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**In Search of a State - Creating a Nation:  
The Role of the Diaspora in Somaliland's Pursuit of Recognised  
Statehood**

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Masters Dissertation

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**Abstract**

Somaliland, the north west region of what was once the Somali Republic and formerly British colonised territory, declared its independence in May 1991, but has of yet failed to obtain recognition by any foreign government or international governmental organisation. This dissertation sets out to examine the role of the Somali diaspora, with particular reference to the Somaliland diaspora in Britain, in the homeland's nation-state formation and ongoing quest for internationally recognized statehood. The triadic relationship between politically active Somalilanders in the diaspora, political actors in Britain and government officials in Somaliland will be explored and discussed. The increased separation between Somalia and Somaliland has led to a parallel split in the Somali diaspora; leaving one scattered Somali population with their roots in the south and a Somaliland population with a unifying political project - the quest for international recognition. One of the central themes of my paper is the active construction and revaluation of national identities which are, in this case, reinforced by the process of seeking state recognition internationally. The actions of the Somaliland government are approached through the thematic framework of 'deterritorialised nation-state building' as it attempts to maintain and further cultivate the strong links between diaspora and homeland.

## Table of Contents

<b>List of abbreviations and glossary</b>	iv
<b>Preface</b>	v
<b>1. Introduction</b>	1
methodology	
<b>2. A brief political history</b>	4
2.1 The colonial legacy - dividing the Somali territory	
2.2 Decolonialisation and formation of the Somali Republic	4
2.3 Somaliland's declaration of independence	
7	
<b>3. The Somali diaspora</b>	8
3.1 Locating Somalis in Britain	
3.2 Politics for afar - 'Somali style'	
10	
<b>4. Redefining boundaries - reconstructing identities</b>	
11	
4.1 The myth of Somali homogeneity	
4.2 Myth and counter-myth	
12	
4.3 From Somali to Somalilander: renegotiating identities in the diaspora	14
<b>5. Somaliland's quest for independence: a transnational project</b>	16
5.1 The missing link between 'host' and 'home'	
5.2 The diaspora goes 'transnational'	
22	
<b>6. Deterritorialised nation-state building</b>	23
<b>7. Somaliland: eleven years on...</b>	25
<b>8. Conclusion</b>	28
<b>Bibliography</b>	30
<b>Appendix A - Maps</b>	33
<b>Appendix B - Introduction to Somali clan structure</b>	35
<b>Appendix C - List of relevant persons and organisations</b>	37

## List of Abbreviations and glossary

<i>Guurti</i>	Committee of elders
<i>Isaaq</i>	A Somali clan family
<i>Shir</i>	Congress of elders
<b>IGAD</b>	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
	International Monetary Fund
<b>IMF</b>	Organisation of African Unity
<b>OAU</b>	Somali National Movement
<b>SNM</b>	Transitional National Government
<b>TNG</b>	

## Preface

Over many years in academia I have been engaged with socio-political issues of the Horn of Africa in general, and Somalia/Somaliland in particular, an interest that has already led to numerous term papers and an undergraduate thesis. This MA dissertation, however, focuses on the role of the Somaliland diaspora, with specific reference to the Somaliland population living in Britain, in their homeland's quest for recognised independence. This political pursuit is coupled with nation building and reevaluation of primary identities as the myth of Somali homogeneity has been undermined and increasingly replaced by an emphasis on a distinct Somaliland identity. Somaliland's nation-state formation and quest for internationally recognised statehood must be understood as a political project where the diasporic population play an important role and this dissertation will trace and attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of the Somaliland diaspora as they draw on both formal and informal sets of relations to impact this international political process. The discussion explores the Somaliland government's various activities in response to the efforts of the diaspora and will seek to 'map out' the triadic relationship that exists between politically active Somalilanders in the diaspora, political actors in Britain and government officials in Somaliland.

By turning my focus to the Somaliland diaspora I was able to engage theoretically with issues of 'transnationalism' and 'deterritorialised nation-state building', but more importantly it allowed me to seek out 'a field' closer to home and acquire a taste for the practical side of anthropology. It is my hope that this experience will act as a foundation for future, more extensive research in related areas.

I trace my fascination with this part of the world back to my friendship with Awill Dualeh, his family and friends, all whom I wish to send a special thanks for the countless evenings of lessons in Somali history and politics, generously accompanied with lamb curry and sweet tea. My interest was further enhanced by Pr. Fred Gamst, whose unforgettable lectures drew on his extensive field work in the Horn of Africa, and who patiently took his time to debate my queries as an undergraduate student in social anthropology at University of Massachusetts, Boston.

With regards to this dissertation, I am extremely grateful to a number of Somalilanders living in Britain, who generously shared their experiences and thoughtful opinions with me. Also, I would like to thank the large and diverse group of people who assisted me one way or another in my research; meeting up for a chat, answering an endless string of questions - you were all helpful with regards to my dissertation!

Without the encouragement from my supervisor, Dr. Ralph Grillo, this fieldwork would not have been done. I thank him for his guidance, insights and feedback throughout this project. I would like to give the warmest thanks to my course tutors and fellow classmates who all contributed to the enjoyment of this year. Thanks Paula, Jamie, Anna and Oliver - 'Here is to anthropology and life-long friendships'. Älskade mor och far, ni är min trygga bas, mitt 'hemma', som ger mig frihet och styrka att fullfölja mina drömmar. Finally, I thank my Tadzio, whose companionship and intellectual stimuli I could not survive without, for selflessly supporting my dream of going to Somaliland this fall...

## 1. Introduction

Somaliland<sup>1</sup>, the north west region of what was once the Somali Republic and formerly British colonised territory, declared its independence in May 1991. This self-declared state has of yet failed to obtain recognition<sup>2</sup> by any foreign government or international governmental organisation. However, Somaliland remains determined to continue lobbying for its sovereignty and proceed as an independent state. This dissertation will take a closer look at this process and evaluate the role of the diaspora, with particular reference to the Somaliland diaspora in Britain, in Somaliland's ongoing quest for internationally recognized statehood. But why 'Somaliland', and why the 'Somaliland diaspora'? Having encountered this question on numerous occasions, a short paragraph justifying this ethnographic study of what may indeed sound like a far-off topic, seems to be in order. In the late nineteenth century, the Horn of Africa was regarded as a significant strategic location by all major colonial powers: the English, the French, the Italians, they all set up shop there, and ever since, international interest for this region have waxed and waned. In the last eleven years, the world has witnessed the complete collapse of the Somali Republic, the disintegration of Somali society mainly along clan lines, and its descent into civil war - causing famine and mass flight. The disastrous US-led "humanitarian intervention" in 1992 and the killing of American soldiers in Mogadishu made Somalia famous for all the wrong reasons before it dropped off the western radar screens.

Today, the region appears to be back on the geo-political agenda, its location once again of strategic importance. In a 'post-September 11th' global political climate there is a growing concern with 'failed states', 'uncontrolled territory' threatening the current world order of nation-states. This is especially pertinent with regards to Somalia, where inaccessible areas are said to possibly harbour internationally networked terrorist organizations (International Crisis group 2002). Somaliland, on the other hand, has achieved internal stability and firm control over much

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<sup>1</sup> Deciding on the appropriate terminology to use in reference to the political entities shifting through time and space in the Somali-inhabited region of the Horn of Africa has not been easy but necessary. I will in this dissertation use the terms *Somaliland* and *Somalilander* for the self-declared independent region in the northwest, and people originating from this area and *Somalia* or *Southern Somali* when referring to the south and east (including Puntland which has expressed an interest in greater autonomy) and its populations, both during Italian colonialisation and after 1991. I have chosen to use the official name, *Somali Republic* when referring to the Somali state between 1960 and 1991 and finally, I will use the term *Somalia/Somaliland* and *Somali* when I am engaged in a more general discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Here 'recognition' refers to "a statement by an international legal person as to the status in international law of another real or alleged international legal person" (Shaw, as cited in Anonymous 2002: 248).

of its self-declared territory, and is therefore seen as a potential ally in case of further American military actions in the 'war against terror'.

However: the fact that the global powers have again cast an eye on the region is not all that is at issue here. More than a decade of political turmoil and violent conflict have forced a large number of Somalis to seek refuge abroad, earning Somalia a place among the ten major refugee countries of origin in the world (UNHCR 1998). Many fled across the border into neighbouring countries whilst some sought asylum further afield in the Middle East, Western Europe and North America, creating a large diaspora with strong political, economic and socio-cultural ties to the homeland, maintained over time and geographical space. The breakdown of the central state, civil war, and Somaliland's declaration of independence have led to a rapidly growing gap between the northwest and the south that has had an effect on how the Somali population abroad continues to engage in homeland affairs. The separation of the two regions has led to a parallel split in the Somali diaspora; leaving one scattered Somali population with their roots in the south and a Somaliland population with a unifying political project - the quest for an internationally recognised homeland.

Current concerns with 'globalisation' have brought into prominence social processes that increasingly transcend the boundaries of nation states and in my dissertation I will focus on one of these in particular: the attempt by Somaliland to construct a state and create a nation while faced with the prospect of having a large segment of the population living abroad. A growing interest in transnational processes within the social sciences more generally, and in anthropology more specifically, has led to an explosion of scholarly theorising as well as an increased collection of ethnographies. I will for the purpose of my discussion draw on the theoretical work by Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Christina Szanton Blanc, as my findings closely correspond to their work on 'deterritorialised nation-state building'. Firmly grounded in their ethnographic material from the Caribbean and the Philippines they analyse exactly *how* the political leadership attempts to maintain the links with the diaspora, wanting them to remain committed and loyal to the homeland. Their case studies illustrate the use of symbols, language, 'diaspora friendly' policies and political rituals similar to what I found with regards to the interactions between the Somaliland authorities and the diaspora. In order to inform my

discussion on ‘diaspora - homeland’ links and relations I consulted the theoretical work on transnationalism by Nadjie Al-Ali, Khalid Koser and Richard Black, who are particularly interested in refugees as transnational actors. The aim of my thesis is to contribute to this broader inquiry by evaluating the role of Somali refugees as transnational communities in international political processes, such as, in this case, a territory’s quest for state recognition, and by taking a closer look at the intimate links between the Somaliland diaspora, Somaliland political leadership and the host country.

I will begin by presenting a brief political history of the region, leading up to the declaration of independence, in order to provide background to the discussion that follows. Next, in chapter three, I set out to localise the Somali diaspora and give an outline of its political organisational structures with particular reference to Somalis in Britain. In chapter four, the focus is on national identity, which, as I will argue, has transformed in response to political processes in Somalia/Somaliland and the diaspora. Proceeding from that discussion I will examine the impact of the Somaliland diaspora, a crucial actor in the ‘Somaliland political project’, on state formation, international lobbying attempts for recognition and nation/identity building and ‘map out’ the triadic relationship that exists between politically active Somalilanders in the diaspora, political actors in Britain and government officials in Somaliland. In chapter six, I will draw on the theoretical concepts of ‘deterritorialised nation-state building’ and ‘transnationalism’ to inform my ethnographic material on the web of relations between the Somaliland diaspora and the Somaliland political leadership, as well as diaspora homeland relations more broadly. Finally I will conclude by giving a short update on international responses to Somaliland’s pursuit for recognition and current Somaliland affairs.

Britain, due mainly to its historical relationship to Somaliland as the former colonial power, has become an important host country for Somali asylum seekers and immigrants. The close links between the Somaliland diaspora in Britain and the homeland creates an excellent opportunity for field work which has taken me on several visits to Cardiff and London’s East End. At the core of this ethnographic study lies a series of in-depth interviews and informal chats over sweetened tea with a number of politically active Somalilanders living in the UK. My thesis also benefited greatly from talks with a number of experienced development workers and foreign

office personnel, all with extensive knowledge from working in, and writing about, Somalia/Somaliland, or working with issues concerning Somali migrants in the UK<sup>3</sup>. In addition to the academic literature, I have also drawn on information collected from the internet where much of the diaspora coordination and ‘awareness-raising’ is taking place and a thorough search of related web-sites and chat rooms provided me with valuable insights into the relationship between Somalilanders living abroad and their homeland.

## **2. A brief political history**

### **2.1 The colonial legacy - dividing the Somali territory**

The Red Sea region has long been recognised as a strategically significant area, and in the latter half of the nineteenth century became a site of imperial power struggles mainly between Britain, France, Italy and the regional hegemon, Ethiopia. The British occupation of Aden in Yemen, serving as an essential port en route to India, had created a demand for Somali meat products. In order to secure a steady food supply, Britain entered into a series of agreements with the leadership of various Somali clans that eventually led to the establishment of the British Somaliland Protectorate in 1886. The French arrived in the Horn of Africa at about the same time and with a similar agenda, keen on finding a port of their own on their way to Madagascar and Indochina and soon gained full control of the *Côte Française des Somaliens*, today Djibouti. The Italians were soon to follow and came to claim the Somali Indian Ocean coast and their *Somalia Italiana* was formally established in 1893. Eager to expand his own territory, Emperor Menilek of Ethiopia entered the race, challenged the European colonial outposts, and was able to lay claims to a large part of Somali inhabited land, Ogaden and Haud. The British conquests in East Africa finished off the colonial partitioning of the Horn which brought the Somali people under five different colonial regimes (Lewis 1965, Laitin and Samatar 1987, Lyons and Samatar 1995, Bradbury 1997, Brons 2001).

### **2.2 Decolonialisation and formation of the Somali Republic**

The British protectorate of Somaliland gained its independence on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1960, followed only days later by the Italian-administered UN Trusteeship Territory of Somalia. Their

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<sup>3</sup> The interviewees’ names when cited in the text are indicated in italics and consult appendix C for a detailed list of

separate existence did not last long as the two territories united on July the 1<sup>st</sup> to form the Somali Republic (Bradbury 1997). As Somaliland had been preparing itself for independence from Britain, there was strong support among the political elite for unification with the south. Sceptical voices were soon silenced by the nationalists' arguments, seeing the unification between former British Somaliland and Italian Somalia as the first step towards the eventual creation of a 'Greater Somalia', a state that would unite the entire Somali population divided so arbitrarily by the foreign colonial powers (Laitin and Samatar 1987). Regardless of how the merger in 1960 was initially perceived by different political actors and different segments of society, most soon realized that Somaliland had entered into the union at a disadvantage. The discontent in the northwest grew in strength and when a referendum was held one year later the population of Somaliland voted in opposition to the newly written constitution of the Somali Republic (out of 100,000 cast votes in Somaliland, 60% voted 'no') but a southern majority carried the vote and endorsed the constitution (SCPD 1999, Laitin and Samatar 1987).

The first nine years of the republic were administratively difficult as the new state strove for economic, judicial and linguistic integration of an area afflicted by very diverse colonial legacies. As the Mogadishu-based government failed to bring about the developments expected to follow independence and unification, dissatisfaction was soon on the rise, and not exclusively in the northwest. In 1969, General Siyad Barre came to power in a military coup, a transition of power initially greeted with excitement. A Supreme Revolutionary Council was established and the new regime adopted 'scientific socialism' as its state ideology and a number of policies were implemented to outlaw clan identity and foster in its place a pan-Somali identity (Lyons and Samatar 1995). Despite Siyad Barre's official aim of undermining the clan structure of Somali society, he relied on classic divide-and-rule tactics, privileging one clan over another and by doing so politicising the very identities he tried to downplay. The nationalist vision of uniting all Somali people under one flag motivated the regime in 1977 to send troops into Ethiopia hoping to seize control over the almost exclusively Somali-inhabited territory of Ogaden. The Horn of Africa, as it had been caught in the geopolitical struggles of the Cold War, was well supplied with American and Soviet arms, and the two-year conflict had disastrous human and environmental consequences. An estimated 1.5 million Ethiopian Somali and Oromo were forced to flee and

seek refuge across the border, and as a result the Somali Republic became host to the largest refugee population in Africa (Bradbury 1999). The large influx of refugees, at one point making up almost half of the total population, created widespread tensions further aggravated by discriminatory government policies, favouring one clan over the other with targeted relief assistance (Simons 1995, Bradbury 1999, SCPD 1999). Ethiopia's consequent defeat of the Somali Republic undermined Siyad Barre's authority and also challenged the fundamental aim of the expansionist state: to unify all Somali people into one nation.

As the economic and political crisis in the country continued, internal opposition in the form of armed insurgencies began to mount and in the following decade Barre had to increasingly rely on oppressive tactics and a sophisticated military apparatus to stay in power (Bradbury 1999). In the early 1980s, frustration in the Northwest had reached a boiling point, especially for the discriminated *Isaaq*-clan family, and collaboration with *Isaaq* communities in the Gulf and Britain led to the establishment of a rebel group, the Somali National Movement (SNM), in the diaspora (see appendices A and B). Soon the SNM had set up bases in Ethiopia from which hit-and-run attacks on government targets in the north were orchestrated, and in response the government stepped up its campaign of repression. In 1988, Ethiopia and the Somali Republic signed a peace accord and Ethiopia agreed to clamp down on the clandestine militia operating from within its borders, motivating the SNM to launch its biggest offensive yet. Barre's troops countered with inhumane reprisal: aerial bomb raids demolished cities such as Hargeisa, Burco and Berbera, while death squads systematically killed civilians, collectively punishing the entire *Isaaq*-clan family for the resistance put up by the northern-based rebel group.

Siyad Barre's 'declaration of war' on his own people led to an exodus of refugees seeking safety in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen as well as further afield in the Gulf, Western Europe and North America. However, instead of putting an end to the SNM insurgency, the brutality of the government's forces united the *Isaaq*-clan behind the militia in their war against the dictatorial administration (Bradbury 1999, SCPD 1999). In the years to come several other armed factions joined the SNM in their campaign against Barre's regime, and by January 1991, the central government was under attack on several fronts. Two months of fierce fighting in the streets of Mogadishu were the final blow and Siyad Barre was forced to leave his post as head of

state and flee to a life in exile. The resulting power vacuum had predictable consequences: as the victorious rebel factions turned on each other, Somalia descended into protracted civil war<sup>4</sup>, forcing yet again another wave of Somalis to leave their homes behind and seek refuge elsewhere.

### 2.3 Somaliland's declaration of independence

With the central government in Mogadishu defeated, factional differences within the resistance movement were exposed. In the north, tensions were on the rise as some clans had fought against the SNM on the side of the Barre regime. However, instead of plunging into another period of armed conflict, the northwest was able to resort to the traditional assembly of clan elders, the so-called *Guurti*,<sup>5</sup> which had been the main political authority in pre-state Somalia to seek solutions to the conflict (Brons 2001). As the maintenance of peace and stability had been the primary task of the *guurti* in the past, particularly important in the pastoral north, the elders once again became the main initiators of a number of peace and reconciliation conferences - known as *shir* - in the early 1990s. The traditional *shir* is structured to allow enough time for deliberations and sufficient trust to be built between the negotiating partners, requiring endurance and patience, which is crucial in a delicate peace and reconciliation process set on tackling deep-seated grievances. In the months directly following the state collapse, a number of *shir* were held in order to deal with entrenched resentments and political differences between the *Isaaq* sub-clans on the side of the SNM and *Warsangeli* and *Dulbahante* (both *Darood/Harti*) and *Gadabuursi* and *Issa* (both *Dir*) on the other side (Brons 2001). As fighting between clan-based militias in the south continued, there had also come a time to make some difficult decisions about this region's political future. The official position of the SNM throughout the civil war, and at the time of Barre's defeat, was to maintain the territorial integrity of the Somali Republic but to gain a certain degree of regional autonomy. However, in light of the increased violence in the south and southern clan militias' tendencies of ignoring the voices of the northwest, the sacredness of the union was being put to a serious challenge.

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<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive understanding of the civil war, the disintegration of the state and breakdown of civil order in the Somali Democratic Republic, see, for example, Simon, A (1995), Lyons, T & A. Samatar (1995), Brons, M (2001).

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed account of Somaliland's early peace and reconciliation process see Farah, A. Y. & I.M. Lewis (1993).

A month after the fall of Barre, the northwest *guurti* gathered in Burco to attend what has now come to be called "the grand *shir*". This *shir* brought together a large number of intellectuals, business people, artists, and included delegations from the diaspora, there to offer advise and share opinions with the *guurti*, which had to decide on the political future of the northwest (SCPD 1999). The *shir* negotiations in Burco took four months, after which the decision to revoke the Single Act of Union was made and the declaration of an independent Republic of Somaliland was announced on May 18<sup>th</sup> (Bradbury 1999). Furthermore, the SNM was instituted as the governing body for a two-year transitional ruling period and crucial accommodations were made with the non-*Isaaq* clans in Somaliland which eased, at least temporarily, the tensions between various clans (SCPD 1999). In 1992, fighting broke out again between different sub-clans in disputes over economic and natural resources, and as the insecurity spread, the hard-earned stability and peace enjoyed in Somaliland came under serious threat. The conflict lead to a second *shir*, this time to be hosted in the town of Borama, and allowed the *guurti* to not only address clan reconciliation and sustainable peace-building, but to debate further state building. At Borama, after months of intense debates, the *guurti* elected Mohamed Ibrahim Egal as the country's first civilian president.

Hopefully it has become clear from this chapter that the independent path Somaliland decided to embark upon in 1991 has not been without challenges and setbacks, but in contrast to the continuously unstable and warring Somalia, Somaliland has managed to move beyond armed conflict, embarking on modest political and economic development. Despite increasing international acknowledgement of its achievements, Somaliland has yet to be recognised as a separate state, but remains adamant in its quest toward *de jure* statehood.

### **3. The Somali diaspora**

#### **3.1 Locating Somalis in Britain**

More than a decade of political turmoil and violent conflict have forced a large number of Somalis to seek refuge abroad<sup>6</sup>, many fleeing across the border into neighbouring countries

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<sup>6</sup> The United Nations estimate that more than one million Somalis have been forced to flee the country since 1991 and that the difficult conditions have led to an unknown number of internally displaced persons (Berns McGown 1999:14, UNHCR 1998).

whilst some sought asylum in the Middle East, Western Europe and North America, forming large Somali communities in cities such as London, Cardiff and Toronto. In the past, Somali migration was mainly motivated by educational and professional ambitions; Somali seamen, who were employed on British ships in the late nineteenth century, settled in London's East End, Cardiff and Liverpool, and were later joined by their families, female domestic workers, university students and a few political exiles from the Siyad Barre dictatorship (Berns McGown 1999, Farah 2000). However, the majority of Somalis residing abroad today left their homes under dramatic circumstances, in flight from state collapse, civil war and famine, creating a sudden influx of large numbers of refugees joining the previously small and relatively disjointed Somali population in the diaspora. This enormous inflow of Somalis to the West naturally led to a qualitative change in the composition of the diaspora: it became younger, more educated, and increasingly active in homeland affairs.

Britain in particular serves as an important host country for Somali asylum seekers, mainly due to its historical relationship to Somaliland as the former colonial power. This migration pattern is reinforced as most migrants follow in the footsteps of family and clan members, ending up in long-standing Somali communities in the UK. According to Home office and Refugee Council statistics, Somali refugees began to arrive in significant numbers in the 1988-1989 period, as the Barre government's persecution of the *Isaaq* clan-family in Somaliland reached its height. One of the most well established and active Somali communities is to be found in Cardiff, Wales where the community dates back to the 1870s, making it an attractive location for Somali refugees when they arrived in the UK. More recently, as the Somali population grew exponentially in the 1990s, London's East End and Tower Hamlets became the home of Britain's largest Somali population, growing from a few hundred to tens of thousands in just a couple of years, current figures estimating 60,000 Somalis in greater London (Griffiths 1997, Berns McGown 1999). The fall of Siyad Barre, consequent state collapse and continued violence led to another wave of Somali asylum claims to Britain in the early 1990s, this time mainly Somalis originally from the south, who settled in the *Isaaq*-dominated communities but also in north and west London (Berns McGown 1999, Griffiths 2000).

### **3.2 Politics from afar - ‘Somali style’**

Most organisations established by migrants in the diaspora serve a dual purpose, tending both to the needs of the migrant community in the host country as well as addressing interests of the homeland (Owusu 2000). This is also true with regards to Somalis in Britain who have formed a number of ethnic and national associations, set on fulfilling a variety of economic, cultural and political functions related to the welfare of the Somali community here and in addition facilitating the contact between the communities in the diaspora and the homeland. Naturally, the Somali diaspora can not be considered a coherent body, neither unified in its attitudes in regards to homeland affairs nor in its relations to the host country. The severe and lengthy conflict have created a large and heterogeneous diaspora, and as one applies this collectivising concept one must remember that “class, gender, generation, region of origin, period of migration, urban or rural origin and citizenship status all powerfully mediate the social construction of place, home, membership, community and identity” in the diaspora (Smith 2002: xii). As the Somali diaspora is not monolithic in structure, its character and the role that it plays in relation to homeland affairs vary over time, responding to changing political, economic and social conditions in both the home and host country. Increased migration changes the composition of migrant communities, leads to diversification, new patterns of settlement and organisation in the diaspora (Esman 1986).

It is this heterogeneous character David Griffiths refers to in his attempt to compare the ways in which Somalis in Britain organise themselves with those of Kurdish migrants (2000). He argues that the Somali migrant population, riddled with internal divisions and with little experience of independent participation in the public sphere after living through over twenty years of dictatorship, has achieved only limited organisational successes. The Kurdish population, however, has been able to mobilise high numbers of people into formal organisational structures, an achievement Griffiths attributes to the presence of the unifying project of gaining international backing for an independent Kurdistan. In comparison, the fractured political landscape caused by civil war in Somalia and the clan and regional tensions that have been transferred into the Somali communities abroad have made political work more difficult in the diaspora. This leads Griffiths to conclude that “the absence of a coherent political project stands out as the defining feature for the Somalis in east London” (2000:294). However, his assumption

only holds if one continues to regard the Somali population as a single unit of analysis. If one instead locates the discussion about this diasporic population within the political context of the homeland and takes into account the self-declared independence of the northwest, which has reinforced the rapidly growing political, economic and social gaps between Somaliland and Somalia, the picture looks different: the increased separation of the two regions has naturally influenced the way in which the diaspora continues to relate to the homeland/s, and can therefore not be ignored. If we accept this argument and regard the 'Somali diaspora' rather as being in fact two diasporas, and focus exclusively on the Somaliland population abroad then there *is* a unifying political project - the quest for a internationally recognised homeland.

The Somali diaspora, and consequently the organisations that have been founded by Somalis abroad, has always been politicised, reflecting the current situation in the homeland (Griffiths 2000). Accordingly, the 'Somali diaspora' is divided along lines that reflect the difference between a south and east that continue to be riven by political instability and factionalism and the northwest region of Somaliland, which has enjoyed relative peace and stability in its pursuit of separate statehood. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, radicalised clan politics in the diaspora led to biased financial support being remitted back to Somaliland: different factions, determined to boost "their" clan militia, sent home funds trying to secure economic and political hegemony (SCPD 1999). This strategy has now, among Somalilanders living abroad, been replaced with a more unified effort to develop the entire country regardless of clan affiliation and to support Somaliland in its search for international recognition. Since the declaration of independence Somaliland has striven determinedly to receive international recognition and rebuild itself from the devastating civil war and today the diaspora, trying to aid in this process, plays a significant role in Somaliland affairs, both economically and politically.

#### **4. Redefining boundaries - reconstructing identities**

##### **4.1 The myth of Somali homogeneity**

The process of state building in Somaliland has fostered the similarly important process of constructing (new) identities for the people of this region as 'Somalilander', an identity that is distinct from 'Somali'. This process takes place against the backdrop of twenty years of pan-

Somali nationalism, during which Somalia was portrayed as a largely homogeneous society, a population speaking one language, sharing a single religion and culture. This homogeneity was constructed as part of a political project, influenced by the political and numerical dominance of pastoral groups, and lies at the core of Somali national identity (Brons 2001: 94). The idea of the ‘Somali nation-state’ emerged through the anti-colonial struggles and when British Somaliland and Italian Somalia finally both gained their independence in 1960, the Somali people shared a national consciousness which was demonstrated through the subsequent Single Act of Union (Laitin and Samatar 1987). When the Republic of Somalia was created, and in the two following decades, an active attempt was made, both by segments of Somali society and by scholars, to portray the Somali population as homogenous. As the discourse of Somali homogeneity continued to be the dominant mantra, regional and political divisions, were repeatedly downplayed or even ignored. The Somali Republic was formed and maintained based on the state ideology of ‘Greater Somalia’, a state that would unite the entire Somali population divided by colonialism. Despite mounting disillusionment with the union, the country was able to hold together and even wage wars with Kenya and Ethiopia, due to an effective process of nation-building resulting in rampant Somali nationalism. This then led to the Somali state being characterised, by what I have come to call the ‘myth of Somali homogeneity’<sup>7</sup>, a portrayal of a uniform Somali society with a negligible minority population, contrasted to the fragmented ethnic and cultural landscape of the African continent (Simons 1995:3).

#### **4.2 Myth and counter-myth**

The complete dissolution of the Republic of Somalia posed a serious challenge to the previously dominant nationalist rhetoric and led to a collective questioning of the "imagined pan-Somali community" by Somalis and Somaliists alike. The breakdown of the authoritarian central state and the political vacuum created have opened the door for a process “of coming to terms with the past” and clearing the necessary space to critically reconsider issues of “Somali origin, history and identity” (Brons 2001: 95). Rima Berns McGown, as one of many scholars following this recent line of inquiry, notes:

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<sup>7</sup> An emphasis on Somali homogeneity runs through the literature, see among many others, Touval (1963), Laitin and Samatar (1987), Adam (1995), and Hirsch and Oakley (1995). After the breakdown of the Somali central state the homogeneous character of the Somali population has been questioned by Somali and Somaliists alike, see e.g. Adam (1994), Bern McGown (1999), Brons (2001).

Somalis are not as homogenous a people as they have frequently been depicted, and there are significant differences in culture and even language between the northern pastoralists and the southerners, with their more mixed economy, [and] this has perhaps become clearer since Somalia's civil breakdown, given that the disintegration of established order has provided the impetus and opportunity for re-creation of some of Somalia's cultural myths (1999:21).

In Somaliland, the 'myth of Somali homogeneity' is not only being questioned but also actively dismantled as a process of building a counter-myth is well under way. The breakdown of the Somali Republic, and the subsequent decline of the cohesive Somali identity has created space for a Somaliland identity, constructed through a process of state formation set in the context of a transnational political project. I do not claim the Somaliland identity to be a recent 'out-of-nothing' creation - a north-south dichotomy has always existed - nevertheless, the common Somali identity has become seriously undermined because of the political project of attaining recognition and the Somaliland identity has now achieved primacy.

The arguments put forward by sympathisers of an independent Somaliland are not only made of an economic, legal or political nature, but are also based on claims of Somaliland/ers' 'distinctiveness'. The northern, predominantly pastoralist constructed counter-myth of 'distinct from...' aims to differentiate between the 'peace-seeking north westerners' and the 'continuously warring southerners'. Both Somalia and Somaliland are pronounced Muslim states; however, Somalilanders have actively sought to distance themselves from what they think of as a 'fundamentalist' south, while they themselves claim to have merged their 'traditional' Muslim values with 'progressive' western sentiments (Somaliland government, *Support Somaliland*). Somaliland have always been distinct from the rest of Somalia, the argument goes. It was different before the colonial encounter, existed for 80 years or more as a separate colonial territory under British rule, and enjoyed five days of independence before unification with the south, making Somaliland a political entity with borders which back then were recognised by international law (Brons 2001, Adam 1994). Justifications for a separate state, therefore, do not focus on the declaration of independence, but rather on the "dissolution of the union of 1 July 1960" (Brons 2001:258). However, claims to independent statehood and a separate national identity also have more recent roots in what Hussein Adam calls a "historic consciousness of oppression" (1994: 35). The time of economic and political marginalisation, discrimination and

finally persecution under Barre's regime is still remembered, and as symbols of resistance and 'distinctiveness' are being constructed, the Somaliland identity grows deeper roots. War graves in Hargeisa, fenced in and decorated, and a MIG plane erected in the centre of town, surrounded by painted and scribbled walls commemorating those that lost their lives and fought 'heroically' in the war, are just two examples of the type of symbolism that refers to an independent Somaliland with a separate identity, a Somaliland identity which will not easily be abandoned.

#### **4.3 From Somali to Somalilander: renegotiating identities in the diaspora**

As an anthropologist curious about the role of the diaspora in the quest for internationally recognised statehood of the homeland, I must not ignore the ongoing redefinition and rewriting of identities taking place. This formulation of a Somaliland national identity occurs both in Somaliland and among those living in the diaspora through a transnational process where identities are constantly being reformulated, transformed and modified (Basch et al. 1994). In the diaspora, the population holds on to, and renegotiates, a set of collective memories and myths about their original homeland which are kept alive while they reside abroad (Safran 1991). In the case of the Somaliland population abroad, the emphasis on the Somaliland identity has evolved as a "complicated process of negotiation and transculturation", where a shared past legitimates the understanding of themselves as a coherent group, distinct from others (Griffiths 1997). The process of constructing a separate identity maintains loyalties and supports the links between the diaspora and the homeland, concurrently, as the below anecdote is meant to illustrate, the Somaliland identity is negotiated and reinforced by the transnational economic, political and social commitments.

*Earlier this year, Abdi Abbey and Kim Adams, both from the Oxford House located in London's East End, went to Somaliland, bringing back a video, a lot of still photographs, and assembling a short report that described the current state of affairs as they saw it. In May, I attended a celebratory event at the community centre, intended to feed back their experiences to the community. The pictures were decorating the walls and a TV placed in one corner was running familiar footage from the streets of Hargeisa and from visited sites. After a short speech by Kim and heaps of Somali food it was time to introduce the highlight of the evening, a well-known guest, Edna Adan, on route from the USA back to Somaliland.*

*Edna gave a rousing speech, emphasising the role of the diaspora in the reconstruction efforts of Somaliland. “We need you”, she lets the younger part of the audience know, “We need doctors, nurses, people with skills and here in Britain you have the ability to acquire these essential skills”. Edna, well-known for making important contributions to Somaliland, is an inspiring speaker when she reminds the Somaliland community of East London of where their loyalties ought to lie and that they still have responsibilities to fulfil in regards to the homeland.*

In Somaliland’s constitution citizenship is defined as follows; “any person who is patriotic of Somaliland, who is the descendant of a person residing in Somaliland on the 26th of June 1960 or earlier, shall be recognised as a citizen of Somaliland” (Somaliland Forum). However, when I asked Osman Hassan of the Somaliland mission in London, who was a Somalilander, the answer was more complex than the constitution suggested. “We are nomads”, he said, “a mobile population with little regard for national borders, as people and goods move freely across the porous borders regularly. Being ‘Somalilander’, therefore, has less to do with ‘living within particular borders’ but rather with being part of, identifying with, and belonging to, the Somaliland project.” Hassan went on to explain that, “some clans in the eastern territories are not entirely convinced of an independent Somaliland, they probably do not define themselves as Somalilanders, whilst there are Somalilanders living in London, British citizens even, but engaged entirely in the political project of developing a separate Somaliland and therefore probably do regard themselves as Somaliland nationals.” Instead of elaborating on the various economic, political and legal arguments I have repeatedly heard in defence of Somaliland recognition, Hassan taps his finger against his head: "it's in here" he says, "being Somalilander is in here".

The relations in the diaspora<sup>8</sup> between Somalilanders and Somalis originally from the south are obviously influenced by the political state of affairs in their homelands and this has a direct impact on the way in which Somalilanders come together and organise themselves in

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<sup>8</sup> There is a sense that animosity between the two groups in the diaspora is decreasing, because the issue of Somaliland independence has become less contentious and less contested. In the light of continued instability in the south, Somaliland has ‘proved’ itself as it is the only part where peace is holding. This has led to a certain amount of understanding and even at times support for Somaliland coming from people originally from the south. (*Support Somaliland*).

Britain. Previously ‘Somali organisations’ have been largely replaced by ‘Somaliland organisations’ that have, in addition to their focus on addressing the needs of the Somali immigrant community, included the issue of Somaliland recognition on their international agenda. As mentioned above, the majority of ethnic Somali in Britain are originally from the northwest and as their ‘Somaliland’ identity has gained primacy over the ‘Somali’ identity, organisations have changed both name and political focus (*Support Somaliland*, Somaliland Forum). The Somaliland organisations in the diaspora therefore play a crucial role in strengthening, even actively (re)producing, the sense of a distinct Somaliland national identity.

## **5. Somaliland’s quest for recognition: a transnational project**

### **5.1 The missing link between ‘host’ and ‘home’**

In the literature a clear distinction is made between migrants and refugees, often overlooking the role of refugee communities in transnational politics because it is generally assumed that most will go back to their place of origin once conditions there have improved and that the political leadership of the home country will more or less turn their backs on those refugees that do not return. ‘Going home’ is often perceived as the last stage of all refugee movements, the obvious conclusion to the ‘refugee cycle’, where people who once where forced to flee must return in order to restore the proper order of things (Hammond 1999: 232). These assumptions are being challenged by scholars such as Nadjé Al-Ali, Richard Black and Khalid Koser, who claim that many immigrant and refugee communities living away from their place of origin can not be characterised as ‘uprooted’ or ‘displaced’ (2001). Instead their research points to a more active involvement by some refugee populations in homeland affairs. Refugees root themselves and become incorporated into the society in which they now reside but may well remain emotionally attached to localities elsewhere, maintaining social, political and economic links which can give them the ability to partake in the construction of new institutions and influence events in the countries they left (Basch et al. 1995). Transmigrants, therefore, “take actions, make decisions and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states” (Basch et al. 1994: 7). A government that manages to maintain an intimate relation with its population settled abroad

gives the dispersed communities the incentives to remain part of the political project of the home country and act accordingly.

When refugees become established in the societies in which they settle down, but maintain multiple links to their place of origin, the concept of 'home' is problematised. Migrants' everyday activities come to depend on the many and constant interconnections which cross cultural and national borders and as they are engaging in transnational practices their identities are configured in relation to political, economic and social processes in more than one country (Basch et al. 1995). However, transnational lives does not mean living between dichotomised poles of either 'here' or 'there', instead as Khalid Koser and Nadjie Al-Ali argues, 'home' can be perceived as "a space, a community created within the changing links between 'here' and 'there'", conceptualised as dynamic; "imagining, creating, unmaking, changing, losing and moving 'homes'" (2001: 6). So, in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between 'home' and diaspora we must engage with the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement, spanning national, cultural and state borders. Having said that, there is a danger that must be noted in depicting transmigrants as individuals who are able to, or even wish, to arrange their lives in 'unbounded space'. Instead, we must view this process as a continuous struggle whereby various socio-political actors, including the migrants themselves, aim to, both through discourse and practice, define boundaries and bound identities, for example national identity and citizenship (Al-Ali and Koser 2001).

My own findings with regards to the Somaliland refugee diaspora in Britain seem to correspond to the view of Al-Ali, Black and Koser, since Somalilanders clearly maintain strong ties to the socio-economic and political fabric of their home country. Somalilanders, once regarded as a population in temporary exile that was limited in its international political work to supporting the struggle against the Siyad Barre regime, have now moved on to being a permanently settled diaspora. In the transformation from exiled refugees to a transnational community they have been able to extend their political and economic activities and engage in the dynamic process of constructing a new state. Somalilanders in the diaspora, despite investing in future lives in Britain, maintain loyalty to, and are very much engaged in, the political project

of (re)creating Somaliland as an independent state. As the goal of the SNM was not an independent Somaliland but rather to cast off the yoke of an oppressive military regime ruling from the distant south, they never came to be seen as a political avant-garde. Instead, the declaration of independence, or rather the revocation of the 1960s Single Act of Union, came out of months of deliberations attended by many factions of society at the ‘grand *shir*’ of Burco as well as at the second *guurti* conference at Borama. By arriving at the conclusion to seek independence through extensive negotiations in a manner that is viewed by the vast majority of the population as a legitimate process of decision making, it has gained broad-based support both in the homeland and in the diaspora (Somaliland Forum, *Support Somaliland*, Hassan). This determination was illustrated again by the results of the 2001 referendum as 97% voted ‘yes’ to the newly revised constitution which clearly affirms the independent status of Somaliland. Consequently, in the diaspora there is a widely shared sense of duty and responsibility to put the cause of independence on the international agenda, motivating Somalilanders abroad to engage in a variety of political activities such as awareness raising campaigns, approaching local and national politicians, or propagating their ideas of a separate Somaliland state in newspapers, on the internet or in academic institutions (Hassan, *Support Somaliland*, Somaliland Forum). In addition, as portrayed in the three short case studies below, there have been collective efforts leading to the development of a multitude of Somaliland community groups and Somaliland international organisations concerning themselves with the issue of internationally recognised statehood for Somaliland.

*Osman Hassan, originally from Somaliland, came to the UK as a refugee in 1985 after having spent a few years in Saudi Arabia where he became one of the founding members of the Somali National Movement (SNM). After arriving in London he continued his political activities with the SNM as the Somaliland diaspora advanced the resistance against Siyad Barre's military regime. His role was to report human rights' violations committed by Barre's troops in Somaliland to international human rights' organisations like Amnesty International and to make the plight of Somalilanders known to western governments. Today, Hassan heads the Somaliland mission to the UK and serves as the liaison between the Somaliland government, British government officials and the Somaliland migrant community. From his office in Whitechapel, London, he stays in*

*regular contact with the British Foreign and Commonwealth office, Home office and Department for International Development. In addition, he tries to co-ordinate the activities of those Somaliland diaspora organisations in the UK that are committed to an independent Somaliland.*

*In Cardiff, Wales, there is a large, visible, and long-established Somali community with its roots in the 1870s as Somali seamen employed on British ships settled down and were later joined by their families. At the outbreak of civil war, when Somalis arrived in Britain in large numbers, Cardiff became an obvious choice for many seeking to live in a supportive and familiar cultural environment. 'Support Somaliland' is a newly launched diaspora organisation that seeks to maintain the ties between the Somaliland community in Wales and the homeland. "The aims of the group", their leaflet proclaims, "are twofold: To campaign for international recognition of Somaliland and to provide material support to schools and colleges in Somaliland, in the process of being rebuilt after the civil war". In order to give appropriate assistance and keep informed about current affairs, 'Support Somaliland' has established links with the 'Academy for Peace and Development', a Hargesia-based organisation. In addressing the first objective of the organisation it draws on the longstanding personal relationships built up between members of the Somali community in Cardiff and political actors in Wales. Members of the Welsh National Assembly have, over the years, been sympathetic to an independent Somaliland because of their significant Somali constituencies, dominated by Somalilanders. The strategy therefore is to continue to attract attention to Somaliland through a number of awareness raising campaigns, targeting both Welsh Assembly members and the general public, and to focus on pressing issues such as 'recognition' and 'development'.*

*At the official launch of 'Support Somaliland', the group was presented by Lorraine Barrett, an Assembly members for Cardiff and Penarth who emphasised continued support that both she and Alun Michael, the Member of Parliament for the area, had given to the Somali community of Cardiff and wished the new group success in its aims. The event was also addressed by a letter of encouragement from the Somaliland Foreign Affairs Minister*

*which was read out loud, as well as a message of support from the Welsh Centre for International Affairs.*

*The Somaliland Forum is an internet-based organisation with hundreds of members, attempting to link Somaliland communities around the world in order to coordinate their economic and political activities. As this is a transnational organisation, its day-to-day affairs are run by an elected executive committee, while a number of volunteer sub-committees “organise, manage and implement the many developmental and social programs the Forum has undertaken in Somaliland” (Somaliland Forum). In addition to financially and materially assisting a number of development projects in Somaliland, the organisation is campaigning for international recognition for Somaliland. They address this issue through sustained letter writing campaigns, press publications, information spreading activities, and in 1998 the Forum organised a number of small scale demonstrations, one of which was staged outside the United Nations’ headquarter in New York, USA. The Somaliland Forum also releases a number of press statements, thirty-two in the last two years, and open letters to the leaders of G-8, the General Secretary of the United Nations, Kofi Annan and the current American administration.*

The Somaliland diaspora plays an important role in Somaliland’s quest to achieve international recognition. As a transnational population, organising their lives across borders, they are able to engage in the process of nation-state formation. Individually, as in the illustrative case of Osman Hassan, and through organisations such as ‘Support Somaliland’ and the ‘Somaliland Forum’, the diasporic population make use of personal relations and their status as a community, for an example in Cardiff, in order to pursue their transnational political agenda. Politically active Somalilanders in the diaspora are able to serve as a link, connecting British government officials and the home country. By drawing on an established web of personal connections that have been built up over several years, they allow for updated information, news and ‘political influence’ to travel in all directions. These channels of communication are maintained through identifiable personal and organisational links providing the Somaliland government with an important way of making their arguments for recognition heard internationally. Osman Hassan illustrates this point well when he makes use of his already

existing personal connections, established over years as politically active, to engage in a dialogue with relevant British government offices despite his *unofficial* status as a representative of the Somaliland government to the UK. Hassan, utilising his personal status and his personal relations perhaps more effectively than the status of his office, has been able to create links between the Somaliland government he is there to represent, politically active Somalilanders in the diaspora and sympathetic individuals in the British Foreign office, Home office and Department for International Development. 'Support Somaliland' is able to gain access to Welsh officials both due to the prominent status of the Somaliland community in Cardiff but also, perhaps more importantly, through the personal relations established by individual members. 'Support Somaliland' is also in a position to transmit information from organisations in Somaliland, such as the 'Academy for Peace and Development,' which are in direct contact with the Somaliland government, to the Welsh Assembly and/or the British government. Organisations such as 'Somaliland Forum', its membership base consisting of a few hundred dispersed through out Canada, United States, Europe and the Middle East, serves a somewhat different role in Somaliland's pursuit of independence. Its main role, in addition to the vast amount of financial and material assistance contributed, is to enable Somalilanders living abroad to get directly engaged in homeland affairs. Somalilanders settled abroad, in places without a local organisation, are able to take part in the 'Somaliland project' on an international level and through its activities the loyalty to the homeland is maintained and strengthened. The Somaliland Forum also has an advisory role with regard to the Somaliland government. Osman Hassan, 'Support Somaliland' and the 'Somaliland Forum', illustrate the type of linkages that exist, connecting the Somaliland diaspora, the British and Somaliland authorities. The case studies also demonstrate how these linkages are forged and maintained over time and how the diaspora actively facilitates the relationship between the British authorities and the state of Somaliland for the purpose of promoting international recognition.

It is hard to estimate exactly how successful the Somalilanders in the diaspora are in their attempt to lobby for internationally recognised statehood for Somaliland. The fact that the population is few in numbers as well as politically and economically insignificant obviously weakens its influence on international political processes and the impact is further hampered by the lack of more formalised coordination between the diaspora organisations. There is also an

apparent problem of continuity, groups wax and wane, websites lie dormant, fax- and phone numbers become outdated as enthusiastic persons move on. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Somaliland migrant community in Britain is actively involved in homeland affairs and that the majority of Somalilanders that live abroad are supportive of Somaliland's quest towards a recognised, separate state. Fieldwork reveals the use of flexible and informal organisational structures of personal relationships between Somalilanders in the diaspora and a number of well-established personal contacts to sympathetic political actors in relevant British offices as well as with individuals in the Somaliland government. Some of the very characteristics that David Griffiths deemed ineffective in his study (2000), comparing the organisational structures produced by the Kurdish population in Britain to that of the Somali, I would like to argue are its strengths.

## **5.2 The diaspora goes 'transnational'**

The wish to one day return to the place of origin is commonly expressed in the Somali diaspora and is demonstrated by the strong economic links and the intimate web of relations being maintained across national borders and through time. Insecure legal status, high unemployment rates and the many cultural and economic difficulties facing ethnic Somalis in western host countries also suggest that many will one day return to Somalia/Somaliland. The eventual return, when conflicts have been resolved and areas are deemed safe, has been predicted by Somalis themselves, refugee and immigrant groups, scholars, host governments and by the authorities in Somalia/Somaliland. David Griffiths demonstrates this view when he argues that Somalis has a "clear awareness that their future lay not in England, but back in Somalia. All, without exception, looked to return as their only viable future" (1997: 11). However, with regard to Somalilanders in Britain, my recent research shows that the dream of unconditional return once there is peace and stability no longer seems the obvious option for the vast majority. Despite Somaliland's political stability for the last six years and modest developments, only a small number of Somalilanders have decided to return permanently. A number of my interviewees express that 'returning home' is still a dream held by many in the diaspora but that there are a number of explicit conditions. The Somalilanders that entertain the idea of one day going back are determined to have this process facilitated by the attainment of British passports, 'getting papers'. Some of the most reoccurring explanations for not returning are insufficient financial

funds, limited access to education, lack of satisfactory health care and no employment prospects. There is also certain amount of generational tension over the issue of return which is not easily negotiable. Young Somalis, either born in Britain or who came here as children, are less eager to return to the Horn of Africa and often express the wish of remaining in Britain for further education and work (Berns McGown 1999). In addition, it is crucial for Somalilanders to see Somaliland recognised internationally as an independent state before they consider return. 'Recognition', it is argued, would both in real terms and symbolically express a commitment to future stability and security of Somaliland by foreign states (*Support Somaliland*).

The continuous political commitment demonstrated by the Somaliland diaspora to the issue of 'recognition' and homeland welfare is often interpreted as a determination to one day return. However, I would like to argue that the activities of the diaspora are part of a much more complex, 'transnational' arrangement encompassing both 'here' *and* 'there'. Many seem to envision continued lives in the west but engage in 'transnational' practices in order to maintain the links to Somaliland. Retaining "the British passport", or any other western legal papers, is an insurance, crucial in case of future political instability and economic hardship that could be faced upon return to Somaliland. Among the Somalilanders living in the UK, many are in search of future mobility, aspire to a transnational living arrangement where they have the ability to develop safe and economically viable living strategies for themselves and their families, without losing stake in the 'Somaliland project', assist in economic development, and lobby for international recognition of an independent Somaliland.

## **6. Deterritorialised nation-state building**

The Somaliland diaspora is of enormous financial importance to the homeland. Ismail Ahmed estimates that the total amount of money remitted back to Somaliland each year adds up to approximately \$500 million which makes diaspora remittances by far the most important source of foreign revenue, bringing more currency to Somaliland than livestock export and international development/relief assistance combined (2000: 380). Remittances that during the civil war often ended up in the pockets of warring militias have been fundamental in supporting individual families throughout the 1990s but have also had an enormous impact on the

national/regional development process. The money transferred back to Somaliland is increasingly being used for long term investments, construction of educational facilities, hospitals and health clinics (SCPD 1999, Afford 2002).

Having established the crucial importance of the diaspora to Somaliland's economic and political future, the government's attempts to maintain and expand on the already existing ties become understandable. The Somaliland government has to consider the prospect of having large segments of its population permanently settled abroad, within the borders of other states to which they may come to belong in the sense of having legalised residency, citizenship, with some even being born abroad (Basch et al. 1994). Through a process of what Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc defines as 'deterritorialised nation-state building', they hope to keep the diaspora involved in Somaliland affairs, as loyal citizens (1994). Both the Somaliland government and the diaspora view their activities as intrinsically linked and in the project of building a state, and a nation, the Somaliland government has sought to enlist the participation of transmigrants in order to have them promote the 'national interest' in the countries in which they have settled. In the case of Somaliland, both homeland and diaspora are parts of and drive forward the same political project: achieving international recognition for the Somaliland nation-state. The Somaliland government attempts to maintain, and further develop, the relationship between itself and the population in the diaspora through a number of public policies, such as expansive notion of Somaliland citizenship, but also importantly through, as illustrated in the case study below, the use of symbolic actions transmitted through language and political rituals (Basch et al. 1994)

*In October of last year, a delegation of Somaliland government officials arrived in London to meet with their 'constituency' in the diaspora. At the reception, hosted by a Somaliland community organisation, the representatives had the opportunity to report directly the latest developments of homeland affairs. The meeting that brought together Somalilanders from all over Britain created an occasion for them to feed back some of their views with regards to the social, economic and political state of Somaliland. Maybe most importantly as Osman Hassan admits, the meeting was an attempt to create a forum where Somalilanders living in the diaspora are given a chance to "let out steam", debate current issues, an exchange which obviously encourages the feeling of being directly involved in*

*the political process at home (Hassan, Somaliland government). In the speeches made by members of the delegation, it was emphasised what an important role the Somaliland diaspora plays in the country's reconstruction efforts, and appeals were made to "further strengthen their unity and links with the homeland" (Somaliland government).*

This short account illustrates one active attempt being made by the political leadership in Hargeisa to encourage, and ultimately secure, the continuous involvement of the diaspora in the Somaliland project. Government ministers travel to meet with Somaliland communities in Toronto, Washington, London, Cardiff, etc., to provide updated news and share future plans. In addition to listening to the latest developments in homeland affairs, these meetings provide people in the diaspora the opportunity to interact with 'their' minister, establish personal relations and, perhaps most importantly, to exercise their voice as a constituency and make demands. This anecdote also shows that the Somaliland authorities treat the diaspora as a group of people that contribute to the development of Somaliland, not only financially and materially but also by engaging in the political process in Somaliland and to advocate the independence of Somaliland internationally by communicating with and lobby relevant government departments in their host country.

## **7. Somaliland: eleven years on...**

It has been eleven years since Somaliland declared its independence and as of yet it has not received international recognition, neither by any foreign government nor any international governmental organisations such as the European Union, the African Union or the Arab league (Anonymous 2002). However, Somaliland remains determined to continue lobbying for its sovereignty and proceed independently of Somalia. In the last decade, the Somaliland political leadership has consistently tried to promote their independence in the international arena by making frequent visits to countries in North America, Western Europe and Africa to meet with government officials and Somalilanders in the diaspora. Foreign dignitaries are welcomed to Hargeisa and the Somaliland government carries on publishing press releases and open letters to the United Nations, European Union and G8-leaders (Somaliland government). International interest and engagement with this region comes and goes and is currently back on the agenda, and

Somaliland is starting to enjoy a growing sense of acceptance. The question seems no longer to be; “why recognize Somaliland?”, but rather, “why *isn't* Somaliland being recognised?” (*Bradbury, Gilkes, Hoyland, Le Mare*).

Somaliland has proved itself and the international acknowledgement and silent nods of approval have been strengthened since the 2001 referendum, and the peaceful transfer of power after President Egal’s unexpected death in May this year which was seen by many as Somaliland’s “the last test”. The shifting attitudes in the last year may also be attributed to loss of confidence in the Transitional National Government (TNG) in Mogadishu, established in the Arta peace and reconciliation conference in 2000, and renewed fighting in Somalia as well as in the eastern region of Puntland (Doornbos 2002, *Gilkes*). In addition, the chronic instability of Somalia has once again gained international attention with growing fears of areas where terrorist networks can seek refuge (International Crisis Group 2002, IRINa). Somaliland’s quest for recognised independence has therefore taken on new significance in the current global political climate, and Somaliland is eager to exonerate itself with the West as closer relations are being forged, especially with the United States and Britain (*Hassan*).

Somaliland’s strongest legal card for independence lay in the fact that it existed as a separate state for five days after independence from Britain and before the union with former Italian Somalia. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), adamant about Somalia’s integrity, stated that they respect the colonial boundaries but there is no reference to a time frame. However, the recently drafted African Union charter notes that it supports colonial boundaries *at the time of independence*, a change of terminology which has probably created Somaliland’s strongest legal argument (Doornbos 2002, Carroll and Rajagopal 1993, *Gilkes*). It is also argued that as long as international donor countries continue to view Somaliland as a part of Somalia, still plagued by sporadic warfare and continuous political instabilities, Somaliland will fail to attract the development funds it so desperately needs (Fitzgerald 1998). The ‘unrecognised’ status also prevents them from receiving loans from multilateral financial institutions such as International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank - institutions which the Somaliland government envisions to fund large scale infrastructure projects - and ‘non-recognition’, also leaves Somaliland without its own voice in international politics. However, alternative views are

being asserted mainly from the critical development camp, that not being recognised as a separate state is potentially a ‘hidden blessing’ for Somaliland as it puts the country *out of the reach* of international financial institutions pushing standardised, neoliberal recipes for economic development. There are fears of a ‘top-down development model’, implemented by IMF/World Bank (i.e. foreign) directives and a fleet of international non-governmental organisations, leading to the process of ‘development’ being ripped out of local hands and immediate national indebtedness (*Le Mare, Hoyland*). In addition to political, economic and legal arguments for recognition, there is a strong emotional component that has to do with national pride and identity. The political project of promoting an independent Somaliland internationally encourages the formation of a separate national identity and holds the population together in the self-declared republic and in the diaspora.

The official position of the European Union on the Somaliland issue continues to be “a policy of explicit non-recognition, bearing in mind the importance of preserving the territorial integrity of Somalia” (Council of the European Union 2002). Nevertheless, Somaliland continues to look towards Britain as the former colonial power to take a stand on Somaliland independence and even to be the first foreign government to grant recognition (*Gilkes*). Despite some sympathetic murmurs in the British establishment there is an unwillingness to pick up the cause internationally, maybe because of fear of being drawn into a costly aid relationship (Doornbos 2002, *Gilkes*).

Instead of holding another national *guurti* to decide on the way forward as the current presidential term is coming to an end, Somaliland is gearing up for its first popular elections in January of next year. The Somaliland government has made an international appeal for financial assistance and the involvement of foreign observers, hoping that this will draw attention to Somaliland’s advances, and as a regional analyst reported to IRIN news “if the elections, which will have to be funded by someone, are a success and fair, then I think we could see some sort of international recognition for Somaliland” (IRINb). Simultaneously, in Somalia, another peace and reconciliation conference is being planned for. The conference is to be held under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and is receiving full support by the United Nations and the European Union, organisations both recognising the TNG

as the legitimate government of Somalia (IRIN - HOA). Nevertheless, the IGAD conference is rejected by the Somaliland authorities, not willing to negotiate with Somalia until they are recognised and can establish a relationship between two independent Somali states (Egal 2002, *Gilkes*).

## **8. Conclusion**

Somaliland's pursuit for internationally recognised statehood is linked to processes of nation building and a revaluation of primary identities. The myth of Somali homogeneity has been questioned, turning the clock on decades of pan-Somali nationalism, and instead there is a recent emphasis on a distinct Somaliland identity. Somaliland's nation-state formation and quest for internationally recognised statehood must be understood as a political project where the population settled abroad plays an important role that has been traced and evaluated in this dissertation: a triadic relationship between the Somaliland diaspora, the Somaliland political leadership and sections of the host government creates a 'transnational space' where issues of statehood, identity, loyalty, commitments and belonging are negotiated and realigned. The Somaliland government draws on the large and increasingly well-established diaspora in the west for continuous economic and political support, and lobbying for recognition acts as a unifying project, bringing Somalilanders in the diaspora together as a group sharing a sense of responsibility and duty towards the homeland; maintain and further cultivate ties between the population living abroad and people in Somaliland; and finally reinforcing the very identity the political project depends on in the first place.

Faced with large and permanently settled population abroad, the political leadership of many post-colonial states must engage in what Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc refer to as 'deterritorialised nation-state building', a theoretical concept of great relevance to my own ethnographic material. Having worked extensively on issues of transnationalism with regards to migrants from Grenada, St. Vincent, the Philippines and Haiti to the United States they analyse *how* the political leadership of the 'home' countries attempt to hold on to the migrants as loyal and committed citizens. Their detailed case studies illustrate the use of symbols, discourses and political rituals as well as the passing of 'diaspora-friendly' public policies. My own findings from

researching the particular transnational experience of Somalilanders in Britain seem to closely correspond to the material of Basch et al. Somaliland government officials frequently visit their 'constituency' abroad, send letters of support and encouragement to organisations such as 'Support Somaliland' in Cardiff, and are able to draw on established Somaliland organisations and individuals, such as Osman Hassan, in their quest for international recognition. Glick Schiller's research on issues of Haitian transnationalism reveals clear attempts made by President Aristide to maintain links with the Haitian migrant population in the United States, categorising them as "the 10<sup>th</sup> department" of Haiti and actively constructing an inclusive national identity in order to incorporate the Haitians abroad regardless of their actual citizenship status. In the case of Haitian migrants in the US, as with Somalilanders settled in Britain, permanent lives abroad did not prevent the fostering of strong economic and political links and commitments to the homeland.

Equally, I find the theorising by Al-Ali, Black and Koser helpful in analysing the lived transnationalism of Somalilanders in Britain. As migrants settle abroad but seek to maintain strong links to the place of origin, a transnational arrangement is starting to take form. However, as Al-Ali et al. remind us that these processes are anchored in the political reality of more than one nation-state. As a diaspora, Somalilanders are attempting to create lives lived across borders, defining transnational space, but with an identity securely rooted in the engagement with a political project, rooted in the practices and discourse of nation-states. The Somaliland identity has less to do with 'living within particular borders' but rather with being part of, identifying with and belonging to, the political project of gaining recognition to the Somaliland homeland under construction.

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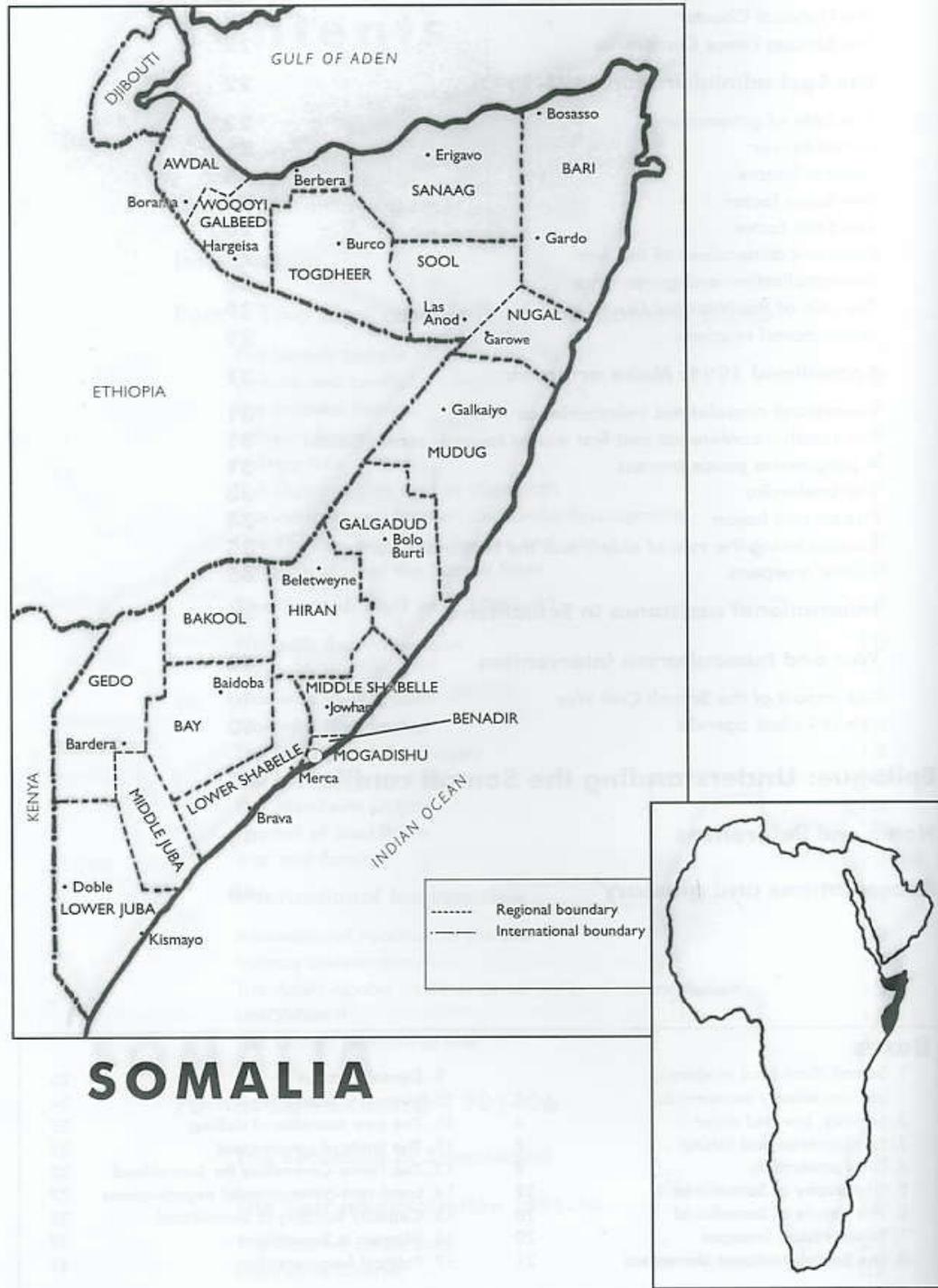
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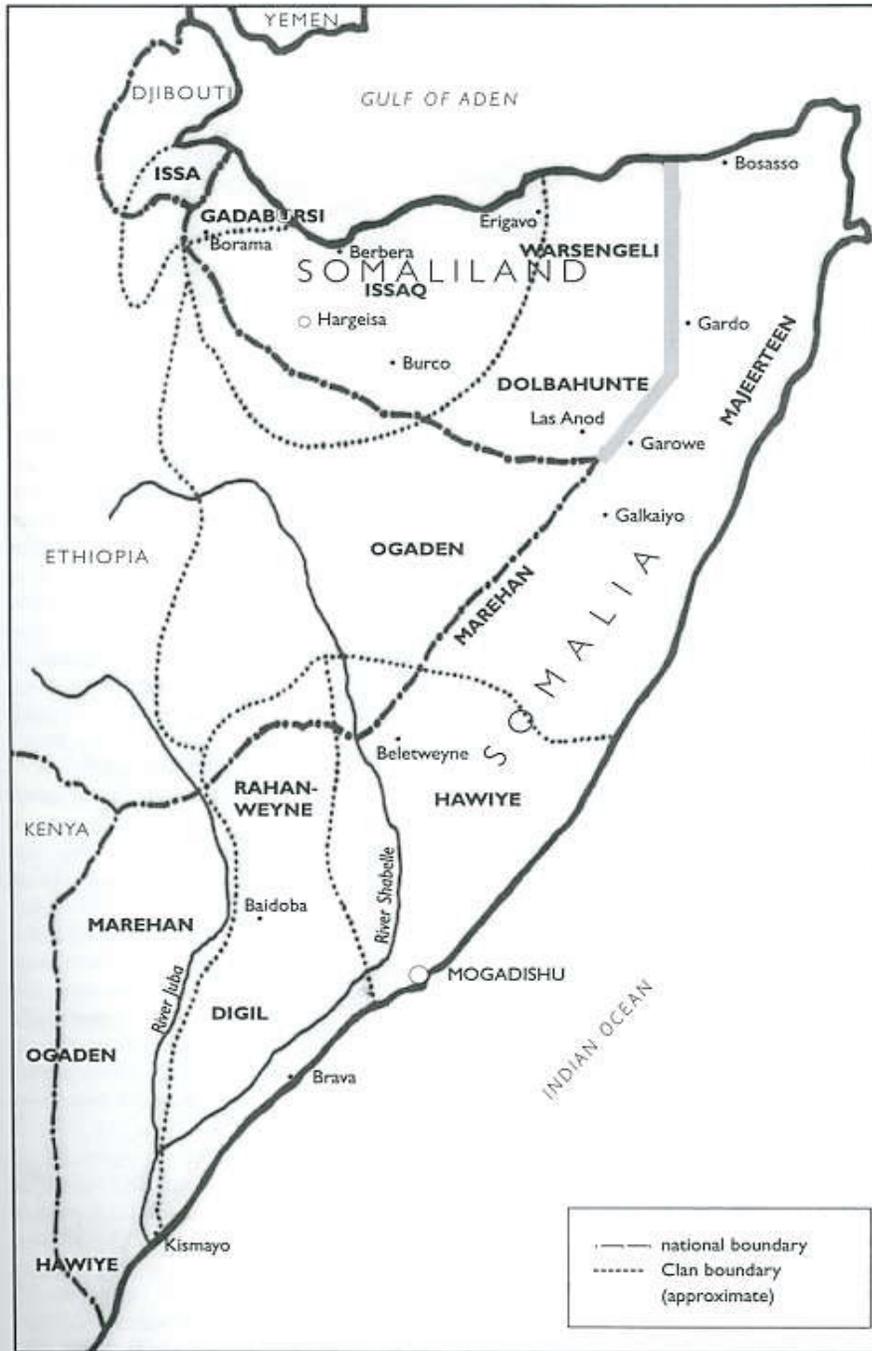
## Appendix A - Maps

### Map 1. Somalia



Source: Bradbury 1997: iv

Map 2. Somalia/Somaliland and clan territories



# SOMALIA/SOMALILAND

Source: Bradbury 1997: v

## Appendix B - Introduction to Somali clan structure

*Me and my clan against the World;  
Me and my family against my clan;  
Me and my brother against my family;  
Me against my brother.*

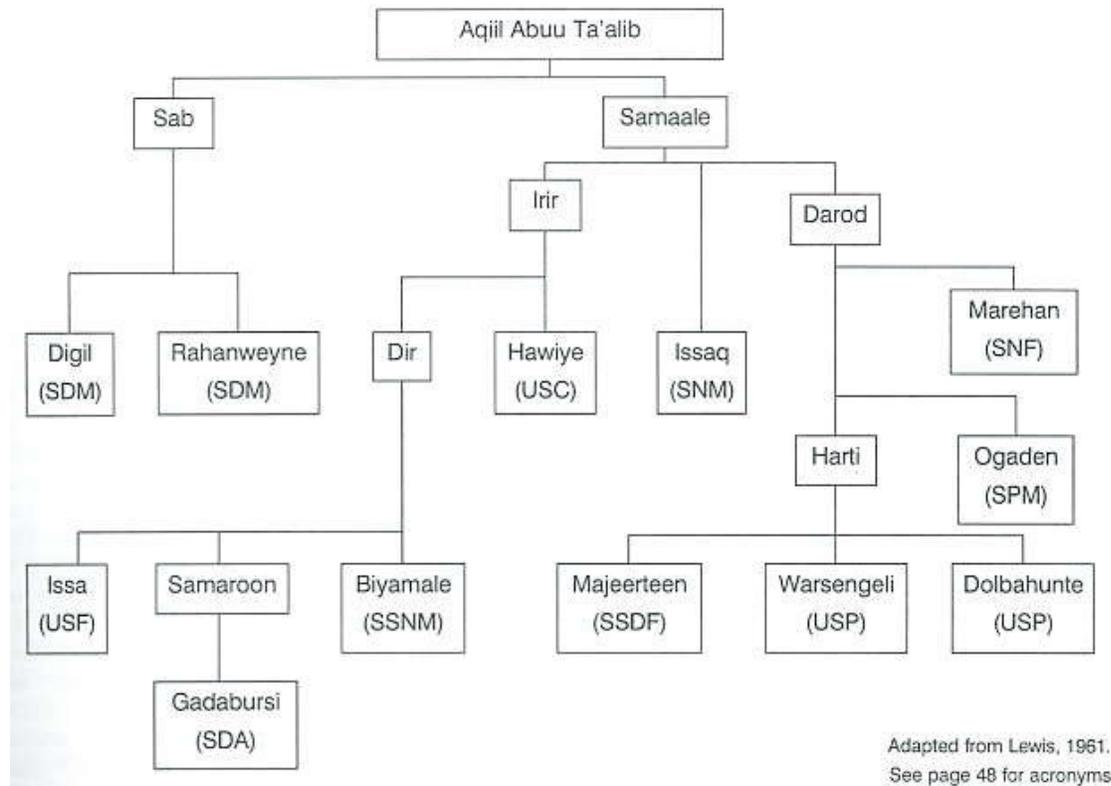
- The hierarchy of priorities,  
as ordered by a Somali proverb  
(Peterson 2000).

The clan system is considered one of the most distinct features of Somali social, political and economic life and a short introductory paragraph is almost always needed. In a classic study on northern Somali pastoralists, *A Pastoral Democracy*, Dr. Lewis notes the following:

It is of the first importance to appreciate that a Somali genealogy is not a mere family tree recording the historical descent and connections of a particular individual or group. Whatever its historical significance, in the sphere of politics its importance lies in the fact that it represents the social divisions of people into corporate political groups. By reference to his ancestor, a man's [and woman's] relations with others are defined, and his [her] position in Somali society as a whole determined. Thus an understanding of the political relations between groups requires a knowledge of their genealogical relationship. ... At the same time, the range of agnatic relationship recognized on one occasion need not be the same as that on another, so that the corporate kinship group in which an individual has political status varies with the context. Thus political and legal affiliation is elastic and fluctuates generally within the range of agnatic connection defined in the genealogies (Lewis 1961: 2).

The Somali clan system has two main lineages, the *Samaale* (predominantly nomadic pastoralist) and the *Sab* (settled agro-pastoralists) which are divided into six kin-based clan families, *Dir*, *Isaaq*, *Darod*, *Hawiye*, *Digil* and *Rahanweyne* (note that their are various spellings), which further divide along the male line into sub-clan and primary lineage (see diagram below). The diagram, which is limited in its scope, also include the different politico-military movements of modern day Somalia, most which are not referred to in my text but are included to demonstrate the complexities of the fractured political landscape during the civil war (Bradbury 1997). The traditional clan territories are outlined in map 2, appendix A.

## Somali clans and politico-military movements



Source: Bradbury 1997: 3

### Abbreviations

<b>SDA</b>	Somali Democratic Alliance
<b>SDM</b>	Somali Democratic Movement
<b>SNF</b>	Somali National Front
<b>SNM</b>	Somali National Movement
<b>SPM</b>	Somali Patriotic Movement
<b>SSDF</b>	Somali Salvation Democratic Front
<b>SSNM</b>	Southern Somali national Movement
<b>USC</b>	United Somali Congress
<b>USF</b>	United Somali front
<b>USP</b>	United Somali party

### Somali National Movement (SNM)

The SNM was a predominantly *Issaq*-based organisation founded 1981 in London to militarily oppose the Barre regime. It initially drew most of its support from the Somali diaspora in Western Europe and Middle East. The leadership base was mainly intellectual, religious and urban elite. The SNM was the most organised of the armed movements in the early days of the civil war. After Somaliland's declaration of independence the SNM was the only official political party but ceased to exist after the 1993 Borama *shir* (Bradbury 1997).

## **Appendix C - List of relevant persons and organisations**

### **Abby, Abdi**

Senior immigration caseworker at Oxford House

### **Academy for Peace and Development**

Think-tank and research organisation, Hargeisa, Somaliland

### **Adams, Kim**

Director of Oxford House

### **Adan, Edna**

Founder of Edna Maternity Hospital, Hargeisa, Somaliland

### **Bradbury, Mark**

Development consultant, has worked extensively in both Somalia and Somaliland for various non-governmental development and relief programmes.

### **Hassan, Osman**

Head of Somaliland Mission to the UK, based in Whitechapel, London.

### **Hoyland, Pippa**

Joint programme manager, Yemen, Somalia/Somaliland at the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR).

### **Gilkes, Patrick**

Analyst, Africa Research Group at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and previously a Horn of Africa journalist for the BBC

### **Le Mare, Robin**

Somaliland team, ActionAid

### **Oxford House**

Community center located in Bethnal Green, London catering to a large Somali migrant population in the East End.

### **Somaliland Forum**

An internet-based Somali diaspora organisation, assisting and promoting social, educational and economic development programs in Somaliland as well as campaigning for international recognition of Somaliland.

### **Support Somaliland**

Somaliland diaspora organisation located in Cardiff, Wales, providing material support as well as campaigning for international recognition of Somaliland statehood.