

Helpdesk Research Report

Somali networks: structures of clan and society

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05.06.2013

Question

Identify and synthesise studies on networks in Somalia, focusing on the structures of Somali clan and society, and including transnational as well as national networks.

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1. Overview

This annotated bibliography focuses on issues of power, participation and governance in relation to Somali networks. There is a healthy body of academic literature examining Somali social structures, including networks and clans. Specific detail on the power relations and differentials between and within clans, however, is scarce. Experts attribute this lack of knowledge to the complexity and fluidity of power relations, and the fluidity of clans themselves.¹

The Somali majority belong to four patrilineal clan families: the *Darod*, *Hawiye*, *Dir*, and *Rahanweyn* (Minority Rights Group 2012, p. 7). These are divided into sub-clans, which can be divided further, illustrating the complexity of the clan system. Minorities are comprised of three distinct social groups: the *Bantu*, *Benadiri*, and 'occupational groups' (p. 7). The latter can be classified into a further three groups: *Midgan* or *Gaboye*, who are traditionally hunters and leatherworkers; *Tumal*, traditionally blacksmiths; and *Tibro*, traditionally 'ritual specialists' (p. 12).

¹ Expert comments

Some of the specific details on power, participation and governance identified in the literature include:

- **Majority clans have exerted dominance over minority groups** (Majid and McDowell 2012; Minority Rights Group 2012). Particular aspects of minority exclusion and abuse include: limited access to justice; denial of rights to education and livelihoods; hate speech; and the prevention and punishment of intermarriage with members of majority clans (Minority Rights Group 2012).
- **Clan chieftdom** can be **hereditary, or chiefs can be elected by a council comprised of heads of tribal sections** (Lewis 1955). Chiefs can have religious or political roles.
- **All adult men are classed as elders** and given the right to speak at council. Respect is attached to age and seniority in lineage (Lewis 1961, p. 197).
- The minority **Reewin and Bantu were disproportionately affected during the 2011 Somali famine** (Majid and McDowell 2012). Their vulnerability to fluctuations in agricultural production was increased due to violence and targeted looting by majority clans, and their inability to tap into internationalised clan networks.
- **Men of religion, or Wadaad, have a role in resolving conflict between different clan groups** Their task is to encourage parties to resolve issues, rather than settle disputes themselves or judge between disputants (Lewis 1961, p.213).
- Somali **transnational networks have been effective at supporting relief and development activities** (Hammond et al. 2011). Examples include clan-based associations, women's groups, mosques, and professional associations.

2. Key texts

A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics Among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa

Lewis, I. M. (1961). London: International African Institute/Oxford University Press.

I.M. Lewis is one of the leading writers on Somali society. In this widely-cited book, Lewis studies the pastoral habits and political institutions of northern Somalia (p. 1). At the outset, the author notes that the **key to understanding Somali politics is kinship** (p. 1). He observes that political units are based on kinship and notes that political affiliations and divisions often correspond to differences in ancestral origin (p. 1). Lewis provides a comprehensive description of the six clan families in Somalia, including their geographical distribution and their historical origins (p. 7-21). He extensively analyses different aspects of political organisation and clanism, including the role of ecology (p. 31-55), the lineage system (p. 127-160), authority and sanctions (p. 196-241), and nationalism and party politics (p. 266-295). The author's observations relating to power, participation and governance include:

- **Clanship and contract are fundamental for Somali political units** (p. 161). The latter, known as **heer**, defines as 'customary procedure founded upon contractual agreement', and incorporates a range of aspects including collective defence and security, and political agreement (p. 162). An example is the provision of **compensation** for physical injury or murder. Lewis notes the variations that exist for different crimes and victims (p. 162-177), commenting, the 'amount of compensation payable for homicide **depends on the status of the person killed**' (p. 165).
- **The Somali social system is characterised by hierarchical clan units** (p. 196). **All adult men are classed as elders** and given the right to speak at council on matters that are common concern (p.

196). The opinions of different men are found to carry different weight, however, relating to status differentials such as wealth, inherited prestige, age, wisdom, and other personal characteristics (p. 196). Lewis notes that in general, **respect is attached to age and seniority in lineage** (p. 197).

- **Men of religion, or *Wadaad*, have a role in resolving conflict between different clan groups** (p. 213). The author comments, 'because they are not warriors and owe allegiance to the ideals of Muslim brotherhood as opposed to the section values of clanship, [they] are theoretically ideal mediators' (p. 217). Their task is to 'incline rival parties to make peace', rather than settle disputes or judge between disputants (the terrain of elders in council or informal courts of arbitration) (p. 217).

Peoples of the Horn of Africa: Somalia, Afar and Saho

Lewis, I. M. (1955) London: International African Institute

This book identifies and describes the cultures and societies in the Horn of Africa region. It covers a broad range of societal dimensions; from tribal groupings and democracy (p. 13-55), to characteristics of the economy (p. 67-87) and religion (p. 140-154). The detail provided on clans is significant. Lewis describes the historical origin of each individual clan, comprehensively maps tribal divisions in clans, and identifies population movements. Some interesting comments are made regarding governance and power relations within and between clans:

- The **Darod** in the Juba region, have a **political structure similar to a military organisation based on age-grades** (p. 20-21).
- The **Sab** are noted as being '**held in contempt** for their lowly origins' and 'despised descendants of Sab' (as opposed to being descended from Somalia) (p. 31). Lewis notes that the word *Sab* means 'lowcaste' and is used by the *Ishaak* and the *Barok* to designate three main groups of people: the *Tumal*, the *Tibir*, and the *Midgan* (p. 51).
- **Clan Chiefs** can be **hereditary** (common in *Darod* and *Dir* clans) (p. 21 and p. 26), or **elected by a council comprised of heads of tribal sections** (p. 99). When the office is hereditary, it belongs to the first born son of the first wife (p. 99). Chiefs can have religious or political roles (p. 21 and p. 23).

3. Literature on clan and society

No Redress: Somalia's Forgotten Minorities

Minority Rights Group. (2010). Minority Rights Group International.

<http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=10370>

This report explores how the clan structure impacts on minority rights in Somalia. At the outset, it is noted that the **clan structure affords protection and privilege to majority groups** – defined as communities belonging to the four patrilineal clan families: *Darod*, *Hawiye*, *Dir* and *Rahanweyn* (p. 3). By comparison, **minorities suffer marginalisation and exclusion from mainstream economic, social and political life** (p. 3). The three distinct social groups that are categorised as minorities are the *Bantu*, *Benadiri*, and occupational groups (p. 8).

Particular aspects of minority exclusion and abuse include: **limited access to justice; denied rights to education and livelihoods; hate speech;** and the **prevention and punishment of intermarriage** with members of majority clans (p. 3). Minority women are noted as experiencing multiple forms of discrimination (p. 4). The report breaks down violations of minority rights by region (p. 17-23):

- In Somaliland, awareness and action for minority rights is more advanced than in other regions (p. 17), however discrimination still exists in **education** and **objections to inter-marriage** (p. 17-18).
- The Puntland region was found to provide little protection or assistance to minorities (p. 19). The parliament here does not reserve seats for minority communities, minority Sultans are recognised by accorded little power, and there are few minority rights organisations (p. 19). Areas of particular concern in this region are **rights violations of the internally displaced** (p. 19) and **denying access to justice** (p. 21).
- Owing to security risks, the authors had difficulty documenting the situation of minorities in South-Central Somalia (p. 21). Drawing from individual testimonies and other literature, the report notes **verbal abuse, social and economic obstacles, lack of recourse in the face of injustice,** and **looting by dominated clans,** are identifiable discriminatory practices (p. 22-23).

Hidden Dimensions of the Somalia Famine

Majid, N. and McDowell, S. (2012). *Global Food Security*. 1: 36-42²

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2012.07.003>

This peer-reviewed journal article explores the 2011 Somalia famine through a 'socio-political lens' (p. 36). The dominant explanatory narrative for the famine identifies drought and crop failure, combined with restricted humanitarian access (p. 36). However, as Majid and McDowell observe, certain 'livelihood and wealth groups' were disproportionately affected both here and during the 1991/92 famine: populations drawn from the *Reewin* and the *Bantu* (p. 36). The authors argue that identifying and examining the role of clan and identity is important, though often missing, from livelihood analysis and food security (p. 41).

It is noted that the '**major clans have historically dominated political and economic structures and resources**' in Somali (p. 37). As smaller, minority, communities, the *Reewin* and the *Bantu* have been **marginalised**. This was exemplified in **targeted violence and looting** by more powerful clan militias (specifically of livestock and food stores) (p. 37). The *Reewin* are identified as vulnerable due to their geographical location: 'bordered by two rivers, more powerful clans and relatively distant from the borders of Ethiopia and Kenya' (p. 37). While the *Bantu* are noted as having a long history of forced removal from productive land by political authorities and dominant groups (p. 38).

Majid and McDowell contend that the strong connection of food, income and coping sources – the agricultural sector provides the key livelihood base for both communities – meant the *Reewin* and *Bantu* were **highly vulnerable to production shocks** (p. 38). In addition, through being **less internationalised than other clans**, both groups were **unable to tap into Somali remittance networks** (p. 39). Additional underlying factors include limited rural-urban links to diversify incomes (p. 39), agricultural production and labour market failure (p. 39), and stretched social support coping mechanisms (p. 41). The authors conclude by emphasising that **clan and identity are important to understanding long term**

² This is a special issue on the 2011 Somali famine. Details of additional articles, which may be of interest, can be found here: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/22119124/1/1>

marginalisation processes and outcomes (p. 41). To aid early warning systems, it is recommended that a 'more socio-politically sensitive risk analysis could strengthen the predictive capabilities of existing early warning systems' (p. 41).

Political Representation in Somalia: Citizenship, Clanism and Territoriality

Höehne, M. V. (2010). In Bradbury, M. and Healy, S. (eds.) *Accord 21: Whose peace is it anyway? Connecting Somali and international peacemaking*: 34-37.

[http://www.c-r.org/sites/c-](http://www.c-r.org/sites/c-r.org/files/Accord%2021_10Political%20representation%20in%20Somalia_2010_ENG.pdf)

[r.org/files/Accord%2021_10Political%20representation%20in%20Somalia_2010_ENG.pdf](http://www.c-r.org/files/Accord%2021_10Political%20representation%20in%20Somalia_2010_ENG.pdf)

This article analyses various dimensions of clanism and argues that representation in Somalia is characterised by '**multiple affiliations, shifting alliances and transferable identities based on nation, clan and religion**' (p. 37). At the outset, Höehne provides a brief overview of the role of clanism in Somali national identity. He observes that the anti-clan nationalist rhetoric that characterised the post-civil war 1980s 'served the interests of nationalist and post-colonial elites who were striving to overcome centrifugal forces of clanism' (p. 34). Despite attempts to elevate loyalty to the state above loyalty to the clan, Höehne contends that **successive Somali governments used notions of clan loyalty to mobilise political factions** (p. 34).

The author argues that in order to understand citizenship and lineage in Somali, one must recognise the different connotations these have for different communities. The **descent model of citizenship** – an ancestral model which stresses the blood relationship of all Somalis (p. 34) – **exists in its purest form among nomadic clans** (p. 35). This allows for flexible alliances, individual freedom, and 'suits pastoral nomads who have to act quickly and often individually in pursuit of pasture' (p. 35). For **agro-pastoralists in southern and central regions territoriality is deemed more important** (p. 35). Strangers are easily adopted into communities and descent is referred only 'for defining social identity at the highest level and strengthening collective security' (p. 35). Höehne notes that **urban communities are characterised by a 'confederation of different lineages'** which are integrated into a centralised political structure (p. 35).

To illustrate the complexities of representation and the competing models of belonging in Somali, Höehne examines two case studies: internationally-sponsored peace talks (p. 35-36); and the *Dhulbahante* clan in the Sool region (p. 36-37). The author uses both examples to emphasise the importance of local context for representation, stating, 'generally, representation can only be effective if it is bound to the local context, and if representatives of groups are genuinely accountable to their constituencies at home, to face queries and possibly even sanctions' (p. 37).

No Easy Way Out: Traditional Authorities in Somaliland and the Limits of Hybrid Political Orders

Höehne, M. (2011). DIIS Working Paper 2011: 18. Danish Institute for International Studies.

<http://www.diis.dk/graphics/Publications/WP2011/DIIS%20WP%202011-18.sk%E6rm.pdf>

Somalia has been without effective state institutions since 1991. However, over the past two decades, moderately effective *state-like* institutions have been established in both Somaliland and Puntland (p. 4). In this paper, Höehne examines the role of non-state actors, particularly traditional authorities, in the process of state formation in Somaliland (p. 4). Through illustrative case studies the author examines how traditional authorities have changed with the involvement of traditional leaders in modern state politics (p. 5). The paper finds that **traditional authorities are highly relevant non-state actors in northern**

Somalia, particularly during the post-war period where they had a role in social and political reconstruction (p. 27). Through their involvement in state structures many have been able to **gain considerable influence and power** (p. 27), though often **at the expense of popular appeal** (p. 28). Away from state politics, Hoehne finds that traditional authorities continue to work for the benefit of their people – for example in conflict mitigation and resolution (p. 27).

Rahanweyn Sociability: A Model for Other Somalis?

Helander, B. (1996). *Voice and Power. ALC Supplement 3*: 195-204.

This article outlines the basic principles of clanship among the *Rahanweyn*. The argument presented is that **inter-clan strife is rarer among Rahanweyn** than other Somali social groups because they assign a restricted set of functions to clanship (p. 195). The *Rahanweyn* are distinct from other Somali clans due to their heterogeneous character and high proportion of immigrant members (p. 195). Common means of self-definition have been to view the clan as a confederation³ or a ‘melting pot’ (p. 196).

Helander argues that there are four characteristics of *Rahanweyn* clans which make them radically different from other Somali clans:

- First, the **status of adopted members** is notably distinct; adopted or incorporated members enjoy a relatively secure status compared to other clans (p. 197-198).
- Second, there are differences in **the nature of diya⁴-paying groups and settlement of diya payments**; whereas the ‘standard Somali’ principle is that descent determines membership in a *diya*-paying group, the *Rahanweyn* view the clan *as a whole* as one large *diya*-paying group (p. 199).
- Third, **marital ties** are particularly important; ‘that marriage can become the basis for husband or wife to change their own clan allegiance is unique to the Rahanweyn’ (p. 200).
- Fourth, **local community** is central. Helander observes that villages are ‘the most remarkable feature of Rahanweyn social fabric’ and the ‘foci of political and social life’ (p. 201); to the extent that many *Rahanweyn* choose to identify with their village of residence rather than clan (p. 203).

Concluding, Helander argues that these features mean that clanship for the *Rahanweyn* ‘is not the chief regulatory principle of social affairs that it generally tends to be in other parts of Somalia’ (p. 203). The clan is viewed as a form of federal government but not an appropriate organisation for everyday matters (p. 204).

Clanpolitics, Clan-democracy and Conflict Regulation in Africa: The Experience of Somalia

Ssereo, F. (2003). *Global Review of Ethnopolitics*. 2/3-4: 25-40.

http://www.ethnopolitics.org/ethnopolitics/archive/volume_II/issue_3-4/ssereo.pdf

In this peer-reviewed article, Ssereo explores whether tribal allegiance, clan difference and exclusive cultural identity cause conflict in Somalia (p. 25). The article argues that when **‘political majority is equated to clan majority...conflict resolution and violence prevention require[s] a different framework’** (p. 39). Ssereo begins by identifying six major clan families in Somalia that are ‘interrelated through complex networks of social relationships’ that extend over clan territories (p. 25). The author contends

³ According to this version, the name *Rahanweyn* derives from the words *raxan* and *weyen* – meaning ‘crowd-big’.

⁴ *Diya* is compensation paid for murder or injury.

that despite sharing a common citizenship, culture and religion, Somali political conflict, government crisis, and 'clan-based civil war', 'have both revealed the negative consequences of clan politics and the manipulation of clan differences to achieve power' (p. 27). The article traces the role of clanism from independence to the late 1980s/90s (p. 27-39). Ssero notes that in traditional Somali society the clan was the social and political unit of organisation and government (p. 26). Each clan had its own leaders and council of elders, and land was communally owned and managed (p. 26). The processes of post-independence modernisation changed this dynamic. In modern Somalia, the **clan system co-exists with modern forms of social and political organisation** (p. 26). Redesigning and transferring functions of traditional leaders to the judiciary (such as customary conventions on war) **changed the role of status of leaders in their communities** (p. 26).

Country of Origin Information Report: Somalia

UK Border Agency. (2009). London: UK Border Agency

<https://www.cimicweb.org/cmo/Piracy/Documents/Somalia/UK%20Border%20Agency%20Somalia%20Report%202009.pdf>

This publication identifies literature on clan dynamics in Somalia, including aspects such as political affiliation and protection, land disputes, intermarriage, and minority groups (p. 78-99). The report notes that **political affiliation in Somalia has generally followed clan lines**. This has been to the detriment of smaller, weaker clans in the south of the country, where local polities are 'associated with clannish hegemony dressed up as formal administration' (p. 79). Further, the report finds that clan protection is more effective in northern Somalia than in the south (p. 81). Secondly, the report identifies the traditional means of resolving land disputes and grievance issues as being governed by *Xe'er*, traditional law, and the adjudication of elders (p. 83). Drawing from the 2006 Danish Refugee Centre/Novib-Oxfam publication, the report notes that it is **difficult for minority clans to get compensation from the major clans**, such as the *Hawiye* of the *Darod* (p. 83).

Better off Stateless: Somalia Before and After Government Collapse

Lesson, P. (2007). *Journal of Comparative Economics*. 35: 689-710.

http://www.peterleeson.com/better_off_stateless.pdf

In this peer-reviewed journal article Leeson explores the impact of anarchy on Somali development. Though not specifically analysing the clan system, the author makes pertinent observations on clanism. Firstly, Lesson notes that during the **1980s, the Marehan** (President Barre's clan) were **consistently privileged by government at the expense of others** (p. 694). This 'ethnic favouritism' created tension between Somali clans and prompted the creation of factional groups such as the Somali Patriotic Movement (largely comprised of *Ogaden*) and the Somali National Movement (comprised mainly of *Hawiye*) (p. 694). Secondly, the paper identifies that **clan leaders work together to provide public goods** in areas outside of Somalia's big cities (p. 705). This includes through 'taxes' charged by militia and through the provision of militiamen for hire to protect businesses (p. 705).

4. Literature on transnational networks

Cash and Compassion: The Role of the Somali Diaspora in Relief, Development and Peace-building

Hammond, L. et al. (2011). Technical Report to UNDP Somalia. UNDP.

<http://www.so.undp.org/docs/Cash%20and%20compassion.pdf>

The Somali diaspora is broadly considered to be effective at supporting relief and development activities in their country of origin (p. 1). This report examines the motivations for support, the factors that influence it, the mechanisms by which it is mobilised and transferred, and the ways in which local actors use it (p. 1). Though not specifically focusing on power, participation and governance, the report does **identify transnational networks** and provides some insights into **the role of clanism in building transnational alliances**. The report notes that remittances can be transferred through various intermediary bodies, including **clan-based associations** (p. 41). Contributions to these are often organised informally and drawn from multiple diaspora countries (p. 41). Clan elders in the diaspora play a key role in organising meetings and support for such associations (p. 42). Additional identified transnational networks include **professional associations** (p. 42), **mosques** (p. 43), and **women's groups** (p. 46). The authors note the Somali diaspora was a 'strong force' in providing funds for peacebuilding conferences and mediation efforts for inter- and intra-clan conflict in Puntland and Galmudug (p. 94).

Contemporary Migration and Transnational Families: The Case of Somali Diaspora(s)

Al-Sharmani, M. (2007). Paper prepared for Migration and Refugee Movements in the Middle East and North Africa. October 23-25.

<http://www.aucegypt.edu/GAPP/cmrs/Documents/MulkiAlsharmani.pdf>

In this paper, Al-Sharmani examines the **transnationalism of Somali communities** (p. 1). He begins by tracing the migratory history of Somali people and noting that the outbreak of civil war in the 1980s heralded a large exodus of citizens (p. 2). The Somali diaspora are described as leading their lives through 'extensive networks of family relations, obligations and shared resources that are set up and managed in different nation-states' (p. 2). The four 'main features' of diaspora lives are highlighted and discussed. These are: remittance; transnational family care and management; reproduction of families and communities; and the politics of movement. Al-Sharmani contends that 'diasporic' Somalis engage in 'extensive and continuous transnational family-based networking, strategies and practices to pursue security and protection, secure livelihood, maximise resources, minimise risks and to feel empowered' (p. 14).

5. Additional references

Experts identified additional books that were not possible to review in the timeframe allocated for this report. A list of these is provided below:

Besteman, C. (1999). *Unravelling Somalia: Race, Violence and the Legacy of Slavery*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Besteman, C. and Cassanelli, L. (1996). *The Struggle for Land in Southern Somalia: The War Behind the War*. London: HAAN.

Gardner, J. and El Bushra, J. (2004). *Somalia the Untold Story: The War through the eyes of Somali women*. London: Pluto Press.

Helander, B. (2003). *The Slaughtered Camel: Coping with Fictitious Descent among the Hubeer of Southern Somalia*. Uppsala: University of Uppsala Press.

Lewis, I. M. (1994) *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press Inc⁵.

Luling, V. (2002). *Somali Sultanate: The Geledi City-State over 150 years*. London: HANN.

Mansur, A. O. (1995). 'The Nature of the Somali Clan System' in J. Ahmed (ed.) *The Invention of Somalia*. Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, p. 117-134.

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Suggested citation

Hinds, R. (2013). *Somali networks: structures of clan and society*. GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 949. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

About this report

This report is based on three days of desk-based research. It was prepared for the UK Government's Department for International Development, © DFID Crown Copyright 2013. The views expressed in this report are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of GSDRC, its partner agencies or DFID.

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⁵ I.M. Lewis's *Blood and Bones (1994)* is considered by some to be the central source of information on Somali clans. However, experts also caution that it has been criticised as an a-historic analysis, which focuses on male clan linkages without paying attention to women's clan links.