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

Masters Dissertation

Elin Svedjemo

September 2002

University of Sussex, Brighton

Masters in Anthropology of Development and Social Transformation

Supervisor: Dr. Ralph Grillo

**In search of a state - Creating a Nation:
The Role of the Diaspora in Somaliland's Pursuit of Recognized Statehood**

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

List of abbreviations and glossary	iv
Preface	v
1. Introduction	1
methodology	
2. A brief political history	4
2.1 The colonial legacy - dividing the Somali territory	4
2.2 Decolonialisation and formation of the Somali Republic	4
2.3 Somaliland's declaration of independence	7
3. The Somali diaspora	8
3.1 Locating Somalis in Britain	
3.2 Politics for afar - 'Somali style'	10
4. Redefining boundaries - reconstructing identities	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
5. Somaliland's quest for independence: a transnational project	16
5.1 The missing link between 'host' and 'home'	
5.2 The diaspora goes 'transnational'	22
6. Deterritorialised nation-state building	23
7. Somaliland: eleven years on...	25
8. Conclusion	28
Bibliography	30
Appendix A - Maps	33
Appendix B - Introduction to Somali clan structure	35
Appendix C - List of relevant persons and organisations	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
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
SNM	Somali National Movement
TNG	Transitional National Government

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...