

DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA: THE OUTSTANDING CASE OF SOMALILAND

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Introduction

With the fall of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991, Somalia was consumed by a civil war which extends to present day. Tens of thousands have died or were exiled and many others are homeless in cities such as Mogadishu, Baidoa and Kismayo. The country hasn't had a functional government for practically three weeks, and large portions of its territory are under the control of paramilitary or terrorist groups, such as *al-Shabaab*³, and warlords. For six years (2008-2013), Somalia has led the Fragile States Index elaborated by US journal Foreign Policy and by the group Fund for Peace. Two UN missions have been dispatched to the region in the 1990s (UNOSOM I and UNOSOM II) and two transitional governments have been formed. Moreover, the *African Union Mission to Somalia* (AMISOM) has been active since 2007 supporting government transitions, training the country's armed forces and helping with the logistics of humanitarian aid. However, despite all the efforts directed at solving the conflict and constructing a functional state, political stability seems like a distant dream, and the survival of Somalia's central government is highly dependent on the African Union and AMISOM (Forti 2011, 5).

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³ Terrorist islamic group linked to Al-Qaeda.

Nevertheless, there is a remarkable case of stability and peace in a territorial area internationally-recognised as Somali. In Northern Somalia, a region called Somaliland has claimed independence in 1991, after the fall of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre. Since then, the self-declared nation has undergone six national elections, has created functional institutions, such as a central bank and a judiciary system, has improved educational indexes and has maintained a minimum level of stability. Yet, even as it is a *de facto state*⁴ under the logics of the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States⁵, no other country recognizes it as a sovereign nation.

This case study's objective is to structure a chronological explanation about how, even in a completely adverse situation, without international recognition and surrounded by conflicts, Somaliland was able to build a minimally functional and stable state. Using the existing literature about the issue, as well as analyses of international organization's reports and of some of the country's most important legal documents, such as its newest Constitution, we will try to reconstruct the events that led Somaliland to its current state of relative stability. Elements such as civil society's participation and traditional Somali governance mechanisms were used in a successful way in this process, mitigating the inevitable flaws of an emerging democracy. Consequently, as Kaplan (2008) writes, the case of Somaliland can bring important lessons not only to its neighbors, but also to other post-colonial nations in Africa and the Middle East.

Somali Traditional Society

In order to better understand events in Somalia and Somaliland, it is important to present Somali people's forms of organization. They profoundly influenced post-independence episodes in the Horn of Africa, especially the construction of the Somaliland state.

The Somali descend from a lineage of peoples who, for thousands of years, have lived in the coastal area of the Horn of Africa. Their culture is a mixture of traditions developed from the contact with nearby civilizations, such as those from the Arabian Peninsula, Northeastern Africa, as well as from more distant communities, such as peoples from the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia (Abdullahi 2001, 155). Their society is defined by aggre-

⁴ The term designates a territory with the characteristics of a state.

⁵ The Convention determines the necessary criteria to incorporate a state under international law.

gate kinship relationships and ruled by customary Somali law (*Xeer*), Islamic practices and commune-driven conflict mediation (Forti 2011, 8). Although Islam is predominant and fervently adored, Samatar (1989) describes the existence of a mix of pragmatism and flexibility in its devotion, largely due to the demands and inconsistencies of the Somali pastoral lifestyle.

Clan system

Ethnically, Somalia is one of the most uniform countries in Africa. It is currently estimated that 85% of its inhabitants, including Somalilanders, are ethnically Somali (WPR, n.d.). However, this doesn't mean that there are no internal cleavages. Somalis organize in a complex clan system which defines the communities' political and social identities (Kaplan 2008, 144). In order to be defined to which clan someone belongs, this individual's paternal family tree must be analysed until a connection to the main Somali families or clans is found (*Darod, Dir, Hawie, Issaq and Rahanweyn*), the *Darods* and the *Issaqs* being the largest clans in the region. Clans are the primary identity of a large part of Somalis (Walls 2009, 377). Therefore, elders, responsible for leading their clans, are important characters in the country's political scene. Somalis frequently use their relationships, in any of these layers, to stimulate cooperation, support and motivation in their communities.

Because they are connected through distant common ancestors, going as far as 15 generations in the past (Lewis 1959, 276), clans are extensive units. Naturally, they have dozens of subdivisions. More defined lineages inside a clan culminate in forming sub-clans, which often possess a sense of identity. When an individual is part of a sub-clan, this group will be the one that he or she mentions as being a part of (Lewis 1959, 276). The most basic unit of this system, other than nuclear families, are the *dia*-settlement groups. These are groups with a common ancestor from four to eight generations past, constituted by a few hundred to a few thousand men (Lewis 1959, 276) and formed via verbal or written contract. In case of homicide, for example, these are the groups which will either pay or receive compensation, which is also called *dia*. Based on Lewis (1959) and Forti (2011), we can delineate the following order of importance for affiliations related to the Somali clan system: 1) the family nucleus is the basic unit, led by an elder; 2) next are *dia*-payer groups, which constitute a combination of families with a closest common ancestor; 3) sub-clans, when existing inside a larger clan; 4) clans are the most comprehensive identity in this system, comprising thousands, sometimes millions of people, and having multiple internal divisions.

Traditional Political-Normative Instruments

This traditional Somali organization system is ruled by consensual decision-making mechanisms which develop under a net of agreements and unwritten rules. In order to understand the regional context and the formation process of contemporary Somaliland, it is fundamental to understand such instruments.

The *Xeer* is one of the main institutions of Somali society, a type of customary Somali law (Kaplan 2011, 145). It represents unwritten agreements between any unit of the clan system, from family nuclei to the main groups. It rules various aspects of life, determining, for example, the due compensation in case of injury, territorial division or even the use of natural resources. When an incident occurs, a delegation of elders, known as *ergo*, is sent to the place where the trial will happen (Wojkowska 2006, 54). Its members will be the judges of the case, and must be from a neutral clan or from extended families of the parties in dispute, which usually are equally represented. Normally, 10 elders take place, five from the victim's ethnic group and five from the aggressor's ethnic group (Lombard 2005). Such individuals are generally chosen because of their knowledge, but there are no specific trainings in law and they can elaborate their own doctrines. Trials are commonly open to the public and take place under a tree. Oral presentations of the case, witnesses and evidences are used in the same way as any other legal system (Wojkowska 2006, 54).

This customary law system has many problems. A militarily stronger clan, for instance, can refuse to follow the determinations of the *ergo* (Wojkowska 2006, 20), which means that many minority groups are discriminated upon. Moreover, in such a system there are problematic issues involving the rights of women. A woman victim of rape, for example, is frequently forced to marry her aggressor. This is done to supposedly protect the woman's honor and to assure that her family gets paid an endowment by the aggressor's family (Wojkowska 2006, 21). Despite these negative aspects, the *Xeer* is of fundamental importance to maintain peace in the region, for it minimizes conflict and creates a culture of negotiation among Somalis. Its flexibility and adaptability also adapt to the nomadic lifestyle (Forti 2011, 9).

The *Shir*, another important traditional Somali mechanism, has on its essence the combination of the structure of clans and the *Xeer*. Such mechanism constitutes of meetings in which decisions are made in a consensual and democratic way (Lewis 1999, 198). Meetings are summoned on an *ad hoc* basis and can last for hours, days, or even months. They are used to deliberate on any issue that could affect the community, such as lawmaking,

distribution of resources or conflict resolution. As described by I.M. Lewis (1999), it is the fundamental governance institution in the Somali culture. In it, each married man can speak for any of his four divisions in the clan system. This institution is the primary representation of some kind of Somali 'pastoral democracy'. However, this system, as well as all the Somali clan structure, has a highly patriarchal organization, giving women a secondary role. Women's political functions are reduced to serving as a bridge between groups through marriage.

Colonization

The geopolitical situation of the African continent is largely a direct and indirect result of its colonization. It formed new boundaries and altered the power dynamics among ethnic groups on the whole continent. It is fundamental to understand the colonization of the Horn of Africa in order to understand the region's current situation. The events that have led Somaliland to declare its independence are linked to this process.

French, British and Italians established settlements in the region from the end of the 19th century. Previously, Somalis were organized in several city-states relatively independent from one another, with the Adal Sultanate and the state of Ajuuraan among the most famous (Forti 2011, 10). As described by Samatar (1989), these centralized governmental structures were important for the Somali pastoral society to expand its network of trade and to create an effective tax-collecting system. From the beginning of the direct European occupation, the territories that would later become Somalia were divided in two. They were called British Somaliland (current Somaliland) to the North, and Italian Somaliland (current Somalia) to the South.

Between 1884 and 1960, Somaliland was an important, although small, British possession. From it, the British obtained the necessary cattle to supply their other colonies with, such as Yemen (Forti 2011, 11). Their approach in the protectorate of the Horn of Africa was different from the one used by the French and Italian in the region. The British were not interested in creating a country-colony in Somaliland (Ahmed and Green 1999, 115). Due to the difficulty in centralizing power, characteristic of the nomadic lifestyle of the Somalis, they adopted a policy of alliance with chiefs of local clans (*Akils*), who would serve as a link between imperial administration and locals. In Somaliland, therefore, the clans maintained their lifestyle and continued to use their laws and decision-making mechanisms.

In Italian Somaliland, changes imposed by colonizers were more drastic. According to Samatar (1989), their policies, driven by a sense of civilizing mission, Roman nostalgia and the pursuit of prestige, undermined traditional Somali structures, diminishing the elder's power and, often, expropriating their lands. With the beginning of Mussolini's leadership, in 1923, Italians imposed an even stricter colonial system, aiming to export agricultural goods. The most fertile lands were confiscated without compensation, rural workers were subjected to forced labor in the fields. The quick transition from a subsistence to an export system resulted in the shortage of food and generalized hunger (Walls 2011, 98).

The organization imposed by Italians in the area controlled by them followed Western examples, disregarding local customs and forms of governance. Consequently, great unbalance was created. A small educated Somali elite in the West was formed and took control of the public administration (Forti 2011, 12). Moreover, due to the changes in agriculture, many people moved to the cities, where large peripheral neighborhoods, previously non-existent, were formed (Kaplan 2008, 146).

Colonization created a series of socioeconomic distortions in Somali society and aggravated possible political differences between the Southern clans (mainly *Darods* and *Hawies*) and Northern clans (mainly *Issaqs*). This would be a crucial legacy for political events in the post-independence years.

Independence and the Siad Barre Era

In 1960, British Somaliland declared its independence on June 26th. Soon after, on July 1st, Italian Somaliland followed suit. On the same day, both nations, now independent, held a joint session which resulted in the union of both countries in a single large republic. Thus emerged the Republic of Somalia. Political issues were soon centralized in Mogadishu, which became the capital of the new country. A new constitution was created, in which freedom of expression, democracy and a multi-party system were granted (Ahmed and Green 1999, 116).

Although the union was widely supported and quickly accepted by the Northern states, which had belonged to the British Somaliland, it wasn't long until dissatisfaction with the new structure emerged in the region. Southerners occupied most jobs in the government and held the majority of seats in Parliament (Ahmed and Green 1999, 116). Public administration

was concentrated among Southern groups, which marginalized sectors of the former British Somaliland.

The new government's policies were also fount of dissatisfaction. Not much effort was made to alleviate underdevelopment and the exaggerated stratification of the colonial period. Another negative factor was the latent corruption in the public sector. Indicated by many as an inheritance of the Italian colonial administration (Italian factor), it rapidly mined the regime's legitimacy (Ahmed and Green 1999, 116). The newly created Somali democracy, previously presented as a mechanism to create union and prosperity, became a catalyst of tension and inequality.

In 1969, the country was completely divided. In that year's elections, fragmentation was at such a level that around 60 political parties ran for a seat in Parliament (Walls 2011, 116). In October that year, president Abd ar-Rashid Ali Shirmake was assassinated by his bodyguard, which led the country to chaos. The incident evoked discussions regarding succession, and the whole electoral process was seen with distrust due to suspected corruption (Forti 2011, 15). In this context, Mohamed Siad Barre, a general in the Somali Army, gathered his troops and took Mogadishu in a bloodless military coup.

Barre was a member of the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC), a Marxist-Leninist wing of the Somali Army. Now in power, he took the initial measures to revoke the constitution, to dissolve Parliament and to prohibit any form of political association. Barre defended the application of "scientific socialism", seeking to substitute, through the state, the clan's functions of promoting security, leadership and welfare (Barre 1970). In short, the former general claimed that he would try to transform Somalia into a modern nation state. His initial promises also mentioned the eradication of tribalism and the future decentralization of power.

Barre was supported by a large part of the population, which saw in his figure an escape from the divisions hindering the young nation's development. However, his promises of union soon deteriorated. The SRC regime counted with the massive support of the *Darod* clan and manipulated clan rivalry in order to neutralize any form of political opposition (Haldén 2008, 24). Besides, due to Barre's alignment with the Soviet Union, the country received large aid packages, which were used by the government to strengthen the Army and maintain itself in power (Walls 2011, 119).

The socialist experiment made successful reforms in the health and education sectors. However, it nationalized important enterprises and administered them in an inefficient way. Bad management and the favoring of specific groups had terrible results. Between 1974 and 1975, the lack of

supply, combined with a drought, resulted in 20,000 people dead in the North (Ahmed and Green 1999, 117). Paradoxically, the Somali Army was then one of the largest and better equipped in Africa, due to Soviet support (Drysdale 2000, 17). Relying on this and seeking to reinforce Somali nationalism, Siad Barre decided, instead of solving the problem of hunger, to invade the Ethiopian region of the Ogaden, with a great Somali population.

The invasion of Ogaden in 1977 rapidly evolved to a large-scale conflict. The Ethiopian government, previously a monarchy led by Haile Selassie, the "Rastafari", was now controlled by a Marxist-Leninist military junta. In this framework, Cuba and the Soviet Union saw the opportunity to change the region's dynamics (Walls 2011, 121). Both countries cut their support to Somalia and began supporting the Ethiopian forces. Ethiopia was traditionally a regional hegemon and, in the socialist powers' point of view, it would be a more important ally than Somalia.

The Somali defeat, in 1978, was humiliating. Hunger, devastation and economic crisis fell upon the country, especially in the North, where many refugees settled (Ahmed and Green 1999, 118). Northerners' dissatisfaction with the regime was growing and many *Issaqs*, a major clan in the North, were marginalized in their own territory.

Naturally, opposition movements began organizing. In former British Somaliland, the Somali National Movement (SNM) emerged in 1981, an organization formed by businessmen, clerics, academics and former military belonging to the *Issaq* clan. The group was trying to overthrow Barre, forming bases in Northern cities such as Hargeisa and Burao.

Like the SNM, other opposition groups emerged throughout the country. The former general's government, which had previously relied on domestic support, now depended on repression and foreign aid to hold on to power (Kaplan 2008, 146). Formerly an ally of the Soviet Union, Barre's regime now was aligned to the United States, which began to send financial support to the country in the first half of the 1980s decade. However, towards the final phases of the Cold War, the amount of aid sent by Americans was drastically reduced. With many organized opposition groups and with no external financial support, Barre's fall became inevitable.

In 1991, after a series of battles and protests around the country, Mohamed Siad Barre fled Mogadishu. Immediately, the country and its political structures collapsed. This marked the beginning of the Somali Civil War. There is no exact date to the outset of the conflict, but generalized confrontation between rebel groups and the Somali government's Armed Forces started in 1988 (Menkhaus 2007, 73).

From the construction of the Somaliland state to current days

Dissatisfaction in the North due to the union of the two Somalias dated back to the 1960s, when Southern clans took key positions in the administration, marginalizing local clans, especially the *Issaqs* and their sub-clans. In Barre's regime, differences were aggravated. After his fall, in 1991, the SNM gathered elders from Northern clans and sub-clans in a national conference in the city of Burao, known as *shir beeleddeka*, or clan meeting (Ali 2013, 394). An important part of this process was the conciliatory behavior of the *Issaqs*. As a Northern majority clan, they could try to retaliate the violence that they suffered, but, under the leadership of their elders, they decided to end conflict in their lands and sought to use traditional Somali governance mechanisms in order to build bridges between clans. From the beginning, this search for consensus based on the clan system and its informal mechanisms, as well as the balance in each clan's representation were marks of the construction of the region's hybrid political order. In the end, the greatest result of the Burao Conference was Somaliland's proclamation of independence, which happened on May 18th, 1991.

The trauma of recent events helped create a kind of national identity among Northerners. Moreover, despite the future challenges that the newly-created nation would face, this spirit of reconciliation built in Burao helped generate a sense of differentiation among the inhabitants of Somaliland towards Somalia (Renders and Terlinden 2010, 730).

Upon separation, Somaliland hoped to obtain vast international recognition. The region had been independent for five days in 1960, before its union with Italian Somalia was put into effect. In this brief period, 34 countries, including the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, recognized its independence (Ali 2013, 338). In 1991, the SNM argued that the country was just returning to its original boundaries and, therefore, hoped not to find major difficulties in establishing diplomatic relations with other nations. However, nations from Africa and other parts of the world preferred not to grant such recognition, fearing that the dissolution of the Somali union would bring more instability.

Without recognition and facing serious problems in its territory due to conflict with the central government, Somaliland had a big challenge ahead of it. The whole process of independence was constructed from a series of negotiations between the clans that previously formed the British protectorate, which made the country's environment less divisive. The *Gadabursi*, the

Dhulbahante, sub-clans Dir and Harti respectively, were politically distinct from the *Issaqs*, who controlled the SNM. From the actions of elders from these clans and their sub-clans, a series of *shirs* were held in Somaliland region. These negotiations formed the basis for the construction of the state.

During the Burao Conference, when independence was declared, there were enormous variations in public opinion (Walls 2009, 380). Because of this, worried with misinterpretations of the reunion's results, the meeting's Central Committee rewrote the elder's final declaration, making it more clear and incisive. It was decided that the SNM leader, Abdirahman Ahmed Ali 'Tuur' would be in Somaliland's presidency for two years. This pattern of *shirs* to solve specific issues, later evolving to national conferences, is something that would be repeated many times during the peacebuilding process in the region.

Now under SNM leadership, more specifically under Ali Tuur's leadership, the newly emancipated, but not yet recognized nation enjoyed a brief period of stability, optimism and economic growth. Reunions and large meetings continued to happen, now aiming at constructing an agreement about what form of government and political representation Somaliland should follow (Kaplan 2008, 148). However, in 1992 the SNM government started to face some problems. There were disputes among militias of *Issaq* sub-clans in Burao, which evolved to more violent fights inside the city. Moreover, the President, while trying to ensure control of taxes in the port of Berbera⁶, ended up initiating a dispute between two *Issaq* sub-clans. The *Habar Yoonis*, to which he belonged, and the *Lise Musa*, who had lived in the port region for years, were both *Issaq* sub-clans. After weeks of negotiation, an elder delegation of the *Gadabursi* clan mediated an agreement between the government and both groups.

This conflict, although brief, is a very important event to understand the formation of Somaliland. The elders consolidated themselves as relevant and formal agents of the country's political structure. Besides, the fact that the mediation of a conflict between *Issaq* sub-clans was conducted by a neutral clan showed that the *Issaqs* wouldn't dominate the state's political structure, as was feared by members of minority clans in the region (Walls 2011, 137). The commitment with the end of retaliation was also noteworthy. The term *xalaydhalay*, which means something like erasing resentment from the past, was very noticeable in the process of forming the country. In normative terms, a fundamental definition that emerged from this conflict was the establishment that the main components of infrastructure, such as

⁶ Important Somaliland port city.

the Berbera and the Zelia ports, as well as the main cities' airports, would be under the responsibility of the central government in Hargeisa.

The next step would be to continue building the country's institutions. It had been defined that president Tuur would govern for two years, but the following stages were still undefined. It was also important to determine how possible future conflicts among clans would be resolved. With such objectives, the Borama Conference was held in 1993. With the government and the SNM awakened by the Berbera conflict, the president decided to assign to the *Guurti*, a formal council of elders, the responsibility to organize the next steps. At that point, the executive transferred the responsibility of mediating the construction of institutions and resolving the transition, from a civilian government to a Somali traditional institution. Although this didn't strengthen the government's power, this was an important measure to unite the country around a national project (Walls 2009, 383).

As a result of the Borama Conference, the "Somaliland Communities Security and Peace Charter" (*Axdiga Nabadgaladyada ee Beelaha Somaliland*) was created. Based on the principles of *shir*, it molded the solution of possible future conflicts. A National Charter (*Axdi Qarameed*), which served as an interim constitution, was also instituted.

The conference lasted for almost four months and its discussions were directed by elders and based on consensus (Forti 2011, 19). Themes such as the government system were widely discussed. Certain clans were favorable to a strong executive, pending presidentialism. Others defended parliamentarism. This issue would also be defined in a consensual manner. The Conference was of extreme importance, and many argue that it was there that an embryo of national identity was formed (Renders and Terlinden 2010, 731).

In the end, the institutions formed in the Borama Conference were a mix of traditional Somali elements with democratic governance mechanisms. This government system was known as *Beel*. In it, there would be a bicameral legislature in which the *Guurti* would be institutionalized, as a type of Senate, sharing responsibilities with the House of Representatives. The *Guurti* would designate the President and determine measures to maintain the region's fragile peace. Haji Ibrahim Egal, a member of the *Issaq* clan and experienced politician who had been the Prime-Minister of unified Somalia in the 1960s, was chosen for a three-year mandate with the possibility of renewal.

Between 1994 and 1997, new conflicts occurred in the country. *Issaq* sub-clans, disputing natural resources in the Hargeisa and Burao regions, initiated armed confrontations. Despite interventions of the *Guurti*, a consensus

was not reached. However, civil society organizations, including expatriate groups, urged the government to take more incisive actions (Forti 2011, 20). Thus, the Hargeisa Conference was established in 1997. After a ceasefire was defined, the participants of the meeting, under Egal government's tutelage, successfully redefined Somaliland's constitution (Forti 2011, 21). This meeting, unlike the previous ones, was financed by the Hargeisa central government and didn't count on foreign financial aid. Besides, the number of delegates was twice the number of participants of the Borama Conference and a reasonable number of women could observe the discussions, although they were not allowed to vote (Abokor, Bradbury and Yusuf 2015, 461).

The country's political system was of organized electoral bases centered in clans for a multi-party democracy (Constitution of Somaliland 2001, 18-41). Under the leadership of Egal and the *Guurti*, each clan was consulted, which gave strong support and legitimacy to the new Constitution (Abokor, Bradbury and Yusuf 2015, 463). In May 2001, a new referendum took place, in which 97% of voters approved that the document produced by the Hargeisa Conference, which formerly only had an interim status, would serve as Somaliland's definitive Constitution.

Traditional governance systems had been very effective when the state had failed. However, Egal and a great part of the Western-educated elite saw a stable future which depended on the adequate establishment of a balance between traditional sociocultural inheritances and the country's political aspirations. Therefore, presenting the country as a modern nation state with a democratic system was important for its political success and for obtaining international recognition (Renders and Terlinden 2010, 735). This mindset was spread throughout the country and was fundamental for the approval of the new Constitution.

In 2002, when he was 74 years old, Egal died. His death generated a stronger nationalist connection among the inhabitants of Somaliland. During his mandate, Egal had often been criticized for adopting clientelist policies and for trying to influence the outcome of important conferences (Renders and Terlinden 2010, 731). However, his figure was very respected because of the fact that he was an elder statesman, active since the 1960s, and for leading the country in the difficult decade of the 1990s (Abokor, Bradbury and Yusuf 2015, 463-464). Both influential supporters and passionate opponents attended his funeral. Thereafter, Vice-President Dahir Riyale Kahin, from the *Gadabursi* clan, fulfilling his constitutional function, took power. This transition was memorable, because it was the first time that the president wasn't *Issaq*. Riyale would be elected in 2003 for another mandate and

would govern until 2010. The 2003 elections had been controversial, but after deliberation by the *Guurti* and the Supreme Court, they were considered fair (Forti 2011, 22). Neutral observers concluded that all parties had benefited from loopholes in the legislation, but, even so, considered that the elections were fair and definitive. In 2005, parliamentary elections were also considered trustworthy, marking the first time that Somalilanders could choose members of the House of Representatives, which shares the legislative body with the *Guurti* (Kaplan 2009, 150).

In 2010, presidential elections were also considered free and fair by international observers, and happened without greater problems (Ali 2015, 58). Mohamed Silanyo, an *Issaq*, was the winner. Voting should have taken place in 2008, due to the five-year presidential mandate, but the lack of experience in organizing elections led to its two-year delay (ICG 2010). Silanyo government would be very criticized. During his mandate, inflation soared and the country's economy became more fragile. Charges for corruption, data fraud and press freedom violations also emerged (Ali 2015, 62).

New general elections were planned for 2015. However, due to a severe drought and lack of preparedness by the organizing committee, they were postponed to 2017. Similar episodes of election postponement represent a recurring problem in Somaliland's young democracy. Pegg and Walls (2018) argue that this is the result of two factors: the lack of resources to hold them and the absence of political will from incumbents. The *Guurti*, which acts as a Senate, should have its members elected every six years. However, since this rule was instituted, in 1997, there was never a poll to choose them. The House of Representatives, which functions as a Parliament, hasn't undergone elections since 2005. This contributes to the fragility of the country's democracy and to an overly presidential dominance. Moreover, during the most recent elections, a frequent complaint among voters was that it was difficult to identify the differences among the country's main parties. Disputes for positions inside the parties, as well as alliances of convenience showed a growing opportunistic feature in the nation's politics and created a certain cynicism among voters (Abokor, Bradbury and Yusuf 2015, 463-464).

In 2017, elections successfully happened. Musa Bihi Abdi, a former Air Force *Issaq* pilot, indicated by Silanyo, who did not run for reelection, was the winner. Parliamentary elections, on its turn, are still pending, and have been postponed since 2005. Abdi's government inherited important challenges from Silanyo. The former leader had created policies favorable to his clan, the *Issaqs*, and imbalance in the distribution of public positions for each group (Ali 2015, 65). A possible resurgence of clan rivalry is one of the

greatest threats to Somaliland's democracy, with the potential to seriously affect its ambition for international recognition. Therefore, it is crucial for the government to take conciliatory actions in this matter.

Abdi, however, has been seeking to improve his country's position in the international arena in other ways. His government has developed closer ties to the United Arab Emirates, a nation that could, possibly, be the first to recognize the country as a sovereign state. In 2018, both governments closed a deal for the construction of a military base in the region, but due to tensions in Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni War, the final project has been transformed into a civilian airport (Reuters 2019). Abdi has also met with representatives of Mogadishu's federal Somali government on two occasions. The first meeting happened in February 2020, and the second one in June, when the Horn of Africa had already been hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. In those meetings, Abdi showed reasons for Somaliland secession, citing the 1933 Montevideo Convention and the country's brief independence period in 1960 (Muse Bihi Abdi Speech [...], 2020). However, little progress was made. Both governments sought advances in other areas, such as the division of foreign aid. This is a crucial issue for Somaliland, because currently any attempt to support the country must pass through Somalia first. In the end, little was decided, but Abdi obtained a small political victory by receiving head of state treatment during the meetings, which were held in Ethiopia and Djibouti.

Although the country has plenty of specific issues, its last challenge was shared with the whole world: the COVID-19 pandemic. Its response received compliments from international organizations such as the WHO, while neighboring nations, such as Somalia itself, couldn't manage to minimally control the spread of the virus (Mukami 2020). Without foreign aid, the country raised US\$15 million internally to face the disease, created informative campaigns and efficient restrictions to the movement of people in cities (Rubin 2020). Somaliland's appropriate response can bring good political outcomes for the country. The European Union and the USA, looking for stability in the region, have sent large sums to the government of Somalia, which administers the resources inefficiently (Rubin 2020). At the same time, Somaliland has done a good job with a small amount of money, which can make foreign donors give the country more attention and treat it separately from Somalia when donating.

During the pandemic, Somaliland also evoked comparisons with Taiwan, an Asian nation which also seeks for international recognition as an independent territory. The similarities in both countries' situations made them establish diplomatic relations at the beginning of July, foreseeing pos-

sible agreements in the fields of fishing, agriculture, mining and education (Aspinwall 2020). This could mean a turning point in the country's history, as it can now count on a valuable partner.

Conclusion

Challenges ahead of the Somaliland state are huge. The country has to deal with frequent deadly droughts and with the persistence of deep socio-economic problems. The nation still has a huge task in obtaining international recognition. However, since its independence, Somaliland was able to maintain stability in its territory and to organize transitions of power between different groups, such as the one after president Egal's death. The country's balance contrasts with the generalized chaos in Somalia, to the South.

The reasons for Somaliland's success in comparison with Somalia date back to the country's colonization. In British Somaliland, the region's peoples, although subject to cruel domination, could maintain their customs and forms of governance. While to the South, Italians imposed their form of administration and created considerable imbalance in social structure. Thus, when confronted with Mohamed Siad Barre's tyranny, Northern clans managed to organize more easily.

The elder's pragmatism after the declaration of independence, in 1991, is another important factor for the region's success. The many conferences held to solve controversies and build institutions happened in a methodical way, approaching a new issue only when the previous one had been resolved (Kaplan 2008, 148). The use of traditional Somali customs was also key to achievement. Meetings shaped from the *Shir* and agreements based on the *Xeer* facilitated understanding among different clans and their union around the ideal of a nation.

In the political sphere, the idea that in order to obtain international recognition it would be necessary to establish a strong democracy helped maintain stability. Moreover, continuous conflict in the South served as a reminder of the importance of solving controversies peacefully. It is argued that this could have had the role of an external enemy as an element for a country's internal union (Walls 2009, 389).

Still in terms of political structure, there is much discussion about whether the country should move away its clan system and traditional decision-making mechanisms from its institutions, as it is argued that they generate rivalries in the public sphere. However, as imperfect as the peace and

institution-building process has been in Somaliland, its achievements are meaningful and demonstrate the importance of handling these processes in a local and bottom-up way. Thus, there are less disputes over the institutional progresses under construction.

In short, while other attempts of peacebuilding in Africa made by international organizations have failed, notably in Somalia, in Somaliland there is an example of the creation of stability driven solely by native leaders. In the region, a unique model of democracy was created, mixing Somali elements to Western prerogatives. In Africa, abrupt transitions to democratic regimes have caused instability in many countries. Somaliland is an example of how customs and traditional structures must be considered when establishing democratic regimes in countries as diverse and complex as the ones in Africa. This way, the country emerges as an interesting example of the construction of state structure not only for post-colonial nations around the world.

In terms of its search for recognition, it is undeniable that the country already fulfills the legal requirements in order to be considered a *de facto* state. The international community tends to follow the African Union's positions regarding boundaries in the continent, and it has been firm in defending that a possible recognition of Somaliland could lead to more instability. For the moment, the best strategies for the country are to maintain itself firm in its road to build a consolidated democracy. Achievements such as its response to the 2020 pandemic can accelerate this process, and it is interesting for the country to keep trying to influence decision makers in nations such as the US, the UK and Scandinavian countries, where there are many Somali expatriates. South Sudan, which obtained international recognition in 2011, is an example of successful international lobby. The government in Mogadishu, in its turn, continues to pose a difficult barrier for the country's recognition, by using its presence in international fora to advocate for Somalian union.

It is not possible to predict if Somaliland's dream is distant or close. It could happen in years, decades, or maybe never. Challenges, internal and external, are plentiful. However, the country has accomplished a lot with limited resources, and recognition would certainly help its development and, possibly, the establishment of peace in the Horn of Africa.

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to understand the processes that culminated in the political success of the self-declared Republic of Somaliland through a case study. Since its independence from Somalia in 1991, the country has gone through four electoral processes, considered fair and reliable, in addition to achieving significant stability in its territory, even without any international recognition and in adverse conditions.

It was concluded that the mixture of traditional elements with western democratic prerogatives was fundamental for the construction of stability in Somaliland. Governments and governance structures that have long been present in Somali culture were used to resolve disputes when the state failed, and were later incorporated into formality in the form of *Guurti*, a council of elders that went on to function as a senate. Several negotiations and conferences, based on the customs of the region, took place during the 90s, uniting the different rival clans that inhabited Somaliland around an ideal of nation. Furthermore, the idea that in order to obtain recognition it would be necessary to establish a solid democracy also contributed to the country's political balance. In short, even though the nation has profound problems, such as misery, corruption and lack of recognition, it is possible to say that in Somaliland a new model of hybrid democracy has emerged so far successfully. And while attempts at peacebuilding in Africa by outside agents have failed, Somaliland is a successful example led by local actors using endogenous governance elements, which can bring lessons and teachings applicable to other cases on the continent.

KEYWORDS

Democracy. Somaliland. State Building. Peacebuilding. Somalia.

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