In Dubai: Traders, In Somalia: Conflict Escalators

A Study of Diasporic Influences on Civil War
Abstract

I have used diaspora theory with a sociological perspective. This perspective has given insight to the importance that a diaspora community can play in conflicts in their country of origin while they are absent. My main research question is: What roles do Somali traders in Dubai play in the Somali clan conflict? My material consists of interviews with three Somali Diaspora traders in Dubai. The aim of this study is to examine how they are involved in the clan conflict in Somalia through their trading activities. Questions have been asked about which precautions that must be taken in order to export and import to/from a country ridden by conflict. Their answers showed that they were dependent on their clan in order to secure their products and, thereby, they were forced to be involved in the conflict in different ways. A reciprocal relationship evolved since also their clans in Somalia became dependent on the traders in Dubai for their position in the conflict.
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1. Introduction

In this paper I argue that a perspective that also considers transnational migration and trade can contribute to the research on conflicts in Africa. My goal is to provide an approach to the Somali clan conflict that begins to take onboard transnational complexity. As a consequence of the ongoing clan conflict in Somalia there seems to be an increasing number of traders from Somalia traveling to the Gulf. I examine contemporary (2005) Somali diaspora traders in Dubai, and their influence in the clan conflict in Somalia, particularly in the capital city of Mogadishu. My material consists of interviews with three Somali Diaspora traders in Dubai; a food trader, a material trader and a general trader. My focus is on how the traders imagine and experience their place in the clan conflict. By focusing on strategies for buying and selling, on trade movements and consumption desires, I question the bounds and the territorial placing of conflict. I employ theories on diasporas and transnationalism as an entry point into the relationship of the contemporary Somali clan conflict and Somali diaspora traders in Dubai. I discuss the specific contribution that theories on diaspora can give to the understanding of Somali traders’ ideological construction of the clan conflict in Somalia. In order to do so I draw on excerpts from interviews with Somali Diaspora businessmen. Thereby, I can examine the traders’ own interpretation of the local context and the position that they hold in their clans and sub-clans. Does the separation in space influence their role in their clans and their sub-clans in which they are members? I also examine the conflict that might be going on between different traders’ interests in growing consumer demands. I discuss how local debates in Dubai about Somali clan conflict prosper, and how they represent broader conflict struggles over their roles in clans and sub-clans and their role in the existing conflict.
2. Research objective

My overall research question is: How do Somali traders in Dubai take part in the Somali clan conflict? In order to answer this question I examine three more specific research questions:

1. How they did earn their start capital. Did they for instance earn it through participating in the conflict?
2. Did the commodities of trade influence their position in the conflict?
3. How did the traders’ social network influence their trade and position in the clan conflict?
3. Methodological approach

I got the idea for my project when I was reading an article called: “Fighting for the plenty; The Banana trade in southern Somalia”, written by Christian Wenbersik (2005). Previously, in my C-assignment, I wrote about the reasons behind the clan conflict in Somalia. I wanted to write about the conflict again, but from another angle, and this article gave me motivation to go further into the subject of trade and transnationalism.

I use a qualitative method in order to answer my questions as I am seeking to get an in-depth understanding of individual traders. I stayed in Dubai from the middle of March 2005 until April 2005. I was already in contact with individual Somali traders in Dubai, who had a large network. Because my contacts were trusted among my informants I saved time initially by easing the process of gaining the informant’s trust (Agar 1996:27-29). They were my door-openers for me in order to come into contact also with others traders from different places in Somalia, and particularly from the south. I started out with these contacts and used a snowballing sampling system (Droeber 2003:411) in order to get in touch with a wide range of individuals so that I had many alternatives when I chose the individuals that became my informants. In the end I chose to focus on three traders. The traders, whom I chose as my informants, all trade in the capital, Mogadishu. I chose informants from this place because it is in the capital, where there is the most conflict, and, therefore, the places where there is the most conflict related to traders in Dubai. Because the conflict in Somalia could be said to be a clan conflict, I chose informants belonging to three different clans. In this way I can understand three different perspectives. Moreover, I chose to interview one person from each of the three largest groups of Somali traders in Dubai, food traders, material traders and general trades. Each of the persons that I picked was asked the same amount of questions. The first person is a food trader who trades with products that are a necessity in the every day life. The second person is a material trader, who trades with cars and building material. The third person is a general trader, which means that he trades with different products depending on the opportunities available in the market. As I am doing a qualitative study I cannot make any generalizations about Somali traders in Dubai, I can only say something about the cases that I study. I chose to interview traders from different clans and from different trading groups. I am, however, aware of that I cannot make any general conclusions about all Somali traders belonging to these groups. In choosing whom to interview I used a purposive sampling method, which means that I purposely chose whom I wanted to interview, rather than
randomly selecting them. This is because this study does not aim to make generalizations, but rather to increase the understanding of “social processes and social action” (Gilbert 1993:71).

I met my informant at their offices or in the cafe’s. It was the informants who decided where to meet, and at what time. When we met in their offices I used a tape recorder and recoded all the interviews, but when I met my informants in the cafes there was a lot of noise so it was not possible to use the tape recorder, instead I took notes. I did a face-to-face interview with each person. The questions were planned in advance relating to the overall research questions. There were asked both pre-coded and open-ended question. The pre-coded questions were asked to collect data that places the person, like how old he is, which background he has, and which social class he belongs to. Then I asked open-ended questions.

Especially because there were barely any material to be found on my area of research it was important to use open-ended questions. I did not know from the beginning what I should be looking for, so I had to find out how the reality looks. To avoid limiting the conversation in the interview to be about only my own pre-assumptions I tried to make the traders speak openly about the theme. There were asked extra questions in accordance to what they wanted to talk about in the interview. I, however, guided them, so that the information revealed something of interest for the project, but I let them talk freely inside of this frame. This study is a middle way between a symbolic integrationist approaches. All the interviews followed some standard questions, and I also included questions deriving from the other interviews.

The interviews provided very much material, because of the open-ended questions. A lot of it was not needed for this project. In order to find out what of it was needed for my purpose was to read through the interviews that had been done and divide the material into different categories. The three most important categories are trade, product and clan. I do not mention their names; instead I refer to them by stating their business profession, in order to preserve their anonymity. Because my informants are anonymous it possible for me to analyse my material more freely.
4. Previous research

Most scholars have focused on conflict between the different clans in Somalia and contestations over land and foreign aid as causes of the initial conflict (See for instance: Laitin and Samatar 1987, Drool 1998, Farah 2000, Fox 2000). Some scholars of Somali studies see the fragmentation along clan lines as the culprit behind the lack of pan-Somali organizations (see Griffiths 2002). The study of Somali clan conflict had dealt with various political groups and individuals through different perspectives. I mention but a few who are particularly important. An early book concerning clan interpretation of Somalia is written by the anthropologist I. M. Lewis (1993), which is a guide to cultural and social institutions. It provides an outline of clan interpretations in Somalia. Another widely read book concerning conflict in Somalia is written by the social scientist Abdullah Drool (1998): Failed States. When governance goes wrong. It is an extensive survey of the states and clan influence movement in Somalia governance. Abdullah discusses the clan relation to the Somali governance and the ideologies of various states. Another well know work is that of the anthropologist Bernhard Helander (2003): The Slaughter Camel, Coping with Fictitious Descent among the Hubbeer of Southern Somalia. This book describes clan-relations in Southern Somalia. A book that deals with clan in relation to the Somali nation state is written by the social scientists, David D Latin and Said S Samatar: Nation in Search of a State. There are two studies conducted of Somali traders. One is written by the Islamologist Rannveig Haga (forthcoming) of northern Somali women traders in Hargeisa and Dubai. The other study is written by the anthropologist Peter D. Little (2003) who has been writing Somalia: Economy without state (2003). He deals with the questions of statelessness, economy and violence in Somalia. He illustrates how clan elders, religious leaders and businessmen work together to provide security in large parts of Somalia.

Studies of Somalis in the West have convincingly argued for the applicability of the term diaspora when studying the Somali networks transcending borders (See for instance: Berns McGown 1999, Griffith 2002, Tillikainen 2003). These studies have pointed out that Somali migrants do not only move from their country of origin to the new host country. Often migrants’ stay in a country is understood as a stepping-stone, and the country they are living in might not even be their first step (Assal 2003). Assal writes about how Somalis in Norway often have resided in places like Kenya, Dubai, Saudi Arabia before entering Norway and how many Somalis search for a new place to live in other countries in Europe or in the Gulf States if they are not satisfied with their situation in Norway.
Studies about Diaspora and transnationalism are too voluminous to sum up here as there is a wide range of books that have been published. There has, however, been no previous research, which examine how traders in the diaspora are involved in the ongoing clan-conflict in Somalia. By examining how Somalis in the diaspora influences the conflict in Somalia new questions arises which can give insight into a conflict which has been going on for decades. Even if traders have an important part to play in the conflict, which will become apparent through my study, there has been no previous research on their involvement. Although there has been done much research about the clan conflict in Somalia his is the first study regarding the clans’ traders in Dubai. That is why I hope that the present study can make contributions.
5. Theoretical frame

I mainly base my theoretical frame on the study: "Theorizing Diaspora “edited by Braziel and Mannur (2003). Diaspora has been loosely associated with other terms, particularly transnationalism, in order to describe the disjuncture and fractured conditions of late modernity. However, the concept of diaspora needs to be extricated from such loose association, and it's historical and theoretical specificities must be made clear. While diaspora may accurately be described as transnational, it is not synonymous with transnationalism. Transnationalism may be defined as the flow of people, ideas, goods, and capital across national territories in the way that undermines nationality and nationalism as discrete categories of identification, economic organization, and political constitution. I differentiate diaspora from transnationalism. Diaspora refers specifically to the movement – forced or voluntary – of people from one or more nationstates to another. While diaspora addresses the migrations and displacements of subjects, transnationalism also includes the movements of information through cybernetics, as well the traffic in goods, products and capital across geopolitical terrains (Braziel and Mannur 2003:7-8). The concept of transnationalism could seem to be a good compliment to the concept of diaspora, particularly in a study of diaspora traders, however, my main focus is on the concept of diaspora because I am interested in studying the relationship between members of the same nation. Even though the Somali traders reside in a different country, they seem to be mostly occupied with networks that include also Somalis, and their investment seems to be directed towards their family back home. Moreover, when studying the traders’ importing and exporting products, my focus is on how they build relationships that influence clan relations. These relations can be studied by distinguishing between two different types of myths of descent common to kin relations; that of “weak transcendence” and “strong transcendence.” Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin (2003) suggest the use of these concepts in order to study different types of diaspora-relationships. According to Boyarin and Boyaring, strong transcendence serves to justify land control. It is more aggressive because it is more embattled and dose more ideological work (Boyarin and Boyarin 2003:105). Boyarin and Boyarin (2003) argues that the myth of descent from a common ancestry widespread among nomads can be associated with group belonging through the body rather than connected to group belonging through land ownership. It can, therefore, be seen as an extension of family-membership and, therefore, of weak transcendence. Although Somalis traditionally were nomads many fight for land control today, and in Mogadishu today clan belonging is to a great extent part of a quest for land
control. Therefore, clan membership has become a part of a conquering ideology, and is becoming a matter of strong transcendence. In the diaspora, clan-relations are not necessarily about land ownership, and could therefore be of weak transcendence. By using these concepts I examine how traders in Dubai relate both to a clan membership that is strong and a clan membership that is weak and less aggressive.

The definition of diaspora, or of a transnational imagined community, is a dimension of social importance among Somalis across the globe (See for instance: Berns McGown 1999, Griffith 2002, Tiilikainen 2003). Even if the concept of diaspora theory can help us shift attention away from the integration of ethnic groups on a national level in order to better view the transnational communities, which are sustained and (re-) shaped across borders, it could be said to deploy a notion of ethnicity which privileges the point of “origin” in constructing identity and solidarity (Anthias 1998:558). This reminds me that it is important to examine the difference within the diaspora community. In my research I also examine how Somali diaspora traders in Dubai are in a hierarchical relationship in their native homeland also when involved in migration and trade.
6. Historical developments in Somalia

Somalia is located on the Horn of Africa, and is the eastern most country in Africa. Somalia has a land area of 637,540 square kilometers. It borders with Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. It has a coastline of 3.025 km by the red sea, gulf Aden and Indian Ocean.

Before the colonial powers came to Somalia or Africa, and before the appearance of urban centers, there was no central authority in Somalia. A flexible clan structure organized the community. Every small clan was either nomadic, moving in search of water and pasture for their animals, or were villagers living by subsistence farming. These communities were mainly clan-based, though there would have been many instances of people of different clans living together. There were no police or prisons; if a crime was committed, the elders of the community required the criminal to pay compensation. Every sub-clan took responsibility for its offenders because the crime of one person was attributed to the whole clan, and revenge could fall on any member of that clan. It was an oral society, and every member of the sub-clan knew the rules of the society by heart, knowing the penalties for each offence.

There are five main clan-families in Somalia. A clan-family is a group of clans who is believed to descent from a common ancestor. Each clan then further sub-divided into sub-lineages. These are the major Somali clan-families and sub-clans:

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The clan, in its essence, is a minimalist association in which members agrees to adopt a common social pact or xeer for dealing with community problems and helping each other. Xeer is described by the sociologist Said Samatar (1993) as being one of the elements which comprise kinship ideology. Is a precedent–based social code which is understood to apply to all Somali people and serve as a necessary restraint and moderating guide in disagreements and feuds between groups and individuals (Samatar 9:1993). For example when a Somali family loses its animal to a drought the clan members pitch in with donated animals, or when
rustlers steal a family’s animals the clan members take action to seek restitution first by negotiation. The social structure based on clans was influenced by colonialization.

The colonizers came to Somalia in the 1880's. From 1941 to 1950 present-day Somalia was ruled solely by European powers. Italy controlled southern Somalia; Britain controlled northern Somalia, and especially the coastal region. France ruled the area that became Djibouti.

When the colonial powers arrived, the traditional rules were replaced by new rules written in Italian or English. At that time less than one per cent of Somalis could read and write, and those who could do so were in the urban centers. The colonial period also involved government employment of salaried officials and the concomitant growth of a small urban petty bourgeoisie. In the north, the British administration originally had concentrated on the coastal area for trading purposes but soon discovered that livestock could be traded came from the interior. Therefore, it was necessary to safeguard caravan routes and keep peace in port areas, requiring the development of police forces and other civil services.

The colonial powers used clan-belonging as a means to divide and weaken their common stand. The clan structure was replaced by “clanism” or the egoistic pursuit of self-interest based upon shared descent (Jimcaale 2005:57). Clanism was created by colonizers because the colonial saw as way to approach Somalia society. The colonial powers shaped and structured social intuitions in a way that gained their interest of ruling. And some of the Somali clans allied in order to gain and maintain power. The historian Liedwien Kapteijns (1995) and the geographer Abdi I. Samatar (1989), who have researched historic developments in Somalia, write about how a process of change that eventually lead to the civil war, began with European colonialization, and the inclusion of the Somali economy into the capitalist world system (Haga, forthcoming).

Italian Somaliland gained its independence from Italy on July 1st 1960. On the same day, it united with British Somaliland, which gained independence on 26th of June 1960 to form the Somali republic. After independence the first president, Cade Osman, was elected in Somalia. After his elected period came to an end he decided to leave the position. This was an historic incident as it was the first African president to leave his position voluntarily so that a new election could take place. The next president of Somalia was Abdi Rashid Sharmarke, who was killed by one of his guards. At that time, the military general Siyad Barre decided to overthrow the government through a coup in 1969.
The conflict clan in Somali has a state ruled by dictatorship as its background. Most of the Somalis complained about the government because only one clan guided it. That is why they started to mobilize and organize their clans in order to overthrow the Siyad Barre’s regime. By this time, the regime had reached the point where no one could trust anyone but his own clansmen. The president had become so suspicious of the other clans that he increasingly resorted to buying the support of his own clan by awarding them promotion, education, health facilities, resources, employment, bank-credits etc. By 1988, all the ministers were in contact with their respective clan-based opposition groups and the regime disintegrated. Because the opposition was divided along clan lines, they could not offer a viable alternative government when the military regime collapsed. This change has lead to an escalation of the conflict between the Somali clans. Each clan saw the opportunity to seize power over the Somali state.

This power struggle was started by anti-government movements formed by the Majerteen from East Somali, which is the sub-clan of Darood, the Isaq from the north, and by the Hawiye clan. As a consequence of these frictions many members of these clans have been forced into exile in deferent countries. Some of them fled to countries in the Middle-East; like Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirate (UAE).

This clan conflict has been going on since the state collapsed in 1991, and until now. After the state system in Somalia collapsed the way that society was organized was so that each individual participant and its groups struggle to maximize their rights or scarce social benefits, which inevitably contributes to social change such as changes in politics and trade.

The multi leveled and multi-layered organization of Somalia society is complex though not inflexible, the flexibility often depending on context and social groups. Perhaps the greatest problem when understanding it is precisely how much of and where traditional Somali society is still intact, and the extent to which it has impacted on political developments. Besides the arguments which have been made regarding the demise and distortion of the clans, not to mention the fact that there has been movement of some clan over time as well, further compounding the problems in understanding how the system does or does not cohere. Moreover, there is a tendency to think of Somali as homogenous group, an undifferentiated whole, when in fact there are some significant differences within these levels and layers. (Mary Jane fox; 2000). Somalis hotly debate the centrality and dominance of clan politics in the diaspora (Farah 2000; Griffiths 2000).
7. Historic Relations Between Somalia and the UAE
The United Arab Emirates forms part of the geographical subdivision of the South-eastern Arabia, together with its western neighbour, Qatar, and its eastern neighbour, the Sultanate of Oman (Frawke Heard-Bey 6). It has some 750 kilometers of shoreline along the so-called Lower Gulf. This shore is reached from the Indian Ocean after navigating the length of the Gulf of Oman and rounding the tip of long and narrow Musandam Peninsula through the 46 kilometer-wide entries to the Gulf, the straits of Hormuz, and past the southern shore of the Iranian province of Baluchistan. The UAE has also direct access to the Indian Ocean on the 75 kilometers of the eastern shoreline, which border on the Gulf of Oman.

From early history Somalis have had a lot of contact with the Gulf area through religion and trade. Since at least the sixteenth century, Somali pastoralists have traded animal products and other goods to Middle Eastern markets (Little 2004). Majerteen from East Somali and Isaaq from Northern Somalia had a closer connection trade with the UAE historically. Because the Emirates was part of a British colony there were especially many from Northern Somalia as this part of Somalia also was a British colony. However, there were also a number of Somalis from other parts of Somalia who traded with the Emirates already before the discovery of oil. At that time Somalis used to export livestock, fruit, and incense.

After Somalia became independent and British and Italian Somaliland united, the contact with the Emirates continued and individuals got license in order to carry out their trade. When the Emirates discovered oil during the 1970s the market changed. This brought with it a type of market liberalism. At that time most Somalis came as guest workers to the UAE. These people work at different levels of works and professions. Most of them worked on oil-platforms, in hospitals and as teachers. At that time there were a small number of well-known traders. During the 1980s Dubai grew and became a center of trade connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe. It was during that time that a growing number of individual big traders started to operate in Dubai.

From a few number in the 1970s, the number of Somalis in the UAE increased to over ten thousand in the year 2000. The flood of Somali immigrants to the UAE started in 1988 with the Siyad Barre government’s bombardment of two of Somalia’s northern towns, and the persecution of the Isaaq clan, which was suspected of having connection with the underground opposition, the Somalia Nationalist Movement (SNM). The stream of the Somali immigrants started first from the north, where the Isaaq clan dominated. Since 1991, however, when the
civil war broke out in the rest of Somalia, Somalis from all over Somalia migrated to the UAE.

The movement of the Somali immigrants has never been a uniform process and inasmuch as many Somalis lost their loved ones, were raped and subjected to different kinds of trauma before the flight, the fission that followed the breakdown continues to plague the Somalis, even after leaving their country. The events that led to the collapse of Somalia also led to the separation of families, and consequently resulted in having members of the family being scattered in many countries, sometimes as many as five. Many had to spend years in convoluted journeys or stop in what are known as first asylum countries (Kenya, Ethiopia, and Yemen) before proceeding to Europe, the United States and Canada (see Manger and Assal 2006).

At the same time as millions fled to the Western countries, an increasing number of Somalis entered the UAE. Particularly there were many traders that moved to the UAE, especially to one Emirate/city with the name Dubai. After the Somali state collapsed in the early 1990s all production has ended. Most of the traders moved to Dubai in the UAE and opened offices there. Dubai played the main role for traders living in Somalia as well because most of the products sold in the market are imported from Dubai, while they also export products to Dubai. Dubai became the main gate to the rest of the world for products from Somalia.

At the time of my fieldwork Somalia especially the capital city in Mogadishu was in a state of conflict and structural relations were ruled by clan and sub-clan belonging. This system filled a function for the Somali traders in Dubai in the absence of state. When they both imported and exported to Mogadishu (capital city of Somalia) the state of conflict presented the traders with opportunities. Their economic capital can buy them great influence as they can have a powerful militia that have the official purpose of protecting their products, while they also fill other functions like security. As the traders can achieve such great influence in a state of conflict they can escape institutional rigidities which were part of the previous social system. “Now we have to arrange for security men with arms when we trade”. (Little 2003).
8. Kafiil system
The kafiil system means that immigrants from other countries can pay citizens of the UAE, who will be responsible for their settlement. This means that citizens of UAE can enable also the Somalia immigrants to settle and operate in UAE with a Somali passport, which was not valid in the rest of the world. With the exception of those who come through the kafiil allowance the programmers, or through the process of business, the majority of Somalis who are in UAE are those who had money that avoided buying the settlement and came directly from Somalia. They came to UAE mostly through business. It is impossible or extremely difficult to get information about the intrigues involved in coming to UAE, and the greater part of the stories told about such intrigues are anecdotal and hearsay. An immigrant would tell that he came to the UAE through kafiil for example, that he or she has to pay two thousand US dollars every year personally to the kafiil to operate their business and reside in the country. According to these anecdotal stories, some of the Somali businessmen come to UAE after the personal connection whit the kafiil through some of the clan in the UAE, For example others moving to the Golf countries on the own or join other family members who are already there.
The tough screening and questioning by the kafiil or by state department authorities immigrants go through effects the way people react to my questions and the responses are mostly anecdotal.
9. Three Somali Diaspora traders in Dubai

I introduce three Somali traders in Dubai; a raw material trader, a material trader, and a general trader. The raw material trader is a middle-aged married man. He lives with his wife and 2 children in Dubai, while he has an additional two children, who go to school in Pakistan. He imports fish, livestock and fruits from Mogadishu to Dubai, and owns his own company with a main office in Dubai, which he opened in 1991. Some of his clan-members who live in Europe, USA and Australia are shareholders in his company, which has a yearly turnover of about 2, 5 – 3 million US dollars.

The material trader is a middle-aged man. He has two wives, one in Europe and one in Dubai. He exports clothes, oil, food, rice and cars, and imports incense, charcoal and wild animals. He owns a company together with his brother, which they started 1992. Sub-clan members who live in Eastern Africa are shareholders in their company. They have a yearly turnover of about 4 million US dollar.

The general trader is also a middle-aged man and his wife and children live in Mogadishu. He earned his start capital by being the advisor for the functioning (an unrecognized) president in 1991-1992 Ali Mahdi, who was opposed by General Muhammad Farah Aidid, a known warlord fought by the American troops. He owns the company by himself with this money. He started trading 1993-94. The yearly turnover is about 3 million US dollars. He is an “opportunistic trader” as he exports whatever the market in Mogadishu requests. When they need cars for military operations he exports to his clan-members. He has an especially tight contact with his clan-leaders and he sends them invitation-visas 2-3 times a year and arranges meetings for them in Dubai. Additionally, he has shares in the money-transfer companies known as Al-Xawala.
10. Somali traders’ Interests in Somalia

In the beginning of the conflict, my informants and other Somali businessmen funded the ruling warlords, but as the conflict developed they found this to be counterproductive. For example, the main warlords controlling Mogadishu in the beginning of the conflict in the 1990s were backed up by the traders. However, these warlords never established the security and predictability traders needed, and the traders began to lose money on their investments. Greater order and security were needed to promote commerce. Eventually the traders started to seek cooperation with local clan elders in order to protect their businesses, and the clan elders mobilized their clan. Because the warlords failed to provide security, the clan elders were the ones providing security for traders. The conflict escalated as there were an increasing number of actors that sought to take power over the clan territories. The traders realized that in order to sell their products it is necessary for them to get protection from their clan, and it is necessary for them to have a good relationship with their clans. Through their clans they create military militias in order to protect their products, and they become close to their clan-leaders. The military militia that the traders have created becomes an important resource for the clan-leaders in order for them to preserve their position in the conflict. For the traders it is also important that their clan-leaders have a good position in the conflict, as this will give them better protection.

Therefore, in Mogadishu the Somali traders have an interest in who controls territories, as they will be more successful with their trade if their clan operates and owns a larger territory, as my informants repeatedly emphasizes. The general trader expresses it in this way: “My clan plays a major role in my business, to protect the material that has been imported to Somalia.” The products that they sell create profit for their clan back home, and that is how the clan becomes stronger and can rule greater territories. In Mogadishu there is a fight over land control going. In this context the traders relate to a kinship of strong transcendence. The material trader expresses it in this way:

I don’t have any problems, because when I reach Somalia my clan’s militia protects me, even when I am here they protect my business in Somalia. My clan and clan-leaders supports me in many different ways, and I support them financially. This is the way of a clan-based ideology
All the traders have in common that they invest money in their territory where their clan is in control. When the traders are in Mogadishu they are segregated and divided because the land is divided into clan territories, and they cannot cross over to each other.

The raw material trader and the material trader have both attempted to cooperate with different clans in Mogadishu. The material trader was unsuccessful in his attempt, as was also the raw material trader. The raw material trader’s products are brought to a port which is controlled by a different clan, and as they do a favor for him by letting him pass through their territory in order to bring his products to the market ruled by his own clan, he attempted to give them a return-favor by letting their clan sell their products within his territory. This attempt failed because his clan rejected his proposition. The general trader conversely believes strongly in territorial control and does not seek cooperation. He believes every clan should stick to their indigenous territory. When the traders operate in Somalia they have an interest in upholding the power of their own clan.
11. Dubai – a center for trade

The state which the traders presently reside in is a safe country where they have a very comfortable lifestyle. The three traders drive their Mercedes Benz or Toyota Land cruiser, in the town of Dubai while they dream that it will be possible to establish a well-functioning state apparatus in their conflict-ridden mother country.

It was when the Somali state collapsed in 1991 that my informants could begin to trade, as it was no longer necessary to have an import/export license (I.C). According to them this made it possible for traders to export raw material from Somalia to other countries, and Dubai is one of the main centers where these products are sold. At that time, a Somali trader could for instance open an office in Dubai which administers, and gives contracts to, other countries so that they can fish at the coast of Somalia. Another example which another trader told me is that they can export wild animals. Some of them stay in the Gulf States where people can watch them in the zoo, while others are exported to other countries across the world. The raw material trader said that many of the traders in Dubai send food which is expired and medicine which is of low quality, and which is duplicated to Somalia. According to the raw material traders, this is possible because there is no state to control the imported goods either.

According to the traders another change that happened after the state collapsed is that people who previously could not obtain a license from the government were now free to trade. Therefore, a great number of Somalis started trading after the state collapsed. Moreover, they told me that many of the traders who became traders in Dubai after the state collapsed also became important actors in the conflict in Somalia. The traders told me that these new traders also regarded themselves as having and important impact on the conflict. They told me that traders bought cars called Toyota land cruisers in Dubai and sent to Somalia where they were used in order to protect their products. They also bought weapons from Yemen which was built into the car. The traders hired youths from their clan who would drive the cars, which protected their goods. In addition, they invited to Dubai those who protect their goods in Somalia so that they can learn about how the trade is done. The traders told me that they do this so that the youth clan leaders will look up to them and, thereby, they preserve their power position.

When the youth leaders come the traders rent a room for them in the hotel where their clan lives. Each clan lives in different hotels. Most of the Hawiyes go to Mirage Hotel where the bright and manager by the Xawaadle clan. Few others mainly Haber Gidir traders will join the
Isaacs and the Djiboutians at the Qasr al-Seyaha Hotel. The Majeertens will use the Al-Aman hotel or the Red Sea hotel. Somali hotels are not the only choice although they are already cheap. People may go to houses rented by close friends or relatives: they will get a bed, do their business and leave some money at the end of their stay.

When the traders sent their products from Dubai to Somalia each clan sends their products from different ports. For instance the Hawiye clan sends their products mainly from Ajman, and the Darood clan sends from the Dubai port. While the hotels and the ports are divided along clan lines the different clans can meet in the restaurants and the cafes. Although each clan has different tables they also speak to each other across the tables. This way they exchange information about the latest news from Somalia and about trade and economics.

My informants have not migrated as they stay temporary in Dubai and they are not displaced as they have chosen strategically to use the opportunities that they can find in the market of Dubai, they are therefore at the right place in order to influence the market “back home”, and therefore also, indirectly, in order to influence the conflict. They do not only consider opportunities presented within their borders and they, therefore, undermine the idea of nation state, however, at the same time they emphasize the idea of clan and Diaspora by being mainly focused upon their place of origin. In my interviews they emphasize time and again that Dubai is not their future home and they have no interest in settling there. Their plan is to return to Somalia and they are investing in a future in Somalia.

Looking at the different Somali Diaspora traders in Dubai reveals the extent to which the clan is resilient. It is important to mention that the roles played by the clan were crucial during their early stages as businessmen in Dubai. Relationships with friends and clan- members play a central role in helping each other at time of crisis and conflict. When they first came to Dubai they were in need of this support. However, when the traders are in Dubai they relate to clans in a non-territorial way but rather through family kinship, which is not connected to land control, and that is why it is less aggressive. In other words it is a kinship of weak transcendence. When there is a shortage of one product in one of the stores in the market in Dubai owed by one clan, while there is an excess of this products in a different store owned by another clan, the traders belonging to the clans who own these two stores will work together in Dubai in order to distribute the products according to demand. While they are in Dubai they have the trade in common, and they cooperate due to their common financial interests, even though they belong to different clans. Therefore, for instance, while the general trader would never think of cooperation in Mogadishu, he does still cooperate with the traders belonging to different clans in Dubai, as he is forced to cooperate in order to serve his
financial interests. In the absence of close family members other kin act on their half. This system of helping can be related to kin-relations of week-transcends. As my informant who trades with raw material told me:

If we are five Somalis from five different clans here in Dubai, where we are in a foreign country, aren’t we .... aren’t we? And if one of us needs help, the others are morally bound to act as the kith and kin of the fifth and come to his or her aid.

The traders in Dubai are occupied with their clans both by strong and weak transcendence, as they, simultaneously, have an interest in land control back home, while they have an interest in cooperation in Dubai. The role of the clan conflict for my informants in Dubai is not always primal for their actions. One can also say that the role of the clan for Somalis in Dubai is undergoing some kind of change, as a result many traders’ activities in Dubai. The situation responsible for producing violence in the clanism conflict does not exist in Dubai. As my informants told me, they remember that at the beginning of the 1990s, when the Somali traders were still fresh arrivals in Dubai, it was a tension between different clan traders. Such tensions are, according to them, vanishing. They tell me that they are looking for new ways of cooperating and benefiting their interests.

The linkages between the traders and their clans have persisted since the start of the settlement of Somali Diaspora traders in Dubai. The traders in Dubai have become increasingly popular during the years, as many Somalis want to follow their example. Within the clan they teach each other how to become traders in Dubai and they teach each other about how to make the different roles of being a trader in Dubai and being a clan member in Mogadishu and Somalia compatible.
12. Somali traders’ involvement in the conflict in Somalia

What concerns me here is the fact that the trade done by Somalis in Dubai, and Somalia are arenas where “clan society” is played out, however, dubious such a phrase may be. I must emphasize that many of these traders are part of clanism-based dominated collectivities. The traders are implicated in the clan conflict back home through trading with their products in Mogadishu. There is no functioning state and no governmental institutions in the country where the Somali traders sell their products. The products that the traders sell create profit for their clan back home. That is how the clan becomes stronger and can rule greater territories. Because the conflict in Somalia is mainly a conflict between different clans, they, therefore, become involved in the clan-conflict in Somalia. Although, the traders did not deny their involvement with their clans in Somalia, they would not at first admit that they influenced the conflict.

At first when I asked the raw material trader if he was involved in the clan-conflict in Somalia he answered spontaneously “no”, and said that he simply creates a militia of clan-members in order to protect his business. However, while we were talking we were interrupted when his cell phone started ringing. It was his clan militia-leader who called in order to inform that another clan who tried to rob his products had attacked them. He told them not to fight with the other clan, but to defend themselves and to protect his products.

After the call we discussed what they had talked about and he told me that this was not the first time they had called him, and that it happens often. Then I asked him if this is not a way to influence the conflict, as he had the authority to decide whether they should start a war between the two clans. He immediately answered: “Now I recognize that my militia could start a war with another militia, and this becomes a clan-conflict, and it can create more conflict in Somalia.” He continues by saying: “But I do not agree with what the clan military is doing at all times.” And he tells me that he does not have any other choice because of the circumstances in Somalia today: “now we have to arrange for security men with arms in my clan, to export from Somalia.” I ask him again about Somali businessmen in Dubai and their influence in the conflict in Somalia and he answers:

I know myself that I am involved in the conflict. If I take myself as an example, I am involved personally, not only with my business, but with a lot of things. What I mean is that back home and here... I mean back home, I am very important in my clan. I am the one who provides all the weapons that keep them in their position in Somalia. At the same time they protect my businesses and keep my business running. For example I have livestock, fish, and fruits and so
on. I benefit as an individual, they benefit me as a member of the clan in the Somali society, which is based on clans

I get a similar reply when I ask the material trader about his influence in the conflict in Somalia as a Somali businessman in Dubai:

I am a businessman who is well known here in the UAE and Far East Asian market. I deal with clothes, oil, food, rice and cars, and I have a lot of contacts around the world. What I think about the conflict in Somali: Somalia is my home and I travel every month, once to see my business in Somalia while my militia protects me. But some times we have a conflict within the clan, which divides us into sub-clan

The material trader tells me that he came from Mogadishu two months earlier and the purpose for his journey was to reopen the national port, which had been closed since 1990 because of disagreements between the different clans. He told me that he met the clan-leader, who was in charge of the port and he paid him 200 000 dollars, and he suggested that they could reopen the port together, and the two clans would benefit from this. They would be in charge and benefit as they could take tax-money from the other clans’ businessmen when they wanted to import and export products. They were, however, not able to open the port after all as the material trader’s clan and the clan that they sought to cooperate with came into conflict with other clans in the area. At that time he understood that he is not only a businessman as his actions also can influence the conflict.

I ask general trader also about his influence in the conflict in Somalia as a businessman in Dubai:

I am not as well known as the other businessmen in Dubai. I trade different materials depending on the market in my home country Somalia that is why it is very important to always have contacts in Somalia, especially with my clan. A group which has amassed a significant amount of heavy weapons is the Somali merchants. We have heavy weapons in order to protect our properties and businesses.
In Somalia the traders are forced to act according to the existing territorial trade which is connected to the clan-system and, therefore, also connected to the clan-conflict in Mogadishu, and the Somali traders in Dubai are part of the conflict in Somalia one way or the other. It seems to me that the Somali traders in Dubai are caught up in the Somali clan conflict without questioning their involvement. Otherwise it might be that they consciously are trying to make a living off the conflict at the cost of Somali society so that they can develop popularity at home and become an important agent in the clan conflict. It could, however, be that Somalis have lost the trust in a common state and organized society and don’t see any alternative than to work within the system.

As the Somali conflict escalates, the Somalia trades play an important role in the conflict, but they are not the only ones. As I have observed the Somali conflict, is also influenced from the outside. International companies demand natural recourses that exist in Somalia and many of the traders capitalize on this demand. In this way the conflict can escalate because of the absence of a Somali state control of the resources. As long as outsiders demand resources, the traders involved in the conflict will continue to influence the conflict. The international companies benefit certain Somali traders over others, and therefore, indirectly, they benefit specific clans. In this way international companies are also involved in the conflict in Somalia, as they side with a clan, even when they are not aware of it.

Traders and their cooperation’s influence in armed conflict is generally overlooked. Probably that is why when peace agreements are made traders are not one of the officially recognized groups. I can mention an as good example the process of the Somali transition government, the TFG, and how it was nominated. The nomination took place in Kenya and all the Somali elders, the clan elders, came to Kenya. They were in Kenya almost two years negotiating how they could build up a Somali state for all the clans in Somalia. At the end it has been made agreements that all the clans should be represented in this government, the so call four point five (4.5) clans. This included the four major clans, and a half clan which consisted of the other minor clans. However, something that was not mentioned was that Somali traders in Dubai’s militia men had decided to use their forces in order to keep their power, and therefore the Somali TFG had exile in Kenya until the end of 2007 when Ethiopian military, backed up by America, invaded Somalia.
13. Conclusion

I have shown that the investments that Somali diaspora traders choose to make with their incomes can reinforce or transform ongoing conflicts in Somalia. In order to sell their products it is necessary for them to get protection from their clan, and it is necessary for them to have a good relationship with their clans. Through their clans they create military militias in order to protect their products, and they become close to their clan-leaders. The military militia that the traders have created becomes an important resource for the clan-leaders in order for them to preserve their position in the conflict. For the traders it is also important that their clan-leaders have a good position in the conflict, as this will give them better protection. As I have shown my informants are involved in the clan conflict in Somalia. It is not difficult to recognize that the clan is still alive; long after Somalis left Somalia and resettled in Dubai. Even though the traders reside in the Diasporas they still influence their homeland through their trade. However, while in Mogadishu there is no cooperation between the different clans and the buyers find their products only within their clan territory. In Dubai the traders from Mogadishu do, conversely, cooperate. While clan-interests are not always primary in Dubai it continuous to be part of a practical reality that they adjust to when trading in Somalia. In Somalia they continue to be invested in clan conflicts and also influence the conflict.

There is a need to carry out an in-depth discussion on the issue of diaspora traders’ influence in the conflict in Somalia. It is important to find out if it is in the interest of Somali traders that the conflict continues in order for them to avoid assessment and in order for their militias to continue ruling their territories. Moreover, it is crucial to investigate how the traders’ money invests arms circulation. Additionally, we have to look at the national clan policies that have been put in place to understand this conflict.

Somalia needs help from the international community, but the question is how the international community can solve the conflict in an approved manner. Because Somalis are divided along clan lines, any foreign intervention, whether political, military or financial, will be viewed as helping one clan against another. Only if there is genuine reconciliation among the Somalis would outside assistance be gainful.

One of the famous Somali poets, Abdullahi Suldhan ‘Timocadde’, who played an important role in the struggle for Independence and after, condemn the clan-based approach and explain clearly its futility. He composed a powerful poem against clannism, in which he wrote:

‘Dugsi ma leh qabyaaladi, waxay dumiso mooyaane’
Clannism offers no shelter, it only destroys
14. References


