J. of Modern African Studies, 44, 3 (2006), pp. 397–414. © 2006 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Printed in the United Kingdom

Political identity, emerging state structures and conflict in northern Somalia

Markus V. Höhne*

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the logic of political identification by individuals and groups in the context of re-emerging state structures in northern Somalia. Current identities are analysed as *political* identities, which are both a product of and a driving force behind political and military conflict in the region. In everyday life political cleavages can be bridged by cross-cutting ties based on neighbourhood, intermarriage or common experiences and history. Only when conflict reaches a certain level and violence escalates, do political identities become mutually exclusive and large-scale fighting become a real threat.

INTRODUCTION

During the Somali civil war, all state institutions collapsed. Somalia had been led by the dictatorial government of Siyad Barre for more than two decades until 1991. During this period the state at least provided certain services.[1] Over the last 14 years every attempt to rebuild it has failed.[2] This, among a legion of other problems, has led to a crisis of political and national identity among many Somali, raising the question of people's orientation towards the state.[3] For people in northern Somalia, this question is not about parties or ideologies within a state or an international framework, but about the very existence of a state itself, and the individual and collective identities related to it. With Somaliland in northwestern Somalia and Puntland in northeastern Somalia, two *de facto* state administrations have been set up which partly fill the state vacuum (Doornbos

* Ph.D. Candidate, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale, Germany. I am grateful to the Max Planck Institute for generously having financed my field research in northern Somalia. This text was improved through the comments of the anonymous referees, and of Dereje Feyissa, Fernanda Pirie and Günther Schlee. I thank Amal Farah for language corrections. An earlier version of the paper was presented at the 9th Somali Studies International Conference in Aalborg, Denmark, and at the ASAUK conference in London, UK, both in September 2004.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

2000). As outlined below, their policies towards the future of the greater region and its inhabitants are incompatible and lead to conflict.

I argue that as a result of the civil war and certain developments in northern Somalia, new identities have formed on the ground. These identities are not new in the sense that they are invented from scratch, but they combine existing identity markers in a way that is particularly meaningful in the current political context. According to Mamdani (2001: 20), these identities can be understood as *political* identities. He writes: 'the process of state formation generates political identities that are distinct not only from market-based identities but also from cultural identities'. Mamdani sees the prescription of certain identities by law and the enforcement of these identities in the context of state-formation as central for the development of political identities. In this way political identities are 'the consequence of how power is organized' (*ibid.*: 22). But they are not only defined 'from above'. They can also be forged 'from below' in the course of political action in contention with the state (*ibid.*: 23). Mamdani's distinction between cultural and political identities is important. The former is based on a common past, while the latter testifies to a common project for the future. Furthermore, cultural identities tend to merge into one another and become blurred, while political identities develop towards polarisation and therefore 'give rise to a kind of political difference where you must be either one or the other. … The difference becomes binary, not simply in law but in political life' (*ibid.*). This process of dividing people according to different (legal) identities was, in both colonial and post-colonial times, often related to violence – that of either the colonisers or post-colonial governments against groups of subjects and vice versa (*ibid.*: 24–39).

The Somali case differs in two ways from Mamdani's discussion of political identities, which is based on the example of Rwanda. Firstly, in Somalia in general and northern Somalia in particular, legal prescription was less important for the forging of political identities than the political activities of colonial and post-colonial governments and the parties to the civil war. Secondly, the political identities discussed in this paper developed partly in the context of state-formation, and partly in the context of state collapse. These differences do not, however, make Mamdani's concept inapplicable, but rather help to expand it.

Political identities manifest themselves in northern Somalia today as the product of cumulative political conflict and violence, from the time of the anti-colonial uprising of Sayid Maxamed Cabdille Xassan 1899–1920 (see, for e.g. Hess 1968; Sheikh-'Abdi 1993), up to the struggle of the Somali guerrilla movements in the 1980s and 1990s (see Compagnon 1990;

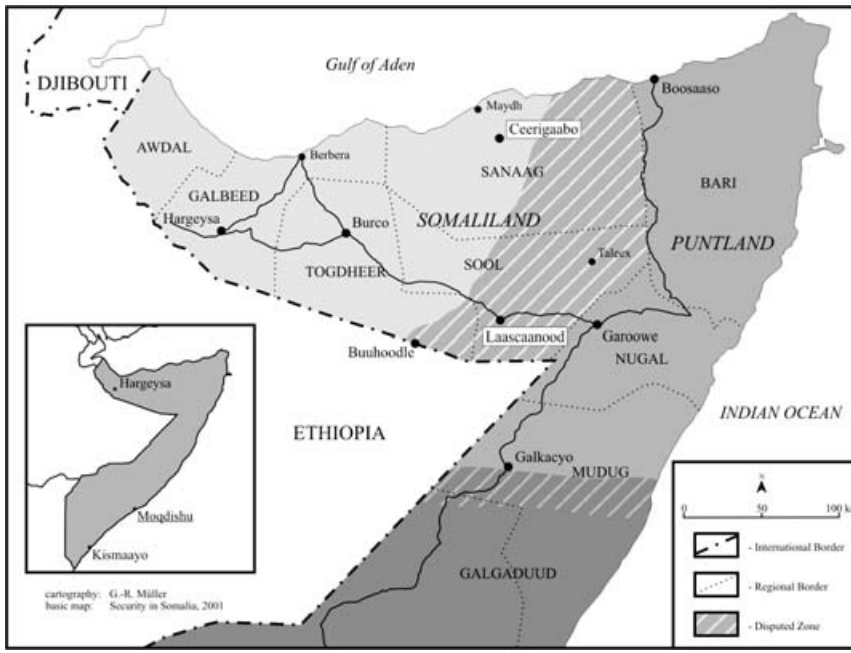
https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Prunier 1995). A basic understanding of the history and the most salient aspects of political identities in Somalia can be grasped from the literature. According to the classic accounts of northern Somali society (Burton 1987 [1856]; Lewis 1961), patrilinear descent (*tol* in Somali), Somali customary law (*xeer*) and Islamic prescriptions were the fundamental principles of social organisation in pre-colonial Somalia. Samatar (1989: 152ff.; 1992: 633–41) and Kapteijns (1994: 220ff.) argue that this basis of society was transformed during colonial and post-colonial times in the context of political and economic change. According to their accounts, descent was increasingly detached from *xeer* and religion and was, especially under Siyad Barre, manipulated by power-hungry elites.[4] They analyse this process as 'clanism'. Kapteijns (1995: 258) states that clanism emerged in the colonial era 'from specific struggles for power not only between the colonial state and local Somali leaders but also among Somali leaders themselves as they operated within (and manipulated) colonial realities'. These struggles continued in post-colonial times.[5] In my view these are the dynamics to which the development of political identities in Somalia can be traced. The forging of mutually exclusive political identities accelerated in the days of fratricide in the Somali civil war, in the late 1980s in northern Somalia and the early 1990s in southern Somalia (see Africa Watch 1990; Human Rights Watch 1995: 22ff.), and continues today in the conflict between Somaliland and Puntland in northern Somalia.[6]

Against this background, this short paper focuses on the most recent phase of political identity-formation in northern Somalia. Identities are very flexible in this setting, due to the common practice of 'climbing up' or 'down' the chain of male ancestors, on which the segmentary lineage system of Somali society is built. However, this kind of cultural identity, to use Mamdani's phrase, does not contradict the existence of political identities. Segmentary identities, such as clan family, clan and sub-clan are different from the political identity described above, even though in the Somali case they can be incorporated into it.

It is nevertheless important to see political identities as non-static. Mamdani describes the formation of political identities as a process and, as is known from cases of Hutu–Tutsi massacres, the final separation of Hutu and Tutsi at the local level often happened in the very act of killing (Appadurai 1998: 232ff.; Malkki 1995: 78ff.). This was when bonds of neighbourhood, friendship and affinal ties and so on were finally cut. In everyday life, political identities are characterised by a certain flexibility and openness. Mamdani (2001: 20) states that cultural, economic and political identities can overlap significantly. However, flexibility vanishes when violence comes into play.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press



MAP 1. Political divisions in northern Somalia.

There follows a brief outline of the current political situation in northern Somalia. Then I describe two identity clusters, which form the basis of political identities in this setting. By showing how these identities are expressed, certain internal contradictions regarding the political claims and the exclusiveness of each cluster become obvious. These contradictions are partly due to, and partly the basis for, cross-cutting ties, and facilitate peaceful cohabitation in the region. However, in the case of serious political and military conflict, these crosscutting ties are cut and mutually exclusive blocks confront each other.

POLITICAL SETTING: NORTHERN SOMALIA TODAY

Somaliland is presented by the government in Hargeysa as an independent state, which seceded from the rest of Somalia in the borders of the former British Protectorate. Its inhabitants belong to different clan families: Isaaq, Dir and Darood/Harti. The Somaliland government claims international recognition for its country on the basis of the clearly demarcated former colonial borders and the support of the majority of the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

population for independence, which was expressed in the approval of the Somaliland constitution in a public referendum in 2001 (Somaliland 2002). In the context of politics the term 'Somalilander' is used by local politicians and by other people pointing to the viability of Somaliland as a nation state borne by a nascent Somaliland national identity.

Puntland is, according to its constitution, part of the Somali state and works towards rebuilding the Somali government. The government in Garowe is based on an alliance of different Daarood/Harti clans, such as Majeerteen, Dhulbahante and Warsangeeli (Battera 1999).[7] Apart from this genealogical identity, the Somali national identity is adhered to. People supporting Puntland very rarely refer to themselves as 'Puntlanders'. Mostly they use the term 'Somali' when speaking about their nationality.

These different positions conflict most severely with regard to, and also in, the Harti inhabited regions of Sool and Sanaag, which are, depending on one's political position, in eastern Somaliland or western Puntland. These regions are claimed by each of the two governments in northern Somalia. The propaganda issued in the political centres, but also discussions about and manifestations of political identity in daily life, reflect the tensions between the Somaliland and the Puntlander/Somali identity in the study area.

IDENTITY CLUSTERS

Hargeysa/Central West Somaliland

General setting

Mostly Isaaq live in the central west of Somaliland. The Isaaq are the majority clan family in Somaliland and in colonial times were closely linked to the British. When Somaliland gained its independence on 26 June 1960 political power was in the hands of the Isaaq. Following unification with the south on 1 July 1960, however, the Isaaq became politically marginalised, and most social and economic developments took place in the south. This resulted in a large-scale migration of people from northwest Somalia to southern Somalia to obtain higher education and in pursuit of work.

The uneasy relationship with the government in Moqdishu, especially under the military dictator Siyad Barre, finally led to the formation of the Somali National Movement (SNM) in 1981. This guerrilla organisation was mostly Isaaq based. After the SNM had taken control over the northwest in the context of a general collapse of the state in early 1991, the independence of Somaliland was proclaimed at a conference of all clans

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

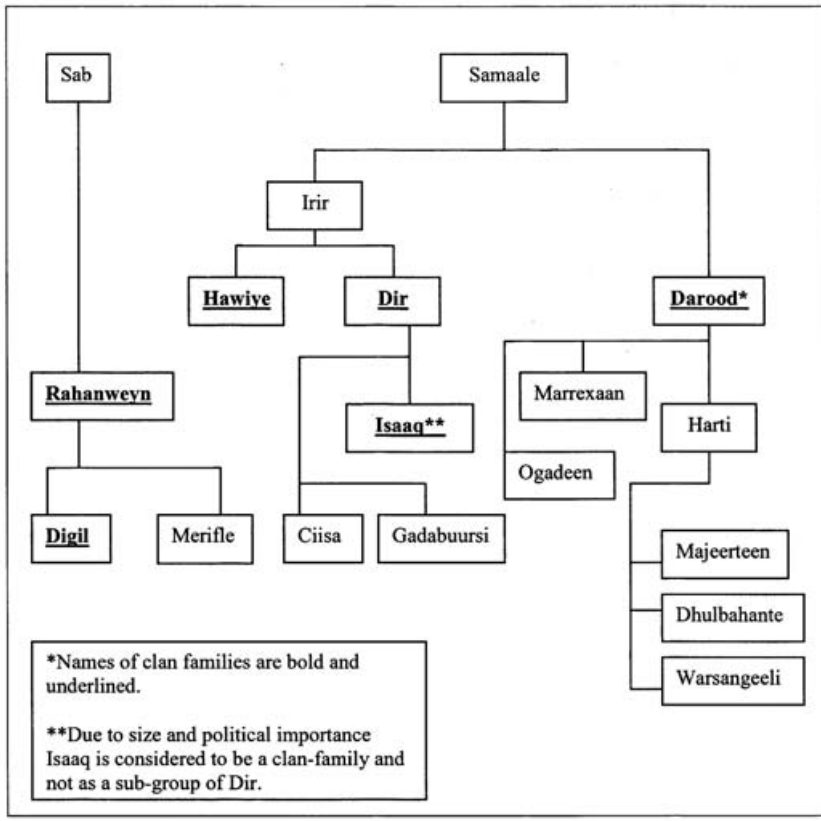


FIGURE 1
Simplified genealogical charter: Somali clan family and clan divisions.

living in the region held in Burco. In the last 15 years peace has been restored and a government with its seat in Hargeysa established; since 2001 serious steps have been undertaken to transform the clan-based system of governance into a more democratic system.[8]

Expression of identity

In early February 2004, a delegation of British parliamentarians arrived in Hargeysa for a 24-hour visit to Somaliland. A splendid welcome was staged at the airport. About two hundred people filled the margins of the airstrip at nine in the morning. In anticipation of the arrival of the plane in 2 hours time, Foreign Minister Edna Aaden and Minister for Information Cabdullahi Maxamed Du'aale, assisted by some policemen and women,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

organised the show. Girls wearing dresses resembling traditional Somali women's wear were put in line to the right and left of the estimated landing place. The traditional white of the dress had been replaced by the green, white and red of the Somaliland flag. The girls started singing and dancing to the monotonous beat of their drums long before the arrival of the delegation.

In the centre stood a group of men consisting mostly of members of the bicameral Somaliland Parliament in which elders and representatives represent the clans and regions of Somaliland. A handful of World War II veterans decorated with British medals also took their positions. The scene was completed by the presence of John Drysdale, the oldest British resident of Somaliland, who has been involved in Somali affairs since colonial times.

Among the participants masses of posters with the Somaliland flag and a picture of Queen Elisabeth II were distributed. The headline on the Queen's poster was: 'The Queen, our mother'. Some people held large banners with messages referring to the long-standing British–Somaliland friendship and to the recent history of Somaliland. Journalists swept the place photographing and filming the parade. In the background an armada of new four-wheel drives waited to take the VIPs to the city.

When the parliamentarians arrived, Edna Aaden and the Minister for Information first received them. Some girls stepped forward and decorated the guests with wreaths of flowers. Following this, Edna Aaden led the group along the masses, whilst the girls danced and sang and the men greeted the guests. Brief conversations were held with the members of the Somaliland Parliament, the war veterans and of course, with John Drysdale. After 15 minutes of shaking hands and posing for the cameras of the journalists, the guests together with the more important participants in the event were carried away by the waiting cars. Along the way to the city spectators had gathered shouting and gesticulating at every car that came from the airport. The police blocked the main roads in the centre of Hargeysa and only government vehicles were allowed to proceed.

The event was interesting with regard to which aspects of the Somaliland identity were presented and which were neglected. It was striking how openly the memory of the colonial past was revived. Looking at the scene one could almost think that Somaliland was still a British Protectorate, and indeed, strove after British protection. Not in the sense that the British government should take control of Somaliland once again, but in the sense that London should protect and facilitate Somaliland's way to international recognition. An amusing example for the direct relation of the 'airport choreography' and this political agenda could be

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

read in the papers the following day: it was reported that the war veterans had asked the visitors for their pensions as former British soldiers; however, the veterans assured them that they would happily renounce their claims if the British government would recognise Somaliland.

The second theme of the event was the achievements of the Republic of Somaliland since its establishment. The peace and stability of the country were represented by the masses of girls dancing and singing and the absence of any great number of security forces. The ministers and the members of the Somaliland Parliament stood for what has been accomplished politically so far, almost without external help. The idea behind this was simple: the only thing Somaliland is renowned for internationally is its peacefulness and the innovative way in which a new political system has been established. This distinguishes it from the rest of Somalia, where heavy fighting still flares up occasionally.[9]

Equally important to what was presented at the airport is what was omitted. The 30 years in which the north and the south of Somalia were one country were hidden. The logic behind this huge historical gap is that any relationship with southern Somalia except economic cooperation is an obstacle to Somaliland's claim to be an independent country deserving international recognition. But this historical omission leads to contradictions with regard to the experiences of the older generation. People over 40, in particular, remember Somalia as it was in the 1960s and 1970s, with a strong national army and widespread international relations. Some of these older Somalis, including some of the active SNM fighters, prefer a future reunion with the south to the independence of Somaliland. They argue that the economy of Somaliland is weak and the number of its people too few to defend itself against potential enemies such as Ethiopia.[10] In their view, economic development and independence based on military power can only be reached together with the Somalis in the south, who are their brothers and sisters, even if split by civil war.

Furthermore, at the airport no reference was made to the SNM and its long and bloody war against the former Somali regime. This is consistent with the current political line of the Somaliland government. The SNM has had its role in the past, but now civilians have succeeded to the rule of the guerrillas, who were almost exclusively Isaaq. Somaliland today is eager to present itself as a multi-clan state where peace reigns.[11] Efforts were made to efface the intra- and inter-clan warfare, which dominated the guerrilla war and the first years following secession from Somalia. But in fact some of the old inter-clan and political tensions prevail. When politics are discussed in the market of Hargeysa, members of the Darood clan family (including the Harti clans) are refered to as 'faqash'. The same

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

term is used for people who had positions in the former Somali government in general, including Isaaq, many of whom have high-ranking positions in the current Somaliland government. 'Faqash' is translated by Hashi (1998: 170) as 'a dirty or corrupt person; filth'.

Laascaanood/eastern Somaliland – western Puntland

General setting

Laascaanood is the capital of the Sool region. Dhulbahante, a branch of the Harti clan, almost exclusively inhabits Sool. In the early twentieth century the area was the setting for an anti-colonial uprising led by the Ogadeen sheikh, poet and politician Maxamed Cabdille Xassan. His followers were called Dervishes (*Daraawiishta*), the majority of whom were Dhulbahante. They fought mostly against the British, aided by Isaaq troops. Following the defeat of the Dervishes in 1921, the Dhulbahante area was effectively incorporated in the British Protectorate. In the 1970s and 1980s, most Dhulbahante, being Darood, supported the regime of Siyad Barre, who belonged to the Marexaan clan of the Darood clan family. A further factor strengthening this alliance was the appointment of Axmed Suleban 'Daffle', a Dhulbahante, as the head of the National Security Service (NSS), making him one of the most powerful men in the state. Until 1991 the clan fought on the side of the government against the guerrillas.

When the SNM took over most of the northwest of Somalia, the representatives of the Dhulbahante agreed on peace with the Isaaq. But the majority of the clan did not accept the programme of secession from Somalia agreed on in Burco.[12] In the years that followed the social and political progress of Somaliland was achieved while excluding the Sool region and largely without the participation of the Dhulbanate. In opposition to Hargeysa, the Dhulbahante played a prominent role in the establishment of Puntland as a Harti state in northeast Somalia in 1998.[13] A Dhulbahante was made vice president, and the Dhulbahante thus became the second power after the Majeerteen, the 'older' Harti brother.[14] The inhabitants of the Sool region have since been split between Somaliland and Puntland.[15]

Expression of identity

I first met Xassan in Laascaanood in November 2003. He was a Dhulbahante, who at the time of our meeting had come only for a visit to Laascaanood. He came from Garowe, the capital of Puntland, where he

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

worked as a high-ranking member of the government. Xassan invited me to visit him in Garowe. I accepted his invitation and spent about a week with him. We talked, among other things, about Dervish history. Xassan told me of his family's, the Bihidarays, conflict with Maxamed Cabdille Xassan during which the Dervishes massacred several of the Bihidarays men. In reaction to this his family had allied with the British and was involved in one of the most devastating defeats of the Dervishes in a place called Jidbaale in the western Sool region. As Xassan put it: 'we defeated him [Maxamed Cabdille Xassan] in Jidbaale'. According to Xassan a man called Cawke 'Jabane' (Cawke Cabdi Aaden), the leader of Bihidarays in those days, advised the British on how to deal with the Dervishes, including the tactics that later led to their defeat. Some days later as Xassan and I walked the streets, and his mood was jollier, he began to sing poems composed by Maxamed Cabille Xassan. I asked him about that and he answered: 'I am a Dervish!'

I was told that Xassan was one of the men who had organised the attack against the Somaliland President Dahir Rayaale Kahin in Laascaanood in December 2002. This attack is one of the recent heroic tales told by Puntland hardliners in Laascaanood, and I was very interested in researching it further. Xassan confirmed that he had been involved in this event and gave me an outline of what had happened.[16] Dahir Rayaale Kahin visited Laascaanood on 7 December 2002; hardly anyone in Somaliland or Puntland was informed about this. More than a dozen 'technicals' (pick-up trucks mounting heavy machine guns) and about 200 soldiers accompanied the president. In the town several Somaliland followers had organised a number of local forces. The visit was unprecedented; no Somaliland president had previously dared to step foot in Sool.

Puntland had to react, even if totally unprepared. Xassan together with some other Dhulbahante politicians collected a force of three technicals and led them from Garowe to Laascaanood. In the early afternoon they passed the eastern checkpoint of Laascaanood without being stopped by the local forces posted to guard the place for Somaliland; the soldiers at the checkpoint were closely related to Xassan. As they entered the town the Puntland forces immediately opened fire, to the utter shock of the Somaliland troops. Following a fierce exchange of fire lasting about 15 minutes, the Somaliland president ordered his troops to retreat. He feared a general uprising of the Puntland followers in town and wanted to avoid bloodshed among civilians. The president left Laascaanood hastily and retreated to Caynabo, a district town in western Sool where Isaaq are predominant. On the side of Puntland, this rather chaotic operation was

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

hailed as a great victory. Shocked by the event Daahir Raayale Kahin ordered his local shadow administration to leave Laascaanood in the following months. This paved the way for the effective occupation of the regional capital by Puntland one year later, in December 2003.

The next time I saw Xassan was in Laascaanood in late January 2004. He told me that he would remain in town for the next few months as a member of the new Puntland administration. I was astonished to hear three weeks later that Xassan had deserted the Puntland camp and come to Hargeysa, where he had been received well. That a high-ranking member of the administration of the 'enemy' had switched sides was celebrated as a victory for Somaliland in the newspapers in Hargeysa. In March I had a chance to meet Xassan in the capital of Somaliland. When I asked him about his change of mind, he said that he had had a disagreement with the Puntland leadership about politics in Sool. In Xassan's view, Puntland just pushed more and more soldiers into the region, which burdened the already low economy of the state (Puntland) and provoked a military confrontation with Somaliland. An escalation of violence in Laascaanood and Sool would only cause mayhem among the local population, which was already in the grip of a severe drought. There was a more personal reason behind Xassan's decision to leave Puntland, however. He had not received his salary for about six months, and neither had most of the members of the administration and the army. Furthermore, he felt inadequate and uninspired under the dictatorial rule of President Cabdullahi Yusuf.

This is admittedly an extreme episode, and is also limited to Laascaanood and the Sool regions. Nevertheless, it reveals some important aspects of the political identity of many inhabitants of the region, including some contradictions. To call oneself 'Dervish' has two meanings in the current political context of the Sool region, both of which can be located in history. Firstly, in the post-colonial years Maxamed Cabdille Xassan was forged as a national hero who fought with his troops for the political unity of all Somalis.[17] To claim to be a Dervish today refers to the vision of building a strong Somali state united once more, against the secessionism of the Isaaq, as many Dhulbahante see it. Secondly, Maxamed Cabdille Xassan's contribution extended further than anti-colonial resistance. As oral and written accounts show, he also fought for power in northern Somalia against traditional rulers and their clans, such as Boqor Cusman, the 'king' of the Majeerteen, the clan currently dominating Puntland politics.

Today the term 'Dervish' gives an identity to the Dhulbahante in Sool who belong neither to Somaliland nor to Puntland. Due to this indefinite

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

position, Sool is one of the least developed regions in northern Somalia. Only one international organisation has a permanent presence there, and not much comes from either Hargeysa or Garowe. Apart from the heroic tales of the Dervish struggle, the cultural heritage left by Maxamed Cabdille Xassan as a poet is a source of pride for the impoverished Dervishes of today.

Dhulbahante today monopolise the Dervish history and use it for political reasons, to distinguish themselves as the 'Somali' Dhulbahante from the 'British' Isaaq. This aspect of political identity, condensed to 'everyday propaganda', can be summarised as follows: while the Isaaq clans have been allies of the British in the colonial past and today call upon them to back their ambitions of separating from Somalia, the Dhulbahante have always remained loyal Somali 'nationalists'. This contradicts the more realistic and locally well-known accounts of the history of numerous individuals and families. A good number of Dhulbahante in fact deserted Maxamed Cabdille Xassan's camp and joined the British, while some Isaaq, especially in the first years of the uprising, joined the Dervishes.

Xassan's story also reveals the feeble nature of the loyalty of many Dhulbahante to either state, which is largely determined by material gain of some sort (e.g. a salary or an aid project) from the Somaliland or the Puntland side. When, however, the conflict between Somaliland and Puntland escalates, most Dhulbahante ally with their Harti brothers. This is clearly demonstrated by the defeat of the Somaliland president in Laascaanood.[18]

Harti politicians try to forge a 'natural' divide between the Isaaq on the one side and the different Harti clans on the other.[19] They therefore have to neglect the cultural and social closeness which developed under British rule between the Dhulbahante and the Isaaq. Members of these two groups studied together in school, and served together as clerks, soldiers or policemen under the British administration. They internalised the 'British system', which was distinct from the 'Italian system' that the Majeerteen and the other former Italian colonial subjects had internalised. On a more local level, intermarriage patterns reveal intensive relations between Dhulbahante and Isaaq clans who have lived for decades as neighbours in the central and northeastern regions of Somaliland. Intermarriage with the Majeerteen is not as strong, as many Dhulbahante admit freely. Dhulbahante elders, asked about what relates their clan to the Isaaq, quite often reply: 'Waa isku degaan, waa isku dhaqan; waanu is dhalnay.' ('We live in the same area, we have the same culture; we gave birth to each other.')

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The desertion of Xassan from Puntland to Somaliland is only partly representative, even if there are similar cases among the Dhulbahante highlighting their political flexibility, such as the former speaker of the Parliament in Hargeysa, who deserted Somaliland and became minister of interior in Puntland. However, what might manifest as extreme shifts at the level of politicians, points to a more basic pattern among ordinary people. Many Dhulbahante are indeed suspicious of the dictatorial ruling style of the old soldier and warlord Cabdullahi Yusuf. They need him to defend them against complete incorporation into Somaliland, but do not want him to take full control of their affairs. Clearly a number of Dhulbahante try to benefit economically from this ambiguity. Some work as politicians or soldiers for the government in Hargeysa, and others for the government in Garowe. The explanation given is that this is merely a pragmatic arrangement, which does not express political beliefs. What matters most is to generate some income in a poor region; politically one does not want to get involved in any trouble. But this obviously does not always work out. When Puntland forces finally entered Laascaanood in a police operation in December 2003, their presence was discreetly criticised by a number of people in town. However, the forces stayed and were massively reinforced by troops in the course of establishing a military administration. In this situation, the uneasiness with domination did not cause the majority of the Dhulbahante to switch sides and fully support Somaliland. On the contrary, the Puntland military administration was gradually transformed into a civil administration, which is currently relatively well established in Laascaanood. The main reason for this is that Puntland represents the vision of a re-united Somalia. This fits well with the political attitude of many Dhulbahante, who take pride in being the ones holding secessionist Somaliland and war-torn Somalia together.

❀ ❀ ❀

Both *de facto* state administrations in northern Somalia exploit a variety of different identity markers, based on the everyday or collectively remembered experience of the people living in the greater region, for their political purposes. Hargeysa stresses the common colonial history, which led to a cultural closeness of the people from the former Protectorate of Somaliland, and the inclusive peace process in the 1990s, to incorporate non-Isaaq into Somaliland. Thereby a political identity – Somalilander – was constructed from above. However, this only works because it relates to certain realities on the ground, where people had similar experiences under British colonial rule, later suffered from and fought in the civil

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

war, and, after a phase of desperation, saw new opportunities for themselves in Somaliland, especially in its prospering capital. Yet, even among the Isaaq, to whom most of the features of the Somaliland political identity apply, not everyone complies with the policies of the government in Hargeysa. It is hardly astonishing that the Harti in Sool (and Sanaag) who in the perspective of Hargeysa belong to Somaliland, without sharing most of these preconditions, are distant from the self-declared Republic. This distance has its deeper roots in a genuine, historically and culturally based reluctance of the Harti clans to become fully integrated. Over the years this has given a comparatively lower political profile to the Harti in Hargeysa, as well as the absence of an effective Somaliland administration and the stagnation of development in the regions they inhabit.

Garowe is eager to attract the Dhulbahante and Warsangeeli as Harti brothers by granting them a clan-balanced share in the government, and by adhering to the vision of a united (but federal) Somalia. With the exception of a few individuals, all Dhulbahante with whom I spoke about the political future of the Somali shared this vision. By sabotaging the full integration of Somaliland in its colonial borders, Puntland politicians hope to prevent its definitive split from Somalia. Nevertheless, historical events as well as social and cultural practices divide the Harti along the former colonial division. Furthermore, two internal political problems of Puntland restrict its political success. Firstly, despite its 'clan-democratic' constitution, Puntland still resembles a military dictatorship, in which not much can be done against the will of Col. Cabdullahi Yusuf and his close family. Secondly, due to severe corruption in the government and the very high cost of the Puntland delegation to the Somali peace conference in Mbagathi/Nairobi, the administration is chronically short of money; when even members of the government, the armed forces and the civil administration get their salaries very irregularly or not at all, not much can be given to the communities in the contested Harti regions to firmly link them to Puntland.[20]

It is clear that the political identities presented in this paper are not 'invented'. They have, to rephrase Schlee (2004: 148), 'a certain reality about them, [*especially*] in the sense of having real effects'. As long as the two administrations in northern Somalia and their followers play their political games without reaching a definitive political conclusion, individuals and groups can manoeuvre. Thus a clash of political identities can be avoided, due to the inconsistencies and contradictions inside the identity clusters which result from and in turn reinforce the cross-cutting ties between them. Peace can be kept in normal life, even if the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

incompatible positions between 'Somalilanders' and the adherents of Puntland/Somalia come to the fore in discussions. However, when either the Somaliland or the Puntland side tries to enforce its policy on the ground, the territorial and mental borders of the political identities close, and serious tensions escalate to the level of military confrontation. This happened on 29 October 2004, when Somaliland and Puntland forces clashed in the countryside near the village of Adhiadeye, about 30 km northeast of Lasscaanood. About 15 soldiers were killed on each side, and several dozen were wounded. Immediately after this event the political climate on the ground worsened, and even people who had previously had a tolerant political position, became extreme in their support for either Somaliland or Puntland. Staying in Hargeysa in October and November 2004, I could observe that the borders of the identity clusters closed; for several nights Isaaq neighbours threw stones at the houses of a Dhulbahante member of the House of Representatives of Somaliland, who had lived with his family in the city for years. In reaction to this the family left Hargeysa for Lasscaanood, which was safe according to genealogical logic. This was not an isolated case. To be a Dhulbahante became an accusation in Hargeysa in those days, regardless of one's personal background.[21]

So far the process of state-formation in northern Somalia is basically limited to the core regions of each of the two political entities in the study area. Further endeavours to set up a fully effective state (be it Somaliland or Puntland/Somalia) recognised under international law may produce a large-scale armed conflict. A way out of this conflict scenario would be to limit the sovereignty of the new Somali government established in Kenya to the south. After peaceful and stable state structures are set up there, broad based negotiations between Somaliland and Somalia could start.[22]

NOTES

1. Despite some minor flaws (Quirin 2004), the best general overview of the history of Somali politics is still Lewis 2002.

2. For a discussion of some of the international and local strategies for conflict settlement, see Höhne 2002; for an update on the recent political developments, see Höhne 2005.

3. The 'state' as a concept for analysis has been discussed for decades. The term refers to many different polities in history, but also in the present. This renders it almost useless as a concept of analysis. Nevertheless, in a certain more positive perspective 'the state is a legal-normative ideal, a modern symbol and institutional expression of the "common good"' (Ferguson 2003: 86). My experience among urban dwellers and semi-sedentarised nomads in northern Somalia is that most people long for a state, as a symbol of unity in a world of states and as provider of opportunities for every individual. Several innovative approaches to Somalia in times of state collapse are insightfully reviewed and discussed by Hagmann 2005.

4. Both of these authors are convincing in their descriptions of political and cultural change in Somalia. However, their argument that this change leads to the establishment of a class-based society does not correspond with my own experience in northern Somalia.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

5. Even if Samatar's and Kapteijns' reading of post-colonial Somali society is rejected by Lewis and others following him, it is common opinion among Somalia researchers that over the last decades patrilinear descent has become *the* decisive factor in (increasingly violent) political conflicts (Lewis 1994: 149–75; Prunier 1995: 4ff.; Schlee 2004: 151–2). This, however, does not mean that there is unity in Somali studies. While the 'transformationsists' (Samatar, Kapteijns and others) regard clanism based on patrilinear descent as corrupted means in a decade long struggle of political elites and, since the 1980s, armed militias to monopolise and exploit resources, the 'traditionalists' (e.g. Lewis, Prunier, Schlee) perceive the use of patrilinear descent in conflict situations as continuity; for them only the resources (international aid, seats in the government and so on instead of water and pasture) and the weapons (automatic rifles instead of spears) have changed. For a brief introduction to this still controversial issue in Somali studies see Höhne 2002: 103ff.

6. To avoid unnecessary confusion, I will introduce some terminological clarifications before delving into the current political situation. The Somali peninsula was divided in colonial times between France, Great Britain, Italy and Ethiopia. In 1960, only the British northwest, known as the Somaliland Protectorate, and the Italian territory, which extended from the northeast to the south, united to form the Somali Republic (Lewis 2002: 40–62). Contrary to geographic logic, the former British Somaliland is called 'North' (*waqooyi*) in Somali, whereas the former Italian part is known as 'South' (*koonfur*), even if it includes the geographical northeast of the Somali peninsula. Therefore, I avoid speaking of north and south Somalia, and use instead the terms northern and southern Somalia for all of the geographic north (which includes Somaliland in the northwest and Puntland in the northeast) and south, respectively.

7. Some smaller clans and minority groups, such as Madiban/Midgan, Tumal, Yibir also live in Somaliland and Puntland. They have not been very prominent in the political developments in northern Somalia in the 1990s and are still hardly represented in one of the two governments in the region. Therefore I do not deal with these groups in this paper.

8. For developments in Somaliland up to the present, see WSP International 2005.

9. Moqdishu is especially known for its instability. As a consequence the newly established Transitional Federal Government (TFG) sits in Nairobi. It does not dare to resume its political business in the capital of Somalia, which is controlled by different factions of warlords, businessmen and religious groups, most of which have some militias at their disposal. Even if most of the warlords have been included in the new government, the situation in the city is still unforeseeable. The leaders of the strict religious community in Moqdishu openly announced their dissatisfaction with the new Somali President, Col. Cabdullahi Yusuf Axmed, who has a reputation as a fighter against militant religious groups such as Al Ittihad. Demonstrations in the city against the new government were organised shortly after his inauguration in October 2004.

10. Despite the fact that Ethiopia today has close ties with Somaliland, it is still perceived by many people there as ambivalent or inimical to Somali affairs in general.

11. This government perspective is reflected in some journalistic and academic accounts of Somaliland, not based on in-depth field research. This has a somewhat contradictory effect: on the one hand, it is necessary to highlight Somaliland as a positive 'African example' with regard to ending the civil war and establishing a well-developed democratic culture in the political centre, with a relatively free press and a political system shifting from clan representation to democratic elections over the last years, without massive external assistance. On the other hand, not to address the remaining severe problems, especially the long-standing conflict between Harti and Isaaq clans within the territory claimed by the government in Hargeysa as Somaliland territory, means to ignore a potential hotspot for civil war in the region.

12. An outline of the event and the role which the highest-ranking traditional authorities of the Dhulbahante played in it can be found in Höhne 2006.

13. For the recent history of and developments in Puntland, see Farah 2001.

14. The Majeerteen are numerically the biggest of the Harti clans. Also according to genealogy, Maxamed 'Majeerteen' is the eldest son of Harti.

15. The situation is in principle similar in eastern Sanaag, where mostly Warsangeeli live, who also belong to the Harti clan-federation. Nevertheless, a careful comparison between the Dhulbahante and the Warsangeeli positions would be necessary to analyse similarities and differences in their political positions, which is not feasible here.

16. This is very much a personal account. I only cross-checked it with some other people in Lasscaanood. It may be that the course of events described here is very biased and that people in Hargeysa would present a different version of what has happened. Nevertheless I use this narrative

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

because it was an important topic among many Dhulbahante in the region and reflects some aspects of their political position.

17. For example in the novel *Aqoondarro waa u nacab jacayl* (Ignorance is the enemy of love), the first major literary publication in the Somali language, the hero of the story who is a Dervish explains: 'The Dervishes are an organization which was created for the Somali people and their country, and their aim is to protect the independence of Somalis and their Muslim faith' (Cawl, Faarax M. J. 1984 [1974]: 20).

18. No matter how biased the narrative above is, the fact that Dahir Rayaale Kahin was attacked and had to retreat in a rush is not contested.

19. This difference goes even further than the 'natural' distinctions of which Lewis talks in his most recent publication (2004: 491), because it sets out to distinguish people not only by 'blood' but by culture and history.

20. On 10 October 2004 Cabdullahi Yusuf was elected President of Somalia. This led to a change in Puntland politics. In early January 2005 General Cadde Muuse won the presidential elections in Puntland. Whether this will lead to a new approach towards the Puntland–Somaliland conflict and the corruption problems inside Puntland remains to be seen.

21. I have no information on whether similar escalations happened on the Puntland side.

22. This position is sometimes expressed in discussions on the local level as a possible way out of the political dilemma. In Somali studies Bryden 2004 most eloquently brings it forward.

REFERENCES

Africa Watch. 1990. *Somalia: a government at war with its own people: testimonies about killings and the conflict in the North*. New York: Africa Watch.

Appadurai, A. 1998. 'Dead certainty: ethnic violence in the era of globalization', *Public Culture* 10, 2: 225–47.

Battera, F. 1999. *Remarks on the 1998 charter of Puntland state of Somalia*. Nairobi: United Nations Development Office for Somalia, Working Paper No. 1.

Bryden, M. 2004. 'Somalia and Somaliland: envisioning a dialogue on the question of Somali unity', *African Security Review* 13, 2: 23–33.

Burton, R. 1987 [1856]. *First Footsteps in East Africa, or, an exploration of Harar*. New York: Dover.

Cawl, Faarax M. J. 1984 [1974]. *Ignorance Is the Enemy of Love* (*Aqoondarro waa u nacab jacayl*). trans. B. W. Andrzejewski. London: Zed.

Compagnon, D. 1990. 'The Somali opposition fronts: some comments and questions', *Horn of Africa* 13, 1&2: 29–54.

Doornbos, M. 2000. 'When is a state a state? Exploring Puntland', in P. Konings, ed. *Trajectoires de liberation en Afrique contemporaire*. Paris: Karthala, 125–39.

Farah, A. Y. 2001. 'Somalia: modern history and the end of the 1990s', in WSP International, *Rebuilding Somalia: issues and possibilities for Puntland*. London: HAAN, 7–30.

Ferguson, Y. H. 2003. 'The state concept and a world of polities under perpetual siege', in R. B. Ferguson, ed. *The State, Identity and Violence: political disintegration in the post cold war period*. London: Routledge, 83–95.

Hagmann, T. 2005. 'From state collapse to duty-free shop: Somalia's path to modernity' (review article), *African Affairs* 104, 416: 525–35.

Hashi, A. A. 1998. *Essential Somali English Dictionary*. Addis Abeba: Fiqi Educational Materials.

Hess, R. L. 1968. 'The Poor Man of God – Muhammad Abdullah Hassan', in N. R. Bennett, ed. *Leadership in Eastern Africa: six political biographies*. Boston, MA: Boston University Press, 63–108.

Höhne, M. V. 2002. *Somalia zwischen Krieg und Frieden: Strategien der friedlichen Konfliktaustragung auf internationaler und lokaler Ebene*. Hamburg: Institut für Afrikakunde.

Höhne, M. V. 2005. 'Somalia – Ein Neubeginn? Entwicklungen und Perspektiven unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Verhältnisse in Nord-Somalia', in W. Feichtinger & G. Hainzl, eds. *Krisenherd Nordostafrika: Internationale oder afrikanische Verantwortung?* Baden-Baden: Nomos, 41–63.

Höhne, M. V. 2006. *Traditional Authorities in Northern Somalia: transformation of positions and powers*. Halle/S.: Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Working Paper (forthcoming).

Human Rights Watch. 1995. *Somalia Faces the Future: human rights in a divided society*. http://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/somalia/ [23.02.2006].

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Kapteijns, L. 1994. 'Women and the crisis of communal identity: the cultural construction of gender in Somali history', in Ahmed I. Samatar, ed. *The Somali Challenge: from catastrophe to renewal*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 211–32.
Kapteijns, L. 1995. 'Gender relations and the transformation of the northern Somali pastoral tradition', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, 2: 241–59.
Lewis, I. M. 1961. *A Pastoral Democracy: a study of pastoralism and politics among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*. London: Oxford University Press.
Lewis, I. M. 1994. *Blood and Bone: the call for kinship in Somali society*. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.
Lewis, I. M. 2002. *A Modern History of the Somali*. Oxford: James Currey.
Lewis, I. M. 2004. 'Visible and invisible differences: the Somali paradox', *Africa* 74, 4: 489–515.
Malkki, L. H. 1995. *Purity and Exile: violence, memory, and national cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Mamdani, M. 2001. *When Victims Become Killers: colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda*. Kampala: Fountain Press.
Prunier, G. 1995. *Somalia: civil war, intervention and withdrawal 1990–1995*. www.asylumlaw.org/docs/somalia/country_conditions/Prunier.pdf [30.01.2006].
Quirin, J. 2004. 'Clan and State' (review of I. M. Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*), *Journal of African History* 45, 1: 132–4.
Samatar, Abdi I. 1989. *The State and Rural Transformation in Northern Somalia 1884–1986*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
Samatar, Abdi I. 1992. 'Destruction of state and society in Somalia: beyond the tribal convention', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, 4: 625–41.
Schlee, G. 2004. 'Taking sides and constructing identities: reflections on conflict theory', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 10, 1: 135–56.
Sheikh-'Abdi, 'Abdi. 1993: *Divine Madness: Mohammed 'Abdulle Hassan (1856–1920)*. London: Zed.
Somaliland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2002. *The Case of Somaliland's International Recognition as a State* (Briefing Paper). Hargeisa: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
WSP International. 2005: *Rebuilding Somaliland: issues and possibilities*. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06001820 Published online by Cambridge University Press