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The Big Demonstration
- A study of transborder political mobilisation

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Demonstrating in Parliament Square

In the afternoon of the 17th of March 2004, thousands of Somalilanders were waving their flags and banners and singing Somaliland slogans in Parliament Square in London. The crowd had started gathering outside the Home Office at about 10 in the morning, but, as it grew larger and larger during the day, had been relocated by the Metropolitan Police to Parliament Square. Not quite familiar with the colours and slogans of the crowd, most of the parliamentarians in Westminster and Portcullis House, and most of the people passing by the square, wondered who they were and what they were demonstrating for or against. To the media in the UK, the 17th of March 2004, was an important day, not because of the demonstration taking place in Parliament Square, but because the budget was presented by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to Parliament and the public. To the demonstrators and Somalilanders all over the world, however, the day was important for reasons, that had very little to do with the state of the economy and the public finances in the UK. On the 17th of March 2004 Somalilanders from all over England, and Scandinavia as well, came to London to protest in favour of the recognition of Somaliland. Demonstrating at the footsteps of Big Ben, the Somalilanders wished to open the eyes and ears of British parliamentarians and the international community to what they see as a legitimate claim to being accepted as a real nation state. In this sense, the 17th of March 2004 was meant for the demonstrators to be a milestone in the history of Somaliland, as it aimed at bringing an end to the ignorance and negligence of the international community on the issue of Somaliland. The demonstration was strategically organised to coincide with a visit made by the Somaliland president and his delegation to the United Kingdom. For the first time ever a president of Somaliland was on a semi-official visit to a western country. Previously the president had visited neighbouring countries like Djibouti and Ethiopia, but this visit was different as the

president and his delegation visited the United Kingdom, which is seen as Somaliland's closest ally in their quest for independence.

On the 17th of March 2004 Somalilanders came together to show their loyalty towards Somaliland and to honour the visiting Somaliland President and his delegation. The people involved in the demonstration behaved according to a "diasporic morality" (Werbner 2002) that is directed towards the wellbeing and future of Somaliland. In this paper we wish to analyse the meaning of "the Somaliland diaspora", not as a nostalgic and aesthetic community, but as a moral community engaged in a transnational political struggle. We will analyse how different meanings of diaspora are employed and performed before, during and after the demonstration at Parliament Square. We unfold the demonstration in Parliament Square and the events relating to this event and argue that a possible and fruitful way of studying issues relating to "diaspora" is by exploring the ways the term is performed and actively used in transnational political mobilisations. The use of the term "diaspora" as an analytical concept is not unproblematic as it has the dangers of solidifying or essentialising social phenomena that are in fact fluid and always in the making. Therefore our understanding and use of "diaspora" is ambivalent and similar to James Clifford's understanding of "culture" as a deeply compromised idea, yet something he cannot do without (Clifford 1988: 10).

Methodologically and analytically we see the 17th of March 2004 as a "social situation" (Gluckman 1958) and apply the "extended case method and situational analysis" (Van Velsen 1967) in our attempt to understand the processes of diasporic identity formation and the performance of diaspora (Werbner 2002). In focusing on one specific event we wish to show how a diasporic event is constructed not only by a shared and publicly performed identity, often anchored in shared symbols and a communal history of suffering and a vision of return, but also by conflicting meanings and practices that exist within diasporas themselves and between diasporas and the host society. In the case of Somaliland, and indeed in relation to Somali politics in general, what is most striking, and what we see as generative and driving social forces in the process of diasporic identity formation, are the conflicting views, frictions and tensions that make up this particular social and political scene. The paper is not only based on interviewing and participating on the 17th of March 2004 in London, however, but also draws on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in Somaliland in 1997, 1998, 2003 and in the greater Copenhagen area in 1999 and 2003. As researchers we wish to stress that we try not to take sides relating to the recognition of Somaliland. As any researcher who undertakes social studies knows, "neutrality" is a difficult position to claim, yet we do not see the events analysed in this paper as either an argument for or against the legitimacy of the recognition of Somaliland. Before advancing our analysis of the events unfolding on the 17th we first of all need to explicate our understanding and use of the term "diaspora".

Diaspora

The first question to ask concerns the nature of 'diaspora' and its value as a theoretical and analytical concept. What and where is "diaspora"? Is it a state of being, a spatial container, a place as "in the diaspora" could suggest - or a group of people, "the diaspora"? Or is it rather, as Turner and Hansen have recently suggested, a set of discursive practices, which are performed, constructed and imagined (T.B. Hansen 2003; Turner 2003)? How can a concept with such global connotations as diaspora be contextualised, maybe even localised - and according to what principles (cf. Axel 2004)?

In relation to Somaliland, it is important to underline that the term "diaspora" is not only a theoretical concept, but also a term that has entered processes of identity formation and political mobilisation within the Somaliland transnational community itself. Like the concept of culture, "diaspora" was developed theoretically within the social sciences and then used by the very people the concept aimed at analysing, in processes of self-portrayal. To avoid confusion between the two levels of analysis, we will start by outlining the two journeys of the concept of diaspora: as a theoretical and emic concept, and then elaborate on how we employ the concept. After this theoretical introduction, we describe the big demonstration and move on to the final section of the paper: a discussion of how the Somaliland diaspora and nation are performed, mobilised and articulated throughout the day as well as a discussion of the analytical value of different perceptions of the concept of diaspora.

A theoretical journey

Up until the beginning of the 1990s, the concept of diaspora was mainly employed in relation to the Jewish, Greek and Armenian histories as well as the Black Atlantic, the slaves and their descendants (Gilroy 1993). In the 1990s, however, diaspora made a come-back in the social sciences, when a range of enthusiastic articles and books started to appear on the topic (i.e. Safran 1991; Brah 1994; Clifford 1994; Cohen 1997; van Hear 1998). Though the works differ on how they employ the concept, they share an idea of the spatial dispersal of a group of people from an existing or imaginary homeland that maintains a sense of collectivity over an extended period of time. Diasporic groups are said to be constituted by "an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history" (Cohen 1997: ix), which is narrated, lived, reproduced and transformed in various ways (Brah 1994: 183). Diasporas are not characterised by a special kind of movement, but of the shared affiliations and senses of belonging to the "homeland" and to fellow "nationals" which might include the categories of refugees, migrants, family re-unified and naturalized citizens alike, often scattered across many different countries (Steen 1993; Crisp 1999). In this theoretical perspective, the emergence of diasporas is seen as a sign of globalising processes and diasporas as "the exemplary communities of the transnational moment" and "emblems of transnationalism" (Tölölyan 1991: 5-6) and as closely related to Appadurai's notion of "ethnoscapes" (Appadurai 1990: 297). Following this line of argumentation, recent definitions see diasporas as transnational networks of dispersed political subjects who are connected by ties of co-responsibility across the boundaries of empires and nations (Werbner 2002: 136).

The concept of diaspora has also received a fair amount of critique, not the least from feminist researchers, who have pointed at an often problematic tendency to homogenise diasporic groups and neglect internal power differences and struggles (Brah 1994; Anthias 1998). Critiques of the employment of diaspora as a "total identity" have suggested that the concept is more useful as a verb - *diasporise* - and an adjective - *diasporic* - than a noun - *diaspora* (T.B Hansen 2003; Turner 2003). Likewise Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Fouron criticise the enthusiastic embrace of diaspora studies and claim that it confounds different experiences and forms of consciousness of transborder belonging and identification (Schiller & Fouron 2001: 23). They suggest the alternative concept of long-distance nationalism to designate "identification with a particular, existing state or the desire to construct a new state" (ibid), which can be one moment or aspect of diasporic formations. Furthermore, they suggest the term "transborder citizenry" to include migrants, their descendants and those who stayed in one single category (Schiller et al. 2001: 20).

In our analysis, we take these critical objections into consideration. We are not going to employ diaspora as a designation of an a priori social fact - however tempting or handy it might be. Rather, we regard it as a concept with a political nature in that it might be at once *claimed by* and *attributed to* different migrant groups such as Somalis or Somalilanders. Still, we do not dismiss the term diaspora; what interests us here are the ongoing constructions and negotiations which are at play in the formations and claims of "being the Somaliland diaspora". This means we pay attention to how terms such as diaspora, home and homelands are *used and mobilised* by different actors in relation to Somaliland. Claiming to be a diaspora, "feeling at home" or "rebuilding the nation" is intertwined with gender ideals and processes of inclusion and exclusion (Brah 1994; George 1996; Eriksen 2002). Mobilising, performing and claiming to be the Somaliland diaspora during the big demonstration in Parliament Square and the following events show these mechanisms at play.

From social sciences to Somali intellectuals

The term diaspora has also gained popularity among scholars studying Somalis and different works referring to the term have started to appear. Such works include *Yesterday – Tomorrow. Voices from the Somali Diaspora* (Farah 2000), *Muslims in the Diaspora. The Somali communities of London and Toronto* (McGown 1999), and *Somali and Kurdish Refugees in London. New Identities in the Diaspora* (Griffiths 2002). Indeed the conference theme *Diaspora and State Formation in the Horn of Africa* is an example of the analytical and heuristic value many scholars of Somali migration have started to attribute to the concept.

Even more interesting, the concept of diaspora has travelled, not only within the fashions of social science and among scholars of Somali migrants, but also into circles of Somali intellectuals who have begun to employ the word. Apart from books and reports about "the Somali diaspora" or "Somalis in the diaspora", there is an abundance of homepages appealing to the "Somali diaspora" to support hospitals, schools, and other kinds of fund-

raising projects; there are countless conference announcements and reports as well as adds for business companies targeting "the diaspora" as their customers, for instance money transfer companies such as *Dahabshiil*. A quick *google* search on "Somali diaspora" gives more than 10.000 hits[1]. The overwhelming large majority of homepages referring to "diaspora" are in English. The usage of the term "diaspora" seems to be limited to English speakers and readers - in short, the educated elite. Still, it is an important question what the term "diaspora" means when it is used by Somalis "abroad" and in Somaliland.

First of all, "diaspora" is used as a noun - "the diaspora" - or a place - "in the diaspora" - and not as an adjective or a verb. In other words, "the diaspora" is something or rather somebody and seems to refer to Somalis who have made it either to the West as refugees or immigrants or maybe the Gulf States. In general, refugees living in countries like Ethiopia and Djibouti are not referred to as living in "the diaspora" but rather as "refugees living in neighbouring countries". The fact that the term "diaspora" is not applied to these groups testifies to the social significance and value attached to this term. Furthermore, returnees from the West seem to continue to refer to themselves as part of "the diaspora" as does the surrounding society, often connecting the "diasporic position" with explicit economic and political expectations (P. Hansen 2004; Kleist 2003). In this sense, we might talk about a "Somaliland transborder citizenry", but a citizenry which is still hierarchically positioned according to where the individual Somalilanders are and have been located, to the experiences they (are supposed to) have obtained and finally to their social status in relation to gender, age and clan affiliations. Or in other words, neither the term diaspora or transborder citizenry can be said to refer to homogenous or harmonic entities.

Diaspora as a conflictual term

Often what is noted in studies of "diasporas" is how they are structured around a shared sense of co-responsibility directed towards their homeland and that they perform and manifest themselves in public events like demonstrations or the collection of money for communal ends within "the diaspora". However, the focus on the public sphere and the shared narratives and orientations directed towards real or imagined homelands should not lead us into celebrating the unity or homogeneity of "diasporas". More than just displaying shared struggles and orientations, it is our understanding that diasporas are formed through conflict or tension existing between different groups, principles of social organization, norms and categories. The basic theoretical assumption behind this argument is that social relations, even those marked by conflict, are constitutive of meaning, practice and identity (Gluckman 1958). Somalilanders in the diaspora may claim a shared cultural purity and orientation, but essentially social movements like the Somaliland diaspora are culturally mixed and hybrid since they arise from within the new social and cultural configuration of the hybridized community (cf. Werbner 2001) and are formed through contrasting political agendas, histories and forms of social organisation. Earlier anthropological theories of liminality and conflict (see for example Turner 1979; Gluckman 1958; Epstein 1958;

[1] The search was made August 3, 2004, and resulted in 10.300 hits. Only the first thousand hits were shown and out of the first 630 hits, only one hit was in Somali. The remaning hits were said to be similar to the ones already shown.

Douglas 1966) are useful for our understanding of contemporary diaspora formations. In the detailed ethnographic description of rituals and myths, anthropologists have shown how the mixing of different cultural forms is often part of social dramas and performances and generative of meaning and practice. The divisions, conflicts and contestations that exist "within" and "outside" "the Somaliland diaspora" are indeed an example of this. Our argument rests on the assumption that in order to understand the diasporic constructions of a Somaliland national ideology and "diasporic practices" like the demonstration in Parliament Square, we need to pay attention to a social context characterised by conflict, tension and marginalisation.

The Big Demonstration

We now turn to the events unfolding before, during and after the 17th of March 2004. We do this in order to analyse how "diaspora" is performed, claimed and emerging within a process of transnational political mobilisation. Firstly, we will analyse the immediate events taking place before the demonstration. Secondly, we focus on the demonstration in London itself. Thirdly, we describe and analyse events unfolding in Portcullis House, and finally we close our case study by describing a reception held at The Landmark Hotel.

Somaliland Debate in Parliament

Prior to the demonstration on the 17th and the president's visit to the UK, the all party Select Committee on International Development of the House of Commons visited Somaliland on the 24th and 25th of January 2004. Newspapers in Somaliland stressed that the Committee was the largest group of British politicians to visit Somaliland since the days of independence and that the visit signalled a heightened attention and understanding from the international community in general and the UK government in particular towards the predicament and possible recognition of Somaliland.

On the 4th of February 2004, following the Committee's return to the UK, a debate on Somaliland was held in the House of Commons. Present at this debate were eight members of the Committee, the Secretary of State for International Development as well as an interested crowd of about twenty Somalilanders living in the UK, who had come to London to attend the debate in Parliament. At the debate the committee members informed The Secretary of State for International Development and the public in general about their impressions from their recent visit to Somaliland. Despite representing different political parties, the different Committee members presented a similar historical understanding of Somaliland and a shared view that the UK should do more to assist Somaliland financially and politically. The fact that Somaliland used to be a British protectorate and, according to the Committee members, that Somalilanders served the Empire with loyalty and affection, for example during the Second World War, put a special responsibility upon the UK to take the lead in advancing the arguments of Somaliland, the Committee members agreed. They also argued that the lack of recognition was getting in the way of fulfilling the millennium goals for development in Somaliland and that more should be done to actively support the efforts of the government of Somaliland to create a modern, democratic state. They also

underlined that the attempt in Nairobi to create a government for the whole of Somalia was unrealistic as there has been too much antagonism between Somaliland and Somalia. The committee members underlined that the solution presented to Somaliland was not fair or realistic, since it asked them to join the people that oppressed them for many years instead of actually acknowledging and rewarding the efforts they have achieved in Somaliland (House of Commons 2004).

During the two hours long debate the Committee members presented a version of the political history of Somalia and Somaliland that firmly rooted Somaliland in a legitimate claim to independence. During the debate it was evident that the Committee members subscribed to a popular discourse on Somaliland independence that is found both in Somaliland and among diasporic Somalilanders. According to this popular discourse, Somaliland has done everything right, but is being ignored by the international community. Somaliland is depicted as a place in the Horn of Africa where there is genuine peace, unity and a functioning state, whereas Somalia is depicted as a place where there is war and lack of state. The Committee members also agreed that Somaliland is extremely poor and deserved increased financial help from the UK government. They agreed that the lack of recognition is getting in the way of further developments in Somaliland. They stressed that it is almost impossible to attract international investments to a country that is not recognised. If Somaliland achieves its recognition it would be possible to support the economic development of Somaliland substantially. For example, one of the Committee members underlined, it would be possible to explore Somaliland's oil and mineral reserves which, according to him and popular Somaliland national imagining, are known to be substantial. In sum, the Committee members presented a picture of Somaliland as a de facto functioning nation state, complete with its own colonial and political history, state institutions, government policies and a dedicated and concerned citizenry dispersed all over the world. Therefore the strategy pursued by "the international community" to insist on a solution for all of Somalia, including Somaliland, is getting in the way of a legitimate claim to self-determination and is hindering Somaliland from developing into a prosperous and truly democratic state in area of Africa, that is known to be ravaged by war, corruption and destruction.

Seen from a Somaliland point of view, the response from the Secretary of State for International Development, was both positive and negative. He underlined that he agreed to what had been said about the predicament and achievements of Somaliland, but also reiterated that the UK government's position on the recognition of Somaliland was to wait and see what comes out of the ongoing peace talks in Nairobi and that not only people in Somaliland but in all of Somalia have the right to peace and prosperity. As a result of the positive experiences and sentiments towards Somaliland, the Committee members invited the president of Somaliland to come to the UK on a semi-official visit.

Parliament Square

On the 15th and 16th of March the President had met with different British politicians, ministers and civil servants in the British government. On the 17th of March the President

was to continue his series of meetings with British politicians and civil servants and later in the afternoon address the House of Commons personally. We had been told that the demonstration was to start at 10 in the morning in front of the Home Office. When we got there at around 10.30 there were no Somalilanders in sight. The only other people there, were some construction workers and five policemen. The policemen were looking sceptically at us as if they did not believe that no more than a few individuals would ever turn up for the demonstration and that their day had been wasted. The policemen had been there the previous two days as well and their scepticism was just. The day before, on the 16th of March 2004, only nine Somalilanders had shown up for the demonstration and at times the policemen had outnumbered the demonstrators.

After an hour two women and one man had shown up for the demonstration. The man was around fifty years old and had come from Norway to participate in the demonstration. The two women who had also shown up were in their twenties. They were cousins and both from London. We knew them from the demonstration the day before where they were among the few Somalilanders that had shown up. One of them worked as a nurse at a hospital in West London. She was born in London and had never actually seen Somaliland. Her parents were from Hargeisa and they lived together with her and her brothers and sisters in London. The other woman was born in Hargeisa. She married a Somali man from London and had come to live with him and their children. She did not have a job, spoke only a few words of English but was taking English lessons.

Within another hour or so, a few more men and women had joined the demonstration. There were a few men from Cardiff, where there is a large "Somaliland community". Before the war and the break-up of Somalia into different political regions, the Somalis living in Cardiff were not explicit Somalilanders but just Somalis. Now that Somaliland was trying to establish a nation state without their brothers and sisters in the south of Somalia, the identity of forming an explicit "Somaliland community" in Cardiff had grown equally stronger. One of the men from Cardiff worked as a "community worker within the Somaliland community". He and some Somaliland friends had an NGO in Cardiff that helped Somalilanders, as well as other Somalis, with all sorts of legal and practical matters. He told us that he was working on a project of collecting the life histories of the old Somaliland seamen living in Cardiff. There are no Somalilanders or Somalis working as seamen any longer. He wanted to document their history and tell the untold story about the legacy of the Somaliland community in Cardiff and the United Kingdom.

As we were waiting for more people to join the demonstration, we discussed the "organisational skills" of Somalis with the few who had shown up. They told us that different persons and organisations had organised to meet at different places and at different times during the day. The Somaliland Mission in East London had issued an invitation on the internet that the demonstration would begin at two in the afternoon outside Downing Street 10. The Envoy for the recognition of Somaliland had issued an invitation in the local Somaliland newspaper in the UK for people to meet the 15th, 16th and 17th of March from 10 am to 4 pm outside the Home Office. A third group of Somalilanders had distributed an

invitation within the community that they would meet on the 17th of March at 3 pm opposite Downing Street 10. Jokingly, yet with a touch of insight into own shortcomings, the few demonstrators told us that coordination within the community in the UK or the Nordic countries was poor. They pointed out that being part of an oral network community, they were good at talking and exchanging information about almost everything, but very poor at getting a job done or organising almost anything. This is reflected in the fact that there is no well-defined centre of political power within the Somaliland community in the diaspora and that anyone who feels an obligation and urge to do something can do so, they explained. The fact that several different invitations had been distributed within the community was also interpreted among the few arrivals as a political statement by the part of the Somaliland diaspora that were members of the political opposition to the ruling party in Somaliland. Clearly, the Somaliland opposition to the President and his government in Somaliland would try to sabotage the demonstration by distributing different invitations and thereby divide the Somalilanders living in the UK.

During the day the demonstration grew larger and larger and people were beginning to feel more and more optimistic and enthusiastic as Somalilanders from different parts of the UK turned up at the demonstration. Not only Somalilanders from the United Kingdom but also from Scandinavia arrived to take part in the demonstration. At one point the demonstration grew too large for the pavement outside the Home Office and the Metropolitan Police relocated it to Parliament Square. At this state the initial nervousness of ever being able to form one coherent demonstrating community had been replaced by joy and confidence.

At the demonstration both men and women, young and old presented the colours of Somaliland and waved banners and posters with messages relating to Somaliland's claim to independence. This was the day for Somalilanders to stand united in their joint effort to achieve recognition. The Somaliland flag played an important symbolic role during the demonstration. The demonstrators were of course waving Somaliland flags, as could be expected on an occasion like this, but more than this, many had also wrapped it around their bodies, or made hats and dresses out of the green, white and red colours, or painted the flag on their faces as if to embody their sense of national identity and loyalty towards Somaliland. Furthermore, several persons carried t-shirts with the flag on their stomach and the text "Rebirth of Somaliland" printed on them. Besides the Somaliland flag, many of the demonstrators had also brought Union Jacks as if to show that Somaliland and the UK share an unbreakable colonial past and to highlight that they have developed some form of loyalty and affection for their second motherland. The demonstrators were also waving their homemade posters and banners carrying messages referring to the unrecognised status and democratic achievements of Somaliland. With slogans like: "Somaliland is not prepared to destroy its nation by joining the destroyers", "Somaliland fulfils the condition of democracy", "Somaliland asks for recognition from the World. We are a democracy"; "Somaliland is a model for effective nation building in Africa", "Free election. Free Society. Free Press. Hallmark of Somaliland" and "No to Somalia. Yes to Somaliland", the demonstrators aimed at portraying Somaliland as a legitimate and democratic nation state.

Portcullis House

About 5 p.m., some of the demonstrators made their way to Portcullis House, House of Commons, to listen to the President of Somaliland, Dahir Riyaale Kaahin, and his delegation. About 200 people filled up the room to the last chair and latecomers had to stand. The majority of the audience consisted of well-dressed Somaliland men, some Somaliland women and a few white researchers, consultants and MPs. The Somaliland delegation included the President, several members of the *Guurti*, the House of Elders, and not the least the minister of foreign affairs, Edna Aden, as the only woman in the delegation.

While the demonstration still continued outside, the meeting in Portcullis House represented a completely different scene. Not only was the audience much smaller, it was selected, seated and co-ordinated along the lines of an ordinary parliamentary dialogue. The feeling of festivity, enthusiasm and the hopeful making of Somaliland history, however, made this more than an ordinary event. Mr. Tony Worthington, MP, who visited Somaliland with the Committee in January 2004 and before that in 1992, chaired the session and welcomed the delegates in this spirit. As an outspoken proponent of the recognition of Somaliland, Worthington fully matched the delegation and the Somaliland-British audience in his celebration and explicit articulation of the achievements of "the diaspora" and of the Somaliland nation. Likewise his denunciation of the relationship to Somalia was equally outspoken. Referring to the union between Somalia and Somaliland, Worthington claimed that "you were not getting a fair deal" and "you regretted it". He furthermore expressed his understanding that Somaliland has remained outside the peace negotiations of Somalia "because you could not co-operate with people such as General Morgan, known as the butcher of Hargeisa". Concluding his speech with the words, that he would now "allow your President to speak to you", Worthington explicitly recognized the Somalilanders present as part of a nation with a president.

The articulations of a nation and a nation state continued throughout the meeting. President Riyale Kaahin, reading out aloud, rehearsed the colonial history of Somaliland as a British colony, arguing that Somaliland - in opposition to Somalia - is not a failed state. "When Eritrea, Serbia and Bosnia could be recognised - why not Somaliland"? Kaahin asked, receiving a standing applause for his speech. Following the President's speech, Worthington opened the floor for questions, though he underlined that he would prioritise non-Somalilanders to ask questions thereby indicating a division of the audience between white British and black Somalilanders. Apparently, the priority of non-Somalilanders was to give the British audience a chance to interrogate the delegation and avoid a discussion of domestic Somaliland affairs as the session proceeded, however, it became clear that the definition of the black audience as consisting of Somalilanders only did not hold water.

After the speech of the President, the floor was opened for questions. As a first question the delegation was asked how the government intends to co-ordinate the reconstruction work undertaken by the diaspora. The reply of the minister of foreign affairs, Edna Aden, was that the government is going to establish a co-ordinating body in the Ministry of State underlining the importance of 'the diaspora'. This was also emphasised by her statement

that "The diaspora has brought Somaliland to where it is today. Somaliland mobilised itself", thereby articulating the unity of Somalilanders all over the world and in Somaliland, as a sort of transborder citizenry.

A further range of questions focused on the role of the diaspora and on the political relations between Somaliland, Somalia and the neighbouring countries. The answers pointed at the importance of the Somaliland relations to the diaspora and the UK, and the impossible relations to Somalia. The atmosphere was festive and good questions, answers and one-liners were rewarded with apprehensive applause and laughter from the floor. Videos and photos were taken. Jokes were told. Towards the end of the session, Abdi Ismail Samatar, a Somali-American Professor took the floor. Presenting himself as from the North, but *not* as a Somalilander, Samatar immediately stirred up a fuss. Some of the audience started to shout and complain, and while some insisted that "Only Somalilanders can talk!", others hissed "Give him a chance". After a little while, Samatar was allowed to speak. Stating that he felt threatened, Samatar argued that the whole of Somalia deserved to be at peace from North to South – and then the different parts of Somalia could decide their futures. After this intervention, Samatar left Portcullis House, but later published his version of the meeting on a Somali web page, www.hornafrik.com (Samatar 2004).

Towards the end of the session and after Worthington had closed for questions, a Somali woman asked for the floor - the first woman apart from Edna Aden to speak. Insisting that the meeting was now over and in spite of comments like "It is time for the ladies", Worthington cut her off, joking that since he had been told in Somaliland that Edna Aden equalled ten men, there had been gender equity, and the woman was silenced. The meeting was then concluded and the audience slowly left Portcullis House, joining the demonstration again or heading somewhere else to celebrate the event. Others hurried towards taxis and the Underground. It was time for the reception.

The Landmark Hotel

Even though we had not been officially invited, two young Somali women whom we had met during the session insisted that we could just turn up at the reception anyway. They had not been invited either, but seemed to know some of the organisers and insisted that it was no problem. So we all took the Underground to Marigold Station in a fashionable part of London and walked into The Landmark Hotel, a very posh hotel. After a couple of minutes of negotiation, we were allowed to enter. Passing through an impressive hall with golden chandeliers, marble floor and luxurious furniture, we entered another huge room with small reception tables and an abundant buffet with Somali, Italian and French style food. In one end of this room, chairs were lined up for people to sit comfortably and listen to the speeches before the dinner. The whole place was filled with beautifully dressed Somalilanders in dress suits, evening gowns, high heels, shimmering jewellery and shiny long dresses with a delicate and sweet scent of *ussi*, a special kind of Somali incense. The President, his delegation, the organisers as well as representatives of organisations, models, politicians and reporters, in short, the elite of the Somaliland-British communities were all there - as well as a few British MPs.

The reception was arranged by the "UK Somaliland Communities", a name for a loosely organised group of patriotic Somalilanders in the UK formed specifically with the purpose of organising the events relating to the visit of the president, the Welsh Somaliland Committee and the Somaliland Mission in the UK. The arrangement hosted several hundred guests and days of work and large amounts of money had gone into the organisation of the reception, because, as some people said, "the delegation deserves it". Celebrating the delegation and the historic moment of the semi-official visit, the reception was also an opportunity to mingle, discuss, make contacts and take photos of each other and maybe of the President and his delegation. The reception could be said to be a celebration of the Somaliland nation and its achievements towards official recognition. It could also be said to be a social event turning the stereotypical image of the "marginalised Somalilanders" upside down, making a sumptuous reception everybody could be proud of and talk about for days. As such, the reception represented a third stage of the big demonstration, where the extent, presence and political commitment of the Somaliland communities were demonstrated during the day, and now celebrated.

The reception started out with a range of speakers introduced by two Somaliland women. The first speaker was Emeritus Professor in Social Anthropology, I.M. Lewis, from the London School of Economics. As any student of Somali affairs will know, Lewis is probably the most important figure in the development of Somali studies and has done extensive fieldwork since the 1950s in the former British Protectorate and later in Somalia. As such, Lewis was the perfect reminder of the British past in Somaliland and this was also the message of his speech - a historical and political account of Somaliland and the British colonial and post-colonial engagement. Lewis made explicit his support of the recognition of Somaliland, blaming the international society in general and the British government in particular that they continue to ignore the virtues of Somaliland in favour of their support of the ongoing peace negotiations in Somalia. Towards the end of his speech, and to the great delight of the audience, Lewis proclaimed that the Italians "would make a more useful contribution if they applied some of their expertise in dealing with the Mafia to sorting out Mogadishu", thereby invoking the often noted differences in colonial experience and style of Somaliland and "the South". Finally, Lewis concluded that the recognition of Somaliland would not damage "the ethnic identity of the Somali people and their socio-economic cohesion", but, on the contrary, serve as a wakeup call to the southern politicians. Like Samatar, Lewis later published his speech on www.hornafrik.com (Lewis 2004), but without direct reference to the demonstration and the other events[2].

Also a Swedish politician, who had acted as an observer of the presidential election in Somaliland, gave a speech. Due to the unrecognised status of Somaliland, no official international observers were present during elections, but a large number of unofficial observers were in Somaliland. These observers were present due to their own interest or as members of organisations, consulting agencies, the British embassy in Ethiopia, or other interested parties. Likewise a large number of politically engaged Somalilanders from "the

[2] The quotations in our paper are taken from the Internet text (Lewis 2004), where they correspond with our notes taken during his talk at the reception.

diaspora" were present[3]. The message of the Swedish politician was that the election was carried out according to international standards and that the disputed result, with only 80 votes in favour of Kaahin, was just. Like I.M. Lewis, the "Swedish observer" could be said to add legitimacy to the narrative of the official national Somaliland elections and ideology and take part in the celebration of the government and president.

After a couple of more speakers, Edna Aden, the minister of foreign affairs spoke on behalf of the president. Edna Aden, who is trained as a midwife and who has founded a maternity hospital in Hargeisa, coupled the nationalistic imaginary of the (re)birth of the Somaliland nation with the idea of *difference* in relation to Somalia. She said:

> "I never expected, when I came to UK to study nursing and later midwifery, that I would be a member of a team trying to deliver a nation. Somaliland grew into a nation in spite of the nation who tried to kill them, but not fighting back, respecting human rights. We separated because of basic differences with people from Somalia. We are Somalilanders and they are Somalis. It is not a question of North and South, we are from Somaliland, it has a name and a place on the map. Somaliland is here to stay. You should inform the world of who you are, you should co-ordinate it."

Edna Aden got standing applause in a both enthusiastic and emotional atmosphere. Her employment of the imaginary of giving birth to a nation points to a gendering of the nation in which the more masculine practices of Somaliland politics with only very few female politicians is challenged. Or rather, the reproduction of the nation is feminised and familiarised (cf. Eriksen 2002). Going on to address and encourage the audience to 'inform the world about who they are' in a co-ordinated way, Edna Aden delivered an outspoken example of mobilisation of (long-distance) nationalism, transformed into an at once local and global political responsibility.

Nations and Empires: Political Kinship and Differences

Obviously, the big demonstration can be analysed and interpreted in a number of ways. As already indicated, it was as much a social event as a political manifestation. Or in other words, it was both a demonstration in the sense of a public meeting as well as in the sense of a showing British politicians and the British public, other Somalis - and maybe even each other as well - that there is such a thing as a Somaliland nation. In this part of the paper, we will focus on the political, cultural, social and historical aspects of the demonstration, the session in Portcullis House and the reception to analyse how these events are part of a larger national and diasporic framework. All four levels are part of the mobilisation and performance of a contested Somaliland nationalist ideology, which highlights issues of sameness as well as difference.

[3] Thanks to Elin Svedjemo for sharing this information.

Colonial ties

The strong linkages between Britain and Somaliland had been underlined within the past months, not only by Somalilanders seeking recognition of the country, but also by the British Parliamentarians who as members of the Select Committee on International Development visited and debated Somaliland in Parliament. During the debate in Parliament both Somalilanders and the Committee members shared the notion that the UK has a special moral responsibility to support Somaliland because of their shared colonial past. Also, the Committee members underlined that even today the population of Somaliland displayed loyalty and affection for the UK.

During the debate in Parliament in February 2004, reference was made to a statement made by the Secretary of State for the Colonies on his visit to Hargeisa on the 9th of February 1959. In the statement the Secretary underlined that

> "whatever the eventual destiny of the Protectorate, Her Majesty's Government will continue to take an interest in the welfare of its inhabitants, and will in the light of the circumstances prevailing from time to time, be prepared to give sympathetic consideration to the continuation of financial assistance within the limits of the amount of aid at present being provided to the Protectorate".

Mr. Tony Baldry of the Committee underlined that this statement was reiterated in a Colonial Office report that was submitted to Parliament on independence. On 4th of May 1960 the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, told the house, that

> "…it is Her Majesty's Government's hope that whatever may be the constitutional future of the Protectorate, the friendship which has been built up between its people and those of the United Kingdom for so many years will continue and indeed flourish".

Mr. Tony Baldry stressed that if there ever was a need for the UK to give friendship and assistance to Somaliland, it was now. The committee members underlined that the closeness between the UK and Somaliland is also found today in the fact that there are many British citizens of Somaliland origin now living in Somaliland, that some of the committee members' constituency live part time in Somaliland, and that the UK Somaliland diaspora has played a vital part in the rebuilding of Somaliland.

Following up on this positive attitude towards recognition, one of the most important messages of the demonstration was to remind the British government of its past as coloniser. During the demonstration, a large amount of posters with a map of Somaliland surrounded by the words "Republic of Somaliland" and "British Somaliland Protectorate" were handed out and taped on to the demonstrators bodies or held in front of them. This focus on the British-Somaliland past is at least two-fold. First of all, should Britain recognise Somaliland, it might very well be the first step in a range of recognitions of other countries - at least, this is what Somaliland politicians seem to hope. Secondly, the British colonial past and thus colonial borders means that the country is in accordance with the principle of the African Union, which maintains that the borders of African nation states

must not violate the colonial borders. Thirdly, Somaliland did receive its Independence on the 26th of June 1960, that is four days before it united into the Republic of Somalia and Somaliland politicians therefore claim that since the country has once been recognised as an independent nation state, it could and should obtain this status again.

Somaliland thus re-claims its nationhood along several lines of arguments and strategies. One is to set the date of Somaliland Independence to 1960 and not 1991. Accordingly, when Mr. Tony Worthington welcomed the delegates at Portcullis House and dated independence to 1991, the minister of foreign affairs, Edna Aden, immediately corrected him. Stating the date of international recognition of Somaliland to the year of 1961, the reunion with Somalia is turned into a historical, illegitimate and unhappy parenthesis, which is now over. On a broader level, this strategy of de-legitimisation of the union and thereby the Republic of Somalia is also related to the failure of Somalia in terms of unifying all the Somali-speaking areas in one nation state, of which the union of the British Protectorate and the UN Trusteeship of Somalia was supposed to be the first step. Furthermore, it is claimed that the treaty of union was never signed by Somaliland and therefore that the Republic of Somalia has been an invalid arrangement the whole time. Returning to the political arguments, which were actually articulated during the big demonstration, the illegitimacy of the Republic of Somalia was however more linked to the arguments of failed states.

As emphasised both by President Riyaale Kaahin and other members of the delegation, by Worthington and later I.M. Lewis, the union with Somalia turned out unhappily, due to the failure of Somalia and most especially the dictatorship of general Siyad Barre. President Riyaale Kaahin, not only invoking the past, but also the future, reminded the audience about September 11, 2001 and the dangers of terrorism and failed states “in the fast-shrinking world of ours”. In contrast to Somalia, where suspected Al-Qaeda terrorists have been detained, Somaliland, Kaahin argued, is peaceful, stable, democratic and, most important, “no building ground for terrorists”. However, while emphasising that Somaliland is not a failed state, Kaahin also seemed to imply that Somaliland has not unfolded its full potential for securing peace and stability in the region, as Somaliland cannot “co-operate with international trade organisations, does not attract investments or fight the war of terrorism”. His statement, however, did not refer to the sad killings of foreign aid workers, which puts a more gloomy perspective on the claimed peacefulness of Somaliland. From October 2003 to March 2004, altogether five foreigners have been killed; the latest incident took place just a few days after the demonstration and speech at Portcullis House. All killings happened while prominent Somaliland politicians were abroad to promote the recognition of Somaliland and the responsibility of the killings has accordingly been blamed on “terrorists from the South” who wish to destabilise Somaliland, scare foreign organisations to stay away, and disturb the peaceful image of the country. This issue was not addressed by Kaahin, who rather seemed to indicate that recognition of Somaliland would be a step towards more stability and a more effective war against terrorism; a win-win situation for both Somaliland and the UK, indeed for all responsible states hoping for more stability in the region.

Later that day, during the reception at night, Lewis also referred to the number of failed peace accords and negotiations as well as the absence of a government in Somalia. In his words, the peace negotiations are more about "the division of power and economic interest among a squabbling bunch of predatory gangsters", who "should have been arrested in Kenya as suspected war crimes perpetrators" (Lewis 2004). The legitimacy – and accordingly recognition - of Somaliland is, in other words, linked both to the colonial past of Somaliland as a British Protectorate as well as to the de-legitimacy of the failed state of Somalia in its claims to keep Somaliland as a part of the state territory.

The colonial past was also invoked in the question of *difference* both politically and culturally between Somaliland and Somalia, due to differences in the Italian and British colonisation. This argument is often related to the "Italianisation" of Somalia - the corrupt Mafia culture of the *Somalia Italiana* and the Italian administrated UN Trusteeship of Somalia - in contrast to the "pure" and "authentic" culture in the British Protectorate. This "purity", the argument goes, is due to the small number of British officials in the Protectorate during colonisation and the claimed British colonial politics of non-intervention in terms of culture. The politics of non-intervention is said to have been even more outspoken in the Protectorate where local warriors and the resistance movement of Mohamed Abdullah Hassan, the so-called "Mad Mullah", forcefully challenged the colonisers from the beginning of colonisation until 1920.

This argument of a pure and authentic culture due to the *distance* between the British colonisers and the Somaliland colonial subjects was not revived during the parliamentary session or the reception. On the contrary: close colonial ties, loyalty, friendship, bonds of kinship and even allegiance to the Queen were emphasised. Worthington, visibly impressed, told that his recent delegation to Somaliland was received with signs stating "The Queen is our Mother". President Riyaale Kaahin expressed his hope that the friendship between Great Britain and Somaliland that existed at the time of Independence in 1960 could continue in the future and be revived between the two nations. The Deputy Speaker of the House of Elders, the *Guurti*, however, was more critical when he reminded the British of the service of the Somalilanders during the two world wars. A British MP asked him about Somaliland's relations towards its neighbouring countries. The Deputy Speaker replied by recounting that Somaliland had not asked Britain about its relations with other countries when they were called upon to join the British Forces at the outbreak of the Second World War, but had in fact supported its friend without any questions asked. Also, the Deputy Speaker blamed the British for not educating their former colonial subjects while "the Somalis in Somalia had been taught tricks by Italy for ten years". Continuing that the British failed to help the former Protectorate in this situation, he exclaimed, that "we are British orphans", thereby emphasising a mixture of parental bonds and failed responsibility from the side of the British, i.e. the missing parents. As already mentioned, the image of birth and kinship had been a theme throughout the day, printed on t-shirts and banners, invoked by the coupling of both the Somaliland flag and Union Jack and articulated by politicians, most forcefully by foreign minister Edna Aden when she invoked the imaginary of delivering a

nation. Only this time, the parents were not supposed to be the British, but the Somalilanders themselves - in diaspora and in Somaliland.

Diaspora, Liminality and Conflict

Looking at the events relating to the demonstration in Parliament Square, one first of all sees the shared expression of "a diaspora" organised around shared histories, symbols and political agendas. Also Somalilanders living in "the diaspora" performed according to what was expected from members of the Somaliland "transborder citizenry" (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001: 20) that are closer to the centres of political power than Somalilanders living in Somaliland: they showed up at the demonstration, backed the arguments presented to the international community in general and the British parliamentarians in particular, organised a reception for the visiting delegation and thereby played their role regarding the recognition of Somaliland and towards the visiting homeland politicians and government officials. The demonstrators played their part as good Somaliland citizens living in the diaspora caring about the future and wellbeing of their homeland. The notion that the demonstrating Somalilanders were somehow doing what was expected from them as "good Somalilanders" was highlighted in one of the invitations distributed within the Somaliland community in London a few days before the demonstration took place. The invitation had the design and colours of the Somaliland flag upon which was written:

> "*Official UK State Visit: President of Somaliland: Mr Dahir Riyaale*", "*Somalilanders* this is it: it is *now* or *never*", "Your country needs your support", "take the day off, whatever you are doing!", "bring your sirens, drums, flags, etc.", "Make sure you play your role regarding the recognition of Somaliland!!!" and "Tell your mum and dad and everyone else you know!!!".

As exemplified in the invitation, shared symbols like the flag of Somaliland and the image of a community unified in achieving the same goals were used in an effort to mobilise Somalilanders. However, to understand the public ritual in Parliament Square and related events and agendas, one needs to look behind the apparent unifying political goal of achieving independence. In other words, one needs to contextualise the demonstration and public expressions of political agendas within a sphere of challenges, conflicts and ambiguities relating to the Somaliland and Somali communities in the UK and the ambiguous status of Somaliland within the international order of nation states.

Within a world of nation states Somaliland remains unrealised as a political community. Following Victor Turner's (1979) theory on *liminality* and *communitas* in the performance of public rituals, we can arrive at a clearer understanding of what was taking place in Parliament Square. Turner developed his theory of liminality on the basis of Van Gennep's (1909) description of a *rite de passage*. Rites of passage are rituals marking the passage of one state of life and entry into another, e.g. birth, puberty, marriage, initiation or death. In this sense rites of passage are rites that accompany every change of place, state, social position and age. Van Gennep (ibid) characterised rites of passage as being composed of a phase of separation, margin or limen (signifying 'threshold' in Latin), and aggregation. The

liminal phase is characterised by ambiguity as this phase is marked neither by the attributes of the past nor by the coming state. Liminal entities are neither here nor there, they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom and convention (Turner 1979:95). In the liminal phase normal rules and social hierarchies are negated and instead replaced by a heightened sense of solidarity between persons undergoing the ritual (ibid).

In a similar way Somaliland is in a liminal phase within the system of nation states. On the one hand, Somaliland is not ravaged by civil war, lawlessness and general chaos. On the other hand however, Somaliland is not a sovereign nation state. Because of its ambiguous or liminal status Somaliland is subjected to practices by international actors that are not applied to sovereign nation states. For example, the United Nations does not refer to Somaliland as Somaliland, yet in its daily dealings with the political leadership in Somaliland and in its operation of numerous UN agencies in Somaliland there is an acknowledgement of the authority of the Somaliland state. Also due to the liminal status, the UNHCR in Somaliland refers directly to UN headquarters in Geneva and not to Nairobi, as other UN agencies in Somaliland do. The liminal or marginal status of Somaliland provides a very powerful base for mobilising solidarity among Somalilanders who identify with the project of achieving independence. At the demonstration in London, Somalilanders formed a visible and existing community. Somalilanders from all over the United Kingdom and Northern Europe were united in London because of their liminal status within the international system of nation states. In this sense what defines the community of Somalilanders as a political categorical identity is their status as a "non-community" within the international order of nation states. Turner's observation that liminality is often likened to death and being in the womb (1979:95) corresponds beautifully with the popular image within Somaliland national discourse of a nation that is once again "being reborn" and given life through "delivery". Following Turner, the fact that Somaliland remains unrecognised provides a very powerful base of identity for the abstract community of Somalilanders. The image that Somaliland and the Somaliland transborder citizenry are somehow at present "on the move", from somewhere to somewhere else, also resembles the religious pilgrimage analysed by Turner (1974). According to Turner (ibid) pilgrims experience an intensified sense of sacredness and community, referred to by Turner as "communitas". The sense of being left out and forgotten by the world, yet still having the possibility of concluding the pilgrimage, moving into the state of being a real internationally recognised nation state, enables people to transcend differences and problems. No one has ever stopped to reflect on what will happen within Somaliland and the Somaliland transborder citizenry if Somaliland is recognised, the pilgrimage comes to an end and the sense of "communitas" disappears. Will it stir up old antagonisms and possibly instigate new fighting within Somaliland? Will the political realization of Somaliland in a paradoxical way lead to its disintegration? Or will the recognition of Somaliland also have some of the imagined positive effects of prosperity and stability that many Somalilanders "abroad and at home" dream about?

The demonstration in Parliament Square tells us something about the nature of 'the Somaliland diaspora' and "the Somaliland community". These phenomena, identities or

positions are not social facts existing without the active ongoing constructions taking place, for example, at a demonstration. In this sense the "imagined community" of Somalilanders would not exist, or at least have different manifestations, if it was not based in and causing social interaction. To position the demonstration within its social contexts is also to allow analytical space for all the aspects that are problematic and yet generative of the construction of a shared political ideology and horizon. On several occasions before, during and after the demonstration the image of a unified and well disciplined and dedicated citizenry was challenged and yet in a more subtle way produced. While waiting for people to show up for the demonstration, the few Somalilanders present were very critical of most things and expressed concerns about the present political leadership in Somaliland. They told us that the President really was not a president, because he was really bad at addressing the people, was not able to govern the country and that he was not only in the UK to discuss development aid and recognition, but also to sign documents allowing the UK to return rejected asylum seekers to Somaliland. Furthermore, they told us that people probably would not show up and that the only Somalilanders with discipline were women since all the men were busy chewing khat or being unemployed. Moreover, they told us that people were too occupied with clan and therefore not really able and ready to form a modern nation state based on a different way of social organisation. Contrary to the official discourse they told us that people's loyalties were not first and foremost directed at the wellbeing of Somaliland. On the contrary, they stressed, people would think about their family and clan first. Secondly, they would think about their city and local areas. Thirdly, they would think about their reception and only fourthly would they think about Somaliland. We need to stress however, that as the demonstration grew bigger and bigger during the day, the frustrations, insecurities and potential conflicts were gradually replaced by a heightened sense of actually forming a united and thriving national community.

These early demonstrators expressed viewpoints that compromise the public ideology of Somaliland and the claims to independence. Our point is precisely that the more difficult it is to realise Somaliland as a functioning political project, the louder the agitators will be shouting in Parliament Square. In this sense Somaliland and 'the Somaliland community' need to be seen in relation to the challenges they face. The more ambiguous and liminal it appears, the stronger the solidarity and the more manifest the national rhetoric. The point is that behind the immediate harmony of the demonstration and the coherence of the arguments for recognition, the demonstration displayed disharmony and liminality. For example the disharmony related to two different bases of social organisation: clan and nation. National ideology informs us that Somaliland is a nation based in its own history and culture. In this sense Somaliland is portrayed as a nation that has moved ahead of Somalia and its own past in its defiance of clan as the base of social organisation. However, everyone only vaguely familiar with social realities in Somaliland and among Somalis and Somalilanders in the West knows that relations between kin, often referred to by westerners and English-speaking Somalis as a clan, are extremely important. The ambivalence between nation and clan and how to fuse social realities with ideologies of nation and state is not only a problem as such but in a more subtle way also a creative tension having the potential of generating heightened solidarities and new identities.

These challenges and ambivalences were also seen in the fact that not all "potential Somalilanders" in London had showed up for the demonstration nor found it a particular good idea to pursue the road that perhaps will lead to independence. On the days preceding the demonstration, several Somalis that potentially could claim their Somaliland citizenship, did not wish to join the demonstration because they did not support Somaliland but on the contrary supported the reinstallation of the Somali Republic. One person, who grew up within the boundaries claimed by Somaliland and who, according to the Somaliland constitution, is a possible Somaliland citizen, had committed an act of effective symbolic violence to one of the above-mentioned invitations hanging on the wall in a café in Southall. He had cut the invitation designed as the Somaliland flag into pieces because he did not support Somaliland and in no way wished to take part in the demonstration. This "potential Somalilander" was not alone in his rejection of Somaliland but on the contrary expressed a position taken by several Somalilanders whom we met before the demonstration. The fact that many people from the geographical area known as Somaliland, and genealogically qualifying for Somaliland citizenship are not supporters of Somaliland, is highly sensitive and surrounded by a certain degree of taboo. This was also seen from the reactions from the Somaliland participants at Portcullis House when the Somali-American professor took the floor during the discussion and presented himself as coming from the North but not seeing himself as a Somalilander thereby trespassing the unwritten boundary of what can be expressed in a public forum celebrating the existence of Somaliland.

Cultural notions and practices of community, belonging and solidarity were also being challenged. In London, as in Copenhagen, many Somalilanders and Somalis express how they feel about the fact that the values and practices characterising their community are disintegrating and challenged by a western foreign culture. Often people have explained to us that the community is falling apart and that people are just living like individuals. The ideology of solidarity is very manifest and relates to a nomadic history and tradition among Somalis. Often it has been explained to us that if a nomadic family in need of water or food for themselves or their livestock encounters another family in the nomadic area they will be helped in the best way possible. According to this ideology, Somalis will always help each other and no one can refuse to help another Somali if their help is really needed. In London, the importance and significance of family networks are changed and partly replaced by the welfare system. One informant explained that in London people are saying goodbye to their clans and joining the welfare community instead. The notion of "leaving your clan" or "community of relations" and joining an abstract "welfare community" is seen as a threat to "the Somali culture and community". Especially to many Somali men living in the west, the welfare system is seen as threatening their position within more traditional Somali family values and practices and thereby Somali values in more general. In sum, the fact that notions of "community" and "solidarity" are challenged in the West, is an important context for the understanding of the demonstration where people at least for a day formed "a community".

Conclusion

The demonstration and the other events unfolding in London point towards a transborder Somaliland citizenry united in its ambitions and orientations towards finding a space for Somaliland within the world of sovereign nation states. "The Somaliland diaspora" appears homogeneous, as it stands shoulder to shoulder united through shared symbols of flags, songs, slogans, colonial histories, memories of civil war and oppression. A closer examination, however, reveals the tensions, disagreements and heterogeneity within "the diaspora" or "transborder citizenry" and thereby points to the weakness of these analytical concepts of often highlighting the shared histories, horizons and agendas and neglecting the rifts and cracks behind a public homogenous image. Underneath the image of homogeneity, there appears to be a wealth of "dangerous" liminal identities not yet certain of what to be, where to go, whom or what to support and how and when to do so. Through detailed ethnographic fieldworks and a sensitive political, cultural and historical contextualisation of the production of a Somaliland political ideology, we have shown how uncertainty and divergent views have a both threatening and creative force "within diasporas".

Moreover, our paper shows the importance of history in arguments for self-determination and how history is not a social fact but the outcome of ongoing arguments and struggles between different actors and institutions. Our study testifies to the important role played by "the diaspora" in the making of history and in presenting the arguments for the recognition of Somaliland. Somalilanders in the UK have not only participated in the construction of a national history and arguments for political self determination, but have also worked to facilitate, create and locate a social and political stage, where these arguments can be presented most powerfully. In this sense Somalilanders living "in diaspora" have played important roles in "spreading the message of Somaliland" to an international audience. This shows how "the diaspora" has been very important for the ideological and physical construction of a homeland and not primarily the other way round, as has been observed in other similar situations. In the case of Haiti, for example, the Haitian diaspora was named the "Tenth Department" by General Aristide when he was inaugurated as president, thereby actively creating "a community of Haitians" living outside the Haitian nation state. In this way Aristide changed the location of diaspora from a location of exile into an integral and vital part of Haiti (Schiller and Fouron 2001: 120-121). In the case of Somaliland, there are still many opportunities for actively creating and incorporating "the Somaliland diaspora" into the affairs of the Somaliland nation state. Also our study has shown that more than describing specific persons and a geographical location, "the Somaliland diaspora" appears to be a social and political position of giving, resourcefulness and agency that can be claimed, wished for and aspired to by different persons in a variety of situations. The complexity of the significance of "diaspora" is highlighted in the fact that the word or notion of "diaspora" did not play a significant role during the demonstration in Parliament Square as this gathering of people was for all Somalilanders. During the debate at Portcullis House and at the Landmark Hotel, however, there were several references to "the Somaliland diaspora" and its importance to Somaliland. This testifies to the elitist connotations associated with the term "diaspora".

Our analysis is based on one specific event and in doing so we go against a strong tradition within anthropology to filter out the freak occurrence, the anomaly, the unrepresentative figure, the non-repetitive pattern, and the impermanent and unnoticed cultural form in the finished ethnography. Anthropology has traditionally been concerned with analysing the patterns of culture, the principles of social organization, customs, and traditions, systems of rules and phenomena that are understood to have withstood the test of time (Malkki 1997: 89-90). The events unfolding in London were unique and transitory, but there can be no doubt that they will not be weak or fleeting in their effects. An interesting path to follow, and a way of extending this case study, would be to follow the intense discussions taking place online where the events in London are being retold, contested and defended by numerous Somalis and Somalilanders around the world. As such the events in London have shaped or influenced notions of being "a Somalilander", "a Somali", of "living in the UK", "in the diaspora", of "returning to Somaliland" or in other ways engaging oneself in a transnational political struggle.

Finally, we would like to repeat that our paper is not an intervention in favour of the political legacy of either Somaliland or a united Somalia, but aims at contributing to a better understanding of the meanings and practices relating to "the Somaliland diaspora".

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