

## ABSTRACT

### **SOMALILAND: BEYOND THE HYBRID OF 'TRADITIONAL' AND REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS**

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Many African states struggle to reconcile traditional social institutions with the precepts of nation-state democracy within previously colonial borders. Somaliland offers similar contradictions, not least through clan politics, yet such contradictions also suggest possible resolution. Despite increasingly autocratic government moves, socio-political norms that emphasise the importance of negotiation and compromise have averted a number of crises in recent years.

The Republic of Somaliland unilaterally declared independence from Somalia in 1991, after a brutal civil war that caused the collapse of the dictatorial Siyaad Barre regime. While the southern areas of Somalia have endured endemic conflict, interspersed with unsuccessful periodic, peace conferences, the north-western territory of Somaliland embarked on a home-grown process of reconciliation and state-building, largely escaping the pressure of outside-brokered and lavishly-funded interventions, intended to establish a government for the whole of the erstwhile Republic of Somalia.

Somaliland remains internationally unrecognised, but has successfully held elections for the head of state, the lower house of parliament and local councils. Much of the process of democratisation has been enabled by an overwhelming public desire to avoid a return to conflict and an accompanying urge to win international recognition (although yoking the two has also proved problematic). The nascent state remains weak and poorly-funded, but has paradoxically enjoyed a degree of legitimacy exceeding that of many African and other governments. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain this institutionalisation of a system that combines elements of traditional 'pastoral' male democracy in the context of the Westphalian and Weberian nation-state. This is where easy assumptions of polarities contained within the rubric of modernity fail to grasp the fluid dynamics of Somaliland's history and politics – in practical terms by failing to integrate into the analysis, the importance of the inheritance of the 'securocratic' state derived from Barre but also the contradictory relationships between diaspora, international civil society in matters such as female incorporation into the political system. In theoretical terms there must be an account that deals with these and the interplay of multiple identity, allegiance and territoriality.

In the immediate future, Somaliland must face up to questions that will fundamentally determine the ways in which traditional institutions interact with the norms of nation-state democracy. Clan continues to play a significant yet dynamic role in the political realm, and a decision on the system of election for the house of elders or *guurti* is increasingly urgent. This paper will consider the role that has been and can be played by clan and related traditional social systems in creating and resolving contemporary democratic dilemmas, but will question whether this interplay has sufficient capacity to resolve present and forthcoming problems.