

Aid in a state of exception

A sociological analysis to international aid agencies active in Somalia

Master thesis

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What the social world has done, it can, armed with knowledge, undo. In any event, what is certain is that nothing is less innocent than non-interference.

Pierre Bourdieu, *The Weight of the World*, 1993

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Photo on front-page: Jan Grarup, *I just want to dunk*, World Press Photo, 2013

ABSTRACT

This master thesis commences with the general observation that the safety of humanitarian and development aid workers is not something given in Somalia. Aid workers have been attacked, kidnapped and killed, sometimes with the consent of local authorities. This points to a certain incompatibility of interests between international aid agencies and Somali local authorities, be they warlords, district commissioners, or insurgents as al-Shabaab militants. It also suggests that there is no such thing as a separate non-political ‘humanitarian space’ within Somalia, but instead, that international aid agencies are part of the context in which they work – with all of its dynamics. With these notions in mind, this thesis questions how international aid agencies interact with Somalia’s dynamics of conflict. To what extent does the presence and practices of international aid agencies affect conflict dynamics? Using a sociological framework introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, the underlying mechanisms of this interaction will be traced back to three guises of capital: 1) economic capital, 2) social capital, and 3) cultural capital. Through building on the experiences of aid professionals that have worked in or on Somalia, it concludes that international aid agencies excel in having economic capital, while relatively lacking social and cultural capital. International aid agencies have the economic capital to pursue their projects: they can rent cars, housing and finance other operational necessities. They can hire Somali staff, consultants, and armed guards. However, aid workers suffer from a lack of social capital. They face resistance when mingling in Somalia’s social structures. And due to the cultural transformative character of their interventions, the mission of international aid agencies is lacking local acceptance. Although bringing relief and emergency assistance to alleviate human suffering, aid is often perceived as foreign meddling. This endangers the safety of aid workers and their operations. Simultaneously, international aid agencies are regarded as a resource to compete for: aid has been confiscated, aid workers kidnapped for ransoms and aid agencies bribed for access to project sites and blackmailed for nepotistic means. To overcome these challenges, international aid agencies hire security companies, pay local insurgents and involve local authorities in economic operational processes such as hiring cars. However, through these emergency measures – taken in a state of exception – international aid agencies become involved in conflict itself. Operating without having to deal – quite literally – with actors that thrive on instability and conflict, without endangering humanitarian principles as staying neutral, impartial and independent, and without ‘doing harm,’ is impossible in Somalia. International aid agencies are part of the violent conflicts that afflict the country. By so, international aid agencies face a Samaritan’s dilemma: their very existence can prompt insurgents and local authorities to generate the condition that attract aid, while suspending emergency food assistance can place thousands of famine-affected people in a truly dire situation.

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ACRONYMS & MAP

AMISOM	-	African Union Mission in Somalia
CED	-	Centre for Education and Development
DRC	-	Danish Refugee Council
EEAS	-	European External Action Service
FGS	-	Federal Government of Somalia
HARDO	-	Humanitarian Action for Relief and Development Organisation
ICRC	-	International Committee of the Red Cross
IHL	-	International Humanitarian Law
IMC	-	International Medical Corps
(I)NGO	-	(International) Non Governmental Organisation
IDP	-	Internally Displaced Person
MSF	-	Medicins Sans Frontieres
NSP	-	NGO Safety Program for Somalia
OCHA	-	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
TFG	-	Transitional Federal Government of Somalia
UN	-	United Nations
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Program
UNOSOM	-	United Nations Operation in Somalia
WASH	-	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (aid program)

The state of exception

The state of exception constitutes a point of imbalance between law and politics, characterized by the absence of normality. It entails the suspension of law – by the law itself (Agamben, 2005), subsequently making it possible to take measures that in the presence of ‘normality’ would never be taken.

Map of the Federal Republic of Somalia¹



Map No. 3650 Rev. 10 UNITED NATIONS
December 2011

Department of Field Support
Cartographic Section

¹ UN Cartographic section, December 2011

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This thesis represents a chapter in my life that I will always treasure: studying in Nijmegen and working for Oxfam Novib in The Hague were enrichments for me personally that gave me lots of ‘social and cultural capital’ (to immediately start with some Bourdieusian terms), and ‘fun’ (to not use some Bourdieusian terms). Here, I would like to say a few words of gratitude to those who made it possible for me to even write this foreword.

In September 2013, a little more than a month after I returned home from doing fieldwork in Nairobi, al-Shabaab attacked the Westgate Mall in Nairobi. It was in that very mall that I had interviewed an aid worker about al-Shabaab. The attack and hostage taking afterwards made the relevance of this research almost tangible. Yet when my internship as security advisor for Oxfam ended and this thesis got more shape, I became more sceptical of the positive role international aid agencies play on the situations of those suffering from humanitarian crises. This thesis indeed underwrites the severe challenges international aid agencies face in order to be conflict-sensitive, which are vital to know before even thinking of intervening. Yet, staying ignorant to the worst human suffering equals ‘putting your head in the sand’ (as the Dutch proverb goes), which is even less innocent. I therefore have the utmost respect and admiration for those individuals that work in or on Somalia – indeed one of the most difficult places to work in. So I would like to thank them – and all the interviewees – for doing what they do, and sharing their extensive knowledge and experiences with me that made this thesis possible.

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1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Prologue

Around March 2013, while I was writing a monthly security update during an internship at Oxfam Novib, my supervisor received an email from Oxfam’s country director for Somalia. Attached was an assessment for the ‘planned office establishment in Mogadishu’. The United Nations had already moved certain departments to Mogadishu; several international aid agencies had opened offices close by and, after 20 years of absence, the British government had re-opened their embassy. So, Oxfam also considered expanding its presence, which subsequently led to a question raised by my supervisor:

“In Mogadishu, Oxfam Novib will enter a web with various actors, so... is Oxfam going to manoeuvre itself in a position where it is in danger of getting consumed by spiders or in a position where it is able to catch the flies?”

Tom Brabers, former security advisor for Oxfam

This metaphorical question summarizes the challenges international aid agencies face when operating in Somalia: not *all* are happy with their presence. In fact, the number of incidents against aid workers increased the last 10 years in such a way that, for example, the threat of kidnapping is considered “the new normal” for aid workers (Stoddard, Harmer, & Toth, 2013). Somalia is one of the most dangerous places on earth for aid workers: 294 aid workers killed per 100.000 between 2006 and 2011 (Stoddard, Harmer, & Hughes, 2012). In 2012, there were 17 attacks on aid workers (Stoddard et al., 2013) and in 2013 there were 15 victims of attacks (including four UN compound guards).² These attacks are not coincidental incidents, but rather “represent large-scale and deliberately targeted actions against humanitarian actors and therefore present a serious, and violent, challenge to the principles that underlie humanitarian action” (Fast, 2010). As the exception has become the norm, humanitarian space³ seems to be a scarcity in Somalia. The withdrawal of MSF from Somalia in August 2013 – a decision not made because of the presence of violent conflict but due to a discourse of “acceptance, tolerance and even support for attacks against humanitarian workers within the Somali society”⁴ – is probably

² According to the Humanitarian Outcomes database: <https://aidworkersecurity.org/incidents> (assessed April 2013).

³ Humanitarian space can, according to Erik Abild (2010: p. 70), be defined as “a space of ‘un-tension’ in which international aid agencies are free to operate: to evaluate needs, to monitor the distribution and use of relief goods and to have a dialogue with the people in need.

⁴ “Doctors Without Borders to Pull out of Somalia (NY Times, 8.15.2013)
http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/15/world/africa/doctors-without-borders-to-pull-out-of-somalia.html?_r=0

one of the most dramatic consequences and examples of international aid agencies experiencing a lack of humanitarian space.

The question raised by the security advisor of Oxfam also addresses Somalia as a web with various actors and interests: a *playing board* of interrelated pieces attempting to manoeuvre themselves in ways that will meet their goals and interests. And he considers Oxfam as one of these interrelated pieces, part of the playing board that is the social space of Somalia. A social space that is described as a myriad of interests “including so many actors, both internal and external, that the previous Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the coalition of ‘stakeholders’ did not drive the situation, but were enmeshed in it like all the other” (Weinstein, 2010). All these actors pursue their own agenda’s, which “ultimately impact on the character and duration of the conflict and prospects for lasting security and development” (Beswick and Jackson, 2011: p. 1). International aid agencies also pursue their own agenda. This agenda is based on the idea that in extreme cases of human suffering external agents may offer assistance to people in need, and that in doing so, aid workers should be accorded respect and even ‘rights’ while carrying out their functions (Vaux, 2006). But how are international aid agencies able to operate if the threat of being kidnapped – the exceptional – has become ‘the new normal’ and previous actors were enmeshed in the situation rather than controlling it? How do their practices interact with dynamics of conflict in Somalia? What are the mechanisms behind this?

Considering international aid agencies as part of the context with all its related dynamics, this research is based on the notion that there is no such thing as a separate non-political space for humanitarian operations, [and that] “agencies have to accept that their actions, and the resources they present, are part of a context” (Abild, 2010). Aid workers that provide humanitarian or development assistance in areas affected by violent conflict become part of that very conflict themselves and have the capacity to actually contribute to violence. Anderson and Woodrow (1989, quoted in Duffield, 2007), for example, describe how poorly managed humanitarian aid could encourage dependency among beneficiaries, distort local markets and prolong wars and political instability. However, *how* aid and conflict interact is not always very clear (Goodhand, 2002). This *how*-question is a central theme for this research and will be answered through analysing the practices of international aid agencies in the case of Somalia.

1.2 Social and academic significance

Pierre Bourdieu argued in his book *The Weight of the World* that, when it comes to human suffering, nothing is less innocent than non-interference (Bourdieu, 1993). Ignoring settings where humanitarian disasters as famine and civil war caused widespread human suffering would certainly remove international aid agencies’ from their *raison d’être*. And, indeed, international aid agencies play a significant role in people’s need for humanitarian relief and development

over the globe. Aid workers have been increasingly present and assisting in settings where natural disasters occurred, such as in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami or the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, as well as in war-affected countries as Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Somalia and Syria.

However, considering the attacks on aid workers and the fact that most international aid agencies have security advisors within their employment seems to indicate that the practices of international aid agencies are not always accepted in Somalia. In 2010, al-Shabaab, or rather its “office for supervising the affairs of foreign agencies (OSAFA)”, even made a ban-list of development and humanitarian agencies from Somalia (Menkhaus, 2012, p. 31). This lack of acceptance makes it very difficult for international aid agencies to operate (Jackson & Aynte, 2013), but it might also say something about their own practices. Western and UN actors, for example, treated Somalia as a post-conflict setting when in fact their own policies helped to inflame armed conflict and insecurity there (Menkhaus, 2009). This, along with the increasing attacks on aid workers, indicates an apparent incompatibility of interests between international aid agencies and local conflict-driven actors. It seems that international aid agencies are mingled in the affairs of conflict-driven parties or actors within the Somali context.

Aid is indeed subject to many academic discussions, which tackle a wide range of questions. I will leave the discussion about aid efficiency out of this elaboration⁵, and focus instead on the discussion regarding the internal logic of international aid agencies. Although the roles of international aid agencies are often seen as “holding operation[s] preventing things from falling apart” (Collier, 2008: p. 100), the goals to which international aid agencies act in developing countries is questioned. This includes criticism for perpetuating the North-South dependencies of the colonial period (Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009) in which aid could be seen as “part of the Western ‘crusade’” (Chigas, 2006: p. 575). It is also criticized for facilitating the emergence of warlord politics, for example in Afghanistan (Goodhand, 2002), or for inducing an ‘aid economy’ that grows up in parallel to a war economy “where the focus is not so much on benefiting from violence as it is on taking advantage of efforts to relieve suffering” (Hoffman and Weiss, 2006: p. 107 quoted in Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009: p. 165). Aid can even be a cause for conflict. For example, in the Rwandan refugee crisis of 1994-1996, international humanitarian organisations actually had the effect of “feeding militants, supporting the war

⁵ Probably most well-known and discussed is the debate on the efficiency of aid, which is the subject of innumerable evaluation reports and donor impact assessments, case- and quantitative studies with questions as “*Can the world cut poverty in half?*” (Collier & Dollar, 2001) or “*Can foreign aid buy growth?*” (Easterly, 2003), books as *Dead Aid, The End of Poverty, The Bottom Billion* and even twitter discussions, such as between Jeffrey Sachs and William Easterly (<http://www.humanosphere.org/2014/01/sachs-easterly-cease-fire-broken-aid-war-of-words-breaks-out-on-twitter/>). Indeed, “economic research on foreign aid effectiveness and economic growth frequently becomes a political football” (Easterly, 2003, p. 23).

economy, sustaining the militants' dependents, and legitimizing the refugees/rebels as victims" (Lischer, 2003).

Foreign development aid is also seen as mingling in internal affairs. Mark Duffield (2002; 2007) argues that foreign development aid is essentially political with the ultimate goal to transform societies: "We are told that development today can no longer be left to chance. [...] Erstwhile developing and transitional countries must now be consciously transformed as a whole, including the attitudes and beliefs of the people within them" (Duffield, 2002: p. 1050). Michael Pugh further elaborates on this by arguing how "...external actors are so intrusive that the imposition is tantamount to a protectorate. International financial institutions, UN administrators, NGOs, intergovernmental aid agencies, private companies, external 'peace support' companies, teams of monitors, outside civilian police and judges attempts to control territory, economic resources and public policy" (Pugh, 2004). This is what Duffield calls the 'radicalisation of development' aid, in which aid is a form of "riot control directed against the unruly parts of the world to uphold the liberal peace" (Pugh, 2004: p. 41). This transformative character of development aid is also observed in humanitarian aid (Beswick & Jackson, 2011). International aid agencies are part of, and potentially subordinated to, the overarching agenda of transforming states and societies through a Wilsonian approach of spreading liberal principles as free markets and multiparty democracy (Beswick & Jackson, 2011) – principles 'they' see as 'universal'. Having the goals (and means) to transform societies – including the attitudes and beliefs of the people within them – is mingling in the social, economic and cultural structures and struggles of societies.

Security and development seem to be interrelated. "What is under discussion here is not the technical efficiency of aid [...] but rather the new possibilities for thinking about security that aid as a will to govern makes possible" (Duffield, 2002: p. 1062). Duffield (2007) argues that development has 'a will to govern' – a security function for 'the North' that is essential to development: "development has consequently always existed to a state of emergency or *exception*. Today, for example, Afghanistan is being pacified militarily so that aid agencies can operate and secure civilian loyalties. This is not a random connection: development has always been linked with what we now understand as counterinsurgency" (Duffield, 2007: p. viii). International aid agencies in Afghanistan therefore maintain, for security reasons, a low profile. Even "humanitarians now finds itself rubbing shoulders with a single superpower and its allies, and it is this relationship that is a primary cause of concern for aid workers today. [...] One of the most immediate causes for concern is that global humanitarianism is highly biased towards a few situations that interests the most powerful Western politicians," (Vaux, 2006, p. 240).

Being part of a context with an own agenda is having influence on a context' driving dynamics – which in the case of Somalia are also violent ones. Humanitarian aid is part of the context of conflict, and where it is given it will inevitably become a part of the political economy of conflict. It influences the decision-making of key actors in conflict and in post-conflict reconstruction, especially elite actors, who often direct or control economic resources and political power and may have a localized monopoly on the use of violence” (Beswick & Jackson, 2011: p. 78). The presence of international aid agencies, might for example threaten the position of local factions: “if insurgents know that development projects will weaken their positions, they have an incentive to oppose them, which may exacerbate in conflict” (Crost & Johnston, 2010, p. 2). It is the question how international aid agencies make a difference in peoples lives, how they – through their presence and practices – affect the dynamics of conflict on the ground that, for international aid agencies, are essential to understand not only in order to ‘do no harm’, but also to be effective in achieving its goals.

Although this question seems to be of utmost importance for intervening in a conflict affected context, little is known about the interactions between aid and the dynamics of violence (Goodhand, 2002), and neither of the mechanisms that are behind this interaction in Somalia. These interactions, as consequences of international aid agencies being part of a context, are particularly interesting for Somalia, because “in a context like Somalia, where resources are extremely scarce, agencies are not only a livelihood provider in terms of the actual goods they deliver to beneficiaries, but also in terms of the employment and contracts that they represent” (Abild, 2010). Aid in resource-scarce environments thus might become a resource itself. “Given that in some cases NGOs can provide up to 90 percent of paid employment in a region or can represent a large proportion of resources coming into a region, especially in poor countries, the negative impacts can be significant” (Chigas, 2006). This can influence ‘incentive systems’ one way or another, as aid not only affects “the size of the economic pie and how it is sliced but also the balance of power among the competing actors and the rules of the game by which they compete. [...] The political impacts of aid can help to decide whether the peace endures or war resumes“ (Boyce in Goodhand, 2002, p. 840).

This all leads me to the proposition that aid agencies play a significant role within dynamics of conflict in Somalia. This is an issue that remained relatively untouched in the literature and in practice, as “the gap between Somali realities on the ground and the set of assumptions on which aid and diplomatic polities toward Somalia have been constructed is wide and deep” (Menkhaus, 2009: p. 224). There have been cases of well intentioned but ill-advised external interventions that felt victim to the law of unintended consequences, making things actually worse (Menkhaus, 2009), which was also acknowledged by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to

Somalia Ahmedou Ould-Abdalla who pointed to a lack of comprehensive understanding of the situation when he described “the acceptance of impunity for human rights abuses and aid’s exacerbating role in the conflict as the biggest challenge” (Abild, 2010, p. 81). International aid agencies *do* account for the weight of the world, but they should also account for their own practices. “The *raison d’être* of humanitarian assistance is alleviation of suffering. If such action contradicts this purpose by doing harm, then a focus on the issue is indeed warranted” (Terry, 2002).

1.3 Research aim

The issues raised above lead me to the research aim of scrutinizing *how* international aid organisations interact with dynamics of conflict in Somalia and to examine whether aid agencies are ‘in a state of exception’ in Somalia. This includes unravelling the *mechanisms* behind interaction: not solely the interaction itself but the way interaction is working (out) between international aid agencies and dynamics of conflict in Somalia. Therefore, an understanding of how international aid agencies interact with possible spoilers of peace and stability – with dynamics of conflict – is crucial for not only “do no harm” but also to “do the good we [aid workers] mean it to do” (Anderson, 1999: p. 3).

Through exposing how international aid agencies interact with dynamics of conflict and subsequently influence these dynamics in Somalia, this research contributes to a better understanding of how international aid agencies should operate in order to be conflict-sensitive in the context of Somalia.

1.4 Methodology

Researching how international aid agencies interact with dynamics of conflict is a rather broad topic: aid workers are also working in countries as Afghanistan, where international aid agencies encounter security challenges as well (Goodhand & Sedra, 2010). However, as outlined in § 1.2, the case of Somalia is quite extraordinary. This thesis therefore serves as a single-case study. A case study attempts to understand an issue or problem using the case as a specific illustration. It is not simply a choice of what is to be studied, but rather a strategy of exploring through of in-depth data collection within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007). George and Bennett (2005: p. 17) define a case as an “instance of a class of events”, such as “revolution”, or “kinds of economic systems” that the researcher studies with the aim of theory development: A case is thus a well-defined aspect of a historical episode that the investigator selects for analysis, rather than a historical event itself. The case of Somalia has proven to be significant in representing a lack of humanitarian space: international aid agencies that operate in a setting where conflict is persistent. Given the specific dynamics within the Somali context, the research’ outcomes do not serve as a blueprint for other cases but rather aim to provide a deeper understanding of the

mechanisms that are behind international aid agencies interacting with dynamics of conflict. The findings could, for example, then be compared to other cases, such as international aid agencies in Afghanistan.

Subsequently, this research is qualitative of nature. Although it includes a literature study to Somalia's context, the outcomes will be dependent on the data gathered through interviews. Through Pierre Bourdieu's stance towards epistemology – the theoretical framework for this thesis (see § 2.2), this research account for both ideas that human beings are predictable as well as unpredictable in their interaction. Bourdieu's project was to “grasp the practical strategies people employed, their relationship to the explanations they gave (to themselves as well as to others), and the ways in which people's pursuit of their own ends nonetheless tended reproduce objective patterns which they did not choose and of which they might even be unaware” (Calhoun, 2000). Therefore, this research describes the *field* (§ 2.3; chapter 3) from ‘without’ through drawing on academic literature and reports on Somalia and aid practices. However, because “interactions among people (...) are difficult to capture with existing [quantitative] measures” (Creswell, 2007: p. 40), this research tries to understand human action through a qualitative research – from ‘within’. Through qualitative research, the researcher has the ability to ask specific questions, or follow-up questions while having face-to-face interaction (Creswell, 2007: p. 37), and is by doing so able to examine the meaning that is given to it by the participant. Unlike statistical research, that “necessary leaves out many contextual and intervening variables” (George & Bennett, 2005: p. 21), qualitative research is able to provide for a better understanding of the problem *within* its context.

Data collected from interviews with aid professionals that work in Somalia are coded in the themes of 1) cultural capital, 2) social capital, and 3) economic capital. These guises of capital are derived from this thesis' theoretical framework and described in paragraph 2.2.2. Within the literature on aid and conflict, the economic capital of international aid agencies is emphasized as an underlying mechanism of interaction between aid and dynamics of conflict, but how do cultural capital and social capital account for mechanisms behind such interaction? Qualitative research gives the possibility to establish themes in a research case, to uncover new or omitted variables, hypothesises, causal paths, causal mechanisms, types, or interaction effects (George & Bennett, 2005: p. 109), and to gain a deeper understanding of the issue. Therefore, the analysis of this single-case

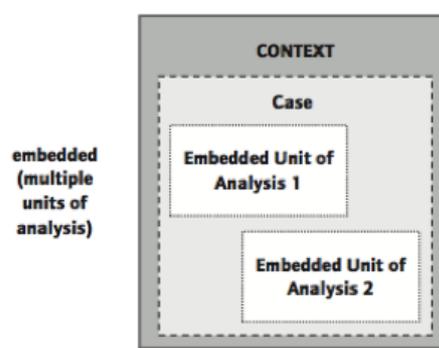


Fig. 1: The embedded, single-case design (Yin, 2003: p. 40)

study is 'embedded': having multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2003: p. 42). The themes of this analysis are the guises of capital generated from the Bourdieusian theoretical framework described in the next chapter.

1.4.1 Interviews

Within the capacity of intern security advisor of Oxfam Novib, one-on-one interviews were held between June and September 2013 in Nairobi, The Hague and Amsterdam with professionals working for international aid agencies that operate in Somalia. These agencies include Oxfam, the ICRC, CARE, Save the Children, IHH, World Vision, IMC, MSF and the DRC. I also interviewed aid workers from local partner organisations of Oxfam, such as HARDO, CED and PHRN. In addition, I interviewed an employee of a donor organisation, the EEAS, a humanitarian affairs officer from OCHA, and three security specialists of NSP. The aid professionals I interviewed had different positions within the aid agency, but were all working on or in Somalia. The interviews were rather guided conversations than structured queries with the characteristic of having an open-ended nature (Yin, 2003). Interviewees were asked on their experiences and thoughts about security related issues, the way they interacted with local actors and their opinions about aid practices and security and conflict in Somalia. The interviews always started with a personal component: the interviewees' position within their organisation. Then the objectives, values and principles of the organisation were discussed; its practices, position and ways of operating in Somalia; and finally the various issues they encountered when operating in Somalia and the interviewees' perspectives on this. Through this manner, interviewees became informants rather than respondents, which is often critical to the success of a case study (Yin, 2003): "Such persons not only provide the case study investigator with insights into a matter but also can suggest sources of corroboratory or contrary evidence – and also initiate the access to such sources" (Yin, 2003: p. 90).

1.4.2 Limitations

Interviews were carried out in a semi-structured way, so that participants were encouraged to share as much as possible on their own initiative. However, this can lead to weaknesses outlined by Yin (2003), such as a 'response bias' and 'reflexivity' – the interviewee gives what the interviewer wants to hear. I tried to overcome this by preventing the interview to be 'ruled' by the questionnaire and to carry out the interview at the interviewee's place of choice – the field at the site where participants' experience the issue or problem under study (Creswell, 2007).⁶

A further research limitation is the way organisations have different aims. Although the aid workers I interviewed all worked on humanitarian and development aid, their organisations'

⁶ With the exception of one interview, which was recorded at the Westgate Shopping mall in Nairobi, all interviews were recorded at the office of the aid worker interviewed.

aims are sometimes differentiated and, as a consequence, their practices can vary, hence their interaction with dynamics of conflict. To overcome this, I interviewed aid professionals from as many different organisations as possible, such as Christian organisations as World Vision; humanitarian organisations that emphasize their neutrality as the ICRC; a Turkish NGO called IHH; and an overarching organisation focussing on security (NSP). In addition, I interviewed aid workers with different positions. Finally, I triangulate the qualitative information through already existing literature.

Finally, a limitation is mentioned by Shearer, who argues in his article *Aiding or Abetting* that evidence for the significant role of aid towards dynamics of conflict heavily relies on anecdotal evidence, and not on quantifiable evidence. He concludes that scholars claiming how aid agencies' affect conflict could very well tell an "exaggerated tale" (Shearer, 2002: p. 193).

1.5 Research questions

In order to unravel how international aid agencies interact with dynamics of conflict, as outlined in the research aim, this thesis will draw on a sociological-theoretical framework that addresses the positions of actors within their social space. This framework will serve as a basis to analyse the practices of international aid agencies within the Somali context, with the aim of answering the main research question:

To what extent does the presence of international aid agencies affect dynamics of conflict in Somalia?

2.5.1 Sub questions

The sub questions will refer to the Bourdieusian framework used in this thesis: to the relative position international aid agencies take in the Somali context and their interaction with dynamics of conflict.

I. How do international aid agencies interact within the field of conflict in Somalia for social capital?

II. How do international aid agencies interact within the field of conflict in Somalia for cultural capital?

III. How do international aid agencies interact within the field of conflict in Somalia for economic capital?

2 A BOURDIEUSIAN FRAMEWORK

As we can see on the 2013 World Press-winning picture on this front-page, a group of women is playing basketball in Somalia's capital Mogadishu, protected by an armed guard who is overseeing the scene. This game of basketball would not have been possible just a few years earlier, when the radical Islamic insurgent group *al-Shabaab* ruled Mogadishu and forbade playing football and other games, together with measures ranging from a ban on selling *khat* (local plant used as narcotic drug) to the ringing of school-bells (because they sound like church-bells).⁷ The fact that the game is guarded indicates that the women do not acquire enough acceptance within their social space to ensure their safety. In fact, these women who “just want to dunk” risk their lives while (and after) playing basketball. Security therefore needs to be imposed; the game protected.

This picture is a metaphor for the way international aid agencies do operate in Somalia. International aid agencies that operate in Somalia also hire/contract armed guards to guarantee their safety and the continuation of their practices (Grosse-kettler, 2004; Menkhaus, 2012). Security advisors are, like the armed guard, hired to oversee potential risks to the organisation and projects. Hence, and more fundamentally, the metaphor of a ‘game’ entails the *Bourdieuian* theoretical framework used in this thesis, that is the way these players are interconnected within the basketball field, international aid agencies are interconnected with other actors present in Somalia. In the way that the capacities, interests and practices of some players will affect the decisions other players take in the *field*, the interests, capacities and practices of international aid agencies will affect the decisions of other actors in Somalia.

2.1 Intense competition

In the light of the research aim – unravelling the mechanisms of interaction between international aid agencies and dynamics of conflict – I will deploy a sociological framework that is concerned with the relative positions of actors within a social space, their relations and interactions. Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) takes here a central position. “A former rugby player and a reader of the later Wittgenstein, Bourdieu was drawn to the metaphor of games to convey his sense of social life. But by ‘game’ he didn’t mean mere entertainments. Rather, he meant a serious athlete’s understanding of a game. He meant the experience of being passionately involved in play, engaged in a struggle with others and with our own limits, over stakes to which we are (at least for the moment) deeply committed. He meant intense competition. He meant for

⁷ “List of Relief Agencies banned by al-Shabaab” (Somali Report, 24.7.2011)
<http://somalireport.com/index.php/post/1214>

us to recall losing ourselves in the play of a game, caught in its flow in such a way that no matter how individualistically we struggle we are also constantly aware of being part of something larger – a team, certainly, but also the game itself’ (Calhoun, 2000). Bourdieu (1985: p. 196) regarded agents and groups of agents as “defined by their relative positions within that space”, which would determine their interaction.

Although Bourdieu’s contributions cover many disciplines and subjects, his theories on the practical strategies that people employ make his efforts very applicable to the research aims previously mentioned. These practical strategies do not solely cover individual choices and how they affect others, but also account for the overarching context, and the means individuals or groups can deploy to pursue their interests. Analysing how the practical strategies’ international aid agencies deploy, and the way these strategies affect others, is key for understanding how international aid agencies interact with dynamics of conflict.

2.2 Practice

‘Practice’ serves as a central motif in Pierre Bourdieu’s anthropological and sociological reflections (Pilario, 2005) and need to be understood beyond the dualisms of structure and action. In theories of conflict, as in the social sciences, we can see different variations on two sets of ontological and epistemological themes (Demmers, 2012), based on theoretical positions to the questions ‘what primarily moves people’ (ontological) and ‘how we should know the world’ (epistemological). According to Jolle Demmers (2012), there is a fundamental divide in the social sciences between approaches that attempts to account for human action by reference to movement in an encompassing social structure; and approaches that take the actions of individuals to be ‘the stuff of history’ and that regards structures as the outcomes of previous actions.

Bourdieu, however, broke with both of these positions and instead argued that *both* the individual and social structures influence practice. Social life is always a struggle; it both imposes constraints and requires improvisation (Calhoun, 2000). Again referring to the game, he argued: “nothing is simultaneously freer and more constrained than the action of the good player. He quite naturally materializes at just the place the ball is about to fall, as if the ball were in command of him – but by that very fact, he is in command of the ball” (Bourdieu, 1990: p. 63). Structure is thus enabling action as well as constraining it, as action is enabling structure and vice versa. People are according to Bourdieu nor solely rational, self-conscious actors, nor simple ‘marionettes’ of structures: “Practice has a logic which is not that of the logician. It puts symbols and knowledge together “practically,” that is, in a philosophically unrigorous but convenient way for practical use” (Bourdieu in Calhoun, 2000). Therefore, Bourdieu both refuses to ‘reduce’ human practice in social life to a schedule like structuralisms tends to do – to

see humans as puppets doing what is determined by structures, but he also refuses to see humans as totally independent, rational, calculating individuals that only do what is in their best material interests – like robots. By so, Bourdieu created a theory of practice that acknowledges the importance of social structures, from experiences and economic means to a family name to institutions as the government, while nevertheless emphasizing the importance of individual human actions as improvisations in various (new) situations. He did this by introducing the “practical sense” – the “feel for the game” which is *habitus*.

2.2.1 Habitus: the ‘feel for the game’

In *The Logic of Practice* (1990), Bourdieu defined habitus as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can objectively be adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (Bourdieu, 1990: p. 53).

Notoriously difficult to pin down, the term “habitus” means basically the embodied sensibility that makes possible structured improvisation (Calhoun, 2000). Bourdieu argued that learning is not only mediated through language, but also embodied, which even outside the level of consciousness is already in active interaction with the world around it (Pilario, 2005). He means that action is not simply rule-following but consist of improvising. The capacity to improvise is learned through interaction *and* through self-creation. The habitus is structured and structuring, therefore “embedded in the repetition (structured) and occasionally innovation (structuring) of action” (Calhoun, 2000). “It is of course ever ruled out that the responses of the habitus may be accompanied by a strategic calculation (...). But these responses are first defined, without any calculation, in relation to objective potentialities” (Bourdieu, 1990: p. 53). Habitus thus does not involve uncalculated, unconscious responses of the individual when encountering specific situations: these responses bear the whole history – his or her experiences, education, family name, job, financial means – of that very individual.

Again, the metaphor of the game might give some more clarity. The movement of the women in the basketball field is not only determined by the rules of the game. More primarily, it is their “sense of anticipation formed by years of physical and psychological training as well as [their] concrete response to the game of the moment” (Pilario, 2005: p. 124) that consists their action. They cannot know all the alternative possibilities before passing the ball, and do not weight all the pros and cons before doing so. “Thus, beyond explicitly obeying ‘rules’ or executing structures, practice consists of improvisations and inventions at the point of urgency: one can anticipate the sense of the future within the present, thanks to the fact of being born into the game” (Pilario, 2005: 124). Embodied dispositions provide the ‘feel for the game’, which cannot

be explained wholly by the rules of the game (Bridge, 2011). This is what Bourdieu called *habitus*.

2.2.2 Capital: the ‘*stakes of the game*’

Bourdieu argued that the social order is determined by the structure of capital’s distribution: being is not as an either/or question. Instead, the question should be ‘how much?’ as Bourdieu argued that ‘being’ is unequally distributed over the social space. To understand any social situation or interaction, Bourdieu suggested, we should ask what game (or games) the actors are playing: “What is at stake in the play?” (Calhoun, 2000) The women on the basketball field are not equally ‘proficient’ in the game. This depends on their accumulated capital – their 1) social, 2) cultural and 3) economic capital that expresses itself in in the form of practice within the field. As Bourdieu argued that we try to actively accumulate being – compete for a monopoly in a given *field* (see § 2.3)– these women try to win the game. That is their interest: to ‘be there’, to participate, to admit that the game is worth pursuing; “it is to recognize the game and to recognize its stakes” (Bourdieu 1998: p. 77 quoted in Pilario, 2005: p. 142).

Hence, Bourdieu argues that interaction masks the structures that are realized in them: “this is one of those cases where the visible, that which is immediately given, hides the invisible which determines it” (Bourdieu, 1989: p. 16). In other words: within a given field there are hierarchies between people or groups (or classes) that are not really visible when they do interact. But, when it matters, these objective relations – that are “relations between positions occupied within the distribution of resources which are or may become active, effective, like aces in a game of cards, in the competition for the appropriation of scarce goods of which the social universe is the site” – will become visible (Bourdieu, 1989: p. 17). In his work, Bourdieu asked himself how these objective relations can be grasped if they are irreducible to the interactions by which they manifest themselves, and so he came up with what Calhoun (2000) called the most important features of Bourdieu’s theory: the three “guises” of capital: economic, social, and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1985; 1989, p. 17), and their interplay, to analyse social relations.

2.2.2.1 Economic capital: *what you have*

Within the forms of capital, economic capital is the most characteristic of capitalism and within this, the most effective form (Pilario, 2005). It can be directly expressed in monetary forms or through property rights, stocks and shares, and is by so the most concrete form of capital. Economic capital needs to be symbolically mediated (for which one needs the other two forms of capital: cultural and social capital) for its consequent legitimation. “It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in its one form recognized by economic theory” (Bourdieu, 1986).

2.2.2.2 Social capital: *whom you know*

Social capital “points to one’s social connections within society which can be seen in personal economic-symbolic interaction but which can also take on institutionalized forms as in the appeal to a common ‘name’” (Pilario, 2005: p. 146). Having a family name; being member of a political party; working for a company: these names influence ones social capital. For example, a person who is part of the *Digle-Mirifle* clan in Somalia has significant less social capital then a person who is part of the *Darod* clan. As a consequence of their lack of social capital, many of these agro-pastoralists lacked access to humanitarian relief (Menkhaus, 2012; see also § 5). A persons’ network of connections is therefore not only important for ones position in Somali society, it is in fact vital for ones survival in times of humanitarian crises.

2.2.2.3 Cultural capital: *what you know*

According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital exists in an *embodied state*, an *objectified state* and an *institutionalized state*. Cultural capital can be acquired, but it can also be inherited. Degrees, technical skills, educational qualifications are *institutionalized* forms of cultural capital: “the autodidact’s qualifications can be questioned at any moment regardless of his/her efficiency, whereas the ‘professional’ is secure in one’s post, thanks to his/her diploma and degrees” (Pilario, 2005: p. 146). Art works, books, machines are *objectified* forms of cultural capital that can be transmitted into economic capital (when sold), but what is difficult to transmit, however, is the “specific *embodied* dispositions cultural capital engenders, e.g., to appreciate a painting, to use a computer or to be interested in books” (Pilario, 2005: p. 145). Cultural capital can only be effective “insofar as it is appropriated by agents and implemented as a weapon and a stake in the struggles within the fields of cultural production [...] and in the field of social classes” (Bourdieu, 1986: p. 247). The question “who are you to say this?” is here suitable. “Directly economic capital operates in a money-based market that can be indefinitely extended. Cultural capital, by contrast, operates as a matter of status, which is often recognized only within specific fields” (Calhoun, 2000).

2.2.2.4 Conversions of capital

These guises of capital are interrelated and can be ‘transformed’ into one another. For example, international aid agencies that compete within the field of aid for a grant from a donor, might in their proposals write about their contacts and relations in the field (social capital), the ‘good name’ of the agency (social capital), the credible means to monitor the projects (cultural capital), their strong understanding of the situation (cultural capital), etc. When one aid agency ‘wins’ the grant from other aid agencies, it has utilized its social and cultural capital to gain economic capital. Yet, by the very fact of hiring professionals that embody cultural (their knowledge of the field) and social capital (their reputation and connections), the aid agency utilized its economic

capital to increase its social and cultural capital. Through their economic capital, aid agencies use their employees for their accumulated social and cultural capital. The guises of capital can therefore be convertible, although it is, as Bourdieu argues, difficult to gain social and cultural capital by economic capital unless economic capital is misrecognized as such – for example through a gift to win ‘loyalty’, or in the form of salary. Economic, social and cultural capital, therefore, are very much interconnected and together key for ones position in a given *field*.

2.3 Field ‘of conflict’: *the playing board*

If social life is thought of as a game, then field is the *playing board*. “The ‘feel of the game’ (habitus) and the stakes involved (capital) only exist and function in relation to the game-field” (Pilario, 2005: p. 160). “Farmers could not figure out why philosophers spend the whole of their waking lives arguing about a single hair-splitting distinction. Nor do theoreticians care about when and how frequent the rainfall is during the year – a fact quite crucial to farmers’ lives. The stakes, therefore, are only effective within the same field (Pilario, 2005: p. 160). A field is, according to Bourdieu, “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu in Pilario, 2005: p. 160): the economic field, the artistic field, the literary field, the religious field, etc. These objective positions are relational with other actors competing for capital within a specific field: “Bourdieu invites us to imagine the social world as a multi-dimensional space where agents or groups of agents occupy relative positions based on first, the overall volume of capital they possess and, second, on the relative weight of the type of capital at their disposal” (Pilario, 2005: p. 169). Since the aim of this thesis is to reflect on the interaction of international aid agencies with dynamics of conflict, the field in question is the ‘field of conflict’ in Somalia. This field, together with the presence of international aid agencies, will be described in chapter 3.

2.4 Reflection

Within conflict studies, there are many theories pointing to different dynamics as ‘cause’ or ‘fuel’ for conflict. The “greed versus grievance” debate is an example of this, as Collier (2000) argued that economical opportunities to materially gain from conflict cause civil war, while other theorists, among others Gurr (1971) argued that grievances mainly ‘cause’ civil war. Although it is agreed by now that the dichotomy seems to be more nuanced, there are still many disciplines within the study of conflict. For example, other theorists emphasized on the importance of ethnicity, or differences in culture, even “civilisation”, or ecology. All these different perspectives and theories make studying violent conflict a delicate occupation, which often raises more questions than answers. Indeed, “[...] far from being unified, the study of armed conflict and war remains fragmented between disciplinary boundaries, which produce conflicting and often mutually exclusive theories” (Porto, 2002). More specific case-studies

towards Somalia seem to emphasize various dynamics, as the 'war-economy', the lack of institutions, the importance of 'clannism', 'warlordism', etc. A sociological perspective therefore accounts for a more comprehensible and inclusive view towards the interaction of aid with conflict in Somalia. A *Bourdieuian* perspective to place international agencies and their practices within a context to the centre of the analysis has the distinct advantage of providing a more encompassing framework that deals with economic, social and cultural factors to better *understand* and *explain* the position, practices and interaction of international aid agencies within a violent context.

3

SOMALIA: A HUMANITARIAN STORY

“If one took the time to breath Mogadishu in, to stop and watch it for a moment, one would have glimpsed a unique time fading quickly into history. The ancient charm of the city had withstood Portuguese invasions, Italian fascist colonialism, and ten years of soviet-sponsored “Scientific Socialism.” Now it was about to experience a seemingly benign invasion of young aid workers, people with money and a culture and lifestyle that was contagious. Nothing in Somalia’s history had prepared it for this.”

Michael Maren (1997), *The Road to Hell*, p. 39

3.1 Framing Somalia

The way we understand a context is as crucial for the outcome of the analysis as the analytical perspective itself. “If analytical perspectives affect the way we understand violent conflict, so too do the frames chosen to surround and organise episodes of violence. Frames are boundaries around what is observed; they help in identifying patterns among the data” (Cramer, 2006: p. 49). If we understand and categorize violence in Somalia as a strictly civil – internal – phenomena, than analytical outcomes might focus on social structures as clan cleavages. When we see violent conflict in Somalia as part of the global system, social structures will probably be analysed beyond these cleavages and emphasize more on international influences. Cramer (2006: p. 49) argues that the way we understand and subsequently categorize violent conflict may rest on a categorical *trompe l’oeil* – an optical illusion, and are in fact more complex realities. Indeed, explanations of Somalia’s extraordinary crisis have tended to fall in one of two camps: one that primarily blamed internal factors and one that emphasised the role of external drivers (Menkhaus, 2009). These explanations address Somalia as suffering from civil war, state collapse, failed peace talks, violent lawlessness and warlordism, internal displacement and refugee flows, chronic food insecurity, piracy, regional proxy wars and Islamic extremism. There is ‘no simple narrative’ in the Somali crisis and both internal and external factors have played their roles (Menkhaus, 2009). Through including the role of foreign aid in Somalia’s history, I include both internal and external factors and go beyond these two camps of explanations.

3.1.1 A history of Somalia

Somalia has been suffering from state-collapse for many years, internally fragmented, fractured and subject to more than a dozen peace conferences (Menkhaus, 2007) and external military interventions. A place “bereft of central government, cantonized into clan fiefdoms, and wracked by deadly spasms of violence” (Bruton, 2010), and “the world’s most utterly failed state” (Economist, 4.9.2008 quoted in Linke & Raleigh, 2011) – a label that, despite the declaration of

a federal government in 2012 and much academic research, remains ‘prominent’ today (Menkhaus, 2014). It has even been argued that the state Somalia is a myth, both a false belief and an idealised conception, as most Somalis have lived with a dizzying array of flags, but rarely unified under one of their own (Hesse, 2010).

However, at the beginning of 2013 things were looking up for Somalia (Hammond, 2013). An international recognized government – the Federal Government of Somalia⁸ (FGS) was installed and al-Shabaab had been pushed out Somalia’s major cities Mogadishu and Kismayo. UN agencies decided to move during the end of 2012 to Mogadishu; Great Britain, after an absence of 20 years, opened its embassy⁹ and several INGOs – such as the DRC and Save the Children, also ‘took the plunge’ into Somalia’s context. Ultimately, there were even voices of hoping Mogadishu would be a tourist hotspot.¹⁰

But is Somalia indeed opening up, and from what exactly? Is Somalia still experiencing a civil war? And is it solely an internal matter, or should it be understood in the context of globalisation? This paragraph attempts to understand conflict in Somalia by addressing its complex history.

The Somali nation and ‘clannism’

Somalia has a long and rich history. Arab and Persian trading settlements emerged over a thousand years ago in Mogadishu and other coast cities as Zeila (Saylac), Merca (Marka) and Brava (Baraawa), where Somalis adopted Islam (Sunni, of the Sha’afi School of Law) as their main religion. These cities were Muslim centres of commerce and a hub for movement to the West and South of Africa. Mogadishu’s earliest mosques are among the oldest on the East African coast (Lewis, 2011). After the European ‘scramble for Africa’ around 1900, the Somali nation was divided into five parts. The eastern part (South Central Somalia and Puntland) was an Italian colony, and together with Somaliland, which was a British ‘protectorate’, this is what is now recognized as Somalia. The third part – what is now Djibouti – was a French colony. Other Somalis eventually came under the British flag in northern Kenya or were located in the Ogaden in Ethiopia (Lewis, 2011). The five-star in the Somali flag still remembers to these areas (Hesse, 2010).

Although the Somali *nation* existed before the state, Somalis themselves are not unified: “A striking paradox about Somalia is how it is so internally divided when in cultural, ethnic,

⁸ Along with its ‘provisional constitution’, adopted on the first of August 2012 in Mogadishu.

⁹ “William Hague opens new British Embassy in Somalia” (BBC, 25.4.2013):

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-22296317>

¹⁰ “Holidays in Somalia? Mogadishu hopes to be tourist hotspot (CNN, 12.6.2013)

<http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/30/business/mogadishu-holidays-business-economy>

religious, language and historical terms it is highly homogeneous” (Abild, 2010, p. 74; Lewis, 2004). Lewis (2011) notes that the distinction between nomad and cultivator coincides roughly with the most marked internal cultural division. The farmers and agro-pastoralists are a confederation of clans called *Digil* and *Rahanweyn* (collectively known as Sab), while the “quintessential” pastoralist Somalis are the *Dir*, *Isaq*, *Hawiye* and *Darod* clans. The Somali nation as a whole thus consists of six main clan divisions, which are to some extent geographically distinct (Lewis, 2011: p. 4). These clan divisions are the basic building blocks of Somali society (Lewis, 2004). In fact, one ‘does not belong to Somali society unless one belongs to a kinship group’ (Laitin and Samatar, 1987: p. 31). This is not to say that there are just six ‘groups’, as there are subclans, sub-subclans and beyond. “For example, in the *Isaq* clan ... there are no less than three (some scholars say as many as eight) subclans: the *Habar Awal*, *Habar Jaalo*, and the *Harhajis*. The *Habar Awal* are then divided into at least two sub-subclans: the *Sa’ad Muse* and the *Lise Muse*... and so on” (Hesse, 2010, p. 249).

The traditional greeting “Is it peace?” shouted at a distance while approaching characterizes the guarded fashion of one towards ‘those of other, potentially hostile groups’ (Lewis, 2011: p. 24). This also applies to foreigners: “in the harsh struggle for survival which is the nomad’s lot, suspicion is the natural attitude towards those with whom one competes for access to scarce pasture and water. This defence mechanism is extended to all contexts of social interaction and hence becomes a national characteristic” (Lewis, 2011: p. 25). Although there is criticism on Lewis’ primordialist emphasis of clan divisions¹¹ (Besteman, 1996; Kapteijns, 2011), there is an overall agreement that indeed clan divisions are part of the process to understand the Somali context. “Undoubtedly, clan dynamics continue to drive conflict amongst Somalis, albeit these dynamics are not always obvious to the casual observer” (Hesse, 2010, p. 251).

General Siyad Barre and the Ogaden War

The Eurocentric political model that was introduced after Somali post-colonial independence did not last long and, in 1969, General Siyad Barre took power through a military coup without encountering opposition (Abild, 2010). Barre held the reins of power firmly in his hands and tried to abolish traditional clan divisions in order to strengthen the ‘nation’ (Lewis, 2011: p. 38). As a stage of the Cold War, he adopted so-called ‘scientific socialism’. In the name of ‘his’ nation, Barre supported the Ogaden Somali rebels in Ethiopia, which subsequently started the Ogaden War (1977-1978) with Ethiopia. The Soviet Union, however, switched sides and supported Ethiopia while the United States supported Somalia. The Ogaden War is often

¹¹ Catherine Besteman (1996: p. 120) argued that emphasizing clan-divisions oversimplified the complex and dynamic hierarchies of status, class, race, and language that were central to the patterning of violence in post-1991 Southern Somalia. The so-called clan basis of recent warfare was the result – not the cause – of contemporary conflicts and competition (ibid, p. 129).

referred as the beginning of the collapse of the Somali state (Abild, 2010). Indeed, after the Ogaden War, the state started to crumble through a combination of government repression, heightened clan cleavages and animosities, gross levels of corruption, low salaries, a collapsing public school system (which was once a source of pride in Somalia) and a dysfunctional civil service (committed civil servants were seen as a threat and removed) (Menkhaus, 2007). Barre, faced with the prospect of losing power, abandoned his previous effort to abolish ‘clannism’ and instead – using a divide-and-rule tactic– resurrected and ratcheted up clan differences (Hesse, 2010). For example, his government became to be known as MOD: *Mareehaan; Ogadeni; and Dulbahante*, three subclans to the Darod clan to which he, his mother and his son-in-law belonged (Hesse, 2010). This stoked deep inter-clan animosities and distrust.

After the Ogaden war, an era of politicisation of humanitarian aid began (Menkhaus, 2010). The Barre regime, for example, used refugee camps as opportunities where government officials positioned themselves as intermediaries (or ‘gatekeepers’), diverting much of the relief. Foreign diplomats who dared to question these matters were expelled. Indeed, during the cold war, foreign aid led to an unsustainable patronage system (by the mid 1980s, 57 per cent of Somalia’s gross domestic product derived from foreign aid while up to 50 per cent of GDP was spent on defence and security (Webersik, 2004, p. 520)) and when Western powers did freeze that aid as a result of the ending of the cold war in 1988-89, the Somali state turned out to be a castle built on sand (Menkhaus, 2007: p. 80).

State collapse, famine and civil war

Menkhaus (2007: p. 80) points out that Somalia was already a failed state by the mid 1980s. During the cold war, foreign aid reduced government accountability to the Somali people, as Somalia externally became a ‘ward of the international aid community’ and internally an instrument of repression to dominate political opponents, recourses (foreign aid as one of these recourses) and rival clans. The peace with Ethiopia set out a sequence of developments that eventually led to the fall of general Siyad Barre in January 1991. While Barre, as agreed, stopped his support for the *Ogaden* rebels in Ethiopia, Ethiopia stopped supporting an *Isaq* Somaliland independence movement. This led to an all-out civil war when Somaliland *Isaq* clansman did an “audacious onslaught” (Lewis, 2011: P. 71) on military installations in Northern Somalia resulting in, again, thousands of refugees.¹² The civil war led to appeals for *Darod* solidarity (armed by the Barre regime) against *Isaq* clans, which in turn evoke *Isaq* appeals to *Hawiye* solidarity against Barre’s *Darod* militias. This threatened Barre’s position further, and in

¹² *Isaq* and *Majerteyn* clans suffered fearful persecution under Barre’s regime (Linke & Raleigh, 2011, p. 53), which had one of the worst human rights records in Africa (Leeson, 2007, p. 693).

desperation he turned his heavy artillery on the *Hawiye* quarters of Mogadishu, provoking such an uprising that Barre was forced to flee the city on 26 January 1991.

The era of warlords & the war economy

When the Somali state collapsed in 1991, ‘an economy of plunder’ developed (Menkhaus, 2007). Somaliland unilaterally declared itself independent and started a remarkable peaceful period of reconciliation, while factional warfare devastated Southern Somalia. During this period, warlords¹³ – such as Mohammed Farah Aided and Ali Mahdi – arose out of a period of lawlessness and impunity, characterized by looting (and the exploiting of aid (Abild, 2010)), a near-universal spread of armaments and massive internal displacements. This included the revenge killings of people of the *Darod* clan-family, but also fighting between Aided and Mahdi militias, both *Hawiye* but Aided belonging to the *Habar Gidir* subclan and Mahdi to the *Abgal* subclan (Lewis, 2011: p. 73). The chaos was combined with a continuing drought that resulted in a devastating famine in which half a million people were estimated to have perished (Lewis, 2011: p. 78). Because international relief aid was routinely looted and stolen, the UN Security Council authorised the first of a series of peacekeeping and famine relief operations to Somalia. The first, the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) entered Somalia in 1992, later on supported by a US-led humanitarian intervention ‘Operation Restore Hope’. Both failed and UNOSOM withdrew in 1995, leaving Somalia still behind in a state of war that certainly did not restore hope. Webersik (2004: p. 529) observed how the decrease in aid after the withdrawal of the UNOSOM in 1995 led to a competition for foreign assistance, resulting in renewed clan cleavages,¹⁴ but, “most disastrously, however, the UNOSOM missions fostered the conditions for lasting conflict by consolidating the clan-based factions” (Compagnon, 1998: p. 87 quoted in Linke & Raleigh, 2011, p. 51).

A war economy emerged. War can be a sustainable system of economic organisation (Grossekettler, 2004) and indeed, Shortland, Christopoulou, & Makatsoris (2013: p. 559) found evidence of Somali urban elite groups *not* being affected by civil war and actually having no incentives to end conflict. The UN monitoring group on Somalia and Eritrea report of 2013

¹³ Important to mention is the problem of the common labelling of warlordism as ‘just’ predatory behaviour and solely clan-based (as clanship is an elastic principle, differently manipulated by ambitious power-hungry individuals (Lewis, 2004)), which is not always true (Marchal, 2007). Warlords (Somalia has known 24 of them) are part of their society as well: they are not just ‘bosses’ or militias and did not emerge only out of a desire for greed (some political officials in all cabinets of Puntland, Somaliland or Somalia were described as ‘greediest of all time’). There was also a *demand* for warlords: they filled a vacuum or were pushed to fill a vacuum in order to perform certain duties and fulfil responsibilities: “a warlord was as dependent on his people as they were on him” (Marchal, 2007: p. 1096). “Warlords provide government functions in so-called ‘shadow states’ (Reno, 1998 in Shortland et al., 2013).

¹⁴ Webersik (2004) observed the exclusion of the *Jareer* clan from employment on aid programmes as a consequence of this competition. The marginalised *Jareer*, without access to economic and political resources, took up arms against the *Jiba* clan in order to be heard.

(UNSC, 2013/413: p. 17, note 41) noted that certain networks continue to benefit from statelessness and the war economy, in the form of charcoal smuggling (which contributes to deforestation), violating the UN arms embargo etc. After investigating where and when violence occurred, Linke & Raleigh (2011) discovered that although violence occurred throughout the country, coast cities with trade routes such as Kismayo in the South and Berbera in the North were particularly violent. This indicates private militant factions fighting for political power through control over markets (Reno 1998: p. 8 in Linke & Raleigh (2011: p. 60). Important to stress here is the dependence of internal actors as warlords or businessmen on *external actors* (Grosse-kettler, 2004). External actors are also international aid agencies. Indeed, along with the war-economy, we can also see the presence of an ‘aid-economy’ in Somalia’s history, as aid has not only benefited the so-called “beneficiaries”: It has also encountered several ‘challenges’ such as the diversion of (food) aid (Abild, 2010; Menkhaus, 2009, 2012; Shortland et al., 2013; Webersik, 2004) or the unequal distribution of it (Menkhaus, 2007, 2009; Webersik, 2006).

The Islamic Courts Union (ICU), al-Shabaab, the TFG and external interventions

A variety of ‘new’ actors emerged in the 2000s, included the Islamic Court Union (ICU), the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), and the radical insurgent group known as al-Shabaab (“The Youth”). The TFG was created in 2004 with president Abdullahi Yusuf, a former warlord, leading and backed by, among others, the US. At around the same time, the ICU emerged in Mogadishu as an attempt to curb the control of warlords and militias. The ICU provided more security than Mogadishu had seen in years, and business was booming (Abild, 2010). The ICU, however, radicalised as ICU hard-liners gained ascendancy, producing mounting tensions with Ethiopia. Feeling threatened, Ethiopia invaded Somalia and installed the TFG in Mogadishu, which had very limited local support (Menkhaus, 2009). The ICU hardliners united in the al-Shabaab insurgent group, controlling much of the main land of South Central Somalia. Combined with an extremely violent counter-insurgency of the TFG and Ethiopian forces, massive displacement took place: 700,000 of Mogadishu’s 1.3 million population were forced to flee from their homes (Menkhaus, 2009: p. 226).

The 2011 famine

The last famine, in 2011 – one of the worst in 20 years (Menkhaus, 2012), affecting some 3.1 million people (Maxwell & Fitzpatrick, 2012) – might serve as an illustrative example of the complexity and variety of actors in Somalia. Already 11 months prior to the ‘official’ declaration of famine on July 20, 2011, there were warnings of drought and an upcoming famine, but conflict, high food prices, a lack of humanitarian access along with the politicisation of aid made the famine an actual “protracted crisis” (Maxwell & Fitzpatrick, 2012). The area affected by famine was under control of the al-Shabaab insurgency (Maxwell & Fitzpatrick, 2012). As al-

Shabaab controlled much of the Somali countryside, it diverted aid out of the hands of international aid agencies. This diversion of aid and the US designation of al-Shabaab as a terrorist organisation resulted in externally imposed legal and political constraints (Menkhaus, 2012). At the same time, al-Shabaab's "Office for Supervising the Affairs of Foreign Agencies" banned several NGOs and humanitarian organisations¹⁵, accused of 'spying for the enemy' (Jackson & Aynte, 2013; Menkhaus, 2010).

Humanitarian aid was as much needed as it was unreachable. This was not only due to al-Shabaab. TFG officials, such as district commissioners, parliamentarians and ministers took the massive influx of famine relief as an opportunity to enrich themselves (Menkhaus, 2012: p. 33). In the 1980s, obstacles for aid agencies were mainly related to a systematic diversion of aid by the Somali state, in the 1990s by predatory armed groups (Menkhaus, 2012). After 2000, aid agencies were restricted by al-Shabaab's obstructionist policies, US suspension of food aid to areas controlled by al-Shabaab, the closing of operations due to 'chronic insecurity', the diversion of food aid by armed groups and corrupt officials of the TFG, and finally a 'privilege gap' through which some groups, such as the *Digle-Mirifle* clan lacked the social capital to reach aid as powerful local forces "embraced different sets of priorities about aid distribution" (Menkhaus, 2012: p. 29-34).

The Somali Federal Government and Mogadishu 'opening up'

Around 2010, the TFG failed to attract a critical mass of local support. This was due to the open blessing of the TFG by the US and other 'Western' countries, which served to isolate the government. Anti-Western sentiments permeated Somalia and at the same time propelled cooperation among previously fractured and quarrelsome extremist groups (Bruton, 2010). TFG security forces – paid by the UN Development Program – were also committing human rights violations as raping, killing and looting. Thus, 'constructive disengagement' with Somalia was the advice expressed in a special report of the US Council on Foreign Relations (Bruton, 2010). This changed in 2012 with the installation of the first government Somalia had in over 20 years. Al-Shabaab was pushed out of the city and AMISOM forces patrolled the city instead. UN agencies opened representations and international NGOs were encouraged to enter Mogadishu. Hammond (2013, p. 192) acknowledged that Somalia was rising, but also stressed the importance of not expecting too much: "it is not the first time that hopes have soared when new leadership has been brought into the Villa Somalia." Or, as the area manager of the NSP for Somalia argued: "the government is a bit obsessed with portraying that everything is nice and secure in Somalia. Cause this attracts Westerners or whatever. And of course it is not".¹⁶

¹⁵ <http://somalireport.com/index.php/post/1214> (assessed August, 2013)

¹⁶ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

Current situation

Western and UN policies in Somalia faced high levels of suspicion and mistrust among Somalis (Menkhaus, 2009), and still do (Jackson & Aynte, 2013). Although the Federal Government of Somalia is internationally recognized, domestically it is not very effective. Indeed, since 2006, 30 mini-states have been declared within Somalia that all compete within Somalia's political field for influence and resources (Hills, 2014). The Armed Conflict Location & Event Dataset April 2013 country report on Somalia is rather sceptic and noticed how narratives of Somalia's transition into post-conflict recovery and reconstruction were 'simplifications of complex geographical and spatial distributions of violence and contestation between multiple competing powers across the country' (ACLED, 2013). These contestations have been seen in Puntland, where, in order to avert violence between competing clans, elections were forced to be postponed (International Crisis Group, 2013), and in Kismayu, where clan-militias, loyal to several self-declared 'presidents of Jubaland', clashed with each other.¹⁷ "But no matter how insecure Puntland is, Mogadishu is more dangerous. The city has experienced 22 years of chronic insecurity, and there are [still] regular battles between government forces and militia groups" (Hills, 2014, p. 93).

3.1.2 Somalia: *field(s) of conflict*

Looking at Somalia's history and current dynamics of conflict, it would be misleading to speak about *the* field of conflict in Somalia, as there are several fields of conflict. Violence seems to occur because of business, along clan dynamics, through extremist groups and counter-insurgency operations, involving a variety of actors such as warlords, local authorities and government officials. Through looking at Somalia's history, we can see how both internal and external factors are deeply interconnected in Somalia's dynamics of conflict. Civil war is still at the surface but should be understood within an internationalized context, as the role of foreign forces (AMISOM, foreign aid influxes, US policies) can often be connected to dynamics of violence. The 1991 state-collapse of Somalia seemed to be a merely internal matter (and was often addressed as such), yet the freezing of foreign aid after the cold war revealed how external factors were actually crucial for keeping things together. Falling into civil war, the UN mission not only worked along ethnic lines but also empowered such discourses through their practices. Although it was a multi-billion dollar mission, it failed and left Somalia behind in a *state of emergency*: endemic armed conflict, lawless criminality and absence of formal central government (Menkhaus, 2004). During the 2011 famine, al-Shabaab diverted foreign aid and gained local support through Somali's suspicion towards the Ethiopian and Western backed

¹⁷ "Somali rivals clash in Central Kismayo" (BBC, 4.6.2013) <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22817051>, an event for which the Somali government blamed the involvement of Kenya as they backed 'one local militia against others': "Somalia accuses Kenya over Kismayo clashes" (BBC, 4.7.2013) <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23177825>

TFG. “Unsurprisingly, Somali goals diverge from the international community’s development-oriented agenda” (Hills, 2014, p. 94).

3.2 Foreign aid in Somalia

In the context described above, international aid agencies have a significant history of presence. Not only humanitarian agencies as the ICRC or its counterpart the Red Crescent Society, but also international aid agencies as, among others, INGOs as MSF, Oxfam, CARE and Save the Children. That this presence in Somalia has not always been easy for its employees is quite an understatement given the numbers of attacks on aid workers, the lack of humanitarian space (Abild, 2010) and access (Menkhaus, 2012). On the question whether or not the international aid agency would expose its employees to the security risks in the context of Somalia, CARE’s security coordinator outlined a summary of the situation of that week between July and August:

“Let me give you an example of this week only. There were like 12 hand grenade attacks in Mogadishu, including VBIED [Vehicle Born Improvised Explosive Device]... Only this week, you have 10 assassination acts being done, this week only – that is Monday to today, Thursday... Several other attacks have happened at the opposite of INGOs. The DRC, Save the Children, all this is on *Almukarramah Road*, where everything has happened. And that is the road from the airport, where the visitors, material are using to pass.

Security Coordinator, CARE, 1.8.2013

The answer was therefore a definite ‘no’: it was better to wait. Yet, many international aid agencies *do* operate in Somalia. This paragraph attempts to account for their program intensions and operating strategies.

3.2.1 Humanitarian involvement

The largest humanitarian actor in Somalia is the ICRC that, in close cooperation with the Somali Red Crescent Society, has been present in Somalia since the Ogaden War of 1977. They work on humanitarian issues as health care, livelihoods, food security and access to water, but also the promotion of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), detention visits and restoring family links. During the 2011 famine, the ICRC was the largest institution still operating in *Shabaab*-territory. Other organisations, mostly INGOs, had more difficulties operating in Somalia. MSF, running hospitals since the Somali state-collapse of 1991, had safety-guarantees with al-Shabaab but had to pull out of Somalia after several attacks and kidnappings on its personnel, tolerated or even perpetrated by al-Shabaab. CARE, active in WASH projects, pulled out after being expelled by al-Shabaab accused of spying-activities. IMC, like MSF operating in Somalia since 1991, was also expelled but, like CARE, still operates through WASH projects, drought- and famine emergency response and primary health care. Save the Children has an office in Mogadishu, and is active in nutrition, health and education programmes. Other humanitarian actors are the WFP,

Oxfam, World Vision, IHH, DRC, whom are, besides being active in humanitarian programmes, also work in refugee and internally displaced people (IDP) camps.

Because there are quite some humanitarian actors in the Somali ‘play’, humanitarian programmes are coordinated through the OCHA in order to ensure a ‘coherent response to emergencies’. This is done through a cluster programme that addresses groups of humanitarian actors within a sector, such as shelter or health.

3.2.2 Development

Development programmes are more involved in long-term progress. The UN Development Programme, for example, “supports the Somali people in creating an enabling environment for stability, rule of law and good governance” (UNDP, 2013). Besides being active in building institutions, this means addressing issues as human rights and/or being active in conflict transformation. For example, Oxfam – working through a ‘rights-based approach’ – supports organisations as the PHRN, or the Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre¹⁸ that focus on human rights and peace-building projects. The rights-based approach implies that people should have the ability to defend the basic human rights they are entitled to. Oxfam is an actor in defending and pro-actively promoting the implementation of these rights (Oxfam Novib, 2012).

3.2.3 Recovery

Whereas differences between humanitarian and development programmes are often perceived as significant (in its short and long-term aims; its purpose; its mandate; etc.), in Somalia these differences are somewhat blurred. For example, CED, a partner of Oxfam in Somalia working mainly in the *Banadir* region, is not only focussing on education, but also on serving the needy: WASH projects, food security, livelihood programmes.¹⁹ The executive director of Hijra, a humanitarian NGO active in Somalia, acknowledged this and argued that the focus should instead be on what people need. “I think you cannot really distinguish the two. So what more defines our programs is the context”.²⁰ Oxfam put in its 2013-2019 strategic plan a focus for “humanitarian work that integrates life-saving response with building resilience”²¹ (Oxfam, 2013). Even the ICRC, a humanitarian actor, acknowledges this ‘blurring’ between development and humanitarian aid:

¹⁸ “Oxfam lobbying partner Fartun Adan honoured with award” (Oxfam, 10.3.2013)

<http://www.oxfamblogs.org/eastafrica/?p=5917>

¹⁹ Interview 2: CEO, CED, Nairobi, 29.7.2013

²⁰ Interview 28: Executive director, Hijra, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

²¹ Resilience: “By 2019 resilience to disasters and conflict is strengthened in high-risk countries, through improved disaster preparedness and risk reduction, and building the capacity of civil society groups and communities, in particular women, to manage shocks, stresses, and address root causes of conflict” (Oxfam, 2013, p. 17).

“Yes, I mean, the ICRC obviously sees itself as a humanitarian organisation. So we have, and we have an operation and approach that breaks down at 6 main elements. The first is response to acute needs, or emergency response. Would be first aid care, emergency food, non-food. Water tracking. Then, also, aligned to that, we have the sort of parallel approach what we would call “recovery assistance”. So it is trying to help communities get back on their feet in the immediate aftermath of either conflict or climatic shocks. So, once the draught crisis was over, or once the IDPs have resettled, we provide them with some economic assistance to get them back on their feet. Obviously that then merges into a grey area between post-conflict recovery and what development actors do.”

Deputy Head for the operation in Somalia, ICRC, 1.8.2013

3.3 *The ‘feel for the game’*: operating strategies

“The two most important questions are these: “Do INGOs have to work there?” I think the answer is absolutely yes. The needs are there. But “can INGOs work there and in what way?” is quite another question.”

Emergency coordinator, MSF, 16.8.2013

The sociological dynamics in Somalia “with clans, and political leaders versus social leaders, community leaders [...] – the political and societal constellation – which of course always changes with *ad-hoc* coalitions” was said to be difficult to track down: “A fluid power play.”²² International aid agencies have to work in this context where “things happen on a regular basis and things tend to change very quickly and very drastically.”²³

“I think Somalia is an extremely complicated context, whereby you have all range of different actors. You have the main international armed conflict, the ICRC would classify as a non-international armed conflict in the South in particular which is obviously the Somali national government with its international and local allies versus al-Shabaab, but then you have a whole series of other what we would call situations of violence, you have the constant level of interclan militia clashes in the area of *Galgadud*, eh, but then sporadically other interclan militias elsewhere, and most recently in Kismayu obviously. There were issues obviously in the *Sool* and *Sanag* region, which was also interclan. You have the sort of piracy issue. You have what is going on in the *Galgala Hills*, which is a sort of offshoot of the border kind of non-international armed conflict in the South. So, I mean, there are numerous different sort of situations of violence in Somalia.”

Deputy Head for the operation in Somalia, ICRC, 1.8.2013

Because of this difficult context, international aid agencies have adopted strategies for working in Somalia. It is important to first understand these strategies, because they entail aid agencies’ ‘feel for the game’ (*habitus*) in Somalia. These strategies are not mentioned on the websites of aid agencies, and therefore, this paragraph draws on the interviews I conducted with professionals working for international aid agencies in Somalia. All aid workers I spoke to were aware of the security issues they or their organisations could encounter and informed me with

²² Interview 15: Director of projects, Oxfam Novib, The Hague, 5.6.2013

²³ Interview 26: Safety and security coordinator for Somalia, Save the Children, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

their ‘feel for the game’, the practical strategies organisations had to employ because of security issues. Most agencies, therefore, have security personnel within their employment that were proactively trying to oversee the organisations’ security position.

3.3.1 Low profiling

International aid agencies, in general, keep a low profile while operating in Somalia. Keeping a low profile, without a branding campaign, was believed to contribute to the organisations’ security and aid workers’ safety. For example, the safety & security coordinator of Save the Children argued that Somalia “is still one of the most dangerous places to be. So for us one of the things that we actually adopted is keeping a low profile. So we don’t have any flags, we don’t have any logo.”²⁴ Interviewees connected this ‘low-profiling’ to the background of the organisations, and the way the organisations could be perceived by locals and/or insurgent groups: “Of course they know. But just not to expose our Western profile, our Christian profile. So we don’t put it on, the world vision signs: only the star.”²⁵ Although it was acknowledged that “those who want to know will know”²⁶, low-profiling was also perceived to be necessary because international aid agencies could be the ‘second choice’ of insurgents/militias when some other attack somehow went wrong: “Because if they can’t get their target, they take the next. Then you can just be chosen.”²⁷ This, for example, happened to Turkish aid workers:

“It was an attack on a court, in Mogadishu, and in a short while, they shot the convoy. Most probably they were just trying to block that road, because that road is used by AMISOM to rush to the centre. That’s when the Turkish were attacked”

Security advisor, World Vision, 19.7.2013

3.3.2 Humanitarian principles

Because most targets in Somalia have been political entities – including the al-Shabaab attack on the UN compound in July 2013 – international aid agencies draw on humanitarian principles to ensure their ‘good’ intentions. The most important principles are neutrality, impartiality and independency. Neutrality is the assurance given by the international aid agency that their efforts are not in military support of either side. Impartiality means that the effort is rendered to the non-combatant population of each wide without distinction and according to need (Anderson, 2014). Independency means the ability of an aid agency to operate without having to compromise their neutrality, impartiality and/or aims. The ICRC is well known for their principle of neutrality, and clearly perceives this as a crucial factor of working in Somalia:

²⁴ Interview 26: Safety and security coordinator for Somalia, Save the Children, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

²⁵ Interview 27: Security advisor, World Vision, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

²⁶ Interview 26: Safety and security coordinator for Somalia, Save the Children, Nairobi, 23.7.2013 and Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

²⁷ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

I think the fact that we have been able to carry on in SC Somalia, with all the different transitions and the context changes in political authorities, and nonetheless we have been able to maintain an operation throughout the years, is because we have been able, because we were neutral and impartial.

Deputy Head for the operation in Somalia, ICRC, 1.8.2013

Oxfam, in contrary, is not neutral – “if that is ever possible” (Oxfam Novib, 2012) – but instead acknowledge its transformative character. Oxfam does endorse the principles of impartiality and independency as key for its operations. Like the ICRC sees neutrality as key for the security of its personnel and their ability to operate, the program manager of HARDO sees impartiality as a prerequisite for being able to work in Somalia.²⁸ These principles are strengthened through working with partner organisations:

“Yes, [CARE is neutral] and impartial and independent. Because we work through our partners, we work with communities, and where there is, like in Puntland and Somaliland, we work with ministries. In South Central now, [we work] with partners and communities: you cannot really affiliate with the government now.”

Security Coordinator, CARE, 1.8.2013

3.3.3 Remote programming

International aid organisations that operate in Somalia often do this through partner organisations with a common vision.²⁹ Oxfam, for example, has partnerships with organisations as the CED, or Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre. Save the Children works with one partner [Centre for Peace and Democracy] in Mogadishu, and World Vision and CARE also work through partners. This lack of access is often the main reason for working with partners: “The security situation in Mogadishu was not allowing anyone to do direct implementation, unless you had an office with national staff in Mogadishu.”³⁰ This is one of the three forms of remote programming, which gives quite some autonomy to the partner organisations: “operationally managed by local staff, or even local organisations, but funding and some monitoring is controlled from afar” (Abild, 2010: p. 83). International aid agencies, such as the ICRC, Oxfam, World Vision, Hijra, IMC, Save the Children and the DRC often manage their programmes from Nairobi, Kenya. But not all agencies work with remote programming. For example, the IHH is sending aid workers to physically work in Somalia and is by so implementing directly.

3.2.4 Emergency measures

International aid agencies that keep a ‘low profile’ work through partners and draw on humanitarian principles, still need to manage exposure to safety and security risks in difficult

²⁸ Interview 6: Program manager, HARDO, Nairobi, 30.7.2013

²⁹ Interview 24: Associate Country Director Somalia, Oxfam Novib, Nairobi, 30.7.2013

³⁰ Interview 26: Safety and security coordinator for Somalia, Save the Children, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

operational contexts. To accomplish this, many organisations subscribe to ‘acceptance’ as their primary approach to security management. Being accepted by the local community is believed to generate less security incidents. The acceptance strategy – involving local communities and local authorities in the projects – is sometimes complemented with protection measures. These include fences around the aid agency’s office, guards and additional security constraints for aid workers, such as a travel-ban for certain areas. When the situation deteriorates, aid agencies can fall back on ‘deterrence’ measures such as withdrawing and cancelling the programmes (Fast, Freeman, Neill, & Rowley, 2013, p. 222). Although the primary security approach of international aid agencies is to focus on acceptance, additional protection measures are often applied in Somalia. This is due to the unpredictable and violent context of Somalia: “an accountability-free zone, with donors, businesses, aid agencies and freebooters playing out their agendas, and with plenty of self-interested Somali gatekeepers willing to indulge them” (Maletta, 2008, p. 3). The MSF withdrawal from Somalia is the latest example of this deterrence measure, and was, according to their emergency coordinator, taken because of the lack of acceptance to humanitarian workers:

Incidents do not happen because there is no concept of law and order in Somalia. Of course there are principles of justice and jurisdiction, but there is a certain unwillingness to put it in place when it concerns humanitarian workers.

Emergency coordinator, MSF, 16.8.2013

Being able to work, NGOs found themselves increasingly dependent on the security provided by private security services, or were even forced to ‘purchase’ access (Jackson & Aynte, 2013) and armed protection from local militias (Grosse-kettler, 2004; Menkhaus, 2010)³¹. These measures are however not perceived as emergency measures, but are rather normalized: “Normally, INGOs and even some bigger local NGOs move only with escorts. This is normally, a fact, everybody knows it don’t think specifically about it.”³² Another emergency measure is that of ‘purchasing access’ through negotiating with insurgent groups and local authorities. A report describing aid agencies’ engagement with al-Shabaab found itself on the headlines of the BBC website and is found to be quite controversial. “If you write in your project concept that you need a percent of the budget to smooth the way, that doesn’t do very good to countries that have anti-corruption laws. That’s a major problem.”³³

³¹ In Kismayo, for example, an international NGO supposedly paid USD 2000 plus food monthly per person for a group of 70 militiamen (Grosse-kettler, 2004, p. 11). In the 2011 famine, aid agencies ‘registration fees’ for access ranged between \$ 500 - \$10.000, paid to al-Shabaab (Jackson & Aynte, 2013).

³² Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

³³ Interview 3: Security and safety coordinator for South Central Somalia, DRC, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

3.4 Conclusion

International aid agencies conduct rule-following practices as well as they have to improvise in Somalia. The context of Somalia is constantly changing. International aid agencies have to manoeuvre through political discourses (such as US policies or al-Shabaab constraints), they need to measure risks and manage these. Relying on private security companies is an emergency measure to impose security. Working through partners is a measure to transfer risks. These ways of working, together with low profiling and emphasizing humanitarian principles, are the products of learning-processes of international aid agencies within Somalia's past. International aid agencies thus have a 'feel for the game': they [the agencies] want to 'be there', they want to participate and do admit that the game is worth pursuing – along with its stakes. However, because the game is fluid, subject to change, as are its rules *and* players, this feel for the game needs to be constantly reflected, as well as the impact of international aid agencies on the local context. Are aid practices working or do they in fact more harm than good? The next chapters analyse how international aid agencies do interact within Somalia's field of conflict economically, socially and culturally.

4 **ECONOMIC CAPITAL IN SOMALIA**

“Somalia is a piece of desert, where you have four or five wells. No more than that. No resources. This creates a culture always of competition.”

Program director, NSP, 19.7.2013

Economic perspectives on conflict are widely known within the academic field of conflict studies. In his influential article “*Doing well out of war*”, Paul Collier (2000) states the importance of an economic agenda as the primary cause of civil conflict. Through a quantitative analysis, he regards rebel movements as rational actors that pursue economic profit rather than values like equality and justice. Collier’s ‘greed’ argument, which has been much criticized, remains influential and could be applied to address specific dynamics of conflict in Somalia. Humanitarian relief does not only benefit those in need of help (Blouin & Pallage, 2008), and that is visible in Somalia, where business districts have been relatively well insulated from the effects of violent conflict. In fact, violence in Mogadishu has had positive effects on light output from cities where humanitarian aid agencies are located (Shortland et al., 2013). Does this say something about the interaction of aid with dynamics of conflict in Somalia? Or is the economic role of aid agencies in civil war an exaggerated tale, as Shearer (2000) would argue? In this analysis, economic capital in Somalia’s field(s) of conflict is at stake.

As described in § 2.2.2.1, economic capital can be directly expressed in its monetary forms and lies at the root of all the other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). From an economic perspective, certain actors in conflict pursue economic or material gain and regard economic capital as a resource to compete for. Yet, in order to be effective, economic capital needs symbolic mediation. This goes through social and cultural capital: money is only effective when it is socially and culturally recognized to be so. The possibility that the forms of capital are convertible lies at the core of Bourdieu’s theory of capital and is embedded in this analysis. For example, economic capital here may also refer to aid in the form of food or other supplies as medicines, livelihood projects, etc. Managing these forms of aid can be transformed into social capital as the person in charge can decide how that type of aid is going to be distributed – if it is going to be distributed.

4.1 Arriving with resources

All interviewees recognized that international aid agencies are resource-rich entities in the relative poor context of Somalia. Their significant role on Somalia’s economy was acknowledged through the operations international aid agencies undertake: not solely in terms of

their livelihood supplies (food, medicines, WASH supplies) that are meant for beneficiaries, but also through the activities they undertake and the materials they need in order to operate. They need to rent cars, a driver, a safe place to stay. Because of a lack of access and humanitarian space, they hire Somali staff. Expatriates come and go, and need protection. If international aid agencies, as Save the Children and the DRC, have an office in Mogadishu, they need electricity, water, gas, furniture, food from the local market, etc. They need a compound that is secured – a ‘bunker’³⁴ – and close to the airport for possible (medical) evacuations. In short, resources were said to be money through contracts, employment, funds, or more physical materials as food aid. All this will involve intermediaries, contracts and subsequent money transactions with suppliers and has, according to the program director of the NSP, influences on the behaviour and decisions of certain actors.

In a context of the Somali, it is a poor context and the lack of resources is very dominant. Who arrives with resources has the capacity to take decisions that will affect a lot of people... And there will be people in getting these resources, and they will behave accordingly. Sometimes in an intelligent way, sometimes in an appropriate way, peaceful, sometimes it could be violent as well.

Program director, NSP, 19.7.2013

Because of their resources, international aid agencies may find themselves as the stakes for competition. This has consequences for international aid agencies in terms of security management: “Of course everybody knows who is World Vision, where we are operating, what kind of projects. And everybody knows that we have money, or resources. Of course it brings some implications if you’re talking about security.”³⁵ The quotation above implicates that international aid agencies have to adapt their strategies of operating in Somalia due to their (significant) resources and the subsequent competition for it. If not, an organisation can become the very centre of conflict:

“Resources that are for us very normal, like jobs, or car hiring [renting], are really actions that modify, or have the capacity to modify the power relations between different actors. [...] I mean some NGOs have created warlords, because of the resources injected in some persons”.

Program director, NSP, 19.7.2013

This has happened in the past, when the UNOSOM entered along with international NGOs that labelled Mogadishu’s warlords as “either partners or villains, depending on the interests of individual parties” (Grosse-kettler, 2004). So how do international aid agencies engage in economic activities in order to get their activities done?

³⁴ Interview 1: staff and programme security coordinator, CARE, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

³⁵ Interview 27: Security advisor, World Vision, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

4.2 Intense competition

When an international aid agency has a project in Somalia, it tenders³⁶. The agency calls for persons or companies that can deliver what they are looking for, be it a car, guards or materials for building water wells. This is considered an important business opportunity for many Somalis.

“Obviously we contribute to the local economy. We cannot hide from the fact we do. We hire vehicles; we hire guards, eh, what is business for someone... There is definitely some impact in terms of the revenue that is generated out of the organisation in terms of paying for the facilities, and in support, and infrastructure required by the organisation.

Safety & security coordinator, Save the Children, 23.7.2013

The humanitarian affairs officer of OCHA, whom I spoke in Nairobi a month after the *Shabaab* attack of June 2013 on their UN Common Compound (UNCC) in Mogadishu, saw the contribution of international aid agencies to the Somali economy as a mainly positive and beneficial discourse for the community.

“The NGO, whether it is local or international, of course they go with resources, and the resources benefit the community at large. Because you will undertake some activities. You will be spending resources, which will directly and indirectly benefit the community. I think the people normally take that in a positive way. Because there will be purchases of material, raw material, foods and services.”

Humanitarian affairs officer, OCHA, 23.7.2013

However, in 2011 al-Shabaab banned the WFP from operating in Somalia because of their negative influence on the local economy. At first, they demanded the WFP to buy its food from local farmers. When this did not work out they accused the organisation of ‘damaging’ local farmers through preventing them from selling their crops at a fair price.³⁷ International aid agencies have indeed the economic capital to decide where beneficiaries buy food: “so we give vouchers to the identified beneficiaries and who go to the shops of certain suppliers we have identified and the amount of food they have to keep.”³⁸ By so, international aid agencies have the power to decide who is going to sell food and who is not – something of vital importance to local markets and businessmen. Furthermore, it was also acknowledged that when someone or some group does not get the tender, “they can also do everything; shoot, hand grenade [attacks]”.³⁹ This is directly linked with social capital, as economic competition often goes along social lines. “They [Somalis] are very tough in making business, in running business... so they defend their business. They kill people. And most, well not most of the attacks, but the hand

³⁶ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

³⁷ List of Relief Agencies Banned by al-Shabaab (Somalia Report, 7.24.2011)
<http://somalireport.com/index.php/post/1214>

³⁸ Interview 1: staff and programme security coordinator, CARE, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

³⁹ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

grenade attacks, half of them is connected to business”.⁴⁰ In terms of employment, one of the biggest threats for international aid agencies was said to be hiring and firing. Firing someone, or not extending a contract, could “go up to killing people”,⁴¹ something that happened to MSF when they did not extend the contract of a national employee.⁴² He then entered the compound and shot two expatriates. Three months later, he was released after paying bribe to the prison chief⁴³.

4.2.1 Nepotism and gatekeepers

The competition for business opportunities has consequences for the way local authorities work. International aid agencies often have to deal with nepotism and clientelism.⁴⁴ Although Somalia has now an international recognized government, it seems that but a few individuals are in charge of the local societal structures. “Who were previously known as warlords, are now district commissioners.”⁴⁵ These individuals have significant social capital and are able to economically exploit this. “It is usually a head man or an elder who is, by default, the manager of the IDP camp and therefore wants his cut for an NGO to come in and deliver to the beneficiaries. He wants a piece of it as well.”⁴⁶ For example, the UN monitoring group on Somalia and Eritrea reported that in 2011 that...

“(…) in order to implement the programme [a wet feeding programme], SAACID [a Somali indigenous NGO] employed all 16 Mogadishu district commissioners, paying them a monthly salary in addition to the remuneration they received as civil servants. The teams managing the kitchens in each district, comprising over 1000 employees in total, as well as the militia providing security, were all chosen by the district commissioners. This arrangement provided the district commissioners with an opportunity to establish patronage networks, while exercising near-total financial and social control over the programme” (UNSC, 2012, p. 314).

An example of the implications that has for international aid agencies was given by the security advisor of World Vision:

“Well, I will give you an example of Doolow. You cannot buy your vehicle, your organisational car in Doolow. No way. Because the DC [district commissioner] is not going to approve that. So now we are arranging the vehicles from the DC, that is the only way of doing that. The same in Mogadishu, the same exactly. Even the security, which security you

⁴⁰ Interview 27: Security advisor, World Vision, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

⁴¹ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

⁴² “Two aid workers shot dead in Somalia” (Al Jazeera, 30.12.2011)

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/12/20111229202028943128.html>

⁴³ Interview 13: Security analyst, NSP, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

⁴⁴ Interview 15: Director of projects, Oxfam Novib, The Hague, 5.6.2013

⁴⁵ Interview 3: Security and safety coordinator for South Central Somalia, DRC, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

⁴⁶ Interview 3: Security and safety coordinator for South Central Somalia, DRC, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

choose like Rainbow, or Bashir or Black and White or whatever... So he provides the vehicles, he provides the drivers, he provides the security guards for our compound.

Security advisor, World Vision, 19.7.2013

By doing so, these district commissioners serve as gatekeepers that keep a strong grip on 'their' environment. They control their own militias although they are now seen as security forces as they support the central government.⁴⁷ International aid agencies cannot work beyond these district commissioners: doing so would immediately be in conflict with an authority possessing the capability to expel the organisation, or worse, fight the organisation. Working with a district commissioner, however, has direct consequences for the humanitarian principles of the aid agency. Operating independently becomes impossible and the agency in fact empowers local authorities:

"I think the interest in power is really the interest in money. And when they ran in Kismaayo they had a very good income. And they basically want a good living standard with a lot of money and they are quite happy with the al-Shabaab Islamic principles on top of that, and you know, the Sharia law. It's still the money, the money controls... what they... their perception of power or, everybody's perception of their power is how much money they have and are able to distribute along the community. Because that is the clan system and the Islamic system is still to disperse money within your clan if you have it. (...) Although huge ransoms are paid, no one individual ends up with a huge amount of money because it is all distributed back in the clans. That is the way it works."

Security & safety coordinator, DRC, 24.7.2013

Since economic capital often goes along social lines, impartiality also becomes more difficult. Many resources are going to the people the district commissioner wants it to go to, and the international aid agency ends up doing business with a single group instead of spreading its resources. International aid agencies become a resource. While the international aid agency is mainly focussing on the humanitarian imperative and therefore on its projects, other actors, such as district commissioners or (previously) warlords are taking care of a chunk of the budget.⁴⁸

4.2.2 Private security companies

The insecure situation in Somalia is not detrimental for everyone, and does in fact allow certain businesses to thrive. Among these businesses are, ironically, private security companies that try to create a field of stability for those who pay. And there are many willing to pay for security. Companies as Black & White Security or *Bashir* (also owner of the Peace Hotel in Mogadishu – one of the few safe hotels in Mogadishu)⁴⁹ do not lack clientele from international aid agencies, as they make it possible for these organisations to operate. Hiring private security companies is part of emergency measures that are taken in place to answer to the humanitarian imperative that

⁴⁷ Interview 14: Humanitarian affairs officer OCHA in Mogadishu, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

⁴⁸ Interview 5: Policy officer, EEAS, food security and agricultural development unit, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

⁴⁹ "Where to stay in a warzone" (14.2.2012) <http://www.somaliareport.com/index.php/post/2788>

still exists. Because these companies are professional, or at least portray themselves professional, international aid agencies avoid being dependent on local militias or local warlords for security. Private security companies are key for operating in Somalia because they can provide security while allowing the agency to maintain its neutral, independent and impartial character. Oxfam security reports, for example, highly discouraged to get affiliated with AMISOM or UN forces by meeting with government officials at public places, even driving close to an AMISOM convoy or visiting the Lido Beach Seafood⁵⁰ restaurant or other restaurants affiliated with politicians or journalists. From this perspective, hiring a private security company is a solution, because it is believed to be strictly business on the basis of a contract⁵¹ without the affiliation one would have using AMISOM forces or a regional/local clan militia. Moreover, if an agency has to pull out, it still has the contractual obligation so that the security company is not directly affected by the fall-out of resources from the agency. They will still pay till the contract is over, which would avoid violent reactions when security guards were suddenly not paid anymore.

Private security companies that provide armed guards, escorts and vehicles are, however, “not cheap.”⁵² And neither are the security measures for the compound itself. For example, the attack on the Turkish embassies’ guesthouse was an attack on a highly secured compound on a strategic place. “An NGO cannot afford to put all these measures in place. It will be costly, it will take a lot of money from the projects budget for other activities”.⁵³ The area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia of the NGO Safety Program acknowledged security is not about small amounts of money:

“At the moment, they just take their chance now. Because this is now big money, because everyone needs, who wants to open [an office], nobody can do this without. [...] It is just a business opportunity to make money. Everybody wants to come, and everybody needs for sure security. [...] It is like an industry now.”

Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, NSP, 19.7.2013

Because of the stakes involved, conflict can in fact be beneficial. The ‘security industry’ is a booming business in a context of conflict and it is in Somalia. International aid agencies should consider hiring security companies seriously, as critics claimed that using local contractors develops an interest in perpetuating conditions that require humanitarian response (Menkhaus, 2010, p. 330). Indeed, spatial analysis shows that violent contest can bring financial benefits by triggering and diverting investment. “High intensity conflict in Mogadishu brings humanitarian

⁵⁰ Also mentioned in interview 26: Safety and security coordinator for Somalia, Save the Children, Nairobi, 23.7.2013 and during interview 1: staff and programme security coordinator, CARE, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

⁵¹ Interview 26: Safety and security coordinator for Somalia, Save the Children, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

⁵² Interview 3: Security and safety coordinator for South Central Somalia, DRC, Nairobi, 24.7.2013

⁵³ Interview 1: Staff and programme security coordinator, CARE, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

aid into WFP centres and boosts local economic activity, allowing local households to increase their consumption as a result” (Shortland et al., 2013, p. 559). This can also count for private security companies, who clearly have an interest in conflict.

“You also see it in Kenya, in Dadaab [Refugee camp close to the border with Somalia], I remember one time, it was so nice, you were allowed to go without escorts, when the police initiated incidents because then what they then got was higher salary.”

Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, NSP, 19.7.2013

At the moment there is no mentioning of private security companies engaging in dubious activities such as creating more insecurity. However, the area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia of the NSP predicted problems in the future, when the Somali government could put their own security forces into means. “What are you doing then with these guys?”⁵⁴ Security problems can therefore come with the exit strategy. The DRC, having an office in Mogadishu, already took a step in the direction of not being entirely dependent upon private security companies in their ability to move. They bought a Toyota B6:

“So we have our own vehicle now. So it is gonna be interesting to see how that is accepted or not by Bashir. I think his organisation is so big that he will accept it without too much difficulty. But it will change costing dynamics, because if we can move staff from the airport without having the contract; I mean, it’s only one and a half kilometres, that is 150 dollars each way for moving people, even if it’s five minutes.”

Security & safety coordinator, DRC, 24.7.2013

Bashir, the security provider and owner of the Peace Hotel in Mogadishu, has to accept here that he is going to miss income. He receives a lot of money from various organisations that are using his services, so it might not matter. In the same interview it was said that there was “no doubt he is then passing on elements of that profit to district commissioners: It’s a big business and he is powerful.”⁵⁵

4.3 Diversion of aid

The most common discourse of aid interacting with dynamics of conflict is called the diversion (theft or ‘confiscation’) of aid by warring factions, which happened a lot in the history of civil war in Somalia and is academically recognized as a factor with the ability to prolong/sustain war. “There have been vocations where aid has been diverted and so on and so forth. I think that is clear over the last 20 years”.⁵⁶ During the 2011 famine in Somalia, the ICRC was the only major aid institution still operating in al-Shabaab areas. According to its deputy head for the

⁵⁴ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

⁵⁵ Interview 3: Security and safety coordinator for South Central Somalia, DRC, Nairobi, 24.7.2013

⁵⁶ Interview 7: deputy head for the operation in Somalia, ICRC, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

operation in Somalia, the operation was so huge that a breakdown in relations with al-Shabaab occurred:

“I think they [al-Shabaab] were concerned they didn’t had a sufficient oversight over what was going on, and so basically ended up in a breakdown in the relations. There was a sort of confiscation of a substantial amount of food, we couldn’t resolve that, so we temporarily suspended the operations in that areas, the emergency food assistance operations in that areas and made that public because of the confiscation of the food. And then they retaliated by then sort of making this statement of closing our activities in their areas.”

Deputy head for the operation in Somalia, ICRC, 1.8.2013

The al-Shabaab statement goes as follow: “Despite being offered unrivalled access to all the regions governed by the Mujahideen in south and central Somalia, the International Committee of the Red Cross has repeatedly betrayed the trust conferred on it by the local population” (in Menkhaus, 2012: p. 31). The statement was then invigorated by claiming that al-Shabaab had burned 2000 metric tons of food aid, in the midst of a famine (Menkhaus, 2012). They might have done this also because it was cooked food without any ‘monetary’ value: “once you cooked it, it is no longer of any real value”⁵⁷, which supports the greed-argument. Burning food in the midst of a famine also points to utilizing starvation as a weapon for more aid – and resources – to come and as a statement for agencies to take their demands in serious consideration.

4.3.1 Monitoring

International aid agencies know about the diversion of aid and take it into account (Blouin & Pallage, 2008). They even consider it as a normal practice (Okumu, 2003). With the aid workers I interviewed, did not regard the diversion or manipulation of aid as ‘normal practice.’ Yet, it was said that agencies had to help where they can: even if there was food diversion.⁵⁸ However, aid workers were indeed knowledgeable of the ways in which aid could be utilized and had been diverted in the past. It was said to be a controversial topic because “it is not supposed to be that money donated from here [the Netherlands] comes in the hands of people from who you not know whether it ends up with the people who need it”.⁵⁹ The influx of resources, be it food aid or funds for projects to partner organisations, is therefore checked through monitoring practices. This was one of the reasons why Save the Children operated through one partner organisation in Mogadishu instead of more.

“Because if you, say, work with five different local partners, do you have the capacity to then do your monitoring and evaluation and ensure that the funds dedicated for the various programs are being utilized for those? [...] I think that becomes a big challenge. You might actually end up utilizing more resources than you would have if you had only one partner.”

⁵⁷ Interview 7: Deputy head for the operation in Somalia, ICRC, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

⁵⁸ Interview 6: Program manager, HARDO, Nairobi, 30.7.2013

⁵⁹ Interview 8: Program coordinator, IHH, Amsterdam, 15.9.2013

Because of the lack of access, international aid agencies often use Somali consultants to check what is done with the resources (such as funds), and how (or if) projects are implemented. However, consultants of donors had sometimes different insights than the aid agency' consultants, which raised the issue that "you don't know how pure one [an 'external' consultant] takes ones role".⁶⁰ The way agencies are able to monitor is an important prerequisite for getting funds, but because of the lack of access and humanitarian space, Somalia is sometimes seen as an exception. "Of course we have someone in Brussels [doing an] evaluation [who] would come and say: 'How could you finance, put [in] so much money, when your means to monitor are very low?' Somalia is an exception in that sense."⁶¹

4.4 Aid workers

Not only international aid agencies were perceived as resource-rich or as a resource. Their employees, aid workers, also had to be aware of their economic power in Somalia's context. This was mostly connected to expatriates. For example when going to a market:

If you go to the market, wearing a World Vision ID or whatever, expats you know, having expensive *tablets*, yes of course your staff can be in trouble. This is the same with compounds. That is why we use armed protection.

Security advisor, World Vision, 19.7.2013

There are some interesting aspects of this phrase. First, the security advisor mentions expatriates wearing a World Vision ID, as if the organisation itself can be a target through the associations' people have with it. Second, he connects expatriates with their resources (having expensive tablets) as a reason why they could be in trouble. Then, he sees armed protection as a mitigation strategy against this 'trouble'. Although expatriates (international staff) are often not allowed to go to the market alone in the first place, let alone with tablets, the point is clear. "They want money; no money, they shoot at you".⁶² Al-Shabaab was believed to take advantage of the kidnapping of expatriates: "they look for money".⁶³ Furthermore, it was acknowledged that although terrorist attacks are mostly done by a particular group, the possibility that hand grenade attacks in Mogadishu occur because of business rivalry or personal enmity could not be ruled out.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Interview 16: Policy officer quality and control, Oxfam Novib, The Hague, 2.7.2013

⁶¹ Interview 5: Policy officer, EEAS, food security and agricultural development unit, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

⁶² Interview 1: staff and programme security coordinator, CARE, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

⁶³ Interview 28: Executive director, Hijra, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

⁶⁴ Interview 14: Humanitarian affairs officer OCHA in Mogadishu, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

4.5 Conclusion

International aid agencies do possess significant economic capital in a context like Somalia, which is both a power and a weakness. It provides the agencies the possibility to set foot in Somalia by investing in social and cultural capital. Access can and often needs to be acquired and gained through payments to gatekeepers – district commissioners, clan-elders and insurgent groups. Operational safety and security can be provided through private security companies. The activities required to operate – such as renting a car, a compound, employing local staff, consultants to monitor, etc. – can foster local entrepreneurship and trade, therefore having the potential to benefit the local community as a whole. Simultaneously, international aid agencies become a resource for groups or individuals to compete for. In Somalia, aid has been a stake of the game between various actors that have the possibility to benefit from the influx of aid, aid workers and the aid agencies – and therefore have an interest in the maintenance and even consolidating of conflict. Aid– food, livelihood supplies and other resources – has a long history of being ‘diverted’ from the beneficiaries in the hands of local authorities and insurgent groups – the 2011 famine in Somalia as the most recent example. Aid workers have been kidnapped with the aim of economic gain for insurgent groups. And international aid agencies have been dependent on gatekeepers as such as district commissioners, clan-elders or authorities, local authorities for having access. Furthermore, the insecure situation in Somalia is a prerequisite for private security companies to bloom, as international aid agencies are condemned to hire armed guards and escorts. Providing safety for expatriates is an industry with stakes that should not be underestimated. Just as gatekeepers, some entrepreneurs therefore have an interest in maintaining the insecure situation.

5

SOCIAL CAPITAL IN SOMALIA

“You cannot hide from the fact that whoever needs to know that the organisation is there, knows that the organisation is there.”

Safety & security coordinator, Save the Children, 23.7.2013

Somalia is a remarkable sociological chapter in Africa’s history. Where many African nationalists in the post-colonial period had to rely almost exclusively on joint opposition to colonial rule, Somalia instead had the ‘luxury’ of having a homogeneous state containing people united by a common religion, language and pastoral history (Laitin & Samatar, 1987). However, this ‘tailor-made’ national ethnicity came with a system of “internal divisions based on the ideology of kinship, and hence *invisible*, which carried the same emotional and subjective charge as *visible* ethnic distinctions elsewhere” (Lewis, 2004: p. 490). These internal divisions were consolidated and strengthened throughout the Somali civil war that started in 1991. According to Lewis, one of the most prominent experts on Somalia, sociological factors are more important in studying Somalia’s social institutions than cultural ones, as “cultural cohesion is undermined by social structure; by the centrifugal pressures of the Somali segmentary system and the pervasive force of the call of clanship, literally (Lewis, 2004, p. 508). A policeman, a government official, a Somali government soldier, an al-Shabaab insurgent: they are all also clan members. “If the clan calls them, they will run to the clan”.⁶⁵

These sociological factors are important to understand because, as previously stated, operating in Somalia is being part of a context: a society that is organised in clan mechanisms. “A clan is a mechanism of solidarity, [...] an extended family concept”,⁶⁶ which will protect one in a harsh society. One’s social capital – ‘one’s position in, and connection with, a social network’ – in Somalia is in fact a crucial factor for survival, which especially becomes clear when a humanitarian crisis occurs:

“One of the most troubling but least discussed aspects of Somalia’s recurring humanitarian crises is the low sense of Somali social and ethical obligation to assist countrymen from weak lineages and social groups. This stands in sharp contrast to the very powerful and non-negotiable obligation Somalis have to assist members of their own lineage. [...] When one asks the clarifying question “Who died?” in a Somali famine, the victims were almost all from the poorly armed Digle-Mirifle clans and the Bantu farming communities, all whom have been treated as second class citizens in Somalia” (Ken Menkhaus, 2012: p. 34).

⁶⁵ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

⁶⁶ Interview 11: Program director, NSP, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

When operating in Somalia, international aid agencies intrinsically admit that their objectives are worth pursuing; “they recognize the game and they recognize its stakes” (Bourdieu 1998: p. 77 quoted in Pilario, 2005: p. 142). International aid agencies, however, are not the only ones in the context that recognise the stakes:

You have staff, and people sit outside and they talk even if they don't mean it bad, they'll talk. And al-Shabaab is not stupid, they also have Internet, they know exactly who is rooming around. So there is no thinking of hiding or pretending of “oh, I'm not around”. Forget it.

Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, NSP, 19.7.2013

As described in the previous chapter, aid in Somalia has a long history of being utilized for the profit of others – gatekeepers, warlords or government officials. They know the organisation and how to utilize its resources since, as mentioned in chapter 4, they can economically profit from aid. But how is it possible that a district commissioner has the possibility to profit out of the influx of aid? That has much to do with his accumulation of social and cultural capital: together with economic capital the stakes of the game.

According to Bourdieu, it is “impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one introduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory” (Bourdieu, 1986: p. 280). Only recognizing economic resources as ‘stakes of the game’ through which international aid agencies interact with dynamics of conflict is ignoring the role of Somalia’s social world, hence international aid agencies’ interaction within this world. Moreover, these social structures and constellations are, according to Ken Menkhaus (2012: p. 34) crucial for understanding how social groups, as clans or factions, can ‘survive’ or are able to accumulate economic capital. Therefore, it is vital to analyse the competition for social and cultural capital in order to understand international aid agencies practices in Somalia and to explain its interaction within the field of conflict. This chapter analyses the competition for social capital.

5.1 Lack of access

During the interviews, it was believed that local authorities, and most Somali nationals in general, had something, which international aid agencies did not have: *access* and *acceptance*. The lack of access is considered the major problem international aid agencies currently face while operating in Somalia (Menkhaus, 2012) as it determines the organisation’s humanitarian space. Access to beneficiaries and project sites is crucial for effective programming because international aid agencies are then able to see where the money actually goes. This ability to monitor by having access is something donors expect of international aid agencies in their allocation of funds. For example, ECHO writes in its strategy plan for 2013 that elements in the fine-tuning of the allocation process [of funds to international aid agencies] are access to

beneficiaries, security aspects and, essentially, the operational capacities of partners on the ground (ECHO, 2013: p. 5). Although Somalia was considered an ‘exception’ because of the complex operating context, donors – such as ECHO – review international aid agencies on their operational capacities. By so, their levels of access and acceptance – their social capital – in Somalia are not only vital for effective programming, but for getting funds as well.

“Donors are not happy about it. [...] Long distance monitoring is more and more difficult and it lacks acceptance as well by donors. So we need to be very active in engaging in monitoring and accountability. [...] Accountability towards beneficiaries and accountability towards donors, so that there is no diversion.”

Country director for Somalia, Oxfam, 4.8.2013

Access to project sites is important for gaining mutual cooperation and understanding with beneficiaries and other stakeholders in the operating context, because “you are more connected to the people, more connected to the government, you exchange information face to face.”⁶⁷ Face-to-face meetings raise ones social capital in the field and therefore benefits the projects as the agency will be more accepted if they involve communities and local authorities. “You have to be able to negotiate constantly. You have to give the people a feeling, they are very frightened – they just want to know whether they can trust you. That is where it is actually about.”⁶⁸ Possessing this form of social capital, of being more connected, was perceived to decrease when having an office in Nairobi instead of in Mogadishu, as the local community and community elders “used to come very easily to our office in Mogadishu, which they cannot easily do when we are in Nairobi. So that connection is somehow lost, yes.”⁶⁹ Indeed, having humanitarian space is not only a matter of the ability of an international aid agency to freely operate, but also of beneficiaries’ ability to access relief (Abild, 2010).

Lack of access is the main reasons why most INGOs, and even some larger NGOs as CED or Saijd,⁷⁰ have offices in Nairobi instead of in Mogadishu. From these offices international aid agencies coordinate projects and communicate with partners on the ground and with donors as the European Commission in Nairobi: doing this in Somalia is considered too difficult and too dangerous. The rationale behind MSF’s pull out of Somalia had similar arguments: although the

⁶⁷ Interview 14: Humanitarian affairs officer OCHA in Mogadishu, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

⁶⁸ Interview 8: Program coordinator, IHH, Amsterdam, 15.9.2013

⁶⁹ Interview 14: Humanitarian affairs officer OCHA in Mogadishu, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

⁷⁰ These bigger ‘indigenous’ NGOs are also in Nairobi to do what they cannot do in Mogadishu: directly communicating to donors and partners. What we can observe here is that both international as local/indigenous aid agencies attempt to accumulate social capital by physically moving their office: International aid agencies try to open offices in Mogadishu, whereas the CED and Hardo, among other NGOs, have offices in Nairobi. Economic capital cannot be left out of this analysis, as international aid agencies try to gain social capital in order to better monitor: a prerequisite of getting funds from donors (economic capital). National/indigenous aid agencies establish offices in Nairobi to better communicate with international aid agencies and/or donors (social capital) for getting funds (economic capital).

mission brought relief to many Somalis, attacks on its aid workers continued to occur and so operating in Somalia became impossible. This Nairobi / Mogadishu dichotomy was mentioned repeatedly in the interviews, with mixed perspectives and opinions on it. Some found it necessary to be in Mogadishu, to be with the beneficiaries and stakeholders,⁷¹ while others did not see the benefit of sitting in bunker without any possibility of free movement.⁷² However, all agreed on the significantly higher risks expatriates face in comparison to national staff. “As an outsider you are just a target, no matter who you are. Turkish, Muslim or not-Muslim, it does not matter.”⁷³ This was perceived as something ‘given’ and obvious, something that did not need much elaboration. International aid agencies cannot simply hide and appear in Somalia. “... You cannot just go out of the compound and say, ‘hi, here I am.’”⁷⁴ Or: “we cannot just walk into a context and say, ‘here we are,’”⁷⁵ were some lines mentioned in interviews that illustrated the lack of access in Somalia for international aid agencies. “I wouldn’t last for five minutes there”, was the response of the regional safety advisor of the DRC – an expatriate from Europe working in Nairobi.⁷⁶ Whether or not having access was directly linked to levels of acceptance: “I think access has been variable for expatriates over the years. I think it primarily comes down to acceptance, and then to levels of security.”⁷⁷ All interviewees agreed on the difficulty of having access, and/or the importance of having acceptance, intrinsically acknowledging the importance of social capital as a stake of the game in Somalia. The security advisor of IMC argued that Somalia is in fact accessible, but that this “really depends on who brings and receives you”⁷⁸: on one’s social capital.

5.1.1 Local acceptance

After the al-Shabaab attack on an AMISOM convoy in July 2013, I was told in a NSP meeting on 31.7.2013 by their Somalia-analyst that al-Shabaab paid compensation to the families of a few civilian bystanders who got killed. Although I could not triangulate that information, al-Shabaab did something alike. In January 2013, two young Somali’s were killed in El Bur (*Ceelbuur*, in South Central Somalia) when al-Shabaab militants fired upon them to stop them from playing football. Al-Shabaab subsequently arrested the clan-elders of these militants – arguing that they were not al-Shabaab militants but citizens – and forced them to pay

⁷¹ Interview 14: Humanitarian affairs officer OCHA in Mogadishu, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

⁷² Interview 5: Policy officer, EEAS, food security and agricultural development unit, Nairobi, 23.7.2013 and interview 1: staff and programme security coordinator, CARE, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

⁷³ Interview 8: Program coordinator, IHH, Amsterdam, 15.9.2013

⁷⁴ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

⁷⁵ Interview 18: Advisor on conflict transformation, Oxfam Novib, The Hague, 2.7.2013

⁷⁶ Interview 4: Regional safety advisor, DRC, Nairobi, 30.7.2013

⁷⁷ Interview 7: deputy head for the operation in Somalia, ICRC, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

⁷⁸ Interview 9: Security advisor, IMC, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

compensation in the form of 200 camels to the families of the two Somalis that got killed.⁷⁹ Such acts indicate that al-Shabaab understands the importance of having social capital, as their position in Somali society is reliant on the tolerance of the population for their mission. It is no surprise al-Shabaab even has a press-office on social media. Maintaining and gaining local acceptance and support is a prerequisite for freely operating, also for other actors as (local) government(s), insurgent groups and international aid agencies. “If you are not accepted by the communities, you can become a target.”⁸⁰ Indeed, ‘acceptance’ was a much-mentioned word during interviews and even deemed as crucial for operating in Somalia, yet very hard to achieve for international aid agencies.

However, the competition for social capital to gain local acceptance and support is, according to the safety and security coordinator of Save the Children, also the reason why some international aid agencies can still operate in Somalia:

“I don’t think that al-Shabaab is stupid enough, I think they have some very intelligent people who also do context analysis like we do, and they know that who supports al-Shabaab is the population. So if you end up taking up basic services away from the population, which is provided by humanitarian agencies, what have you done to that population? You have deliberately driven them against you. And so I don’t think they are stupid enough. I think they do realize that also there is a need because, you know, there are so many displaced people. The government will not be able to take care of these people I don’t think al-Shabaab has the capacity to take care of all those displaced people. And I think the reason why, not just Save the Children, but most INGOs, have not been targeted, is that there must be a level of [...] well, for lack of a better word, appreciation that the services that are being provided are life saving. And so let’s not take this away, because if we do this, we end up with a population that is really in some serious need, and then we actually end up driving them against us.”

Safety & security coordinator, Save the Children, 23.7.2013

By letting aid agencies operate in their areas of influence, al-Shabaab does not solely utilize international aid agencies for economic capital, but for social capital as well. In fact, according to the quotation above, al-Shabaab needs international aid agencies to maintain acceptance and support from the Somali population. Al-Shabaab cannot dismiss life-saving aid from the population they need in order to be effective – or even exist. International aid agencies meet the demand for basic human needs while insurgent groups or government forces that cause the human suffering don’t need to worry about the consequences of their actions. After all, international aid agencies take care of these consequences. There is some academic criticism on the role of these aid agencies in conflict settings, such as the possibility that international aid

⁷⁹ “El Bur elders forced to pay damages for al-Shabaab killings” (Sabahi, 28.1.2013)

http://sabahionline.com/en_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2013/01/28/feature-01

⁸⁰ Interview 24: Associate Country Director Somalia, Oxfam Novib, Nairobi, 30.7.2013

agencies prolong conflict by taking responsibilities away from the perpetrators of human suffering (i.e. Terry, 2002; Anderson, 1999). “Aid not taking the political context in consideration can be seen as enabling warring parties to focus their resources on fighting, seeing that humanitarian agencies will deliver to the needs of their population” (Abild, 2010: p. 73). And so the struggle for social capital can actually prolong conflict. Not all agree on this: “I think the question is: would the conflict have stopped had the organisation not been in Somalia? I’ll be very doubtful if Somalia would found political solutions to its conflict if international aid organisations had not been present.”⁸¹

Although the difficulties of working in Somalia were emphasized in the interviews, there was also an example of an international aid agency having local acceptance and support. The security advisor of World Vision was convinced of having acceptance for a project in the town of Doolow. Local acceptance that in fact protected the agency from al-Shabaab insurgents:

“We are accepted by the community. That is very important. Even the al-Shabaab infiltration in Doolow, it is almost impossible... because of the local population and surrounding villages. If they see a stranger, the information flows like flies to the district commissioner, to our NGO community here, so that’s very important.”

Security advisor, World Vision, 19.7.2013

This was due to a long period of operating and a ‘good’ profile, which together improved the organisations’ connection and relations with the local population. This example of good practice’, once again, underlines the importance of social capital.

Moreover, international aid agencies work often through partner organisations in Somalia. Aid workers from Somali, indigenous, aid organisations that I interviewed claimed, often in contrast to employees of international aid agencies, to have acceptance and full access. The CEO of the CED believed to have acceptance because of his organisations’ close relationships with community elders, women groups youth groups. “Whenever we implementing a program, we have staff that stays with the community. Since we have been working there for a long time, we have acceptance. They know us, we know them.”⁸² The specific role of partner organisations in being able to operate has much to do with cultural capital, and will be discussed in chapter 7.

5.1.2 Security

In order to gain access, all international aid agencies have security advisors, coordinators and analysts working full-time to manage the security issues coming forth from Somalia’s context. Security staff is hired in order to enable operating in complex environments. The security policies of international aid agencies draw therefore very much on social capital: local

⁸¹ Interview 7: Deputy head for the operation in Somalia, ICRC, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

⁸² Interview 2: CEO, CED, Nairobi, 29.7.2013

acceptance was considered the most important strategy to manage security issues. “Of course, in a place like Mogadishu, we still use deterrence and protection, but we’re very heavy on acceptance.”⁸³ Oxfam’s security policy describes this as “acceptance as much as possible, protection when needed.”⁸⁴ Security staff is primarily concerned with the safety and security of the employees of the agency, but also takes the safety of its beneficiaries in account when they can face security threats:

“And basically what we’re doing is, what we are looking at, is our relationship of what we are doing associating with the context where people are in, and what kind of threats our staff, or people might encounter. But also with beneficiaries, because we don’t want to do anything which might injure the beneficiaries. So all these things we’re looking at. It is a very thin line.”

Security Coordinator, CARE, 1.8.2013

The relationship between the agency’s practices and the context is crucial for security staff. However, since most international aid agencies work with emergency measures – such as buying access through negotiating with insurgent groups, hiring private security companies, or working through partner organisation to “transfer the risks”⁸⁵ – this relationship is not always satisfactory for international aid agencies. For example, SAACID, an indigenous NGO that saved thousands of lives in the 2011 famine with its nutrition programmes, was mentioned specifically in the UN monitoring group 2012 report for paying all 16 district-commissioners of Mogadishu for access (UNSC, 2012). Is that having acceptance? SAACID, having offices in Nairobi, Queensland and Austin, was banned by al-Shabaab, along with several other INGOs and humanitarian organisations (including the ICRC). “NGOs often presume they have gained acceptance solely because programs are ongoing, with little analysis of the linkage between program activity [...] and levels of acceptance” (Rowley, Neill, Freeman, & Fast, 2011). The emergency coordinator of MSF summarized this, by questioning statements of acceptance itself:

“I think one should always be careful with statements as ‘it seems to be more quiet’, or that ‘acceptance is higher then before’. Are the principles of your organisation accepted or is the mission of your organisation accepted or do you just have support of the dominant clan?”

Emergency coordinator, MSF, 16.8.2013

Having solely the support of the dominant group in a context, or buying access through district commissioners cannot really be called local acceptance, and also endangers the aid agency’s humanitarian principles as independency and impartiality. Although having economic capital to continue operating, international aid agencies face severe challenges in gaining social capital.

⁸³ Interview 26: Safety and security coordinator for Somalia, Save the Children, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

⁸⁴ Oxfam Novib security policy, 2010, internal document

⁸⁵ Interview 27: Security advisor, World Vision, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

One way through which it was believed to gain access was through working with local partners, or through employing Somali nationals.

5.2 Nationals and expatriates

As earlier mentioned, social capital is vital for being able to operate in Somalia. For this, international aid agencies in Somalia are often reliant on partner organisations and national (Somali) staff for being able to operate and other practises, as information gathering and project monitoring.

“So we feel that it is actually necessary to have someone there, and someone of Somali nationality, who is about to go to other offices, in Beledweyne, and they have more flexibility in terms of how far they can actually go. It’s much easier for him, and we find that even for us it’s much easier. Because they understand the more technical aspects of security, in terms of analysis, you know, information gathering. So it’s useful to have that link. And they have good contacts as well, and they speak the language, so it’s much easier for them.

Safety & security coordinator, Save the Children, 23.7.2013

National Somali’s were considered to exactly have what expatriates do not possess: social and cultural capital. Social capital, because “they have good contacts”, and for international aid agencies, it is useful to have “that link”. Cultural capital, because “they speak the language” or “understand the more technical aspects of security, in terms of analysis.” We can see a conversion of economic capital towards social capital: “It’s much easier for him, and we find that even for us it’s much easier.” Oxfam’s security advisor is a Kenyan-Somali, who argued that he could “go anywhere.”⁸⁶ The executive director of Hijra also made a distinction between nationals and expatriates, and concluded; “in terms of vulnerability, myself, who is actually a Somali, and yourself, who is actually from the Netherlands, have different vulnerability levels.”⁸⁷

Well, I think as expatriates, we don’t have access everywhere. I mean for the time being, expatriates have principally in urban areas access. So expatriates have access in Mogadishu, Baydhaba, we have beginning to go to Kismayu, and Beledweyne, these areas and then Somaliland obviously... Gaalkacyo, Gaalkacyo North. But it is the urban areas that are more complicated. That being said, we have Somali colleagues that have access everywhere.

Deputy head for the operation in Somalia, ICRC, 1.8.2013

International aid agencies thus employ Somali nationals and, besides transferring risks, believe to have more access, flexibility and knowledge of the context:

It’s easier for them [nationals, also Somali expatriates from the diaspora] because of the clan affiliations. In Somalia, the clan affiliation is more important than the country you’re from. It

⁸⁶ Interview 21: Security Advisor for Somalia, Oxfam Novib, Nairobi, 22.7.2013

⁸⁷ Interview 28: Executive director, Hijra, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

is the clan that determines. So if you come from Mogadishu, *Hawiye* clan, it doesn't matter where you are from... So they don't talk to you as a Canadian Somali, you are *Hawiye*.

Security advisor, IMC, 1.8.2013

In all the interviews with staff of local and international NGOs, nationals – Somalis – are considered to have more access, have more flexibility in terms of how far they can actually go, are earlier of security issues aware and thus safer.⁸⁸ It seems that the difference between expatriates and nationals is something taken for granted. Not only by aid workers, but also from a local perspective, as described by the area manager of the NSP: “Normally INGOs and even some bigger local NGOs move only with escorts. This is normal, a fact, everybody knows it and don't think specifically about it.”⁸⁹ The different perception of security levels between nationals and expatriates reached such proportions that Somali national staff even showed reluctance for entering the compound of an international aid agency. They feared to be affiliated with expatriates that are around the area and in the compound:

“So, defensively, it [the compound] is pretty well defended, but against that, it is so close to other UN facilities and the airport that the local staff now sees it as a fixed target they don't want to go to. They don't want to come to the office.”

Security & safety coordinator, DRC, 24.7.2013

However, when looking at aid workers killed in 2008, we find that for every international, there were approximately seven nationals killed (Abild, 2010). From January 2012 till now, 30 nationals have been attacked and 14 internationals (of which 8 during the UN blast in June 2013). Although these numbers do not really confirm the higher vulnerability of expatriates in Somalia – as twice as many nationals have been targeted last year – this is also due to the relative small number of expatriates present in Somalia and the high protection measures they receive. National staff working for an international aid agency becomes ‘caught in conflict’ when the agency they work for has a lack of social capital: they are in the same compound as expatriates and are then under the same threat.⁹⁰ By being affiliated with an international aid agency, he or she seems to inherit the social capital of the agency. This is also true for local NGOs funded by Western organisations: “they hide their sources of funding. Because if they [al-Shabaab] find out, they will also ban you [the local NGO].”⁹¹

Directly implementing (operating with expatriates in the field) was done by one international aid agency interviewed: the Turkish IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation. Turkey supports institution-building processes in Somalia and invested millions in the country's development.

⁸⁸ Interview 2: CEO, CED, Nairobi, 29.7.2013 and Interview 28: Executive director, Hijra, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

⁸⁹ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, NSP, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

⁹⁰ Interview 3: Security and safety coordinator for South Central Somalia, DRC, Nairobi, 24.7.2013

⁹¹ Interview 21: Security Advisor for Somalia, Oxfam Novib, Nairobi, 22.7.2013

Turkey's support to the Somali government was illustrated in August 2011, during a disastrous famine, when the Turkish president Erdogan visited the country. It was the first official visit of a non-African president in two decades. However, al-Shabaab regards Turkey's involvement in Somalia as a 'cover for Western invaders'. On several occasions they threatened and targeted Turkish aid workers, and the Turkish embassy was attacked on 27 July 2013. Yet, the project coordinator of IHH claimed to have more humanitarian space exactly because they mingled in Somali society instead of working through local partners.⁹²

“Western organisations that come here, stay at the airport, do not dare to set foot outside the airport. They are afraid to mingle in society, but those Turks, they come here and physically go to work... That's the Turkish method. And we profit out of that... in the sense of more freedom of movement

Project coordinator, IHH, 15.9.2013

5.3 Keeping the balance

Within the highly divided and harsh context of Somalia, international aid agencies arrive with all the resources described in chapter 4. They lack social capital because they are not considered part of the Somali society: “The Somali context is very complicated, and because of that complication (...) communities will not perceive you [an expatriate aid worker] as one of them. That is very clear.”⁹³ However, that does not mean that international aid agencies are not part of the divided Somali context. And so unequally sharing or distributing resources and/or having a sociological unbalanced staff can actually fuel local conflict. Security advisors are aware of this, and advise aid agencies to pro-actively manage their position in Somali society by keeping ‘balance’.

5.3.1 Good sharing

Resources and social ties are very much interconnected in Somalia. Running business often follows clan dynamics: resources are often shared on the basis of clan. A businessman makes contracts from which, often, one clan profits. “He gets his own people. It is normally your own people you trust”.⁹⁴ It was even regarded “a fact that all services one buys in Somalia are connected to clans. You cannot read it on the front door, but money will go in via the back door.”⁹⁵ Therefore, the distribution of resources – actual goods to beneficiaries (food, WASH supplies) and signing contracts with various businesses that enable international aid agencies to operate (private security companies, renting vehicles and compounds) – can affect the local balance of power. For international aid agencies that operate on the basis of humanitarian

⁹² “Turkish moves in Somalia unnerve al-Shabaab (Al-Jazeera, 8.8.2013)

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/08/201386115526820190.html>

⁹³ Interview 3: Security and safety coordinator for South Central Somalia, DRC, Nairobi, 24.7.2013

⁹⁴ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

⁹⁵ Interview 22: Security advisor, Oxfam Novib, The Hague, 4.7.2013

principles, the practice of ‘good sharing’ is of vital importance for one’s social capital: “the way the resource is shared will condition your acceptance. (...) The good sharing of this resource is very important if you don’t want to have problems.”⁹⁶ But since we cannot really speak of two ‘sides’ in the Somali conflict, sharing can encounter some severe difficulties: “The issue with that is: how far do you divide that cake, in terms of resources that we have, in order to please everybody? I don’t know.”⁹⁷ International aid agencies, at some point in the distribution of aid, have to trust a regional administrator, a village chief, and/or heads of households “to do the right thing and see that the aid gets to those in need” (Menkhaus, 2012: p. 34). Since aid has been easily felt into the hands of groups that have the most social capital (Menkhaus, 2012), international aid agencies’ inability to fully control the distribution process of aid has consequences for their humanitarian principles, especially the one of impartiality. But also signing contracts (for hiring vehicles, a compound, buying basic needs supplies) and doing business with one particular group or person will not enhance an agency’s independency and impartiality:

“Whatever you do, or plan to do, you have to go to the district and you have to ask permission. There is no other way. If you have to recruit staff, you have to go to the district and consult. He [the district commissioner] will approve and disapprove. Because clan-issues are everywhere in Somalia, everywhere. [...] And it’s not good, its not supposed to be like that. Because we have to be impartial, we have to be, you know, independent. But, you know, this is the only way.”

Security advisor, World Vision, 19.7.2013

Likewise, clashes over economic capital are often fought along clan lines.⁹⁸ In a context where there is a lack of government control, “where a lot of people, especially men, walk around on the streets with Kalashnikovs,”⁹⁹ and where terrorist attacks happen every now and then, business/clan related violence such as criminality, business rivalry or personal enmity can be blurred into the ‘broader line’ of civil war.¹⁰⁰ For example, government forces that have not been paid salary make their money by setting up illegal checkpoints. This checkpoint money is then divided between clans. “A lot of intra-clashes in Mogadishu happen when they [the clans] fight over the checkpoint money. [...] And often it is really armed clashes. And often civilian bystanders get killed.”¹⁰¹ For international aid agencies, realizing this is vital for not ending up as the centre of a violent conflict. Abild (2010) interviewed a security advisor working in Somalia who told the agency that they had to fix a hole in their compounds’ wall: “... the agency explained that fixing the hole was an even bigger security threat. They had been told by

⁹⁶ Interview 11: Program director, NSP, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

⁹⁷ Interview 26: Safety and security coordinator for Somalia, Save the Children, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

⁹⁸ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013, ocha

⁹⁹ Interview 8: Program coordinator, IHH, Amsterdam, 15.9.2013

¹⁰⁰ Interview 14: Humanitarian affairs officer OCHA in Mogadishu, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

¹⁰¹ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

two competing clans that if they chose the other clan to do the maintenance job, they would attack them” (Abild, 2010: 87).

5.3.2 Staff management

Keeping balance, in terms of various (sub) clans that get a share of the resources an international aid agency brings, is important for gaining and maintaining social capital. As shown in the previous paragraph, not pro-actively managing this can end up disastrously for the agency. However, the pursuit for balance should not only focus on external dynamics such as the distribution of resources. Working with only one or two clans might not only seriously damage the humanitarian principles with which the international aid agencies operates, but it can also affect the agency’s access:

“The moment you find an access point, though clan A, you could have lost them [clan B] in that particular moment. Same with clan B, you could immediately lose clan A. Really you have to decide, is it more important to be there, and actually taking the risk of losing the clans, or are you saying like ‘well, maybe its not so important to be there, we just work with partners’. But what would it do to the partners, if you were affiliated [...]”

Advisor on conflict transformation, Oxfam Novib, 2.7.2013

Because most international aid agencies work with Somali national staff, they are a provider of jobs as well. A balanced (sociological) human resources policy is therefore considered as vital for the ability to operate in Somalia:

“Look at the recruitment process. For example Baidoa now, we are just planning to operate in Baidoa, we need to recruit staff for our operations. We cannot recruit from one clan: it should be balanced. We cannot shortlist the candidates from one clan and then try to explain ‘ok, we are here, we are going to hire the most professional guys, we need professionals, we hear you, we can see your opinion’ – its tricky, but in shortlist... if you choose, if you recruit a candidate from one clan, for another position, you have to recruit from another clan.”

Security advisor, World Vision, 19.7.2013

Sociological factors are considered even more important than professionalism in terms of its effects on security for the agency and its employees. “It is like I was in Northern Ireland and I was Irish, the first question would be: ‘which school did you go to?’ And immediately they would know your allegiance, your alliance and all that.”¹⁰² As a “Somali national is always part of his context”¹⁰³, a particular aid agency could be drawn in conflict due to their staff’s clan lineages:

“Neutrality is not easy anymore in Somalia, it is so diluted. I mean, for us, theoretically if there is a clan conflict, what you have to do is check your national staff. Because if they are

¹⁰² Interview 3: Security and safety coordinator for South Central Somalia, DRC, Nairobi, 24.7.2013

¹⁰³ Interview 10: Emergency coordinator, MSF Amsterdam, 16.8.2013

from let's say the perpetrators clan, you might not be able to send him to a certain location because he might be killed, not because he is working for you but because of the clan. So you have to check.”

Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, NSP, 19.7.2013

Besides keeping balance and having competent staff, international aid agencies were expected to always check their employees before entering the compound.

“Even so, even we have a well known and full staff, our procedures on arrivals is full-body searches, and scanning, and bag-search. Because one never knows what conversion have been applied. Their family may be held hostage, and they would be told to put something in their bag. You never know.

Security & safety coordinator, DRC, 24.7.2013

In one interview, with the move of expatriates to Mogadishu in mind, the balance between nationals and expatriates was mentioned as very important: “I mean, our Somali colleagues have been chiefly present and implementing over all these years, and now wanting to kind of return an expatriate permanent presence obviously has certain sensitivities with regards to how they perceive that, towards their sort of credibility”.¹⁰⁴

5.4 Conclusion

International aid agencies, as mentioned in chapter 5, have relatively significant economic means to pursue their mission in Somalia. They do not, however, possess significant social capital: they lack access to project sites and are not always accepted by the local population and by local authorities. International aid agencies do not determine the rules of the game in Somalia and are forced to use their economic capital in order to operate. They have to pay those who have social capital: local clan-militias, insurgent groups as al-Shabaab, district commissioners and other gatekeepers in order to answer to the humanitarian imperative. Purchasing protection and access do not fall in line with a policy that focuses on local acceptance. Indeed, the mission and mandate of international aid agencies is often not supported, or even accepted, by all Somalis. This is directly linked to the safety and security of international aid agencies staff and so international aid agencies mainly transfer risks by working through national staff and partner organisations. At the same time, these local NGOs might claim acceptance as an act of opportunism: they can fill the gap of social capital that international aid agencies lack only in their pursuit for something they lack: economic capital. International aid agencies tend to see all Somali NGOs as part of the Somali society and inherently accepted, which is not in accordance to the ground reality. By so, the lack of social capital that international aid agencies have is an economic opportunity to many actors that thrive on conflict.

¹⁰⁴ Interview 7: deputy head for the operation in Somalia, ICRC, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

Clannism is a discourse within Somali society that always needs to be taken into account when carrying out activities in Somalia. And, indeed, international aid agencies have operated through clan-lines. The paradox here is that not recognising clan-divisions will bring sincere security threats to international aid agencies in the distribution of resources. Balance in terms of sharing resources and employing staff of various clans is therefore considered of utmost importance for being 'conflict-sensitive'. Simultaneously, pro-actively managing a sociological balance, what many international aid agencies do, consolidates already existing divisions, therefore prolonging already fragile social structures.

6 **CULTURAL CAPITAL IN SOMALIA**

“Progress is a nice word, but change is its motivator and change has its enemies”

Security advisor, Hijra

Bourdieu brought up the concept of cultural capital to describe the “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body: knowledge, skills and interests that is acquired and inherited by the individual and “declines and dies with its bearer” (Bourdieu, 1986: p. 283). The acquisition of cultural capital costs time that should be personally invested by the investor; it requires economic capital, and like a muscular physique or a suntan it cannot be done at second hand (Bourdieu, 1986: p. 283). It can be acquired consciously, like studying at a university, writing a master thesis and institutionalised through a university degree. It can also ‘happen’ to be acquired and embodied by simply being part of a context for a particular time, without any deliberate calculation. When acquired, cultural capital becomes an integral part of a person’s habitat that distinguishes him or her from others. Although Bourdieu often referred to education with his concept of cultural capital, I analyse cultural capital in terms of the underlying logic of international aid agencies’ practices in Somalia: their dispositions to and knowledge of Somalia’s social world. How do international aid agencies mingle culturally in Somalia and, by doing so, how do these practices encounter conflict dynamics?

Just as a person who does not know – or has not been taught – anything of cubism and the Spanish civil war will probably not fully understand (or even appreciate) Picasso’s Guernica, a person who does not know Somali culture, language, traditions and history (of conflict) will probably not understand his or her role in that particular society. Oxfam’s advisor on conflict transformation explained the importance of cultural capital in Somalia as follows:

“Thinking of Somalia, there are different layers. You have the local layer, which is really traditional system that you have to understand before you even move in that country. Because it influences your work significantly if you just get involved with one of the clans, because you are coincidentally in the district of this one clan in Mogadishu, then you might not get the whole picture, but what this clan sees. So that moment, you are neither impartial nor neutral and you are actually affiliated.

Advisor on conflict transformation, Oxfam Novib, 2.7.2013

International actors and humanitarian interveners did not always understand the Somali social system. The UNOSOM intervention in the 1990s failed partly because of this. Instead of keeping peace, it consolidated and strengthened clan divisions and empowered warlords just by their presence and activities. The UN mission, and other international aid agencies, mingled in a

balance of power that was reliant on the way Somalia was socially organised. The failure to understand this social context was expressed by the director of the NSP Somalia:

“That was the problem in the 90s, that we didn’t know what a clan was. We arrived and said: “we need a driver, we need a car, we need one generator and a second car and one house.” And they knew perfectly what a clan was, but not us. We arrived there and [...] how they perceived it, they don’t tell you. It’s very hard for you to know. Now we have learned of it, now we know, more or less, what a clan is.”

Director, NSP, 19.7.2013

Yet, international aid agencies have understanding of the context since they are operating – and therefore intervening – in that very context. Aid agencies envision goals in the name of development or humanitarianism; concepts that are highly associated with cultural capital as international aid agencies believe their goals are worth operating for. They pay employees who studied for it (thereby converting economic capital to cultural capital) and work to facilitate these goals (cultural capital that influences the habitus).

6.1 Making difference

Somalia is not simply the stage of inter-clan conflicts, nor do conflicts solely have an economic – greed – incentive. Cultural arguments are also often made in Somali conflicts. Al-Shabaab, considered one of the major conflict-causing groups in Somalia by the interviewees, used cultural arguments in their rhetoric: they banned school-bells because they sound Christian, forbade watching BBC News and prohibited children to play football. They also banned international aid agencies such as World Vision and ADRA Adventist Development, accusing them of propagating Christianity in a Muslim country.¹⁰⁵ Hence, the Somali government is targeted by al-Shabaab exactly because they are believed to be backed by the Western world. “According to them [al-Shabaab], they [the Somali government] are not Muslims. They are not governing true Islamic sharia. So it is illegitimate.”¹⁰⁶ Instead, al-Shabaab wants Somalia to be an “isolated island”, away from the international community and remain a “no-go zone.”¹⁰⁷ There is a direct incompatibility of interests between al-Shabaab and international aid agencies who are attempting to overcome no-go zone’s in Somalia (Menkhaus, 2012).

In more subtle ways, international aid agencies also use cultural arguments to justify their presence in Somalia. Foreign development actors in Somalia get or give funds for trying to promote concepts as democracy, liberalism and/or human rights in Somalia. But even humanitarian actors as the DRC and the ICRC are also involved in training of international

¹⁰⁵ “List of Relief Agencies banned by al-Shabaab” (Somali Report, 24.7.2011) <http://somalireport.com/index.php/post/1214>

¹⁰⁶ Interview 21: Security Advisor for Somalia, Oxfam Novib, Nairobi, 22.7.2013

¹⁰⁷ Interview 28: Executive director, Hijra, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

humanitarian law to the ‘nascent’ security forces of Somalia,¹⁰⁸ and armed violence reduction, which “could be seen as supporting the government.”¹⁰⁹ These goals often intrinsically imply socio-political change.¹¹⁰ For example, Oxfam’s director of operations believed that “people living in underprivileged situations live in a situation that needs to be changed, end.”¹¹¹ “For societies dislocated by war and political instability – the failed and collapsed states – the situation is even more challenging. Besides being returned to sustainable development, these states have to be restructured as well; [...] a process involving fundamental change and reordering” (Duffield, 2002, p. 1050). Although Duffield is merely concerned with the development aspect of aid and does not address the humanitarian imperative of certain developing countries (which in the case of Somalia often is an argument to intervene, considering the many humanitarian crises Somalia has faced), the history of humanitarian assistance is not one of political neutrality either. Rather, it is “the story of how aid has functioned as an economic and political resource for the last 40 years.”¹¹² Facilitating fundamental change through what Duffield (2002) calls the ‘radicalisation of aid’ might also affect dynamics of conflict. “One of the most challenging aspects identified [...] is that humanitarian staff and agencies might not be targeted because they are ineffective or unprincipled, but exactly because they are effective and make a difference in peoples’ lives” (Abild, 2010, p. 100):

“I would say ... that it would be naive to think that we’re not part of the issues as well. You do your work in hopes to reach the maximal amount of people [...] as conflict sensitive as possible. And you also try to make sure that the work you’re doing is not directly fuelling the conflict. Do no harm, but further than that: making sure that the work that we’re doing is having the effect we want to have.”

Policy advisor, Oxfam, 2.7.2013

6.1.1 Development interventions

The effect international development agencies want to have is mainly to make a positive difference in the lives of people. This does not stop with local projects, but also includes political involvement. International aid agencies that have development programmes are deeply concerned with governance. “Involving the government, how weak and fragile it may be in this phase, could contribute to strengthen their legitimacy, a guarantee for durability, because the

¹⁰⁸ Interview 7: deputy head for the operation in Somalia, ICRC, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

¹⁰⁹ Interview 3: Security and safety coordinator for South Central Somalia, DRC, Nairobi, 24.7.2013

¹¹⁰ Interview 24: Associate Country Director Somalia, Oxfam Novib, Nairobi, 30.7.2013

¹¹¹ Interview 15: Director of projects, Oxfam Novib, The Hague, 5.6.2013

¹¹² “Risks and compromises for aid workers: when is enough, enough?” (The Guardian, 28.8.2013)

<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2013/aug/28/risks-compromises-aid-workers-somalia>

government is involved. For our own legitimacy, it is also important.”¹¹³ Oxfam’s country director for Somalia elaborated further on this:

“We cannot say that we don’t talk with the government at the moment, because this is a legally elected government, in a way. So in any other country that we are working in, we work on rights-based approaches, we have to make sure that the systems are strengthened for the duty bearers to do their obligation. So in order to do that, you have to build capacities. The different ministries, authorities, so it is not only the government, the president, we are looking at the ministry of education, ministry of food and agriculture, and the local authorities down to the district level. [...] What matters is not about our name. At the end of the day the international communities are not the ones who are really going to make the country run. It’s the nationals; it’s the government, the civil societies. So our obligation is to build these institutions and make sure that the system is properly running.”

Country director for Somalia, Oxfam, 5.6.2013

This can be seen, however, as a national and cultural matter. For example, not managing an inclusive staff and an inclusive way of working (involving several clans on an impartial basis) could quickly tend to cultural imperialism: “Because we are Oxfam, Western of nature.”¹¹⁴ This is comparable with several other development organisations. “When you are talking about CARE, they [the local population] directly link that to the USA.”¹¹⁵ World Vision was also considered [a] Western organisation, American-based. “Our main office is in California.”¹¹⁶ By so, condemning prominent actors of violating human rights in Somalia, while being present, is a delicate matter as rights-based arguments do often mingle with political arguments:

“You are for democracy; you are for human rights; you are for peace; you have to decide who are the good guys and who are the bad guys. This is politics. It’s clear. It is a necessity work at some point.”¹¹⁷

Program director, NSP, 19.7.2013

Mingling – or meddling – in politics is controversial in Somalia. For example, a journalist was detained for interviewing a woman that accused Somali security forces of raping her. The woman herself had to go to jail for ‘discrediting the Somali forces’. “The government is not keen to, that such things are even mentioned”.¹¹⁸ This is expressed in a reluctance of talking about specific issues in interviews: “Some of these things are fairly confidential, because we work in places where we publically don’t talk about certain things like human rights”.¹¹⁹ Subtlety in expressing social change is essential.

¹¹³ Interview 15: Director of projects, Oxfam Novib, The Hague, 5.6.2013

¹¹⁴ Interview 15: Director of projects, Oxfam Novib, The Hague, 5.6.2013

¹¹⁵ Interview 1: Staff and programme security coordinator, CARE, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

¹¹⁶ Interview 27: Security advisor, World Vision, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

¹¹⁷ Interview 11: Program director, NSP, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

¹¹⁸ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

¹¹⁹ Interview 17: Policy officer ‘Knowledge and Programme Management’, Oxfam Novib, The Hague, 2.7.2013

“The human rights organisation[s] were blacklisted by the government, and were arrested, bank accounts frozen, family members arrested as well. I met with one partner, she’s trying to make a difference, but that of course might cause an effect. Hawa Aden [Mohamed], who is the executive director of GECPD [Galkayo Education Centre for Peace and Development], has got regular life threats, has got threats against her life because of the work she is doing on girls education. And so, she is trying to make a difference, but that’s of course going to cause an effect.”

Policy officer, Oxfam, 2.7.2013

6.1.2 Humanitarian interventions

Humanitarian aid agencies are believed to mingle less in dynamics of conflict due to its neutral character. Humanitarian assistance only takes place during situations where the local population is in dire need for help, and does, by so, not mingle in political affairs. Interviewees argued that, in contrast to development work, humanitarian interventions are based upon concepts of neutrality, independency and impartiality.

“Because if you become more biased, it’s the time you will encounter problems. But if they know your position and that you’re doing humanitarian programmes, and don’t care who is who, regardless of what ideology you have, people will see, think this is an organisation we can actually work with.”

Executive director, Hijra, 1.8.2013

Neutrality and impartiality is based on international aid agencies’ working in different places, with a variety of actors. It is also based the agency’s working reputation –its working history and aims. The history of the organisation and the actual work the organisation did, such as reaching and responding to the needs of beneficiaries, was often mentioned when talking about how the organisation was perceived. “They don’t need the political issues.”¹²⁰ “If you go to a settlement to do WASH or nutrition [projects], then of course you have community acceptance. But if you just come to do ‘bla-bla’ with the government, nobody will eat from it.”¹²¹ Furthermore, it is important that the local community knows that international aid agencies are not pushing their ideologies, but just provide services for the communities.¹²² By so, there is a connection between pushing political issues and one’s ideology – one’s cultural capital – and levels of security. The local population would not do anything against the organisation, not only because they needed the services the organisation was offering, but also because there was no pushing of the organisation’s cultural capital. This also includes promoting human rights, work that is more likely to step on people’s toes:

¹²⁰ Interview 27: Security advisor, World Vision, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

¹²¹ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

¹²² Interview 27: Security advisor, World Vision, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

“So if you look at the work that we do (...) it is very non-political. And so it is very unlikely of being seen or perceived as very Western. Because I think one of the things we are probably be seen is that we are heavy on child protection, but then the rest of our other interventions including nutrition, health, WASH, and shelter. So unlike Oxfam, who is quite likely to step on toes, peoples toes at one point, I think we are slightly different in the core sectors that we work in.”

Security & Safety advisor, Save the Children, 23.7.2013

6.1.3 Transformative character

Yet, even the ICRC deputy head for the Somali mission acknowledged that they were “to a certain extent” politically networking.¹²³ In fact, this was deemed necessary as “all NGOs working in Somalia should register” to the government and “partners [...] should tell [the government] the source of the money and if that NGO is registered in Mogadishu.”¹²⁴ Indeed, from most interviews with aid workers, it was acknowledged that being neutral and impartial is extremely difficult in Somalia, as “a lot of problems for humanitarian workers come from the organisations’ accommodation of political winds. How are you different than the TFG?”¹²⁵

Organisations having political purposes were perceived to run significant risks because they were choosing sides, therefore mingling in conflict. But even international aid agencies with solely humanitarian or recovery purposes can end up being perceived as political. The ICRC, which has the concept of neutrality as the main pillar of its mandate, is training the Somali military in rules of conduct in accordance to the IHL, which raises questions of their neutrality and impartiality towards other actors as al-Shabaab. “I think that there are people within al-Shabaab that, if they found out about it, they might not be especially sympathetic towards it”.¹²⁶ The transformative character of many international aid agencies has the potential to cause conflict rather than to bring relief and peace:

“I think you should always go in trying to promote gender justice, but the way you package it is so important. If you’re going into a community, and say: “well, this group of people that didn’t have any power for hundreds of years, we want to give them power, and that will mean that you have less power,” we’re essentially causing the conflict.”

Policy officer, Oxfam, 2.7.2013

And so international aid agencies hire national staff, because change imposed by ‘others’ seems to be highly controversial in Somalia and has already encountered resistance and violence: “local partners implement projects through civil society, which, for Oxfam, makes “huge difference[s]

¹²³ Interview 7: Deputy head for the operation in Somalia, ICRC, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

¹²⁴ Interview 21: Security Advisor for Somalia, Oxfam Novib, Nairobi, 22.7.2013

¹²⁵ Interview 10: Emergency coordinator, MSF Amsterdam, 16.8.2013

¹²⁶ Interview 1: Staff and programme security coordinator, CARE, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

to be able to have an understanding how to phrase things, how to talk about things”¹²⁷ in Somalia.¹²⁸

“If I go to a [Somali] minister and say, Oxfam stands for a rights-based approach and that is what we want, I will most probably not make friends. But he has to know that it is what Oxfam stands for. How do you wrap messages, how do you get the other to go along with your vision, how do you involve him with the projects.

Director of projects, Oxfam, 5.6.2013

We can observe that al-Shabaab’s “desire to profit from aid agency activity existed alongside deeply entrenched suspicion of the aims and origins of aid agencies” (Jackson & Aynte, 2013). Illustrative for this is the al-Shabaab banning of international aid agencies in 2011. When many international aid agencies were expelled from Somalia, Oxfam was not on the banning-list, and neither did it received any indication that they were banned,¹²⁹ because it was working through partners.¹³⁰ Although being active in Somalia, Oxfam did not have a permanent presence and worked only through local partners. The security coordinator of CARE argued that this issue is related to intelligence collection. “So they know you’re there, you have gadgets, you can record, copy, you can get their positions. So that’s why they are banning, because they have this in mind.”¹³¹ One of Oxfam’s lobbyist’s argued that, although they did not exactly knew al-Shabaab’s rationale behind the banning of aid agencies, Oxfam did operate through local “clubs” that knew better what is going on.¹³² This was acknowledged by Hijra’s’ executive director, who argued that his organisation hired local staff instead of working through expatriates:

“Because of the vulnerability level for expatriates, it is higher, they don’t know the context, they don’t know the area, you know. They are not part of the community; they are not easily being accepted by the community, because of either your skin of because of your culture or the way you dress, the way you use to live is totally different than how those communities live. Whereas they [nationals] know the local culture, the local leaders, the people where they deal with, the context. So it is through them that we have actually access to every part of Somalia.”¹³³

Executive director, Hijra, 1.8.2013

¹²⁷ Interview 17: Policy officer, Oxfam Novib, The Hague, 2.7.2013

¹²⁸ Besides the ethical questions of transferring the risks aid workers run to national staff, working through partners – due to a lack of social and cultural capital – has also fostered “cynicism and mistrust” (Abild, 2010) between national aid workers in Somalia and expatriates working from Nairobi, Kenya. “Outside [in Mogadishu], there is the perception that most NGOs, international NGOs are just in Nairobi dining and drinking in big hotels, using the money meant for the poor and the needy in Somalia” (Interview 21: Security Advisor for Somalia, Oxfam Novib, Nairobi, 22.7.2013).

¹²⁹ Interview 21: Security Advisor for Somalia, Oxfam Novib, Nairobi, 22.7.2013

¹³⁰ Interview 24: Associate Country Director Somalia, Oxfam Novib, Nairobi, 30.7.2013

¹³¹ Interview 1: Staff and programme security coordinator, CARE, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

¹³² Interview 19: Lobbyist, Oxfam Novib, The Hague, 4.7.2013

¹³³ Interview 28: Executive director, Hijra, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

Al-Shabaab's suspicion towards aid comes from its perceived affiliation with Western governments. This highlights a shift in aid practices especially after the declaration of the "war on terror" after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001: aid agencies have less control over their actions and have to justify their actions towards their donors which are often Western liberal institutions (Vaux, 2006). Both international development and humanitarian efforts on Somalia are considered interventions that do intrinsically imply social change and are affiliated with Western governments. By so, international aid agencies have become biased and are perceived to be more biased.

6.2 Affiliation

When a US missile strike killed Aden Hashi Ayro, an al-Shabaab leader in Somalia, the international aid agencies CARE and IMC got expelled by al-Shabaab. They were directly linked with their background – the United States of America – and accused of espionage.

"The thing is, the affiliation. When you're talking about CARE they directly [link that] to the USA. And the same applied before. Something happened with CARE, we were in a certain area and then I think the same night, there was a strike, a drone strike, and so one of the al-Shabaab leaders was killed. So they connected that, that's why we were told to leave... So there was the connection, and the affiliation."

CARE, 1.8.2013

With whom an organisation and their employees are affiliated is of vital importance for its role within conflict. Firstly, agencies that work towards stabilisation are perceived to be working with the government. Stabilisation projects, such as capacity building projects for government administrations, are therefore under the most threats. "The problem is: if al-Shabaab knows, they know that you are working for stabilisation for Somalia. And they don't like that. And what they are doing, they target everyone who is working towards stabilisation."¹³⁴ "So everybody who is seen to support the government is also a direct enemy"¹³⁵ for al-Shabaab and other militias that oppose the government. On the contrary, when Oxfam raised questions on the safety of civilians during and after African forces under the lead of Kenya captured Kismayo from al-Shabaab in September 2012, it was interpreted as pro-Shabaab."¹³⁶ This expresses the delicacy of local perception towards an international aid agency in a dynamic society that is internally divided, with opportunistic alliances of 'convenience' (Bruton, 2010; Roque, 2009) that can change any time. Even issues as "identification with hotels [or] how are they going to be moved [or] who are you going to contract for renting vehicles"¹³⁷ matter for operational security, according to the security coordinator of CARE. The organisation now uses vehicles of their local partners

¹³⁴ Interview 1: staff and programme security coordinator, CARE, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

¹³⁵ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

¹³⁶ Interview 19: Lobbyist, Oxfam Novib, The Hague, 4.7.2013

¹³⁷ Interview 1: staff and programme security coordinator, CARE, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

“because they have been there for long, they have a certain level of acceptance within the community.”¹³⁸

Secondly, affiliation of aid workers though their nationality was considered a major factor in encountering dynamics of conflict. This was for example expressed by the security advisor of CARE, an organisation that had been banned by al-Shabaab on the accusation of spying for the enemy.

“We are very selective of the people we are sending. Because we don’t want, like sometimes we don’t want to send white faces, because that also increases the profile of that area or the people who are involved in that project. Because in Somalia, you know, people talk, and saying this, and so that can be a problem. So we are looking for people we are sending into Somalia, looking what kind of nationality. Because now you see the AMISOM, people from Uganda, Kenyans in Kismayo, so even when you select people to check [monitor] you have to look at nationalities because they might be exposed because of that they are doing within that area.

Security advisor, CARE, 1.8.2013

Aid workers are therefore perceived as inseparable from the context they come from.¹³⁹ Kenyan aid workers in Somalia may be working for an organisation that claims to be neutral, impartial and independent but the person is still affiliated with the involvement of Kenya in Somalia, such as the Kenyan invasion of Kismayo, a big port in Somalia. Turkish aid workers have been affiliated with Turkey’s support for the Somali government. Because of that affiliation, several Turkish aid workers have been attacked and even killed: “And they shown clearly, they actually say, AS, through the media, that they are actually against Turkish in Somalia, and so if they are want to be spared for their lives, they have to stop what they’re doing.”¹⁴⁰ The UN Common Compound has been attacked because of the UNDP’s interests in building institutions in cooperation with the Somali government. “So they consider the UN their enemy which is not true. I mean the UN is supporting people without any discrimination, without any religious, linguistic barriers. But unfortunately, they don’t understand.”¹⁴¹ As a consequence, the concept of neutrality was perceived as difficult to maintain in Somalia. Insisting on impartiality and neutrality and, as a consequence, also working in areas where the government has no power,

¹³⁸ Interview 1: staff and programme security coordinator, CARE, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

¹³⁹ This is not a new observation of aid workers that have been attacked for being affiliated with the context they come from. For example, after the controversial cartoons of the prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper, foreign aid workers were attacked in Sudan. (“Prophet drawings led to attacks on aid workers in Sudan – EU official” (22.3.2006) <http://sudantribune.com/spip.php?article14205>). Discreet missions of U.S.A.I.D in the name of advancing democracy led to many calls from aid workers working around the world that asked how U.S.A.I.D could pursue this and put them in such danger. (“Secret programs hurt aid efforts” (15.4.2014) <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/04/15/when-is-foreign-aid-meddling>).

¹⁴⁰ Interview 28: Executive director, Hijra, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

¹⁴¹ Interview 14: Humanitarian affairs officer OCHA in Mogadishu, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

could be perceived as undermining state-building efforts of the UN and donors. Indeed, “to be neutral, becomes political” (Abild, 2010: p. 87).

“I would say neutrality would be only if you work on your own. Which is impossible. Because in Somalia for example, working with the US government, working with the UK government, who al-Shabaab is highly against, then that question is no longer valid. Because we are getting funding from the UK. We probably are getting some funding from the US. So from our perspective, there is. But from the wider net (...) then none of the agencies working there straight and neutral, including the locals that work with us.”

Safety and security coordinator, Save the Children, 23.7.2013

6.3 Who is who at which moment?

Unlike international aid agencies, which are very easily affiliated with political powers and interests, local alliances and affiliations change ad-hoc and are therefore very difficult to understand. “Who is who at which moment?”¹⁴² is a question as important as intractable. For example in Mogadishu: “The city is divided, but there are no green lines. It doesn’t mean that all this areas, like Hodan is for clan X, and clan Y should not cross... no”.¹⁴³ Mogadishu was both mentioned a cosmopolitan city that “welcomes everybody”¹⁴⁴ as well as a city that at night belonged to “somebody else”.¹⁴⁵ These invisible characteristics of Somali society are a major challenge for international aid agencies, especially in a context where violent conflict is recurrent and prominent at the surface. “The structure of society is still so fractured that nobody is quite sure who is what, on what side, and in between of this we got al-Shabaab coming with terrorist attacks and quite severe ones.”¹⁴⁶ Illustrative is the al-Shabaab attack on the court in Mogadishu of April 14, 2013, which cost the lives of at least 20 people:¹⁴⁷

“Nobody knows who is in the uniform. This is the biggest problem. And also in the court, in the end they gave the order to shoot everyone in the court with a gun and a uniform because they did not know if it was al-Shabaab or one of theirs. So they also killed two of their own people, because nobody knows who is in the uniform”

Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, NSP, 19.7.2013

Al-Shabaab thrives on the fragmented nature of society. For example, in Kismayo they exploited tensions between rival local militias in order to attack a Ras Kamboni military base. The Ras Kamboni militia was previously allied with al-Shabaab but joined Kenyan forces later on. These fluid political and social constellations, characterized by ad hoc alliances, make working in Somalia very difficult (Roque, 2009). This is not only applicable for international aid agencies:

¹⁴² Interview 10: Emergency coordinator, MSF Amsterdam, 16.8.2013

¹⁴³ Interview 21: Security Advisor for Somalia, Oxfam Novib, Nairobi, 22.7.2013

¹⁴⁴ Interview 2: CEO, CED, Nairobi, 29.7.2013

¹⁴⁵ Interview 12: Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

¹⁴⁶ Interview 3: Security and safety coordinator for South Central Somalia, DRC, Nairobi, 24.7.2013

¹⁴⁷ “Somalia supreme court attacks kills at least 20” (The Guardian, 14.4.2013)

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/14/somalia-supreme-court-attack-kills>

Al-Qaeda, often linked with al-Shabaab, experienced this already back in 1993 when they regarded Somalia as a “low-cost recruiting ground” but instead “found a lawless land of shifting alliances. [...] The primacy of clan ultimately frustrated al-Qaeda’s efforts to recruit and develop a strong, unified coalition” (Shinn, 2011). Their mission, just like UNISOM’s, failed.

Al-Shabaab has the capacities to infiltrate everywhere because of their invisibility. They are just part of the community. “Because Shabaab is not written on their’ forehead, so they are just regular people like anyone else living there. [...] They are integrated into the society, into the larger cities as well.”¹⁴⁸ And so it is very hard to differentiate who is al-Shabaab in the community and who is not. The MSF emergency coordinator expressed the difficulty of working in Somalia as follows:

Making public accusations without endangering the programs of other INGOs is very difficult. It is very difficult to accuse the Hells Angels in a country as the Netherlands, because “is the Hells Angels a criminal organisation or do certain members of the organisation engage in criminal behaviour? This is something totally different, and if this is already difficult in the Netherlands, how difficult is it in a fragmented country as Somalia?

Emergency coordinator, MSF, 16.8.2013

6.4 Conclusion

International aid agencies want to make a difference in Somali social life. However, through the practices of aid workers and their understanding of Somalia’s social world, international aid agencies do not only socially mingle in Somalia but also culturally. They make difference. International aid agencies are involved in Somali local and regional politics. Many aid agencies are engaged in capacity building and have to work with Somalia’s public institutions to do their projects. More important, international aid agencies pursue societal change, which does endanger other influential actors. This is mainly opposed by the radical Islamic group al-Shabaab (who is against any form of foreign involvement in Somalia), but also Somalia’s own government is suspicious of the transformative character of most international aid agencies. By culturally mingling in Somalia, international aid agencies encounter different dynamics than is the case with social and economic capital. Mingling in Somalia’s social world is rather perceived as culturally meddling. As a consequence, international aid agencies are very quickly affiliated with their, often Western, background, therefore with political powers. This endangers humanitarian principles as neutrality and impartiality and has direct implications on the safety and security of Somali and expatriate aid workers.

¹⁴⁸ Interview 26: Safety and security coordinator for Somalia, Save the Children, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

7 CONCLUSION

The position of international aid agencies in Somalia is – just like the state itself – very fragile. Aid workers – nationals and expatriates – have been specifically targeted: they were attacked, abducted or killed by a variety of actors that are driven by opportunity and change coalitions rapidly. International aid agencies have an imperative to intervene and operate in Somalia, but answering this imperative should come parallel to seriously considering their impact on dynamics of conflict and their potential to prolong conflict. By analysing the economic, social and cultural capital of international aid agencies in Somalia, this thesis provides a broad framework through which the position of international aid agencies has become more visible.

First, international aid agencies are resource-rich entities in Somalia. Their activities and projects provide an income to many Somalis and have the potential to foster local entrepreneurship that can benefit many communities. Through their significant economic capital, aid agencies are able to operate: they can hire private security companies, pay for access and safety guarantees from local authorities. They can hire national employees that understand the working context or pay local NGOs to do the projects for them, thereby transferring risks. Economic capital provides international aid agencies the ability to set foot in Somalia. However, the significant influx of economic capital can also become a source for conflict. Actors that have the power to benefit from this influx of aid (through diverting food, livelihood supplies and other resources), the presence of aid workers (kidnapping for money-exchange), or the organisations (receiving payments for safety-guarantees, providing security and access to project sites) have a stake in the continuation of conflict and human suffering. These actors have an interest in the maintenance and even consolidating of conflict itself. Hence, insecurity has become a prerequisite for the so-called security industry in Somalia.

Second, international aid agencies lack social capital in Somalia. Although economic capital makes operating possible, aid workers themselves are often not accepted by local communities. They lack the social connections vital for being able to operate. Hence, international aid agencies do not control the rules of the game in Somalia. They are dependent upon local authorities for access and security. Those who do possess social capital can use this capital in the pursuit for economic capital from international aid agencies. District commissioners have the ability to decide where aid agencies have to hire their car, their compound and their staff. By so, the humanitarian principle of independence becomes seriously compromised.

To overcome this, most international aid agencies work through ‘remote programming.’ They hire Somali nationals to carry out the projects, and keep contact with stakeholders, gatekeepers such as clan elders or district commissioners, beneficiaries and local communities. However, transferring risks from expatriates to nationals prompt some serious ethical considerations, as the numbers of Somali aid-workers that have been targeted actually surpass that of expatriate aid-workers. Only working with nationals is, therefore, not a panacea in order to overcome dealing with dynamics of conflict. This is a reality barely acknowledged by international aid agencies.

National staff of international aid agencies is part of their context as well and can be easily affiliated with local conflict-dynamics through their clan identities. International aid agencies can, as a consequence, lose their impartiality and need to manage a sociological balance in their staff. However, when doing this international aid agencies face the paradox of being conflict-sensitive: by attempting to keep a sociological balance in their staff, they simultaneously maintain and consolidate the already existing sociological clan-divisions that foster conflict in the first place. Hence, international aid agencies do not only provide relief for beneficiaries. They also provide relief to al-Shabaab from not – or less – having to care for the population. Al-Shabaab does not have the capacity to take care of basic human needs to the population, and so international aid agencies fill this gap. By doing so, al-Shabaab needs the activities of international aid agencies to maintain local support for their mission.

Third, international aid agencies often have a Western, liberal framework through which they look at the Somali society. The transformative character of their cultural capital is problematic as it distances the aid agency with the local, traditional, beliefs. Those who possess significant cultural capital in Somali society might feel endangered by this transformative character. Indeed, looking through a Bourdieusian framework, we can see that al-Shabaab has a paradoxical relationship with international aid agencies. In terms of social capital, they need the activities of international aid agencies to keep the support from the local population. In terms of cultural capital, however, they are very anxious and suspicious of the internal logic of aid. They regard expatriates as cultural intruders and target national staff for compelling with foreigners. This explains accusations of espionage for the U.S, spreading Christianity, and basically everything that does not fit in Shabaab’s vision for Somalia.

International aid agencies are working in a state of exception. As humanitarian space is not something given in Somalia, they take measures that are exceptional: negotiating and paying insurgent groups, other militias or gatekeepers for access to project sites, using armed guards from private security companies, funding projects with often low means to monitor, transferring risks by engaging in remote partnerships and keeping a sociological balance in staff

management. All these measures seem to be necessary to answer to the humanitarian imperative, but simultaneously endanger and compromise humanitarian principles and have the potential to prolong conflict. Willing or not, international aid agencies are part of the Somali context, including the violent conflicts that afflict the country. By being part of it, international aid agencies affect dynamics of conflict in Somalia and face a Samaritan's dilemma: their very existence can prompt warlords and other local authorities to generate the condition that attract aid. By their practices, they are relieving insurgent groups from keeping the population in mind and have the potential to create difference in Somalia's sociological and political constellations. Yet, suspending humanitarian and development assistance can place thousands of people in a truly dire situation: an agonizing dilemma for every aid worker active in Somalia.

8

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

CARE

1. Staff and programme security coordinator, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

Centre for Education and Development (CED)

2. CEO, Nairobi, 29.7.2013

Danish Refugee Council (DRC)

3. Security and safety coordinator for South Central Somalia, Nairobi, 24.7.2013
4. Regional safety advisor, Nairobi, 30.7.2013

European External Action Service (EEAS) of the European Commission (EC)

5. Policy officer, EC delegation in Nairobi, food security and agricultural development unit, 23.7.2013

Humanitarian Action for Relief and Development Organisation (HARDO)

6. Program manager, Nairobi, 30.7.2013

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

7. Deputy head for the operation in Somalia, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

IHH Humanitarian Relief Organisation, Netherlands

8. Program coordinator, Amsterdam, 15.9.2013 (translated from Dutch)

International Medical Corps (IMC)

9. Security advisor, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF)

10. Emergency coordinator, Amsterdam (phone call) 16.8.2013 (translated from Dutch)

NGO Safety Program for Somalia (NSP Somalia)

11. Program director, Nairobi, 19.7.2013
12. Area manager for Mogadishu and South Central Somalia based in Mogadishu, Nairobi, 19.7.2013
13. Security analyst, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

14. Humanitarian affairs officer in Mogadishu, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

Oxfam

15. Director of projects, The Hague, 5.6.2013 (translated from Dutch)
16. Policy officer quality and control, The Hague, 2.7.2013 (translated from Dutch)
17. Policy officer Knowledge and Programme Management, The Hague, 2.7.2013 (translated from Dutch)

18. Advisor on conflict transformation, The Hague, 2.7.2013
19. Lobbyist, The Hague, 4.7.2013 (translated from Dutch)
20. Programme officer, Nairobi, 1.8.2013
21. Security Advisor for Somalia, Nairobi, 22.7.2013
22. Security advisor, The Hague, 4.7.2013 (translated from Dutch)
23. Staff 'Knowledge and Programme Management', The Hague, 2.7.2013 (translated from Dutch)
24. Interview 24: Associate Country Director Somalia, Nairobi, 30.7.2013
25. Country Director Somalia, Nairobi, 4.8.2013

Save the Children

26. Safety and security coordinator for Somalia, Nairobi, 23.7.2013

World Vision

27. Security advisor, Nairobi, 19.7.2013

Hijra

28. Executive director, Nairobi, 1.8.2013

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