State-making at Gunpoint: The Role of Violent Conflict in Somaliland’s March to Statehood

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Abstract: For decades, the role of war in processes of state-making has been hotly disputed by both policymakers and scholars—a debate that has been revived since the end of the Cold War. At this point in time, Somaliland unilaterally declared its independence subsequent to a decade-long civil war. In light of the fact that the polity has frequently been judged an African ‘success story’, questions surrounding the role war played in its trajectory obtrude. While the polity’s achievements have generally been traced to traditional authorities, processes of bottom-up governance, a political culture of peace, and the alleged hybridity of its political orders, this article explores the argument that Somaliland’s state-making trajectory was importantly shaped by experiences of violent conflict. It shows how the bellicose structures of governance that emerged during the liberation struggle were key in establishing the self-declared state’s foundation, and how a narrow political elite did not shy away from civil war in the post-1991 era, which helped advancing its state-making endeavor. The article concludes that, while collective political violence is neither an angel of order nor a daemon of decay, war can, under certain conditions and in certain respect, still be constitutive of state-making today.

Panel: ‘Civil Wars and State Formation’ (P046)
Chair: Didier Péclard, University of Geneva
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Proposing that ‘war makes states, and vice versa’, Tilly (1992) has revived an age-old debate of historical sociology and political science around the role of violent conflict may play in processes of state-making. Scholars have generally acknowledged that “the experience of warfare has played a central and indeed essential role in the process of state and nation formation in Europe” (Clapham 2001:11; Huntington 1968) and that “violence […] is an integral part of the processes of accumulation of power by the national state” (Cohen et al. 1981:90; Mann 1986). Yet, there is great hesitation among academics and policy makers to extend this proposition to contemporary developing states. At a time in which the neo-liberal paradigm with its emphasis on individual human rights, celebration of plural societies, and the international community’s responsibility to protect (R2P) reign supreme, war has been considered constituting a “political retrovirus […] about nothing at all” (Enzensberger 1994; as in Cramer 2006:77). Such assessment is bolstered by scholars such as Kaldor (1999) and Leander (2004) who cast doubt on Tilly’s dictum.

Although the view of the ‘war makes states’-critics prevails, some accounts do suggest that violent conflict has not only played a crucial role in historical state formation in historical Europe, but that war may also play a constitutive role in more contemporary state-making projects in the Global South. Deflem (1999:379), for example, argues that the data on the evolution of the Zulu Kingdom “leave no doubt on the significance of warfare in aggregating formerly dispersed tribes into one nation.” Similarly, Niemann (2007) shows how the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had, at heart, been about state-making. Meanwhile, Taylor and Botea (2008:42) suggest that “[w]ar-making clearly contributed to state-making in Vietnam” in the context of the Cold War. More generally, a number of scholars accept Tilly’s basic logic, contending that “civil war is not a stupid thing” (Cramer 2006), and that violence in developing states did not indicate state breakdown but rather processes of “primitive accumulation of power” (Cohen et al. 1981). Conversely, Centeno (2002:167-215) and Herbst (2000:126-30) stress how the absence of war has hindered nation-building in Latin America and Africa respectively.

Based on the insight that “[n]ot all types of violent conflict are equivalent in their historical significance” (Cramer 2006:48), the debate has come to an impasse at which the inconclusive argument is made that “[t]he effects of contemporary wars on statehood are ambivalent” and that there is “no single unambiguous causal relation between states and wars” (Schlichte 2003:38). Thus, further research is needed to shed additional light on this ambiguous relationship. The case of Somaliland may be instructive in this regard. Not only has the polity been widely celebrated for its alleged state-making success (Jhazbhay 2007; Henwood 2007)—but it also experienced recurrent episodes of large-scale violent conflict both prior and subsequent to its unilateral declaration of independence from Somalia in 1991. Consequently, this article sets out to investigate how some of the major episodes of violent conflict Somaliland experienced might have been constitutive of its state-making endeavour. The article is based on secondary data as well as nine months of primary field research in Somaliland, during the course of which some 158 interviews were conducted.

**War and state-making: conceptual considerations**

Already over a century ago, Hintze (1906) suggested a connection between war and state-making. While there has obviously been significant variation with regard to both nature of war and its effect on state-making and degree of success of waging war to forge states, there is general agreement on some fundamental mechanisms by which war can potentially be constitutive of state-making. Among the most crucial of these are the ability of violent conflict to contribute to the accumulation of coercion and capital, the establishment of institutional structures favorable to state-making, and the forging of
a national identity. The subsequent paragraphs briefly touch upon these aspects in order to provide the theoretical foundations for the subsequent empirical investigation.

Accumulation of coercion and capital

One central means by which war can foster state-making lies in its ability to procure a state’s (aspiring) political elite with a monopoly of the legitimate means of physical violence (Weber 1948), by means of militarily defeating adversarial competitors. This proposition is in line with one of the most robust findings of the war termination literature—namely that military triumphs result in more sustainable peace (Licklider 1993; Toft 2003; Fortna 2003)—and, obviously, holds true beyond the medieval European context. Hence, Ottaway (2002:1013) argues that in Uganda, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, “the first step towards reconstituting (or constituting) the state was a military victory.” Thereby, the monopolization of the use of physical force has historically been inextricably linked to the accumulation of capital in general, and the development of a monopoly of taxation more particularly (Moore 2004). Thus, Cramer (2006:178) suggests that “[m]uch of the institutional apparatus of modern government and economic management has its origins in this compulsion to finance wars”, and Levi (1988:1) claims that “[t]he history of state revenue production is the history of the evolution of the state” (see also Bräutigam et al. 2008; Snyder/Bhavnani 2005:572; Evans et al. 1985).

Forging institutional settlements

Yet, the way by which war can exercise a constitutive function for state-making transcends the usurpation of coercive means and capital. This becomes particularly obvious when putting the argument of Tilly (1975) and Mann (1986)—that (prospective) political elites seek to control resources in the form of ‘men, materials, and money’ (Finer 1975:96) in order to wield coercion against both internal and external competitors—into an institutional framework. Viewed through this prism, it emerges that state-making is much about the ability of a state’s (aspiring) political elite to dominate the ‘rules of the game’, which lie squarely at the heart of regularizing role relationships and allocating power. According to North (1990:260f.), institutions are created “to serve the interest of those with bargaining power to create new rules”—an objective, which war may be well-placed to help achieve. Given that fundamental alterations to the prevailing institutional framework go in tandem with changes in the allocation and distribution of power and are, thus, generally objected to by prevailing elites, the evolution of new sets of ‘rules of the game’ is not unlikely to be accompanied by (violent) contestation and crisis. While being a means to achieve such institutional reshuffling, war tends to also diminish institutional ambiguity and provide greater coherence among rule-yielding elites.

Consolidating identities

Apart from exercising an important role regarding the (re-)organization of military, economic, and institutional powers in ways that are constitutive of state-making, war has also been judged “vital in shaping the emergence and course of modern nationalism” (Mann 1986; as quoted in Smith 1998:80). According to Renan (1882), Fukui et al. (1979), Ferguson (1984), Holsti (1996), and others, it was “very difficult to create national self-consciousness without war” (Howard 1979:108). Similarly, “[s]cholars of colonialism suggest that the most important factor in the formation of national consciousness in colonised societies is the resistance to foreign domination” (Bereketæb 2000:181; see also Emerson 1960; Anderson 1983). Starting with the army’s consistent uniforms that turn every individual into a uniform(ed) soldier and ending with the sheir unitary play-back of ideologies among military personnel, warfare can significantly contribute to the standardization of an (‘imagined’) community. Accordingly, Jacquin-Berdal (2002:41) states for the context of the Horn of Africa that “[...] the role that war plays in spreading national identity among individuals who until then had only a vague understanding of the meaning and implications of their national belonging, cannot be overlooked”
(cf. Clapham 2001; Ottaway 2002). And that forging a common (national) identity is indispensable for state-making is a well-established argument (cf. Lemay-Hébert 2009).

In sum, there is room to argue that large-scale violent conflict can be constitutive of state-making under the condition that it enhances the ruling elite’s ability to accumulate coercive and financial capacities, that it leads to an institutional settlement that allows this elite to shape the ‘rules of the game’ vis-à-vis potential competitors, and that it forges a commonly shared identity.

**War and state-making: empirical examination**

Having enjoyed relative peace and stability since it unilaterally declared independence in 1991, Somaliland’s state-making project allegedly constitutes ‘Africa’s best kept secret’ (Jhazbhay 2003). Past attempts to disclose its mystery referenced processes of ‘traditional reconciliation’ (Bryden 1995; Jhazbhay 2007; Walls 2009), ‘grassroots democracy’ (Adam 1995; Othieno 2008; Forti 2011), the combination of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ forms of governance into ‘hybrid political orders’ (Böge et al. 2008; Rendes/Terlinden 2010), and its overall peaceful nature (Othieno 2008). These narratives of Somaliland’s state-making have not only led to the assertion that the polity’s state development was allegedly unique (Hoyle 2000; Kaplan 2008), but culminated in the erroneous contention that throughout its process of state-making “[n]o civil war occurred” (Safi 2003:285).

Yet, Somaliland’s trajectory was not as benign as has frequently been claimed. Not only did its state-making project witness serious traits of authoritarian governance, but it was also marked by episodes of large-scale violence—both prior and subsequent to its unilateral declaration of independence in 1991. While it has been recognized that the struggle of the Somali National Movement (SNM) against dictator Mohamed Siyad Barre during the 1980s was foundational for Somaliland (Hulianar 2002; Spears 2004; Bakonyi 2009), there is reason to argue that also the ‘war projects’ undertaken by Somaliland’s late President Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal in the early to mid-1990s were constitutive of the polity’s state-making endeavor. Hence, this section challenges the prevailing reading of Somaliland’s state-making history and explores in how far bellicose elements account for its trajectory.

Our understanding of the early organization of violence and the dynamics of war in Somalia and Somaliland has been much informed by Prunier (1990/91), Compagnon (1990; 1998), Marchal (1992; 1997) Bakonyi (2009), and Spears (2010). However, the connection between the decade-long civil war of the 1980s and Somaliland’s state-making endeavor remains under-researched to date, not least because most accounts of the polity’s state-making project commence their analysis with the polity’s *de facto* secession in 1991 at the very earliest. Yet, neglecting the bellicose decade preceding Somaliland’s formal creation is not only problematic empirically, but also conceptually, as it silently subjects to the neo-liberal proposition that war constituted nothing but ‘development in reverse’ (World Bank 2003; Collier 2004). Hence, subsequent paragraphs first analyze the effect the ‘War of Independence’ in the 1980s had on Somaliland’s state-making, before turning to President Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal’s ‘War Projects’ of the 1990s and their effects on state development.

**The ‘War of Independence’: Mass Violence in the 1980s**

After Somalia had lost the Ogadeen War of 1977/78 against Ethiopia, armed resistance against the dictatorial reign of Mohamed Siyad Barre took root. Officially pronounced in London on 6 April 1981,

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1 In fact, it is generally argued that the 1991-1993 period was characterized by peace-building and that state-building did not set in until 1993 (Battera 2004; Bradbury 2008; Walls 2008; Pham 2012). A notable exception to this line of argument is Samatar (1997).
the Somali National Movement (SNM) was one of the first rebel groups to form, finding its base amongst the Isaaq clan family. Seeking alliances with other clan militias, the movement waged a guerrilla struggle in the country’s north-west, aiming to overthrow and replace the military government. Losing its Ethiopian sanctuary in 1988 due to a joint communique signed by Barre and Mengistu Haile Mariam to cease supporting rebel activities (Compagnon 1999:266), the SNM’s survival was at stake, leading the rebels to launch a daredevil attack on Somalia’s north-west. Although Bradbury (2008:50) argues that the “particular nature of the SNM as a politico-military movement [...] influenced the form of polity that emerged in Somaliland after the war”, it remains unclear how the anti-government war further affected the formation of the new polity.

Obviously, Somaliland can be considered to be “very much a product of war” (Spears 2004:185), in the sense that the latter constituted the polity’s veritable birth certificate. Without the military defeat of Barre and the Somali National Army (SNA), it would have been highly unlikely that the polity of Somaliland would have been established in the first place. Thus, Bradbury (2008:5) argues that this self-styled state has “its origins in the war that led to the collapse of the Somali state.” Yet, the role war played in Somaliland’s state-making goes beyond this passive and destructive component. To be sure, the war actively aided the formation of the Somaliland state—not least by assisting an accumulation of coercion and capital, forging vital institutional settlements that enabled different actors to forge common ‘rules of the game’, and consolidating a nascent national identity.

**Accumulation of coercion and capital**

Although the SNM was far from exercising a monopoly over the means of violence, it achieved “outstanding military success” (Adam 1994:36), seeing the liberation movement emerging from war as the “most powerful military force in the north-west” (Bradbury 2008:79). Although the SNM has frequently been mocked for constituting a “weak, inexperienced, decentralized, clan-based” organization, which was “unable to provide capable national leadership and vision” (Adam 1995:78), it achieved what no other Somali insurgency movement had—to emerge from war unappealingly in military terms. Despite a lack of a fully-fledged monopoly of power, the SNM thus indirectly controlled the evolving political developments (Höhne 2010:178), and held a “legitimate claim to exercise power” (Compagnon 1998:82). Posing a credible threat to all non-Isaaq communities, “cooperation with the Isaaq was inevitable” (Renders 2006:196; Menkhaus 1997:11; Compagnon 1990:266), leaving the former no “viable alternative” (Terlinden/Ibrahim 2008:2f.) than to engage in ceasefire and peace negotiations (Compagnon 1990:266; Renders/Terlinden 2010:737). Hence, the process of reconciliation and peace-making that is generally considered central for Somaliland’s state-making project “was helped by the military supremacy of the SNM” (Omaar 2004:87).

Apart from allowing the SNM to concentrate coercive capacity in its hands, the war also resulted in an accumulation of capital in its favour. While rebel movements in south-central Somalia generally had easy access to large amounts of capital to finance their operations (Reno 2003:18f.; Leonard 2009:8), the SNM was less fortunate in economic terms. Having been established some eight years prior to most other (southern) guerrilla movements, the SNM faced a highly uncertain outcome, preventing major Somali(land) entrepreneurs from readily switching from the government’s to the insurgency’s side to have their assets protected—a decision that came to be much more self-evident during the later years of the war. Furthermore, potential external funders, such as Libya or Ethiopia, were not ready to grant the SNM financial assistance in the early 1980s (Adam 1995:76; Cliffe 1999:91; Interview with SNM veteran, Burco, 14.04.2009). Thus, apart from some “token contributions” in the form of

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2 This assessment is put into perspective by (Dool 1998:242) who argues that “[o]f all the Somali political movements, the SNM was undoubtedly the most organized and efficient.”
fuel and ammunition (Samatar 1997:42), the SNM did not receive “any substantial external aid” (Compagnon 1998:79; Adam 2008:194; Interview with SNM veteran, Hargeysa, 12.03.2009; Interview with senior government official, Erigavo, 8.4.2009). Consequently, the rebel movement needed to rely on its own resources and ability to fundraise (Interview with SNM veteran and former minister of the Somaliland government, Hargeysa, 30.1.2009). This financial autonomy not only came with the benefit of providing the SNM with more freedom than most other militias enjoyed, but, ultimately, strengthened the insurgency movement (Cliffe 1999:91).

At its inception, the SNM raised resources mainly among the Isaaq diaspora (Adam 1995:76; Interview with former member of the SNM Central Committee and former minister of the Somaliland government, Hargeysa, 22.07.2008) by what was judged to be a “highly evolved fund-raising structure”—which, however, “collapsed almost as soon as victory was realized” (Bryden/Farah 1996:8). While, during its early days, the SNM was not only politically, but also financially “more representative of Somaliland’s exile communities than of its local population” (Jacquin-Berdal 2002:173), this soon changed, not least because the diaspora provided only an irregular and insufficient financial resource (Compagnon 1998:79f.). Hence, the SNM started to raise domestic resources—either by drawing on the business community or on the population at large (Reno 2003:24). After Barre banned the production and trading of khat in 1983 (Brons 2001:190), for example, SNM leaders struck deals with prominent Isaaq merchants in order to create win-win-situations. Both the reliance on business tycoons and tapping into the khat economy featured prominently with regard to the subsequent war-to-peace transition, as both sources of income were maintained in the successively evolving state-making project.

Subsequent to the SNM’s expulsion from its Ethiopian sanctuary in April 1988, and in the wake of the bombardment of Hargeysa and Burco the next month, the rebel movement’s ranks expanded exponentially, requiring the organization to raise further resources. Consequently, the SNM came to “develop a popular support base among the Isaaq” (Bradbury 2008:82) in order to maintain its struggle (Bryden 1999:8; Bruns 2001:204; Interview with former member of the SNM Central Committee and former minister of the Somaliland government, Hargeysa, 22.07.2008). The different Isaaq sub-clans started mobilizing resources for their particular units (Bradbury 2008:70; Samatar 1997:43; Interview with SNM veteran, Hargeysa, 12.03.2009; Interview with SNM veteran, Hargeysa, 12.03.2009; Interview with SNM veteran, Burco, 14.04.2009), and the population was soon subjected to compulsory tributes (Compagnon 1998:80). This rudimentary system of taxation (Ahmed/Green 1999:120) obliged each household to not only second a male member to the SNM, but also make payment of one sheep (or its equivalent in cash) at least once a year—rules that were strictly applied during the course of war (Interview with former official of the House of Parliament, Hargeysa, 13.3.2009; Interview with SNM veteran, Burco, 21.4.2009).

The SNM’s economic self-reliance was “unique among liberation movements, past and present” (Samatar 1997:42; Compagnon 1998:80; Interview with SNM veteran and former minister of the

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3 This argument is, however, questioned by (Cliffe 1999:91) and (Gilkes 1989:54).

4 For example, former US chargé d’affaires in Addis Ababa described the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), a rebel movement of the Majerteen clan in northeast Somalia, as “practically a creation of the Ethiopian and Libyan Governments” (cf. Korn 1986:78; see also Rawson 1994:163). According to a former member of the SSDF, this rebel group received USD 50 million and 300 pieces of artillery from Libya alone (Interview with SSDF veteran, Hargeysa, 4.7.2011).

5 A mild amphetamine-like stimulant, largely consumed by male Somalis, which had become a viable cash crop in the Northwest in the late 1970s.

Somaliland government, Hargeysa, 30.1.2009), and had the positive effect of turning the guerrilla war into a people’s project. The reliance on their own population also discouraged the SNM fighters from looting and preying upon communities that “provided critical income from remittances and which were the bases of the commercial organizations essential to the militia’s continued survival” (Reno 2003:24f.). Tapping into local resources and mechanisms to finance the war effort thus not only put brakes on the emergence of warlords, but also led to an incrementally enhancing entanglement of rebel movement and population. The latter showed particularly in the fact that the community elders, who controlled many of the resources (Interview with former official of the House of Parliament, Hargeysa, 13.3.2009), gained in political importance over the years (Reno 2003:24; Compagnon 1998:84).

**Forging institutional settlements**

The war also significantly shaped the polity’s political institutions. The guurti, or ‘council of elders’, which has frequently been identified to lie at the heart of Somaliland’s alleged state-making success (Renders 2006; Höhne 2006b; Glavitsa 2008; Moe 2009; Richards 2009), is a creation of the SNM (Interview with former member of the SNM Central Committee and former minister of the Somaliland government, Hargeysa, 22.07.2008; Interview with SNM veteran, Hargeysa, 12.03.2009) and a direct outcome of the liberation struggle (Interview with former official of the House of Parliament of Somaliland, Hargeysa, 13.3.2009; Interview with senior official of the Somaliland Ministry of Interior, Hargeysa, 20.4.2009; Interview with Member of Parliament of Somaliland, Hargeysa, 3.7.2011). It was created by the SNM fighters in response to the need for and policy towards ensuring popular support. As the young officers who had deserted the Somali National Army for the SNM had, due to their upbringing and education in a socialist state that had literally buried clannism (Lewis 2002:209), little knowledge about how the clan system worked (Interview with Member of Parliament of Somaliland, Hargeysa, 3.7.2011; Interview with senior politician, Hargeysa, 8.7.2011; Interview with SNM veteran, Hargeysa, 19.7.2011), they needed to draw on intermediaries to help mobilize resources and adjudicate disputes (Adam 1995; Compagnon 1993; Interview with former member of the SNM Central Committee and former minister of the Somaliland government, Hargeysa, 22.07.2008; Brons 2001) (Interview with former official of the House of Parliament, Hargeysa, 13.3.2009). Although having been a much more unintended and problematic product of the civil war (Interview with senior politician, Hargeysa, 8.7.2011) than attested by some (see e.g. Bradbury 2008:69), it had a major impact on Somaliland’s state-making project (Interview with former member of the SNM Central Committee and former minister of the Somaliland government, Hargeysa, 22.07.2008).

Once the SNM leadership had realized in the second half of the 1980s that the movement could no longer maintain its struggle without the support of the traditional authorities (Adam 1995:82) (Interview with former official of the House of Parliament, Hargeysa, 13.3.2009), the SNM established an advisory body of self-selected Isaaq elders who represented their respective sub-clans (Renders/Terlinden 2010:728) and who increasingly took over the task of mobilizing resources (Interview with former member of the SNM Central Committee and former minister of the Somaliland government, Hargeysa, 22.07.2008; Interview with former minister of the Somaliland government, Hargeysa, 30.3.2009). Accounting for their growing importance, the SNM incrementally incorporated the elders into its governance structure (Bryden 1999:8; Bradbury 2008:97). The resulting

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6 For a comparison of the SNM with the United Somali Congress (USC), another, Hawiye-based rebel movement in south-central Somalia, on this issue, see Bakonyi (2009:435).

7 Already on the eve of independence in 1960, the legislators of the Somali Republic abolished the status of clan by law no. 13 (Lewis 2002:156), prosecuting the public disclosure of clan affiliation (Hoben 1988:206) and officially burying tribalism (Gassem 1994:25).
collaboration was, however, anything but smooth sailing. According to a former high-ranking militia fighter, the elders were a “nuisance” to the SNM. For one, their mode of operation created frictions within the guerrilla movement; for another, the rebel leaders soon felt themselves being taken hostage by the traditional authorities (Interview with senior politician, Hargeysa, 8.7.2011). In light of their command over resources (Adam 2008:201), the elders’ political clout had increased significantly (Renders/Terlinden 2010:728). Within the guerrilla movement, the guurti came to be equal in importance with the Central Committee, the SNM’s legislative organ (Samatar 1997:44), largely because it allowed the SNM to expand in such a way as to include all of Somaliland’s clans and to create a broader constituency (Bradbury 2008:97). While Bradbury (2008:69) maintains that the evolution of the guurti can be explained with reference to the “objectives of the SNM’s political manifesto to meld traditional and modern forms of political organization”, it seems as if the council of elders was created out of necessity and was much more an unintended product of the civil war.

Consolidating a nascent national identity

The war also aided the formation of the Somaliland polity by contributing to the development of a nascent national identity, which is indispensable for state-making to succeed (Lemay-Hébert 2009; North 2005). While the Somali Democratic Republic came to be politically divided into two only in 1991, a division into different identities had incrementally taken place long before (Samatar 1997:46; cf. Spears 2010:151f.). This division and the emergence of sub-national identities was fortified through the war experience in different ways. First, the fact that Barre singled out the Isaaq clan for punishment reinforced the formation of an alternative (clan) identity among the (northern) Somali population. Second, apart from reviving clan identities, the war also lent currency to identity markers that diverged from the national Somali identity. When, at the second SNM Congress in 1982, leadership changed to Sheikh Madar, who descended from the religious family that had founded Hargeysa in the nineteenth century and who belonged to the Saudi-based group of the SNM, the rebel movement committed itself to sharia law and instructed its fighters in Islamic teaching and practice (Bradbury 2008:64). Consequently, the guerrilla force decided to rename its fighters mujahedeen (‘holy warriors’), which Adam (2008:209) judges having been “good for morale”. Subscribing to a religious identity not only alluded to the independence struggle of Sayid Mohamed Abdullahi Hassan «Guray», who had fought a ‘jihad’ against the colonial infidels between 1900 and 1920, but also helped finding and defining an identity that set the SNM and its beneficiaries apart from the waning Somali national identity. Against this background, Huliaras (2002:174) concludes that “unlike most other African countries, warfare has played a crucial role in the formation of a strong sense of identity—at least for the majority of its population.” He continues to argue that

“In sum, as happened in the case of medieval Europe (Tilly 1990; McNeill 1982), warfare had played a central and indeed essential role in the process of nation-formation in Somaliland. War shaped the ‘imagined community’ that later proved essential in providing a government apparatus with the moral basis needed to ensure the willing participation and often self-sacrifice of its citizens” (Huliaras 2002:159).

Similarly, (Omaar 1994:234) suggests that the SNM-led guerrilla war “reinforced the bonds” among the Somalilanders, and (Höhne 2006a:398) argues that “as a result of the civil war […], new identities have formed on the ground [which] combine existing identity markers in a way that is particularly meaningful in the current political context.” Although it would be misleading to conclude that the

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8 Yet, it was not until after the war that the guurti was established as a national platform, including traditional authorities of other regions and clans (Interview with Member of Parliament of Somaliland, Hargeysa, 3.7.2011).
Somaliland polity emerged from war with one single, unified identity—not least as non-Isaaq communities obviously entertained identities that (partly) diverged from those of the Isaaq—there is much ground to argue that the civil war fostered the emergence of a nascent national identity.

The ‘War Projects’: State-making and large-scale violence in the 1990s

Mass violence continued to shape Somaliland’s state-making endeavor in the years following its unilateral declaration of independence. Already in 1991, contestation about the allocation of political, military and economic resources started taking root. The ensuing civil strife largely pitted the SNM’s ‘civilian’ and ‘military’ wings, which had emerged during the decade-long liberation struggle, against one another. Whereas the former was mainly comprised of intellectuals who had proclaimed the formation of the SNM in London and Jeddah in 1981, the latter largely encompassed militaries who had started the armed resistance on the ground (Interview with senior politician, Hargeysa, 8.7.2011).

Enjoying the backing of the ‘civilian wing’, interim president Abdirahman Ahmed Ali «Tuur» was eyed with suspicion by the more hardline military elements, the Calan Cas, who were in charge of the most potent SNM militias. In the absence of a binding, centralized command over the different SNM militias (Gilkes 1993; Reno 2003; Spears 2010), «Tuur’s» attempts to establish state-owned security forces provoked tensions within and outside of his administration.

Violent clashes occurred in Burco in January 1992, followed by large-scale violence in Berbera, when the government attempted to secure the port and its revenues, which was controlled by the Isaaq sub-clan of lisa Muse that opposed the Garhajis-dominated «Tuur» government. The subsequent eight months of “extensive death and destruction” (Renders 2006:207) resulted in presumably 1,000 individuals losing their life (Bradbury 2008). Throughout 1992, security continued to deteriorate (Flint 1994), as every clan established its own militia, turning Hargeysa allegedly more insecure than Mogadishu (Interview with official of the Somaliland Ministry of National Planning and Coordination, Erigavo, 8.4.2009; Interview with SNM veteran, Hargeysa, 20.4.2009; Interview with former official of the Presidency, Hargeysa, 4.7.2011). With the government far from being in control of the polity’s military and economic prowess, competing (sub-)clan militias started clashing over control of resources throughout the polity (Renders/Terlinden 2010). The violent conflicts resulted in a diffusion of coercive capacity, institutional fragmentation, and a subordination of a national identity, which is why the 1991-1992 period came to be widely considered having constituted “two wasted years” (Gilkes 1993). This trend was reversed by the ‘war projects’ of President Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal in the mid-1990s.

At the Boroma Conference in 1993, «Tuur» was replaced by Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal as President. While Bradbury (2008) proposes that the guurti selected Egal in a smooth process on 5 May 1993, it was, in fact, the Calan Cas who propagated him in a prolonged tug-of-war. To the military hardliners Egal appeared to be the ideal candidate, not least because the Calan Cas believed that they could easily manipulate and rule through him (Interview with local researcher in Somaliland, Hargeysa, 28.7.2008; Interview with official of the government of Somaliland, Hargeysa, 27.7.2011). Yet, during subsequent years, Egal applied shrewd, authoritarian politics and unwittingly instrumentalyzed different factions against one another, and ultimately overcame the fragmented character Somaliland had taken during the 1991-93 period. Thereby, he did not shy away from instigating two civil wars in order to consolidate his power and, ultimately, drive the state-making project forward. For one, these ‘war projects’ freed Egal from the tight grip of the Calan Cas, whom he felt being hostage to (Interview with Member of Parliament of Somaliland, Hargeysa, 21.7.2011). Being well aware of the historical tensions between the Calan Cas and the Garhajis—a clan congregation of the Habar Yonis and Eidaqalle who supported former President «Tuur»—Egal politically accommodated the SNM hardliners at the expense of the Garhajis, thus fueling the friction, leading some to argue that “Egal intentionally ignited the conflict—
it was really obvious” (Interview with Member of Parliament of Somaliland, Hargeysa, 21.7.2011). For another, these ‘war projects’ allowed Egal to also contain the powers of the ‘traditional authorities’. At their most basic, the ensuing violent conflicts significantly contributed to a re-accumulation of the means of coercion and capital in the hands of the state, the forging of a more state-centred institutional settlement, and the consolidation of a nascent national identity.

Accumulation of coercion and capital

The fragmented character Somaliland had taken during the 1991-93 period constituted a key structural challenge for the young polity and its potential to establish stable state institutions, largely because it favored a situation, in which multiple political actors contested economic and political power. Hence, Egal’s imminent priority lay with the concentration of capital in the hands of the state and acquisition of the means over large-scale violence. In order to finance the state-making project, Egal secured the support of important Isaaq businessmen already during the Boroma conference, whom he largely paid back through tax exemptions (Interview with former minister of the governments of Somalia and Somaliland, Hargeysa, 30.6.2011; Interview with entrepreneur and political activist, Hargeysa, 2.8.2011) and assuring long-term market control (Renders/Terlinden 2010:732). As the main revenue generating assets were under the control of the Habar Awal and/or key Calan Cas militia leaders, and as Isaaq businessmen in Djibouti and Kenya came under increasing pressure by the respective government (Interview with entrepreneur and political activist, Hargeysa, 2.8.2011), Egal found it much easier to access the state’s most profitable revenue streams and attract the business community to invest in Somaliland as compared to his predecessor (Zierau 2003:60; Interview with former official of the Presidency, Hargeysa, 11.7.2011).

Moreover, Egal introduced a proper currency, the Somaliland Shilling, in October 1994. This not only allowed the government to better manage the country’s economy and fiscal household, but it also produced a considerable financial windfall for the government (Bradbury 2008:112). Egal also tapped the khat trade. Customs generated from khat constituted not only the second most profitable source of revenue, but were also a reasonably easy tax to levy, as most of the mild stimulant passes through the town of Kalabeydh close to the Ethiopian-Somaliland border. Given that this town and its environs fell largely under the control of the Habar Awal militias, Egal could relatively easily establish a number of checkpoints and revenue offices to collect charges from the traders. Ultimately, Egal also benefited from regional developments. When Saudi Arabia reopened its market to Somali meat, Somaliland’s economy significantly benefited from the revival of the livestock export trade. In order to draw on the port’s resources, Egal created the Berbera Port Authority in 1993, setting it up in such a way that part of the revenues flowed directly into the President’s office, eluding parliamentary. While this provided Egal with an immediate revenue stream of approximately USD 10-15 million per year, it led to accusations of corruption and impeachment hearings later in the 1990s (Bradbury 2008:111).

Having brought major revenue streams under the control of the state, Egal moved to re-accumulate the polity’s coercive capital. As the Boroma conference had led to provisions for a localized approach to establishing peace and security, Egal initially announced that he had no intentions to centralize control over security forces or to form a national army. Yet, once Egal had established himself in office and secured sufficient sources of revenue, he launched efforts to take control over the coercive means. To this effect, he engaged in a major programme of disarmament, demobilization and

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9 While custom duties levied on the import and export of goods fell to the Ministry of Finance, the revenues generated from service charges came under the presidency. This way, Egal could assure his Habar Awal/lisa Muse clansmen that ‘their’ revenue remained under their clan control (Interview with former official of the Presidency, Hargeysa, 11.7.2011).
reintegration (DDR), for which he used most of the young polity's first revenue (Warsame/Brons 1994:25). By March 1994, the 1st Brigade of the new national army was operative, and eighteen months later, estimates put the number of uniformed and armed soldiers as high as 15,000 (Bradbury 1997:23).

It was not before long that those opposed to the new government in general, and the Calan Cas in particular, accused Egal of having gone against the Peace Charter, which laid out decentralized security provisions. Thus, the Garhajis sub-clans who had supported «Tuur» rejected demobilization (Interview with senior official of the Somaliland National Demobilization Commission, Hargeysa, 25.7.2008; Interview with official of the Somaliland Police Force, Hargeysa, 17.3.2009), which also had little success around Burco and did not take place in Sool or eastern Sanaag (Bradbury 2008:114). Two Garhajis units tightened their military control over Hargeysa airport, which lies in the territory of the Garhajis lineage of the Eidagalle, mirroring the earlier stance of certain Habar Awal militias under «Tuur» (Interview with journalist, Hargeysa, 25.7.2008). Their non-compliance with Egal’s policies and consequent hindrance of Egal’s endeavour to concentrate the means of large-scale violence in the state realm rendered military action at the part of the government both increasingly necessary and legitimate to pursue its objective.

Although political issues lay at the heart of the dispute, it also carried economic connotations (Interview with former minister of the governments of Somalia and Somaliland, Hargeysa, 7.8.2008; Interview with former official of the House of Parliament, Hargeysa, 13.3.2009), as by taxing and harassing commercial and aid flights, the Garhajis militia interfered in the business of the Habar Awal entrepreneurs living in Hargeysa, who were crucial to Egal’s ability to establish and maintain government capacity (Bradbury 2008). Thus, in many ways, the challenges Egal faced resembled the conflict «Tuur» had fought in Berbera two years earlier. Rejecting calls for another national clan conference to resolve outstanding issues, Egal unleashed his eager military officers onto the opposition in November 1994, with the stated aim of securing the airport. Conflict spread to the Eidagalle village of Toon and Burco, when government troops tried to take control of Habar Yonis checkpoints in the city’s vicinity in March 1995. The resulting war sparked the heaviest fighting since the anti-Barre struggle in which as many as 4,000 people lost their lives, and up to 180,000 fled to Ethiopia (Bradbury 2008). The conflict ultimately led to the military defeat of the opposition, leaving Egal’s government with an enhanced degree of control over the polity’s coercive capacity. The war had thus helped to achieve what Egal had not attained through political maneuvering: weakening the Garhajis opposition in military, political, and economic terms and replacing their power through state agency. As had been the case for the SNM in 1991, also the Egal administration did not end up holding an outright monopoly over the means of coercion across the Somaliland territory—yet, its quasi-monopoly over large-scale violence allowed it to indirectly control the evolving political developments.

Forging institutional settlements

The ‘war projects’ also allowed Egal to reform the institutional set-up in a way that provided him and his government with greater political powers, control, and room for maneuver. While it is true that the civil wars Egal willingly entered into left Somaliland in shatters to a significant degree, the President emerged from these wars not only as winner, but in a strengthened position. First, the ‘war projects’ allowed Egal to weaken the opposition. For one, the wars crippled the opposition militarily; for another, they permitted the President to annihilate the organized Garhajis opposition in political terms—not least by bribing certain of its leaders. Second, the civil wars also enabled Egal to liberate himself from the tight grip of the Calan Cas. Having given the military leaders plenty of rope and portraying the war effort as an ‘Calan Cas project’, the President managed to wash his hands of responsibility, while, simultaneously, politically delegitimizing the Calan Cas (Interview with local researcher in Somaliland, Hargeysa, 28.7.2008; Interview with SSDF veteran, Hargeysa, 4.7.2011;
Interview with former official of the Presidency, Hargeysa, 4.7.2011; Interview with official of the Somaliland Ministry of Education, 10.7.2011). Assuring himself of the support of the guurti, whom Egal convinced that the Calan Cas constituted a threat to peace in Somaliland (Interview with Intellectual, Hargeysa, 6.7.2011), he incrementally sacked Calan Cas individuals from their ministerial positions, replacing them either with individuals from smaller clans, ‘traditional leaders’, and/or members of the Garhajis (Interview with senior official of the Somaliland National Demobilization Commission, Hargeysa, 25.7.2008; Interview with former official of the Presidency, Hargeysa, 4.7.2011). In order to deprive both the Garhajis leaders as well as the Calan Cas commanders of the ability to contest his political maneuvering militarily, Egal accommodated their rank and file by turning them into presidential guards. This not only served the purpose of removing the support base of his competitors, but also signaled other militias that it paid to belong to the state.

The ‘war projects’ were concluded by the shrewdly engineered Hargeysa Summit, which took place in the capital between October 1996 and February 1997. The conference served Egal to consolidate the institutional settlement. Egal hamstrung the involvement of traditional authorities in the inter-clan negotiations prior to the Hargeysa summit and positioned himself at the centre of all negotiations (Renders/Terlinden 2010:732f.; Interview with Intellectual, Hargeysa, 6.7.2011).10 The President justified this by arguing that the civil wars had constituted political rather than clan conflicts, thus rendering the involvement of the polity’s legitimate government at the cost of ‘traditional authorities’ essential. While the summit had officially been organized by the House of Elders, the latter was steadily controlled by Egal (Renders/Terlinden 2010:733). Egal exercised additional leverage over the conference on the basis that it was largely financed by the government—a novelty in Somaliland’s track-record of summits (Jimcaale 2005:66f.; Academy for Peace and Development 2008). Moreover, the President had not only selected a conference presidium and secretariat already prior to the meeting’s onset, but had also handpicked roughly half of the 315 delegates (Interview with Member of Parliament of Somaliland, Hargeysa, 21.7.2011).11 This led a group of seventy-nine prominent individuals to sign a petition in which they called for the appointment of a neutral guurti to ensure fair conference proceedings (Interview with Intellectual, Hargeysa, 6.7.2011). While the government refused to tolerate any debate, going so far as to dismiss ministers suspected of not readily toeing the party line (Bradbury 2008:125), the House of Elders rejected the petition, incrementally becoming partisan to the government. Thus, the war projects and their conclusion allowed Egal to not only concentrate the means of violence in the government’s hands, but also resumed authority over the ‘rules of the game’.

**Consolidating a national identity**

Even though the civil wars pitched different (clan-based) camps against one another, thus limiting chances of readily consolidating a national identity, they ultimately also assisted in carving out identity markers for a common Somaliland identity. This was largely accomplished by strengthening the narrative of independence. Apart from successfully labeling the Calan Cas as war mongers, Egal skillfully framed the wars as struggles between nationalists and unionists. While placing himself firmly in the independence camp, Egal portrayed the Garhajis opposition as struggling for re-unification with

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10 By and large, Egal simply suppressed the participation of the elders of his own Habar Awal clan, thus depriving the other clans’ elders of their equivocation negotiation party and bringing the talks to a halt.

11 The Hargeysa conference numbered about twice as many voting delegates as the Boroma conference, because Egal insisted on supplementing the traditional authorities by an equal number of parliamentarian delegates (International Crisis Group 2003:12; Academy for Peace and Development 2008). While he justified this modification by arguing that the legislature should have a say in national matters, this alteration lay largely in the President’s goal to maximise his chances of emerging from the conference as political victor.
the south. For historical, geographical, and political reasons, the Garhajis were, indeed, largely in favour of unification with the remainder of Somalia (Interview with local researcher in Somaliland, Hargeysa, 28.7.2008; Interview with senior official of the Somaliland Ministry of Interior, Hargeysa, 20.4.2009). The portrayal of the opposition as pro-unionists gained credence when preceding President «Tuur», his former Finance Minister Ismail Hurre «Buba», and General «Yare» all accepted positions in Aideed’s government in Mogadishu. Given that these prominent leaders also took with them all senior politicians of the Garhajis, this Isaaq clan lost any say in Somaliland politics (Interview with Member of Parliament of Somaliland, Hargeysa, 21.7.2011). More crucially, however, Egal managed to thus revive and reinvigorate debate about Somaliland nationalism. The years subsequent to the violent turmoil of the mid-1990s were characterized by increasing moves towards nation-building. According to Rengers and Terlinden (2010:731), “President Egal masterfully nurtured and instrumentalized the embryonic popular sense of nationhood and statehood initiated at Borama.”

In sum, it is plain to see that the processes Somaliland went through to arrive at a nascent state by late 1996 were anything but peaceful, and featured diverse violent conflicts during the first six years of the polity’s existence. Hence, Farah (1999) rightly argues that “Somaliland’s experience in peacekeeping and governance had been relatively violent (yet constructive).” While it is indisputable that these civil wars were brutish and had a negative impact on the lives of thousands of people, and while there might have been alternatives to violent conflict in order to achieve the desired outcomes, the civil wars fought in the mid-1990s were clearly constitutive of Somaliland’s state-making. The civil wars Egal pitched not only enhanced state regime hegemony in institutional terms, but have been judged that “as in so many other instances, the notion of statehood was nurtured during the course of war” (Rengers/Terlinden 2010:732; referring to Rengers 2006:271, 9).

Concluding Remarks

While neither a necessary nor sufficient condition,12 some of the more sustained episodes of mass violence appear having been instrumental for state-making in Somaliland. Although the SNM-led struggle did not exactly produce the outcomes Tilly describes for historical Europe—resulting in the emergence of a tight administration, coherent army, etc.—it has been considered “formative in creating a ‘political community’ of shared interests” (Bradbury 2008:50) and perceived as having served as a “cruel university in the arts of political mobilisation and popular leadership” (Bryden 1999:137). Similarly, also the post-1991 civil wars are thought having “served to consolidate public support for the territory’s independence and to strengthen central government” (Bradbury 2008:123), leading (Huliaras 2002:159) to conclude that “[i]n sum, as happened in the case of medieval Europe [...], warfare had played a central and indeed essential role in the process of nation-formation in Somaliland.”

Although more research is necessary to establish more precisely how and why what components of Somaliland’s bellicose trajectory have been constitutive of state-making, the argument that ‘warfare had played a central and indeed essential role in the process of nation-formation in Somaliland’ seems to be a plausible one. While war is surely neither a panacea nor an ‘angel of order’, in historical and macro-societal terms it appears to be more than a mere ‘daemon of decay’. Hence, academics and policymakers alike need to seriously scrutinize the common proposition that “the Chaka wars were senseless and inhumane while the Thirty Years’ War was fought for a noble cause” (Ogot 1972:3).

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12 See e.g. the case of Puntland, which “was unaffected by the civil strife that accompanied the collapse of the Somali state” (Battera 2003:230), but nevertheless formed a similar polity.

Rather than summarily demonising violent conflict in contemporary Africa, we might need to acknowledge that large-scale violence might, despite its immense human cost, exert effects that are constitutive of state-making. Somaliland does appear not to be an exception in this regard.
Bibliography


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