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MIMESIS AND MIMICRY IN DYNAMICS OF STATE AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN NORTHERN SOMALIA

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The muddle of Somali statehood reveals the limits of the current international system.[1] The empty shell of the collapsed state of Somalia enjoys international recognition, whereas Somaliland in north-western Somalia, which seceded in 1991 and developed as a *de facto* state, goes unrecognized. Puntland in the north-east is somewhat in-between. It is part of a future federal Somalia; in the absence of the latter, 'Puntland will exercise within its jurisdiction the rights of the former Somalia' (Charter of the State of Puntland). This situation does not find any reflection within the state-centric structure of international law. Additionally, the factual absence of any internally representative *and* externally recognized Somali authority leaves the Somali population in a legal and political limbo, without access to foreign embassies, valid travel documents, and so forth, and defenceless against external intervention. Somalis continue to uphold the idea of the state, which, however, over the years of civil war and statelessness, has split up into a 'one state' and a 'two state' vision. The latter informed the secession of Somaliland, while the former is adhered to by Somali nationalists, among them the constituency of Puntland, who reject the division of Somalia.[2]

Starting from this empirical situation, I wish to make a more general point about identity and state formation in northern Somalia through mimesis and mimicry. Doornbos has observed that among the Bakonzo in western Uganda and the ancient Hebrews kingship was established by emulation. In his words, '[t]he two cases illustrate how closely interrelated can be the emulation and adoption of worldly state institutions, the assertion of political power and the articulation

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[2] The third vision would be 'pan-Somalism', which was particularly strong in the late colonial and early post-colonial times. It is still present in the minds of many (older) Somalis. Since, at the moment, pan-Somalism is far from the political realities on the ground, I do not treat it here as a serious political vision.

of identity' (Doornbos 2006: 19). Drawing on institutional economics he emphasizes 'the strength and importance of organisational models in competitive processes' as 'pull factors' for processes of emulation (*ibid.*: 21). In a similar vein Spruyt (2007: 220) notes that

> sociological institutionalism, in particular, sees the convergence towards the state as a process of mimicry and social imprinting. Polities tend to interact with like types of governments. At the same time newly emerging polities will style themselves self-consciously to conform to the existing 'organizational field'.[3]

Schlee points out that this kind of imitative behaviour can also be found among 'old' enemies who 'dispose of a common repertoire of threats, tactics and strategies which they learned from their respective enemy'. Even their forms of propaganda and 'iconography of violence' are often very similar (Schlee 2001: 20).[4] Both mimesis and mimicry contain the notion of imitation; additionally, they comprise a variety of different facets. In order to make mimesis and mimicry helpful concepts for analysing social and political developments, I am going to differentiate them according to some minimal definitions derived from philosophy/art and biology, respectively.[5]

The continuing discussion about mimesis started with Plato and involved questions of truthful representation. The complexity of the concept defies any clear-cut definition. But it can be confirmed that mimesis denotes the endeavour to imitate, represent and understand nature and ideas. Imitation can be either an aim in itself (Gebauer and Wulf 1992; Encyclopaedia Britannica 2008), or an interim aim on the way to gaining certain powers/goods/resources related to the imitated model (Görlich 1999: 157).[6] Mimicry, on the other hand, is described in biology as a three-part system, involving the model, the mimic and the signal receiver (Barrett 1987: 76). The mimic imitates the model and thereby sends wrong or confusing signals to the signal receiver, who then reacts in a way that is potentially beneficial for the mimic. Consequently, mimicry has in most cases the aim to deceive and/or camouflage in order to gain some profit (Barrett 1987; Encyclopaedia Britannica 2008; Pasteur 1982).

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[3] Both Doornbos and Spruyt make use (at least implicitly) of ideas originally expressed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), who analysed how organizations tend to become similar within an organizational field. Their concept of mimetic isomorphism in fact captures many aspects of what I describe in this paper under 'mimesis'. Yet the aspect of mimicry is absent in DiMaggio's and Powell's concept. In their theory of isomorphism they are interested in structural determinants leading to homogenization (*ibid.*: 149). I am also interested in the (personal) motivations of actors, as far as discernible, that impact on processes of state and identity formation. This intentional aspect is best captured by mimicry.

[4] All translations from German are mine.

[5] Both terms are sometimes used in social anthropology, but without much differentiation; see, for example, Ferguson (2002), Taussig (1993), Huggan (1997/8).

[6] Taussig (1993) emphasizes that the 'magic of mimicry' – that is, the appropriation of power, for instance, through the imitation of the form – works even if similarity is achieved only at an abstract or surface level.

The main analytical difference between mimesis and mimicry is that the first is an open attempt to imitate, often as a strategy to cope with uncertainty, while the latter helps to conceal the real intentions of the actors. Empirically, however, both often are simultaneously involved in processes of imitation.

Against this background, I argue first, that mimesis and mimicry, or the (partly deceptive) imitation and representation of contemporary standards of statehood and nationhood on the side of Somaliland, and the more or less open mimicking of Somaliland's developments by Puntland, strongly contributed to institution building in both political entities. Second, my argument continues that mimesis and mimicry play a role in the ongoing processes of identity formation and nation building in northern Somalia. Since the region as a whole is inhabited by culturally rather homogeneous people, the formation of Somaliland and Puntland implies the construction of *political identities*. These are tied to the opposed visions regarding Somali statehood mentioned above, and are 'rooted' in different claims to the past in order to legitimize current positions.[7] Finally, I propose that the mutually exclusive logics of the political programmes of Somaliland and Puntland breed conflict that has triggered repeated military clashes since 2002. Thus, the fighting between Somaliland and Puntland, particularly over the Sool region, is understood as part of a larger conflict of state formation.

SOMALIA AND SOMALILAND IN LEGAL AND POLITICAL THEORY

Somalia is frequently presented as the classical example of 'state collapse' in recent history (Langford 1999: 61; Menkhaus 2007a: 68). It is well known that this term is highly problematic.[8] Here, I focus exclusively on some issues within legal and political theory that are directly related to the situation in northern Somalia.

In international law, collapsed states are 'states in which the government institutions have ceased to function, or have totally disappeared, for a prolonged period of time' (Koskenmäki 2004: 5; see also Thürer 1999). This makes sense from an international legal perspective, in which the existence of an effective government is a key condition for the legal existence of a state (Crawford 2007: 33–5) – though, even in the absence of an effective government,

> international law provides . . . strong protection against disturbances that might threaten the statehood of a once established state. Firstly,

[7] The term 'rooted' does *not* exclusively indicate something grown from historical depth. Rather, people 'drive their roots from the present into the past, from the surface of time into its depth, just like a plant drives its roots downwards into the soil' (Schlee 2007: 419). Of course some historical ground has to be already in place for driving down the roots.

[8] It is ridden by normative presumptions and tied to situational political agendas. This leads to terminological fuzziness and the inability to grasp the complex political situations at the local level (Hagmann and Hoehne 2009).

> governments are protected by a presumption in favour of their effectiveness and continuity. Therefore, the temporary ineffectiveness or absence of a government . . . does not affect statehood. Secondly, state identity also enjoys legal protection by a presumption in favour of its continuity and against extinction. (Koskenmäki 2004: 6)

In cases of state collapse, obviously, international law supports the *status quo*, which is the continued existence of a state, at least as a legal fiction. Nonetheless, the absence of a government brings about a number of practical problems, which Koskenmäki (*ibid*.: 7–18) summarizes as 'gradual loss of representative powers'.

Some of the internal consequences are that people within a collapsed state have difficulties in accessing official documents, travelling legally, and conducting formal business transactions. At the level of international politics, the representation of a collapsed state will at best be ambiguous. This opens the door to manipulations and interferences by external actors.

Closely related to the problems of international representation in the absence of a government is the problem of (non-)recognition of alternative institutions replacing the defunct government and political entities emerging from collapsed states. According to Schoiswohl (2004: 7), recognition 'touches upon the fundamental question of *when* a State – endowed with legal capacity under international law – emerges (question of statehood) as well as of *who* bears the legal capacity to represent an existing State under international law (question of governance and representation)'.[9] This author discusses theoretical questions of (non-)recognition and secession in international law intensively, and applies his findings to the case of Somaliland, for which he introduces the term 'dissolving secession'. It captures the complex interplay of secession and dissolution when a state collapses, but is upheld as a matter of international law under the principle of continuity (*ibid*.: 50). Regarding the problem of (non-)recognition, Schoiswohl observes that even in cases such as Somaliland, where the effective existence of the new political entity is beyond doubt, and the collapse of the 'parent state' is equally well established, recognition does not have to be granted. It is a political issue and up to members of the international community to recognize Somaliland or not. At the same time, Schoiswohl proposes that in the face of the high degree of its factual *effectiveness*, and the satisfaction of the remaining criteria of statehood, Somaliland – while not enjoying a right to secession – may under international law be qualified as a state even in the absence of recognition. This theoretical position, however, remains without much concrete effect unless other states treat Somaliland as a state (*ibid*.: 182–3).

Currently, Somaliland is one of several emerging states challenging the existing international system.[10] The processes of their formation

[9] Italics and capitals in the original.
[10] For other examples see Bahcheli *et al*. (2004).

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FIGURE 1 Political divisions in the Horn of Africa

are often related to conflict and war (Clapham 2001; Doornbos 2006). Long ago, Tilly made the point that state making is war making. Yet, his findings were mostly confined to Western Europe (Tilly 1975; Herbst 1990). Only recently did Niemann (2007) employ Tilly's model of state formation to the continued conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). He also identified significant dissimilarities between Tilly's model and the current situation in Congo – for example, the embeddedness of local extraction in global markets and the massive interference of external state and non-state actors in DRC (including members of the diaspora, who financially support conflict parties in the home country). Additionally, Niemann stressed the role of 'ethnopolitics' as a driving force behind many current conflicts. This does not mean that similar social differences were irrelevant in early modern Europe, or that ethnic differences are the cause of present conflicts. Rather, the author emphasized that social identities that

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have gained importance during colonial and post-colonial times can be mobilized in contemporary war making (*ibid.*: 30–4).[11] These qualifications of Tilly's argument are also important regarding the developments in northern Somalia.

While a number of new states have been established and recognized worldwide since 1990, the African Union (AU) retreats to the principle of the sanctity of the post-colonial borders, in order to avoid the possibility of large-scale instability due to the contested nature of most of Africa's borders.[12] The gap, which results in some cases at least, between empirical reality and *realpolitik* is filled by what Pegg terms *de facto* states. These are

> entities which feature long-term, effective, and popularly supported organized political leaderships that provide governmental services to a given population in a defined territorial area. They seek international recognition and view themselves as capable of meeting the obligations of sovereign statehood. They are, however, unable to secure widespread juridical recognition and therefore function outside the boundaries of international legitimacy. (Pegg 1998: 4)

Somaliland fulfils these criteria, as will be shown below. Of course, it was not 'born' as a viable *de facto* state. Its development, particularly in relation to Puntland, is the subject of the next section.

STATE FORMATION IN NORTHERN SOMALIA THROUGH MIMESIS AND MIMICRY

Somaliland's way

The government of Maxamed Siyad Barre was overthrown in Mogadishu in January 1991.[13] At the same time, the Somali National Movement (SNM), the guerrilla organization dominated by members of the Isaaq clan family, took control over north-western Somalia.[14] Shortly afterwards, this region declared its independence, as the Republic of Somaliland, from the rest of Somalia in line with the borders of the former British Protectorate. These old/new borders cut Somalia in the central north, about 100 kilometres east of Laascaanood, where the British and the Italians drew the line in 1874 (Lewis 2002: 55).

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[11] On the role of social (for example, ethnic) identities in conflicts, see Schlee (2006), Ferguson (2003) and Bowen (1996).

[12] The only exception to this principle is Eritrea, so far. Its independence in 1993 was supported by the parent state, Ethiopia. Southern Sudan could become the next case of post-colonial state formation in Africa.

[13] Somali place and personal names in this text follow the Somali orthography (with the exception of Mogadishu, which is so well established in English, and the names of some Somali authors who adopted an anglicized version of their names). The Latin 'c' stands for a sound close to the Arabic 'ع' (ayn); 'x' denotes 'ح' (ha), as in, for example, Laascaanood or in Farax.

[14] Clan families are sub-divided in clans, sub-clans and so forth (Lewis 1961).

There were a number of reasons for this step, but two reasons stand out in particular. The first was the unfolding civil war in southern Somalia after the fall of Barre, and the usurpation of the presidency by Cali Mahdi. The latter was one of the two leaders of the United Somali Congress (USC), and he took the presidency without the consent of his co-leader in the USC, Maxamed Farax Caydiid, and without consulting the other guerrilla factions, including the SNM, who felt that the south was again marginalizing the 'north' (present-day Somaliland).[15] Subsequently, Caydiid and Mahdi started to fight for power in Mogadishu, causing large-scale destruction and disaster. The news coming from there was truly horrifying and repelled people in the north. Of second and equal importance for Somaliland's secession was the still fresh memory of the bombardment of Hargeysa and Burco by Siad Barre's army. The SNM had taken the two towns in north-western Somalia, which are predominantly inhabited by Isaaq, in a surprise attack in late May 1988. The regime's counter-attack with indiscriminate shelling and bombing claimed thousands of civilian lives; hundreds of thousands of refugees fled to the countryside or across the border into eastern Ethiopia (Africa Watch 1990). This collective experience of suffering transformed the SNM into a mass movement, which a close observer at that time described as 'simply the Isaaq people up in arms' (Prunier 1990/1: 109).

The decision to secede was taken at a conference (Somali sing.: *shir*) in the town of Burco in May 1991. Representatives of all clans inhabiting north-western Somalia were present, among them Dhulbahante and Warsangeeli.[16] At the *shir* in Burco the SNM leadership was not clearly in favour of secession.[17] However, the rank and file of the movement, remembering the bombardments in 1988, were. The situation was volatile since everybody around the conference had arms, and the SNM was without doubt the most powerful party. One of the high-ranking traditional leaders of the Dhulbahante, the late Garaad Cabdiqani, recounted the situation as follows:

> We saw that it was impossible to reach an agreement with the people of the southern regions. We decided to establish an administration for the northern region .... While we were in Burco, big demonstrations happened in the large towns of Hargeysa, Burco and Berbera. There was no other choice than to say: 'Yes, we accept.' At this moment we were not convinced about secession, but no one could say 'no' (interview, Laascaanood, September 2002).

[15] The term 'north' (in Somali: *waqooyi*) in fact refers to the geographical north-west of Somalia, and covers the territory of the former British Protectorate. The area from the north-east to the south was administered by the Italians and is called 'south' (*koonfur*). After the unification of British and Italian Somaliland in 1960, power and resources were concentrated in Mogadishu in the south (Adam 1994: 24–8).

[16] These two clans, together with the Majeerteen clan and several smaller groups, form the Harti clan confederation inhabiting mainly but not exclusively the central and eastern regions of northern Somalia.

[17] Throughout the 1980s, the SNM had officially aimed at toppling Barre and reforming rule in Somalia (Bradbury 2008: 63–5).

This step was presented as revocation of the voluntary union between British and Italian Somaliland that had formed the Republic of Somalia on 1 July 1960 (Somaliland Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2002). Despite this historical reference, the observer's perspective reveals that the declaration of independence in 1991 was clearly born out of the momentary dramatic situation and was ill-prepared. A number of SNM leaders and many members of the non-Isaaq clans were not in favour of cutting themselves off from the rest of Somalia.

In the early 1990s, Somaliland was ridden by internal conflict (Gilkes 1993). The SNM could not even manage to establish basic law and order in the capital city of Hargeysa. At the same time, and despite political impasse, peace was built at the local level largely through recourse to traditional strategies of conflict settlement (Farah and Lewis 1997). This provided the country with a socio-political foundation. Somaliland's first President, the former SNM chairman Cabdiraxman Axmed Cali Tuur, was succeeded by Maxamed Ibraahim Cigaal in 1993. Thereupon, Tuur abandoned the secessionist project and turned to the south, where he joined Maxamed Farax Caydiid in Mogadishu. While he arguably followed his own agenda of keeping power in Somali politics, he also represented some sections among Isaaq (particularly among his own clan) who were against secession or disappointed with power sharing in Somaliland and therefore looked for other options in Somalia (Bryden 1996). During the early 1990s, various Isaaq clans (which made up the core of SNM) fought each other in Hargeysa, Berbera and Burco. The other non-Isaaq clans in Somaliland – the Gadabuursi and Ciisa in the west, and the Dhulbahante and Warsangeeli in the east – existed in a limbo, in a situation of 'no peace, no war' (Richards 2005). A second big *shir* was held in the town of Booroma in the Gadabuursi area in 1993. Here, both a peace and a national charter were adopted by the participants. The latter served as a provisional constitution for Somaliland in the following years. A bicameral Parliament was established, consisting of a House of Elders (*Golaha Guurtida*) and a House of Representatives (*Golaha Wakiiladda*), which characterized the hybrid nature of the political system of Somaliland. The integration of traditional authorities ensured basic legitimacy in a society divided into patrilinear descent groups.[18] The condition of the country stabilized in the second half of the 1990s (WSP 2005; Renders 2006).

From the outside, the Republic of Somaliland resembled the contemporary model of a state regarding political self-representation, territoriality and institutional framework. I argue that these state structures were established by local actors in a mimetic fashion, modelled after other states in the international system, in order to gain regional stability and prevent violent escalations as in the south.[19]

[18] For a highly insightful discussion of the role of descent in Somali society, see Luling (2006).

[19] This aspect of mimesis in the context of the formation of Somaliland is fully consistent with the characteristics of mimetic isomorphism described by DiMaggio and

Mimicry comes in, since, from the very beginning, a number of the country's elites were not committed to its independence, which they nonetheless proclaimed towards the outside. This discrepancy was well known among the local population. Thus, the signal receivers in this act of mimicry were the international community and probably the political leaders in the south. Arguably, Tuur and others perceived Somaliland as a vehicle to gain resources and power, and to strengthen their position in possible future negotiations about power sharing in Somalia. In the eyes of many ordinary SNM fighters and Isaaq civilians, however, the declaration of independence was not mimicry, but an adequate expression of their feelings and will after 'southern' oppression and civil war. Interestingly enough, these different agendas behind the processes of mimetic state formation could co-exist at the local level, since they led to the same result: the establishment of Somaliland.

Under President Maxamed Ibraahim Cigaal, an experienced Isaaq politician who had *not* joined the guerrillas previously, important steps were taken to further democratize – in the 'Western' sense – the emerging state. To begin with, he pushed the SNM leaders out of political key positions and bureaucratized the system. After his re-election in 1997, Somaliland was realized as a political entity and identity in a *quid pro quo* fight for power and participation between the President, war veterans, and members of the nascent civil society.[20] In this way, the vision of Somaliland as an independent state increasingly materialized in domestic politics, but also, and most tangibly, through the introduction of a new currency (the Somaliland shilling), the establishment of Somaliland newspapers, and the erection of national and civil war monuments. The foundation for the development of an imagined community (Anderson 1983) was thus established. Even if initially, as argued above, Somaliland was predominantly shaped by mimicry on the part of some elites, its *de facto* statehood increasingly gained weight on its own – at least in the political centre of the country.

In May 2001, a referendum on the constitution was held. The first article of the constitution confirms that Somaliland is an independent state. Yet votes on this constitution as well as in all following elections in Somaliland – the local government polls in 2002, the Presidential contest in 2003 and the parliamentary elections in 2005 – were not or were only very incompletely cast in the Harti-inhabited territories in the regions of Togdheer, Sool, and Sanaag. This resulted in the disproportionate under-representation of Harti in the government institutions of Somaliland (Hansen and Bradbury 2007: 470–1). Moreover, some of the Dhulbahante and Warsangeeli representatives

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Powell (1983: 151); they emphasize that 'uncertainty is a powerful force that encourages imitation'. In this context they mention Japan's political reforms in the late nineteenth century as 'one of the most dramatic instances [of] modelling apparently successful western prototypes' (*ibid.*).

[20] This of course was a complex process. Its description is beyond the scope of this article. See Renders (2006) for an exhaustive outline of the multifaceted internal dynamics of state formation in Somaliland.

in Hargeysa do not enjoy much support among their supposed constituency, as one informant in Ceerigaabo (interview, 31 July 2002) stated: 'We call the national *guurti* the funny Members of Parliament.' He explained that most of them were not elected. Frequently people complained that the clan representatives in Hargeysa had been 'hand-picked' by President Ciigal.

The political marginalization of the Harti was partly self-induced. Many non-Isaaq clans opposed the secession of Somaliland from Somalia in 1991. Over the years, the Gadabuursi, however, integrated well into the political framework, and the current President of Somaliland, Dahir Rayaale Kahin, belongs to this clan. In contrast, the anti-secessionist position of Dhulbahante and Warsangeeli further hardened and gained relevance when Puntland was founded in north-eastern Somalia in 1998 (Bryden 1999: 137). Within its purely Harti-led administration, Majeerteen took the lead, followed by Dhulbahante and Warsangeeli. The experienced Majeerteen military officer and leader of the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), Cabdullahi Yusuf, became President and established himself in the capital city of Garoowe.[21]

Becoming Puntland

In the early 1990s north-eastern Somalia was largely spared the violent disruption of civil war. Only in the Mudug region, south of the town of Gaalkacyo, was there military action: some SSDF and USC troops clashed as part of the greater Darood–Hawiye confrontation emanating from the ongoing fighting in southern Somalia.[22] A fragile cessation of hostilities was reached here in 1993. Between 1992 and 1993 the SSDF was also engaged in fighting Al Ittihat Al Islami (AIAI), an Islamic organization which at first cooperated with the SSDF and local authorities in administrating the port of Boosaaso in north-east Somalia. When it became clear that AIAI had its own political agenda, the SSDF, led by Cabdullahi Yusuf, routed the organization to the extent that it dissolved as a military front; its remaining members either fled south or hurried to re-integrate in local civilian life (Farah 2004).

Subsequently, the north-east remained calm, but lacked any effective institutional rule. Local administrations were erected in different districts and regions. They were aided by the SSDF as the only well-developed military organization – it took over some supra-regional policing responsibilities – and by traditional authorities who enjoyed legitimacy as mediators and advisers in exercising a minimum of governance. The richness in natural resources along the coast of north-east Somalia allowed the economy to flourish. Politically, the

[21] The SSDF was the oldest Somali guerrilla front founded, under a different name, in 1979 (Abdi 1998: 316–20).

[22] The last President, Maxamed Siyad Barre, belonged to the Darood clan family. After the USC took over Mogadishu in January 1991, Hawiye militias chased members of the Darood group as 'Barre's family' out of Mogadishu and all over southern Somalia.

whole region was nevertheless blockaded by divisions within the SSDF between Cabdullahi Yusuf and Maxamed Abshir Muuse, a former police general, and their respective followers. The former belonged to the Cumar Maxamuud, the latter to the Cusman Maxamuud sub-clan of the Majeerteen. Some internal unity was reached only temporarily when the SSDF leaders engaged in externally organized reconciliation conferences for Somalia, such as the so-called Sodere process organized by Ethiopia in 1996. The uniting bond was a strong commitment of the SSDF leadership and the people residing in the north-east to support the unity of Somalia. After the repeated failure of national reconciliation, the popular pressure on the political actors in the region to organize some overarching regional administration increased (*ibid.*).

Between May and August 1998, a clan conference, similar to the earlier conferences held in Burco and Booroma in Somaliland, took place in Garoowe. Ahmed Yusuf Farah, an intimate observer of developments at that time, argued that 'the SSDF viewed the conference as the first step towards establishing a democratic representative government based on the will of the people, and towards *creating an alternative to the secessionist option* [exercised by Somaliland]' (Farah 2001: 20, italics added). Battera, who attended the *shir* in Garoowe 1998 as an external adviser, described the 'Charter of the State of Puntland', which became Puntland's (preliminary) constitution, as following 'the pattern of the Booroma National Charter, which formalized the birth of Somaliland' (Battera 1998: 4). The institutional framework of Somaliland was partly copied. Puntland only has one chamber of Parliament, the House of Representatives. The role of the traditional authorities (Somali pl. *Isimo*), who in Somaliland sit in the House of Elders, was not formalized in Puntland. They nevertheless enjoy great respect and are frequently engaged in mediating internal conflicts (*ibid.*; Gundel 2006: 24–5; Doornbos 2000).

This sketch of the development of Puntland shows that its formation process clearly bears signs of mimesis – the close imitation of important organizational and institutional steps taken earlier by Somaliland.[23] At the same time, the choice of the name Puntland suggests that mimicry was involved as well. The emerging political entity was forged out of a congregation of different Harti clans and thus had a genealogical reference point. Why then was Puntland not called 'Hartiland' upon its foundation in 1998 – more so since it was never really meant to be an independent state, but to remain a part of Somalia? The political actors in the north-east must have been aware of the fact that a clan

[23] It has to be noted that Puntland was established *before* the so-called building-block approach that proposed the establishment of regional administrations as a way to stabilize collapsed Somalia was submitted by Ethiopia to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in late 1998 (Bryden 1999: 134). Thus, its founders were oriented towards Somaliland and did not follow an external agenda. This is vital for the argument concerning mimesis and mimicry involved in this process.

name would never have been taken seriously by the outside world and by Somaliland. I argue that, against the latter, the name Puntland was consciously employed. It had two advantages. First, it had a ring of 'land' and thus established a territorial claim, including the Dhulbahante- and Warsangeeli-inhabited regions, which were already claimed by Somaliland. Thereby it elegantly compensated for the fact that Puntland could not draw on colonial borders like Somaliland. Second, the name drew an enormous historical connection between the land of Punt mentioned in Egyptian sources and the present-day political entity. Even though archaeologists locate the ancient Punt much further to the north-west, along today's southern Sudanese coast or in Eritrea, this historical reference is an expression of political ingenuity, and added 'depth' and a sense of national identity to the genealogical construct of Puntland.[24]

The further development of Puntland was hindered by the authoritarian style of rule of President Cabdullahi Yusuf. After three years in office, his government had failed to accomplish the constitutional provisions to draft a new constitution, conduct a population census, organize a constitutional referendum, and hold multi-party elections. The old tensions between different Majeerteen sub-clans over power sharing were still there. Additionally, the external political arena had changed once again. In 2000, the government of Djibouti hosted a peace and reconciliation conference for Somalia in Arta, a town south-east of Djibouti city, which resulted in the setting up of the Transitional National Government (TNG). The conference followed a formula of power sharing between the bigger Somali clan families. This negated the territorial arrangements of Somaliland and Puntland. Both administrations therefore boycotted this initiative. Particularly in Puntland, the opposition took the chance to mingle with the so-called Arta group in order to demolish Cabdullahi Yusuf's rule in north-eastern Somalia. The volatile political situation in the north-east finally escalated into armed conflict between Yusuf's camp and the opposition. In November 2001, Jaamac Cali Jaamac from Boosaaso, who belonged to the Cusman Maxamuud sub-clan of the Majeerteen, was elected as the new President. Cabdullahi Yusuf did not recognize the new President and retreated to his home town Gaalkacyo, where the Cumar Maxamuud sub-clan has its centre. Subsequently, in the aftermath of 11 September, he managed to brand Jaamac Cali Jaamac and his alleged allies from the TNG government as 'terrorists'. This secured him the backing of Ethiopia and, at least indirectly, the US. In early 2002, he confronted his rival militarily and chased him out of Puntland. Jaamac Cali Jaamac's cause was taken up by General Maxamuud Cadde Muuse, also from the Cusman Maxamuud sub-clan. The conflict within the Majeerteen clan continued throughout 2002 (Farah 2004).

[24] For a recent discussion on the location of the ancient land of Punt see Phillips (1997).

MIMESIS AND MIMICRY IN THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL IDENTITIES

'Somalilander' versus 'Harti'

Northern Somalia is predominantly inhabited by ethnic Somalis, who speak the same language, adhere to the same faith, share basic cultural traits, and so forth. In order to foster their distinctiveness, Somaliland activists had to elaborate on all available markers of difference beneath ethnic, but above genealogically based identity.[25] Having been British, having fought as SNM and, more recently, having rebuilt the country after complete destruction by the former Somali national army provided the 'material' out of which a decisive Somalilander identity was constructed (Hoehne 2006: 401–5). As in other cases, the memory of suffering aided the building of a collective identity: 'Whenever I remember what they [the Southerners] did to us, how they killed our people, destructed the cities, oppressed us, and how much people we lost . . . . The people who have lost their relatives are still alive' (interview in English, Hargeysa 17 April 2004). Nation building was fostered – again through mimesis, as I argue – by adopting national holidays (among them the 'Day of SNM'), a national flag and a national anthem. Mimicry comes into play since, until recently, most people in Somaliland hardly saw themselves as Somalilanders, but rather as 'northerners' (Somali: *reer waqooyi*) or as members of particular descent groups. Somalilander as 'label' was introduced by political activists (and non-Somali Somaliland lobbyists) to supplement the country's claim to statehood with a proper national identity. It was employed consciously to buttress Somaliland's case internationally.[26] Interestingly enough, over the years this constructed identity gained some reality on the ground. Three factors were decisive here. First, after the internal stabilization of Somaliland, its politicians increasingly agitated in favour of recognition. President Cigaal visited the US in 1999 and advertised Somaliland's achievements in order to aid its quest for statehood.[27] While this claim fell on deaf ears in the US and elsewhere in the world, inside Somaliland recognition combined with reference

[25] Differences in genealogy that otherwise are common markers of distinction among Somalis (Lewis 2004: 490–1) do not support Somaliland's claim to state- and nationhood, since this polity encompasses genealogically quite different groups.

[26] Most recently Mark Bradbury has written a dense but very accessible history of Somaliland. In my perspective, however, Bradbury (2008) presents the formation of Somaliland as state and nation in a rather teleological way. Throughout his book he uses the term 'Somalilander' without qualification. Frequently he in fact subsumes all people inhabiting the north-west under this term, regardless of their different political positions. Further, his account suggests that Somaliland today is a more or less direct continuation of the British Protectorate regarding political community, regional culture, and so forth. Thereby Bradbury brushes too easily over important historical and contemporary breaches within the ongoing state and identity formation processes.

[27] In fact, I heard rumours in Hargeysa during field research that Cigaal, never fully satisfied with Somaliland, secretly had hoped for the presidency of Somalia, instead. After his death, he of course was 'canonized' as founding father of the country. Recently, President Kahin was accused – admittedly by the political opposition – of a hidden anti-Somaliland agenda (Hoehne 2008: 103).

to national identity and the right of self-determination became – in the face of missing ideological differences – the most important topic (besides development) in the election campaigns from 2002 onwards. In this way, the calculation of political actors seeking domestic power merged with genuine popular feelings about the past oppression and the present issue of self-determination, and formed a 'thick street-identity' in Hargeysa and other centres of Somaliland. Additionally, pro-Somaliland nationalistic daily newspapers, which were mostly run by SNM veterans, pushed the issues of independence and Somalilander identity in the arena of public discussions (Hoehne 2008). Finally, the passing of time without a proper Somali state and the growing up of a civil war generation of youth, for whom Somalia was a dark shadow rather than their homeland, contributed to the formation of a Somalilander identity.

On the Puntland side, it was clear from the very beginning that the political aim was the re-establishment of Somalia within its 1990 borders. Thus, there was no basis for the development of a 'Puntlander' identity. In fact, people in the north-east usually refer to themselves as Harti, if they wish to stress their political allegiance. This genealogical identity is frequently substantiated by reference to important episodes within the canon of Somali national history. In particular, the Dervish (Somali: *Darawiishta*) uprising against the colonial powers in the early twentieth century is collectively remembered and represented. Tellingly, the Puntland army is called *Ciidamka Darawiishta* – the Dervish Army.[28] Additionally, the strength of post-colonial Somalia before its defeat in the Ogadeen War is evoked, when Majeerteen were among the leading figures in the first democratic governments. After 1969, with Maxamed Siyad Barre, at least a Darood was President.[29]

It becomes clear that the historical roots – in Schlee's (2007) sense, as mentioned above – of both identities (Somalilander and Harti) are grounded in a consciously selective reading of the past. While one side re-introduces colonial division and stresses regional particularities, the other celebrates anti-colonial resistance and Somali nationalism. The most decisive markers of distinction of both identities, however, are the antithetic political visions of their proponents. This makes them political identities, in my understanding. In addition, Somaliland and Puntland politicians are engaged in an interesting identity game with words. On the side of Puntland they use 'Isaaq' rather than 'Somalilanders' when describing their enemy. Thereby, they break the conflict down to the clan level – between Isaaq and Harti. Somaliland politicians, on the other hand, prefer to speak of 'Majeerteeniya' when talking about Puntland. Thus they rhetorically confine their adversary

[28] Historically, the relationship between the Majeerteen and the Dervishes was not without breaches. At least once, the Dervishes massacred a considerable number of Ciisa Maxamuud, a Majeerteen sub-clan, at a place called Illig/Eyl (Sheikh-Abdi 1993: 147–8; Interview, Eyl, November 2003).

[29] Barre belonged to the Marrexaan clan that is part of the Darood clan family, as are the Harti clans.

in the Majeerteen lands in the far north-east, which are far smaller than the Harti-inhabited territories that include parts of the regions Sool, Sanaag and Togdheer. This means that they contrast Somaliland as state and nation with the land and the people belonging to Majeerteen, one of virtually hundreds of Somali clans. In this way, both Puntland and Somaliland hardliners mimic the respective other in a dismissive way. It is important to note that these rhetorical figures and strategies of inclusion and exclusion evolve in a relational process.[30] In everyday life, the effects of political conflict in the region can best be observed in the borderlands between both political centres.

(MICRO-) DYNAMICS OF WAR MAKING AND STATE FORMATION

Conflict in the borderlands

Borderlands are located at the margins of states, including *de facto* states. It is here that (national) identities and politics, which are otherwise taken for granted, are questioned or reinforced. The legitimacy of states can be undermined or strengthened through the agency of 'borderlanders' (Horstmann and Wadley 2006: 3–6). In the case of Somaliland and Puntland, the borderlanders are Dhulbahante and Warsangeeli who reside predominantly in the regions of Sool, eastern Sanaag, and southern Togdheer. From 1998 onwards, they participated as members of the Harti clan confederation in Puntland politics. As inhabitants of the territory of the former British Protectorate, they simultaneously were part of Somaliland. Living along the border between both political entities in northern Somalia came with certain costs and benefits for the local communities. The positive effects were that Warsangeeli and Dhulbahante have representatives on both sides, in the administrations of Somaliland and of Puntland. At the local level, both centres provide some employment within their respective military or civil administrations in villages and towns. At the same time, since they were an insecure constituency for both regional governments, the Dhulbahante and Warsangeeli lands in eastern Somaliland and western Puntland remained politically and economically marginalized. With very few exceptions, no international NGOs came to their areas, and no state development projects were implemented. Locals, sometimes angrily, argued that the centres 'are keeping all the resources for themselves' and 'send only soldiers' (interviews, Laascaanood, 7 September 2002; and Buuhoodle, 9 April 2004). Even the presidents, Maxamed Ibraahim Cigaal and Cabdullahi Yusuf, wisely refrained from visiting Sool and eastern Sanaag, in order not to provoke an escalation of their conflict. They were satisfied with the instalment of rump administrations in towns and villages of the contested regions. These administrations were staffed with locals who

[30] This is in accordance with sociological and socio-anthropological perspectives on identity formation in general (Barth 1996; Jenkins 1996: 19–28).

received small salaries from either side but remained largely ineffective politically. The only effective control was exercised by traditional authorities, who increasingly got caught up in regional power politics and conflict (Hoehne 2007).

This situation changed when Cabdullahi Yusuf faced strong internal opposition in 2002. As Puntland's chances to enforce its claim over the peripheral regions of Sool and Sanaag were minimal, the government of Somaliland took a decisive step. In May 2002, Somaliland's Maxamed Ibraahim Cigaal had died. He was succeeded by his Vice-President, Dahir Rayaale Kahin. The new President visited Laascaanood, the capital of Sool region, in December 2002.[31] This was the first-ever visit of a Somaliland President to this locale. Puntland had to react, and several Dhulbahante politicians in Puntland organized a minimal defence by sending a couple of battle wagons (so-called technicals) against the considerable force accompanying Kahin on his trip.[32] Even though the Somaliland force clearly outnumbered the Puntland fighters, the former retreated after a brief but fierce battle. 'He [Kahin] wanted to prevent bloodshed,' reasoned one informant in Laascaanood (interview, 26 November 2003), who, despite his opposition to secession, credited the President of Somaliland for not having engaged in heavy fighting in the town.

In reaction to these events, Hargeysa withdrew its rump administration from Laascaanood. The void was filled gradually by Puntland, where Cabdullahi Yusuf had regained control. Garoowe took serious steps to establish an effective military and then civilian administration in early 2004. Somaliland immediately sent armed forces to the Sool region. However, they could only proceed as far as areas where Isaaq clans and the few Dhulbahante sub-clans sympathetic to their cause resided. Somaliland forces established themselves near the village of Cadhiadeye, about 30 kilometres west of Laascaanood. Puntland secured Laascaanood's western exit and established its troops close to the town. In early October, Cabdullahi Yusuf was elected President of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) for Somalia at the internationally sponsored peace conference in Nairobi, Kenya.[33] On 29 October 2004, substantial numbers of Puntland and Somaliland troops clashed for the first time. In the one-day battle near Cadhiadeye about a dozen soldiers died and more than 20 were taken as prisoners of war on each side. Subsequently, traditional authorities and representatives of the civil society on both sides succeeded in easing tensions. Further fighting was prevented through the limited military and economic capacities of the parties in conflict. The situation remained tense and militarized (Hoehne 2006).

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[31] He had worked there as National Security Service (NSS) officer in the past, under Siyad Barre. Kahin's remaining personal contacts to Laascaanood may have supported his decision to visit the town.

[32] Technicals are pick-up trucks or lorries with heavy machine or anti-aircraft guns mounted on the back.

[33] The TNG installed earlier in Djibouti had crumbled; it officially abdicated government functions in 2003.

In April 2007, Somaliland and Puntland forces were again engaged in a one-day battle. This time the fighting happened in eastern Sanaag, in Warsangeeli territory near the village of Dahar. Subsequent and heavier fighting occurred when Puntland and Somaliland armed forces clashed near Laascaanood in early and mid-October 2007. Since then, Laascaanood has remained in the hands of the Somaliland forces. Though precise numbers are not available, the fighting cost several dozen lives, and roughly half the town's population of approximately 15–20,000 temporarily fled Laascaanood.

As outlined above, these recent clashes between Somaliland and Puntland forces in Sool are nothing new. Thus, the questions are: why did they escalate in October 2007 and continue since then, and what is at stake? Reason for the timing of events can be found in recent internal power struggles within Puntland and Somaliland. Furthermore, the developments in Mogadishu, where Cabdullahi Yusuf has been fighting to establish his rule over Somalia, sharpen the debate over the respective status of Somaliland and Puntland regional administrations. Besides these regional and 'national' issues, the personal interests of some Dhulbahante politicians and their respective local constituencies were decisive for the escalation of the conflict in early October 2007.

South-bound

In the years 2006 and 2007, the main focus of Somali and international politics with regard to Somalia was on the south. The TFG moved from Kenya into Somalia in mid-2005, but immediately split. The first session of the Parliament, held in the provisional capital city of Baydhoa in central Somalia in March 2006, was overshadowed by the escalation of serious fighting in Mogadishu. Warlords, who were partly members of the TFG cabinet and were on the payroll of US counter-terrorist institutions, fought against the militias of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). The latter had grown over the years in various neighbourhoods of Mogadishu. The sharia courts had gained some local legitimacy. After the 11 September attacks, they had attracted the suspicion of the US (Menkhaus 2007b; Marchal 2007a).

Against all expectations, the UIC defeated the warlord alliance and took control of Mogadishu in June 2006. It consequently expanded its rule over much of southern Somalia and thereby challenged the TFG in Baydhoa. In December 2006, a few thousand TFG soldiers, aided by a massive Ethiopian military force of about 40,000 fighters plus tanks and warplanes, and supported by US intelligence, overran the UIC forces and took hold of Mogadishu. The year 2007 saw massive fighting in Mogadishu and in parts of southern Somalia between TFG and Ethiopian forces, on the one side, and an unclear amalgam of former UIC militias, and Hawiye clan fighters, who stand against the 'Darood-dominated' TFG under Cabdullahi Yusuf, on the other.[34] Ordinary

[34] As Majeerteen, Cabdullahi Yusuf belongs to the Darood clan family. This and his personal history as former SSDF leader made Cabdullahi Yusuf suspect for many Hawiye in Mogadishu, who remember the Hawiye–Darood fighting in the early 1990s.

criminals were also taking advantage of the renewed lawlessness (Barnes and Haruun 2007).

When Cabdullahi Yusuf took power in Mogadishu in early 2007, he drew a considerable number of soldiers, who were members of the Puntland armed forces, from the north-east to the south. Additionally, his earlier presidential campaign in Kenya and his current policy in southern Somalia diverted much of Puntland's economic resources, which were mostly generated in the port of Boosaaso, to the south. As a result, Puntland suffered from severe internal weaknesses, engaged as it was in two conflicts – in Sool and, indirectly, by supporting Cabdullahi Yusuf, in the south. Financially, it has teetered for years on the edge of bankruptcy, and salaries to administrative and military staff are paid only irregularly, which weakens the morale of some politicians and soldiers.

Politically, of course, and particularly with regard to the vision of establishing a united Somalia after collapse, Puntland is an important ally of Cabdullahi Yusuf's TFG. In early August 2007, a TFG delegation headed by the President met with the Puntland government under Maxamuud Cadde Muuse.[35] One aim of this meeting was to ensure the continued support of Puntland for the TFG. Cabdullahi Yusuf stressed in his speech that 'Puntland is the centre of unity and sovereignty of Somalia, and the only established federal government so far [within a future federal Somalia].'[36]

Cabdullahi Yusuf's presidency obviously binds Puntland willy-nilly to the developments in the south. Somaliland has to observe carefully who gains the upper hand in the ongoing struggle for control in Mogadishu, in order not to be surprised by a – so far completely speculative – combined onslaught by Cabdullahi Yusuf's part of the TFG and Puntland.

Personal interest, clan rivalries and strategic choices

It has been mentioned that, as borderland communities, Dhulbahante and Warsangeeli occupy positions in both Somaliland and Puntland administrations. One of the prominent Dhulbahante politicians in the region is Axmed Cabdi Xabsade. In the mid-1990s, he was speaker of the House of Representatives (*Golaha Wakiilada*) in Hargeysa. He fell out with President Cigaal and subsequently turned his back on Somaliland (Liban 2005: 14). Later, he was involved in the establishment of Puntland and finally became Minister of Interior in Garoowe. Over the summer of 2007, Xabsade had got into open

[35] As outlined above, Cabdullahi Yusuf fought with General Maxamuud Cadde Muuse in 2002. Yet, peace was brokered in 2003. Subsequently, Maxamuud Cadde Muuse was integrated into the political and military framework of Puntland, and finally was elected President in January 2005, after Cabdullahi Yusuf had become President of Somalia.

[36] I received a report about this meeting via e-mail from an informant, 2 August 2007. The original Somali sentence reads '*Puntland waa xarunti midnimada iyo qaranimada Soomaaliyeed waana dawlad goboleedke keliya ee dhisan*.' All translations from Somali are mine.

disagreements with President Maxamuud Cadde Muuse and his Vice-President, Xassan Dahir Afqurac, a Dhulbahante from the Sool region. Both had come to power after Cabdullahi Yusuf had been elected Somali President in 2004.

Xabsade had previously sided with Cabdullahi Yusuf against Maxamuud Cadde Muuse when the two Majeerteen heavyweights were fighting in 2002. This had negatively affected the relationship between Xabsade and Cadde Muuse. Also, Xabsade perceived the policy of the Puntland government towards Laascaanood and the Sool region as mistaken and not beneficial to the local community (personal communication with an informant in Galkacyo, October 2007). While visiting some Dhulbahante strongholds in September 2007, he initiated the establishment of a local administration which was supposed to be independent of Somaliland *and* Puntland.[37] This step was in accordance with the looming tensions between two large Dhulbahante sub-clans, Maxamuud Garaad and Farax Garaad. Many of the Farax Garaad sub-clan felt that the new Vice-President of Puntland, Xassan Dahir Afqurac, who belongs to the Maxamuud Garaad branch, distributed important positions under his authority to members of his own group to the exclusion of other Dhulbahante. Axmed Cabdi Xabsade, who by descent is a member of the Farax Garaad branch, tried to counter these developments by initiating a kind of Farax Garaad administration in places such as Buuhoodle. President Cadde Muuse reacted by calling Xabsade back to Garoowe. The minister delayed his return, allowing the President to dismiss him for defying his orders (personal communication with informants in Garoowe and Buuhoodle, October 2007).

Following his dismissal, the ex-minister mobilized members of his own and some other sub-clans against Puntland's authority. He also approached Somaliland for support. The government in Hargeysa agreed, and Somaliland troops, with the consent and help of some Dhulbahante, advanced on Laascaanood and pushed Puntland out of its positions in and around the town.

The community in Sool clearly split over the conflict. While some parts of the Dhulbahante clan seemed to align with the Somaliland side, and Somaliland troops established themselves in and around Laascaanood, the majority of the traditional authorities of the clan condemned the military occupation of their clan homeland by Somaliland forces. In the so-called Boocame Declaration of 22 November 2007, the

[37] This endeavour might have been inspired by the earlier foundation of the Maakhir state in eastern Sanaag. It was set up in the Warsangeeli-inhabited area in mid-2007. In December 2007, the Maakhir Diaspora Forum published a statement in which it explains the history and the motivations of the newly founded Maakhir state. This 'state' is claimed to continue, in fact, the rule of a previous autonomous sultanate (most probably the Warsangeeli sultanate under Sultan Maxamuud Cali Shire, who died around 1960). It is described as a self-governing region independent of Somaliland and Puntland, but under the authority of a (future?) federal government of Somalia. Its main aim is to attract international assistance directly to the region, in order to upgrade the local administration, service provision, and so forth (statement by the Maakhir Diaspora Forum, 2007).

traditional Dhulbahante leaders informed the international community and the Somali people that their community is not part of Somaliland, and called upon the Somaliland administration to withdraw its troops (Bo'ame Declaration [sic] of Dhulbahante clan elders).[38]

For the government in Hargeysa, Xabsade's moves represented a golden opportunity to break the stalemate in the Sool region and to recapture Laascaanood. Its most probable reasons for a renewed push against Puntland were twofold. First, since January 2004, Somaliland troops had been stationed in Sool without achieving any discernible progress, and Hargeysa was increasingly humiliated by the advance of Puntland in Sool. Moreover, the establishment of a more effective Puntland administration in Laascaanood seriously challenged Somaliland's claim for internationally recognized (ex-colonial) borders. Second, President Kahin faced upcoming presidential elections in spring, 2008.[39] Throughout 2007 he was involved in several internal conflicts over freedom of speech in Somaliland, electoral legislation, and the question of increasing the number of legal political parties beyond the three currently allowed by the constitution (Hansen and Bradbury 2007: 472). The operation against Puntland offered the opportunity to divert the attention of the voters away from internal problems and to mobilize national unity.

War making and state making in Somalia and Somaliland

Tilly's argument about state making through war making, supplemented by Niemann's perspective on contemporary processes of state formation and renegotiations of social and territorial boundaries, in the context of global connections and interferences, can be applied to the situation in northern Somalia. Up to now, state formation has been limited to the central regions of Somaliland and Puntland, where the government institutions, but also international organizations and NGOs, are predominantly located. It is in the centres that the political decisions are made and debate occurs when the nascent civil society (especially in Somaliland) has a chance to articulate its positions. In much of Sool and Sanaag, which are on the periphery of both Somaliland and Puntland, economic development and political participation are very limited, and the sense of belonging to one of the two regional states is weak. Among many Dhulbahante and Warsangeeli, the hope that Somalia will be re-established as a strong national state has not yet died. This links the local developments in Sool directly to the situation in southern Somalia, and therefore to the issue of state (re-)formation in – and the international politics towards – Somalia.

A large-scale military confrontation between Somaliland and Puntland would most probably clarify the contradictory and opaque

[38] At the time of writing (September 2008) Laascaanood is still in the hands of Somaliland. Despite announcing plans to recapture the place, Puntland's forces have not moved against it.

[39] In May 2008 the elections were postponed to April 2009.

notions of belonging held by a number of the inhabitants of northern Somalia. Harti in particular, but also some Gadabuursi and the members of certain Isaaq clans, have ambivalent positions on Somaliland's independence (Hoehne 2006). They would have to decide whether to fight for an independent Somaliland or to stand for the unity of Somalia. By creating a new 'reality on the ground' through capturing and holding Laascaanood, Somaliland would probably enhance its chances of international recognition, provided southern Somalia remains unstable in the coming years (Roble 2007).

Further endeavours to set up a fully effective state recognized under international law will probably produce large-scale armed conflict between Somaliland and Puntland/Somalia. This involves the risk of losing what has so far been the biggest asset of Somaliland and Puntland, internationally: their relative peacefulness and internal stability, when compared to the instability in the south.[40] Without clarifying their territorial borders, Somaliland and Puntland/Somalia cannot exist as states in the formal sense recognized under international law. This at least is the understanding of international law most widely held by Somali actors. In March 2004, Dahir Rayaale Kahin was invited to address the members of the British House of Commons. In his speech, the President stressed that Somaliland possessed a permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states (Republic of Somaliland 2004). Thereby he exactly conformed to Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (1933).[41]

Recently, in January 2008, Dahir Rayaale Kahin visited the US, as his predecessor Cigaal had in 1999. It was reported that the Somaliland delegation met with several US officials, the highest-ranking of whom was Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Jendayi Frazer. While US officials underlined the importance of having contact with responsible political figures all over Somalia, the Bush administration announced that it is not recognizing Somaliland as an independent country. The transnational component of the process of state making became obvious when, during the stay of the delegation from Hargeysa in the US, demonstrations in favour of Somaliland's recognition were staged in the US by members of the Somaliland diaspora, and simultaneously in Hargeysa and Burco 'at home'. Online news reports appeared with headlines such as 'US not moving to recognize Somaliland' and '*Mudaharaado ka dhacay magalooyinka waaweyn ee Somaliland*' [Demonstrations that happened in the large towns of Somaliland].[42]

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[40] Other peaceful options are explored in Bryden 2004.

[41] This article codifies that 'A state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to enter into relations with other states.'

[42] ⟨http://www.hiiraan.com/news/2008/jan/wararka_manta17-2750.htm⟩, accessed 18 January 2008. Members of the Somaliland and the Puntland diaspora are heavily involved in northern Somali affairs. They finance the day-to-day survival of relatives at home, but

External interference in the wider region

The political orders and conflict dynamics within the territory of the former Republic of Somalia do not exist in a political vacuum, of course. Somaliland, Puntland, and southern Somalia are to various degrees influenced by neighbouring countries in the Horn – Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, Sudan, and Ethiopia – but also by the countries in the Arab Peninsula, just on the other side of the Gulf of Aden. Some, like Djibouti and Kenya, can be credited with having kept a rather neutral position towards Somali internal affairs. They have not interfered militarily and have even tried to mediate and facilitate the establishment of stable and integrative political institutions. Other countries have taken decisive political stances for some Somali groups and against others. The operations of the US and its allies within the 'war on terrorism' in and around Somalia contributed notably to the destabilization of the emerging political order in the south under UIC rule. The US strategy of cooperating with Mogadishu-based warlords in order to get hold of a few terror suspects, who allegedly were hiding in southern Somalia, proved disastrous. It initiated the fighting between the warlords and the UIC, which eventually led to the massive escalation of violence and continuing civil war in southern Somalia. This of course influenced the conflict dynamics in the north.

The two powers interfering most directly are Ethiopia and Eritrea. For many years, both states have used the civil war in Somalia in their own politics, and most recently they have intensified engagement with their Somali proxies, when Ethiopia intervened in support of the TFG, while Eritrea gave a helping hand to the UIC (Menkhaus 2007b). In the ongoing conflict in northern Somalia, too, Ethiopia plays an important role. It has good economic relations with Somaliland and receives a considerable number of sea imports via the port of Berbera, north of Hargeysa. Simultaneously, Ethiopia backed Puntland militarily against the advancing UIC militias in mid-2006, and continues to underpin Cabdullahi Yusuf's fight for power in Mogadishu. In this sense, the conflict between Somaliland and Puntland is a conflict between two 'client states' of Ethiopia.[43] Yet this does not pose a problem for Ethiopia, since its overall objective is to prevent a unified, resurrected Somalia. That is why Ethiopia puts its bets on different 'horses' (Somaliland, Cabdullahi Yusuf) at the same time.[44] It is arguable that the Ethiopian government does not gain anything from the recognition of Somaliland. Therefore, Ethiopia might be eager to maintain the

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also engage in regional development projects and politics, including the conflict between Somaliland and Puntland.

[43] Not surprisingly, after the last round of fighting both Puntland and Somaliland accused each other of collaboration with Ethiopia's enemies – the Ogadeen National Liberation Front (ONLF), Eritrea, and the UIC. However, none of these allegations can be substantiated and they are likely to be driven by propaganda purposes (personal communication with an informant in Hargeysa who prefers to stay anonymous).

[44] I thank Tobias Hagmann for making me aware of this 'double bet' of Ethiopia. This corresponds fully to the view of many Somalis.

status quo of contested borders in northern Somalia and, if possible, prevent politically decisive fighting between Somaliland and Puntland over Sool. For Ethiopia, the most important thing is that *someone* controls Laascaanood and Sool, in order to prevent the infiltration of the area by ONLF fighters or UIC cells.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown how Somaliland and Puntland developed over the past two decades through mimesis and mimicry. In particular, their initial institutional set-up was understood as mimetic state formation. Regarding Somaliland, the concept of mimesis captures the establishment of prototypical state institutions – government, cabinet, Parliament, judiciary, and so forth. Initially, imitation was mostly driven by uncertainty. Declaring Somaliland was a decisive step safeguarding the region from the chaos unfolding in the south. Under SNM rule, the state institutions were rather hollow and the country was plagued by internal violence and military conflicts. Somaliland's success as a *de facto* state could not be foreseen. Still, over the years, it developed into a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', carried along by immense civic and 'grassroots' engagement, and support from the diaspora. Additionally, the hopelessness of the situation in the south encouraged this development. Mimicry played a role, as Somaliland's claim for independence was, at least for some members of the local elite, rather a means to attract support from outside and strengthen their positions within Somali power politics. Later, some of these politicians were overtaken by their own success, to the point where many people in the centre of Somaliland and the diaspora held the leaders in Hargeysa accountable for the promotion of Somaliland's case.

The process of building Puntland imitated the earlier founding procedures and institutional structures of Somaliland. Mimesis aided the quick set-up of the polity, with the aims of stabilizing the region, and protecting and fostering the idea of a united Somalia. Simultaneously, mimicry was involved since Puntland was never meant to be an independent state on its own. Somaliland was mimicked in its 'stateness' in order to give the impression towards the outside – to the wider Somali audience and internationally – that there are two regional states in northern Somalia, which are competing for external attention, resources, and, most importantly, over state territory. This served Puntland's actual aim: as long as Somaliland is unstable due to the conflict in Sool, the international community – the most important signal receiver in this case of mimicry – might refrain from accepting Hargeysa's claim for recognition.

The article has also showed that the construction and mobilization of mutually intelligible but opposed political identities in Somaliland and Puntland implied aspects of mimesis and mimicry. These identities on both sides were the 'cards' in a kind of 'identity game' between the adversaries in northern Somalia, who tried to gain the upper hand

by downgrading each other. For Somaliland supporters, Puntland is only Majeerteeniya. They avoid identifying Harti as their enemy, since this category includes Warsangeeli and Dhulbahante who reside in the Sool, Sanaag and southern Togdheer regions, which are claimed as part of Somaliland. In contrast, Puntland supporters describe Somaliland as Isaaq-land. Thus, they define their adversary genealogically, refute Hargeysa's claim to nation-statehood based on the former colonial boundaries, and reduce Somaliland effectively to the western regions inhabited by Isaaq.

The conflicting political identities of Somalilander and Harti – this is the local version of 'ethnopolitics' mentioned by Niemann (2007) – provided the link between the processes of state and identity formation, discussed above, and the escalation of military conflict. They are based on opposed political visions – the 'one state' vision of Puntland and the 'two state' vision of Somaliland. Conflict escalates since statehood is an important resource for both sides.[45] Being a state allows entrance to the international system and access to its economic and other benefits. Moreover, a state provides citizens, in theory at least, with a number of freedoms; the latter diminish, as outlined in the beginning of this article, when states collapse and gradually lose their representative powers. The concept of state is also related to individual self-esteem and identity. Young has stressed that the state is an 'ensemble of affective orientations, images, and expectations imprinted in the minds of the subjects' (Young 1994: 33; Nielsen 2007).

Since mimesis and mimicry have played a role in state and identity formation in Somaliland and Puntland in the first place, they contributed to conflict escalation in northern Somalia. Suleiman Baldo (2008) brilliantly summarized the issues at stake by arguing that

> resolving Somaliland's status is by no means a straightforward proposition. For both sides [Somaliland and Puntland/southern Somalia], the issue of recognition is not merely political or legal; it is *existential*. Most southern Somalis [including the Harti in the north-east] are very attached to the notion of a united Somali Republic, while many Somalilanders – scarred by the experience of civil war, flight and exile – refer to unity only in the past tense. For a generation of Somaliland's youths, who have no memories of the united Somalia to which young Southerners attach such importance, Somaliland's sovereignty is a matter of identity.[46]

Any shift in power in southern as well as in northern Somalia will have severe consequences for the future Somali state(s), which again

[45] The role of the state as a contested resource was recently highlighted by Hagmann and Mulugeta (2008). They showed that pastoral conflicts in the semi-arid peripheries of Ethiopia were shaped by ongoing processes of state building in the context of decentralization. Similarly, Milton J. Esman (1990: 57–8) argued some time ago that 'during the twentieth century, the modern state has become the principal arena of competition for access to and control of scarce resources'. This competition is frequently expressed in terms of 'traditional ethnic solidarities' that have become modernized.

[46] Italics added.

impact on the region, for instance regarding Ethiopian and Eritrean politics. International law and politics seem to be either overstrained by the situation, or indifferent, apart from concerns about international terrorism gaining a foothold in Somalia.[47] On the one hand, the legal fiction of Somalia as a state is continued, and the territorial integrity and identity of the collapsed state are protected. On the other, the international community tolerates the massive military intervention of Ethiopia, on the invitation of a domestically illegitimate and ineffective TFG, causing human rights violations on a gross scale (Human Rights Watch 2007; Amnesty International 2008).

On a more generic level, the Somali material shows that in the absence of a legal categorization irrespective of the state–non-state divide, the populations of collapsed and *de facto* states are largely left on their own. Hence, they create realities beyond the static legal and political frameworks. This poses the question: can the newly emerging political orders be accommodated within the international system of states, or will we see the gap between this system and the empirical realities on the ground widening, with many people just 'disappearing' from a world of states and citizens, and 'reappearing' as illegal migrants and relief-aid recipients?

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[47] For a well-argued criticism of the stereotypical perception of the failed state Somalia as safe haven for international terrorism, see Marchal (2007b).

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ABSTRACT

In this article, mimesis and mimicry are used as analytical concepts to explore dynamics of state and identity formation in Somaliland and Puntland since the early 1990s. Mimesis captures endeavours to imitate well-established models of social and political organization. Mimicry involves the deceptive imitation of such models in order to reach a certain aim. In the particular setting of northern Somalia, miming and mimicking in state and identity formation are also related to conflict escalation. The article first presents relevant political and legal positions on state collapse and secession. This helps to grasp the theoretical and policy implications of the empirical material. Then, the establishment of Somaliland and Puntland through mimesis and mimicry is sketched. The outline of the repeated military confrontations between both sides, particularly the last round of fighting in and around the town of Laascaanood in late 2007, indicates the relation of state and identity formation to military conflict. These localized dynamics are embedded into the continuing conflict in southern Somalia that involves a number of internal and external actors. The article concludes that miming and mimicking underlie many of Somaliland's and Puntland's internal developments and their conflictive relationship. Moreover, since the conflict in northern Somalia concerns state formation, it might have far-reaching consequences for the future of Somalia as a whole. This finally leads to the suggestion that the international norms regarding state collapse and secession have to be re-evaluated in the light of the empirical realities at hand.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet article, le mimétisme et l'imitation sont utilisés comme concepts analytiques pour explorer la dynamique de l'État et la formation identitaire dans le Somaliland et le Puntland depuis le début des années 1990. Le mimétisme traduit les tentatives d'imiter des modèles bien établis d'organisation sociale et politique. L'imitation désigne l'imitation trompeuse de tels modèles dans un but précis. Dans le contexte particulier du Nord de la Somalie, le mimétisme et l'imitation dans la formation de l'État et de l'identité sont également liés à l'escalade des conflits. L'article commence par présenter

les positions politiques et juridiques pertinentes sur l'effondrement de l'État et la sécession. Ce faisant, il aide à saisir les implications théoriques et politiques du matériel empirique. Il décrit ensuite l'établissement du Somaliland et du Puntland par le biais du mimétisme et de l'imitation. L'exposé des confrontations militaires répétées entre les deux bords, notamment la dernière vague de combats dans la ville de Laascaanood et ses environs fin 2007, montre le lien entre la formation de l'État et de l'identité et le conflit militaire. Ces dynamiques localisées se fondent dans le conflit qui persiste dans le Sud de la Somalie et implique un certain nombre d'acteurs internes et externes. L'article conclut que le mimétisme et l'imitation sont à la base d'un grand nombre d'événements internes au Somaliland et au Puntland et de leur relation conflictuelle. De plus, parce que le conflit du Nord de la Somalie concerne la formation de l'État, il peut avoir des conséquences considérables pour le futur de la Somalie dans son ensemble. L'article finit en suggérant qu'il conviendrait de réévaluer les normes internationales en matière d'effondrement d'État et de sécession, à la lumière des réalités empiriques disponibles.