogadishu, supports the Ethiopian occupation, categorises the Islamist opposition as extremist, and insists that it renounce violence as a precondition for engagement in political dialogue. Recent statements suggest the US may be prepared to shift policy on Somalia to place greater emphasis on fulfilling the political transition rather than strengthening the governance-capacity of the TFG.

**Gulf states.** Gulf states – principally Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, and the UAE – play an intermittent role in Somalia but do not give the country sustained attention. They periodically provide foreign aid, and are as a result sought after by Somali factions and transitional governments. They have good offices with the opposition, and have at times allowed the opposition – both Islamist and non-Islamist – to operate freely in their countries for residency and fund-raising. At the same time, they have sought to maintain working relations with the TFG and Ethiopia, and have been called on by the US for diplomatic support on Somalia. All play a critical role in Somalia's economy, with the UAE serving as the main commercial and financial hub for Somalia, Saudi Arabia as the main foreign market, and Yemen as the main source of small arms and a primary transit stop for Somali migrants seeking work in the Gulf. Some diplomats have expressed hope that some Gulf states will lead a “coalition of the willing” peacekeeping force to allow the Ethiopian forces to withdraw.

**Donor community (Western states).** Donor states – principally European countries and the European Commission (EC) – play an important role both as sources of foreign aid and in diplomacy in Somalia. All are based in Nairobi. The EC has for years been the largest donor in Somalia, and at times has exercised considerable clout in Somali political affairs. Among European countries, Italy has played a lead role on Somalia, with the United Kingdom and Scandinavian states also more engaged than others on Somalia. The Western donor states have not always agreed on Somalia policy; the US in particular has found itself increasingly isolated due to its preoccupation with counter-terrorism – an agenda shared with less enthusiasm by other donors. In the past, all Somali political movements and factions sought close relations with the

Nairobi-based donor groups, and Nairobi was the diplomatic hub of Somalia. Today, with the Islamist and other opposition based in the Gulf or in Eritrea, and linked more closely to the Islamic world than to the West, the diplomatic centre of gravity has shifted away from Nairobi. The impact of Western donor states on Somali state-building efforts has been variable and in some quarters contested. Some of the most innovative aid projects in local governance and democratisation have been funded by Western donor states, but much of the donor efforts at state revival has tended to be formulaic and accusations have been made that it is exacerbating the problems of warlordism and corruption.

**United Nations and other international organisations.** The UN plays a lead role in humanitarian relief, state-building programmes, and mediation in Somalia. Like the donors, the UN specialised agencies and its Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) are based in Nairobi. The UN's performance has been uneven in Somalia, and it has periodically come under criticism from Somali groups and others. In recent times, the UN's lead role in diplomatic efforts to end the insurgency in Somalia has gained donor support and confidence.

**Somali diaspora.** As noted earlier, the Somali diaspora is very large – numbering about one million people – and powerful. The diaspora is increasingly active in Somali affairs, with many to most political leaders in Somalia holding citizenship in a second country. The diaspora also sends funds to political movements; the CIC derived considerable revenue from fund-raising among the diaspora. The diaspora is not united in its political positions, but in general has been exceptionally vocal in its condemnation of Ethiopian occupation of Mogadishu. It is very likely that the diaspora will continue to see its role in Somali political affairs grow in years to come, as it is the repository of many of the country's professional class.

**Foreign Islamist movements.** A variety of foreign Islamist movements, mainly based out of the Gulf states, play an important role in Somalia, mainly as sources of funding. These Islamist groups are usually though not always Salafist in orientation, embracing a strict interpretation of Islam that is deeply at odds with traditional Sufi Islam practiced in Somalia. These groups include Salafist missionaries like Tabliq, which helps fund new mosque construction, sends clerics, and provides scholarship money to Somali followers. There are also more progressive Islamic groups providing funding for Somali movements like al-Islah, which has helped establish schools and hospitals in southern Somalia (Le Sage 2004). A small but dangerous foreign Islamist actor in Somalia consists of al-Qaeda or other radical groups and individuals believed to provide funds to the Shabaab militia. One of the missing elements in talks to promote peace and state revival in Somalia has been active partnership of the Islamic charities and movements with Nairobi-based Western diplomacy.

### **What Kind of Somali State?**

Over the past seventeen years, Somalis and external donors have consistently sought to rebuild a central government on the model of conventional state structures. While fierce disagreements have raged over the details – over the nature of federalism to be



adopted, the extent to which a clan should be an explicit basis of representation in the legislature, and so on – the basic template of an expansive government comprising dozens of ministries and thousands of civil servants goes unchallenged. For Somali planners, this is a vision of a state serving the logic of patronage politics, with ample foreign aid revenues flowing in to cover the cost of a large army, civil service, and budget. This maximalist state is the model that the current generation of leaders came to appreciate under Siyad Barre; the state is the catchment point for foreign aid, loans, and customs revenues upon which well-placed political figures can enrich themselves. The TFG naming of an eighty-two member cabinet in 2005, including the unlikely post of Minister of Tourism, captures well the impulse to reconstruct a large and expansive central government. External donors have done little to discourage this impulse.

In the longer term, if and when Somalia enjoys sustained and robust economic growth and an enlarged tax base, the Somali people will be in a position to choose between a minimalist or an expansive government. At present, the country does not have the luxury of such options. Discussion about sustainable state-building must be based on fiscal realism. A very compact and efficient central state that focuses on accomplishing a few essential tasks of government and leaves the rest to the private sector or local governance bodies is the only model of state-building that Somalia can presently afford. By definition, this version of a state cannot be used as a vessel for patronage politics – it will lack the resources required of patronage politics. Instead, it will necessarily target resources primarily at a small but efficient civil service, one which serves as a regulator and enabler of the private sector and a partner, not a rival, of local governance systems. Organisationally, this will mean a reshaping of the government, away from the current hourglass shape of the TFG – many ministers at the top, virtually no functionaries in the middle, and a large security force on the bottom – towards a more beaker-shaped government, with fewer ministers and more functionaries. The government will, at least as an interim measure, be compelled to sub-contract out many of the state's functions to local polities described earlier as part of Somalia's "governance without government." This will constitute to some degree a mediated state-model of government in Somalia.

Precisely because a more sustainable state model will need to be smaller and possess minimal coercive and patronage power, the government will have to be based on consensus, not conquest or cooptation. The challenge will be for such a modest government to be able to catalyse development and maintain security. As Somali scholar Ahmed Samatar has argued, "hardly any society has achieved modernity and development without a strong national state" (Samatar 1994: 98). The Somali challenge will be to build a state which is simultaneously strong enough to promote development and yet exceptionally lean in size and mandate.

Realism is also required with regard to the regional context of state revival in Somalia. In the short term, Somalia will remain a much weaker country than its large neighbour, Ethiopia. Survival of a new government in Mogadishu will necessitate coming to a *modus vivendi* with Ethiopia, one which provides the kinds of security guarantees sought by Ethiopia. This could entail an informal form of circumscribed sovereignty for Somalia in its foreign relations; specifically, a new government will need to be prudent with regard to relations with Salafist or radical Islamic movements and states. The idea of having to defer to Ethiopian agendas and craft domestic and foreign policies with Ethiopian needs in mind will constitute a bitter pill for Somali

nationalists to swallow; emotions against Ethiopia run very high in Somalia, and justifiably so. But that does not change the calculus of power in the region, nor alter the fact that an Ethiopia which feels threatened by political developments in Somalia will not hesitate to undermine them.

Beyond these fiscal and regional constraints, the many other critical decisions about the future nature and structure of the Somali state – federalism, the system of representation and elections, the role of Islam in political and legal life, and so on – should be kept in the hands of the Somali people. The temptation on the part of outsiders, especially the donor community, to dictate to Somalis the kind of political system they should adopt must be resisted. The international community has a valuable role to play in providing Somalis with information about the many types of political systems elsewhere – the so-called menu of options – but efforts to go beyond that and insist on a particular model only erodes the sense of local ownership of these ideas, dooming them from the start. The more organic the system of governance is in Somalia, the more likely it is to survive and develop despite the challenging environment that Somalia poses for state revival.

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*The center of Mogadishu, November 2007*



# Making Peace, Rebuilding Institutions: Somaliland – A Success Story?

Having overcome bouts of internal conflict, Somaliland has established key state institutions and in 2005 held its first round of parliamentary elections. While Somaliland is not recognised by any other government, and has disputes over the eastern regions of Sool and Sanaag with Puntland, its territory has been largely stable for the past twelve years.

This contribution<sup>1</sup> elucidates the question whether Somaliland can, in various ways, be regarded as a success story in terms of fostering peace and reconciliation, building a state, and developing democratic forms of governance – all in the absence of international recognition. The first part of this paper outlines the historical background of Somaliland, and the next three sections deal with the processes of peacemaking, state-building, and democratisation respectively, taking stock of both the challenges and achievements since the country declared independence in 1991. Following this, we review the role of external assistance in and the “unfinished business” of these processes and provide a future outlook.

## Historical Background

The Somali people have traditionally lived in an area in the Horn of Africa that stretches from the far north-east corner of the Republic of Somali (now Puntland) into modern day Djibouti, the Ogaden region of Ethiopia and northern Kenya, united by the Somali language, Sunni Islam, and a clan-based form of socio-political organisation. Thus Somalis have been described as “an ethnic nation but not a single polity” (Lewis 1994: 222). Following a devastating conflict, the north-west Somali region seceded in 1991 as the Republic of Somaliland, claiming the boundaries of the former colonial British protectorate. Today, Somaliland consists of an estimated 2 million people<sup>2</sup> living in a territory of 137,600 square kilometres. Stretching from the shores of the Gulf of Aden, Somaliland extends southwards to Ethiopia, westwards to Djibouti, and eastwards to the regional administration of Puntland.

During the pre-colonial period, Somali society was predominantly nomadic, stateless, and organised on the basis of kinship, with social and political relations structured around clans, sub-clans and families. Ad hoc assemblies of elders (*shir*) managed the internal and external affairs of the respective groups, drawing on

1 The authors wish to thank Anna Lindley and Stefan Raths for their contributions to this paper.

2 Population estimates vary significantly between one and three million (Bradbury 2007: 161), while the official figure from the Ministry of National Planning and Co-ordination is three million.

customary law (*xeer*) as well as the Islamic Shari'a (Lewis 1982: 196–201). The British signed various protection treaties with Ciisse, Gadabursi and Issaq clan elders in the north-west, establishing the Protectorate of British Somaliland in 1887 (Brons 2001). A centralised administration was introduced with some elders incorporated as salaried chiefs (*aqils*) and judges (*qaadiyo*). But even in coastal and western Somaliland, clan-based arrangements were still widely used, particularly to resolve inter-group conflicts. In the east, the colonisers faced stiff resistance from Dhulbahante, Warsangeli, and other Darod (Drysdale 2000: 6–7).

An independent Republic of Somalia was created in 1960 from the union of the former Italian colony to the south and Somaliland to the north. The post-independence period was characterised by a mushrooming of clan-based political parties, heavy reliance on budgetary support from other countries, and growing public discontent – particularly in the north-west – at visible corruption and the over-centralisation of power in the southern capital, Mogadishu (Lewis 1994).

Following a military coup in 1969, General Siyad Barre launched on a path of “scientific socialism”, supported by Soviet military and development aid. Following Somalia's defeat in the Ogaden War with Ethiopia in 1978, and a subsequent coup attempt, the regime became increasingly repressive. While anti-tribalist laws formally banned manifestations of clan organisation, including compensation payments (blood money), Barre was in many respects a “master tribalist” (Lewis 1994). Deserted by the Soviets, Somalia experienced a huge influx of Western development and humanitarian aid, fostering domestic clientelism (UNDP 2001). Moreover, where the state failed to establish responsive and broad-based formal institutions, the clans offered viable alternative frameworks, and continued to provide (some) security and justice, particularly in the north. Over time, the Issaq majority in the north-west region was gradually marginalised in the regime's manipulation of clan politics. Increasing state intervention in the economy was seen as interference by many business-minded northerners, compounded by growing extortion and corruption by state officials. Dissatisfaction with the regime led to the establishment of the mainly Issaq-based Somali National Movement (SNM) in 1981 (Jimcaale 2005). After Somalia's defeat in 1978, a large portion of the estimated 1.5 million Ogadeni refugees had arrived in the North and posed a threat to the Issaq's lands. Most of the refugees politically supported the Barre regime, and were later armed by the government to fight the SNM rebels.

The government responded to the SNM's attacks inside the north-west in 1988 with savage reprisals against Issaq civilians, killing more than 50,000 people and generating massive displacement (APD and WSP 1999: 19). But other rebel movements were also growing and the regime was sinking into crisis. In January 1991, the United Somali Congress ousted Barre and appointed an acting President and interim government. While the SNM had originally intended to maintain the union with the South, this unilateral announcement and other signs of southern domination were rejected by the SNM, as by some southern factions.

Despite the political cleavages between their clans, the people of present day Somaliland had shared a distinct colonial history, resentment against the post-independence concentration of power and resources in the south, and grievances against Barre's military rule, too. More specifically, the joint experience of persecution, rebellion, and flight was etched in the collective memory of the Issaq clans (Bradbury 1997: 11). Yet at the same time, the military regime and the civil war had fostered

divisions between the Issaq on the one hand and the Gadabursi (Awdal), Warsangeli and Dhulbahante (Sanaag, Sool) on the other, who largely supported the Barre regime till the end. From this complex political context, Somaliland emerged. Clearly the peacemaking, state-building, and democratisation processes in Somaliland are intricately related, but can be discussed separately in three broad and overlapping historical phases.

## **The Peacemaking Process**

After the collapse of Siyad Barre's regime in 1991, efforts to consolidate peace and security in Somaliland took a very different path from that of the South. Following their takeover of most of north-west Somalia, the victorious Issaq-led SNM opted for reconciliation and a cessation of hostilities with the non-Issaq clans, rather than engaging in retribution and the settling of old scores. Above all, the Issaq sought to consolidate political control over the territory. For their part, the non-Issaq (Dhulbahante, Warsangeli, and Gadabursi), who had been associated with the previous regime, more than anything needed peaceful relations with the predominant SNM force, particularly in the absence of any viable alternatives.

Thus both sides were committed to bringing an end to the hostilities. A strategic decision was reached to base the reconciliation process on the indigenous system of conflict resolution, putting the peacemaking capacity of traditional elders of the various clans to a serious test. Albeit transformed, these traditional institutions had survived British colonial rule and Somali statehood functionally intact, whereas they had been broken up more actively in the Italian settlement colony and Barre's regime in the south (Reno 2003).

Peace and stability were achieved through a series of no less than thirty-eight clan-based peace and reconciliation conferences and meetings between 1990 and 1997 (APD and Interpeace 2008). But the foundations of peacemaking in the north had been laid well before the collapse of the regime: For instance, a key figure of the Dhulbahante clan, Garaad Abdiqani Garaad Jamac, and Jaamac Rabileh of the Gadabursi, already held dialogue to mend fences with the SNM leadership in 1990. After 1991, these relationships with the SNM facilitated an immediate ceasefire between the Issaq and Dhulbahante (Bradbury 2007: 84–5). Similar efforts to reconcile the Issaq with their western neighbours of the Gadabursi in 1991 strongly benefited from the bridge-building role of Abdirahman Aw Ali Farah, a Gadabursi who had played a key role in the Issaq-led SNM struggle.

Early in February 1991, the Berbera Meeting organised by the SNM brought delegations from all Issaq and non-Issaq clans of Somaliland together. The gathering agreed on a formal cessation of hostilities and set the date for the “Grand Conference of the Northern Peoples”, the first inter-clan conference held in Burco in May 1991 (Drysdale 1992). At Burco, the elders made seven proposals, which were then endorsed by the Central Committee of the SNM. These brought about a basic reconciliation of the warring parties to the conflict, the declaration of the Somaliland Republic on 18 May 1991, and the initiation of a separate reconciliation process for the Sanaag region (APD and WSP 1999).

On balance, the Burco conference succeeded in defusing the potential for violent conflict between the Issaq and their non-Issaq neighbours to a certain extent,



and chartered a course of action for the pending issues of Sanaag. But it did little to address the pre-existing tensions within the SNM itself, which had previously been suppressed for sake of the struggle against the regime. Less than a year after the Burco meeting, the SNM found itself immersed in factional fighting. Early in 1992, government attempts to initialise the disarmament and reintegration of the up to 50,000 irregular militias and to form a national army triggered violent clashes between the forces of the Habr Yonis (pro-government) and Habr Jecllo (now termed “opposition”) sub-clans in Burco (Jimcaale 2005: 61–2). Government-associated troops unsuccessfully tried to capture the strategic port town of Berbera for about six months, and the fighting ultimately spread to the capital Hargeisa.

The traditional elders once again stepped in. Hostilities were ended by another (more local) peace conference in the town of Sheikh late in 1992, which in turn sparked the national reconciliation meeting known as the Boroma conference. Held between January and May 1993, this meeting represented a turning point in Somaliland’s peace and reconciliation process. The 150-member *Guurti* (council of elders), together with hundreds of delegates and observers from across Somaliland, adopted a Peace Charter as the basis for efforts towards longer-term peace building, to be implemented during a further transitional period of two years. Much of the success of the conference is attributed to the fact that, based on the traditional leaders’ direct involvement, it was a genuinely locally-owned process. In the absence of any meaningful external support or interference, the burden for hosting the meeting was mainly shouldered by the Boroma community, inducing a strong sense of ownership.

The Boroma conference also paved the way for an initial round of reintegration and demobilisation. In particular, it effectively brought the port of Berbera under government control, making crucial revenues available for the stabilisation of the country. Furthermore, many of the former SNM commanders were appointed into the new cabinet, thus neutralising much of their potential to undermine the government. All this allowed the government to complement the clearing of roadblocks, which had started after the Sheikh conference, with the formal integration of some of the militia into a “national army”, leading to their encampment and preparing for demobilisation. However, the integration process could not be accomplished on full scale, especially as clans in the eastern regions were reluctant to cooperate and dependence on the government rations remained high. Only little assistance was provided for the reintegration of ex-fighters into civilian life, the bulk of which took the form of “self-demobilisation”. The oversized security apparatus henceforth consumed a huge share of the national budget, seriously constraining state expenditures in other sectors.

Hostilities between government forces and clan-based opposition troops erupted once more in 1994 in Hargeisa and then in Burco in 1995, and continued until early 1996. These hostilities arose mainly from the discontent of some sub-clans over their political representation after the Boroma conference. In particular, the Habr Yonis sub-clan of the Issaq – who held the presidency from 1991 to 1993 – had immediately voiced dissatisfaction with the removal of “their” president from power. They were further angered by the number of parliamentary seats and cabinet positions allocated to the sub-clan. This combined with the government’s efforts to have power over revenue-generating facilities, like the capital’s airport, thus far controlled by militia of the Eidagalle, close brethren of the Habr Yonis (Jimcaale 2005). Despite numerous

efforts both from within Somaliland, as well as from the diaspora, peace talks made little progress until 1996 (Bryden and Ahmed Yusuf Farah 1996). Eventually, a peace settlement was instituted at the subsequent national conference held in Hargeisa in 1996/97, addressing some of the grievances of the opposition by increasing their share in the two Houses of Parliament (Bradbury 1997). General stability returned in 1997.

In parallel to these different conflicts, meetings, and conferences, a peace and reconciliation process took place in Sanaag region, where lineages of the Issaq (Habr Yonis and Habr Jecló) and Harti (Warsangeli and Dhulbahante) reside side by side, have intermarried, and maintain long-established social and economic ties. During the Somali civil war until 1991, the Harti had been broadly supportive of Siyad Barre's regime, while the Issaq had backed the SNM. While the peace-building efforts of the Burco and Boroma conferences had focused on the macro-level and national political power-sharing, other kinds of locally-driven peacemaking initiatives were needed to re-establish broken relationships. This was necessary to share grazing lands, return agricultural land and looted property in exchange for access to trade and movement. A total of twelve local meetings culminated in a grand conference in Ceerigaabo between August and October, 1993 (APD and Interpeace 2008).

Despite these achievements, political instability continues in the Sool and eastern Sanaag regions, which are claimed by both Somaliland and neighbouring Puntland.

## The State-Building Process

The starting point for every successful state-building effort is the facilitation of basic security and the establishment of an acceptable framework of governance. Tackling other political, social, and economic challenges of post-war reconstruction must fail without these underlying conditions. As Somaliland lacked international recognition, and external assistance thus remained limited (see section on external assistance), it had to enhance security and rebuild political structures on its own. To a large extent, this meant starting the post-authoritarian transition process from scratch.

Beyond a cessation of hostilities and initiating reconciliation, the Burco conference had also achieved the formation of the first post-war government. As part of the new arrangement, Abdulrahman Ahmed Ali Tuur became Somaliland's first interim President, and the Somali National Movement (SNM)'s Central Committee – broadened by the inclusion of members from non-Issaq clans – was to serve as a provisional national council (Brons 2001: 247–8). The SNM Transitional Government consisted of nineteen ministries, a civil service, a high court, security branches, and a central bank. In an attempt to establish a broad-based government, six cabinet seats were allocated to non-Issaqs (two Dhulbahante, two Gadabursi, one Warsangeli, and one Ciisse) (Drysdale 1992: 8). The Tuur administration served from 1991 to 1993 and assumed the task of forming a functioning government. However, due to factional fighting, the condition of the territory and the people, and the lack of resources, it was hard to attain concrete progress during Tuur's term.

In the absence of local administrative structures, ad hoc councils of elders (*guurtiida*) were formed to take on the role of quasi administrations, managing militias, mediating disputes, administering justice, interacting with international agencies, and raising local revenue (Bradbury 1994: 75). These different councils of

elders (at regional level and district level) were established from 1991 to 1993 in the Awdal, Togdheer, Sanaag, and Sool regions.

The Boroma conference became a defining moment in terms of state-building, too. The Transitional National Charter produced during the conference foresaw the drafting and ratification of a constitution within a two-year period. In order to accommodate and balance clan interests in terms of political representation and power-sharing, the *beel* system of government was adopted: It incorporated the clans and their leaderships within a formal framework of governance (Bradbury 2007: 102–3). *Beel* refers to a temporary settlement of nomadic pastoralists, a community and “clan family”. The *beel* clan- or community-based system has been debated as a “dynamic hybrid of western form and traditional substance” (Jimcaale 2005: 81). It institutionalised the participation of Somaliland’s traditional elders in the further political reconstruction process – a role they had assumed as a result of the paralysis of the SNM and the need for reconciliation.

The Transitional National Charter defined the executive (President, Vice-President, and Council of Ministers), the legislative (bicameral Parliament with an upper House of Elders – the *Guurti* – and a lower House of Representatives) and an independent judiciary. The Charter further prescribed that the Auditor General, the Head of the Central Bank, and the regional governors and mayors were to be appointed by the central government (Bradbury 2007: 103).

At Boroma, Mohammed Haji Ibrahim Egal, a veteran politician, was selected as Somaliland’s new President, with Abdirahman Aw Ali Farah as his Vice-President, to lead the two year transitional administration. Within this period, the government was to re-establish functional government institutions and move the country towards a western-style multi-party system of governance. This ambitious political programme proved to be a formidable challenge. Until 1997, Egal, who enjoyed considerable public trust, was able to make significant progress in establishing the institutions of government, in demobilisation, creating a revenue system, and providing a secure environment for economic recovery (Bradbury 2007) – but not sufficient for political reforms to allow elections. However, based on his leadership qualities and legitimising support from the *Guurti*, President Egal was able to consolidate the power of the state and to pave the way towards a democratisation of the country.

During the first two years of his administration, the government was able to provide security and revive a basic rule of law. Ministries were reinstated, offices were refurbished, and a new Civil Service Commission was installed. Government staff began to receive regular salaries. The police was re-organised and equipped in Hargeisa, Boroma, and Berbera. Regional and district courts, utilising the 1960 penal code, were re-established.

Significant progress was made on the economic front, too: Customs offices were established and revenue collection restarted. A government-controlled Central Bank was created and the Somaliland shilling was introduced as a new currency in 1994, which contributed heavily to the country’s economic and political stabilisation (War-torn Societies Project 2005: 64). In November 1994, Somaliland’s first annual budget was agreed, almost half of which went to the security services. Education and health together received 17 per cent of the total (Gilkes 1995: 29). Regular coordination meetings were established between the Ministry of Planning and international NGOs and UN agencies (Bradbury 2007: 113).

Meanwhile, political reconstruction was slower than expected. In April 1995, when Egal's two-year mandate ended, his tenure and that of the legislature were extended by the House of Elders for a further eighteen months. This was meant to provide time for him to end the war, finalise a constitution, and prepare the country for elections. Yet disagreement between the President and the House of Representatives over the drafting of the new constitution hampered the development of a single document. A draft constitution was eventually adopted and ratified at the Hargeisa conference early in 1997 to set the stage for multiparty elections within five years (till February 2002).

As far as decentralisation and the extension of the administration are concerned, the government began to develop functional relationships with the regions. However, the rebuilding process remained uneven across the country. Until the Hargeisa conference in 1996/97, it was largely confined to Hargeisa, Berbera, Boroma, and to some degree Burco, which fell under the government's writ. The central government authorised regional health and education plans and started to pay incentives to health workers and some education officials, although often funded by international agencies. Supported by UN-Habitat, Hargeisa municipality embarked on initial stages of town planning and civil engineering, including the rehabilitation of government offices and the reconstruction of basic infrastructure (Bradbury 2007: 114).

Following the Hargeisa conference and the government's realignment, especially with the Habr Yonis, political reconstruction gradually extended to the east. However, it remains less successful around Burco (Togdheer). In Ceerigaabo (Sanaag), only a skeleton of the government's structures has been established to date, while eastern Sanaag remains outside of its control. Efforts to establish the Somaliland administration in Sool only started after the takeover of Las Anod in October 2007.

## The Democratisation Process

A decade after Somaliland embarked on an ostensible two-year political transition period in May 1991, the country was still in transition and ruled by a government based on the clan system. Most troubling, as the government's 1997–2001 term drew to a close, Somaliland's political future was up in the air. Although the draft constitution adopted at the Hargeisa conference in 1997 foresaw multiparty elections, the public was unaware of the course of action that the government would take.

A vigorous public discussion on the future political direction of the country ensued. As indicated in public debates, people held diverse opinions on this matter (Jimcaale 2005). Some advocated for a continuation of the existing clan-based system of governance, with gradual changes and improvements. Others stressed the importance of holding the elections, despite risks, as it was time to move forward. However, the majority of the population supported neither the holding of another Grand Clan Conference (*shir-beeleed*), nor western-style multiparty elections, and instead proposed something in between. They considered a *shir-beeleed* as regressive and multipartyism as impractical. To all intents and purposes, no one was able to come up with a workable compromise formula.

The entire country, particularly the political opposition and critics of the government, was taken by surprise when President Egal suddenly announced the schedule for a referendum on the constitution. In March 2001, the Parliament adopted a Provisional Constitution, including some amendments proposed by the

government, and passed a law scheduling a referendum on the constitution for 31 May 2001. Passage of this law was the first and crucial step in the long overdue process of political transition (Ibrahim 2004).

During the preparations for the scheduled referendum, the opposition became more vociferous in its criticism. The government ignored this. A veiled threat of armed response from the opposition pushed the political temperature up. The public, which had previously paid little attention to the debate on constitutional reform, began to fear that a veritable crisis was in the making. By publicly engaging both the government and the opposition, a forum debate on the referendum, hosted and organised by the Academy for Peace and Development, helped diffuse the tensions (Ibrahim 2004).

According to the Somaliland government, about 1.18 million people voted in the constitutional referendum of 31 May 2001, with an overwhelming 97.7 per cent approving it.<sup>3</sup> However, voter turnout in the eastern Sanaag and Sool regions was limited, reflecting the fact that many in the area opposed the political system of Somaliland. Nevertheless, outside observers concluded that the process adhered to internationally accepted standards and estimated that approximately 66 per cent of Somaliland's eligible voters had endorsed the new constitution (Initiative and Referendum Institute 2001).

The approval of the constitution was to finally set in motion the implementation of the electoral process. On 6 August 2001, Law No. 14 was passed, legalising the formation of political organisations. Only a month after the referendum and already two months before the legalisation of political organisations, President Egal had launched his political organisation, UDUB, at a grand conference in Hargeisa. Another seven political organisations had been announced by the end of September 2001. An electoral law was passed in November 2001, and the National Electoral Commission (NEC) was formed in February 2002 (Bradbury et al. 2003).

During the second half of 2001, people started to doubt the possibility of free and fair elections under Egal, and the opposition was able to galvanise support from some members of Parliament and clan leaders. In August 2001, President Egal survived an attempted parliamentary impeachment by just one vote. The same month, a group of sultans (traditional clan leaders) challenged the President's authority, calling for UDUB to be dismantled within forty-five days and for a national conference to chart the country's political future. When the government arrested several sultans of the group in Hargeisa, the country was taken to the brink of another civil conflict, which could only be avoided through mediation by religious leaders, businessmen, and civil society groups (Bradbury et al. 2003). Egal's second term eventually expired without elections being held. On 12 January 2002, the *Guurti* invoked Article 83 of the constitution, and extended the term of the government (which was to expire on 22 February 2002) by one more year – within which it should complete the transition. This move eased the political tensions that had embroiled the country towards the end of 2001.

While visiting South Africa, Egal died unexpectedly in May 2002. The Vice-President, Dahir Rayaale Kahin, was swiftly sworn in as his successor, ensuring continuity. The death of Egal allowed a more level political playing field, and it

3 The vote did not involve control mechanisms to avoid double-voting. However, it is not disputed that the great majority of the people endorsed the constitution (Bradbury et al. 2003: 463).

encouraged some groups who had previously opposed the political process to participate more fully.

The new President continued the transitional process. On December 15, Somalilanders went to the polls for the first time in more than thirty years. The electoral cycle started with the local council elections because the result of this contest between the six political organisations (ASAD, Hormood, Kulmiye, Sahan, UDUB, and UCID) was to determine who would be eligible to form the three political parties to stand in the presidential and parliamentary elections. On 23 December 2002, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) declared that UDUB, Kulmiye, and UCID would contest in the following polls (Ibrahim 2004).

According to the constitution, the presidential elections had to be held before February 2003 and parliamentary polls before May 2003 – thus a month prior to the end of either term. However, it was neither technically, financially, nor politically feasible to have back-to-back elections within these two months. Furthermore, the electoral law pertaining to the parliamentary elections remained controversial and potentially divisive. Disagreement on such issues as the allocation of parliamentary seats by region and the demarcation of electoral districts remained unresolved.

But without extending the mandate of the government, it would have been unconstitutional to postpone the elections. The government insisted on holding the presidential election as scheduled, while the two opposition parties (Kulmiye and UCID) wanted them on May 30. After consulting all sides, the electoral commission finally scheduled the presidential election for March 31, citing technical and financial issues. The *Guurti* saw the move as a violation of the constitution, as it claims the sole constitutional right to extend the government's mandate. In the end the commission backed down and the *Guurti* extended the mandate of the government by three months to allow the holding of presidential elections. In April, the *Guurti* extended the tenure of the House of Representative by one year, which also added two years for the *Guurti*, whose term always ends one the year after the one of the House of Representatives (Bradbury et al. 2003).

On 14 April 2003, nearly half a million Somalilanders finally went to the polls to select a new President. Voting was peaceful, orderly, and without notable security incidents. International and domestic observers confirmed the free and transparent way in which polling was conducted (Bradbury et al. 2003: 468–9).

Political observers and pundits in Somaliland predicted a very close contest, and were proven right. The preliminary results, announced by the National Electoral Commission on April 19, gave the ruling UDUB a narrow victory over Kulmiye, by a margin of eighty votes. Kulmiye contested the results and presented evidence of a tabulation error by the NEC in the final tally. UDUB also contested the election results, hoping to increase its margin of victory. The NEC refused to review either side's complaints and referred the matter to the Supreme Court. On 11 May 2003, after listening to the arguments of both sides as well as the NEC, the Supreme Court ruled in UDUB's favour. Kulmiye rejected the verdict and questioned the competence of the Court, but Dahir Rayaale Kahin was sworn in on 16 May 2003 as Somaliland's President. Shortly after, Kulmiye's leadership bowed to increasing public pressure and conceded Rayaale's victory (International Crisis Group 2003).

After the presidential elections, it took almost two and a half years to hold the first elections for the legislative – the House of Representatives. On 29 September

2005, the people could finally elect the eighty-two MPs for the new lower House of Parliament. In the run-up to the polls, political tensions between the government and the opposition parties, Kulmiye and UCID, cast doubts over the electoral process. Occasional autocratic and undemocratic practices to stymie the freedom of speech and expression threatened to derail the campaigning process (Kibble and Abokor 2004). With thirty-three seats, the final result gave the ruling UDUB the largest single share, but twenty-eight Kulmiye MPs and twenty-one of UCID provided the combined opposition with an almost 60 per cent majority in parliament.

The upper chamber of the Parliament, the *Guurti*, remains unelected. The *Guurti* was supposed to be freshly constituted in September 2006, but while the House of Representatives was still debating an applicable law for the election or new selection of *Guurti* members, the latter extended its own term of office by four additional years. The House of Representatives, the political opposition parties, and large segments of Somaliland's society denounced the move and continue to challenge its constitutionality (APD and Interpeace 2006b).

## External Interventions

The involvement of the outside world, whether at multi- and bilateral levels of the international community or through civil society activities, business relations and the exposure from the media may have a critical influence on processes of political reconstruction. In the case of Somaliland, external engagement gradually changed both in terms of intensity and form, as well as in the role it played for the internal processes.

The near absence of external support to Somaliland's peacemaking is often depicted as a major factor in its success (APD and WSP 1999: 84). Apart from minor material inputs by some NGOs, all peace conferences in Somaliland were funded from internal sources. None of the UNOSOM (United Nations Operation in Somalia) blue helmets ever set foot into Somaliland, and international attention was limited to short observer visits. These circumstances provided the space for serious local ownership, while the parallel deployment of UNOSOM in Somalia created additional incentives for home-grown solutions. Both the Sheikh and the Boroma conferences were marked by a considerable desire to avoid an extension of the peacekeeping mission into Somaliland.

In contrast to this, the state-building process showed significant discrepancies between internal needs and external offers of support. In fact, especially during the early years after the end of Somaliland's internal conflicts in 1996, international involvement with the building of the unrecognised state was uneasy. When initial caution after the war began to fade, assistance gradually moved from token to strategic engagement, in parallel with the growing absorption capacity of the administration. For example, the UNDP supported the Ministries of Finance and Planning with international consultants, and a major "Somali Civil Protection Programme" benefited the Ministry of Justice, the courts, and the police. Yet the lack of international recognition continues to limit the scope of foreign assistance, denies the government access to international financial instruments, and discourages major foreign direct investment. While the factors limiting state-building are certainly not only external, the restrictions associated with non-recognition tend to hinder effective

assistance at least in the more sensitive areas of state-building. Furthermore, the need to channel all assistance through a huge number NGOs and UN bodies implies significantly higher expenses for administrative structures and logistics, impacting on the effectiveness of external resources.

Over the years, external engagement with the democratisation process has witnessed a complete and decisive “change of heart”. Modest international support was provided for voter education and training before the local elections in 2002. Only few donors were ready to support the presidential elections in 2003 by funding technical assistance and voter education (Bradbury et al. 2003: 466–8). The parliamentary elections in September 2005 marked a breakthrough, when donors came in full force. The success of these polls not only boosted Somaliland’s international reputation, but won it enormous donor confidence in terms of assisting the further democratisation process in spite of non-recognition. Donor governments have meanwhile pledged strong support for the costly voter registration exercise and the local and presidential elections due in 2008. By providing funds, technical expertise, and close political monitoring, international assistance in this field has not only had a decisive role in Somaliland’s democratisation process, but has also demonstrated the enormous potential of concerted international engagement with the political reconstruction of the country.

## **Peace, State, Democracy – Unfinished Business?**

### *Peacemaking: external and internal challenges*

The major challenge in the area of peace and reconciliation for Somaliland is not primarily an internal affair: The settlement of the country’s longstanding dispute with neighbouring Puntland (Somalia) over the Sool and eastern Sanaag regions is pending. Somaliland’s claims are rooted in the history of its colonial boundary with Somalia, while the neighbouring region bases its position on the fact that the Dhulbahante and Warsangeli inhabiting the area are part of the Harti clan that controls Puntland. The conflict between the two entities remained a “Cold War” during the Egal administration (1993–2002), but it erupted in bloody confrontations after Dahir Rayaale Kahin assumed the presidency in 2002 and paid a visit to the Sool region. Since late 2002, forces of Somaliland and Puntland have been locked in a standoff, resulting in several rounds of fighting, especially in 2004. Following clashes in Dhahar (eastern Sanaag) in March/April 2007, the year saw a considerable change of landscape when shifting alliances and further fighting resulted in the eventual capture of Sool’s capital, Las Anod, by Somaliland forces in October 2007. The situation remains very tense, and observers expect a series of recurrent clashes so long as the underlying conflict remains unaddressed.

Internally, Somaliland looks back at well over a decade of tranquillity. Peacemaking within the country must therefore be recognised as remarkably successful, especially when measured against the context of the former Somalia and the conflict-ridden environment of the entire Horn of Africa Region.

However, some concerns remain as to whether the reconciliation process is complete, and to what extent the institutionalised forms of conflict resolution can maintain the still fragile peace when it comes under stress (APD and WSP 1999: 84). This sentiment could clearly be felt when, early in 2007, fighting raged between rival



members of the Habr Yonis and Eidagalle sub-clans in Daroor, in Ethiopia's Somali region near the border with Somaliland. forty-three people were reportedly killed, fifty wounded, and scores of others fled. Though this conflict took place inside Ethiopia, Somaliland bore the brunt of the conflict, because the communities of these sub-clans (of the Issaq-Garxajis) live on both sides of the border. Hospitals in Hargeisa and Burco received dozens of wounded, and many worried that the conflict could spread into these major urban centres of Somaliland (APD 2007).

There is no shortage of potential for future conflict: From the recurrence of local confrontations over natural resources (land, water, etc.), revenge and counter-revenge killings, a number of unsettled scores on the local level (especially in the east), and the risk of a derailed political process spiralling out of control and escalating into wider violent conflict. Undoubtedly, there is a universal commitment to maintaining the peace, and Somalilanders have more than once demonstrated their dedication to compromise for the sake of this greater good. But this provides no guarantee that – if parties are deliberately mobilised for individual or political aims – the usually ad hoc, often improvised and localised mechanisms of conflict resolution will be sufficient to guard against renewed internal violence. To consolidate stability, Somaliland still needs to move from improvised regulation and peaceful coexistence to the institutionalisation of peace and an amalgamation of society. In particular, this involves the building of truly crosscutting rather than just inter-clan institutions of conflict resolution and conflict management, as well as a long-term structural transformation of conflict.

#### *The struggle of consolidating the state's institutions*

With the three branches of government in place, a civil service, army, and police forces established, and local and regional administrations existing in almost every part, Somaliland has certainly succeeded in reorganising the nominal structures of the state. While – particularly in the absence of strong and direct international assistance – these achievements must not be underestimated, the new state in many ways continues to resemble a skeleton rather than a fully-fledged body with functioning organs and lively structures. “A state is always ‘work in progress’”, Mark Bradbury concludes.<sup>4</sup> The capacity and effectiveness of the state, the separation and balance of power, the degree of centralisation, and the lack of international recognition remain important “construction sites” in Somaliland's state-building efforts.

Of all issues, turning the existing administration into an effective, stable, formalised, and professional bureaucracy presents an uphill struggle. The limited capacity and effectiveness of the state's institutions is rooted in a combination of factors, including the striking lack of financial and human resources at the government's disposal, but also resistance to reforms and mismanagement, both of which are closely tied to the role that the current state plays within Somaliland society.

Not only does the state survive on little more than US\$ 20 million per year, government bodies are also staffed with largely unqualified personnel, much of which has been recruited due to clan identity and proportions, rather than merit. Likewise, the ministers are as much government officials as they are clan representatives. The need for clan-balancing at this level has bloated the number of portfolios, while the

<sup>4</sup> See Bradbury (2007: 248), paraphrasing Milliken and Krause (2003: 1).

ministries underneath continue to lack effective “bodies” to deliver services. Moreover, in these one-man ministries, all decisions rest with the minister; in his/her absence, everything stands still. As another result, the national budget is largely consumed by the basic running costs of this huge skeleton, leaving hardly anything for an operational budget and thus seriously limiting the scope to implement government programmes.

Though some bureaucratic procedures have been put in place, much of the business of administration is still conducted through personal contacts rather than a formal system for all. A deficit in transparency, accountability, professionalism, and sense of civic duty is manifest, and has encouraged corruption.

Though the balance and separation of powers between the three branches of government is clearly stipulated in the constitution, in practice, the executive is overwhelmingly stronger than the other two branches. With no effective clout in the process of government, the judiciary and the legislative are unable to provide tangible checks and balances within the new political system.

The **Parliament** with its two chambers must ratify all legislation. The elected lower house may also initiate bills, and most importantly has the constitutional privilege to amend and approve the national budget of the country. However, the Parliament has not been able to exercise these rights effectively: Of the bills passed since the September 2005 parliamentary elections, only four have been accepted by the *Guurti* and signed into law by the President. Parliamentary initiatives to develop legislation independently from the executive have been greeted with hostility and in fact have been very limited. Since 2002, only the annual accounts of 2005 were presented to Parliament in 2007, and the Parliament’s changes to the 2007 budget were rejected. Calls for members of the cabinet to report to Parliament have regularly been ignored, and ministers and other officials have remained in office over extended periods of time even though they had not been confirmed by the house. In a nutshell, the elected Parliament has got very little in its hands to exercise effective oversight.

Yet, to be fair, the limitations of the Parliament are not only external. Halfway into its first elected term, the legislature still lacks a good understanding of both its role and functional capacity. There is a continuing disagreement between the ruling and the opposition parties over the role of the house leadership, which has affected the ability of the House of Representatives to function as a single, collective institution. The house leadership also stands accused of acting independently of the assembly. Overall, the legal expertise of the Parliament to draft laws is inadequate, parliamentary procedures are poorly defined and understood, and initiative is limited. To hold the executive branch accountable, the further development of these seemingly “technical” aspects will also be crucial.

The **House of Elders** (*Guurti*, the upper chamber of Parliament) is a particular case. Historically, it played a crucial role in making peace and laying the foundations for the new state, and as such was an innovation in its time. However, unlike many other parts of the state apparatus, the further development and adaptation of this fundamental institution to the increasingly complex political challenges has stagnated. Although Somaliland’s second electoral cycle is imminent in 2008, legislation governing the future nomination (if not election) to the House of Elders has not yet been developed. Meanwhile, many members of the *Guurti* have become urbanised and somewhat disconnected from their largely rural constituencies. These issues concern the *Guurti*’s legitimacy and raise an increasing number of questions,

especially in the context of its comprehensive powers to rule on matters that are judged to threaten the peace. This is particularly sensitive because these are no longer clan conflicts alone: The *Guurti* tends to be drawn into constitutional disputes beyond its original capacity and role.

The **judiciary** of Somaliland by and large lacks the capacity and professionalism to enforce the rule of law (APD 2002). Civil and criminal codes date back to the immediate post-independence era and there have not been major reforms after the war. There is a legal pluralism of Somali, Italian, and British statutory law, customary law (*xeer*) and Shari'a law – all of which are marked by serious contradictions. With a fundamental lack of professional judges, and in the absence of a functional regulatory body, the judicial system remains weak. Most courts do not have the resources to function adequately, and corruption is endemic. Moreover, the judiciary does not have the independence to provide effective checks and balances for the new political system: The Chief Justice is appointed and removed freely, and efforts by Parliament to vet candidates for the post have largely failed. There is no courts administration independent of the Ministry of Justice, which controls all relevant funds with the exception of the Supreme Court. The lack of safeguards for the judiciary's independence is particularly critical with regard to the Supreme Court, which has repeatedly had to rule on crucial legal disputes between the government and opposition since the beginning of the democratisation process.

Intending to prevent a return to authoritarian rule and to strengthen participation in governance, Somaliland's constitution provides for a **decentralised system** of government (Jimcaale 2005; APD and Interpeace 2006a). But despite the establishment of local administrations and the introduction of local council elections, realising this goal is a continuing challenge. Not only has the development of the local administrations been uneven, most local councils have so far failed to take on their roles effectively. The defined roles of the councils (as decision-makers) and the mayor (as the executive) are not followed, and mayors have frequently been threatened with impeachment for failing to meet the expectations of the council members. Furthermore, the system has failed to provide better access for the public. Revenue collection remains mostly centralised, providing little power to the councils.

Last but not least, another key aspect of Somaliland's unfinished state-building is obviously the lack of international recognition and the unresolved relationship with Somalia. In material ways, this can be felt in its implications for international assistance, which can hardly flow through government channels as long as Somaliland has not been recognised. This status has also barred the country from establishing links with international financial institutions (Bradbury 2007: 247). As another effect and an area of growing concern, the lack of international sovereignty minimises the extent of protection Somaliland would receive in a case of external aggression. While these aspects clearly constrain the continuing state-building efforts, observers have also pointed out that non-recognition has simultaneously provided the space and freedom to develop genuinely home-grown institutions and to experiment without unhelpful international pressure for conformity.

*Democratisation: From formal democracy to democratic transformation?*

With a constitutional referendum and the full cycle of local, presidential, and parliamentary elections having been held, Somaliland has come a long way in its democra-

tisation process. As far as the credentials of formal democratisation are concerned, the key challenge is when and at what level of quality this process will be continued. There are growing concerns over the electoral timetable, which foresees a voter registration process to be followed by the second round of local and presidential elections in 2008. Implementing the first and complex voter registration is a tough call, particularly under serious time pressure combined with the risk of inherent tensions of any further delay. In addition, a legal dispute over the eligibility of new political associations to contest the local elections continues to simmer unresolved.

Meanwhile, despite the achievements in the formal democratisation process, Somaliland's democracy so far remains somewhat "narrowly legal" and at a fragile and formative stage. A deep democratic transformation, embracing society and delivering a sustainable and *functional* democracy, is still pending. More than legal aspects, "the reformation of government and the state and the development of other elements that foster a democratic culture" will be critical (Carothers 2003). Many of the unfinished aspects of state-building, in particular a greater separation and balance of powers, the strengthening of the rule of law, and a continuation of the decentralisation process are key elements to this. From a functional perspective, the development of effective channels of popular participation is central to this transformation. This includes in particular:

The democratisation and opening up of internal structures of political parties, providing equal access to engaged citizens and guaranteeing opportunities for participation within the framework of the restrained three-party system.

Political space for the active involvement of civil society organisations and marginalised political interest groups. This includes in particular the development of advocacy platforms and dialogue interfaces with Parliament and the executive.

The strengthening of the parliament, inter alia through internal capacity-building and the bolstering of constituency relations.

Free political competition including the right to peaceful political association and expression.

The liberalisation of the media sector, combined with the development of a greater sense of responsibility among journalists (including editorial boards and self-regulation mechanisms).

Respect for human and civil rights as safeguards to unrestricted participation.

In the longer run, these issues are also closely connected with the development of a stronger domestic constituency to promote and safeguard a continuation and deepening of the democratisation process. So far, Somaliland lacks a critical mass that could clearly be identified as the popular driving force of democratisation. In the absence of experience of participation in a system of liberal democracy, there is a tendency to look up and wait for concepts to come from above. Although there is a broad perception that democracy is beneficial to the populace, there is no urge or disposition to fight for it. Democracy has very little active lobby, despite its general approval.

Few individuals are reform-minded in the true sense and have the horizon of experience to understand the concepts and complexities of this. Those who do understand find it difficult to connect to each other and to create a common

platform, particularly due to clan divisions, economic competition including in the civil society, and the (partly experience-based) perception that there is no political space for an organised civic movement to take on a political and advocacy role in the young state.

Ironically, it is equally difficult to identify clearly “anti-democratic forces”. It often seems that the question of democratic orientation depends very much on where in the system actors stand at a particular moment. Throughout the different periods of Somaliland’s development, those in power tended to object to reform in order to maintain the status quo, whilst the powerless called for democratisation in order to gather clout and gain access to power. This image was further reinforced by the legacy of long dictatorial rule: In the eyes of the public, those in power seek to consolidate their position and centralise everything in their hands.

Overall, the main cleavages of society continue to be along clan lines and alliances. Cross-sectional and “horizontal” forms of civic association and organisation remain very limited, strongly contributing to the absence of a culture of broad-based movements. As a consequence, organisational capacity focuses on the representation of the interests of sub-sections of society, rather than on issues and particular policies. This creates a tendency to wash out formal democracy, reducing it to a regulatory arena for segmented interests instead of an engine of comprehensive social change.

## The Way Forward

On balance, Somaliland has an outstanding record of peacemaking, laid all the basic foundations of statehood, and demonstrated remarkable commitment to the development of a formal democracy. A key lesson to be learnt from this experience is that international recognition is not a prerequisite to the re-establishment of functional structures of governance. Such efforts can go very far even when embarked upon in a functional entity that once formed only a part of a collapsed state. Especially when measured against the countless failures of state-building at the national level of the former Somali state, Somaliland is truly a success story.

In some ways it may have been a blessing that, especially during the earlier stages, this was achieved with relatively little international assistance and engagement as it increased local ownership and provided incentives for consensus building and good governance in the country. Yet this constellation has its limits, and it would be foolish for the outside world to just take a continuation of the country’s successes for granted. The grudge against the international community is already growing because it was expected that Somaliland would obtain international recognition as a “peace dividend”. There is also a perception that strong development cooperation failed to arrive. Securing Somaliland’s accomplishments, including against external threats, and deepening state-building and democratisation requires increased bi- and multilateral cooperation and international engagement. It also goes without saying that the potential for external leverage in such matters – if and when it may be needed – is obviously tied to the level of involvement one has with a given country.

Meanwhile, Somaliland remains interested in, and in fact eager for, increased international cooperation and exchange. As long as the country has not been recognised, the international community remains challenged to creatively craft

forms of support that can nevertheless help tackle bottlenecks in the state-building and democratisation processes. The international donor investment in Somaliland's 2005 parliamentary elections presented a formidable example for the effective and valuable support that can be provided even below the threshold of international recognition, but beyond "classical" forms of foreign governance support to a non-recognised country. Another illustration of such efforts is assistance through the World Bank to develop Somaliland's Public Finance Management, which involves serious incentives for good governance.

These initiatives underscore that the world is abandoning the principle of "good enough by comparison with southern Somalia" and considers Somaliland's achievements and needs in their own right. This signals readiness for increased engagement as much as it forbids any potential sense of complacency.

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*In Hargeisa, Somaliland, February 2007*

# Civil Society in the Absence of a Somali State

In the last two decades, civil society organisations (CSOs) have been active in providing assistance in the areas in which conflicts have destroyed the social and economic lives of Somali people. Many of them are trying to enhance the general well-being of the Somali people, and the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in particular. Today, CSOs have a far more positive and direct influence on the lives of many Somalis than any other institutions. The numerous hospitals, schools, and even community-based universities established across Somalia by the civil society serve as examples.

Civil society has also created political spaces in which protagonists have been able to resolve their differences through dialogue, instead of violence. It has provided a number of peace-building initiatives. While exclusion of women still prevails in Somali society, particularly with regard to the economic arena, their role has increased, due to their involvement in CSOs. Diaspora women especially have played a vital role in the push for mediation and peace-building. The civil society sector in Somalia has produced leaders with a more visible and deeper commitment to social responsibility, democratic values, and respect for human rights than the current generation of political and military leaders.

At the same time, civil society in Somalia faces numerous constraints and challenges arising from the insecurity and violence, the socio-political situation, and internal capacity problems. The constraints include a lack of strong, unified structures among civil society organisations, a profound mistrust between civil society institutions and authorities (initially the warlords, later the transitional national and local institutions), and limited financial and moral support by external actors involved in the Somalia crisis. Civil society in Somalia also finds itself in a difficult political environment, fractured by clan and other divisions – which puts CSOs in difficult, sometimes dangerous situations.

This essay examines the roles of CSOs in Somalia in the absence of a functioning state. It discusses the relationships between various civil society actors and provides information on the historical background, current initiatives, and future challenges faced by the civil society movement in Somalia. This essay will also look at vital roles of civil society in the development and reconstruction process in Somalia and at the best ways to strengthen and influence democratic transition processes as well as possible future roles for civil society groups working towards these goals. In addition, it outlines possible ways in which civil society can be rekindled in a country where state control is minimal.



## 1 Introduction

Over the past decade, the number and variety of organisations and associations at the core of the civil society movement in Somalia have grown rapidly. Although reliable data on the number of civil society organisations in Somalia do not exist, their number has risen substantially – from a few small institutions in early 1980s to hundreds of organisations across Somalia in the 1990s. Their growth in size and number is strengthening their organisational capacities. Despite a lack of central coordination and formal structure, they are now strongly engaged in social services delivery and other vital public services.

Besides delivering services, a strong civil society can counterbalance state power – or, in the case of Somalia, militias, warlords, and other local power brokers. It can open up channels of communication and promote transparency between the state/local authorities and its citizens. This can lay foundations for future democratic institutions. Also, civil society can foster the growth of a strong market economy, which can provide services, empower communities, and build grass-roots organisational capacity.

In 2002, Oxfam Novib mapped Somali civil society in all regions of Somalia. The study (Novib-Oxfam 2003) found that civil society could be broken up into four categories: non-governmental organisations (NGOs), networks, professional associations (PAs), and community-based organisations (CBOs).

Through the sustained support and continuing engagement of the international community, the Somali civil society has reached a certain maturity. Civil society organisations are increasingly cooperating and networking, particularly those with a focus on peace promotion, education, health, and women/gender issues. Furthermore, the voice and the influence of the civil society movement are becoming more pronounced in the Somali social and political arena. Examples of this shift in focus were the peaceful and unchallenged mass rallies and demonstrations organised by civil society in Mogadishu and other parts of the country as well as in the diaspora, for example, the peace rally held in Minnesota in May 2007 (Somali Women Peace Rally 2007).

The Somali civil society movement, although nascent, has succeeded in becoming a hub for intellectuals and professionals who are increasingly important players in the promotion of a culture of peace and good governance.

## 2 Civil Society in Somalia: Historical Perspective

The history of CSOs in Somalia dates back to the early 1940s. Then, the Somali Youth League (SYL), with the support of traditional elders, created a widespread civic movement to fight against the colonial powers and for the unity of greater Somalia. After Somalia gained independence in 1960, however, the SYL ceased to function, lacking the ability to transcend beyond the liberation discourse. SYL leaders formed different parties in order to participate in elections. Formal civil society structures did not emerge in the 1960s, while traditional structures and authorities often played a positive role in enhancing good governance and maintaining local peace.

Civil society groups were slow to take root under the civilian government (1960–69), and from 1969 became severely restricted by the military regime of Siyad Barre (1969–91). Instead, the Siyad Barre regime established parastatal social organisations

under the guidance of ministries, for example, a women's organisation and a worker's union. However, these organisations were part of the government apparatus for social control, as they enjoyed no autonomy or freedom to criticise the government. Many would argue that the main purpose of creating and allowing these organisations was to promote a government agenda. The regime subdued any attempts at building independent civil society structures.

The lack of an associational network independent to the state is illustrated by the history of NGOs in Somalia: Institutionalised NGOs first appeared in the early 1980s, in the wake of international aid agencies that rushed in to help with the huge influx of Ethiopian refugees as a result of the 1977–78 Ogaden war. These were primarily local relief organisations. In the early 1980s, as the international agencies began to withdraw, local NGOs increased in number and implemented projects mainly in the health and income-generating sectors. The majority of these local NGOs at the time were based in Mogadishu.

Two things are worth noting about this: First, the idea of NGOs was new and NGOs were only beginning to emerge in Somalia when the civil war was already about to break out. Secondly, the impetus for their formation was a major relief initiative. Thus they had goals – usually short-term goals – and focused on a crisis at hand. They modelled themselves primarily on international relief agencies and did not concern themselves with long-term developmental goals.

Before the civil war, however, few organisations officially registered with the government as NGOs. The need for independent civil society organisations emerged after the eruption of the civil war and the collapse of the state apparatus in 1991. The immediate aftermath of the overthrow of the Barre regime produced what de Waal (1994: 143) describes as, “a rapid proliferation of civic organizations, enjoying the first freedom from authoritarian government for more than two decades.”

This brief flowering of civil society was, however, quickly stifled by the factional fighting between the clan-based militias who had overthrown Barre and then the massive influx of international aid agencies with UNOSOM (United Nations Operation in Somalia), which marginalised and incapacitated local institutions.

Following the arrival of US-led Operation “Restore Hope” in late 1992, the international aid agencies, collaborating with newly emerging Somali NGOs, succeeded in delivering much needed humanitarian assistance to drought- and war-stricken Somalis. They revived schools and clinics offering basic education and emergency health services in various towns across Somalia, particularly in South-Central Somalia where international forces were stationed. However, few of these facilities remained functional after UNOSOM II withdrew in March 1995.

The vacuum created by the withdrawal of almost all Western aid agencies, coupled with despair and hopelessness among Somalis, forced many Somali NGOs to assume some of the services left behind by the international agencies. It is important to note that, in this period, Islamic NGOs and civil institutions operating in Somalia that had been part of the international aid agencies helping Somali people in the country remained behind to continue delivery of the much needed humanitarian assistance.

The presence of the Islamic NGOs in Somalia continued with the support of local professionals to run the services with incentives generated from the local communities. The Islamic NGOs inspired many civic organisations to become actively involved in areas of social-service delivery and community mobilisation.

This facilitated the emergence of the first wave of credible Somali NGOs led by Somali professionals.

From the late 1990s, Somali civil society became much more organised. Some NGOs formed umbrella and network organisations to coordinate their activities. This included the formation of the Coalition for Grassroots Women Organization (COGWO) established in 1996 to unite the efforts of twenty different women organisations. Another network was established with INXA, an umbrella organisation that involves a wide range of organisations active in advocacy and human rights. Furthermore, there are educational networks such as the Formal Private Education Network for Somalia (FPENS), one of the largest and most effective education umbrella organisations providing primary and secondary education. It operates in half of the country's eighteen regions, including Borama and Bossaso in the northwest (Somaliland) and northeast (Puntland) and consists of 101 educational centres with 51,378 students, with 33.5 per cent girls among them, and an academic staff of 1,384 (FPENS 2003). Most of its members use Arabic language as the medium of instruction.<sup>1</sup> Currently, 261 students are studying at universities in countries like Sudan, Yemen, and Egypt under the auspices of the Islamic Bank scholarship programme.

In the new millennium, Somali civil society has prospered further, it has formed many networks, and well-structured, professional organisations have emerged. Civil society is particularly vibrant in these areas:

- Education: schools, universities, and other institutions;
- Health: hospitals and maternal/child health care centres;
- Peace-building: reconciliation between warring parties; removal of militia checkpoints;
- Human, women, and child rights: advocacy in media and public forums; reporting human rights violations; awareness-raising on FGM, HIV/AIDS and child labour;
- Humanitarian assistance: providing shelter for internally displaced persons (IDP).

### 3 Traditional Institutions and Civil Society

Traditional clan leaders and religious leaders had a pivotal role in Somali society, in particular in the pre-colonial era. One of the main traditional activities of elders and religious leaders has always been conflict mitigation. Unfortunately, their roles have never fully developed beyond the local sphere so that they have difficulties managing regional or national disputes. Also, due to different models of colonial rule – “indirect rule” in British Somaliland, as against a more centralised Italian administration in the rest of the country – the level of influence of traditional elders varied and varies from region to region. In both contemporary Somaliland and Puntland, traditional elders still commend considerable influence in all sectors, while their counterparts in today's

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1 Somalia had schools with three medium of instruction, Arabic, English, and Italian. Since independence until 1991, graduates from the schools with English and Italian medium of instruction used to get the best opportunities, as regards jobs and political offices. As a result, most Arabic-school graduates ended up in the military ranks, resulting in a majority of Somali high-ranking military officials coming from an Arabic language schooling background. Most of the schools in Somalia today are directly or indirectly influenced by former Arabic-school graduates.

South-Central Somalia have very limited influence. After independence, the civilian Somali governments and the Barre regime confined the roles of elders and religious leaders to traditional conflict resolution. In many instances the government in power bought allegiances and gave power to those who were willing to collaborate.

After the fall of the Siyad Barre regime, the influence of traditional elders eroded further in light of the US-led operation “Restore Hope” and the UN operations UNOSOM I and II (1992–95). The political empowerment of the armed factions by the international community and the proliferation of weapons undermined their authority in South-Central Somalia, particularly in Mogadishu.

The role of elders, however, re-gained strength during the Arta peace process in Djibouti in August 2000. The process aimed at avoiding the failures of previous initiatives in which only faction leaders had been key players. To this end traditional elders could participate. Civil society delegates, traditional and religious leaders, and women’s groups attended the conference. Armed political faction-leaders could only attend in a purely personal capacity and had no special status. Thus, they only played a marginal role.

Against this background, the Arta peace process brought about the revival of some powerful traditional elders. In the following years, they have positioned themselves as a moral force and have supported civil society activities. They have also been able to gather individual clans to unite around broader issues. In particular in Puntland and Somaliland, many recent conflicts have been resolved through the concerted efforts of traditional elders.

#### **4 Civil Society in the Absence of a State: Conceptual Issues**

Although definitions of civil society are fluid, most scholars generally agree on some aspects. Civil society involves citizen participation and gives citizens a chance to speak out. There is collective action around shared interests, purposes, and values. Involvement in civil society builds social capital, trust, and shared values. It can be argued that involvement in CSOs, through formal or informal structures, teaches the ability to participate in democratic decision-making.

Usually, the role of civil society has been defined vis-à-vis the “state”. Some analysts in this field argue that “civil society is not likely to thrive, unless there is an effective, strong state which can establish the rules of the game and provide some discriminatory framework for civil society activities.” (Porter and Kilby 1996: 32) However, in the 1990s, Somali civil society institutions were born out of the people’s desire to fill the vacuum created by a lack of state structures and by a need to achieve durable peace and long-term development. Furthermore, Center for Research & Dialogue (CRD) studies from Somalia have found that a vibrant and strong civil society can exist in the absence of a functioning state and that the existence of CSOs can facilitate state-building (CRD and World Bank 2004).

Hann and Dunn (1996) argue that civil society should refer more loosely to the moral community and the problems of trust, accountability, and cooperation that all groups face. This position, with its stress on the importance of trust and how it is generated in social life, links civil society closely to concepts of social capital. This appears a more useful concept in the Somali context.

Another distinction commonly made in the literature is the distinction between NGOs and CBOs (Hann and Dunn 1996; North 1995). NGOs are seen as interme-

diaries between grass-roots organisations (i.e., CBOs which are membership organisations) and the state, and as essential actors for creating a strong association-based civil society. Their role is to provide a mechanism for politically and economically empowering membership organisations. If NGOs and CBOs are supposed to be intermediaries between the state and the community, in the Somali context the question arises: What is their role in a stateless society? Do they become a de facto state by assuming the responsibility of the state?

In the Somali case, CSOs have filled state vacuums in all sectors – and they have done so quite often efficiently and productively. This is in part due to their community-based approach. Furthermore, the absence of a regulatory framework has given rise to a new generation of civil society leaders with skills in entrepreneurship and grass-roots community development. At the same time, the Somali diaspora – with the help of local CSOs like CRD – generates new ideas, re-introduces them to the country at a grass-roots level, and also communicates them via the Somali Internet websites and other media.<sup>2</sup> Today, the thriving media organisations provide credible and reliable information to the Somali community in the country and abroad. CSOs have facilitated this development by offering technical and – in some cases – financial support to the media.

However, the absence of a state framework poses a number of problems to CSOs. For example, CSOs are currently fulfilling a number of state functions without a clear mandate. The legitimacy and origins of some CSOs are questionable. Some of them are clearly clan-based and managed by people with their own agendas. Many observers argue that some CSOs simply help to further consolidate the power of already powerful clans. Also, while the Somali media is a powerful tool for the dissemination of ideas, large clans own most of the important media groups. Women continue to play a very limited role in the media.

Issues of equity also play a role in the sense that without state welfare, poor and marginalised groups usually struggle to access health and education services. Civil society organisations manage most of the available social services on a fee basis. For example, many school buildings now host schools run by CSOs that provide education for a fee. CSOs argue that in addition to providing education, they are also maintaining the infrastructure for a future government. However, communities or persons without financial resources cannot always get full access.

To a large extent, CSOs today sustain Somalia – particularly the south-central region. Their involvement in areas such as health and education stems from a real and ongoing desire to see an improvement for the future generations of Somalis who will inherit the legacy of the current situation. Without building social capacity in these groups, a whole generation of children will only know clan loyalty, violence, and anarchy. The current growth and development of CSOs working in Somalia need to be fostered so that any future functioning government has citizens who have experienced more than just violence and anarchy.

This essay uses a wide definition of the civil society concept, because only an inclusive definition is able to capture the uniqueness and the diversity of Somali civil

2 CRD has recently initiated a project of diaspora engagement, where the Somali diaspora in the US, Canada, Europe, Australia, as well as students in Malaysia were engaged. This initiative challenged the Somali diaspora and students to play a serious role in the rebuilding of their country.

society. The term “civil society” is used to describe “an intermediate associational realm between state and family, populated by organizations enjoying some autonomy in relation to the state and formed voluntarily by members of society to protect their interests or values.” (White 1994: 6). This sociological approach to civil society means that it embraces a wide range of social forces. These might be modern or traditional, foster or hinder democracy, and be involved or not in politics.

While many CSOs in Somalia claim to be “a-political”, they find themselves embedded in a political environment which they cannot easily escape. Although many CSOs have emerged across clan lines, clan as a basis for allegiance and action is an ongoing issue in Somalia. Certain CSOs in Somalia unfortunately clearly promote clan-based thinking. More recently, some CSOs have clearly aligned themselves with political factions, such as the Asmara group<sup>3</sup> or the Transitional Federal Government (TFG).

Overall, however, recent developments within the Somali society have led to a situation in which CSOs unite individuals around broader issues beyond clan confines. One example was the Pacification of Mogadishu exercise. In May 2005, Mogadishu civil society organisations unified their efforts to remove the roadblock across Mogadishu and succeeded in a few days to remove over sixty of them. In partnership with the TFG in Mogadishu, CSOs managed to encamp more than 1,500 militiamen and 60 “technicals” (“battlewagons”) at two training camps outside Mogadishu. In addition, CSOs conducted a fund-raising campaign and collected a substantial amount in support of the Mogadishu Security and Stabilization Plan (MSSP). The participation of CSOs in a future post-conflict situation could contribute to a departure from clan-based thinking towards issues that are of paramount importance to the whole community.

## **5 Engagement and Growth of Civil Society**

There is a great variety of institutions of civil society in contemporary Somalia. This section characterises the major groups among them.

### **5.1 Women’s groups**

Women’s groups have emerged as an influential and powerful voice in Somalia. While the activities of these groups largely centre on the welfare of women and children, they have also played a key role in peace-building and national reconciliation efforts on a number of occasions. Transcending artificial boundaries created by the formal political system and clan restrictions that tend to exclude them, Somali women have taken initiatives to restore peace and security in their communities and worked towards national reconciliation. A common stereotype has it that, while men come to the negotiating table directly from the battlefield, women arrive from civil activism and family care. Women, more than men, tend to perceive peace in terms of social security, building on the idea of a better future for their children.

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**3** The “Asmara group” is the Somali opposition against the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), based in Asmara, Eritrea, since 2007, consisting of members of the former Islamic Shari’a Court Union (ICU) and of the Somali transitional federal parliament that had been created in the year 2000.

Some of efforts by women's group to build peace include:

■ A group of women attempted to counteract the spread of guns by contacting the spouses of militia members and urged them to convert their husbands into peace-builders.

■ Mogadishu women's groups, spearheaded by *Haweenka Horseedka Nabadda* (HINNA), Mogadishu's most influential women's group, championed several peace-building initiatives aimed at the armed faction leaders and their militiamen.

■ In Mogadishu, women challenged civil society to play a more proactive role in promoting peace after many male-dominated organisations failed to make progress. Many of these women crossed demarcation lines to advocate for peace across clan differences.

■ In Merca, a local women's development organisation launched a demobilisation project, offering education and alternative income opportunities for a number of boys who were part of warlord militias and exchanged their guns for a brighter future.

■ In South-Central Somalia, a women's group joined forces with a youth-for-peace group and visited areas hardest hit by violence to persuade the militia to stop fighting. Beyond convincing their peers, the youths had a great impact in changing the attitudes of the elder community members.

■ In several areas, women helped to create neighbourhood watch groups to protect the community from kidnappings and thefts.

While they have had some success, women's groups in Somalia need training to build capacity and effectiveness. This will further enhance their role in the peace-building process, while the traditional and cultural restraints on Somali women continue to be an impediment: Although Somali women actively participated in the construction of their nation and demonstrated immense capability during the last seventeen years of war, they have mostly been denied their rights to political participation. In 2004, twenty women's groups issued an appeal protesting their exclusion from political decision-making. The fact that these women's groups have united for a common purpose demonstrates that the growth of social capital is empowering segments of the populace that were previously marginalised and segregated through clan allegiances.

## 5.2 Media

Following the outbreak of the civil war, private media became one of the most effective civil society institutions. Especially Mogadishu witnessed the growth of new, privately owned newspapers and radio stations. In addition, numerous Somali websites have emerged that provide information, political analysis, discussion boards, and advanced media functionalities for the Somali communities around the world (Liddle 2001).<sup>4</sup> However, some of the new media outlets have "became mouthpieces for the clan-based warlords who resorted to fighting each other for power." (CRD and UNDP

4 Noticeable and popular among them are HornAfrik Radio (<http://www.hornafrik.com>), Radio Shabelle (<http://www.shabelle.net>), Radio Dalmar (<http://www.dalmar.org>), Radio Garowe (<http://www.garoweonline.com>), Hiiraan Online (<http://www.hiiraan.com>), and SomaliWeyn (<http://www.somaliweyn.com>).

2004: 59) The same is true for the websites, some of which are tools for pushing the political clan agendas.

On the other hand, many of the mainstream media in South-Central Somalia have shed their “earlier warmongering” and have now become drivers of civil society activities. They are contributing to “conflict prevention and resolution, creating a neutral political space in which communities exchange comments and views, and advocating for human rights. In general, the media in the region have played a vital role in the peace processes.” (CRD 2004: 45)

There is no regulatory framework governing the media in South-Central Somalia. This, however, does not mean that the media enjoy unencumbered freedom. One has to be well aware that in a highly politicised environment in which everyone is affiliated to a clan and a faction leader, the media cannot be entirely independent.

In turn, media ownership also plays a role in how society perceives a particular organisation. Somalis tend to perceive media outlets as “under foreign control” when they receive foreign funding. Similarly, some sectors of the society see stations like VOA and BBC as agents for external actors, which can put the lives of the reporters and other staff at risk.

Another threat for the media arises from the armed forces of the TFG, the Ethiopians, and the opposition. Ali Iman Sharma’arke was assassinated on 11 August 2007 after returning from the burial of his colleague Mahad Mohamed Elmi, who had been killed earlier the same day. Unknown militias killed the acting chairperson of Radio Shabelle, Bashir Nur Geedi, in front of his house.

### 5.3 Traditional religious leaders

In general, Somali traditional religious leaders continue to command respect. They are integral parts of the community, act as mediators, bury the dead, and provide moral support for the community at times of crisis. They are credited with attempting to stop the conflict and encourage dialogue. Somalis continue to find hope in their religious convictions. Without conditions, Somali traditional religious leaders supported all peace-building processes from the Arta peace process in Djibouti onward.

Although the peace-building process in Kenya 2002–04 did not provide a formal space for the religious leaders, these leaders supported initiatives that appeared to head in the right direction. They also spoke out on inter-clan reconciliation processes through the local media. In light of chaos and anarchy, in the absence of a functioning government, some Somalis tend to cling ever more tightly to their faith, because Islamic teachings are the dominant force in people’s lives and the backbone of their values.

Muslim clergy has always played a vital role in providing civil laws through Islamic Shari’a Courts. However, the role of traditional religious leaders in South-Central Somalia became “politicised” when the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) took over quasi-governmental roles in 2006.

Following the takeover of Mogadishu by the ICU in June 2006, Mogadishu for the first time felt a sense of public security. Checkpoints were removed, roads reopened, both the Mogadishu airport and seaport were reopened after years of being off limits to the public. However, many of the traditional religious leaders who provided civic law through the Courts were sidelined by the newly emerging young leadership of



the Courts who had more far-reaching agendas. The credibility of traditional leaders continues to be relevant even after the fall of the ICU.

#### 5.4 The Somali diaspora: The other civil society

The diaspora supports the development of the Somali society in various ways. Remittances from the diaspora are a major source of income for many families in Somalia and contribute considerably to the economy. These remittance services are linked to Somalia's role as a labour reserve for Gulf States (since the 1970s) and as a Diaspora community in the west (since the mid-1980s).

In the 1970s and 80s, the opportunity to work as a migrant labourer in the Gulf was considered a privilege available only to middle- or upper-income Somali households, even though the work in the Gulf was often menial labour. Hence, starting in the 1970s, the system of remittances quickly became an important pillar of the Somali economy. In 1983, a Boston University study suggested that far from being a "brain drain", Somalia's export of its own labour was probably the best use of that workforce, earning higher value abroad than at home (African Studies Center 1983; Miller 1982).

However, from the 1990s onward, many Somali intellectuals and professionals with different areas of expertise started to leave the country in large numbers, and the role of the diaspora expanded. Members of the diaspora have helped with disaster relief and business development (according to some estimates, they have provided more assistance than the UN agencies). They are also helping to build and maintain schools and universities in cooperation with local CSOs.

However, all conflict parties have relied on or profited from remittances at times. Obviously, many groups within the diaspora tend to support their clan affiliates or faction leaders. Remittance sent by the diaspora can thus become a factor contributing to local conflict. "One of the reasons that prolonged conflict between Salemaan and Said sub-clans in central region was overwhelming money sent by the diaspora, each clan received substantial money from their clansman in the diaspora", said Ahmed Duelle, an elder from the Mudug region in an interview with CRD.

In 2006, the Somali diaspora seemingly supported the rise of the ICU with millions of US dollars, in an effort to enhance peace and stability in some of the most troubled regions of the country. However, what some sectors of the Somali community viewed as a positive development, the US administration, and some other donor countries, viewed as a serious threat.

#### 5.5 The business community

Business community activities have had both stabilising and destabilising effects on the wider conflict as well as on the lives of ordinary Somalis (International Alert 2006). Economic prosperity even at a basic level helps to maintain daily life and prevents a further breakdown of society. Another phenomenon is that businessmen hire a considerable number of clan gunmen (e.g., as guards), thereby diverting young men from militia activities and preventing them from the hopelessness that many militia members face.

The concept of business groups as part of civil society is debatable. Some argue that the motive of the business sector is profit, which could be in conflict with the common interest that is supposed to be at the heart of civil society. However, major sectors of the business community clearly have stakes in bringing peace to the region.

Some hospitals (e.g., Banadir and Medina) which the government had once run now rely on businesspeople, who along with CSOs, keep them operating. Many businessmen regard the handouts they give to the community as a charity obliged by the religious faith – as Zakah<sup>5</sup> payments. Hence there is mutual benefit.

Business groups in partnership with civil society have also invested logistical assistance in several mediation meetings and in interventions to de-escalate flare-ups through gathering traditional elders together. The engagement of the *Digil-Mirifle* elders in the “*Iidaale* conflict” in 1996 and the engagement of the traditional elders in the central regions conflict are good examples. Business circles sponsored the local peace process held in Brava, Elbur, and Moqonkori. Abas Ahmed, a local businessman said: “As a businessman, I fully appreciate the support of the people and therefore, we need to give something back to the people. We worry about their safety, and by extension mine, we have civic association like others.”

The example of one of the most effective CSOs in the Banadir region, the Shabelle Business Women’s Association, shows increased acceptance of the role of women’s CSOs in the community. Through the CSOs, women now have a voice, which they never had before.

On the other hand, there are those who benefit from Somalia’s war economy. New businesses have emerged out of the state collapse. They were and are involved in various informal sectors of the economy throughout the country. These sectors are fuelled by merchants and war profiteers whose main objective is to use public means for private ends. It is evident that this group often sustains a greed-based economy, while the majority of the people suffer through unemployment and poverty. Main activities include money printing, proliferation of weapons, forced checkpoints, operating private air strips and sea ports, charcoal exports, illegal fishing, piracy, and other criminal activities. These war profiteers are obviously not interested in engaging in any peace- and state-building efforts.

In summary, there is considerable desire on the part of business people to encourage political stabilisation and peace. Business groups have succeeded to some degree in disarming militias and in encouraging them to gain employment through the efforts of individual businessmen within the context of CSO engagement. In Somalia, the business sector is part of the civil society structures and plays a vital role as an integral part of many civil society institutions.

## 6 Forces for Change

The growing positive record of CSOs in Somalia in general and Mogadishu in particular underscores their relevance for any peace-building efforts. They do, however, face a number of impediments. Moving away from individualised, fragmented, and disorganised advocacy to collective advocacy is essential if CSOs are to become a strong, countervailing force to the armed faction leaders.

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5 Zakah is one of the five major pillars of Islam.

The civil society activities in connection with the Mogadishu Security and Stabilization Plan (MSSP) in 2005 can serve as an example. It came about as a result of intense pressure from a coalition of women's groups, business groups, NGOs, and CBOs, all of which successfully pressured the TFG to approve the MSSP.

The plan provided a schedule for the cantonment of local militias and the clearance of heavy weapons from the capital, aimed to make the city safe for the government to relocate. The women's organisation HINNA raised major funding for the plan's implementation from local civic groups, businessmen, and the general public. Applying social pressure and public mobilisation, CSOs succeeded in forcing militia leaders/warlords to abandon their militia and commit to cantonment. Several media were heavily engaged; this forced warlords to accept public demands and send their forces outside Mogadishu. For the first time, the people of Mogadishu felt a sense of security as the militia – at least partly – left the city. However, due to the absence of the international community support and the escalation of internal conflict among transitional federal institutions, civil society groups had no other choice than to abandon the initiative. Upon defeat of the warlords, the ICU declined to adapt the MSSP.

The lesson learnt from this experience could well be that when civil society uses its community-based power, it can achieve substantial progress – even if these achievements are sometimes short lived.

However, attempts at silencing public voices constitute a serious threat to such efforts. CSOs in Somalia have witnessed and documented many significant incidents like assaults and arrests of journalists and the shutting down of newspapers and radio stations. Prominent Somali community leaders – including peace activists – have even been assassinated due to fear of their power to change the dynamics of Somali society and in an attempt to silence public voices and to discourage others from speaking out.<sup>6</sup>

## 7 Civil Society in Transitional Somalia

In the absence of capable or credible public institutions, the international development community relies heavily on local CSOs to reach out to marginalised and vulnerable parts of the populace. The role of civil society in conflict-affected countries is an important element in mitigating and resolving conflicts. Inversely, the absence of an active and organised civil society and professional independent media are major factors contributing to conflict.

Somalia's case is a classic example. It has become apparent that in a post-conflict state, misappropriation of resources can occur quickly as controlling mechanism are usually not in place. This can lead to massive inequality and corruption, fuelling more violence in turn.

Peace conferences for Somalia have usually been state-building exercises, aimed at the formation of a national government – as quickly as possible. Since most Somalis expect a future government to reproduce past patterns of political behaviour, they are

<sup>6</sup> Most of these killings coincide with major events taking place in Somalia. For example, the killing of Abdulkadir Yahya Ali, one of the prominent Somali civil society leaders, came at the time when divided TFG leaders (in Jowhar and Mogadishu) began a dialogue.

understandably ambivalent about the prospect. The fact that most of the political leaders are well known – either having held senior posts in the previous regimes or taken part in the political and military factionalism during civil war – reinforces the anticipation that history will repeat itself. The majority of Somalis do not have much faith in the current political leadership born out of the externally-sponsored peace process. Many consider civil society leaders as an alternative to the current political leadership.

Challenges facing the TFG include a lack of accountability and human resources. This in itself is a result of a more profound crisis which results from the lack of government revenue, since there is no functioning tax system. Therefore, there is no mechanism to recruit skilled staff. Hence, the TFG has no capacity to deliver on the basic state functions.

In addition, most senior staff members of the government are not experienced in managing post-conflict environments. Some have held higher positions in the previous regime but do not have the skills to work effectively towards rebuilding a society which is rife with divisions and conflicting interests. In terms of the top TFG leadership, there is also a clear lack of skills, and sometimes will, to work effectively towards reconciliation.

On the other hand, Somali CSOs have lived with a great amount of insecurity, but they have also enjoyed freedom from state regulation and intervention for the past seventeen years. It is therefore understandable that some CSOs feel threatened by the idea of a stronger central government. Simultaneously, the TFG tends to see civil society as a social force challenging the authority of the government. As a result, there is profound mistrust between the two.

At the same time, the significant capacity problems of the TFG make the role of civil society all the more relevant. CSOs have an extremely important role to play in the transition period – be it in providing social services, in maintaining local peace through direct engagement with the grass-root community level, or be it in providing a more fertile ground for democracy through civic education (see below).

In the Somali situation, CSOs can also contribute in the constitutional dialogue. Somalia urgently requires a new – federalist – constitution, and the constitution needs a public debate. Civil society members, who are on the ground and in touch with community sentiment, can best facilitate this process,

However, in order to overcome the hostility that is prevalent between the TFG and civil society, there must be a genuine dialogue and commitment to the principal of partnership as a basis for further cooperation.

One extremely important area in which Somali CSOs can affect change and transition to democracy together with the TFG is that of civic education. CSOs should develop a greater focus on civic education, and they also need to work with state institutions as well as the TFG members.

Civic education should initially be provided to community leaders and government officials. It will help community members to understand what to expect from their government and what their responsibilities as a citizen are. CSOs can develop creative ways of getting better outcomes from the many community consultations. There has to be a new “thinking”, and CSOs need to develop ways to radically change the political fabric of the Somali society, from a clan-based system to an environment where the rule of law is accepted.

Finally, yet importantly, CSOs should focus on the creation of bridges between the people in Somalia and the diaspora. The role of the diaspora is not limited to supporting Somalia, but can also be expanded to help Somalis to succeed in their host countries. The Center for Research & Dialogue has done a tremendous amount of work in this area, but there is still an urgent need in a number of areas – including accessing health, education, and employment – to avoid marginalisation of Somalis in the diaspora.

## **8 The ICU as Part of Civil Society**

To contextualise the emergence of the Islamic Courts as part of civil society, it is important to look back at what had precipitated the emergence of the Courts. The evolution of the Islamic Courts in Somalia dates back to 1993, when the first Court was established in the Medina district to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the state and the inability of local warlords to establish viable administrative structures. The widely known North Mogadishu Islamic Court, established in 1994, was credited with remarkable improvements in the security of the area. More Islamic Courts emerged in other parts of South-Central Somalia, and even beyond, in the following years.

In 2004, a new umbrella organisation, initially known as the Supreme Council of Islamic Courts (SCIC), was formed in Mogadishu, comprising the city's seven Islamic Courts. Subsequently, chairmen were elected and the Council has been expanded to encompass newly established Courts. From late 2004, the SCIC became a better-organised force with greater enforcement power, that is, military capacity, and by early 2006 had reorganised itself as the ICU.

The warlords-turned-ministers who had once claimed complete control of the capital now had to recognise the arrival of a new political force in the city. This led to the formation of the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism on 18 February 2006 by a group of four armed ministers and a well-known businessman from north Mogadishu. This gave the Islamic Courts the impetus to prove the coalition as addressing the needs of foreign forces, rather than those of the Somali people – a fact that severely undermined their support base.

From May 2006, the Islamic Courts started to push an agenda for peace and stabilisation, and those who resisted their call often paid a heavy price. This produced short-term stability in what virtually all now agree was a reasonably peaceful period. During the confrontation of the ICU and the anti-terror alliance, CSOs mobilised the Somali public in an effort to get rid of the warlords, who have been the main obstacle to peace.

The Courts managed to achieve a certain level of stability in Mogadishu and surrounding areas and gained the support of the business community in the latter half of 2006, mainly because most business leaders preferred a stable and predictable environment in which to conduct their operations. Local businessmen took commercial disputes to the Islamic Courts in the absence of viable formal alternatives. However, once the Courts had taken over power, they quickly marginalised the role of civil society. Some civil society leaders were encouraged to join the Courts and accepted, hoping to wield some influence within the Courts. A few of them even took up higher position within the Court structures and represented

the Courts in the Khartoum peace talks with the TFG, as well as in other events. This development weakened the credibility of some civil society actors, while the majority of them kept neutral.

## 9 Challenges

A number of structural problems hampers the civil society sector in Somalia, the most important of which I analyse in this section.

**Distrust between government institutions and CSOs:** There is profound mistrust between the TFG – as well as other government institutions such as local authorities – and civil society. This is not limited to externally funded CSOs. Grass-roots and locally-formed CBOs feel this tension as well. The TFG has recently shown a tendency to try to take over civil society projects without proper procedures in place, while understandably CSOs are not keen to accept government’s takeover. This has already created disputes among the TFG and CSOs. Recently, the TFG demanded that all media houses comply with government guidelines, while the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Management ordered all civil society organisations to get government authorisation papers before initiating community-based projects.

**Lack of regulation and self-regulation:** At the same time, a meaningful and reliable regulatory framework is missing. CSOs in South-Central Somalia are largely unregistered and not under the supervision of any authority. They are not subject to any legal or regulatory framework. Like the private sector, they have no national umbrella group. This situation has further exacerbated the distrust between the TFG and CSOs, but also impacts negatively on relationships between CSOs themselves. Past attempts at collaboration have failed for three main reasons:

- groups are often in competition for limited donor resources;
- social differences among civil society actors give rise to mutual suspicions;
- larger, more well-established groups often dominate collaborative efforts.

**Loose structures and lack of clarity:** One source of the tensions between civil society and the “government side” is the loose structures of CSOs and the insecurity felt by local authorities. There is neither a clear and concrete framework nor a structured strategy that CSOs set out for their activities. Without such clarity, CSOs have become vulnerable to external manipulations. In the past, attempts were made to improve the institution-building and formulation of a larger, more concrete framework that can represent all CSOs in Somalia. The Civil Society Forum – which started as a loose hub that sought to unite the major civil society networks and umbrellas in South-Central Somalia – is in its nascent stage. However, the forum has already established core principles and a code of conduct for all of its engagements.

**Dependency on external funding:** While some support for Somali civil society comes from the business community and the diaspora, Somali CSOs at-large overly depend on foreign funding. This not only provokes competition among groups. It also means that when foreign aid is withdrawn, the groups have little other resources to draw on, and many of them will probably have to close their doors.

**Limited international engagement and support:** The international community and international NGOs operating inside Somalia have had only limited engagement with local CSOs. The lack or limitation of such a closer collaboration has limited the capacity of local organisations to mature or assume a larger role. Few international organisations have developed initiatives to build the capacity of local Somali NGOs. Such capacity-building efforts are not only important to overcome the lack of leadership capacity and organisational structure. They might also help Somali CSOs to become more sustainable over time and reduce the dependency on external donor funding.

**External pressure for networking:** Donors frequently require local groups to collaborate in order to receive project funding. While this can sometimes lead to stable networks, founded on common goals, it often encourages partnerships whose only reason for collaboration is to secure foreign funding. Some loose networks have formed recently, including Civil Society in Action, which promotes peace-building initiatives. CRD and Saferworld launched a programme aimed at encouraging non-state actors to network more comprehensively. There are growing professional associations and networks, as well as CBOs striving to transcend issues of clan.

**Moving targets:** The constantly shifting dynamics in South-Central Somalia are some of the most complicated challenges that civil society faces, making it very difficult for CSOs to undertake sustainable activities. Political configurations are changing fast. Civil society organisations build schools and hospitals – just to see those investments destroyed by fighting soon afterwards.

**Unchanging faces:** Like all other organisations, CSOs run the risk of suffering from stagnant structures that frustrate the injection of new ideas and the necessarily agility to adapt to the fast-changing environments. In the past, some civil society groups have resisted compromise and consensus, putting personal interest ahead of the interests and mandate of the larger civil society. Some of these individuals have held top positions in civil society for a long time, with little change in their thinking. This has made it difficult to separate between the individual leading the institution and the institution itself, often resulting in the individuals becoming more prominent than the organisations.

**Mogadishu bias:** Limited focus on specific goals and/or specific geographic coverage is another problem that reduces the outcome of many CSO activities, many of which take place in Mogadishu. As a result, the influence of the CSOs in the broader region is rather limited and their activities sometimes little coordinated. Efforts to promote CSOs at the regional and district levels have not been effective due to this problem.

## 10 Conclusion

This essay has covered many facets of the role of civil society organisations in an environment where there is little or no state authority and minimum rule of law. It has shown that civil society is both flourishing and relevant in contemporary Somalia. It has also shown the constraints and challenges faced by civil society.

The contribution of CSOs in delivering relief and basic services in Somalia, where in some cases they played de facto administrators and managers of certain sectors of the Somali community and its public institutions, is very valuable – despite various shortcomings which we need to acknowledge.

As regards involvement into democratic political processes, some powerful actors, including main warlords and the TFG, view CSOs as a threat to their perceived authority. In some cases this has already caused violence. Still, Somali CSOs need to strengthen their ability to influence the TFG or a future government. Therefore, it is necessary to broaden the opportunities available to Somalis to participate in public affairs, to promote a culture of transparency, and to challenge the practice of governmental authorities to make decisions without much public debate and consultation. The contribution of Somali civil society organisations in this area is not limited to influencing public policy. Their capacity to offer citizens a say in decisions and to enhance pluralism may be as important as their ability to influence policy and demand accountability and transparency in decision-making from state actors.

However, the long-term impact of civil society activities in Somalia also depends on whether a minimal procedural level of institutionalisation can be achieved. A framework must encourage coalition-building, provide mediation mechanisms, and be inclusive in terms of diversity of belief and opinion. The question at hand is: When violent conflict continues to exist and when the state is virtually absent, what role can civil society realistically play in advocating for change, in enhancing social capital, and in peace-building?

Traditional and community leaders, with the help of CSOs, play a major role in conflict resolution. Local administrations are emerging that provide frameworks which deliver governance and support to the thriving business community.

The international community can contribute to the reconstruction process, and to the strengthening of civil society in Somalia, but its impact on these processes will be limited. International donors can support positive developments but cannot make them happen (Hearn and Robinson 2000). New structures facilitating closer collaboration between CSOs, donors, and end beneficiaries would be a big step forward. Future activities should recognise the need for a greater emphasis on development programmes, advocacy on human rights issues, and promoting civic education.

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# Gender, Society, and Politics in Somalia<sup>1</sup>

The UNDP Development Report (1998) identifies stateless and war-ravaged Somalia as being one of the poorest and least-developed countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Somali women are the poorest segment of this impoverished and war-ravaged nation. For over a decade of statelessness and insecurity, Somalia has been a battlefield where heavily armed, clan-based groups have been flexing their muscles and fighting among themselves over power and scarce resources. Women have been severely affected by the protracted conflict and state collapse. Since the occupation of South-Central Somalia by Ethiopian troops in December 2006 and the relocation of the fledgling Transitional Federal Government (TFG) forces to the capital Mogadishu in January 2007, thousands of women and children are once again caught in the crossfire and are experiencing death, injuries, looting, internal and external displacement, and hunger. Women and girls in Mogadishu and its surroundings are again experiencing rape as they are forced to flee from their homes to refugee camps, where they are deprived of access to food, clean water, shelter, and medicine. The current waves of violence raging in south and central Somalia have far-reaching gender implications. The insecurity not only threatens the well-being of women and their children but also affects various community development initiatives and programmes undertaken over the last seventeen years by women activists in the areas of education, health, and many other services. The new waves of violence have also eroded the few gains made by women and girls in the areas of education and trade. Many of the schools established and run by communities and civil society have ceased to function as they have been targeted by both TFG and Ethiopian forces, who have shut their operations down due to their political opinions and stances. Since the arrival of Ethiopian and TFG troops in Mogadishu in December 2006, many women who have been their family's primary income-providers are no longer able to engage in income-generating activities. The recent insecurity, increasing militarization, and growing tensions between TFG/Ethiopia and the resisters in Mogadishu are not only increasing the suffering and hardship experienced by Somali girls and women but also preventing

1 This chapter is based on fieldwork conducted during 1999, 2005, and 2006. My 1999 fieldwork took place in three refugee camps in Kenya, during which I interviewed Somali refugee women displaced by the civil war. During my recent one-year period of fieldwork in Puntland, Somalia, and Somalia from 2005 to 2006, I interviewed various stakeholders including leaders of women's organisations, women's activists, and beneficiaries of women's organisations. I also interviewed a number of international aid organisations in Nairobi, Kenya, to assess their levels of support for women's organisations in Somalia and Somaliland. I would like to extend my thanks to Dr Axel Harneit-Sievers for providing a lot of advice and guidance on this piece. I also thank my friend Hilary Grammer for reading and providing important suggestions. Both the opinions expressed and any associated shortcomings in this chapter are solely mine.

the promotion of social democratisation as well as undermining empowerment and gender equality in decision-making processes.

All past and present internal and external warring groups have been committing gross crimes against Somali women and children who have been denied the right to live in peace, prosperity, and dignity for over a decade. However, in any analysis of the roles played by Somali women during state collapse and civil war in their country, it is important to understand the complexity of women's roles and to avoid viewing women as mere passive victims.<sup>2</sup> “[H]ighlighting the common difficulties that women face as a group can easily degenerate into seeing them as innocent victims and prevents an appreciation of the great variety of roles women actually embrace” in both war and peace time (Pankhurst 2004: 32). Despite being socially, economically, and politically disadvantaged, Somali women have been ensuring the survival of families and communities hard hit by the loss of livelihoods, opportunities, security, protection, and citizenship. Some of them have emerged as important leaders shaping their communities.

This chapter starts with an overview of gender relations in Somali society. Somali women do not form a homogeneous entity – they differ in terms of class, ethnicity, age, education, and geographic origins, and these factors have an impact on the nature of their experiences and roles: both pre- and post-conflict. The chapter then documents Somali women's experiences during state collapse and civil war, analysing how women were affected, the multiple roles they played, the coping mechanisms they employed, and the changes in gender relations and activism that resulted. Finally, the chapter highlights opportunities and constraints that women will face in their efforts to transform war-torn Somalia and Somaliland into societies where women and men are extended the same protection and opportunities.

## 1 Traditional Determinants of Gender Relations in Somalia

In order to make sense of changes in gender relations that are attributable to state collapse and civil war, it is helpful to briefly revisit the nature of gender relations prior to conflict. Gender implies men and women (*rag iyo dumar*). Gender also refers to the social construction of men and women in a given society, with men and women being assigned certain characteristics, roles, responsibilities, and opportunities. Through socialisation, boys and girls learn about their roles and responsibilities, the ways they are to behave within their families, and the consequences for straying from these societal expectations.

Somali society is, even in conflict-time, both traditional and patriarchal, with women placed in lesser positions with fewer rights, opportunities, privileges, and protection than Somali men. From birth until death, the lives of Somali women are run and controlled by men – including by their fathers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers, then by their spouses in later life. Traditional values are instilled in girls at a very young age, with core messages including that girls should eat less, lower their voices and gazes, and that boys are preferred over girls. In very traditional Somali families,

2 Feminist scholars have been concerned about the continuing depiction of women in conflict zones, including Somalia, as purely victims, vulnerable and without any agency (Cockburn 1998; Enloe 1998; Giles 2003).

boys are treated like royalty – they eat first and do not do house chores. A boy's birth is celebrated, and being a *wiil* (a boy) is treated as an accomplishment that comes with privileges. By contrast, young girls are expected to fulfil specific roles of lesser status for their families and society. Girls serve their fathers, brothers, and are often reduced to being little maids to their male relatives. They cook, clean, and look after younger siblings. Young girls are trained at an early age to master most of the house chores and to become long-term caregivers for their family members. In urban centres, while young girls are allowed to attend school, the general attitude is that girls' education has limited value because one day they will become mothers who will stay at home and raise their children.

There are several components to gender roles and gender relations in Somalia, with the dominant three being the traditional pastoral society, the clan system, and Islam.

### Gender relations and pastoral society

In pastoral society, there are traditionally-defined gender roles and tasks. For example, women are responsible for taking care of herds of smaller animals such as goats and sheep. They are also responsible for cooking, fetching firewood for cooking, cleaning, rearing children, and attending to other family members' needs. Women spend considerable time carrying out the above-mentioned activities on a daily basis. Young children, both boys and girls, also tend the sheep and goats while women are out collecting firewood or attending to other house chores. The pastoral economy is based on herds – thus the search for grass and water is fundamental to the livelihood of pastoral families. Whenever the family settles in a new locale, women are responsible for unpacking the family's *Tukul* and setting it up.

In the traditional pastoral environment, men are the main decision-makers. They own all of the herds in the barn and have the right to decide which animals to sell, to whom, where, when, and for how much. Women care for the animals, but it is most often their spouses who take goats, sheep, and camels to the local market and sell them to buyers. Even tending to animals is based on their value: For example, camels are considered to be a male responsibility, and it is only men and younger boys who can take care of them.

While their roles are marginalised, women are critical to the success of the pastoral economy. They provide unpaid labour to their families and communities with no rewards or incentives. However, as will be discussed later, the ongoing civil war has temporarily loosened some of the rigidly defined gender division of labour due to women's loss of their spouses as primary income providers. This has forced many women to take on roles which are traditionally assigned to men.

### Gender relations and the clan system

As a people, Somalis are believed to be culturally, religiously, and linguistically homogeneous, sharing traditions that are based primarily on pastoral nomadism and Islam. However, within this larger shared context, Somalis have divided themselves along clan lines, segmenting themselves into a hierarchical system of patrilineal descent groups believed to be descendants of a common ancestor whose

name is the surname of the clan. Clans are divided into sub-clans and lineages. The clan is one of the oldest institutions in pastoral Somali society. It is an institution which directly and indirectly discriminates against women and perpetuates their marginalisation through the way in which gender responsibilities, rights, and entitlements are determined. Somalis use clan as more than a form of identification – the clan system includes and excludes people, with the politics of inclusion and exclusion leading to both discrimination and racism. The clan system is heavily relied upon as a safety net and has been used as a form of insurance with clan members investing in it and banking on it. For example, in times of crisis, members of a specific clan will make an appeal to their brethren and their kin and kith will respond to such calls.

The clan system is deeply entrenched in Somalia, and dominance, superiority, and rank is determined by both gender and clan affiliation. Being born a male with membership in a dominant clan means inheriting a position of great protection and privilege. The clan system elevates the position of men in that their names and clan memberships are the only ones that can be passed on to the next generations. Male lineages are memorised by children and adults alike, to trace their clans and sub-clans to the larger tribe from which their clan originates. Even though young girls take their fathers' names and clan membership, in general women are considered to be second-class clan members.

Young girls and women are considered to be temporary guests in their fathers' clan – guests who will eventually marry individuals belonging to either a different sub-clan of their clan or to other clans. A famous proverb which supports the marginalisation of women in their clan says “*gabadi qabiilkeedu waa reerka ay u dhaxdo*” (a woman's clan is the clan she will marry into). There is another Somali saying: “*Uur hooyo waa maanyo*” (a mother's womb is like the oceans), referring to a woman's womb's capacity to bear children belonging to different clans. Because of this, women are not considered to be loyal, permanent, trustworthy clan members. For example, women who are in cross-clan marriages experience specific hardships as they are not trusted by either clan, and have difficulty obtaining protection. The clan system is constructed by men, guarded by men and reserved exclusively for men, with men being bestowed with a lifelong membership and realising all of the privileges, protection, and rights as legitimate and lawful members. Men's blood is considered to be the true blood of the clan – when a male clan member's blood is shed by an individual belonging to another clan, it is as though his entire clan's blood is being shed and swift action is taken to either compensate that blood through violence or through monetary compensation for the loss.<sup>3</sup> Women's blood is not revered as men's is. For example, if a man murders his spouse, her family, relatives, and clan will be more likely to accept monetary compensation for their loss. When a male member is murdered, then it is more likely that the clan will favour revenge – an eye for an eye.

In addition, decision-making within the clan system is an activity preserved exclusively for men. In most of the clans and tribes, it is men who are chosen to be clan leaders and legitimate spokespersons. There has not been one single case in

3 For example, *diya* (blood compensation) for men is 100 camels (female camels are preferred), whereas for women it is only 50 camels.

Somalia where a woman was appointed to serve as her clan's leader. For instance, leadership titles such as *Ugas*, *Isim*, *Suldan*, and *Boqor* come with duties assigned only to men. When men holding these titles pass away, it is only men – often the deceased's son, brother, or nephew – who can take their place. The actual process of searching and selecting a male candidate is considered to be “men's work”; women are excluded from the process despite the fact that it will have an enormous impact on their lives. For example, clan leaders have power over selecting who can marry their clan women folks and whether brides are to be exchanged with other clans in situations of reconciliation, divorce, and death.

Pastoral societies such as Somalia govern themselves through man-made laws known as *xeer*. Customary law, or *xeer*, is used by men to “address or solve” problems in areas such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, sharing of scarce resources such as water, and conflict resolution. In pastoral communities, for example, the leader of a specific clan can authorise bridal exchanges in times of conflict in order to avert further bloodshed. This practice is known as “*Godob reeb*” or “*Godob tir*”, and its purpose is to erase the blood shed by one group through the exchanges of brides to the clan who experienced the loss – with the expectation that the young brides will bear male children for their new clan. What is problematic about such a practice is that the sins of men are transferred to women. While their male clan members who shed the blood of men belonging to other clans walk free, women must join the clan that experienced the loss of lives. Becoming wives under such an arrangement makes women vulnerable to violence and abuse, especially if they fail to produce sons. Women are excluded from meetings where these decisions are made, and this reflects the longstanding belief that they are inferior clan members who lack the knowledge, skills, experience, or capacity required to take on leadership roles in traditional or state institutions.

This marginalisation of women in traditional Somali institutions is a particular concern, as the stability in Somaliland and Puntland has been attributed to the revival of traditional structures. It is certainly true that traditional leaders in both Puntland and Somaliland have been able to avert violence between and among clans in those zones. But it is also true that women have played pivotal roles in establishing these two zones – and the revival of traditional structures has not facilitated gender equality. Women continue to struggle for recognition and equality in these so-called peaceful zones. I argue that, as long as women continue to be marginalised in traditional Somali institutions, they will be discriminated against and denied their own space in emerging governmental institutions. This will be especially so if international organisations attempt to solidify and revive traditional institutions, such as clan, in order to build a foundation for stability and governance – and by doing so, negatively affect opportunities to promote new gender relations and empowerment in post-conflict Somalia. However, it is also important to recognise that Somali women have been creative in finding ways to manoeuvre through the rigid traditional, clan, pastoral societal restrictions and to place pressure or have influence on their husbands, fathers, uncles (both sides), brothers, cousins, and sons to avert violence and push for reconciliation.

The following section examines the ways in which Islam shapes gender relations, with a consideration of the rights and protection that Islam provides to women, and whether these rights are upheld for women in Somalia.

## Gender relations and Islam

Somalis are predominantly Sunni Muslims, and, like their male counterparts, Somali women have been seeking solace in their faith during times of crisis. When things fell apart in Somalia, Islam offered them hope and triggered their optimism, solidarity, empathy, and activism. Through the Koran, Islam grants certain rights and entitlements to each gender. For instance, women have the right to education, to inherit their deceased parents' assets, and most of all to property ownership. In contrast to what the Koran clearly sets out, under Somali customary law, *xeer*, women are neither allowed to own property nor inherit property from their spouses or parents. Additionally, while Islam forbids forced marriages without both gender's consent and forbids forced widow inheritance, both of these practices are common in various communities in Somalia, and are clear violations of women's rights. I argue that the rights and entitlements granted to them by their religion are violated by patriarchal institutions, cultural practices, and the misinterpretation of Shari'a law by some men. Shari'a law is Allah's (God's) law and is holistic in its approach and contains provisions intended to guide people (both men and women) in governing themselves fairly and justly in their daily affairs. Shari'a clearly sets out issues relating to women's rights as well as families.

Like other Muslim societies, Somali society often mixes Shari'a law (divine law) with *xeer* (customary law), which leads to a misinterpretation and distortion of the Shari'a law. The women I interviewed in both Puntland and Somaliland in 2005 and 2006, in refugee camps in Kenya in 1999, and those women residing in North America, rarely cite Islam as the cause of the marginalisation and discrimination they face in their own society. Rather, they clearly attribute it to Somali culture (including the customary law), patriarchal institutions (such as the clan system), and the misinterpretation of Islam.

The low literacy rate in Somalia perpetuates this misinterpretation. However, many women, inside and outside of Somalia, are studying their religion in order to fully understand their duties and rights. Even though this is important, in and of itself, becoming familiar with their rights under Islam will not solve the marginalisation and discrimination women face. Institutional changes, establishing regulatory bodies to ensure competent interpretation of Shari'a laws, and education for both genders are all needed if the root causes of gender discrimination are to be tackled. Somali women need to find creative ways to challenge customary laws which are often disguised as divine law, and to use their faith as a weapon for social and gender justice. The challenge facing both men and women is whether they will be able to separate Shari'a law from *xeer*. If and when this happens, there will be a new dawn for Somali women to realise their God-granted rights and entitlements which they were deprived from for so long.

The following section looks at the specific impacts of state collapse, civil war, and the recent waves of violence on Somali women.

## 2 Impacts of State Collapse, the Civil War, and the Recent Violence on Women

Since the legal and administrative disintegration of the Somali state in the 1990s and the subsequent civil war, there has been a power vacuum within which a number

of warlords – some of whom are now members of the TFG – continue to be locked in deadly power struggles. This has resulted in loss of life, destruction of public institutions and infrastructures, looting of natural resources (charcoal burning), depletion of marine resources (contracting foreign fleets to fish Somalia's water), starvation, and most of all the expulsion of civilians, mostly women and children, from their communities to situations of internal and external displacement.

Within this war-ravaged environment, the lives of Somali women continue to be besieged by unending material deprivation, violence, insecurity, chaos, and anarchy. Women have lost their entitlements and rights to access social services such as education, health, and employment previously provided and run by government institutions. Additionally, women have lost their right to societal protection from violence. Women and girls have been repeatedly violated by armed groups, particularly warlords and their armed militiamen who pillage resources such as land and farms and sexually abuse females of all ages. Women have also lost ground on gains made in pre-war Somalia in the labour sector and political and economic arenas.

Somali women have been profoundly affected by the state collapse and the civil war and have been suffering in multiple and distinct ways compared to the rest of the society. For instance, in the early 1990s both men and women were killed by oppositional groups because of their clan membership. Women suspected of having any affiliation with the Barre regime were deliberately targeted by the warlords and their armed militias who looted both family and personal assets. Whatever roles (direct or indirect) they played in the various conflicts, women experienced overwhelming losses attributable to displacement, the absence of state services, death of family members, and further economic and political marginalisation. In most cases, it is Somali women who carry most of the burden of war, especially in terms of ensuring the survival of their families without the availability of needed networks or services.

Another example illustrating the specific gendered impact of state collapse and the civil war is related to the disintegration of institutions such as hospitals, schools, and universities, the looting of essential infrastructure including water pipes, electric poles, factories – all of which are pertinent to women's well-being and empowerment. The events over the last decade have taken Somali people one century back with no functioning schools, health care, security, or employment. As the education institutions disintegrated in the 1990s, the chances for girls to attend school diminished. Family status, ethnicity, lack of resources, and social as well as cultural attitudes towards girls' education remain obstacles facing Somali girls and adult females, denying them the right to a basic education. The looting of public goods such as hospital equipment has forced pregnant women to give birth in temporary camps or refugee camps inside and outside of Somalia, and their children remain without birth certificates or registration. In many ways, the unending civil war in Somalia has been a war against women where their physical, economic, social, and political rights have been violated and diminished by non-state actors.

Somali women and children have been the groups most affected by the civil war and the absence of law and order. For more than a decade, women have been subjected to specific kinds of violence. Rape has been used as a tool of war and revenge by most of the clan militias to destroy and humiliate the other clan – by targeting “the enemy's” women. Women belonging to unarmed minority groups, such as *Barawe* and the *reer Hamar* and others without clan protection, have been



among those most affected by sexual violence. The legacy of rape is permanent and raped women are marked forever. Bunch (2004: 81) argues that “gender matters to war makers and what happens to women is just not an accidental by-product of war, or biology.” The atrocities committed against Somali women and girls were incidents planned or condoned by all sides.

There is a need to acknowledge the gender-differentiated impact of war and statelessness, to address this reality, and to develop and implement post-conflict programmes that address the psycho-social needs of such a war-affected population. Some Somali women’s organisations have been going into communities and attempting to provide specific services to rape survivors. However, to bring about healing will require that individuals who committed atrocities be brought to justice and that victims receive both material and non-material compensation.

### What about Somali women’s agency?

In Somalia, women have not been solely passive bystanders and pure victims of gender-based violence. They have played and continue to play major roles in both armed conflicts and peace-building. As noted by Sorenson, women in conflict zones throughout the world “... contribute to the outbreak of violence and hostilities – in many cases, they are instrumental in inciting men to defend group interests, honour, and collective livelihoods” (1998: ii). This has also been the case during the Somali civil war. Some women supported the dominant clan leadership in the hopes of receiving monetary benefits or status in the emerging political power structure. Others did so merely in order to obtain a means of survival through access to goods and protection (El Bushra 2000; Karam 2001).

Women in both Somalia and Somaliland supported their clans to go to war in a variety of ways, including cooking, cleaning, nursing, raising funds by selling their jewellery to finance the war, and spying on “the enemy”. It has also been a common practice for women hailing from different clans to use their artistic expression in support of their clansmen’s war by producing and reciting songs as well as *Buraanburs*. These poems recited only by women at both private and public gatherings both boost the morale of their clansmen and encourage them to fight harder and win the war. Some women also participated in the looting that was so common in the early 1990s. Female looters belonging to dominant clans with the upper hand in the conflict looted the jewellery and possessions of women with other clan affiliations, including minority women who did not have clan protection.

At the same time, women played other roles that were critical to family and community survival. For example, at the height of the conflict in the early 1990s, their marginalised status allowed them to enter “no go zones” that were inaccessible to their spouses, and to trade goods with other women and men belonging to an “enemy” faction. In addition, Somali women’s extensive clan linkages established through birth and marriage provided them with the means to carry out effective mediation and peace-building among clans, and to reach out to other women and men belonging to opposing clans. These linkages need to be recognised and supported in post-conflict Somalia in order for women to gain more space and influence on their society.

It is necessary to understand the complexity of women’s participation and agency in war in order to appreciate that they were not simply victims. The multiple roles

played by Somali women during the civil war calls for recognition of their agency in war-time, along with a consideration of the potential contributions they can make to peace-building and reconstruction. Like men, Somali women were confronted with making rational choices to either contribute to the war-machine or to work towards peace-building, with decisions made based on factors such as individual and family survival, personal gain, and increased status.

### New roles and responsibilities: New gender relations?

History provides many examples of how rigid gender roles may be reversed during times of conflict as men are displaced from their role as providers and women assume responsibilities traditionally assigned to men. As Codou observes, “due to the high mortality rate of men in wars, the displacements and migrations bring profound changes in families. One of the most significant is the formation of households headed by women who assume all responsibility for the household’s upkeep” (2001: 27). Gardner and El-Bushra identified this reality in Somalia and Somaliland in their finding that “... women are increasingly replacing men as the breadwinners of the family” (2004: 10).

Conflict inevitably alters the demographic make-up of society. Men’s involvement in war leaves women and children to fend for themselves and women are left with no alternative but to maintain the survival of their families – and this has been the case in both Somalia and Somaliland. Another truth is that, although women experience increased burdens as a result of the reversed gender roles that accompany conflict and displacement, they also develop an awareness of their resilience and capacity for autonomous action (El-Bushra 2001). As their nation and communities have been collapsing and violence has been consuming the lives and the energy of their people, Somali women have emerged as very resourceful and continue to be critical actors for the survival of their families and communities. They have become a recognisable force and important economic actors who have been ensuring the survival of their loved ones despite the absence of adequate support or resources from the state or any other supporting networks.

Despite the value of their contributions, the absence of state institutions, social services, and education along with protracted conflict and high unemployment rates have all exacerbated the feminisation of poverty in Somalia. Even in Somaliland and Puntland, which have been largely peaceful in recent years, women continue to be the poorest of the poor, and the most marginalised and discriminated against group in their patriarchal society.

### Rallying for peace: Women’s roles in peace-building in Somalia and Somaliland

Women’s reality in conflict is complex – they are victims, perpetrators, and supporters of both war and peace (Giles et al. 2003). For example, during the war between Ali Mahdi and Aideed – two warlords in Mogadishu – in the early 1990s, women belonging to the two warring clans used a number of creative excuses to cross the two warlords’ checkpoints to visit and provide assistance to women and children affected by the violence: for example, saying that they needed to borrow salt or sugar from a relative or friend residing in the other side of the city. Women have also been bridge-builders

whose participation in peace-building efforts is crucial to establishing a sustainable peace in their communities (Cockburn 1998). Somali women often “... used the methods of anti-war protest traditionally open to women [for instance] ... [w]earing white headscarves, holding prayer-meetings and composing poems” (Gardner and El-Bushra 2004: 15–6). Somali women used the female poetry of *Buraanburs* to rally not only for war but also for peace, by describing their own personal losses. In addition, women were the first actors to pick up the pieces after the end of conflict and begin the mending process in their communities.

State collapse, civil war, loss of livelihoods, new gender relations, reversed gender roles, the humanitarian crisis, insecurity, and displacement have combined to provide Somali women an opportunity to search and advocate for alternative grass-roots methods of peace-building. Women pursued opportunities that utilise an inclusive, community-based, bottom-up approach – the only method for effectively achieving social peace-building. Gardner and El-Bushra attribute women’s capacity to be at the forefront of peace-building efforts and to prevent further violence to their ability to work effectively within the patrilineal clan system in Somalia. Being in a lesser position within the clan system has provided Somali women with an opportunity to “... move with relative ease between clans and see beyond clan interests” (Gardner and El-Bushra 2004: 16). Women used their marginalisation in the clan system to maximise their capacity to reach out to women and men belonging to other clans. For instance, at the Arta (Djibouti) peace conference in 2000, women activists such as Asha Hagi Elmi and other like-minded women promoted the idea of constituting Somali women symbolically as a “sixth clan” in order to demand increased women’s representation. More recently, in the peace talks held in Kenya from 2002, twenty-three women were selected as members of the new transitional parliament. Thus, mobilising Somali women across clan lines has the potential to weaken the patriarchal clan membership order.

The dominant one-dimensional image of Somali women as victims ignores their active roles in both war and peace. The “passive victim” image of women is often used not only to deny women any responsibility in contributing to the conflict, but also to deny them any role in peace-building processes (Kardam 2001: 7). Somali women’s activism in peace-building is inextricably linked to their activism in war and to their resourcefulness in securing the survival of their families and communities in the early years of the conflict.

### Gaining a strategic space: Women in Somalia and Somaliland shaping the future

Disasters such as state collapse, civil wars, and forced displacement can create opportunities for the most under-represented and marginalised groups in any community, including women. The collapse of the Somali state and the weakening of patriarchal values and structures has the potential to provide a liberating experience for women due to a new capacity to make unique contributions to their families and communities. Women in Somalia and Somaliland have gained a space that they have never occupied before – the space of civil society.

Due to the humanitarian crises engulfing their communities, Somali women have established their own organisations to respond to the crises affecting their communities, both with and without the support of international organisations.

One of the major catalysts for the formation of Somali women's organisations has been the withdrawal of Somali men from the public arena and the latter's primary preoccupation with clan warfare and power struggles in both greater Somalia and Somaliland. This withdrawal and the accompanying temporary shift in gender relations rewarded women with a new space in the public arena previously denied them. Experience shows that women utilised that space effectively to sustain the survival of their families and communities.

Many Somali women have seized the opportunity to take leadership positions in the NGO sector and assist their families and communities in coping with the effect of war and engaging in grass-roots peace-building and rebuilding activities. Date-Bah calls this abrupt gender role change as "advantage in the adversity" of war (1996: 14) and notes that Somali women have responded proactively to the crisis and found a fortune (a physical space) in an unfortunate time characterised by anarchy, statelessness, insecurity, and humanitarian crises. This change in gender roles and decision-making "is a positive development which can contribute to women's empowerment if ... maintained and promoted in the post-war reconstruction efforts" (1996: 11).

The appalling living conditions in Somalia and Somaliland have served as another catalyst for women's activism: for the emergence of women's organisations, their engagement in service delivery, peace-building and rebuilding activities in their war-torn communities. When the Somali National Movement (SNM) defeated Barre's forces in Somaliland in 1991, the displaced and refugee population returned to their communities, which were destroyed and had no functioning social programmes. As a result, both women and men formed organisations to meet the immediate needs of their people. As Nakaya observed, "the Somali women's movement emerged out of humanitarian necessity during the prolonged civil war, during which women provided shelter and medical care to the combatants, supplied clean water in war-affected communities, and restored destroyed schools" (2004: 152).

The state collapse and civil war brought both a dire humanitarian crisis and power vacuum, which combined to allow for the establishment and growth of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – including women's groups – in response to the needs of vulnerable groups. One of the most remarkable and promising developments in war-torn Somalia and Somaliland is that women have not only established a space of their own, but that they formed NGOs to respond to the humanitarian crises in their communities. These organisations include Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC), Galkacyo Education Centre for Peace and Development (GECPD), Horn Relief, NAGAAD (an umbrella organisation with thirty-one member organisations), We Are Women's Activists (WAWA), and Coalition for Grassroots Women Organization (COGWO).

The new space gained by Somali women represents their resistance to violence, statelessness, the feminisation of poverty, and women's marginalisation. It is also an alternative response to patriarchy, a strategic space from which Somali women activists can contribute to rebuilding a just society characterised by peace and gender equality. Somali women have been using their own experiences as victims, perpetrators, and active agents to work towards achieving a sustainable peace in communities and a nation ravaged by unending civil war and lawlessness.

Somali women are now demanding full inclusion in all stages of the post-conflict reconstruction processes. Their newly-gained role in civil society forms a strategic

space from which they can both resist and tackle political insecurity, statelessness, violence against women, poverty, gender injustice, and the marginalisation of women in general. If maintained during and after state reconstruction (and if and when Somaliland gains international recognition for its separation from the rest of Somalia), the civil arena will be an important space from which to challenge traditional, patriarchal values and women's marginalisation during the post-conflict period. It will be a key mechanism through which Somali women can demand gender justice in the new institutions that are developed in their communities.

As indicated earlier, Somali women and female-led organisations are heterogeneous, with different mandates, goals, visions, and challenges. Within the context of humanitarian and political crises and insufficient international support and solidarity, this heterogeneity has led to competition between organisations for scarce resources and international organisations' acknowledgement. It is common practice for leaders of women's organisations to accuse each other of being a "bogus" or "briefcase one-woman NGO". This failure to cooperate and share resources undermines their common purpose of fighting for gender equality and justice in Somalia and Somaliland. Women's organisations can only be effective actors and can only attain tangible successes if they join hands together for this common purpose.

Despite its shortcomings, women's activism in civil society represents an alternative grass-roots response within the larger peace-building process that provides a critical focus on gender equality. Transformative political change can emerge from within this space, including changes in social practices and gender relations. As Raghe asserts, Somali NGOs' roles include:

*... policy advocacy, development education and empowerment of the grass-roots [that] are currently much needed in Somalia. The consequence of state collapse creates special responsibilities for NGOs both in physical as well as moral terms. They offer one of the few threads of opportunity to strengthen local capacities that could at least empower and stimulate the participatory approach needed for recovery (1997: 380).*

Most women's organisations in all parts of Somalia rely on both external funding and financial contributions from Somali diaspora living abroad. Diaspora women living in Europe and North America have played pivotal roles in the formation of these organisations, either through assuming leadership positions or by providing financial support. Deeper linkages need to be established between Somali diaspora women and women's organisations and female activists located in Somalia and Somaliland. Organisations such as the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF) can assume a leadership role in bridging the gaps between diaspora women and female activists within Somalia and Somaliland, perhaps by developing networks for the exchange of ideas and resources to promote gender equality and empowerment.

### The reinvention of Somali women: A force to reckon

"[W]ar not only makes victims but also produces its share of heroes and heroines" (Kardam 2001: 8). War affects everyone negatively, but it also transforms people positively. The situations in Somalia and Somaliland are a case in point. Despite the devastating impact on women in conflict zones, conflict also has the capacity

to “... destroy(s) the patriarchal structures of society that confine and degrade women. In the very breakdown of morals, traditions, customs, and community, war also opens up and creates new beginnings” (Kardam 2001: 20). The weakening or the collapse of structures which previously dictated the lives of women provide the opportunity for women to reinvent themselves and reassert their agency.

During the conflict, Somali women developed an understanding of the importance of forming new identities, thereby recognising their agency and acting on it. They began to reinvent themselves as important subjects with the capacity to transform their livelihoods and their communities. Both state collapse and conflict have provided women with opportunities to organise and establish their own organisations to address the concerns of women, children, and the affected community at large. This reality contrasts sharply with the dominant image of women in conflict zones as passive helpless victims. Women’s identities, their agency, resilience, reinventions, and their various experiences of war need to be understood as context-specific and strategic – and also in constant flux in both war and peacetime.

The activities of Somali NGOs offer a glimpse of hope to a nation devastated by war and unending lawlessness. These NGOs have been delivering and implementing much needed services and community development projects in various parts of Somalia and Somaliland. These services and programmes provided by women-led NGOs are the only ones that many vulnerable people in Somalia and Somaliland can turn to. Their services and community development work have maintained the survival of communities which had no hope and would have, otherwise, perished.

### **3 Promoting Gender Equality: Opportunities, Constraints, and Challenges**

Most of the work undertaken by these women’s organisations or other civil society organisations led by women in Somalia currently fits within the first or “charitable” stage, with a focus on meeting the immediate needs of the population in various communities, such as providing primary and adult education, basic health care, and microcredit financing for widows to engage in income-generating activities. This approach recognises the overwhelming humanitarian crises in Somalia and the lack of state institutions available to respond to them. Because of the overwhelming need for the services that are typical of the charitable stage, women in Somaliland have only just begun to engage in advocacy and to focus on policy actions and inactions that can affect both the short- and long-term needs of women. The development of these organisations led by women in war-torn Somalia and post-conflict Somaliland deserve to be celebrated and their future potential both recognised and supported – especially, their capacity to advocate for gender equality, political, social, and economic rights for the citizens of Somalia and Somaliland.

In contrast to Somaliland with its – albeit weak – state institutions, women’s organisations in South-Central Somalia and Puntland may not be able to function like their NGO counterpart in non-conflict environments. Still, these NGOs have been important actors. They have assisted returnees in Somalia and have supported an abandoned nation exploited by warlords and mired in insecurity. It is not my intention to portray these women’s organisations as the answer to all of the existing problems in war-torn Somalia and Somaliland. However, it is important to recognise that while they may only offer some solutions, they will be important agents which

will no doubt shape the economic, social, and political arenas which have yet to emerge in Somalia and some of which are already evolving in Somaliland. Anderlini addresses some of the challenges facing women's organisations, noting that their work is "... confined to grass-roots and civic organizing, [thus] women often face an uphill struggle to reach official political structures, partly because they lack resources or experiences in developing effective strategies for engagement" (2000: 11). This is the case for women's organisations in Puntland and Somaliland. In the context of statelessness and conflict, women in Somalia have gained some visibility but lack the resources to organise effectively to develop a comprehensive plan of action for promoting gender equality. However, the visibility of women in the NGO sector/civil society in Somalia and Somaliland is an example of how they have taken advantage of statelessness and the post-conflict period to exert their agency.

Women activists and their organisations will face challenges when advocating for women's rights and gender equality in post-conflict Somalia and Somaliland. It remains to be seen to what extent their political demands will be accommodated by a future government of Somalia, how their advocacy work will affect gender equality, and whether women in both Somalia and Somaliland will be able to maintain their presence in civil society – and at what cost.

If women living in conflict zones such as Somalia are to sustain their organisation and push for political accommodation, they must "strive for institutional, political and legal representation and create solidarity and support through local, regional and international networks" (Anderlini 2000: 13). This is where international organisations such as HBF can help. The search for durable solutions to Somalia's political instability calls not only for the formation of a legitimate state, disarmament, and the rule of law. It also calls for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment. This is what women's organisations in Somalia (including Puntland) and Somaliland have been doing in their small-scale, under-funded programmes. Improving the status of women and girls in both war-torn Somalia and in Somaliland is pivotal to building a sustainable peace, to future development, and to overall post-conflict transformation efforts. Somali women's organisations can contribute to the peace-building process and the post-conflict transformation of their respective communities. Perhaps more forums and publications can be supported to increase the existing literature on women in Somalia and Somaliland and focus on their activism and involvement in peace-building. Men, women, and young people need to know about the important work undertaken by women activists in their communities.

It remains important to support the abilities and capacities of women's organisations, particularly those involved in peace-building and post-conflict transformation. With the support of international organisations, women's organisations have been bringing normalcy to the lives of people struggling to survive in a violent environment. However, the significant role played by Somali women and their organisations in peace-building continues to be ignored and understudied. More research is needed to document women's initiatives.

### Challenges associated with the mainstream approach to peace-building

The mainstream approach to peace-building is often criticised as top-down and male-dominated (Kumar 2001; Cockburn 1998; Sorensen 1998) and has often been

unsuccessful in bringing an end to conflicts. For example, national reconciliation processes are often dominated by external actors and warlords who happen to be men, while members of civil society and women are often restricted to the role of observers. These non-inclusive top-down approaches to peace-building and reconstruction have had, and will continue to have negative impacts for Somali women. Darby and MacGinty address this in their observation that, “those who held the guns or the dominant position on the battlefield when a cease fire was called become negotiating partners regardless of their ability to represent their community. Other voices [*particularly women* – my emphasis], often those without firepower, tend to go unheard” (2003: 3). Meintjes reiterates and expands on this, asserting that, “unless women are recognized in the period proceeding negotiations and are prepared to push [for] a women’s agenda in the context of the peacemaking process and the power brokering, there is a danger that the men in power will sideline the needs and the interests of women, in both practical and strategic terms” (2001: 76).

A non-inclusive and top-down approach to peace-building has very negative ramifications for women, as it ignores their everyday contributions to peace-building at the grass-roots level. It also reinforces traditional patriarchy, and makes the reconstruction of a male-dominated society more likely, with women being denied active roles in the public sphere. Women will not fully benefit from a peace which is built without their input.

In past and recent national reconciliation conferences in Somalia, the clan institution has been used as a major component in formulas for power-sharing. However, the use of a clan formula as a tool for power-sharing method favours men and not women. It privileges men as representatives of their clans to come to the negotiating table and creates opportunities especially for them to be part of the new state institutions. Both internal and external actors (often men) believe that using clan as a tool is the right approach – one that will appease discontented groups and bring them to the negotiation table to work on a durable solution to Somalia’s political crisis. However, the emphasis placed on clan ignores the gender discrimination, which is an inherent part of this system. Using a system that openly denies women the right to equal and fair representation in the decision-making arena is seriously flawed because gender equality is a critical part of bringing peace, stability, and good governance to war-torn Somalia and Somaliland.

The clan-based formula was central to the power-sharing used to establish the regional administration in Puntland and the state institution in Somaliland. It has marginalised and prevented women from having equal representation in the new regional institutions. Men in those communities made little effort to increase the number of women in these institutions. Similarly, many clans and tribes provide little or no support to their clan women who wish to represent them in politics, reflecting the societal attitudes that women do not make effective political leaders and should not be politicians. Given this, it is no surprise that women in Puntland and Somaliland are under-represented in village, regional, and transitional institutions in Puntland, Somaliland, and in the national political arena.

While it is strategically and politically important for women to be part of the decisions and plans made in national reconciliation gatherings, cultural, social, economic, and political barriers continue to hinder their participation. Organisations such as HBF, UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), and Oxfam-



Novib have attempted to promote a gender perspective at these meetings by pushing for women's participation through providing technical support required by women to articulate their concerns and interests as related to the future of the nation. This external support, along with strategic pressure, has been pivotal in providing Somali women, particularly activists, with a space to raise gender issues at these forums, and has also contributed to the selection of a few women into the new parliament.

### Challenges associated with Islamist groups

As a religion, Islam grants relatively more rights and protection to women than *xeer* customary law. However, it is very common practice in countries such as Somalia to use cultural norms rather than religion as the primary determinants of social position. In other words, Somali women are discriminated against because of cultural rather than religious practices. For example, women have been negatively affected by the misinterpretation of Islam by the Islamist groups and their harsh treatment towards women.

Islamist groups emerged in the 1990s, but established themselves as relevant political actors only rather recently. In the summer of 2006, when the Islamists gained control over South-Central Somalia, including the city of Mogadishu, they brought stability and succeeded in dismantling the reign of terror carried out by warlords and their militias. Roadblocks were removed. People in Mogadishu were able to go to anywhere in the city without the previous restrictions imposed by militia groups.

Women benefited from this temporarily-established stability. For example, in Mogadishu, incidents of rape have declined considerably. However, women have also experienced negative consequences of Islamist political control. Female breadwinners were told to return to their homes and not come to public arenas such as market places. Video rooms showing Indian and European films were closed down, and because women sold tea, coffee, and snacks in these locations, their livelihoods have been affected. These and other restrictive actions made by the Islamists ignore the important contributions of Somali women in ensuring the survival of their families, communities, and the overall nation. The Islamists failed to appreciate and accommodate the new gender relations that emerged as a result of civil war and state collapse. They also failed to recognise the critical importance of women's roles in a stateless nation for over a decade, despite little attention and support from the international community.

Somali women and their agency cannot be ignored as they will be central components of peace and development in Somalia and Somaliland. If any political organisation or grass-roots organisation which embraces Islam is to be meaningful to women, it needs to not restrict their activism, leadership, and initiatives. It needs to recognise that these are much needed activities in war-ruined societies, and that it would be in the government's interest to invest and promote women's empowerment in all spheres of Somali life.

### Challenges associated with social conservatism

The growing level of social conservatism in Somalia and Somaliland forms another challenge for women, particularly activists. Some men have become increasingly

hostile to women who have political aspirations. An illustration of the revival of conservatism, whether based on clan politics or political Islam, is that the few women who possess the qualifications needed to enter politics must still receive approval from their spouses, religious and clan leaders in order to politically represent their communities. This conservatism is at least, in part, a reaction to both the expanding space for women that occurred during conflict and the lack of socio-economic opportunities faced by many men. These factors have resulted in a heightened resentment towards women, their ability to cope with the crisis and their eagerness to provide for their families and communities.

In response to this growing conservatism, Somali women have adopted specific strategies in bargaining with these hostile stakeholders. For example, women activists in Puntland and Somaliland (and this may well be the case for women activists in South-Central Somalia also) have partnered with male clan and religious leaders in their community to work towards enhancing the effectiveness of programmes addressing violence against women and female genital mutilation. By forming partnerships with male leaders of their communities, women activists are reducing tensions, suspicions, and hatred. A key lesson to be learned from this is that women's empowerment and the goal of opening up more spaces for women's participation in the decision-making process cannot be achieved in isolation. In other words, if positive changes are to be made in gender relations and gender equality, men must be involved so that they can be champions, supporters, and allies for gender equality and justice in their communities.

A strong civil society including organisations led by women is much needed in both Somalia and Somaliland. International organisations such as HBF can have important roles to play in bolstering local capacity to challenge gender-insensitive state policies, patriarchy, and traditional practices which hamper gender equality and empowerment.

#### **4 Conclusion and the Way Forward**

Despite the barriers faced, women in Somalia and Somaliland continue to be an important force for peace, community development, gender empowerment, and recovery. If post-conflict political reconstruction and good governance are to be effective and have a positive impact on Somali women, it is critical to provide a central role for women and to give them every opportunity to participate fully in all stages of politics. The inclusion of women in the reconstitution of state institutions in Somalia is paramount to promote durable political solutions and gender equality. Gender equality matters to the transformation of the political institutions in war-torn Somalia. To avert future conflicts and state collapse, it is important to solidify the roles of local organisations, particularly those led by women. Strong women's organisations can be a watchdog for women's rights and equality by holding governments accountable if they fail to promote and protect women's rights in their communities. "[W]ithout the active participation of women and the inclusion of their perspectives at all levels of decision-making, the lofty goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved" (Adeleye-Fayemi 2004: 104). Biixi, a Somali himself, accurately notes the importance of gender equality in a male-dominated society such as ours and warns that without gender equality, it

will be impossible for Somalia to achieve peace, prosperity, and development. In his words:

*No nation that excludes half its people from the process of nation-building has succeeded in securing development and just advancement. Advancing women's participation in all spheres of the life of the nation does not in any way mean or suggest disrespect for the faith and rich traditions of the Somali people or disregard of them. To the contrary, it is by adopting an all-inclusive system with full and meaningful participation in governance that the faith and traditions of the people can be enriched and allowed to develop and move forward (2001: 91).*

Due to their experiences of the war and the collapse of the state, Somali women can offer important insights and input in peace-building, reconstruction, and the rebuilding of state institutions.

Women's adaptation to new gender roles, their survival mechanisms, activism, and the civil space they gained are all major factors which need to be given special consideration in the post-conflict period. As men – who have been absent from their families and their assigned responsibilities – return to their families and communities and desire to re-adjust their status and resume traditional gender relations, women – who have taken numerous roles and maintained the survival of their families – may be forced to retreat to their old domains (i.e., the domestic sphere). Despite these challenges, I believe that women in Somalia and Somaliland are reluctant to return to the way things used to be before war. There is an urgency to challenge the top-down, male-dominated approach to state-building, peace-building, and reconstruction. This is an area where women activists can transform the societal structures and norms existing prior to the war which marginalise and discriminate against women.

International organisations, including HBF, should regard Somali women's newly-gained space in civil society as a very strategic mechanism through which they can exercise resistance to the political insecurity, statelessness, violence, poverty, and the marginalisation experienced by women in their communities. Many women have expressed confidence that this space will remain open for some time. In the words of one female activist in Puntland:

*I do not think this space in which we women have been occupying will shut down completely. We women are determined to be part of the decision making process (at the civil society level) in post-conflict period. We will continue to occupy this space in order for our activism and activities to continue. We will not allow any force to shut this space.<sup>4</sup>*

Women in Somaliland have also expressed vigilance about this space and have pledged to keep it, no matter what. Only time will tell if the space can be maintained.

If this space is maintained and continues to be available for women after state reconstitution, it will allow women to articulate, negotiate, and advocate for their rights and interests. It will also be a space where women can challenge patriarchal

4 "Halima", personal interview by Shukria Dini, Galkacyo, Puntland, Somalia, December 2005. To protect the real identity of women activists, fictive names are used.

institutions and traditional practices that harm women and girls, and where they can champion the empowerment of girls and women in their communities. Without such a space of their own, it will be difficult for Somali women activists to promote women's empowerment.

International organisations need to pay specific attention to the new gender relations that are emerging from conflict, and they need to invest in women's societal visibility and leadership. By doing so they will support gender equality in the post-conflict period and ensure that their funding and programming – particularly as it pertains to post-conflict reconstruction – enhances the position of women: socially, economically, and politically. International organisations can also support interaction between Somali women at home and in the diaspora, for example by establishing linkages between Somali researchers living abroad and women activists in Somalia and Somaliland. This would facilitate collaborative research and also create fundraising opportunities by diasporas for projects undertaken by women's organisations in Somalia and Somaliland.

Both national actors (including the future government that will establish itself in Somalia), international institutions, and donors need to create opportunities for women activists so that they can contribute to the rebuilding of institutions in a way that will ensure that women's and girls' specific needs are met. The skills and capacities of women's organisations require bolstering in order for them to effectively strive for gender equality. If provided with the necessary skills and capacity-building opportunities, women's organisations will be able to democratise “people's minds” and bring about change at the community level.

More work is needed in the area of training on women's issues, particularly for politicians at the village, regional, and national levels. The level of education for the majority of current transitional parliament members is still very low. Educational workshops on women's rights and the importance of gender equality and empowerment for male parliamentarians and clan leaders are needed. Some of these workshops should be delivered by men – using men to educate other men on women's rights has been found to be very effective, as men are often more open to listening to other men in their communities. Perhaps such tactics could be considered by aid agencies. Women activists in both Puntland and Somaliland have used this approach and have found that it had positive results for their programmes.

Finally, more caution is needed, particularly regarding efforts being undertaken by international organisations in attempts to rebuild traditional structures. The revival of undemocratic structures that will perpetuate barriers to gender equality and empowerment will be a dangerous endeavour. International organisations and donors need to ensure that local structures that are to be revived will provide women with a space to exercise their leadership and activism. Every dollar that is extended to rebuild local institutions – including government institutions, whether in Somalia or Somaliland – must be conditional on the promotion of gender equality. It is a common practice among aid agencies to shy away from promoting gender equality due to the fear of being accused of altering local culture and imposing foreign values. However, gender equality is not a foreign value but an essential part of achieving durable peace and development in Somalia and Somaliland.

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*Refugee camp near Mogadishu, November 2007*

# The Heinrich Böll Foundation in Somalia: Engagements and Experiences

With its long history of instability, violent conflict, external intervention, and internal institutional failure, Somalia poses peculiar challenges to foreign policymakers and development specialists alike.

In 1992–93, Somalia seemed to prove the futility of a “robust” international humanitarian intervention, if and when relevant (i.e., sufficiently armed) local actors were unwilling to participate in it or feared losing their political position in the course of such a mission. Afterwards, international interest in the country faded for nearly a decade. In effect, during the 1990s, neither massive external involvement nor the lack of it brought the country’s crisis any closer to a solution. Only the breakaway republic of Somaliland showed the capacity of Somali society – given conducive circumstances and the political will of relevant actors – to make peace and build institutions, largely relying on its own capacities.

International interest in Somalia re-emerged after the turn of the millennium. The regionally mediated negotiations during 2002–04 – resulting in the creation of transitory federal political institutions that had much international support – provided at least some opportunities for a way forward. However, whatever opportunities existed were lost afterwards as a result of power struggles within Somalia, meddling by regional powers, and the tunnel vision of the “war on terror” that informed US policy in supporting Ethiopia’s military intervention in 2006/07. The civil war situation that emerged during 2007 showed once more that external military intervention has made matters worse and a political solution even more difficult than before.

Still, while external actors are rightly being criticised for their meddling into Somalia’s affairs, it is all too easy to simply demand “Somali solutions”. Obviously, major Somali actors themselves have found it impossible up to now to bring about lasting solutions to the problems of peacemaking and state-building in their country. Beyond the provision of humanitarian assistance – often difficult enough given the conditions prevailing in Somalia – external actors have to involve themselves in a constructive way to work towards political solutions.

One of the major challenges for external actors in Somalia is to identify viable local actors and to support their capacity to contribute to the resolution of conflicts and towards building legitimate and functioning institutions. On different levels and with different approaches, various international organisations – besides the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF), these include Oxfam-Novib, Saferworld, Interpeace, the Danish Refugee Council, and others – are working in Somalia today towards such

goals. They also provide important linkages with local actors who otherwise would find it nearly impossible to access international support at all.<sup>1</sup>

## **Background on HBF in the Region**

HBF is one of Germany's "political foundations". It is affiliated to the Greens political party ("Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen") that is represented in Germany's federal parliament. Like other German political foundations, HBF is devoted to civic educational work, both within Germany and internationally. By early 2008, HBF operated twenty-six international offices, four of them in Africa.

Due to its "green roots", HBF promotes human rights, gender democracy, sustainable development, and peaceful conflict resolution. Many of HBF's activities are in areas dedicated to creating and publicising knowledge and capacity around topical political issues in these fields, supporting critical and constructive political debate and input for decision-making processes. In institutional terms, HBF primarily works with non-governmental organisations and independent "think-tanks", and its work addresses both the grass-roots as well as different decision-making levels.

HBF has been active in the Horn of Africa region since the first half of the 1990s. In the early years, HBF's engagement was informed by the hopeful expectations that arose from the new situation at the Horn – with the end of the Mengistu dictatorship in Ethiopia and Eritrea's independence – and also by existing relationships of political solidarity with Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora groups in Germany. HBF extended its support towards creating knowledge and building institutional capacity in these countries. In Eritrea, for example, HBF from 1995 onwards funded activities of government ministries responsible for environment and education and helped them to develop a National Environment Management Plan. Projects in Ethiopia supported the establishment of environmental clubs in schools, as well as training courses aimed at strengthening democratic practices.

A full-scale HBF Regional Office for East & Horn of Africa was established in 1997 in Addis Abeba. It focused on support for environmental work as well as the more general support for the development of civil society in the Horn region. In the aftermath of the outbreak of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the office had to be moved to Nairobi, Kenya, where it re-opened in 2001. For nearly ten years, Ms Aseghedeth Ghirmazion, an Eritrean-born German national, headed HBF's work in the region. Besides its work within the region itself, HBF also helped to bring about dialogue on issues related to the Horn of Africa outside of it, for example by bringing Ethiopian and Eritrean journalists together in Germany in early 1999.

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1 Many of these initiatives are co-funded by the "non-state actors" programme for Somalia, operated by the European Commission's delegation in Nairobi (Kenya). This is part of the more comprehensive European Union cooperation with Somalia, focusing on poverty alleviation, social services, and governance, see <http://www.delken.ec.europa.eu/en/information.asp?MenuID=3&SubMenuID=14>.



## Regional Activities

Besides the project activities in Ethiopia and Eritrea, HBF's work has had a strong regional dimension from its early years. The reconstitution of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in 1996 as a regional development agency (as against its earlier focus on desertification and other environmental problems) and other regional and pan-African perspectives developing around the millennium (especially the creation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development – NEPAD – in 2001) opened avenues for intensified regional work and networking. From the beginning, the office was always strongly aware of the inter-connectedness of the conflicts in the region – conflicts that re-emerged, with disturbing intensity, from about 1998. Added to this was the problematic fact that both Ethiopia and Eritrea tended to support Somali actors for their own national interests, and even as proxies in the conflict between them.

Due to the diversity of issues and conflicts in the wider Horn of Africa region worth addressing, the office developed the concept of the “academy for dialogue”. This “academy” was not a formal institution but rather constituted of a number of focal points and settings that brought together scholars and activists from the region in order to provide a forum and nurture informed political and scholarly debate. From the beginning, activists and scholars from Somalia were part of this venture – and they have been ever since. The spectrum of such encounters extended over the years through many concrete debates – from the “African court of women” (in Addis Abeba in 1999) to the conference “In quest for a culture of peace in the Horn of Africa” (in Nairobi 2006; see HBF 2006) that addressed scholarly and popular constructions of history and identity in the region and thereby tried to identify common trajectories in the region, rather than to focus on the divisive issues which are usually looked at primarily. The office also supported a number of Somali civil society actors to prepare for, and participate in, global governance negotiation processes such as the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD, Johannesburg 2002) – thus helping to distribute knowledge and create at least some linkages between Somalia and international processes and represent Somali positions in a situation where state institutions in Somalia were virtually unable to do so.

### Somalia-related Work

For a while, HBF provided funding for the Dikhil women's organisation in Djibouti – a part of the Somali-speaking world as well. But HBF support for project activities “on the ground” in Somalia proper began by the late 1990s in Somaliland. By then, the territory had achieved a remarkable degree of progress in the areas of peace-building, de-armament, and the creation of basic democratic institutions, and in doing so it

had relied primarily on local (material as well as cultural) resources, rather than on external support.<sup>2</sup> HBF support concentrated on two areas.

Firstly, Somaliland's nascent Ministry for Pastoral Development and Environment received direct institutional support (for personnel, equipment, and activities) until 2005. Support for fledgling governmental institutions in a state-like entity seemed appropriate to strengthen their capacity – and also to build bridges between state institutions and local non-governmental organisations, as both sides had to work together to develop policies.

Secondly, on the non-governmental level, HBF helped to create NAGAAD, an umbrella organisation of thirty-one women's and other non-governmental organisations in Somaliland. HBF has provided crucial assistance for NAGAAD's organisational infrastructure since 1999. Starting with an information and meeting centre for rural women, NAGAAD over the years evolved into the most important women's organisation in Somaliland. Since 2002, NAGAAD has organised public gender forums and thus has brought women's rights (and more general, gender) issues into a broader public debate. NAGAAD also gave input on gender policy issues into political decision-making processes, supported female political candidates for political offices, and worked towards increasing female representation in governmental institutions in general.

From 2003, assistance in Somaliland has extended into another core area of HBF's concern: environmental and energy issues. Partly using the network of its member organisations, NAGAAD established a number of neighbourhood committees in Hargeisa devoted to the improvement of the local environment (waste management, etc.). From the beginning, women played key roles in most of these committees, and they continue to do so today.

Furthermore, HBF support for NAGAAD's members Candlelight for Health and Education (CLHE) and the Agricultural Development Organisation (ADO) began to address one of the core environmental problems of Somaliland – its local version of the "energy crisis": Massive charcoal production for domestic use (as few viable alternatives are available) as well as for export to the Arab peninsula leads to a rapid destruction of the already thin tree cover. HBF's partner organisations do awareness-creation work, for example in schools, and publish newsletters; they pursue small-scale reforestation projects and promote the use of energy-efficient cooking stoves. More recently, first steps were made to synchronize efforts with other actors in this area (especially the Adventist Development and Relief Agency

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2 The HBF office's 1997 internal report attributed the stabilisation of Somaliland not only to a more positive agricultural development (compared to the rest of Somalia), but remarkably also to the fact that relief organisations had withdrawn from the area in 1992, after clan militias had looted relief materials on a large scale in 1991. In effect, the report argued, this also removed one of the core resources that militias were inclined to fight over. The office recognised the political will of different clan leaders in the territory to re-establish peaceful relationships, by rebuilding them from the grass-roots; it acknowledged the fact that the Boroma conference in 1997, a major peace initiative within Somaliland, was conducted with little external support, and that government institutions had to be rebuilt from scratch. By 1997, the situation in Somaliland already compared very favorably to that in South-Central Somalia, where only private businesses and civil society organisations provided social services and thereby substituted virtually non-existing state structures.

– ADRA), with a view to promote the systematic implementation of an energy policy for Somaliland.

Somaliland may have relatively weak state institutions, but it has an overall peaceful and stable socio-political framework; under these conditions, “classical” support for local NGO work (both for concrete project work as well as for the strengthening of their organisational capacities) could form a main focus of HBF work. The approach was accompanied by a number of activities designed to strengthen the capacity of a specific ministry to formulate policies and implement them. As elsewhere, relationships between state and non-state actors have not always been easy, as there is competition around status and access to resources. But there is no doubt that the approach is worth taking, and it is going to be continued in the future.

However, insecurity and the virtual non-existence of government institutions over long periods of time, combined with extreme volatility in the overall political conditions, did not allow for the taking of such an approach in South-Central Somalia. Instead, the processes of negotiation around a new political order and the development of policy perspectives for transitory institutions themselves became the focus of HBF’s approach.

HBF contacts to civil society activists and scholars in or hailing from South-Central Somalia date back to the late 1990s. However, it was the new round of negotiations for transitional institutions (parliament and government) taking off under the auspices of IGAD in October 2002 which opened up avenues for intensified engagement. HBF pursued two main aims: the strengthening of the role of women in the negotiations and the political processes around it; and the development of political perspectives and policy documents for the post-conflict development of Somalia’s society and economy in the post-conflict period. (For its work in both areas, as well as with NAGAAD in Somaliland, HBF secured additional funding from the European Union in 2006.)

HBF has been systematically supporting Somali women’s activists in their attempts to secure a greater say of women in the ongoing negotiations. The cooperation with and support for Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC) under its outspoken leader, Asha Hagi Elmi, has been at the core of this engagement. In the course of the eighteen-month conference in Kenya, civil society organisations played a more important role than in all earlier conferences that had tried to solve the Somalia impasse. Demands for a greater formalised role of women were systematically raised, culminating in the remarkable (if largely symbolic) redefinition of Somali women as a “sixth clan” – and thereby demanding a well-defined and increased formal representation within the clan-based system and discourse of Somali politics.

In the end, a 12 per cent quota for women in the transitional parliament was accepted, even if in reality only 24 out of the 275 parliamentarians who were appointed on a clan basis, that is a mere 7 per cent, turned out to be women.<sup>3</sup> SSWC accompanied this political work on the national level by awareness-raising and advocacy activities work “on the ground”, for example on issues of women’s rights within Islamic Shari’a law, by means of organising Gender Forums in Mogadishu.

<sup>3</sup> An even higher women’s quota of 25 per cent had been agreed upon in the Arta peace process (Djibouti) in 2000 in an earlier round of negotiations, but this was never put into practice.

SSWC also formed the core of a Women's Political Caucus as a (small) pressure-group of women's activists intervening in current affairs. After the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) had taken over control in Mogadishu, by November 2006 even SSWC negotiated with moderate representatives of the Islamic Courts on ways and means to improve women's rights and female participation in the public sphere under Islamic law.

The second line of action pursued by HBF was the assistance given to Somali intellectuals debating the present and the future of the country, producing analyses and scenarios for the development of specific sectors in the post-conflict period. Out of earlier networks of Somali scholars involved the regionally-backed peace dialogue of 2002–04, a National Civic Forum (NCF) was founded in 2004. The NCF is a network comprising of respected Somali intellectuals and civil society activists based in Somalia, in the eastern African region, and in the wider diaspora. HBF supported NCF in establishing a basic infrastructure in Mogadishu, designed to organise civic educational programmes locally. It also assisted NCF's networking activities, including the holding of annual conferences in Nairobi since 2004.<sup>4</sup> NCF has created an organised and substantive voice of intellectuals within Somalia's politics that otherwise is largely dominated by mere power politics, warlordism, and violence.

## Constraints and Perspectives

The Ethiopian intervention in South-Central Somalia, which started in December 2006, has thrown into disarray many promising starting points for a reconciliation, reconstruction, and state-building process that had evolved from the negotiation processes since 2002. It not only made many post-conflict scenarios obsolete, at least for the time being, but it also hardened positions between supporters of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and its opponents of the clan-based, "nationalist", and Islamist varieties, respectively. Several rounds of intense fighting between Ethiopian forces and insurgents in Mogadishu displaced hundreds of thousands of inhabitants from the city. In the ensuing climate of tension and manifest violence, the reconciliation conference called in by the TFG in mid-2007 achieved little. The operational space for civil society – not least for the media, faced with shut-downs by the TFG authorities as well as assassinations – has shrunk, rather than expanded.

Civil society-based work in Mogadishu continued during 2007 even under the prevailing conditions – but with severe constraints and interruptions. SSWC, for example, continued to hold public forums, critically accompanying the reconciliation conference and the "counter-conference" of the Asmara-based opposition groups, trying to strengthen women's voices in these processes. The organisation also conducted political advocacy with TFG institutions in the interest of displaced people. NCF was able to conduct public forums on developmental issues and kept on distributing critical news items. Activities on a larger scale, however, were difficult. Contrary to optimistic expectations still prevailing in 2006, the NCF annual conference in December 2007 could only be held in Djibouti, rather than anywhere in Somalia itself. While providing a welcome forum for debate among individuals and groups who rarely meet otherwise, the conference also showed the difficulties

<sup>4</sup> The results of the 2006 NCF annual conference were published as a special issue of *Bildhaan* (2007).

of developing forward-looking perspectives for the country in the middle of deep political divisions between TFG and the opposition, due primarily to the Ethiopian military presence in Somalia.

Currently, much of HBF's project-support in South-Central Somalia aims at keeping "civil voices" – and especially the voices of women – alive under very difficult conditions. Civil society voices have a particular potential to transcend entrenched boundaries of political enmity – even though in situations of escalated conflict this potential is not always as easily realised as one may wish, because divisions of society in general are reflected among civil society actors as well. Still, Somali civil society actors can and do support contact- and trust-building and reconciliation efforts "below" official levels. A number of meetings in the first quarter of 2008, parallel to efforts of the TFG's new Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein to reach out to the opposition, provided reasons for some (cautious) hope, even if the most radical segments of the armed opposition continued to appear inaccessible to any mediation effort as long as the Ethiopian military presence continued. Supporting such efforts at reconciliation, and providing popular involvement in the pursuit of the "transitional tasks" (census, voter's registration, etc., leading towards 2009, when a new government is to be elected) continued to remain the most viable political option for civil society actors in Somalia in early 2008. The alternative would be endless and potentially ever more violent confrontation.

In a stark contrast to South-Central Somalia, HBF support for non-governmental organisations in Somaliland on issues of gender equity and environmental protection and sustainable development continues to operate along lines similar to those in other African countries. Of course, the capacity of Somaliland local organisations to implement donor-funded projects is not always as high as in other African countries – but the overall peaceful Somaliland environment allows HBF to pursue systematic capacity-building, by sending members of its own staff for training programmes with partner organisations to Hargeisa; and sometimes partner organisations' staff members from South-Central Somalia are able to attend in those trainings as well.

However, various concerns and challenges remain.

First, there is the issue of support focused on non-governmental organisations in a setting where the weak institutions of an emerging (or fledgling) state are in desperate need of strengthening. For the time being, HBF does not directly support government institutions in Somaliland, as it did for some years in the past, after realising problems of inefficiency and lack of transparency. Of course, engagements and negotiations between civil society organisations on the one hand, and government actors and institutions on the other, remain an important aspect of HBF's current approach when it comes to developing specific sectoral policies (on gender or environment, for example). But the core problem of imbalance between state and non-state actors remains, and it is difficult to see how it could be resolved as long as large international donors find it difficult to provide substantial institutional support (and the required supervision) to government institutions even in peaceful, but internationally unrecognised, Somaliland.

A second important challenge is the structure of civil society in Somalia itself, its diversity, its dependency on foreign funding, and its inherent strong competition – a competition that is sometimes linked to overall political competition as well. From the top-down perspective, it appears as a problem of "donor coordination"

in a vast and competitive market for external funding. Of course, the diversity of organisations and approaches taken has produced numerous good and innovative approaches and project ideas. At the same time, however, HBF and others who play an important “intermediary” role in “channelling” big donors’ funding (from the European Commission, for example) find themselves sometimes in a dizzying array of activities, project proposals, and ideas that are not only confusing, but sometimes prone to lack of information, project doubling, and wasteful competition.

A third challenge – but even more an opportunity – is the integration of networking and cooperation of Somali civil society groups beyond the boundaries of the three quasi-state separate entities that exist in Somalia today. Over time, and with increasingly different trajectories of political development, civil society organisations in the three entities are bound to develop further apart from each other than they already are today. Whatever view they (or HBF) may have on Somaliland’s demand for independence, one thing is sure: There are numerous issues and areas where civil society organisations from all parts of Somalia can cooperate, dialogue, and learn from each other, as many problems are and remain similar. Such cooperation also builds trust and thereby provides a foundation for a peaceful solution to issues of statehood, independence, or federalism in Somalia. HBF hopes to be able to strengthen such cross-boundary cooperation among Somali civil society actors in the time to come.

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## APPENDIX

# Overview of Somalia's History

### Early History

- 3rd Millennium B. C.** Egypt imports myrrh and frankincense from a country called "Punt" on what is now the Somali coast.
- 1st Millennium B. C.** Bantu peoples migrate to East Africa.

### From the Pre-Colonial Period to World War II

- 1st Century** Nomads migrate from present-day Northern Kenya to the Northeastern Horn of Africa; over the following centuries several market towns are established on the coast.
- Early 7th Century, ca. 615 onward** Spread of Islam on the Horn of Africa, originating from coastal centers expanded by Arab and Persian traders.
- Ca. 900** Mogadishu founded by Arab and Persian traders.
- 11th-13th Century** Expansion of Islam in the inland Horn of Africa.
- Mid-16th Century onward** Islam forced back out of the inland regions; Jesuit missions to Ethiopia.
- 1670 onward** Ottoman rule over the coastal colony of Zeila and parts of present-day Northwestern Somalia.
- Mid-18th Century onward** British dominance over the Indian Ocean.
- Ca. 1800-1850** Treaties between the British East India Company and Somali communities regarding harbor rights.
- 1862** French conquest of Obock.
- 1877** Founding of Djibouti

- 1889** Italian colony of Eritrea established.  
Menelik II crowned as Emperor of Ethiopia.
- 1895-6** First Ethiopian-Italian War; Ethiopian victory at Adua in 1896.
- 1896 onward** “French Somali Coast” colony established (capital: Djibouti).
- Late 19th Century onward** Somali areas on the Horn of Africa colonized by Italy (Italian Somalia), France (Djibouti) and Great Britain (British Somalia).
- 1899-1920** Somali resistance to colonization led by Mohammed Abdullah Hassan; Great Britain quells the rebellion.
- 1935-6** Second Ethiopian-Italian War; Ethiopia occupied by Italian troops; Emperor Haile Selassie goes into exile in London.
- 1941** Ethiopia reconquered by the British army; end of Italian rule in Ethiopia; British administration in all of Somalia.

### **From the Cold War to Civil War**

- 1949** UN puts Southern Somalia back under Italian administration in preparation for independence.
- 1951** Arabic becomes Somalia’s official language.
- 1953** Military treat between Ethiopia and the USA.
- 1960** Independent Republic of Somalia founded; unification of the former regions of British and Italian Somaliland. Semi-democratic phase in Somalia until 1969.
- 1963** Military treaty between Somalia and the Soviet Union.
- 1969** Bloodless military putsch; the rule of Mohammed Siyad Barre begins.
- 1974** Somalia joins the Arab League; additional cooperation treaty with the Soviet Union.  
Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie deposed by the “Derg”.
- 1977** Mengistu Haile Mariam imposes military rule in Ethiopia; “Red Terror” and break with the USA.



|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>1977-78</b>           | Ogaden War: Somalia invades the Eastern Ethiopian region of Ogaden; after initial Somali gains, the Soviet Union and Cuba intervene on Ethiopia's behalf; Barre revokes the military treaty with the Soviet Union; Somalia announces its withdrawal from the Ogaden in March 1978. |
| <b>1978</b>              | Military treaty between Ethiopia and the Soviet Union, followed shortly thereafter by cautious rapprochement between Somalia and the USA (“reversal of alliances”).  |
| <b>Early 1980 onward</b> | Rapid deterioration of Somalia's economic situation; armed resistance against Barre's weakened regime is on the rise.  |
| <b>1988</b>              | Under pressure by the superpowers, Somalia and Ethiopia sign a peace treaty, followed by the open outbreak of civil war in Northwestern Somalia, seizing all of Somalia by 1990.   |
| <b>1991</b>              | Barre is deposed and flees; broad collapse of public order in Southern Somalia, especially in Mogadishu. Declaration of the Independent Republic of Somaliland (May 20). Overthrow of the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia; Eritrea declares independence.                              |
| <b>1992 onward</b>       | US-led missions UNOSOM I, UNITAF and UNOSOM II aim to provide humanitarian aid and restore stable conditions in Somalia.   |
| <b>March 1993</b>        | Start of UNOSOM II, the first 3rd-generation peacekeeping operation in accordance with Chapter VII of the UN Charter.  |
| <b>October 3-4, 1993</b> | “Battle of Mogadishu”: 18 US soldiers killed in a failed arrest operation; subsequent shift in US strategy; by March 1994 western troops have been withdrawn from Somalia and the civil war is “re-Somalized”.   |
| <b>March 1995</b>        | Official end of UNOSOM II.   |
| <b>1996</b>              | Establishment of the regional organization “Intergovernmental Authority on Development” (IGAD).  |
| <b>1998</b>              | Proclamation of the Autonomous Region of Puntland under Abdullahi Yusuf.   |
| <b>1998-2000</b>         | Border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea.   |

## **After the Turn of the Millennium**

- 2000** “Somali National Peace Conference” in Arta (Djibouti) meets to form a transitional Somali government; establishment of the Transitional National Government (TNG) under President Abdiqassim Salad Hassan, which finds little acceptance in its four years in power.
- 2002-2004** Reconciliation conference in Eldoret (Kenya); clans based representation in the Transitional Federal Parliament (TFP); election of Abdullahi Yusuf (leader of the Autonomous Region of Puntland) as Somalia’s new president (November 2004).
- 2004 onward** A number of Islamic courts in Mogadishu unite under the umbrella of the Supreme Council of Sharia Courts in Somalia, also known as the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), under Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys and Sheikh Sharif Ahmed.
- 2006** Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and parliament move from Kenya to Somalia, for security reasons taking up headquarters in Baidoa, about 250 km away from Mogadishu.
- February 2006** Founding of the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT) in Mogadishu by Somali warlords and businesspeople under pressure from the CIA; immediately thereafter heavy fighting breaks out with the Islamic courts’ militias.
- June 2006** The ARPCT is defeated and flees Mogadishu.
- Mid-2006 onward** ICU militias advance into large parts of Southern Somalia; Ethiopian troops infiltrate Somalia.
- December 24, 2006** Ethiopian Premier Meles Zenawi officially declares war on the Islamic courts.
- Late December 2006-January 2007** With US support, Ethiopian troops invade, advancing rapidly; Mogadishu taken without a struggle; ICU militias defeated in Southern Somalia.
- February 2007** UN Security Council authorizes the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM); ca. 1,500 soldiers from Uganda dispatched in March 2007 and ca. 200 soldiers from Burundi in December.

- September 2007** Establishment of the oppositional Alliance for the (Re-) Liberation of Somalia in Asmara (Eritrea) by Sheikh Aweys, Sheikh Ahmed, the former TFG Speaker of Parliament Sheikh Aden and the former deputy TFG Prime Minister Hussein Farrah, among others.
- 2007 onward** Unknown numbers of Ethiopian troops present in Somalia; recurring clashes between Ethiopian forces/government troops and rebels, especially in the area of Mogadishu; varying estimates of 5-10,000 deaths and 1.5-2 million refugees.

# Persons, Organizations, Institutions

## Persons (with clan affiliation)

### **Abdullahi Yusuf**

**Ahmed** (Darod-Majertain)

President of the TFG and thus Somali's official head of state following the formation of the TFG in late 2004; his term of office will end in 2009. After training in Italy and the Soviet Union, he became a commander of the Somali army in the 1960s and later took part in attempts to overthrow dictator Siyad Barre (initially with Ethiopian support). Later arrested by the Mengistu regime and released only after its collapse; since then he has maintained good connections with the Ethiopian Premier Meles Zenawi. In the 1990s Yusuf was the leader of the Somali Salvation Democratic Front and thus of Puntland, which he proclaimed an autonomous region in 1998, causing repeated conflicts with militant Islamists such as Sheikh Aweys.

### **Sheikh Sharif**

### **Sheikh Ahmed**

(Hawiye-Abgaal)

Became chairman in the inner leadership circle of the SCIC (ICU) in Mogadishu in 2004; in contrast to Sheikh Aweys he is generally regarded as the moderate "face" of the ICU and a potential partner for a negotiated solution. Spent a short time in Kenyan captivity after the Ethiopian invasion, then went into exile in Eritrea. Became a founding member of the ALS in Asmara in 2007.

### **Mohammed**

### **Farah Aideed**

(Hawiye-Habar Gedir)

Warlord in Mogadishu; regarded as victor over the US troops since October 4, 1993, when his militias killed 18 US soldiers in street fighting, causing the US withdrawal; died in 1996.

**Sheikh Hassan  
Dahir Aweys**

(Hawiye-Habar  
Gedir)

Widely respected colonel in the Somali army (e.g. in the Ogaden War); militia leader under Mohammed Aidid in the early 1990s; connections with suspected terrorist organization al-Itihaad; took part in unsuccessful attempts to establish local Islamic emirates in Somalia. In the mid- to late 1990s he began building an umbrella organization of Islamic courts in Mogadishu and was a leading personality of the ICU from the beginning; representative of the more radical wing, supposed connections (which he has denied) to Wahhabism and al-Qaeda. In Eritrea since 2007, founding member of the ALS.

**Aden Hashi  
“Ayro”**

Protégé of Dahir Aweys, who presumably arranged for his training in Afghan training camps. Connections with the Somali al-Itihaad in the 1990s. Appointed leader of the al-Shabaab, the youth militia of the ICU, by Aweys. Killed in May 2008 by an American airstrike.

**Mohammed  
Siyad Barre**

(Darod-Marehan)

Presumably born in 1919, originally a shepherd with no formal education, joined the Italian colonial police (1941-1960) and received his military training in Italy. Following Somali independence in 1960, he served as a Vice Commander in the Somali Army, rising to become Major General (and thus Commander-in-Chief) of the army by 1966; leader of the bloodless coup in 1969 and dictator until 1991. Introduced the ideology of “Scientific Socialism” and initially took the side of the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Governed on a clan basis with the so-called MOD Coalition (Marehan-Ogadeni-Dhulbahante); promulgated an aggressive, nationalist Pan-Somalia policy; waged and lost the Ogaden War against Ethiopia in 1977/78; increasingly lost control over the country in the 1980s, controlling only a few streets in the capital by 1990. Expelled from the city by Mohammed Farah Aideed in 1991; died in 1995 in exile in Lagos, Nigeria.

**Hussein  
Mohammed  
Farah; also  
known as  
Hussein  
Mohammed  
Farah Aideed, or  
“Aideed Junior”**

(Hawiye-Habar  
Gedir)

Many-faced warlord from Mogadishu, son of warlord Mohammed Farah Aideed. Trained as a marine in the USA. Became leader of the Somali National Alliance in 1996, later founding member of the SRRC and opponent of the TNG; joined the new TFG in 2004, where he was active in various ministerial posts and as Deputy Premier, welcoming the Ethiopian invasion in late 2006. Dismissed as Deputy Premier in 2007, subsequently becoming a founding member of the ALS with Sheikh Aweys in Eritrea.

- Ali Mohammed Ghedi** (Hawiye-Abgal) Prime Minister of the TFG under Abdullahi Yusuf from 2004-7, widely regarded as a unifying figure with regard to Hawiye clan interests; a veterinarian by trade, he was a founding member and president of the Somali NGO Consortium and lacks a conspicuous political profile; lost his position in 2007 after differences of opinion with Yusuf.
- Abdiqasim Salad Hassan** (Hawiye-Habar Gedir) Somali transitional president in Djibouti exile at the time of the TNG (2000-2004); resolute opponent of the new TFG; Interior and Finance Minister for periods under Siyad Barre.
- Nur Hassan Hussein (“Nur Adde”)** (Hawiye-Abgal) Prime Minister of the TFG since November 2007, regarded as moderate and open to dialogue. Member of the Italian colonial police in the 1950s; later studied law and took courses at police academies in Italy and the USA; deputy chair of a court for prosecuting financial offenses. Since 1991 he has served as the widely-respected chair of the Somali Red Crescent.

## Organizations and Institutions

- Alliance for the Liberation of Somalia (ALS)** Movement opposing the TFG, founded in Asmara (Eritrea) in 2007, also known as the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS). Includes a broad spectrum of members of the leadership circle of the ICU and other opponents of the TFG. Apart from the rejection of the TFG and the hostile attitude toward President Yusuf, the common denominator is the demand that Ethiopian troops withdraw from Somalia.
- al-Shabaab** Youth militia of the ICU, also known as Hizbul Shabaab (“Party of Youth”); headed until the end of 2006 by the militant Aden Hashi Ayro. Widely varying estimates of its size. After the ICU’s military defeat in early 2007, numerous members of the al-Shabaab joined the guerilla uprising against Ethiopia’s presence in the country. Officially classified as a terrorist organization by the US Department of State on February 28, 2008.
- African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)** Military mission of the African Union in Somalia; sanctioned by the UN Security Council in February 2007 after the Ethiopian invasion. Of the 8,000 soldiers originally planned, in April 2008 circa 2,000 (from Uganda and Burundi) were in the country, able to secure only a few strategic areas in the capital. AMISOM’s mandate originally covered the period from mid-2007 to the end of the year, and has since been extended by 6 months.

**Islamic Courts  
Union (ICU)/  
Union of Islamic  
Courts (UIC)**

Umbrella organization of Islamic (Sharia) courts, mainly in Mogadishu; the terms Supreme Council of Islamic Courts (SCIC) and Supreme Islamic Courts Council (SICC) are also used. SCIC and SICC refer more to the Islamic leadership of the organization, while the term Islamic Courts is often used for the movement as a whole. Islamic courts have a long tradition in the country, but established themselves more firmly in the 1990s as local alternatives in response to the general situation of legal uncertainty. The ICU was founded as an umbrella organization around the turn of the millennium (from 2000-2003 also known under the name Sharia Implementation Council) and was strongly influenced by Sheikh Aweys, who is regarded as militant. The moderate face was Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, who functioned as chair. The division of power between moderate and militant forces was a recurrent bone of contention. After 2000 the organization built up its own militias (including the youth militia al-Shabaab) and over the years to come developed into a key political and paramilitary factor in the country. In 2004 it was re-founded as the Supreme Council of Islamic Courts (SCIC). Beginning in February 2006 bloody clashes with the militias of the ARPCT took place, with a rapid victory for the ICU; in June 2006 it took Mogadishu and occupied large parts of Southern Somalia. Perceived as an Islamist threat, especially by the USA and Ethiopia, and occasionally characterized as a Somali version of the Taliban; however, in retrospect many Somalis regard the ICU's interregnum as a brief period of stabilization and relative security. In December 2006 it advanced upon the TFG's seat of government, but was defeated and expelled by Somali government troops with crucial assistance from Ethiopia in late 2006/early 2007. Subsequently many members and militiamen scattered and mingled with the population; some members of the leadership circle have gone into hiding, while others became founders of the ALS.

**Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC)**

Political movement in Somalia from 2001-2004 in opposition to the TNG; one key initiator was Aidid Junior.

**Transitional  
Federal Govern-  
ment (TFG)**

Somali transitional government headed by President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, formed at the end of 2004 as a result of the renewed Somali peace negotiations in Eldoret (Kenya). The transitional government lacked resources and legitimacy. In 2006 it met in Baidoa (near the Ethiopian border) for security reasons, felt increasingly threatened by the advance of the ICU militias in the second half of the year, and turned to Ethiopia for help. The TFG moved to Mogadishu only after its military victory over the ICU in 2007. Since then it has been able to maintain its position, mainly thanks to Ethiopian support. The TFG's term of office will end in 2009; by then, according to the transitional constitution, a census and general elections must be held.

**Transitional  
National Govern-  
ment (TNG)**

Somali transitional government headed by Abdiqasim Salad Hassan, formed in 2000 as a result of the peace negotiations in Arta (Djibouti). The TNG met in exile in Djibouti and was never able to gain the trust of the Somali population. In 2004 it was replaced by the TFG.

**UNISOM I and  
II/UNITAF**

The United Nations Operation in Somalia I (UNOSOM I) was established in April 1992 as a UN mission to support and enable humanitarian aid. In December 1992 UNOSOM's tasks were taken over by the US-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF, also known as "Operation Restore Hope"), the first to hold a so-called robust mandate according to Chapter VII of the UN Charter; its task was to secure humanitarian aid "by all necessary means". In March 1993 UNITAF was succeeded by UNOSOM II, which also operated according to Chapter VII. After initial sympathy, UNOSOM II increasingly met with resistance on the part of individual warlords and the population at large. On October 3-4 a failed arrest action led to protracted clashes between US soldiers and Somali militias (especially those of the warlord Aidid), in which 18 Americans and an estimated 500 to 1,000 Somalis were killed. After pictures of two dead US soldiers went around the world, on October 4 US President Clinton decided to withdraw from Somalia (known as the "CNN effect"). By the end of March 1994 the USA and practically all the western nations had withdrawn their soldiers. The remaining troops from southern nations made little headway as militia warfare flared up, and were withdrawn as well by March 1995 (official end of UNOSOM II).



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Award in 1999. Jabril has been a principal advisor for number of international NGOs operating in Somalia as well as donor agencies based Nairobi and New York, acting as coordinator for research projects under World Bank and UNDP. He is the director of the Center for Research Dialogue – Somalia (CRD) in Mogadishu, an independent not-for-profit corporation aimed to promote the social, economic & political rebuilding of Somalia, utilising participatory research as a means to facilitate processes of dialogue, consensus building, policy development and institutional capacity building at the national and local levels. The CRD program brings together actors from local and international institutions, civil society groups, private sector, community leaders, local and international NGOs.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>ADRA</b>   | Adventist Development and Relief Agency                                |
| <b>AMISOM</b> | African Union Mission to Somalia                                       |
| <b>ARS</b>    | Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia                              |
| <b>ADO</b>    | Agricultural Development Organisation                                  |
| <b>CLHE</b>   | Candlelight for Health and Education                                   |
| <b>CBO</b>    | Community-based Organisations  |
| <b>CIC</b>    | Council of Islamic Courts  |
| <b>COGWO</b>  | Coalition for Grassroots Women Organisation                            |
| <b>CRD</b>    | Center for Research and Dialogue                                       |
| <b>CSO</b>    | Civil Society Organisation   |
| <b>EC</b>     | European Commission  |
| <b>ENDF</b>   | Ethiopian National Defence Force                                       |
| <b>GECPD</b>  | Galkacyo Education Centre for Peace and Development                    |
| <b>HBF</b>    | Heinrich Böll Foundation (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung)                      |
| <b>HINNA</b>  | Women Pioneers for Peace and Life                                      |
| <b>IDP</b>    | Internally Displaced Persons   |
| <b>IGAD</b>   | InterGovernmental Authority on Development                             |
| <b>ICU</b>    | Islamic Courts Union   |
| <b>FPENS</b>  | Formal Private Education Network for Somalia                           |
| <b>MSSP</b>   | Mogadishu Security and Stabilisation Plan                              |
| <b>NAGAAD</b> | (A women's umbrella organisation with thirty-one member organisations) |
| <b>NCF</b>    | National Civic Forum   |
| <b>NEC</b>    | National Electoral Commission  |
| <b>NEPAD</b>  | New Partnership for Africa's Development                               |
| <b>NGO</b>    | Nongovernmental Organisation   |
| <b>PA</b>     | Professional Association   |
| <b>SSWC</b>   | Save Somali Women and Children   |
| <b>SCIC</b>   | Supreme Council of Islamic Courts                                      |
| <b>SRRC</b>   | Somali Reconstruction and Reconciliation Council                       |
| <b>SSDF</b>   | Somali Salvation Democratic Front                                      |
| <b>SNM</b>    | Somali National Movement   |
| <b>SYL</b>    | Somali Youth League  |
| <b>TFG</b>    | Transitional Federal Government  |
| <b>TNG</b>    | Transitional National Government                                       |
| <b>UDUB</b>   | United People's Democratic Party                                       |
| <b>UCID</b>   | Justice and Welfare Party of Somaliland                                |
| <b>UNOSOM</b> | United Nations Operation in Somalia                                    |
| <b>UNIFEM</b> | United Nations Development Fund for Women                              |
| <b>UNPOS</b>  | United Nations Political Office for Somalia                            |
| <b>USC</b>    | United Somali Congress   |
| <b>WSSD</b>   | World Summit for Sustainable Development                               |
| <b>WAWA</b>   | We Are Women's Activists   |



Somalia once again is projecting images of war and humanitarian crisis. The country has endured seventeen years of complete state collapse, the rule of warlords and Islamic courts, and we can recount at least fourteen failed reconciliation conferences. Somalia has “re-sisted” a whole series of external interventions to bring about peace and stability and to reconstitute the state. In all the military escalations, innocent civilians – some already displaced by and fleeing from the re-emerging conflicts – have lost the foundations of their livelihoods, not to mention their hope for change. The situation today has

all the ingredients of a disaster that compounds Somalia’s already endemic human insecurity.

This publication tries to shed some light on the history and present reality of prolonged state collapse in Somalia with a specific focus on the possible reasons for the failures of the many attempts to rebuild the state so far. It takes a closer look at the internal and external actors taking part in such efforts and suggests paying more attention to Somali civil society and gender dynamics in particular.

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