The Ogaden War:
Somali women’s roles and the psychological ramifications.

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P. 1  Asli Hassan Abade: first female pilot in Somalia.


P. 70  ‘The Lost Victims of War’.

Used acronyms

A.I.A.I.  Al-Ittihad al-Islami (also called Ijtihad al-Islami)
A.S.D.  Acute Stress Disorder\(^1\)
O.A.U.  Organisation of African Unity
O.L.F.  Oromo Liberation Front
O.N.L.F.  Ogaden National Liberation Front
P.T.S.D.  Post-traumatic Stress Disorder\(^2\)
S.N.M  Somali National Movement
U.K.  United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
U.S.C.  United Somali Congress
U.S.S.R.  Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
U.W.S.L.F.  United Western Somali Liberation Front
W.H.O.  World Health Organization
W.S.L.F.  Western Somali Liberation Front

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\(^1\) Cf. appendix for a list of ASD symptoms
\(^2\) Cf. appendix for a list of PTSD symptoms
Glossary


Qaad: Also spelled khat, kaad, qad, chat. *Catha edulis.* A plant whose ‘leaves and twigs are chewed for their euphorizing effects, [it] is a popular stimulant known and used in many parts of the Middle East and the Horn of Africa ... One must chew large amounts of khat leaves, whose taste westerners may find repulsive, to experience a minimum level of excitement’. It has the special property of ‘enlivening the imagination, clearing the ideas, cheering the heart, diminishing sleep, and taking the place of food’.

Ugas: A Somali title for elderly men who are the leader or president of the assembled elderly men within a community. Sometimes translated by my interpreters as ‘chief’.

Zaar: Spirit possession by a *zaar* spirit. Mostly occurs in women and can be found all over East-Africa.

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Introduction

‘Many have died. To say more is to simplify, but to fathom the statement is also to make the fact bearable.’

Setting
The Ogaden war or Somali-Ethiopian war (July 1977 – March 1978) was one of the largest inter-state wars in contemporary Africa. The war was situated in the Ogaden region in the east of current day Ethiopia. This part of the Ethiopian plateau is mainly populated by Ogadeeni – literally ‘those of the plateau’ a Somali ‘subclan’ which makes up one third of the total Somali population. The Ogadeeni belong to the ‘northern’ Somali people, who are divided in three clans: Isaak, Dir and Daarood. According to Cerulli the Daarood are

‘the most numerous Somali group. They inhabit the eastern portion of British Somaliland; northern Italian Somaliland; “Oltre-Giuba”; the Somali districts in Kenya Colony, and almost the whole Somali zone of the Ethiopian plateau. The principal Dārōd groups are: I) the Kablallah, who are divided into Komba and Kūmada. … The Kūmada comprise, besides the little groups Galimēs, Waitēn, Bal’ad and Djīdīwāk, the great tribe of Ogadēn, and then occupy the most part Ethiopian Somaliland …’

The Ogadeeni were, and still are, a mostly nomadic people who herd camels, sheep and goats in a region westerners have referred to as ‘a thousand miles of sand’. The aridity of the region was no deterrent to the irredentist ambitions of Somali president Siad Barre (1969-1991), who wanted to incorporate the Ogaden region into a Greater Somalia. Barre unofficially supported several Ogaden based militias such as the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF). These had to structurally weaken the Ethiopian forces in the Ogaden, before the Somali army could invade Ethiopia in 1977. In the first couple of weeks these Somali

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7 Heirman M. (ed.) ‘Regionale konflikten en internationale spanningen in de Hoorn van Afrika’ In International Peace Information Service – Dossiers (Antwerp, s.d.) p. 66
troops could conquer most of the Ogaden after which long and costly battles developed over the bigger cities such as Jijiga, Harer and Dire Dawa. When the USSR and Cuba, originally supporting Somalia, switched sides and allied with Ethiopian Dergue and its president Haile Mariam Mengistu, Somalia eventually lost the war and retreated into its own realm. Thus the people living in the Ogaden desert were first overwhelmed by the WSLF, then by the Somali regular army and eventually by the avenging Ethiopian troops. Only in 1988 did Somalia officially stop supporting Somali militias who were fighting the Ethiopian army. However, the fighting in the area never stopped. In 1984, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) was established and up until today they are active in the region even though they no longer fight for a Greater Somalia but for an independent Ogadeenia. Until very recently the Islamists group Al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) (that later changed its name to United Western Somali Liberation Front (UWSLF)) was also active in the Ogaden.

This brief outline of the Ogaden war is however, in need of contextualization, since there is far more to the story then is apparent at first glance. Histories of the conflict have often been confusing because of confusion about terms like “Ogaden”, “war”. Much needs to be clarified before any attempt at writing a history of the conflict is attempted since everything from the motivations, to the geographical and temporal boundaries of the conflict are disputed by the parties involved:

Firstly, the geographical limits of Ogaden are often said to be the product of an Ethiopian reorganisation of its provinces after the fall of Mengistu, during which new regions based on ethnic lines were created. The current borders of Ogaden province date back to this event. But is the Ogaden as discussed here the current Somali Region, or is it the former province of Hararge, maybe including parts of Bale province? Is it the nomadic countryside, or does it also include the cities of Dire Dawa, Harer and Jijiga? Is it the pastoral grounds of the lower areas of Harerge, or also the Harerge highlands where the Somalis form an important minority

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12 Many of my informants preferred the term ‘liberated’ when the WSLF took their village or town.
13 Heirman M. (ed.) ‘Regionale konflikten en internationale spanningen in de Hoorn van Afrika’ p. 66.
14 Mohamed Sherif, ONLF Deputy head of the Information Office (43) 27-04-2011, Nairobi - Eastleigh
population? Ogadeeni nationalists, and their supporters often see the Ogaden as broad as possible, Ethiopian nationalists and their supporters tend to see it as only the arid nomadic lands in the east.

Second, according to Somalia the Ogaden war was never an interstate war. Somalia always denied being military involved: the official Somali statement was that the WSLF, not Somalia, was fighting in the Ethiopian regime. So even though there is more than enough evidence to prove the opposite, Somalia always claimed that the WSLF only got moral support from Somalia, never military support.

Third, the given timetable can never be more than just an estimate. The conflict in the Ogaden started in the 19th century and is still going on today. From beginning to end there were rebel groups fighting the central Ethiopian regime (Cf. *Infra*). Since Somalia never declared war on Ethiopia there is no clear date at which the war broke out or when it ended. The dates mentioned above are those that are most often used and July 1977 seems indeed to be the start of more intense fighting. The end date is more uncertain: May 1978 is often mentioned, but others use 1979.

Fourthly, the goal of the war is not always clear. Did Somalia invade the Ogaden to incorporate it into a Greater Somalia or to help the Ogadeeni to gain their independence and create their own state, Ogadeenia? Even at the time, ambiguous signs were sent out and it seemed each actor had its own idea on the purpose of the conflict.

These elements are responsible for the fact that many accounts of the war differ in their details, thus constructing a vague and sometimes confusing image of the Ogaden war.

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16 In these Highlands, the most easterly of the Somali clans live, who are ethnically mixed Oromo and Somali, practicing Oromo agricultural techniques but possessing Somali social institutions. [Gebissa E. *Leaf of Allah. Khat & agricultural transformation in Harerger*, *Ethiopia 1875-1991* (Oxford, 2004) p. 36]

17 S.n. ‘Confrontatie in de Ogaden’ In *Keesings Historisch Archief*. 1977. (year 46, No. 2402) p. 609

18 Somali MiG-21 warplanes were often seen in action above Ethiopian territory. [Rovers E. ‘A first-hand report from the frontline’ In *Daily Nation*, 17 August 1977, p. 8]


20 El-Bushra J. and Sahl I.M.G. *Cycles of Violence. Gender Relations and Armed Conflict* (Nairobi, 2005) p. 43

21 According to some, referenda were to decided whether the Ogaden would become a part of Somalia or an independent state. [S.n. ‘Ogaden people to decide’ In *Daily Nation*, 18 August 1977, p. 1]

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It is however clear and undisputable that many people died, were wounded or had to flee their homes. Nobody in the region was left unaffected by the Ogaden war.

Where to start when discussing such bloodshed? How can we make the horrors and the horrendousness of the conflict known to the world without losing hope? I believe the answer lies in talking to the people who lived through the war and letting them recount the events as they saw them. I undertook to interview survivors of the Ogaden conflict and record what they had to say. This may not have led to a classical positivist historiography of the Ogaden war, but I believe that is was valuable as an account of the war as it was witnessed and remembered by those I spoke to. This side of the story – albeit not “unbiased” – is essential if we want to understand the social and psychological impact of the war.

I have chosen to discuss the Ogaden war with a focus on women, for they are too often considered victims or, at best, passive actors in a conflict. They are rarely seen as active participants in war. Nevertheless, this presumption is based on an ideal western gender model which ascribes a caring role to women and a defending one to men. This ideal model is no reality: ‘We need recall only the tales of Herodotus and the more recent accounts of the amazons of Dahomey to realize that woman has shared in warfare – and with no less ferocity and cruelty than man’. Therefore I wish to discuss the roles Somali women took up in the conflict, hoping to challenge existing gender ideas that still guide so many policy makers and researchers.

Apart from their roles in the war, I also examined the impact of the war on the lives of Somali and tried to detect possible traumata Somali encountered during the Ogaden war. The way these traumata are coped with, the way they are expressed and the way they are defined are, in my opinion, all essential to understanding the personal impact of conflict on people. This way it might be possible to find and sketch the ways a society copes with war traumata. In recounting the individual story of several eyewitnesses, I tried to find the answers to these questions.

As a historian working on psychology I was often moving on thin academic ice, but I did everything possible to make sure no mistakes were made. I also ally with Donna Haraway

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22 There are no accounts on civilian casualties but according to Gebru Tareke the Ethiopian and Somali armies both lost over 6,100 troops. Ethiopia had over 10,500 members of personnel injured, Somalia over 2,400. [Tareke G. ‘The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited’ In The International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2000), p. 665]

when she radically states that knowledge claims are social constructions by which ‘no insider’s perspective is privileged, because all drawings of inside-outside boundaries in knowledge are theorized as power moves, not moves toward truth’.  

Research questions

Above, I touched upon some of the questions I would like to answer in this essay. However, since I focus both on gender and psychology, I believe a clear list of research questions can be useful. To benefit the reader, I decided to use two sets of questions that will be elaborated separately even though they are strongly intertwined.

The first set of questions is related to the roles of Somali women in the Ogaden war.

- The role of Somali women in the official Somali armed forces.
  - Were Somali women enrolled in the Somali official forces?
  - If so, did Somali women fight actively as Somali soldiers, or did they have a more logistic or caring function?

- The roles of Somali women in the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF).
  - Were women involved in the WSLF?
  - What were the tasks they had to fulfil?
  - What was their position in this rebel group?
  - Can we create an image of the daily life of women involved in the WSLF?
  - If they were active in the WSLF, were their roles and their position accepted by Somali society?

- The roles of Somali women in the early Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF).
  - Were women involved in the creation of the ONLF?
  - What were the tasks they had to fulfil?
  - What was their position in this rebel group?

- The roles of Somali women as civilians and non-combatants.
  - Were civilian women involved in the conflict?
  - Are civilian women remembered as victims or actors in the conflict?

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Did civilian women, both in the Ethiopia and in Somalia, collaborate with one of the fighting parties, and how?
- Are women remembered as active agents in the Ogaden war?

The second set of questions is related to the psychological and social consequences of the actions women undertook and/or underwent.
- First I would like to know why women got involved in the Somali-Ethiopian war in the first place.
- More focussed on the psychological aspect, this paper wants to find whether these women suffered psychological traumata during the conflict.
  - Did Somali women suffer physical violence of any kind during the conflict and what are the repercussions up until today in their everyday lives?
  - Did Somali women suffer emotional and or psychological violence of any kind during the conflict and what are the repercussions up until today in their everyday lives?
  - Did they lose friends and/or family during the war?
  - Did they flee the region and what were the effects of seeking refuge?
- How did Somali women cope with these (potential) stressors?
  - Have they ever been helped in gaining specific coping strategies?
  - What is the role of clan or family-based social support networks in coping with the memories?
  - In what way were these social networks damaged by the war and its aftermath?
  - Are there alternatives to the aforementioned support networks?
- Do these women see themselves as victims of the war?
- How did the Ogaden war affected the ‘social memory’ within the Somali society? And how does the ‘collective memory’ of the Somali people deals with war traumata? Did these memories contributed to the creation of new coping strategies?

26 Abbink J. Identiteit, strijd en continuïteit in trans-modern Afrika, een kritisch-realistische benadering (Amsterdam, 2001) p. 4
Methodology

Oral history and oral sources: methods and problems

Oral history is the result of obtaining information through a verbal testimony, using a historical question. Through Oral history, the past can be (re)constructed. A verbal testimony or oral source has to be juxtaposed with other historical sources in order to check its reliability. The fact that the historian and the historical subject are creating the source together is quite unique and fuelled the idea that this method could not be scientific. Even though historians will contextualise and interpret oral sources, this idea is backed by the fact that oral history is strongly dependent on the memory of the interviewee, which is not only affected by time but also by knowledge on post factum events and previous performances of that history. The interviewee has thus already contextualised the discussed events, thereby creating an image of the past that is his/her own and fitting his/her motives. This image is in turn strongly influenced by different media, propaganda, “official” historiography, the ‘collective’ memory etc. Rephrased, the oral history that will be produced here is a product of its cultural and social context. Not only because it has this context as its subject, but also because individual memories are always communicating with, and thus influenced by, the larger ‘social’ or ‘collective’ memory.

This being said, it needs to be stressed that the same is true for written sources, which are also strongly influenced and biased. What renders more authority to written sources is the fact that they are more easily duplicated and thus more accessible for other researcher, and the limited interaction in the creation of the narrative. However, since I have transcribed all interviews in this essay and donated them, with the original sound files, to the archives of Ghent University, in part in the hope this will undermine potential criticisms about the reliability of my sources.

28 Crul Ch. and Rzoska B. (eds.) Van Horen Zeggen. Mondeling geschiedenis in de praktijk (Schaarbeek, 2005) p. 17
30 De Wever B. and François P. Gestemd verleden. Mondeling geschiedenis als praktijk. p. 15
31 Ibidem p. 10 and p. 15
Oral sources also have to be juxtaposed with other oral sources. Therefore I interviewed as many people as possible during the year I worked on this paper. I spend three months in Kenya where I interviewed most of my respondents. Considering the subject of this paper it would have been better to spend these months in Somalia and or Ethiopia. But since Somalia is considered to be too dangerous by the University’s insurances and Ethiopia is waging a war against the ONLF, this proved to be impossible. In Kenya I interviewed 18 people but only 12 of these interviews were directly useful for this research. I also had several interesting but informal talks with people in Belgium and the UK.

I interviewed Somali men and women active in the WSLF or its youth movement, Somali men active in the Somali military, people who are or were active in the ONLF, members of the Diaspora and civilians. These people came from different socio-economic backgrounds: some of them were community leaders, others were uneducated. Originally I also wanted to interview western observers, journalists, and aid workers but this turned out to be impossible since the Ethiopian and Somali governments denied all foreigners access to the Ogaden. Only one western journalist, David Wood working for Time Magazine, was able to enter the Ogaden during the war. Yet, I was not able to get in contact with this man. Since the issue in the Ogaden is still a delicate one, I was not able to talk to government officials or Ethiopian witnesses.

During the interviews I made use of a topic list to make sure all major themes discussed in this paper would be discussed with the interviewees.32 I also created a list of questions but this list never dominated the interview for it could have easily guided the answers of the interviewee, thereby creating a narrative based on my questions instead of the person’s memory. I thus used so-called ‘semi-structured interviews’ and the idea resulting from the research are created during the interviews and are illustrated with quotes from the interviews.33

However not all interviews were conducted this way. One interview was conducted by Abdhilin who works for Médecins Sans Frontières Somalia in Kenya. He interviewed a former commander from the Somali regular forces on one of his many trips to Mogadishu. For this I created a questionnaire he could use. This is a very different way of interviewing in which the respondent is much more “guided”, however since this interview turned out to

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32 Crul Ch. and Rzoska B. (eds.) Van Horen Zeggen. Mondelinge geschiedenis in de praktijk (Schaarbeek, 2005) p. 23
entail significant information, I nevertheless decided to use this method: I could not miss this opportunity.

Extremely important for this paper is my own position as interviewer. Being a young, European, male student both had negative and positive effects on the gathering of information. As an outsider, people had to explain many things they would otherwise consider obvious, providing me with more information about the social context of this conflict. Most of my respondents saw me as a “neutral person” and more importantly, someone who could tell “their” story to the outside world, which made the interviewees more willing to talk about controversial subjects. However, talking about war trauma is always emotional and can be shocking for all those involved. This was often only overcome because the people I talked to wanted the world to know about the pain they suffered. For the same reason, to my surprise, it was not very difficult for me to talk to women about actions that disrupted gender patterns and atrocities such as sexual violence. On the negative side, growing up in a safe, middleclass, western environment did make it very difficult for me to grasp the events of the Ogaden war making me depend on the vivid and detailed stories of my interviewees. Like any historian, I am tied to my sources for better or worse.

The Ogaden war raged over three decades ago, which is a long time to remember something. Especially considering the fact that the Somali civil war has been traumatising the Somali population ever since the end of the Ogaden war and research in other context have shown that ‘trauma-related mental illness seems to reduce steadily over time’, making the detection of the psychological impact of the war ever more difficult.\(^{34}\) It is true that most details are forgotten right after they take place, but those things that are still remembered after several years will probably be remembered for the rest of the person’s life.\(^{35}\) But, it has been pointed out by Kienzler, ‘\textit{a subgroup of people with a high degree of exposure to trauma has long-term psychiatric morbidity}’, and will thus, unfortunately, show signs of trauma up until today.\(^{36}\)

\(^{34}\) Kienzler H. ‘Debating war-trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in an interdisciplinary arena’ In \textit{Social Science & Medicine} 67, 2008, p. 221

\(^{35}\) And traumata are deemed to be the best remembered events. [De Wever B. and François P. \textit{Gestemd verleden. Mondelinge geschiedenis als praktijk. Object, Methode, Toepassing.} (Schaarbeek, 2003) pp. 11-13]

\(^{36}\) Kienzler H. ‘Debating war-trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in an interdisciplinary arena’ In \textit{Social Science & Medicine} 67, 2008, p. 221
Psychological research

Psychological research on war traumata is normally conducted via questionnaires with a strong categorical approach to psychology, such as the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire. According to Kienzler, these questionnaires have significant flaws because they incorrectly assume that the researcher and the patient understand the questions in the exact same way. ‘Furthermore, it is not acknowledged that different psychological conditions manifest themselves with similar mental symptoms’ and that not all responses to distress are (forms of) mental disorders. What is more important for this paper is that questionnaires are designed, and used, to interview people that recently experienced trauma. When discussing the Ogaden war, these questionnaires become invalid because, as written above, a trauma-related mental illness tends to diminish over time which makes the answering of very precise questions impossible. Since we cannot use questionnaires here, ‘open questions’ are needed which will carefully detect the psychological reality of the informants. To fit in this obscure reality, these questions will have to be constructed in the informants own psychological language, a discourse I am not familiar with. Nonetheless, by building on ‘existing community resources, knowledge, skills and attributes’, I tried to apply a social constructivist approach and tried to use local perspectives on trauma and psychology thus allowing the individuals to define traumata themselves and define how important they are in their current life. In other words, it was not me who determined whether the people I interviewed suffered traumata, they did so themselves. In respect to the theory of ‘social suffering’ (cf. Infra: Theoretical Frameworks) I had to ‘embed individual biography in the larger matrix of culture, history and political economy’ to find out how the experience of trauma is influenced by these structures. According to Zarowsky, this is precisely what Somali already do by automatically linking

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37 A categorical approach to psychology means that one categorises disorders based on a certain combination of symptoms. A person can thus only be diagnosed with a certain disorder when he/she is showing the matching symptoms, and vice versa. [de Wit J., Slot W. and van Aken M. (red.) Psychologie van de Adolescentie. Basisboek (Baarn, 2004) p.145 and Halepota A.A. and Wasif S.A. ‘Harvard Trauma Questionnaire Urdu translation: the only cross-culturally validated screening instrument for the assessment of trauma and torture and their sequelae’ In The Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association 2001 51(8) p. 285]

38 Kienzler H. ‘Debating war-trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder’ p. 222

39 Ibidem p. 221


41 Kienzler H. ‘Debating war-trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder’ p. 225
individual and local experiences to bigger realities such as war, politics and dispossession.\textsuperscript{42} Coupling personal experience to the political and economic context, and combining local and global contexts,\textsuperscript{43} can not only give us a better insight into the traumata of the individual, it will also enable us to place psychological traumata in a historical context. As a final note, it needs to be stressed that the limited amount of information on psychology in Somalia means this research heavily relies on a handful of articles and a relatively small number of citations from the few interviews I conducted. Therefore the conclusions reached in this thesis should be taken as suggestions and assumptions that might function as a base of further research one day.

**Written sources**

This paper is of course based on more than just interviews: it also relies on written documents. In January 2010 I spend several days in the British National Archives in London. With the help of some archivists I managed to find some documents which were related to the Ogaden war, but I could not find anything that wasn’t already written down in the article of Gebru Tareke.\textsuperscript{44}

I read newspapers from the 1970s on three different locations: in the library of the University of Aberdeen I read the New York Times, at the library of Ghent University I read De Vooruit and in McMillan Library in Nairobi I read The Daily Nation, Sunday Nation, and The Standard.

In the same libraries I found books and articles that I used in this text. However, one of the best libraries for this research was, by far, the BIEA/IFRA library in Nairobi. This place is a goldmine for anyone working on Eastern Africa, especially when helped by the librarians.

**The reality of an apology**

There is no way denying it: the research conducted for this paper was my first real experience with fieldwork. As a result, it is inevitable that I made methodological, theoretical, practical, and maybe even ethical mistakes of which I am unaware. And although it is “not done” to

\textsuperscript{42} Zarowsky Ch. ‘Writing Trauma: Emotion, Ethnography, and The Politics of Suffering among Somali Returnees in Ethiopia’ In *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 28, 2004, p. 190


admit this, living among other researchers with varying levels of experience (undergraduates, postgraduates, (post)doctoral researchers and even full-fledged professors) while staying in Nairobi, showed me all researchers struggle with the same problem in some way. This short chapter is meant to contextualise my fieldwork, let us call it an apology.

The figures of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) gave me hope. They reported that ‘[a]t the end of 2010, Kenya was hosting well over 400,000 refugees and asylum seekers, primarily from Somalia (83 per cent), [and] Ethiopia (eight per cent)’. Of these 400,000 people, about 57,000 are “registered” by UNHCR to live in Nairobi where ‘[a]t the end of 2009, the largest numbers of registered refugees originated from Somalia (43 per cent), [and] Ethiopia (26 per cent)’. With a total of almost 15,000 Ethiopians and 32,000 Somali living in Nairobi, most of them in the same neighborhood, it was nonetheless difficult to find respondents and the reasons are manifold. First, the war happened over 30 years ago and those who witnessed it become older every day. Second, after the end of the Ogaden war those who survived could not return to a safe home: the Ogaden remained a warzone up until today and those who tried to settle in Somalia faced one of the deadliest civil wars in modern times. In other words, many of the eyewitnesses died after the end of the official war in the Ogaden. Third, those who managed to get in Nairobi alive, still fear the Ethiopian secret service who regularly sends death squads into Kenya to kill dissident Ethiopians. Fourth, a couple of days before I arrived in Kenya, rumours started to spread through Eastleigh, the Somali neighbourhood in Nairobi, that Djibouti, Somaliland and Puntland were arresting the Ogadeeni refugees in their territories and were about to send them back to Ethiopia where they were to be imprisoned in the notorious ‘Jail Ogaden’ near Jijiga. Many then feared Kenya too would send her Ogaden refugees back. Ogadeeni living in Nairobi were thus not very eager to talk to a mzungu strolling through their neighbourhood. This meant that those willing to be interviewed were determined to stay anonymous or where already widely known to be active members of the Ogadeeni Diaspora.

46 Ibidem p. 7
48 *Mzungu* means white man
I tried to get around this by finding Ogadeeni and Somali refugees living in other, less visible locations. However, building a network proved to be difficult and time consuming: only after one month I felt I was properly known in the Ogaden community in Eastleigh and could start interviewing those who, at first, were in doubt about seeing me. I neither had the means nor the time to start this process over in Mombasa or Garissa. Through some people I met in Nairobi I was able to interview three people in Mombasa, the only ones I interviewed outside Nairobi.

The fact that ‘[f]rom the early 1990s onwards, the Kenyan authorities effectively required refugees to reside in either Dadaab or Kakuma’ did not help either.49 Getting access to both camps proved extremely difficult and even impossible with the budget and time I had at my disposal. The Kafkaesque administration of both the Kenyan authorities and the different NGOs made it difficult. The ‘popularity’ of the camp where journalist, donators, and aid workers occupied all facilities made it hard. The fact that no organisation wanted to assist me during the visit because they viewed my topic as too political made it harder. Fighting near Dadaab and Kakuma made it impossible for me to visit the refugee camps independently.

Once I found people who were willing to be interviewed, language was the next barrier that needed to be overcome. Some of my respondents spoke English and felt comfortable enough to be interviewed in English. Most, however preferred to be interviewed in Somali, something I needed an interpreter for. A careful selection of this person was crucial for his/her language skills would determine my understanding of the roles women played in the Ogaden war. More crucial was the fact that the interpreter had to be someone with whom the interviewee felt at ease in discussing painful and moving subjects. I could not, however, afford any professional interpreters but for most of my interviews I could count on Axmed, who spoke both English and Somali and had some experience working as an interpreter for aid workers in Eastleigh. I have no doubt his translations were sincere but I do not know how accurate his work is. I am sure information got lost during the long talks Axmed and I had with the respondents, but I believe Axmed worked to the best of his abilities.

Having said that, all these problems I faced were, in a way and in the long run, useful for this research: they brought me closer to those who helped me, not seldom Ogadeeni refugees.

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Theoretical frameworks. Gender and Psychology

Gender

We cannot discuss this conflict without paying attention to the different positions women took up in Somali society, especially during the conflict itself.\footnote{… the gender structure of a particular time and place is causally affected not only by other contemporary structures ... but also by the previous history of gender ... without a historical approach to gender, we can never hope fully to comprehend it’. Linda Nicholson [quoted by Okin S.M. ‘Gender, the public, and the private’ In Phillips A. Feminism & politics (Oxford, 1998) p. 129]} Neither can we focus on women only because it would produce ‘a fragmented and partial understanding of the workings of ... difference in [a] society’.\footnote{Canning K. ‘Gender History. Meanings, methods & Narratives’ In Canning K. Gender History in Practice. Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class & Citizenship (London, 2006) p. 6} Additionally, we also have to focus on gender when discussing the psychological effects of conflict. Power relations within a society and the structures and interactions they engender are essential in shaping the different ‘coping strategies’ a society can offer its members because they contextualize the suffered traumata. In short, if this research wants to create an understanding of why women took up certain roles and what the social and psychological effects were, gender cannot be forgotten. This is because

“The experiences and concerns of men, women, boys, and girls before, during, and after wars and armed conflicts are shaped by their gendered social roles. Those roles are in turn formed by cultural, social, economic and political conditions, expectations, and obligations within the family, community and nation. Gender is shaped by and helps shape concepts and experiences of ethnicity, race, class, poverty level, and age.”\footnote{Mazurana D., Raven-Roberts A. and Parpart J. Gender, conflict, and peacekeeping (Oxford, 2005) p. 13}

This means the focus on gender triggers a much wider scope for research. Working on gender means working on social roles, culture, politics, class, ‘race’, etc. Gender is a way of ‘asking historical questions’ that have not yet been asked before in discussing the Ogaden war.\footnote{Scott J.W. ‘Unanswered Questions’ In American Historical Review Vol. 113, nr. 5, (December 2008) p. 1423}

But working on gender, Scott reminds us to be aware of the uniqueness of gender roles in societies. ‘Being a woman’ or ‘man’ is not the same in different historical and geographical
settings. Social relations vary, just like “cultural available symbols that evoke multiple ... representations”, and the normative concepts that are assigning meaning to them. Even the ways by which gender is made a part of the subjective identity vary according to space and time. Therefore it is important that, while doing research on the Horn of Africa, we keep in mind that we are not confronted with western gender concepts, and a specific gender approach is necessary.

**Psychology**

Psychology and historiography do not seem to get along very well. Most historians find psychology too positivistic, most psychologists don’t see history as relevant to their field. Still, it has been proven many times that war, violence, poverty, displacement, substance abuse and other popular themes in historiography can cause psychological distress. This is not to say that war and violence necessarily lead to psychological disorders, for many people show “a high degree of resilience and communities can rely on very effective coping mechanisms”. These coping mechanisms can evolve and interact, they can be institutionalised and mythlised, they are historical. So, when Ellis states that the contemporary historiography of Africa needs new themes that are more closely linked with the African reality of today without him mentioning psychology, I was slightly disappointed. But psychiatry and psychology too need to change and widen their scope for “[t]oute psychiatrie est ethnopsychiatrie”, thus knowledge of other cultures and society is crucial when discussing non-western psychological situations.

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54 Riley D. ‘Does a Sex have a History? ‘Women’ and Feminism’ In *New Formations* nr. 1 (Spring 1987), p. 35
56 Ibidem p. 1067
59 Ibidem p. 19
60 Ellis S. ‘Writing Histories of Contemporary Africa’ In *Journal of African History* 43 (2002), pp. 4-12
There is, of course, the rather controversial field of ‘psychohistory’, inaugurated by Lloyd deMause,\(^{62}\) and defined by Henry Lawton as ‘the interdisciplinary study of why man has acted as he has in history, prominently utilizing psychoanalytic principles’.\(^{63}\) This makes psychohistory problematic in two ways. First, it seeks only to understand why people acted the way they did. What the psychological repercussions of their actions were for others and themselves, how a society is formed by psychology, how coping strategies are constructed and how trauma is perceived, are problems left aside by this theory. The second problem is raised by the focus on psychoanalyses. This unscientific theory cannot be used in this paper because psychoanalyses is ‘simply non testable, irrefutable. There [is] no conceivable human behaviour which could contradict [it]’.\(^{64}\) Also, this theory is culturally strongly related to Western Europe which makes it not applicable in other regions such as Africa’s Horn since ‘La psychiatrie ... ne peut être séparée de l’univers symbolique dont elle tire tous ses elements’.\(^{65}\)

Unfortunately, this last remark is not only valid to psychoanalysis but is true for a large part of psychological theory today. There have been ‘fierce discussions’ over the universality of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), war trauma, and other trauma-related disorders.\(^{66}\) Today, PTSD is often ‘believed to be a ... cross-culturally valid psychopathological response to traumatic distress’.\(^{67}\) Whether someone actually develops PTSD after a traumatic event depends, according to this vision, on the nature of the event, prior experiences and personal characteristics of the individual.\(^{68}\) Social and cultural differences are thus not taken into account. PTSD is, however, a ‘historical product that originated in the scientific and clinical discourse of the 19th century’.\(^{69}\) It is, as the whole (western) psychology, based on ‘cultural

\(^{66}\) Kienzler H. ‘Debating war-trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder’ p. 218
\(^{67}\) Ibidem p. 220
\(^{68}\) Some also believe genetics are involved but further research on this is still necessary [Kienzler H. ‘Debating war-trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder’ p. 221]
\(^{69}\) The idea was developed through Erichsen (1864), Charcot (1889), Janet (1903), ‘shell shock’ in World War I, Freud (1922), ‘war neuroses’ in the Second World War, and the veterans of the Vietnam War before it received official recognition in the 1980’s [Kienzler H. ‘Debating war-trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder’ p. 219, Bracken P.J. en Petty C. 20
conceptions of normality and deviance’. The construct ‘PTSD’ can still be useful, but only if we consider the patients’ cultural backgrounds and the different traditions of healing present in the society.

Furthermore, the idea of PTSD has a simplistic view of survivors as ‘passive vessels of negative psychological effects’ and denies the individual any form of agency in the negotiation of life course, status, society and ultimately, themselves. Therefore, we have to be cautious when presuming war and conflict automatically lead to traumata, especially since, according to Malkki, war-affected populations are often reluctant to accept western mental health models ‘as they do not consider their symptoms pathological’. A theory that does take into account non-western ideas on psychology is the theory of ‘Transcultural Psychiatry’, which is a ‘psychiatrie essentiellement comparatiste qui étudie les différences dans la nature et dans la fréquence des maladies mentales lorsque l’on passé d’un groupe à un autre’.

Comparing western therapies and definitions of deviancy with those in Somali society could be very valuable for this research but Transcultural Psychiatry ‘utilise notamment les statistiques afin d’isoler les variables culturelles’. Apart from having doubts about bringing cultural differences down to a matrix of measurable data, statistic research based on the handful interviews I collected would be impossible.

Hence, the idea of ‘social suffering’ was introduced to complement PTSD. ‘Social suffering’ results from the effects of power relations and their influences on social problems and includes situations and conditions that simultaneously involve welfare, health, moral,


Kienzler H. ‘Debating war-trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder’ p. 223

One of these ‘traditions of healing’ is the western psychiatric healing [Kienzler H. ‘Debating war-trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder’ p. 223]

Kienzler H. ‘Debating war-trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder’ p. 222


Emphasis in the original [Laplantine F. ‘Maladies mentales et thérapies traditionnelles en Afrique Noire’ p. 19]

Laplantine F. ‘Maladies mentales et thérapies traditionnelles en Afrique Noire’ p. 19

legal, and religious issues.\textsuperscript{77} Its study aims to ‘understand exactly how individuals, families, and whole societies respond to violence’ and it will therefore involve social actors such as the state, the media and international organizations ‘in the creation, maintenance, and soothing of violence.’\textsuperscript{78} ‘Social suffering’ considers suffering to be:

‘a social experience in that it is first, an interpersonal engagement with pain and hardship in social relationships; second, a societal construction that serves as a cultural model and moral guide ... and third, a professional discourse that organises forms of suffering as bureaucratic categories and objects of technical intervention’.\textsuperscript{79}

To understand traumata and suffering we have to look at the social and cultural context where the individual is situated in and focus on factors such as gender, class, religion, ideology and income.\textsuperscript{80} This will provide us with a better insight on how traumata are perceived within a culture and how people cope with them.\textsuperscript{81}

As a final note it needs to be mentioned that trauma can also engender positive effects, mainly resilience of both individuals and communities by which other traumatic events can be coped with more easily. According to Pedersen, the mobilisation of social cohesion is also facilitated.\textsuperscript{82} Later in this essay we will see that these two issues will come together as a specific coping strategy within Ogadeeni society.

\textsuperscript{77} Pedersen D. ‘Political violence, ethnic conflict, and contemporary wars’ p. 187
\textsuperscript{78} Kienzler H. ‘Debating war-trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder’ p. 224
\textsuperscript{79} Ibidem p. 225
\textsuperscript{81} Zarowsky Ch. ‘Writing Trauma’ p. 202
\textsuperscript{82} Pedersen D. ‘Political violence, ethnic conflict, and contemporary wars: broad implications for health and social well-being’ In Social Science & Medicine 55 (2002) p. 185
The Ogaden conflict.

‘This history is not a history of “long ago”; it is a history of “just yesterday.” It is not a finished chapter that may be reopened at will, looked at, reexperienced if so wished, and reclosed. It is still being “written.” It is not an abstract history or a history of abstractions; it is anchored in experience, the experience of suffering.’

Even though I do not wish to spend too much text on a discussion of the political and military side of the Ogaden war, I believe a general context can be useful and even necessary if we want to understand the role women played in this war. Especially since ‘the highly personal and fragmentary nature of the sources [makes it easy to focus] on the individual exploits [and] to disregard the larger context.’

Instead of viewing the war of 1977 as a classic inter-state war, as often happens, I believe it would be better to consider the Ogaden war as a culmination point of different kinds of Somali resistance against the Ethiopian ‘occupation’ of the Ogaden. This resistance took part at different levels and during the war the interstate level was indeed stronger than at any other moment. But the area has always been a region of distress, even when the Somali-Ethiopian relations were relatively stable.

It is a cliché but it seems true: the Somali’s never tolerated rule by outsiders. The Somali territories enjoyed a long independence: the coastline was under strong Arabic influence but the interior of the Somali territories remained independent until the end of the 19th Century when the European powers arrived. Johann Ludwig Krapf described how in 1843 the Emir of Seila, who nominally controlled parts of the Somali territory was not capable of controlling the Somali people, nor could he guarantee the safety of the European missionaries when they travelled through his realm: ‘aber sie sollten schriftlich erklären, daß der Emir nicht für die

Unbilden verantwortlich sein sollte, die ihnen unterwegs von den Somali und Danakil oder Udal zustoßen würden”.

In 1887, Ethiopia seized the city of Harar, thereby conquering the existing ‘buffer state’ between the Ethiopian empire and the Somalis. From then onwards, the Somali were frequently attacked by cattle raiding parties looking ‘for meat for the hungry garrison now established at Harar. The Ethiopians were at this time making heavy importations of firearms, and the Somalis, since the British held the coast and did not allow the importation of arms, were ... helpless before the Ethiopian soldiers’. By 1891, the Ethiopian troops ‘could claim to have mastered the Somalis in the region ... but not to have occupied the country’. This explains how Sheikh Mohammed Ibn Abd Allah Hassan al-Mahdi, known as ‘the Mad Mullah’ to the British, could wage ‘a twenty-year anti-colonial jihad against British, Ethiopian, and Italian forces’ from 1899 until 1920.

In the Second World War Italy conquered most of the Horn but was eventually defeated by British troops. Thereafter the UK occupied most of pre-colonial ‘Somaliland’: both Italian and British Somaliland, but also North-Eastern Province in Kenya and the Ogaden region. The British only withdrew from the Ogaden in 1954, giving the region back to Ethiopia, even though there was a considerable amount of protest from the Ogadeeni.

When Italian and British Somaliland gradually moved towards independence, tensions in the Horn grew for many feared a wish for a Greater Somalia would rise up. Indeed, just before the independence of the Somali republic, the Somali Youth League (SYL) set up offices all over the Ogaden to promote the idea of a Greater Somalia and spurring anti Ethiopian feelings.

87 Krapf J.L. Reisen in Ostafrika ausgeführt in den Jahren 1837 – 1855 (Stuttgart, 1964) p.159 (ersten Theils)
88 One of my respondents used 1889 as the year in which Harar was captured. [Mahmoed Derrie (age unkown): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya] Perham M. The Government of Ethiopia (London, 1969) p. 335
90 Ibidem p. 336
94 Mahmoed Derrie (age unkown): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya and ‘Ugas’ (82 years old): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
In the fifties and sixties ‘border disputes periodically flared into open warfare and Ogaden remained a prohibited area in which visitors ... were not permitted freedom of travel’. From 1964 till 1970 a group of rebels, led by Waqo Gutu and supported by Somalia, was active in the region, fighting the police and military whenever and wherever possible. An *Ugas* told me he returned to the Ogaden in 1964 and joined a band of rebels killing a lot of Ethiopian military personnel. This led, in 1965, to the recalling of the Ethiopian ambassador from Somalia until a ‘détente’ came about two years later.

In 1971, therefore, the Ogaden was ‘reported to be peaceful’ and the existing travel restrictions were lifted. In this year, wildlife biologist Melvin Bolton “achieved in penetrating” the region, writing a rare account of life in the Ogaden. He lived in Ethiopia over five years and surprisingly wrote that the Ogaden region was the only region in Ethiopia ‘where I did not see firearms being openly carried by tribemen’. Although he could travel freely through most of the region, police were present in large numbers in the whole region and they were very heavily armed. The further east he went, the more Bolton was pressed to accept a police escort, although (focussed as he was on spotting rare mammals) he did not mention whether this was for his own safety or because he was not allowed to visit certain areas. In any case, going east of Galadi was not possible since that was too close to the Somali border.

Six years later, the war broke out. This long history of violence in the region can be explained by the fact that the ‘majority of the Somalis in the Ethiopian section ... never came under effective Ethiopian administration’. Margery Perham wrote, in a highly stereotyping way, that the Somali ‘semi-nomadic pastoral life in their own wilder-ness is antagonistic to any control, and the Somalis, with their pride bordering on arrogance, and their fiercely warlike nature, were not easily subjected by the Amharas’. She does, however, also give a more plausible reason why the Ethiopians never really controlled the Ogaden region: it could not generate enough

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95 Bolton M. *Ethiopian Wildlands* (London, 1976) p. 182
97 ‘Ugas’ (82 years old): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
100 Ibidem p. 191, p. 197
101 Ibidem pp. 189-193 and p. 198
103 Ibidem p. 336
income to make the effort worthwhile. Before oil was discovered in the Ogaden region, the economy solely relied on the export of livestock, hides, and Qaad which explains why the Ethiopian government could not create enough ‘surplus revenue from which to finance the administration, still less the development and welfare’ of this region.\(^{104}\)

The reason why the Ethiopian government still exhausted many resources to control this region is because the Ogaden nationalism clashes with the first point of the ten point programme the Dergue published on December 20, 1974 which states that ‘Ethiopië moet een verenigd land blijven zonder ethnische, religieuze, taalkundige of culturele verschillen. Alle Ethiopiërs zullen in harmonie leven, ongeacht religie, stam, geslacht of taal …’.\(^{105}\)

Nationalism, with separation and disparity as its intrinsic focal point, was one of the demons of the socialist regime of Mengistu. Another decisive reason might have been that, in the middle of the 1970s, rumours started to spread that ‘The arid tract […] is believed to be rich in minerals, including oil’.\(^{106}\)

We do not have a lot of information about the war itself and objective sources are especially missing. In April 1977, the Ethiopian military government ordered the last three western journalists operating in Ethiopia to leave the country,\(^{107}\) after which ‘no Western correspondents were allowed to observe the desert combat at first hand.’\(^{108}\) Only a few African and Soviet journalists did get in and they could only enter the Ogaden in staged visits organised by the Ethiopian government.\(^{109}\) What we do know about the war mostly comes from government sources like Radio Mogadishu and The Dergue’s ministries.

On October 21, 1976 at 8 o’clock the Somali-Ethiopian war began when ‘1040 Somali official troops were ordered to take off their official uniforms and entered Ethiopia secretly. ... In February 1977 the Somali government sent 1200 support troops from (mainly) north Somalia

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\(^{104}\) *Qaad* is an addictive drug used all over eastern Africa, cf. glossary [Perham M. *The Government of Ethiopia* (London, 1969) p. 337]

\(^{105}\) S.n. ‘De Bloedige Ethiopische Revolutie’ In *Keesings Historisch Archief*. 1977. (year 46, No. 2370) p.98

\(^{106}\) S.n. ‘Ethiopians annihilated, says Somalis’ In *Daily Nation*, 29 July 1977, back page

\(^{107}\) Araujo A. ‘America’s honeymoon in Ethiopia is over’ In *The Sunday Nation*, 1 May 1977, p. 13


The next couple of months a joint force of WSLF fighters and Somali soldiers managed to conquer most of the Ogaden region. In August 1977 only the cities of Jijiga, Harer and Dire Dawa were left in Ethiopian hands. When the Ethiopian troops received help from their allies (Cuba provided personnel and weaponry, the USSR provided military advisors, South Yemen sent two battalions) and when the Somali troops ran short on ammunition (neither the USA, nor the west European countries were eager to get involved in the conflict) the Somalis where slowly pushed back into Somalia. On March 23th, Ethiopia claimed to have won the war, even though Somali rebels were still omnipresent. The Somali irredentism isolated Somali in the African political field since the Ogaden war was a clear violation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) resolution that ‘required all member states to respect the colonial boundaries’. The Ogaden war also 

‘heralded the beginning of revolution against Siad Bare’s regime. To suppress growing insurgency, Bare employed divide and rule tactics, creating hostilities and mistrust between the different Somali clans. Brutal security organs, corruption in high echelons of government, declining foreign aid and diplomatic isolation devastated the country’s economy and weakened Bare’s grip on power.’

Ethiopia, on the other hand, had secured strong support from the USSR and its allies.

After the Ethiopian troops regained control over the Ogaden, a period of terror was established during which villages where bombed, wells were poisoned and food was confiscated. This was, however, not something unique to the Ogaden at that time: when Mengistu could again focus on internal politics after the 1977 war was ended, the “Red Terror” was launched in Ethiopia. According to Henze, it was primarily directed against the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP), a group of hardliner Marxists intellectuals

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110 ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin)
111 Tareke G. ‘The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited’ p. 645
112 Ibidem p. 651
113 Ibidem p. 660
116 Cliffe L. ‘Forging a Nation: The Eritrean Experience’ In: Third World Quarterly Vol. 11, No. 4, Ethnicity in World Politics (Oct., 1989), pp. 139
117 Heirman M. (ed.) ‘Regionale konflikten en internationale spanningen in De Hoorn’ p. 68
that ‘displayed open disdain for the low ideological level of the Derg’, although everyone considered anti-Dergue was hunted down and many were killed.\textsuperscript{118}

Having missed the opportunity to be ‘liberated’ from the Ethiopian ‘colonisers’, many Ogadeeni were disappointed in the WSLF, and radicalised their nationalist claims (cf. infra).

After several years of internal discussions, a dissident group within the Young WSLF established the \textit{Ogaden National Liberation Front}: the region was no longer \textit{Western Somalia}.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{118} Henze P.B. ‘Retrospective on opposition to the DERG’ In Fukui K., Kurimoto E. and Shigeta M. \textit{Ethiopia in broader Perspective.} (Kyoto, 1997) p. 155
Women in conflict

Let us now focus on the first focal point of this paper: women. As stated above, this text focuses more on women than it does on gender. Even though the idea originated from a strong sense of injustice that was nurtured in courses on gender history, and the fact that much of the literature used here stems from the field of gender studies, I would prefer to call the result women’s history. Conveniently, some claim that women’s history has to precede, and create a base for, gender history.\textsuperscript{119}

While I state this research stems from a profound feeling of injustice towards women, I do not mean to say that women are completely ignored when violent conflicts are discussed. On the contrary: many NGOs, researchers, and governments do pay attention to women in conflicts. However, they work on issues such as gender based violence, women as mothers, widows, and nurses: issues that perpetuate classic Western gender roles. Simply put: when women are involved in conflict they are either victims or peaceful actors offering help. El-Bushra and Sahl points out when talking about the work of development agencies in Somalia, this leads to agencies failing to “capitalise on the wider changes [for women] which result from ... war”.\textsuperscript{120}

The fact that “women and girls ... play crucial roles in supporting and perpetuating violence”,\textsuperscript{121} is forgotten or ignored and women are portrayed “as passive objects rather than subjects”.\textsuperscript{122} More dangerous and disturbing is the fact that conflicts are consequently explained by means of aggressive men only. Apart from an unfair allegation of guilt, this incorrect image of the aggressive (African) male has a strong influence on policy makers worldwide.

To recapitulate in the words of Alice Macdonald: “the presence of girl fighters has been continually ignored by the international community and neglected in academic writing. When girls have attracted attention, it has been purely as victims”.\textsuperscript{123} One could ask herself why

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\textsuperscript{119} Wiesner-Hanks M. \textit{Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe. Third Edition.} (Cambridge, 2008) pp. 3-8

\textsuperscript{120} El-Bushra J. and Sahl I.M.G. \textit{Cycles of Violence. Gender Relations and Armed Conflict} (Nairobi, 2005) p. 44

\textsuperscript{121} Mazurana D., Raven-Roberts A. and Parpart J. \textit{Gender, conflict, and peacekeeping}, Oxford, 2005, p 2

\textsuperscript{122} Macdonald A. ‘New Wars: Forgotten Warriors’: Why Have Girl Fighters Been Excluded from Western Representations of Conflict in Sierra Leoné?’ In: \textit{Africa Development.} Vol. 33, No. 3 (2008) p. 136

\textsuperscript{123} Ibidem p. 135.
some flagrant examples of women fighting in wars are being ignored. Some claim these facts are ignored to support the western illusion of the ‘white male saviour’ rescuing ‘helpless African women’ who function as a strong symbol of victimhood, a basic idea in the aid industry.\textsuperscript{124} This discussion, yet extremely interesting, would lead us too far and will not be discussed in this essay.

Finally, I wish to stress that by focussing on the active role women play in conflicts, I do not want to dismiss the suffering these women have been experiencing, nor do I want to deny the fact that, like men, more women are victims then perpetrators in armed conflicts.

**Women in violent conflicts**

Comparing specific situations with similar-but-different situations is never easy, especially when your respondents continue to stress the uniqueness of their situation. Mohamad Ali, for example, insisted the Ogaden war was much more lethal than the Eritrean war of independence,\textsuperscript{125} and an elder anonymous lady could not understand the attention South Sudan received, for “\textit{this is a much younger conflict with much less casualties}”.\textsuperscript{126} However, when one is confronted with a limited amount of sources, some nuanced comparisons can enrich the account and the arguments.\textsuperscript{127} To prevent any generalisation on Africa, the following cases will cover more than the African continent.

Let it be clear that comparison is very much possible: girls and women have been fighting all over the world for as long as men have been fighting. Mazurana et al. made a short list of recent conflicts in which women were known to have actively fought:

‘Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, East Timor, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Guatemala, Iraq, Lebanon, Mozambique, Namibia, Palestine, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda, .. Between 1990 and 2003, girl soldiers were present in fighting forces and groups in at least fifty-four countries and participated in armed conflict in thirty-six of those countries.’\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{124} Macdonald A. ‘“New Wars: Forgotten Warriors’ In: \textit{Africa Development}. Vol. 33, No. 3 (2008) pp. 140-141
\textsuperscript{125} Mohamad Ali (52): 14-03-2011, Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
\textsuperscript{126} L. (at least 55): 17-02-2011 (nr. 1), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
\textsuperscript{127} This is a suggestion form Harry Verhoeven
Haeri comes up with the same list but adds that women also fought in El Salvador and Bangladesh.  "Women serve[d] in every capacity, including infront-line battle’ for the Eritrean Liberation Front and they were trained in special training camps. Women also served in the Ethiopian army since 1983 when youths and some women were forced into military service. In Timor-Leste, ‘women were instrumental in the independence movement; they fought, transported arms and supplies, established clinics to treat injured fighters and spoke out around the world on the injustices.’ Page describes that women were also active in the colonial troops of the British in East Africa. Lady Sidney Farrar, a so called FANY during the First World War, established the Women’s Territorial Service which included about 800 women by the end of 1940. These women were active in the whole of East Africa and the Horn. They did not engage military in World War II but they occupied several logistic functions in dispatching rider, mailing, and telephone services and staffed the ambulances ‘held in readiness for casualties from Ethiopia’. We shall see Somali women occupied similar functions in the Somali-Ethiopian war. As World War II proceeded, the women took on additional duties such as catering but also intelligence work in East Africa, Somalia, and other places within the British Empire.

In Sierra Leone women of all ages were prominent in the civil war (1991-2002). Twenty-five per cent of the child soldiers, or eight per cent of the total number of fighters, were girls. According to Macdonald these Small Girls Units ‘also committed a high level of atrocities’.

Here, women were also active in the high ranks of the military organisations of the NPLF and the RUF. Wives of commanders were also very influential and many of them were as cruel as

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133 First Aid Nursing Yeomanry
135 Ibidem p.60
136 Macdonald A. ‘New Wars: Forgotten Warriors’ p. 136
their husbands.\textsuperscript{137} The girls in both militias carried out different tasks and roles; they were ‘cooks, porters, wives, food producers and spies. Furthermore, nearly half of those interviewed ... received basic military and weapons training’.\textsuperscript{138} The label of ‘victim’ many of these girls received afterwards is challenged even further when it appears that many girls joined these groups voluntary because fighting in the war offered them excitement, power, and material gains. Girls and women were thus very active in the civil war of Sierra Leone, even though this was not recognised afterwards, making their reintegration in society very difficult.\textsuperscript{139}

During the civil war in Angola (1975-1990) women played an important role as well. In a documentary by CNN, an interview is shown with Ruth Mendes who was a colonel of the MPLA (\textit{Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola}). As a military leader she explains how the war is progressing. American mercenaries, sent by the CIA, were also active in Angola, supporting the South African troops. Among these mercenaries, fully armed women can be spotted in the same CNN documentary.\textsuperscript{140}

In Mexico too, women were active in the revolutions of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century and again women took up many different roles: they were colonels in the different rebel armies, regular soldiers, nurses, caterers or prostitutes. There were wives giving moral support, spies, smugglers, messengers, and financiers. Women carried the gear, foraged after the battles, smuggled arms and ammunition: ‘\textit{No army of the revolution fought without women’}.\textsuperscript{141} Some women in the Mexican revolution were known for their horsemanship, cunningness or intelligence, others for their discipline or their cruelty. In fact, in the first couple of years of the revolution, the imagination of the international public was captured by this ‘\textit{image of female soldiers’}.\textsuperscript{142} These Mexican women were in many aspects different from Somali

\begin{footnotes}
\item[137] Macdonald A. ‘\textit{New Wars: Forgotten Warriors}’ p. 136
\item[138] Ibidem p. 137
\item[139] Ibidem p. 137, p. 139
\item[140] Turned T. \textit{CNN Cold War (17) Good Guys Bad Guys. 1967-1978} on www.youtube.com/watch?v=inRjPR9mdd0&feature=realted (consulted on 22-07-2011, 09u27)
\item[141] Reséndez Fuentes A. ‘\textit{Battleground Women: Soldaderas and Female Soldiers in the Mexican Revolution}’ In: \textit{The Americas} Vol. 51, Nr. 4 (April 1995) pp. 526-527
\item[142] The total amount of female soldiers was estimated on around 200. Many more served as soldaderas who had different functions within the army and did not bear arms. [Reséndez
\end{footnotes}
women in the Ogaden war. Ogadeeni women were more than just housewives following the battlefield, as seemed to be the case for most of the soldaderas in Mexico. Nor where they merely the wives or daughters of leading soldiers, as was the case with most of the Mexican female fighters. As we see in the next chapter, the nurses of the WSLF in the Ogaden war showed a lot of affinity with the soldaderas who ‘combed the ground for wounded soldiers [...] treated the injured on the spot, then transported them in ox carts to the nearest hospital.’

As in almost all conflicts, the Mexican revolution ‘uprooted thousands of rural women, soldaderas and female soldiers among them, who ended up in slums in Mexico City or in border towns. As a result, many women had few other options but to take menial jobs and some even had to resort to prostitution’ This problem was also a reality for women after the Ogaden war ‘finished’: thousands fled the violence and ended up in refugee camps in Somalia, Kenya and Djibouti.

The aggressive side of women is not only visible in particular armed conflicts, but also in accepted lifestyles. For example in Jewish tradition where women should be obedient but not passive: ‘Hebrew Scripture recounts the exploits of many women who carried out heroic actions to defend their households or Israelite society, but when the emergency had passed, these women, such as Judith or Jael, returned willingly to their quiet domestic lives.’

Even so, with all the evidence present, many texts still claim women in these conflicts were mainly victims of rape, forced impregnation or abortion, trafficking, mutilation, torture, sexual slavery, and the spread of sexual transmitted diseases. Or they are important advocates for peace and postconflict reconstruction as well. While this will all be true, focus is too often on sexual and gender-based violence while women can be cruel masters of war as

Reséndez Fuentes A. ‘Battleground Women’ p. 542
Ibidem p. 553
well. 147 This being said, it is important to shortly address sexuality since it is, according to Sander Gilman, ‘the most salient marker of Otherness’ making it indispensable in enforcing boundaries. Sexuality was, for example, an important weapon in maintaining social dominance in slave plantations and colonies where even ‘the sex act itself served as a ritualistic re-enactment [sic.] of the daily pattern of social dominance’. 148 This idea does not only apply to power relations and boundary creations in ‘everyday use’ as we see in colonial oppressive systems, but also to the exceptional use of sexual violence in wartime. Sexual abuse is seen by western psychology, for both men and women, as a high impact trauma that is likely to lead to PTSD. 149 This is not only because it creates ‘otherness’ between the violator and the victim but also because, in the Somali society, it alienates the victim from its own social network. 150 This last is often the reason why people commit sexual violence in times of conflict: it ‘involves an act of revenge aimed at humiliating and dishonoring a powerful and potentially threatening rival’. 151 This way, the rival is ‘supposed to break down under the grief and dishonour of the violation of his womenfolk’. 152 Yet rape and sexual

147 If women are being focused at in conflicts, the focus is too often on women’s role as victim. Even those women who actively seek another role than that as a victim are only getting attention when they fulfill the cliché of being a female war victim. Cf. a report by Amnesty International: ‘This report ... highlights the violations suffered by women caught up in armed conflicts, particularly rape and sexual abuse. The situation of women activists is examined - trade unionists, human rights lawyers, grassroots activists etc - who are subject to violations ranging from harassment and arbitrary detention to torture, "disappearance" and even killing. The report looks at groups of women who are particularly at risk of human rights violation, namely women in custody and women in countries where their legal or social position puts them at risk. It concludes with AI’s [Amnesty International’s] 15 point program to protect women’s human rights. An appendix deals with the issue of female genital mutilation.’ [http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ACT77/001/1995/en : introduction on a report by Amnesty International about women’s rights in 75 countries. (consulted on 21-11-2010, 18u34)]


violence were not as common in the Somali-Ethiopian war as they are in the current conflict in both the Ogaden and Somalia.\textsuperscript{153} This is not to say no women were raped: both WSLF fighters and civilian women were said to be raped.\textsuperscript{154} But since the number of rapes has risen so dramatically, most of my informants did not see rape as a major problem during the war.

Apart from all this, it is also important to recognize the social, political and economical influence of war on women.\textsuperscript{155} Writing about the First World War, for example, Kathleen Canning wrote that the ‘significance of women to the conduct of war’ reveals itself

‘from their labor in field hospitals and munitions plants to the reorganization of domestic life on the home front, whether in the public realm of welfare, education, and social hygiene or in the everyday management of individual homes and hearths in a time of prolonged and severe crisis’.\textsuperscript{156}

But although wars in western Europe could create opportunities for women, the tasks and roles in the conduct of war are still highly gendered: ‘Some women, certainly, are strong. But ... it seems ... clear that women’s goals themselves are shaped by social systems which deny them ready access to the social privilege, authority, and esteem enjoyed by a majority of men.’\textsuperscript{157}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{153} El-Bushra J. and Sahl I.M.G. Cycles of Violence. Gender Relations and Armed Conflict (Nairobi, 2005) p. 47
\textsuperscript{154} Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown) and ‘Ugas’ (82 years old): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya.
\textsuperscript{155} Mazurana D., Raven-Roberts A. and Parpart J. Gender, conflict, and peacekeeping p. 5
\textsuperscript{156} Canning K. Gender History in Practice p. 42
\textsuperscript{157} Rosaldo M.Z. ‘The Use and Abuse of Anthropology’ p. 395
\end{flushleft}
Somali women in the Ogaden war

When discussing the roles Somali women took up during the Ogaden war we should take care not to ‘lump all women of the battlefield together, portraying them simultaneously as loyal […] followers and fierce warriors’. Every woman I spoke to had a different story to tell and even though I will try to generalise some of their experiences we have to keep in mind that this will all be based on a relatively small number of sources.

This being said, let us now unravel the complex history of women during the Ogaden war. According to El-Bushra and Sahl ‘in traditional Somali warfare women and children were spared from violence’. This would mean that women are traditionally not involved in war or conflict and that this was a field of manliness. It could also mean that even if women had a specific role in the war, it would be ignored by Ogadeeni recounting the war since this could challenges the culturally acceptable ideas of how women should behave.

Interestingly enough, this is not the case so one could challenge the quote given above. First we can ask ourselves what ‘tradition’ means and how old something needs to be so we can call it a tradition. One of my respondents even claimed the contrary was ‘tradition’: he stated that Somali women ‘traditionally … didn't stay in the kitchen!’ but have always been active in society, politics and struggles. Maybe the word ‘traditional’ does not refer to a reality but to an expectation where people are supposed to live up to.

Second, and more importantly, I believe this quote is not taking into account a large part of Somali history. Ever since the struggle for independence, women have been politically and military active: somewhere between the ruins in Mogadishu a statue still stands, picturing the leader of a group of women who fought against the Italian colonial troops. And we will see in this chapter that women were active in the Ogaden war as well, in all sorts of positions.

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158 Reséndez Fuentes A. ‘Battleground Women: Soldaderas and Female Soldiers in the Mexican Revolution’ p. 526
159 El-Bushra J. and Sahl I.M.G. Cycles of Violence. Gender Relations and Armed Conflict (Nairobi, 2005) p. 47
160 Macdonald A. ‘New Wars: Forgotten Warriors’ p. 137
161 Mohamed Warsama, BBC monitoring services Somalia during Ogaden War (at least 60 yearsold): 15-03-2011, New Town, Mombasa, Kenya
162 Mohamed Jama Z. ‘Fighting to Be Heard: Somali Women's Poetry’ In African Languages and Cultures, Vol. 4, No. 1, The Literatures of War (1991), pp. 43-44
163 Mohamed Warsama, BBC monitoring services Somalia during Ogaden War (at least 60 yearsold): 15-03-2011, New Town, Mombasa, Kenya
and functions. Many of my respondents even stated with a hinge of pride that women were the backbone of the Ogaden war.164

Women were active in the Ogaden region when the Ogaden war raged, just as women were active in other conflicts in other regions of the world. These women played different roles within the conflict, their involvement takes different shapes and varies from active fighting to a mere symbolic role in the wartime discourse.

First, women were active in the WSLF, also during the war. Within this rebel front women had a lot of different roles to play.

As was the case in Sierra Leone, a few women were leaders in the organisation of the rebel front,165 with some even leading subunits of the WSLF armed forces.166 A lot more women within the WSLF were fighters: ‘Oh yes! They were fighting often! At that time, they are super armed.’167 Yet the number of female fighters was limited as well. One former WSLF fighters estimates that about five per cent of the total number of fighters at the front were women. Assuming this is more or less correct, we could be able to guess the number of female fighters in the Ogaden war. According to NRC Handelsblad, the WSLF had about 6,000 guerrilla fighters in its ranks,168 a figure much more likely than the 400,000 the WSLF claimed to have in Time magazine.169 Based on these rudimentary and unconfirmed sources an estimate 300 female fighter were active in the Somali-Ethiopian war.

These women were of course living a hard life. A woman who grew up in Mogadishu explained to me how big the difference was in lifestyle:

‘[There are] snakes you are never used to it, there are a lot of people [bitten] by snakes bite because there is no city, they sleep in the forest because they hiding and all those things. ... life was very hard. There is no houses, there is no place to sleep, firstly, the

164 For example Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown) and ‘Ugas’ (82 years old): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
165 Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
166 Mohamed Sherif, ONLF Deputy Head of Information Office (43 years old): 27-04-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
167 Mohamed Warsama, BBC monitoring services Somalia during Ogaden War (at least 60 years old): 15-03-2011, New Town, Mombasa, Kenya
168 S.n. ‘Confrontatie in de Ogaden’ In Keesings Historisch Archief. 1977. (year 46, No. 2402) p. 611
169 S.n. ‘Sticks, Stones and Rockets’ in Time magazine, 24 10 1977, on http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,915678,00.html#ixzz1S5apxNsC
food, ... you have dried food so you will eat if you cannot that time. Sleeping, you have to sleep on the sand, there is no other place to sleep ... If you're going to the bathroom, you have to go to the forest, there is no bathroom, towels, nothing. You not taking shower, even days, you're not taking shower. So she says it was very hard life.¹⁷⁰

A (male) soldier of the WSLF also tried to explain this to me:

‘It's a very hard life. It's different from the outside. Not the life of a human. The other people they live in big difference. When [you are] young ... , you cannot feel that time but when you become old you can feel the different situation from that life. When I come to be old, I remember that time is very hard. But when you're younger, you cannot feel it: you're just running. Bad food, bad life, bad place where you can sleep, you're very hungry sometimes, you don't have enough time to eat, you cannot get enough time to sleep.’¹⁷¹

The clothes they were wearing reflected their lifestyle and priorities:

‘Every nomad seems to carry a rock, a club or a knife. Some have antiquated rifles, and a few proudly display Soviet-made automatic weapons. They are dressed in rags for the most part, but are highly motivated.’¹⁷²

Another issue in the daily lives of these fighters is the fact that they are constantly on the road together: moving from one front to another. This means men and women have to live closely together.

‘Of course we, women, because of our religion, they always be separate from men. But not very distant. … during the war, it's not same as when you are safe. you covering yourself, you are away from men, but you are like a soldier... yourself, so of course there was sleep in the same area, but then you are not maybe sleeping next to a man, you cannot do that, but in the same area.’¹⁷³

When a woman was injured, it was likely she was helped by a female nurse, but some were also treaded by men. One respondent told me the story of a woman who was fighting in the war and who was shot in her hip. When a male nurse tried to help her, she refused for she wouldn’t allow a man examining her thigh.¹⁷⁴

Details like this show how even these strong

¹⁷⁰ Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya
¹⁷¹ Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
¹⁷² S.n. ‘Sticks, Stones and Rockets’ in Time magazine, 24 10 1977, on http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,915678,00.html#ixzz1S5apxNsC
¹⁷³ Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya
¹⁷⁴ Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
women keep respecting the pervasive gender regulations. These female soldiers held powerful positions in the war since they were the direct enemies of the Ethiopian forces and killed as quick and ruthless as men. Yet, this does not mean these women were not victimised. In battle women like this were wounded and killed, and like men, they suffered when they were taken prisoner by the Ethiopian soldiers who raped or killed them. The niece of one interviewee, for example, died in battle: she too was a WSLF fighter.

Much more women within the WSLF were nurses who had to take care of wounded fighters. Most of these women were volunteers from Somalia. There were different kinds of nurses within the WSLF, each working at a different stage (and place) in the process of treating wounded fighters. There were nurses who helped fighters from the moment they were wounded. They had to be in the midst of the fight, providing first aid and bringing the wounded to the much safer field hospitals (often not much more than the shadow of a tree). Here patients were actually treated and when the wounds were too severe, people were transferred to military hospitals in Somalia. Those who needed a lot of care but were not badly injured were often handed over to local families who took these soldiers in. A family could host up to 13 people for several months. Once their wounds were healed, many fighters returned to the battlefield.

Yet, these nurses are more than just caring women: all of them were armed, having a gun at their sides at all times. When we consider that the nurses who were responsible for the first aid were constantly with the WSLF fighters, facing life-threatening situations on daily base

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175 Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
176 Mohamad Ali speaks of one of his female friends who lost a hand in the fight. One of his best friend, also a female fighter lost her life in the war. [Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya]. An elder lady lost a niece who fought fro the WSLF in the war as well ['L'. (at least 55 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr. 1), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya]
177 Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
178 'L'. (at least 55 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr. 1), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
179 Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya, and ‘Volunteer’ (50 years old): 19-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya, and Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya, and ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin)
180 Mohamed Sherif, ONLF Deputy Head of Information Office (43 years old): 27-04-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
and ‘running after the soldiers who were fighting,’\textsuperscript{181} the divide between these nurses and the female fighters is blurred. Fadumo, a frontline nurse of the WSLF ‘was injured [by] one of the Ethiopian soldiers, he had something called bayonet, it's something like a knife. A strong one and they put in [my] shoulder. And [I] was wounded in that way.’\textsuperscript{182} The functions of these nurses were also broader than caring for wounded WSLF fighters. They had to bury those who died, which most often happened at the spot where they were killed, and they also helped wounded civilians. Sometimes, they even helped women deliver babies.\textsuperscript{183} Their job also had a pleasant side though for they respected by their brothers and sisters in arms: ‘we help a lot of people, ... we made a lot of friends, ... because they were side by side to those actions.’\textsuperscript{184}

Most women in the WSLF were responsible for practical and logistical functions. Here a distinction needs to be made between those women mainly responsible for telecommunications within the military department of the WSLF and volunteers who had to provide the fighters in the frontline and camps with whatever they needed.\textsuperscript{185} The women working as a communication expert were always with the fighting units, carrying their devices, weighing about 12 kilograms, on their backs.\textsuperscript{186} These women were also carrying a gun at their sides at all times.\textsuperscript{187} Their experiences are therefore much like those of the frontline nurses.

There were also ‘a lot of women helping the military and helping the wounded people to […], giving them food, water, whatever they needed.’\textsuperscript{188} These women (there were almost no men doing these jobs) had to provide the people at the frontline with everything they needed and couldn’t carry with them. They did not only bring them food but also water, clothes, medicines, bandages, etc.\textsuperscript{189} Some of these women had just one job: carrying water to the fighters, making sure they could drink. Even though they were most often based in towns and

\textsuperscript{181} Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya
\textsuperscript{182} Ibidem
\textsuperscript{183} Ibidem
\textsuperscript{184} Ibidem
\textsuperscript{185} ‘Volunteer’ (50 years old): 19-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
\textsuperscript{186} Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
\textsuperscript{187} Mohamed Sherif, ONLF Deputy Head of Information Office (43 years old): 27-04-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
\textsuperscript{188} Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya
\textsuperscript{189} Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
little villages where the commanding units of the army were based, many of these women went in the frontline one regular base.\textsuperscript{190}

Yet these women did more than just supporting the WSLF by landing a hand in the practical matters: they were also important for morale:

‘\textit{some of them they can cook the food and they can bring, or send, to deliver the food.} 
... \textit{And also there are some, in the evening and also the night time, \ldots do the cultural dancing, they are singing, they call to the fight, the spiritual, they \ldots give them} [the fighters] \textit{the strong word, the strong health}.’\textsuperscript{191}

These cultural events were never performed at the frontline itself but always in a more peaceful place. A \textit{danta}, as they are called, served to lift the spirits of the fighters and other members of the WSLF. Women played a crucial role in these for they were singing and dancing.\textsuperscript{192} A former WSLF soldiers tried to explain to me how exactly these \textit{danta} were organized:

‘\textit{So what we were doing, the ladies they are one line and men they come on one line, they stand in the nighttime. They didn’t do it in the daytime. They shake the hands and they’re dancing…. The soldiers, … we call our country we lost. But [to] the ladies "what do you want?" the men said. They ladies they answer: ... ”I wanna fight but I need arms and trees” … then they say “I will fight the frontline \ldots and I will burn \ldots the homes of the Ethiopians” … That’s [what] they sing, the entertainment, on both sides. when they talk and do the cultural dance they call ‘danta’, in the evening. ... Some of them [the women who sing] were fighters and some of them came from the farmers and some of them, they came from the small towns. ... some senior fighter, ... they give [me] an announcement. The message, the spirits, they give it to the fighters... they give[me]the danto, the cultural blessing, that’s how it’s called.’

Fadumo, one of my respondents, told me she did a \textit{danta} almost every night and that she was very popular amongst her colleagues: her songs and poetry were nice and hopeful.\textsuperscript{193} The songs that were sung are still popular today and one can easily collect a cd full of songs in any cd-printing shop in Eastleigh. I also have such a cd but regrettfully I did not have the means to

\textsuperscript{190} Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
\textsuperscript{191} Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
\textsuperscript{192} Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya, and Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
\textsuperscript{193} Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya
arrange a translation of these songs. Yet, this is undoubtedly a very rich source of information on the Ogaden war and the way it is remembered.

Women were also important on the side of the Somali Republic. Habiba, a Somali refugee in Ghent, told me that Somali women were part of the ‘democratic’ republic of Somalia and thus ‘equal in all aspects of life’. Therefore, they had to serve in the military too. She stated there were many women in the Somali army but the female soldiers did not actually fight. They might have occasionally, when circumstances dictated it, but women were mainly employed as chauffeurs or cooks, in logistics and in other non combat functions. A commander of the Somali army agreed when he said the official Somali troops did not use female fighters, even though the military had women in her ranks. Somali officers saw them as too weak to actually fight in a war.

Women ‘were also more powerful at the grassroots level organisers. They were the ones responsible for each, critical economic forces, the material support, the moral support, they were active in that role.’ These women were organising the civilians in Somalia and in the Ogaden to help and support the joined Somali forces, setting up different initiatives that could provide the fighting forces with everything they needed. ‘[S]ince the women are attractive to the public, comparing with men, they were, they have an easy access to mobilising the community. To contact with them, to persuade them the visions, the agenda’s and [mobilising] the whole communities in the Ogaden.’ Thus many Somali civilian women put a lot of effort in the support of the fighting troops, especially for those of the WSLF.

‘When we come back to the social groups and their role in the struggle, the leading roles where [...] to the Youth League and ... the women group of the WSLF [led] ... by a madam called Fadimah Hasan. [...] And they participated in two ways: the first was

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194 ‘One of the great promises of the regime of Mohamed Siyad Barre (1969-91) [under the banner of “scientific socialism”] was to work toward equality for Somali women. With the socialist revolution in 1969, women were encouraged to attend school beyond the elementary level and to participate in government and the military. The Family Law (Xeer Qoyska) of 1975 sought to establish women’s equality in several areas.’ [Merryman N.H. ‘Women’s Welfare in the Jubba Valley: Somali Socialism and After’ In Besteman C. and Cassanelli L.V. The Struggle for Land in Southern Somalia. The War Behind the War (London, 1996) p. 179]

195 Habiba (54): 07-09-2010 (12u30-14u45), Ghent, Belgium. Informal talk.

196 ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin)

197 ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin)

198 Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
that of the mobilisation, the moral support, the contribution was ... as a campaign. And the other one was through the military. Those two perspectives, the women participated in the conflict. ... And from that perspective, the women were the backbone, the only column that the whole struggle was circling through. ... The other group who were very active in the struggle were the youth group who were consisted of [both] boy and girls, but ... particular ... the women group called "The Mothers" [Hooyooyin]. The Mothers, they had the good role because of they were even influential to the Somali Government to support the Ogaden struggle, I mean the Western Somali struggle at that time.... And ... some ... visited the battlefield of the Ogaden in 1977. [They] were above 70 per cent the Mothers, or the women group, who physically went there and saw what is happening, and they come back Somalia and according to their observations, mobilised the community, to the Ogaden war of the 1977.199

One of these Hooyooyin explained to me how they organised themselves and in what way they helped the WSLF in its struggle in the Ogaden:

‘a number of elderly women belonging to the Ogaden people, we used to collect the money from per person. We used to make ropes and ties and euh, the, which is to accommodate the ammunitions, yeah, to carry. We used to buy the military dress, the shoes, the belts, and even the ... drink can. We were a number of mothers, then, when we paid the whole necessities, the dresses, the robes, the belts. [Y]ounger girls ... bring [all this] to Ogaden, from Mogadishu.’200

Yet some of these women felt they had to do more and went into the Ogaden in the midst of the war. In the months Somalia and the WSLF had control of the Ogaden it was safe for Somali to enter this region. The same Hooyo (mother) told me she went to support the fight her husband was fighting as a military commander. She never met her husband during these eight months since he was at the front and she resided in an area free of any military personnel.201 In the Ogaden she mainly took care of slightly injured fighters:

‘at the time, the, most of the rebels were at the frontline. ... those [who] got injured, mostly they were taken directly to Somalia. But some of them were, were brought to ...

199 Mohamed Sherif, ONLF Deputy Head of Information Office (43 years old): 27-04-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
200 ‘Volunteer’ (50 years old): 19-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
201 Ibidem
us, and we provided the food, the medicine, [but] they were smaller number. Most of them was directly taken to Somalia.\textsuperscript{202}

Most of the people this volunteer treated were men, but sometimes a woman would be in need of help as well. These people were not only treated by volunteers, their medicines were also paid for by these people:\textsuperscript{203} the Somali government only paid for those soldiers who needed to be transferred to Somalia. As we shall later see, this a proof of a solidarity system build around political believes instead of clan or family focused care.

Women were also important in Somali politics. Some, such as Mrs. Dahab Omar Mohamed were had important functions,\textsuperscript{204} but more importantly, women were a powerful pressure group. In a CNN documentary on the Cold War it is also clear that women were not only present during political rallies and protests but that they were also very active during these events.\textsuperscript{205} A former journalist affirmed this, saying that whenever a political meeting would take place, there were always a lot of women present. Many of these women were members of the Somali Women’s League, cheering and taking part in the discussions:

‘Siad Barre was addressing a rally in central Somali in a place, that town called Jowhaar. ... Calling for the people to support their soldiers in the front. Now the women delegation there told him: "No worry about Kenya: we, the women, will take care of Kenya, you need to concentrate on Ethiopia." ... It was on the radio. Quite an insult! To Kenya, isn't it?\textsuperscript{206}

\textsuperscript{202} Ibidem
\textsuperscript{203} Ibidem
\textsuperscript{204} She was a was a Somali diplomat in Tanzania [S.n. ‘Somalia holding our land, admits Ethiopia’ In Daily Nation, 4 August 1977, p. 6]
\textsuperscript{205} http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inRIPR9md0&feature=related Turned T. CNN Cold War (17) Good Guys Bad Guys. 1967-1978 (consulted on 22-07-2011, 09u27)
\textsuperscript{206} Mohamed Warsama, BBC monitoring services Somalia during Ogaden War (at least 60 years old): 15-03-2011, New Town, Mombasa, Kenya
All these women have one thing in common: they themselves have chosen to get involved in the war. It is absolutely true that ‘[it is hard to make generalizations about female soldiers given their small number and heterogeneity],’ yet, since women were not enrolled as soldiers in the army, those who did pick up a gun and fought did so out of their own free will. Those leaving their jobs in Somalia to enter the Ogaden and serve as a nurse or volunteer in the WSLF did so because they wanted to help. These women were thus had to have a clear vision on politics and society, putting aside religious conventions and mockery of friends. Therefore it is likely that the devotion of these women towards the cause of the war (whether it be an independent Ogadeenia or a Greater Somalia) was stronger than the devotion of most men. When the war was over, everybody knew who had been active at the front with the WSLF. This means female fighters, like their male colleagues, received a lot of respect within the Ogadeeni and Somali society, but also that they cannot return to Ethiopia ever again.

Except for those women who were committing themselves to the war as a fighter, nurse or volunteer, many people had to support one of the fighting parties. Ogadeeni women gave Somali fighters food, drinks and sometimes living animals. However, the WSLF had to use force sometimes to obtain these goods: as we will see later in this essay, not all people supported the WSLF. Their unclear position with respect to Ogadeeni independence made some people believe the WSLF was a puppet army of the Somali regime (cf. infra).

Women were also important for the WSLF after the war. Somali women were active in the troops of the Somali National Movement (SNM) fighting Siad Barre as fighters, nurses,

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207 Reséndez Fuentes A. ‘Battleground Women: Soldaderas and Female Soldiers in the Mexican Revolution’ p. 545
208 Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown) and ‘Ugas’ (82 years old): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya.
209 Ibidem
210 Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya
211 Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown) and ‘Ugas’ (82 years old): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya, and Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya
212 Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
cooks, fundraisers etc. Women were also involved in the long transition from WSLF to ONLF.

Zamzam, for example, joined the Western Somali Youth Organisation, the youth wing of the Western Somali Liberation Front and she became a member of the executive committee of the Student Congress. The young wing was a very active organisation: its chairman participated in conferences all over the country and even in conferences of the Arab League. Many women were involved in this organisation, even in the higher levels. However, soon a conflict between the WSLF and its more radical youth wing arose on political matters concerning the Ogaden autonomy. This led, in 1984, to the arrest of the Chairman, the vice chair, the secretary, and a few other important members, including Zamzam. After this episode the Western Somali youth league made an important decision: the name of the organisation was changed: it was no longer Western Somalia they worked on, it was the Ogaden. From now one, the independence of the Ogaden region was the main goal of the Ogadeeni. Zamzam explains how she was involved in all this:

‘I was in that committee [of the Western Somali Youth Organisation] for 4 years. In those years, I helped to reform the movement to the ONLF. We saw it as the only solution of the struggle. The name change was widely appreciated among the people, but nobody dared to change it thus far. ... the organisation was big enough to pressure the regime. [The] call for independence of the Ogaden, though the symbolic change of the name, did thus not pass unnoticed.’

The Somali government and the WSLF were, however, very unhappy with this new liberation front that was no longer aiming to incorporate the Ogaden into Somalia. They did everything possible to disrupt and disorganise the ONLF.

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213 In the 1990’s the SNM fought the regime of ‘president’ Siyad Barre. They had female fighters but did not actively recruit those, as happened in Eritrea and Tigray. [Bradbury M. ‘Becoming Somaliland’ In African Issues (Oxford-Nairobi, 2008) pp. 71-72]
214 This organisation was established in 13 July 1979 [Mohamed Sherif, ONLF Deputy Head of Information Office (43 years old): 27-04-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya]
215 Ifrah Asayr (around 40 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
216 Mohamed Sherif, ONLF Deputy Head of Information Office (43 years old): 27-04-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya, and ‘Zamzam’ Faduma Mohamed Abdikadir (41 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
217 ‘Zamzam’ Faduma Mohamed Abdikadir (41 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
218 ‘Zamzam’ Faduma Mohamed Abdikadir (41 years old) and Ifrah Asayr (around 40 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
Today, many women are fighting in the Ogaden for the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). These women were mainly pushed into the ONLF by circumstances. A young woman told Aljazeera that “The Ethiopian troops imprisoned me and my brother. They killed him in front of my eyes and then they raped me. They killed my husband as well. Seeking security, I joined the fighters.” Others want to protect themselves against the raping and killing in the region, feeling more secure when carrying a gun and being among the rebels.\footnote{Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya} Those who join the ONLF have to be trained. Some girls told me they were trained for a couple of years, others claim they were trained in a just over a month.\footnote{Liilaaf (23 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr.2), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya and Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya,\footnote{Broadcast from Aljazeera, 16 – 04 – 2008. The girl’s statement was dubbed in English, it is this text I used here. \[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OO1jfIvBoE\] consulted on 13-01-2010: 10u12]} The role as guerrilla soldier is a hard extra chore for Ogaden women, next to the household, raising of children and guiding the cattle. All these chores are more and more shouldered by women only, for men are fighting in – or fleeing from – the war.\footnote{Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya} Yet, some women leave their family and household to join the rebels: they divorce their husband, leave their children with a relative and start anew in the bush with the rebels.\footnote{Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya} These women receive a lot of support from their community: ‘Yes: being a member [of the ONLF] resulted in more respect. We received a lot of moral support from others.’\footnote{“Zamzam” Faduma Mohamed Abdikadir (41 years old) and Ifrah Asayr (around 40 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya} All the roles described above were played by women. Yet it is true that most of these roles were an exception and that not everybody was pleased with women fighting on different fronts of the Ogadeeni struggle.

‘Even though I was not there at that time, but I have seen a lot of women now, a lot of womans say that “we have been taking part in the war ... as nurses, and as the same time helping other soldiers”. Some of them were also fighting having guns sometimes but euh, because these people were displaced, there is no other way that they can leave. They have to take part in the war. ..... And it's not rare to see women participating in the war because if they are desperate, there is no other way that they
can live. They have to take part in the war. Yeah, I know a lot of women who had taken part in that war.²²⁴

Another respondent explained that there were some religious issues connected to the roles women played in the war:

*Actually, in the ... Muslim religion ... they [women] can fight. Because ... if they have an [occupation] for herself, her family, own territory, own whatever, even when it's easy to rape, she is trying to defense herself. Because she can fight. Then, some of ... the cleric they say that "No! ONLF they doing like the western culture" or something like that. And ONLF they say no. They ... announced "Yes, even the holy Q'ran and the Hadith, they are talking about ... generation to generation, there was fighting. And they are talking about some of the dress....[but] if they stay in the town or she get covered in the Hijab and one Ethiopian soldier comes to her and [it's] easy to kill, easy to rape. ... she has to go out to survive and stay wherever she can, trying to fight." It's easy! But most of them as in Ogaden region, from generation to generation, they know [this]. Even the ladies from that time [the Ogaden war] with the fighters, they support it. They get the food and the water. Even they are carrying ... something for the army ... Even that time, I saw some pictures they get the training and they go to fighters in the 1977²²⁵

One of the best examples to indicate the fact that military women are not yet completely accepted, or at least seen as a curiosity, is the story of Qasad and Hasan. They met while fighting at the frontline in the Somali-Ethiopian war and both were members of the WSLF and strong supporters of the Ogaden cause. They fell in love at the front and went to Somalia together to marry in Mogadishu. At the marriage many people were joking about the fact Qasad had been, and still was, a fighter for the WSLF:

‘his family they say "hey! The lady who is still fighting as a soldier, they look like the men. Are you married to another man?" [laughs] Yes! but they think like that. This lady, she comes like a men. She is ... fighting and she is stronger than another woman, she is carrying the gun and everything.’²²⁶

The image of a strong woman serving as a female fighter remained something unusual.²²⁷

²²⁴ ‘Civil servant’ (age unknown): 02-04-2011, Central Business District, Nairobi, Kenya
²²⁵ Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
²²⁶ Ibidem
²²⁷ Ibidem
Yet, even though gender roles do not disappear in wartime, violence and the created opportunities for women during conflicts can sometimes transform masculinities, femininities, and the relations between the sexes. This idea is backed by the fact that the distinction between battlefield (presumed as ‘male’) and homestead (presumed as ‘female’) sometimes blurred when armies raged through villages or when guerrillas used towns as military bases. Whether this change has occurred – and was maintained – in the Somali society and whether these new images are conservative (and thus imply a more rigorous following of older gender roles) or progressive (and thus more flexible version of the original roles) cannot be discussed yet since the warlike situation is not yet over.

Or, as Gardner and El Bushra put it:

‘It is well documented in gender and politics scholarship that international and civil conflict transforms women’s traditional roles and responsibilities, increasing their participation in politics and the paid labour force ... After the conflict however there is often pressure on women to return to gender roles as they were pre-conflict.’

However, I believe Somali women have been so active over the last 50 years or so that a setback will be difficult both for the women involved and for society at large. Maybe the female fighters in East Timor could be an example for Somali society, for here ‘women have been able to transform from freedom fighters to a fully fledged women’s movement within the short space of a decade’.

We mustn’t forget of course that wars predominantly create victims and these victims are both men and women. No matter how strong women stood in the Somali-Ethiopian war, no matter how fierce they fought, many women died in the war and in the eyes of many, women are in the first place still victims of war: ‘the [Ethiopian] fighters, when they capture some town and when they come in, they kill for the kids, for the women and the animals.’

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228 Canning K. Gender History in Practice pp. 44-45
229 Changes in gender relations have been noticed during the Somali civil war of the 1990’s. [Gardner J. and El Bushra J. (eds.) Somalia. The Untold Story. The war through the eyes of Somali women (London, 2004) pp. 17-18]
232 Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
Psychology in conflict

We now return to the second focal point of this paper. Considering the previous chapters, I believe it is safe to state women were very active in the war and that they faced the same shocking experiences as their male colleagues. They killed and witnessed killings, they wounded others and were wounded themselves, they lived the same barren life as the big group of male soldiers. They lost friends and relatives, they had to leave everything behind in order to stay alive, they convinced others to die for the Ogaden cause. In sum, Somali women were no less active in wartime as they were in any other times.

As a human being blessed with a very basic sense of empathy, I could not help but wonder how all these distressing events influenced the lives of these people. This curiosity turned out to be difficult to assuage (cf. supra) but nonetheless a careful attempt is made in the following chapters.

“For many people involved in violent conflicts, fear, pain and loss due to different forms of violence as part of the conflict is a chronic state of affair, lingering on in the aftermath.”

Therefore, it might seem as stating the obvious but it needs to be stressed that

“armed conflicts cause significant psychological and social suffering to affected populations. The psychological and social impacts of violence and conflicts may be acute in the short term, but they can also undermine the long-term mental health and psychosocial well-being of the affected population. These impacts may threaten peace, human rights and development.”

If you combine this information with the fact that wars have been raging all over the world ever since human society emerged, this means a significant part of the world population is bound to suffer psychologically. Figures released by the World Health Organisation (WHO) do show that ‘10% of the world population is affected by some kind of mental distress and

mental disorder. This percentage increases up to 20% in war-torn and conflict-prone countries, ... where the extent of violence has permeated the different layers of the society.  

The fact that people in all regions and cultures suffer under the stress and pain war and conflicts engender does not mean these people will suffer the same consequences from the same events, express their suffering in the same way, or deal with the consequences with the same coping strategies. The reasons why people react different to traumatising events are manifold but largely unknown. When Pedersen lists some of them, he cannot but express them in questions waiting to be answered. In what way is trauma a product of social inequality, exclusion or poverty? How important is culture for the creation of the narratives of pain exactly? What is the role of psycho-biological phenomena? These questions are extremely difficult to answer and the few answers that are found are constructed on research done in the West. Therefore there is a ‘need to document non-western patterns of trauma-related conditions: local idioms of distress and wide range of responses to trauma - including adaptive and strategic responses - at the individual and at the collective level’

Psychology in non-western conflicts

It is clear that differences exist in the way people express, and cope with, feelings. These differences occur on a number of levels, most notable on the individual level: different people from the same country, religion, region, socio-economic background etc. will handle the same emotional situation in different ways. Differences also occur on higher levels. Different reactions for similar situations will exists in different cultures, religions, subcultures, etc. This is not to say there are no similarities, for most psychological maladies are the result of physical processes that can be detected with the help of medical science. What does differ is the way they are seen by the patients and their environment. In other words ‘la structure et l’économie d’une psychose ou d’une névrose variant peu, finalement, d’une société à l’autre ... . Mais ce qui est différent, en revanche, c’est le contenu, c’est-à-dire les matériaux avec lesquels se construisent les grands processus psychopathologiques.’ This is shown by François Laplantine who claims the belief in ancestors, spirits and other fetishes are crucial in

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236 Pedersen D. ‘Political violence, ethnic conflict, and contemporary wars’ p. 184
237 Ibidem p. 183
238 Laplantine F. ‘Maladies mentales et thérapies traditionnelles en Afrique Noire’ p. 23
239 Ibidem p. 23
understanding how some African people handle psychological issues for they can provide guidance and/or solutions to people’s problems.\textsuperscript{240} This is different for Somali who are, generally speaking, Muslims and are likely to turn to other spiritual guidance.\textsuperscript{241} During my interviews I never came across the ideas of shamanism, ghosts, ancestors, or any other “fetishes”. Yet, as we shall see in the next chapter, one specific ritual does exist in which stress is done away with by a ‘relaxing feast’.\textsuperscript{242} Yet this is the only surviving element of an ancient belief in spirits in Somali society.\textsuperscript{243}

Apart from different ways to express psychological issues, some problems are more - or less - present in certain societies. Depression, for example, is supposed to be rare in Africa due to ‘l’efficacité des mécanismes projectives et au rôle protecteur de la famille élargie qui agit collectivement comme un puissant anti-dépresseur.’\textsuperscript{244} This role families and other social groups play in the “African psychological context” appears to be of major importance. However, as we will see in the next pages, there are situations, such as the Ogaden war, were the issues at hand are simply too vast to be controlled by this collective anti-depressing force.

In his effort to explain how the Baoulé society copes with calamities of different scales, Laplantine explains ‘le rituel thérapeutique auquel on fait appel pour soigner est structurellement identique à celui qui est utilisé pour remédier à tout ce qui est considéré par le groupe social comme une calamité.’\textsuperscript{245} This therapeutic ritual holds a series of moments and stages that helps society to revoke the unknown into the known. Further in this essay I will argue the Ogaden war is today such a rituel thérapeutique. Psychological therapies are the unknown for several African people since, in some African contexts, the idea of psychology is strange and the distinction between medical sciences and psychiatric sciences might even be staggering.

‘La distinction entre le somatique et le psychique, ..., est rarement retenue en [most of] Afrique comme critère différentiateur. De même que la maladie s’inscrit dans une logique globale du mal et du malheur, elle n’est à vrai dire jamais considérée

\textsuperscript{240} Ibidem p. 24
\textsuperscript{241} Abdullahi M.D. Culture and customs of Somalia (Westport, 2001) p. 65
\textsuperscript{242} Ibidem p. 66
\textsuperscript{243} Ibidem p. 67
\textsuperscript{244} Laplantine F. ‘Maladies mentales et thérapies traditionnelles en Afrique Noire’ p. 22
\textsuperscript{245} Ibidem pp. 38-39
seulement comme une atteinte d’un membre de corps... En poussant le raisonnement jusqu’au bout, on pourrait presque dire que c’est tout individu, et plus encore tout le groupe auquel il appartient, qui est frappé... ’

In other words, also by Laplantine, ‘La maladie ... n’est jamais considérée en Afrique comme un phénomène isolable qui viendrait s’abattre sur un individu particulier. Elle est toujours vécue et comprise comme une dégradation des liens sociaux dont le malade est la victime.’

Still, there are ‘spécialistes et des spécialités pharmaceutiques, mais elles sont toujours associées à un traitement d’ensemble qui a un impact affectif, émotionnel et social évident.’

These ideas do challenge the base of this thesis for if psychology is alien to African societies, one can ask herself if it is useful to try to detect and analyse something that is not there. Is psychology something that has its origins in the western individualism that worships the individual and his or her goals and motivations? Does the collectiveness of “African” therapies block a psychological thinking? I believe these thoughts are premature and the French quotes used above need to be handled with caution. They do not represent the whole of African psychological attitudes, even though Laplantine claims they do, since they are based on research on the Baoulé in Ivory Coast only. Furthermore, psychology does not necessarily have to be based on individualism and can also be working with collectives. Projecting these findings on the whole of (sub-Saharan) Africa will not help us differentiating current day psychology.

**Social context for suffering.**

*And you can understand that when there is a war that there is always danger.*

It has been stated numerous times before in this paper: to understand the real impact of the Ogaden war on the Ogaden people we need to know much more about the context of this war. To understand what impact the loss of a marital partner has we need to know the position of ‘the family’ within society. To know how deep the financial pit will be when someone loses his or her livestock, we need to know the economic fabric of society and the possible social support networks. Daniel, working on Sri Lanka, also showed us that when discussing past

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246 Laplantine F. ‘Maladies mentales et thérapies traditionnelles en Afrique Noire’ pp. 46-47.
247 Ibidem p. 39
248 Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya

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violence in a certain community, a full understanding of the community’s understanding of, orientation to, and utilisation of the past is very important. This is, however, an endless task, or it is at least a task beyond my capacities and means. In this short chapter I will briefly discuss those parts of life that are touched upon by my respondents.

In respect to the social context of suffering it is extremely important to realise that the Ogaden war was not the first, nor the last conflict in the region. The people living here were facing violence and conflict for generations when the war broke out. This fact could lead to two seemingly contrasting consequences. Some may have found it even more difficult to cope with the experience of war because children can only develop coping strategies when their parents teach them the necessary techniques to do so. In many societies however, traumata are kept quiet and children remain unaware of ways to cope with them. When several generations suffer tremendously, it is likely the coping strategies which are usually provided by people’s upbringing are lost. However, I have the impression this is not the case for the Ogaden community since all young people I spoke to were all strongly aware of the troubles older generations went through: ‘Over evening fires, the Somalis often recount the exploits of the revered Ahmed Gurey, perhaps the first of the Somali freedom fighters; he attacked Ethiopians in the Ogaden in the 16th century.’ (cf. infra ‘Ogaden war as coping strategy’).

The other consequence could be that the society as a whole gets used to conflict and violence. That is why several people suggest that war and struggle does not have the expected traumatic effect upon Somali people. This is based on old ideas of Somali as notoriously dangerous people, an image early European travellers took over from Arab traders. Tate, for example, suggested in 1942 that the diya system made the Somali a ‘vindictive’ people that could

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250 Verhaegen P. Over normaliteit en andere afwijkingen. Handboek klinische psychodiagnostiek (Leuven, 2005) p. 266
251 S.n. ‘Sticks, Stones and Rockets’ in Time magazine, 24 10 1977, on http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,915678,00.html#ixzz1S5apxNsC
253 The diya, or blood payment, is a fine paid in case of homicide. It is paid by the clan of the violator to the clan of the victim and is mostly preferred over the execution of the murderer. [Gardner J. and El Bushra J. (eds.) Somalia. The Untold Story. The war through the eyes of Somali women p. 157]
cope more easily with the loss of a loved one. Others claimed that the nomadic lifestyle of most Somali would make the experience of forced migration and seeking refuge less traumatising. Pharaonic circumcision makes some believe Somali women are tougher, and Reid, finally, claimed that the violent history of the region made violence and suffering ‘the norm’. These types of generalisations about Somali ruthlessness not only imply that certain people would be more violent than others, but they also fail to mention the violence of other cultures: ‘That the history of Europe ... is a history of belligerence [but is still the birthplace of modern ideas on war trauma, is] also forgotten.

The everlasting conflict in the Ogaden seems to have had at least some, albeit small, benefits for those who fled the region when the Somali-Ethiopian war broke out. People had been fleeing the Ogaden (and returning home when the violence subsided) for generations and were thus able to establish contacts and relations all over the Horn of Africa. Somalia, where people speak the same language, share the same culture and where many Ogadeeni have relatives, appears to have been the most preferred country to seek refuge in. During violent episodes in the Ogaden in the 1920s and 1960s, for example, many fled to Somalia and returned when the violence ended. Some Ogadeeni had also studied in Somalia in the 1960s, and some even found a partner in Somalia. So when a family fled the Ogaden in 1977, chances were high a family member had already been in Somalia (or another country of refuge) which made finding a job, receiving education, and finding a new home easier. In other words building a new life, in the place of refuge is made considerably easier by connections arriving before them. For these reasons, all the people I interviewed fled to

255 This was suggested by A. H. Brind [Esq. in Mogadishu] in a letter dated 8th March 1978. [In the National British Archives, FCO 31/2241]
257 Reid R. ‘War and Remembrance: Orality, Literacy and Conflict in the Horn’ In Journal of African Cultural Studies Vol. 18, No. 1, Language, Power and Society: Orality and Literacy in the Horn of Africa (Jun., 2006), pp. 92 and 98
259 Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
260 ‘Volunteer’ (50 years old): 19-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
Somalia even though other countries surrounding Ethiopia also received Ogadeeni refugees, notably Djibouti.261

When I write about the continuity of conflict in the Ogaden region, I do not claim the conflict was monotone: the ways in which the conflict was fought chanced and evolved to an ever crueler degree.

*In Ahmed Gurey's day, skirmishes were fought with swords and camels. Today [1977] heavy tanks grind through the stony wastes, villages are destroyed by enemy shells, livestock are seized by both armies, and townspeople live in terror of attack from the air. The desert is strewn with burned-out tanks, wrecked artillery, empty mortar casings.*262

This was of course a gradual evolution: any idealistic image of the Ogaden before the war has to be nuanced since in the early 1960s too, it was hard to earn a living:

‘I had a ... small shop ... in Kelafo area, once upon a time, in Kelafo town. ... I was then a member of a committee established there, ... , and I was the secretary of the committee. Then ... a government team, particularly the spies, gave the information that I am a member of that movement [and] the government managed to prepare its military forces, targeted my shop, and confiscated the whole property. [I] managed to escape. It was in 1963.’263

One respondent illustrates this evolution in the Ogaden with the changing lifestyle of his parents:

‘They was living the farmers, outside the towns. They have a good life. They have animals, goats, sheep, camel; Even they have a small business ..., they have money. That was their life. Even right now there are some of them they can die from hunger. That time, the Mengistu time, they used the bullet [to kill people]. You can kill by a bullet. But at this time [i.e. 2011] they can wiring the neck [meaning people are strangled with (much cheaper) iron wires].

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262 Wood D. ‘Sticks, Stones and Rockets’ in *Time magazine*, 24 10 1977, on [http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,915678,00.html#ixzz1S5apxNsC](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,915678,00.html#ixzz1S5apxNsC)

263 ‘Ugas’ (82 years old): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
Wood tells the story of a man he interviewed in 1977, adding more atrocities to this cruel list:

‘Husein Liban, a Jijiga elder, recalls how the Somali nomads once killed an Ethiopian policeman who tried to collect a tax that they regarded as unfair. In revenge, he recalls, they "took 35 of our people and shot them. They would cut the breasts of our women to prevent them from suckling our young. When the fighting increased, the Ethiopians took 150 of our people as hostages. They shot them all, including my brother Odowa." Liban proudly claims to have been a guerrilla for 31 of his 71 years. "There is killing and killing," he says "but we are determined to fight on."’

This endless crescendo of violence is thus of obvious importance when trying to understand the real impact of the Somali-Ethiopian war (cf. infra). But I was going to focus on the more detailed aspects of life influencing the experience of the Ogaden war.

During the Ogaden war life was severely disrupted for the Ogadeeni. As we could read above, cattle and other livestock was often targeted by air raids or confiscated by different warring parties. This is a financial disaster since livestock is for most people the only way to earn a living. Furthermore, the diet of nomads is often based on the products their animals produce: milk, dairy products, meat and (sometimes) blood. This can be supplemented with bush fruits and some grain, if available. ‘In Ogaden, they ... like the Somali food. The pasta and Italian, bread and sugar, rice, milk, camel, goat.’ According to Bolton, a family of five that lives on a diet of milk and - approximately - 25% meat, needs (the equivalent of) 25 cows.

‘In an area like Korahe [a district in central Ogaden] with an irregular twelve inches [30.5 cm] of rain a year, such a family herd will require over 500 acres of grazing. This in turn limits the human population density to six people to the square mile.’

In 1970, 94.2% of the population of Hararghe province was living in rural areas, a total of more than three million people. So when a family loses its herd or when the grazing

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264 Wood D. ‘Sticks, Stones and Rockets’ in Time magazine, 24 10 1977, on http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,915678,00.html#ixzz1S5apxNsC
265 ‘L’. (at least 55 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr. 1), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya, and Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown) and ‘Ugas’ (82 years old): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
268 Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
grounds are inaccessible because of ongoing fighting, concern about food and fiscal security arises. During these difficult times the people living in the Ogaden did not only have to protect and safeguard their own possessions, often they were also looking after animals and belongings of their relatives who fled the violence. These refugees were hoping to return home one day and pick up the life they left behind an elder lady entrusted me that ‘I never had peace. My whole life I have been separated from my property.’ One interviewee told me his cousins guarded their camels, goats and sheep while he and his family were gone. When he and his siblings returned to their village in the Ogaden they could only survive their first weeks by living of the animals his relatives had been looking after. Later, he managed to settle into a slightly more comfortable life by selling his fathers’ RPG gun that was kept safe in his village by one of his father’s friends.

The economic impact of the Somali-Ethiopian war on Qaad production, the second biggest economic sector in the Ogaden, was also strong. In the year 1977 the Qaad export from Harerge dropped from over 3,000 tons in 1976 to 747 tons in 1977, with the incomes dropping from almost 8 million birr to 5 million birr. By the time the export levels were back on track, the fall of both the Somali and Ethiopian regimes was only a couple of months away. In the same year of 1977, the coffee export from Harerge dropped from 8,000 tons to 4,000 tons. When Somali-Ethiopian hostilities flared up, the Ethiopian government often banned the “export” of Qaad to Somali territories—including the Ogaden—, thereby losing up to 3 million birr in state revenues.

Such economic shifts can also result in a new divisions of labour and new economic roles for women. In that way, the Somali ‘civil’ war (1979-...), for example, resulted in a major shift in the economic status of women in Somali society. Suddenly, they became the sole breadwinners and practically took over the entire economy. Research by Merryman on the Jubba valley shows this was different in this pastoral-agricultural area by indicating that, before and even during the ‘civil’ war, the ‘economic and social position of Somali women is

271 ‘L’. (at least 55 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr. 1), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
272 Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
consistently weak’. She claims urban Somali women in the Jubba valley enjoyed greater opportunities for economic independence and had more control of ‘productive resources, education and health’ than women in the pastoral sector.  

The ownership of herds was mostly in male hands. Women had thus little control over the primary economic resources, even though some, most urban, women were involved in some cash-earning activities such as weaving mats and baskets or running a tea shop. Before the civil war, women in Somali society already spent a great amount of time working in ‘the domestic sphere’. They collected firewood and water, milked camels and process the milk, maintained the herds, loaded camels for treks and even built and dismantled huts. Most of these chores they did on their own, or with help from their daughters. Coupled with the destruction of public facilities such as hospitals and schools, many responsibilities shifted back into the ‘private sphere’ and thus onto women. The official economy was no longer sufficient to support the whole family, which resulted in women pursuing multiple jobs, not seldom in the informal sectors of prostitution, smuggling, and begging. These problems were not solved by the international community, as sometimes happens today, since there were no NGOs in the Ogaden at the time of the Somali-Ethiopian war. Only from the late 1980s onwards NGOs appeared in the Ogaden where they did not only provide aid and food but also well-paid jobs and thus opportunities for the Ogaden people.

Next to food, health care is obviously one of the most pressing priorities in dire situations such as violent conflicts. Yet, hospitals too were amongst the targets of bomber planes:

> ‘In late August they [the WSLF] ended a 15-day siege of the town of Jijiga (pop. 4,000) with a final push that sent 4,000 mutinous Ethiopian troops scurrying off through the nearby Marda Pass. The fighting zone is now more than 50 miles away, but dust-blown little Jijiga is not yet out of enemy range, as Correspondent Wood discovered on his visit there. "Without warning,” he reports, "three Ethiopian jets suddenly screamed over the town, pumping rockets and bombs into ramshackle buildings and strafing the dusty streets with 40 mm. cannon fire. In four passes, the

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277 Ibidem p. 186-189
278 Ibidem p. 184-185
279 Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
280 Ibidem
jets concentrated on Jijiga’s miserably under-equipped hospital, a target they had hit four days earlier. This time they finished the job, killing the hospital’s three young nurses and four other civilians, and seriously wounding the town’s only doctor.\textsuperscript{281} A shortage in health facilities and personnel is critical since many people were physically wounded during the war. I met people who’s wounds were healed and people who still suffer from their injuries. These afflictions often had a major impact on people’s lives. A woman who was educated as a nurse in Mogadishu and worked as a frontline nurse with the WSLF, for example, was badly injured by a bayonet (cf. \textit{supra}) and could no longer work as a nurse when the war was over. She changed careers and became a peace advocate working with several NGOs.\textsuperscript{282} A former WSLF fighter lost a big chunk of muscle in his left leg, severely restricting his possibilities within society.\textsuperscript{283} An ex-soldier of the Somali army was disabled in combat and spend the rest of his life in hospital.\textsuperscript{284}

Another everyday concern focusing on the long term is often the education of children. Often during the Ogaden war, it was too dangerous to leave the house and gathering places such as schools were an easy target for the Ethiopian air force. This way many children could no longer attend school or \textit{madrasa}.\textsuperscript{285} If the current concerns of the Ogadeeni community living in Kenya could reflect the concerns of the Ogadeeni during the Somali-Ethiopian war, this must have been an important issue. In a marginalised region such as the Ogaden, the \textit{idée fixe} that education is the only way to a better life is very dominant. However, only those who fled to Somalia had a chance to attend school, especially if they had connections within the Somali society.\textsuperscript{286} Here, the WSLF and the Somali government organised some basic schooling for women and children in several of the refugee camps.\textsuperscript{287} Zamzam, for example was able to finish her studies in Mogadishu thanks to one of her uncles who was a minister in the Somali

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Wood D. ‘Sticks, Stones and Rockets’ in \textit{Time magazine}, 24 10 1977, on \url{http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,915678,00.html#ixzz1S5apxNsC}
\item Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya
\item Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
\item ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin)
\item Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
\item Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya, and ‘Zamzam’ Faduma Mohamed Abdikadir (41 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
\item These schools had often only one classroom where pupils of all ages were mixed. [‘Zamzam’ Faduma Mohamed Abdikadir (41 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya, and Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya]
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
government. Some Ogadeeni returnees could also obtain some education but only when they were known as supporters of the Addis regime. ‘[Y]ou have to imitate those people who are pro Ethiopians and it’s only that way that you can gain education, you have to just, you know, behave like pro Ethiopian.’\(^{288}\) However, behaving this way often means isolation from the rest of the Ogaden community.

More disturbing is the fact that two sources claim children joined the forces of the WSLF, depriving them of a chance to avoid the violence.\(^{289}\) This specific issue needs to be researched further to determine how many children joined, what their tasks were, how they were enrolled, whether any of them survived etc.

Another long term issue is the fact that many families and clans broke apart during the war. Different family members often fled to different places. Once the war was over this situation often deteriorated when only parts of a family returned to the Ogaden.\(^{290}\) This does not only bring about emotional issues, it also undermines an assumed basic support network within Ogaden community. When a family or clan falls apart, so does people’s supporting networks. However, this presupposed solidarity in Somali society is openly questioned by some of my respondents. A young woman told me she never helped any of her inmates, even those of her own clan, when she was in jail, nor did she received any help from them.\(^{291}\) However, this is a victim of the current conflict in the Ogaden and is thus not applicable to our time range. Yet, the girls’ doubts are reflected by the story of an elder lady who told me ‘those who lost body parts [in the Ogaden war] didn’t get any help from anybody’,\(^{292}\) there were simply too many people in need for help. A women who sometimes worked in refugee camps in Somalia recounts that the Somali government helped these people a bit (cf. infra) because ‘[t]hey didn’t get help from anybody [else] since they were all in the same situation: they all went through the same suffering. However, even when they got medicine, the greatest injury was

\(^{288}\) ‘Civil servant’ (age unknown): 02-04-2011, Central Business District, Nairobi, Kenya
\(^{289}\) Wood mentiones ‘15-year-olds’ [Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya, and \url{http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,919356,00.html#ixzz1UAbuBS55} Wood D. ‘A Desert Duel Keeps Heating Up’ in \textit{Time magazine} (consulted on 05-08-2011, 17u52)]
\(^{290}\) Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
\(^{291}\) ‘G’ (24 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr.3), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
\(^{292}\) ‘L’. (at least 55 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr. 1), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
the disappointment of not being liberated by the war.”293 My interpreter Axmed, too, tried to explain to me that solidarity within the family and clan are very important to the people in the Ogaden but during the Ogaden war (and up until today) this network was overstretched:

‘That's [support from family and friends] helping, yes, but it's beyond its scope. Even I myself, I was ... earning my own wage ... now I'm here, around two years and eight months. I'm not going to work and nobody is paying for me but I'm just living on behalf of my family and relatives. Particularly those abroad in the western countries. ... But they cannot soften ... the problems in the Ogaden. Particularly those in the refugee camps. ... But relatively, ... the reason that we're living, ... is because that we are helping each other. That's the reason that we stay.’294

Too much people in need of help and torn apart families made a lethal social mix only some could escape. One way to escape this dire situation is by joining ‘new’ social support networks. In case of one young woman who lost contact with her mother while in jail (‘Whenever I remember the mother, I feel, I lost my emotional confidence’)295 joining the rebels of the ONLF was the best option. This group of people started to function as her new family that supported her: ‘The life [with the ONLF] ... does not have any problem. When you are living with your people who loves you, who helps you, who you feels that you are amongst them.’296 This last is very interesting since her description of life with the ONLF matches others’ descriptions of life with the WSLF:

‘you are along the people. At your turn, you do your work. If you feel tired or exhausted, some other will replace you and do, will do the job. If you get injury, you are given to the families or the villages around the area of the countryside, those civilians take care of you while the others are in the fighting and you have a lot of support with the, in the community. You are given trainings and when you take those trainings, you don't feel much exhaustion, much [...], and you feel comfortable.’297

Thus the traditional solidarity structures based around clan and family are replaced by a support networks organised around political and military goals. The same occurred in the

293 ‘Zamzam’ Faduma Mohamed Abdikadir (41 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
294 Axmed during the interview with Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown) and ‘Ugas’ (82 years old): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
295 Liilaaf (23 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr.2), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
296 Ibidem
297 Ibidem
WSLF where members of the rebel front also found respect and support amongst each other.  

The war also had a profound but less direct impact on the daily life people led in Somalia. Many men had to go fighting in the Ogaden war, leaving behind their families. This led to similar situations as in the Ogaden with families that are separated by the conflict. Some women decided to enter the Ogaden and participate in the war their men were fighting but these women most often did not meet their husband in the Ogaden and they too left behind a family and social life in their home towns.  

The influx of Ogadeeni refugees in Somalia – the population in Somalia tripled in years of the - created a competition for the available commodities and resources. These were scarce already as a result of the economic impact of the war and the drought that hit the Horn in the same years the Somali-Ethiopian war raged. For the Somali too, food became a precious good.  

When Somalia started to lose the war, Ethiopian bombers started to target the whole Somali border region, destroying whole villages and killing many. As with people in the Ogaden region, Somali had to fear the sky for a long time and this fear paralysed many public facilities such as schools. Hospitals too felt the impact of the war: not only did they have to treat the wounded soldiers, some public hospitals were turned into military hospitals by the Somali government in 1978, leaving the Somali citizens with a much smaller network of public health care. Since 1978, the Martini hospital in Mogadishu only housed military personnel and war veterans (mainly from the Ogaden war) occupy one entire part of the hospital with their families. One room often harbours one or two veterans, their wives and their children.

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298 Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya  
299 Ibidem  
301 Ifrah Asayr (around 40 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya, and Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya  
302 Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya  
303 ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin)  
304 ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin) and an informal talk with Abdhilin who has visited the place numerous times as a MSF employee.
Those Somali citizens who were most affected by the war were the soldiers. In contrast to many WSLF fighters, the Somali soldiers were prepared for warfare: everyone in Somalia who finished her/his secondary education was obliged to attend a military education.\textsuperscript{305} However, their experiences during the war and the physical impact of the fight took its toll: one ex-soldier, for example, was so severely wounded in his leg he could no longer serve as a soldier or, in fact, do any other work to earn his living. He and his colleagues were dependent on a veteran salary and had to spend the rest of their days in the above-mentioned Martini Hospital in Mogadishu. After the collapse of the Somali government they lost this source of income and they were left depending on help from their families and several NGOs, such as Médecins Sans Frontières.\textsuperscript{306}

Stress about food shortages, loss of animals and the fragmentation of family ties added to the general and constant stress experienced during the war. The fear of bombings was ubiquitous during the Ogaden war (cf. \textit{supra}) since air raids did not only target (possible) military targets. The Ethiopian bomber planes, for example, also targeted villages where no WSLF fighters or Somali soldiers were present.\textsuperscript{307} Permanent stress and fear, the loss of economic security and the threatening of social support networks create a social base for suffering, a suffering that goes much deeper than a trauma from exposure to a moment of cruelty. Overall insecurity can furthermore lead to ‘collective distress’ where a ‘\textit{general violent context, extreme insecurity, lack of shelter and access to basic needs increase the risk of developing mental disorders}’\textsuperscript{308}

\textsuperscript{305} Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya, and ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin)

\textsuperscript{306} ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin)

\textsuperscript{307} Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya

\textsuperscript{308} Rivelli F. (ed.) \textit{A situation analysis of mental health in Somalia} (World Health Organisation, 2010) p. 19
Psychology and the Ogaden war

‘It can’t be healthy just to live with such a steep emotion.’

François Laplantine is one of the many who asks himself: ‘Existe-t-il des troubles mentaux qui seraient originaux à certaines sociétés et que l’on ne retrouveraient pas ailleurs?’ In this case: are there specific Somali expressions of certain psychological disorders and are there even specific Somali psychological disorders? To answer this question, we do not only need a lot of detailed information on the Somali society and culture, but also on the Somali psychology. Yet, information on psychology in the Somali context is scarce because ‘[t]here is no evidence of scientific research being carried out on mental health in Somalia’. The World Health Organization (WHO) very recently published a ‘Situation Analysis of Mental Health in Somalia’ that disclosed some information on how psychological issues are being dealt with in the Somali context. But even a gigantesque organisation like the WHO was not able to collect enough data to create a ‘clear national picture on the prevalence of mental disorders’. They could only conclude that psychology, like mental health care, is a ‘neglected and almost forgotten sector’. Their research was further complicated by two issues. One is the fact that mental health (caafimadka maskaxda) as a concept is not well known in Somali society. ‘Depression for example, has no direct translation in Af-Somali. Instead it is described as: ‘qulub, qalbi-jab iyo murugo joogto ah.’ ‘Qulub’ refers to the feelings a camel has when its friend dies.’

Because of this, the WHO used a rather dubious way in tracing down the different psychological problems prevalent in Somali society: the illness was detected by describing the illness through its recognised symptoms instead of using a category or label. This means, however, that only those illnesses known to western psychology were detected. Thus a pastiche of western psychology was created, not a Somali alternative to it. The second problem they faced was the lack of human resources in current day Somali mental health care.

309 From K’naan, ‘Somalia’ on Troubadour, A&M/Octone Records, 2010
312 Ibidem p. 18
313 Ibidem p. 13
314 Ibidem p. 18
In the whole territory of the former Somali Republic there are only three psychiatrists and no psychologists.315 Furthermore, the WHO raised serious doubts about the diagnostic capacities of the medical staff that is present.316 These two problems make Western psychological research difficult, but they might just enable the creation of a more Somali-orientated psychology that is much less influenced by western ideas on deviance.

One of the most interesting results of the research conducted by the WHO is the fact that most Somalis report somatoform disorders: they are more likely to \textit{report physical pain when they are experiencing depression or sadness.}317 Most common, according the WHO, are headaches, chest pain, sleep problems and sweating.318 When people suffer from these somatoform symptoms there are much more likely to see a physician than a psychologist, even though this means a frustrating \textquoteleft you are fine \textquoteright{} is all they will get.319 One young woman who faced many traumatic experiences in her young life (she witnessed the murder of her uncle, spent a full year in military detention suffering torture, rape and humiliation and fought a year with the ONLF) explained to me how she feels when remembering these events: \textquoteleft Whenever I remember that event, my physical appearance make a change and I emotionally become higher because of the events happening there.\textquoteright{}320

Apart from the WHO, important research has been done by Christina Zarowsky who worked with Gurgura321 returnees who fled their homelands in eastern Ethiopia when the Ogaden war broke out. This is one of the rare pieces of academic information on psychology in a Somali context. Zarowsky did apply a much more Somali-orientated approach. She noticed that \textit{shame and guilt were almost never expressed [when talking about experiences of war] ... and anxiety was related to immediate and long-term survival rather than to traumatic memories}.322 These findings are reflected in most of my interviews where people tend to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Rivelli F. (ed.) \textit{A situation analysis of mental health in Somalia} (World Health Organisation, 2010) p. 40
\item Ibidem p. 18
\item Ibidem p. 18
\item Ibidem
\item Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
\item Liilaaf (23 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr.2), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
\item Gurgura is a subclan of the Dir clan and is thus not closely related to the Ogadeni who are a subclan of the Darod clan.
\item Zarowsky Ch. ‘Writing Trauma: Emotion, Ethnography, and The Politics of Suffering among Somali Returnees in Ethiopia’ p. 191
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
stress the physical impact of violence over the psychological impact. Furthermore, most respondents never regretted the actions they performed. The emotions Zarowsky encountered during her fieldwork were, of course, real but they were not pathological, instead Zarowsky believes they were used to strengthen the community. She found that narratives and rhetorics of emotion are organised around ‘moral webs among individuals and between communities and other institutions - rather than private loss or distress’. This might be a highly gendered rhetoric, based on the idea women should first care for others and only then turn to themselves. But this does not have to affect the importance of this theory: psychology is one of the most pure reflections of power relations within a society. The moral webs in Ogaden and Somali society Zarowsky talks about are of course closely related to the family and other social groups mentioned above. When kin or friends notice someone is suffering it is their duty to intervene and help (by embedding him/her ‘more deeply in a moral web’), before the emotions get too strong and ‘cause madness’. Yet, as we saw in the previous chapter, the suffering in the Ogaden today and during the Ogaden war, might just be too big to be organised around these moral webs alone. Furthermore, many of the people I talked to did stress their own personal suffering and freely talked about their private loss, next to a constant referring to the pain society at large is in.

Zarowsky also turns to the expression of grief in Somali culture. Here she claims that

‘crying is not encouraged in Somali Islam because “it shows your faith is not strong.” nevertheless spontaneous grief, properly demonstrated and contained in the spatial and temporal boundaries of a given community’s Muslim practice, is acceptable and indeed expected … This religious stance is not limited to observant Muslims’.

This is a finding I cannot support even if I wanted to. Many of my respondents were observant Muslims and still openly talked about how other people cried, how they themselves

323 Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown) and ‘Ugas’ (82 years old): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya, and Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya, and Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya, and ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin)
324 Ibidem p. 194
325 Ibidem pp. 197-198
326 ‘G’ (24 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr.3), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya, and Liilaaf (23 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr.2), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
327 Ibidem p. 197
have cried and a few of them even cried during the interview.\(^{328}\) One respondent, for example, told me he vividly remembers that, after his village was bombed by Ethiopian airplanes in the beginning of the Ogaden war, he saw many people cry in the streets for the loss of their homes.\(^{329}\) Another told me, while he was telling the story of a young girl who disappeared and never came back that ‘[t]his was very painful, yes. Sometimes, if I keep continuing, I will be crying.’\(^{330}\) A young girl cried when talking about the death of her uncle.\(^{331}\) Several victims of torture and rape cried when talking about their experiences: some kept talking, others had to take a break, most changed subjects (cf. infra).\(^{332}\)

The Ogaden war made many people flee their homes. In July 1977, when the war was only a couple of weeks in progress, there were approximately one hundred people killed and a thousand wounded or on the run.\(^{333}\) All those I interviewed fled the Ogaden at a certain stage of the war. They did not only flee the country when the war broke out or when the fighting was at its worst; many fled the region when the Somali joined forces lost terrain and the Ethiopian troops regained their territory.\(^{334}\) When seeking refuge abroad, people had to leave behind most of what they owned and could only take with them what they, or the vehicle they used, could carry:\(^{335}\)

> 'my mom, she tried to get ... one goat. ... she said we can get some milk. to get the feeding, and the driver of the car, he said, "no, no, no", then we ask him “please” and they get him in the backside of the car. Then we stop some place, ..., then we buy some food and something ... . When we get to the town, ..., they tried to help us: they gave us the water. Some jerry can: 20 liter, 10 liter, 5 liter water they gave us. After

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\(^{328}\) ‘L’ (at least 55 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr. 1), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya, and Liilaaaf (23 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr.2), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya, and ‘Young woman’ (24 years old): 19-02-2011 (nr.1), Eastleigh Nairobi, Kenya, and Ifrah Asayr (around 40 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya, and Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya

\(^{329}\) Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya

\(^{330}\) Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya

\(^{331}\) Liilaaaf (23 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr.2), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya

\(^{332}\) ‘L’. (at least 55 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr. 1), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya, and Liilaaaf (23 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr.2), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya, and ‘Young woman’ (24 years old): 19-02-2011 (nr.1), Eastleigh Nairobi, Kenya.

\(^{333}\) s.n. ‘Woestijn inzet van regelrechte oorlog in Ethiopische provincie’ In Vooruit, 26 July 1988, p. 1

\(^{334}\) ‘Volunteer’ (50 years old): 19-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya and ‘Zamzam’ Faduma Mohamed Abdikadir (41 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya

\(^{335}\) ‘L’. (at least 55 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr. 1), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
that, my dad, he came and transferred to the minibus he lend and brought us to the refugee camp.\textsuperscript{336}

In the 1970s the roads in Somalia were still in a good state which made the journey easier once refugees entered Somalia. Still, traveling by car from the Somali-Ethiopian border to Mogadishu would take you about one day and some even walked this distance.\textsuperscript{337}

Many did return to the Ogaden when the war was over,\textsuperscript{338} but those who had been a member of the WSLF often had to stay in Somalia: returning to the Ethiopian controlled Ogaden was – and still is – simply too dangerous.\textsuperscript{339} This does not only mean these people are forever separated from their place of birth and other places with a certain sentimental value, it also means they are unable to be around when their parents die, family members get lost, siblings are imprisoned, etc.\textsuperscript{340} According to one of my interviewees who was active in the youth group of the WSLF, these Ogadeeni who had to stay in Somalia ended up in refugee camps where they received some material help from local people and the Somali government.\textsuperscript{341} But still, the situation was not optimal: ‘There were many people in these camps and all of them were Ogadeeni. They were living in round huts and were dependent on donors for food and medicines.’\textsuperscript{342}

The Somali Ministry of Health helped these people also by providing a few jobs for them. They had a policy of hiring Ogadeeni refugees or migrants who could help their

\textsuperscript{336} Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
\textsuperscript{337} Godé (for example) is about 600 km from Mogadishu [Ifrah Asayr (around 40 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya and Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya]
\textsuperscript{338} ‘Civil servant’ (age unknown): 02-04-2011, Central Business District, Nairobi, Kenya
\textsuperscript{339} Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12:03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya
\textsuperscript{340} Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
\textsuperscript{341} ‘Zamzam’ Faduma Mohamed Abdikadir (41 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
\textsuperscript{342} Ibidem
“compatriots”. Even so, life for these people was hard because most refugees, returnees and internally displaced people suffer discrimination and abuse based on their gender, class, clan, dialect etc. They face harassment, physical violence, torture, and sexual abuse. Many refugees also suffer from family loss, disruption of daily life, lack of shelter and food shortages. Children face an increased risk of being separated from their families, making them more vulnerable. The displaced are usually deprived from social, material, and emotional support systems, which may make them more fragile and vulnerable to environmental adversities and social distress. What is more: refugees residing near the Somali-Ethiopian border still had to fear air raids for it was known that Ethiopian bombers sometimes attacked Somali territory during and right after the Ogaden war. An elderly lady told me Ogadeeni refugees residing in Somalia faced a particular hard time when the Somali ‘civil’ war broke out in the early 1990s. They were associated with the regime of Siad Barre, who had kin relations with the Ogaden clan, and thus targeted by insurgents:

‘The rebel group USC [United Somali Congress] did not only fought Barre’s regime: after they toppled Siad Barre, they started to target the Ogadeeni refugees. [Who fled the Ogaden in 1977-78 and were at the time residing in Somalia] This resulted into the Ban-Balaayo massacre in 1991. More than 75 civilian men were killed by the USC and many more (especially women and children) died while trying to escape the terrors by crossing a nearby river. Those who survived the killing and the river-crossing fled to Puur-Cukur but on the way (which was more than 100 km long) several militia groups (based on clan lines) killed and raped many women, while taking others and forcing them to marry them. Many women and girls lost their dignity on that road.’

Victims of similar violence conducted by another militia fighting Barre in the North claim they suffered more than those in southern Somalia, but the core of their message is the same: they were targeted by clan-based violence.

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343 One of these was Hasan Isse’s father [Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya]
344 Pedersen D. ‘Political violence, ethnic conflict, and contemporary wars’ p. 181
345 Ibidem p. 179
346 Mazurana D., Raven-Roberts A. and Parpart J. Gender, conflict, and peacekeeping p. 8
347 Pedersen D. ‘Political violence, ethnic conflict, and contemporary wars’ p. 182
348 One respondent told me he witnessed two air raids by Ethiopian MIG-21 jets in Beledweyne. One in 1977 and one in 1978. [Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya]
349 ‘L’. (at least 55 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr. 1), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
‘There is a difference between northern Somalia [now Somaliland] and Southern Somalia. Those Ogadeeni ending up in Somaliland did suffer a lot. They were seen as enemies of the locals because of their clan ties with Siad Barre. The Somali National Movement (SNM) made the refugees suffer a lot more. In the south [present-day Somalia] they were seen as refugees and received help because this region had a close historical relationship with the people living in the Ogaden.’

In the late 1980s and early 1990s clan based violence wiped out the refugee camps of (amongst others) Qoryodey, Luug, and Jala-Lagsi, leaving the Ogadeeni people living in Somalia no choice but to flee again. Many went back to the Ogaden, others fled to Kenya, Djibouti, Europe, South Africa, the USA etc.

When so many live in this volatile situation, a new kind of society can be established. Some would say the social fabric brakes down, other would claim it developed into a new construction during this unstable situation. The fact is that many refugees’ lives are disrupted, which often contributes to their suffering. One man who fought in the Ogaden war and had to flee to Kenya afterwards, told me he did not have a chance to go back yet and that

‘sometimes when you miss your country a long time, even if I'm going to doctor, sometimes I'm getting sick, sometimes they're saying "you're OK", but I'm not doing OK but very bad. Sometimes [I have a] nightmare. The only medicine is sometimes going back home and to be [with] the young generation.’

Not all people fleeing into Somalia during and after the war were displaced people, many were Somali nationals returning to their homes: they had the prospect of resettling in their own country with a functioning government. However, chances are small this government did anything to offer psychological help for, as Rivelli shows,

‘[e]ven before the outbreak of the internal conflict [in 1991], the health system in Somalia was rather weak and underfunded. The centralized government did not managed to allocate any budget to some services like mental health and some facilities

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350 ‘Zamzam’ Faduma Mohamed Abdikadir (41 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
351 Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya and
352 Pedersen D. ‘Political violence, ethnic conflict, and contemporary wars’ p. 179
353 Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
were completely neglected. In 1989, the Ministry of Health was allocated 2.95% of the government’s regular budget. While in 1984, 67% of the total health budget came from external aid, … In 1990, over 79% of the Ministry of Health’s financial resources were allocated to the capital Mogadishu, alone.\textsuperscript{354}

So the Somali regime did not invest much of its resources into a mental health system. Nor did the Ethiopian government invest in psychological support.\textsuperscript{355} Soldiers returning from the war, wounded WSLF rebels brought to Somali hospitals, and civilians fleeing to Somalia where thus unlikely to be helped with any traumata they might have encountered. This could have been problematic since many studies have proven that mental disorders can appear (in a part of) the population when no psychological assistance of any kind is provided.\textsuperscript{356} A former commander of the Somali army told me there were no NGOs active in the region during the Somali-Ethiopian war so help could only come from the government.\textsuperscript{357} However, neither in government hospitals, or anywhere else, did these people ever received psychological assistance. Consequently the only form of support came from other veterans. One soldier told me he received some emotional support ‘from the other soldiers: they helped each other out a little bit. They told each other they were sorry for their losses but there were no other or official ways of emotional support.’\textsuperscript{358}

Yet, this little help provided by friends, relatives and political allies did have results according to a former WSLF nurse: ‘Ethiopians, they had more casualties than the Somalis. Because Somalis, the people who live in that area, were helping the Somali military and Somali people because they are from same ethnic groups.’\textsuperscript{359} This way, many people’s lives were saved.\textsuperscript{360}

\textsuperscript{355} According to the WHO, Ethiopia only started to develop a mental health policy in 2004 [WHO. WHO-AIMS report on Mental Health System in Ethiopia (Addis Ababa, 2006) p. 5]
\textsuperscript{356} “Psychological assistance” can be freely interpreted: in contrast to the WHO I believe local customs and religious practices can also bring relief to those in need of psychological guidance. [Rivelli F. (ed.) A situation analysis of mental health in Somalia (World Health Organisation, 2010) p. 19]
\textsuperscript{357} ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin) and Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
\textsuperscript{358} ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin)
\textsuperscript{359} Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya
\textsuperscript{360} Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya, and Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya
Still, not all people fled the Ogaden since many took refuge closer by:

`Fedis, an agricultural center of 5,000, is deserted. The dirt streets of the village are strewn with torn clothing, bricks, pieces of tin roof and spent shells. When the rockets came, the people fled. A few hundred have turned up in Harar, a day's walk away, where they took shelter in warehouses, their bundles of belongings arranged in a circle around each family. The rest exist in the bush, watching the kites (scavenging hawks) circle their villages. Last week the Ethiopian air force dropped leaflets telling the villagers it was safe to return home. Most declined.`

These people too suffered once the Somali-Ethiopian war was over because the revenge of the Ethiopian forces for their attempt to abandon the Ethiopian state was hard. A woman who withdrew into Somalia when the Ethiopian and Cuban troops advanced, told me how this all happened. The Somali were defeated by the Ethiopian and Cuban troops and drove their own vehicles back in retreat, urging the Ogadeeni urban population to flee to Somalia with them or retreat into the countryside where, because of its vastness, the Ethiopian troops would not be able to organise a proper campaign of revenge.

`Those in the urban area, mostly they run away with the Somali army and the rebels. Those in the countryside and the villages they stayed in their village in the countryside because the Ethiopian military just did come in the urban areas. There they would be first. And the people were afraid of a revenge from them. That's why, mostly those fled from at the time were living there, in the urban areas with the Somali army.`

Those who could not find a truck or car to flee in were killed on the spot.

`[A]fter Somalia was defeated they [the Ethiopian troops] have undertaken a lot of massacres. A lot of massacres in different places in Ogaden and people were not given the freedom to decide, the freedom to just speak, the freedom to take part of the government and maybe to rule, to be elected. ... It was some sort of revenge.`

On a more visible level, Ethiopian forces started ‘burning villages, poisoning pools and framing military force on pool areas and ... waterholes.’

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361 [http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,919356,00.html#ixzz1UAbuBS55](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,919356,00.html#ixzz1UAbuBS55)

Wood D. ‘A Desert Duel Keeps Heating Up’ in *Time* magazine (consulted on 05-08-2011, 17u52)

362 ‘Volunteer’ (50 years old): 19-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya

363 Ibidem

364 ‘Civil servant’ (age unknown): 02-04-2011, Central Business District, Nairobi, Kenya

365 Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
The problem in the area when the Ethiopians came back, was impossible to imagine. It was out of humanity. They fight at the whole perspective of life: education, health, no roads were built, it was just ... as ... when Adam was breached by god. [and] the land was left just as it was. Nothing was structured by human actions. And there was no development cause by the Ethiopians, it is just as a buffer zone to defend this Ethiopian empire. It's a garrison area. ... it's a war zone, it's an area were security is more priority than any other thing, and a lot of inhumanities were brought by the Ethiopian government. 

Yet most people suffered during the war itself. A former WSLF nurse explained to me that among the soldiers she cared for many suffered psychological as well as physical injuries. She recounted that witnessing killings, bombings and other forms of destruction but also committing these kind of war atrocities has a serious impact on people: ‘people, when they see all that, they, mentally they will be damaged. They will be depressed, some of them of course went never functioned after that.’

People who fought in the Somali-Ethiopian war usually saw many friends die in battle, both men and women, and most still remember their deaths vividly and with much regret. ‘The Somalis [for example] accused the Ethiopians of burning villages and massacring hundreds of civilians during their retreat.’ December 1977 was, in this perspective, a bad month: the Somali joined forces reached Jijga, Gabrabor, and Dire Dawa where it came to a climax of the war. In the same month Somali troops managed to enter Kaaramardha, the biggest Ethiopian military stronghold. ‘These were important regions and the Ethiopians fought fierce.’ Countless men died here, trying to capture these cities and camps.

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366 Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
367 Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya
368 Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya and ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin) and Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya
370 ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin)
371 Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya, and ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin)
Outside Harar, a major town in the Ogaden, Somali tanks and artillery fought for two months against Ethiopian defenders dug into the hillsides. Along the winding dirt road from Harar to the front, small huts of clay bricks and thatched grass roofs were burned by occupying Somali forces, then hit by rockets and bombs from Ethiopian warplanes. Now the rubble lies mixed with brass shell casings, shattered steel helmets and bodies left to rot when the war passed through.372

These rotting bodies attracted hyenas and lions that were not only adding to the constant stress of the battlefield but were also creating scenes of horror where human bodies were torn apart by these animals.373 The Daily Nation reported in August 1977 that Ethiopian troops were also purging the arias under their control from WSLF supporters:

‘Ethiopian leader Mengistu Haile Mariam has been accused of ordering the massacre of hundreds of innocent women and children in his country’s Ogaden war zone. The WSLF said Ethiopian troops were burning and maiming people suspected of sympathising with the Front to deter local people from supporting the insurgents. Troops of the Front interviewed on Mogadishu radio said men had their eyes gouged out and ears cut off and women had their breasts cut off in a barbaric purge. ... Somali sources ... said the Ethiopians were adopting a scorched-earth policy, destroying towns, farms and livestock as they retreated. Somali’s Sonna news agency said the butchering of women, children, and old men took place in the towns of Dire Dawa, Harrar and Jijiga. Sonna, quoting the Front, said Mengistu had personally visited Jijiga and ordered the massacres.’374

All these deaths cause a lot of grief and sometimes all this grief becomes too much to carry. An elder lady, for example, recounts one of the bombings of her village. Two of her nephews died that day and their mother did not only turned deaf by the noise of the explosions, she also ‘turned mad from grief: she bound a rope around her waist as a punishment.’375 The war had such devastating impact on the people around this woman that they were no longer capable of lending her a hand: ‘no assistance was offered except by Allah. This is because nobody could offer any help: no one had anything to offer. Until now she is mad. She is called Kaaha

372 http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,919356,00.html#ixzz1UAbuBS55
Wood D. ‘A Desert Duel Keeps Heating Up’ in Time magazine (consulted on 05-08-2011, 17u52)
373 Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
374 S.n. ‘Ethiopians butchering women and children’ In Daily Nation, 2 August 1977, Back page
375 ‘L’, (at least 55 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr. 1), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
A young woman told me the story of her murdered uncle’s wife: she witnessed the death of her husband while she was giving birth. After this experience the lady was ‘shocked’: ‘she got emotional and got madness’. When asked to explain this ‘madness’ I was told this women acted as if her newborn child was her husband, having long conversations with this baby as if it was her husband. She also stopped eating. The woman was helped by her family, mainly her sister-in-law and in time she ‘calmed down’.

Grief was present with all the people I talked to, for they all lost friends and relatives during and after the Ogaden war. With all this bloodshed it is only natural most people prioritise certain deaths. This is to say that the death of some people are better remembered and considered as a greater loss than deaths of others. These deaths are most often close relatives like children, parents or siblings. Sometimes, however, inspiring people like military leaders are well remembered. One respondent answered my question what she remembers best of the whole war without hesitation: ‘The guy [a military leader of the WSLF] they killed him first, he was a very brave man and he’s the one who said "Godé or my life". When ... they killed him, ... [I] was there, [I] cannot forget that moment.’

Others mourn the deaths of friends more than others:

‘It look like [...] but she didn’t get to hospital. I remember the one who died, my friend, the lady, ... her name is Halemo. She died in the fightings. It was a big history, if we start it we cannot finish it today because my memory is very, very full. Our friend, the fight in the Ethiopia, they go and back, go and back, go and back. They keep us memory and they are very bad to us, our memories! They damage us.’

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376 L’. (at least 55 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr. 1), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
377 Lilaa (23 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr.2), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
379 The respondent is talking about a moment early on in the war where a military leader of the WSLF was shot by Ethiopian soldiers while he attacked the city of Godé in central Ogaden. [Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya]
380 The respondent describes how he feels when he lost a friend who fought for the WSLF [Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya]
People from the military without family in the Ogaden, prioritised the death of their brothers in arms.381

Apart from remembering those who died, many people remember specific events that had a big impact on their lives. Ifrah, for example has ‘never forgotten the Ethiopian bomb’ that destroyed her home in the border town of Dhuusa-Mareb in 1981, killing her ‘uncle, mother, brothers, sisters, and four guests.’382 ‘There was nothing I could do but cry,’ all she can remember of this horrible and life changing event is that she threw away her earrings out of grief.383 However, apart from a few talkative informants, most people do not want to talk much about upsetting or traumatic events. They stress that what they and other people suffered was ‘unimaginable’ and would then quickly turn to another subject.384 Often they prefer to talk about the general problems the war caused or about other people’s suffering.385 Some researchers claim this is because the Somali society has a different way to cope with traumatic events (cf. supra) but it is also arguable that referring to the bigger picture of suffering is a way to avoid facing one’s own deepest torments.

Yet, how Somali people determine these psychological torments is still unclear. This is mainly because one needs a thorough understanding of the Somali language to be able to grasp such abstract and volatile terms and expressions as those concerning psychology. It is this wide range of words related to trauma in the Somali language that proves Somali society is home to people with fears and hopes like any other. It was Zarowsky who explained some of the words she encountered most often.386 When respondents were asked to explain the same words, it became clear that the meanings and translations Zarowsky provided are only one way to explain them. Most of the differences are easy to explain for the Somali language has many different dialects and when discussing abstract words concerning feelings we all would have a difficult time finding consensus on a translation of the term. However, sometimes bigger differences occur. What follows is a short list of words that are explained

381 ‘Officer’ (55 years old): 11-04-2011, Martini Hospital, Mogadishu, Somalia (telephone interview by Abdhilin)
382 Ifrah Asayr (around 40 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
383 Ibidem
384 Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
385 Ibidem
386 Zarowsky Ch. ‘Writing Trauma’ pp. 195-196
first by Zarowsky, and then by some respondents. These respondents are a group of women I interviewed in Nairobi and a young men I talked to in Mombasa.387

*Hummad*, is supposed to be a positive band, a passion, that binds one to someone or something. Yet the group of women did not know this word and Ismail explained it to me as follows: ‘when the situation become worse and people are in mid of the battle. When the situation is becoming bad’. These explanations are so different from each other I presume one of them is based on a wrong translation.

*Niyed jab* is difficult to translate and its meaning is variable, but lies between ‘demoralisation’ and ‘depression’. An explanation that is confirmed by both my sources.

*Dhibaato* means ‘problem’. Spelled differently *Dhibaat* is also recognised as problem by the group of women. Ismail describes it more dramatically as ‘*suffering and anguish, having undergone great suffering and pain*’.

*Wilwil* is ‘worry’. Yet agreed upon by the women, Ismail changed this into *Walwa* and explained it as ‘*loaded with so many [...]*, anxiety not sure of what will happen next.’

*Wareer* is ‘*worry to the point of distraction*’,388 and Ismail too explained it as ‘*confused and lost [...]*, so confused that cannot know what you objectives was.’ Yet, the group of women translated as ‘*Wareer: is when the military start to fight. That’s when they fight. Like they were sitting in the military spaces and in the morning they start fighting: that’s wareer. Wareer is when you start yourself, when for example Somali military start the war of Ethiopia.* ’ This translation does not seem very useful though, especially since it does not refer to an individual feeling.

Ruminating on *wilwil* is called *murugo* by Zarowsky. Ismail too explains it as ‘*deep pain, anguish, enduring suffering.*’ The women translate it as ‘stress’.

*Waalliy* or ‘mad’ is spelled differently by the women (*waalli*) but seen as the same thing.

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387 These are Zamzam, Fadumo and Maryam during the interview with Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya and Ismail with whom I had an informal conversation in New Peoples Hotel, Mombasa (15-03-2011)

388 Zarowsky Ch. ‘Writing Trauma’ p. 195
The symptoms of what western psychology calls Acute Stress Disorder (ASD)\(^\text{389}\) is called *argegah*. And Ismaiïl indeed describes it as ‘*terror, scaring, something that causes terror like landmines*’. The group of women translated it into ‘shock’.

*Marrora dilla*’ is described by Zarowski as similar to *argegah* but characterised by rage and perceived powerlessness.\(^\text{390}\) Yet these are explained completely different by everyone: According to Ismail it’s a person who ‘*discourage in war, who does not support people when they are embarking in a battle*’. The group of women translates it as ‘moral’. Something obviously went wrong along the way.

This short and unannounced linguistic detour is no result of my stubbornness or refusal to ‘kill a darling’ but it serves to prove the linguistic complexity exists within the Somali language to have a nuanced and academic discussion on psychological issues, even though a camel might pop up once and a while. The importance of these words is shown when I asked one of my respondents if she herself experienced these feelings: ‘*yes. I felt all these, even the civil war in Somalia, they kill my son*.’\(^\text{391}\) Thus even though western terms might be alien to many Somali (cf. *supra*) they have their own means of communicating mental problems and others should use this potential.

To deal with these symptoms, and traumatic experiences, different coping strategies exist. In this last and short paragraph of this chapter those strategies are listed I encountered during my fieldwork in Kenya. People can use different coping strategies at once, others focus on one way to deal with their problems. Hope turned out to be a very important coping strategy for many. This hope can be directed to many different issues. Some people living abroad ever since they left the Ogaden believe returning to their home town would be the best cure for their ‘illness’.\(^\text{392}\) Others hope for a (political) solution of the turmoil in the Ogaden.

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\(^{389}\) cf. appendix for a definition of ASD

\(^{390}\) All words and their translations are from Zarowsky [Zarowsky Ch. ‘Writing Trauma’ pp. 195-196]

\(^{391}\) Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya

\(^{392}\) Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
A woman who was detained by the Somali government in the 1980s for her outspoken Ogadeeni nationalism explained that two things made her cope with the hard time she had in prison. ‘Ifrah [her long-time friend] was with me,’ but her devotion to the Ogadeeni cause might have been more important in making the month in prison bearable: this way she had a goal to cling on to (cf. infra). This coping strategy will be elaborated in the following chapter.

Religion, too, is an important coping strategy for many people in the Ogaden. When asked if he turns to Allah to find support one respondent answered the following:

‘That's a must! That's what we doing. That's a must, what we should do, yeah. We have learned to go to Him, as a Muslim, when we have problem, instead of going [to] someone to say "could you solve this problem", it's for us to pray for god as in the aim of forgivingness, then for a solution for your problem. We believe, whatever is going on is a destiny from Allah, from god. ... Namely the problem that we are facing, we believe that [it] is a destiny came from Allah and we are waiting for him to lift it up. ... And that's the moral support we do get.'

Another respondent concisely answered: ‘We can only wait for Allah to solve it. Until then, we’ll fight.’ Yet, religion can also contribute to the feeling of stress when religious rules are not respected. A young woman who was imprisoned and tortured in 2001 told me she had to share her cell with both men and women because the prison was so full. This seemed to have shocked her more than the fact she was tortured, for this violation of one of the basic religious rules left her speechless: after discussing this she refused to talk about her time in jail again.

Many look to drugs to escape the cruel reality. In the Horn Qaad, which causes a ‘mildly stimulating sensation and ... a loss of appetite’, is very popular. Many chew Qaad to

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393 Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
394 ‘L’. (at least 55 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr. 1), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
395 ‘G’ (24 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr.3), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
397 Gardner J. and El Bushra J. (eds.) Somalia. The Untold Story. The war through the eyes of Somali women  p. 37
‘forget their ‘misery’, [or] ... to ‘pray’ for a better life.’

Recent surveys in Ethiopia also show that those suffering harsh living conditions (people living on the streets, members of fragmented families etc.) use more Qaad than others. According to Gebissa, the use of Qaad among Somali all over the Horn rose strongly in the 1960’s and 70’s until 1983, when Siad Barre banned the production and importation of Qaad in Somalia. Yet, linking Qaad to psychological problems is difficult since ‘Khat abuse was often related to different kind of [psychological] disorders while it was not possible to identify the causal relationship’. It is also possible Qaad creates psychological problems. What is sure is that the use of drugs has a major impact on the social and economic life of a drug user, spending all they have on their addiction, which can lead to poverty, social isolation, and even death. Luckily, coping strategies are manifold and most are not as destructive as drugs are.

One other possible coping strategy is called the zaar. Not a single respondent ever mentioned this to me but according to Abdullahi, the zaar is an ancient ritual dance of spirit possession. The zaar usually only visits women who are in a lot of stress. Zaar spirits enter the head and ‘and cause mind changing behaviour and physical maladies.’ The zaar spirit needs to be pleased to make life more comfortable for those visited by it. This is done by organising a relaxing feast with ritual dancing, where the possessed woman is allowed to behave in ways otherwise not tolerated, such as smoking. The ritual allows for ‘expression of pent-up emotions, or a sharing of personal insecurities, sexual feelings, frustrations and desires.’ The ritual, that can last a couple of days, is chaired by an elder woman who has been possessed by the zaar herself. Yet, it seems zaar possessions are most often a way for hard
pressed women to temporarily escape the Somali ‘male-dominated society.’ It is unclear whether possession rituals are also used as treatment of other psychological problems, notably war traumata. Therefore, I believe it is more likely the real coping strategy used by survivors of the Ogaden war is to be found in one of the following chapters (cf. Infra: The Ogaden war as coping strategy). Yet to explain this, we first need to ruminate on the possible motivations people had to get involved in the war.

**Motivations to fight.**

If we want to understand how women cope with the effects of the conflict, it is essential to understand the reasons why they engaged in the conflict in the first place. The answer to this question is probably one of the most confusing elements of the already puzzling narrative relayed here. There seemed to be two radically opposing reasons why the war started and why people got involved. Some were fighting for a Greater Somalia, others for an independent Ogadeenia. Retrospectively, it is difficult to detect personal motivations especially since some people seemed to have shifted over time from one legitimisation for their involvement to another. These two political motives dominate all discourse of both literature and interviews: only rarely did people give more personal reasons for their involvement in the fight. What is remarkable is that the (political) motives for the Ogaden war as written down in the academic literature almost never correspond with the reasons that my interviewees themselves gave for engaging in this war.

Before I went to Kenya I believed the Ogaden war was all about creating a ‘Greater Somalia’. Most literature speaks of a well prepared plan by Siad Barre to incorporate the Ogaden, supported by most of the Somali people. Barre made use of the chaos in Ethiopia at the time. Eritrea was fighting for its independence, the Ethiopian Democratic Union based in northern Ethiopia challenged Mengistu’s rule, and political violence and armed conflict were not uncommon: Ethiopia seemed “on the verge of collapse”. When Sudan too, invaded Ethiopia, Mengistu seemed weak and distracted and the year 1977 seemed like the ideal

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405 Adam A. ‘A Saar Gaamuri in Somalia. Spirit possession as expression of women’s autonomy?’ p. 189
opportunity to capture the Ogaden. Barre, therefore ‘developed a scheme for invasion’. 408 According to most of the literature on this subject, he first mobilised the WSLF to prepare the region for the invasion and sent his official troops into the Ogaden afterwards.409

Most of my respondents, however, told me very different stories about the beginning of the war. They talked of Ogaden nationalism instead of Somali nationalism. There is little doubt about the motivations of the Somali political and military leadership. They were clearly looking for a way to incorporate the Ogaden after peaceful negotiations had failed.410 Using the big pool of Ogadeeni refugees already living in Somalia they managed to find support for such a radical move.411 The WSLF too, originally focussed on the annexation of the Ogaden by Somalia which is expressed by their politically charged label; Western Somali Liberation Front. Furthermore, the WSLF was obviously backed by Somalia, who sent them both personnel (soldiers on leave) and war material. And indeed, an elder lady who worked as a frontline nurse in the WSLF was determined to bring the Ogaden into the Somali republic, referring proudly to the five point star in the Somali flag.412 However, I believe calling the WSLF a ‘puppet movement controlled by Somalia’413 is a bridge too far for. It is clear that the WSLF was a nebulous movement with different factions.414 From the very beginning of the Ogaden war people in the WSLF stressed that it should be for the local Ogadeeni to decide on a potential incorporation in Somalia or an independent Ogadeenia.415 This proposal for a referendum was in part a tactic designed to prevent a split in the Ogadeeni movement: as long as the war was on, all Somali were united by a deep hatred towards Ethiopia.416 But if Ethiopia would no longer rule the Ogaden, it was thought that a real conflict of interests

408 Henze P.B. ‘Retrospective on opposition to the DERG’ In Fukui K., Kurimoto E. and Shigeta M. Ethiopia in broader Perspective. (Kyoto, 1997) p. 154
409 Ibidem p. 154
410 S.n. ‘Confrontatie in de Ogaden’ In Keesings Historisch Archief. 1977. (year 46, No. 2402) pp. 609-610
411 These refugees were Ogadeeni who fled the Ogaden because of the constant threat of violence in the region (cf. supra) [Mohamed Sherif, ONLF Deputy Head of Information Office (43 years old): 27-04-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya]
412 The five point star in the Somali flag represents the five Somali territories. [Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya]
413 Civil servant’ (age unknown): 02-04-2011, Central Business District, Nairobi, Kenya
414 Ottaway M. and Ottaway D. Ethiopia. Empire in Revolution p. 94
415 S.n. ‘Confrontatie in de Ogaden’ In Keesings Historisch Archief. 1977. (year 46, No. 2402) p. 611 and Ugas (82 years old): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
416 Mohamed Warsama, BBC monitoring services Somalia during Ogaden War (at least 60 years old): 15-03-2011, New Town, Mombasa, Kenya
would erupt between Ogaden nationalism and Somali nationalism. However, the WSLF was not the Ogaden National Liberation Front which made some believe the WSLF was just a political move to get help from one of the most powerful armies in Africa at that time.

Today, all of my informants, both male and female, claim they wanted to seize the opportunity of the Ogaden war to free their country from the “colonising Ethiopians”. This discourse came back in every single interview, what varied was the alternative for the Ethiopian rule. Most of the accounts start with the independence of the Horn of Africa: the Ogaden people were disappointed because most of the Somali areas gained independence in the 1960s while they were, and still consider themselves to be, colonised by another African people. This idea is not unique to the Somali people in Ethiopia. According to Adebo the ‘colonial idea’ was mainly used by the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) and later adopted by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). This discourse is also dominant in all communication of the contemporary ONLF, which made me believe my respondents changed their attitude, and their discourse, over time. It is likely they were fighting for a Greater Somalia in the 1970s but, in retrospect, wanted to legitimise their actions even when Somalia got caught up in its bloody ‘civil’ war. I believed that by claiming to have been fighting for an independent state, they could popularise their actions and historicise the actions of the ONLF. This is a clear political action for it would strengthen the Ogadeeni Nationalism by both using it as a legitimisation and providing it legitimacy. However, reading newspapers dating from the summer of 1977, proved this reasoning to be false. Abdullah Hassan Mahmoud, one of the leaders of the WSLF, explained that ‘the people of the Ogaden will decide “after independence” whether to unite with Somalia or form an independent state’. The Somali Minister of Foreign affairs, Abdurahman Jama Barre also called the Ethiopian empire a colonising state. This proves both the motives and the discourse used by my informants today existed during the Somali-
Ethiopian war. It also shows that from the start of the war the Somali government and its most important partner, the WSLF, had different objectives and that the idea of an independent Ogadenia existed before the creation of the ONLF in 1984. When people claim they were fighting for an independent Ogaden, this was not, per se, a conscious search for retrospective legitimisation of their actions for it could have been a genuine drive to action.

As described in the contextualising chapter on the Ogaden conflict (cf. supra), it is true that the Somali people enjoyed a long history of full independence and, furthermore, the different identities within the Abyssinian empire have never been unified into one Ethiopian identity. It seems logical, then, that the ‘question of nationalities’ would become very important in the 1960s and later. This nationalistic drive was, however, not just a result of a Romantic longing for a nation, but had its roots in a desire for mundane forms of justice. Simple nationalist ideology in itself only motivated a small radicalised group of Somali people. The amount of supporters for the war was raised to a substantial level by promising the people involved that actual (material) gains would be the product of engaging in the conflict. Gains that would be bigger than the potential costs. Tarekegn Adebo, a fierce defender of the Ethiopian unity, admitted that the Somali – and others – had a good basis for their anger towards the Ethiopian centre: the

‘archaic feudal system continued for too long keeping the majority of people under a serf-like land holding system with its smothering effects on socioeconomic development. Overcentralization of power in the hands of autocrats, marginalisation of reformist intelligentsia in political life, alienation of the populace from democratic exercise, which was particularly severe among the oppressed nationalities who also suffered land appropriation, cultural and linguistic alienation. It is a case of poverty in political culture’. 424

Elements of daily life such as infrastructure and education were poor too:

*Bale* [province, which forms the Ogaden region together with Harahghe] was a glaring example of exploitation and maladministration by the Addis Ababa government. It had

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424 Adebo T. ‘Conceptualizing society and democratization in multiethnic developing state: the case of Ethiopia’ In Fukui K., Kurimoto E., and Shigeta M. *Ethiopia in broader Perspective* p. 11
few roads, hospitals, or schools, and those that existed served mainly the Amhara Christian population of the urban centers. In 1970 ... the province had only one high-school with a total enrolment of 680 students, only 86 of whom were Moslem. ... Government officials and judges tended to be Christians and the few employed Moslem officials were paid far lower salaries.\textsuperscript{425} 

These numbers should be seen alongside similar figures regarding the number of high ranking officials in the Ethiopian imperial government: of the 138 officials with the rank of (vice) minister or minister of state between 1942 and 1966, only two men were Somali and both served in the 1960s. This makes the Somali the least represented group of people in the higher ranks of government, together with the Harari and the Ilubabor.\textsuperscript{426} According to Christopher Clapham, this was \textit{not simply the result of ‘discrimination’; it reflects, rather, the way in which they [the Muslim community of Ethiopia, including the Somali] have been largely left out of the whole sphere of government activity, in terms alike of education, recruitment, patronage and political groupings}.\textsuperscript{427} 

Hussein Adam adds that the Ogadeeni are a \textit{‘peripheral’} people in Ethiopia: they are marginalised in the socio-political life, suffer economic \textit{‘backwardness’}, and lack integration within the centre.\textsuperscript{428} What is more: some of these problems were only \textit{‘solved’} through contested revolutionary measures enacted by the Mengistu regime, measures which were too radical for many Ethiopians.\textsuperscript{429} When Mengistu allowed his troops to massacre thousands of people all over Ethiopia in the months before the Ogaden war broke out,\textsuperscript{430} the political situation might not have been colonial, but it could easily be depicted as colonial by its opponents. When we compare the Ogaden case with the Somali people living in Kenya’s North-Eastern Province, this idea can be confirmed. The Somali in Kenya originally wanted to join a Greater Somalia and expressed this in the Shifta war (1963–1967). Yet when this war was won by Kenya, Kenyan Somalis never used the colonial discourse again and were

\textsuperscript{425} Ottaway M. and Ottaway D. \textit{Ethiopia. Empire in Revolution} (London/New York 1978) p. 92
\textsuperscript{426} Both groups also had 2 officials in the same time period [Clapham Ch. \textit{Haile-Selassie’s Government} (London, 1969) p. 77]
\textsuperscript{428} Hussein Adam S. ‘Systematic Factors and the conflicts in the Horn of Africa: 1961-1991’ In Fukui K., Kurimoto E. and Shigeta M. \textit{Ethiopia in broader Perspective}, p. 109
\textsuperscript{429} Henze P.B. ‘Retrospective on opposition to the DERG’ In Fukui K., Kurimoto E., and Shigeta M. \textit{Ethiopia in broader Perspective}. p. 158
\textsuperscript{430} S.n. ‘‘Stop killings’ Mengistu told’’ In \textit{Daily Nation} 8 July 1977, back page
determined to stay within the Kenyan state. Both political and material they were ‘far better off than [their] counterpart[s] in Somalia’.

The fact that the Ogaden held - and still holds - such a low position in Ethiopian society is not the only reason Ogadeeni Nationalism could flourish. We mustn’t forget that the Ogadeeni belong to a larger Somali people, a people that even gained its own state when the former Italian and British Somaliland united. Thus, the Ogadeeni were not only discriminated against, they also saw their kinsmen creating their own state and celebrating their independence from colonial rule. This can be seen as another motivation for fighting off the Ethiopian ‘occupation’, a motivation that can explain why the Ogaden has always been a conflict region, even when other quelled parts of Ethiopia were relatively peaceful. To explain this it might be useful to use Cliffe’s work on Eritrea. He explains the unification of Ethiopia that started from a ‘conglomerate of different communities’. This unification is the exact opposite of what I try to argue here (the disintegration of Somali nationalism). Yet Cliffe’s central claim is that ‘it is now accurate to talk about an Eritrean nation that has evolved through a long and bitter war and also through the traumas of internal conflict’. In the Eritrean case, sharing traumata meant a ‘national’ feeling could sprout and, arguably, the same goes for the Ogadeeni. Let there be no mistake: the Ogadeeni are a Somali subclan and always identified as Somali, even today. However, the Ogadeeni have a history of their own, a history that is not shared by other Somali clans and subclans. They might have been the pivot point of Somali nationalism for some years, but they were forgotten after the Ogaden war failed for Somalia. The Ogaden clan even became an enemy of many rebel groups in the Somali civil war because of their links with president Siad Barre, who was part Ogadeeni. Many Ogadeeni I talked to felt betrayed and became alienated from other Somali clans. Put differently both the Somali and Ogadeeni solidarity shrank after the Somali-Ethiopian war. Therefore in the last 30 years or so the Ogadeeni drift away not only from the Ethiopian centre, but also from the Somali centre. To use the words of John Wood: ‘they ... have to

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431 S.n. ‘Shifta condemned’ In Daily Nation, 12 October 1977, p. 4
432 Editorial. ‘Kenya has no border problem’ In The Standard 26 September 1977, p. 4
435 Cliffe L. ‘Forging a Nation: The Eritrean Experience’ In: Third World Quarterly Vol. 11, No. 4, Ethnicity in World Politics (Oct., 1989), p. 143
follow their animals, whose needs often draw their owners and managers away from the center to the dangerous and distant margins’.

Today Ogaden nationalism is historicised by the myth of Sheikh Mohammed Ibn Abd Allah Hassan al-Mahdi, or ‘the Mad Mullah’. (cf. supra). He belonged to the Ogaden Geri subclan, and many of my interviewees see him as the first to fight for the independence of the Ogaden. However, according to Cerulli, the Ogadeeni were already rebelling against the Abyssinians when Mohammed Ibn Abd Allah declared himself to be the Mahdi in 1899 and started a holy war against the Christians in the Horn. Furthermore, he never served the Ogadeeni agenda, rather, he wanted to unite all Somali clans to stand a better chance against the British, French, Italians and Ethiopians. Therefore Mohammed Ibn Abd Allah even refused to refer to himself as Ogadeeni, and when, in the early 1920s, he started to lose his fight, he headed his own newly created ‘clan’, the Darawish: an amalgam of fighters from many different Somali (sub)clans. Siad Barre sought to commemorate Ibn Abdallah’s pan Somali vision when he erected a statue of him as one of the great Somali nationalists.

A former civil servant of the regional Ogaden administration explained to me that the Ogaden war was actually a bad time for the Ogadeeni movement because the Somali government had such a firm grip on the situation that those people and organisations striving for an Ogaden agenda had no choice but to support a Greater Somalia: those who persisted with the

437 Mohamed Sherif, ONLF Deputy Head of Information Office (43 years old): 27-04-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
439 Mohamed Warsama, BBC monitoring services Somalia during Ogaden War (at least 60 years old): 15-03-2011, New Town, Mombasa, Kenya, and Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown) and ‘Ugas’ (82 years old): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya, and ‘Civil servant’ (age unknown): 02-04-2011, Central Business District, Nairobi, Kenya
441 Ibidem pp. 156
442 Mohamed Warsama, BBC monitoring services Somalia during Ogaden War (at least 60 years old): 15-03-2011, New Town, Mombasa, Kenya
Ogadeeni national agenda were all arrested. Siad Barre even made tribalism illegal: ‘if you ever open your mouth or asked somebody in public what tribe you are, you would be locked up. You would be taken to court and locked up’. Openly discussing a plan for an independent Ogadeenia based on the Ogaden clan, was thus out of the question in Somalia. Some even claim that because of this focus on creating a ‘Greater Somalia’, many people did not want to get involved in the Somali-Ethiopian war since it was not helping them achieving an independent Ogadeenia.

However, when the joint effort of the WSLF and the Somali armies failed in 1978, reality changed and thus ideology had to follow. Many of those who were fighting in the war for a Greater Somalia became disappointed and frustrated by the perceived missed opportunity. They eventually turned their anger to the more Ethiopian focused ‘colonial discourse’, used by the Ogaden National Liberation Front. The newly established ONLF, founded by members of the youth wing of the WSLF, was immediately opposed by the Somali government, the Ethiopian government and the WSLF itself. Thus, when the ONLF was founded and slowly gained influence and military strength, there was still a substantial group of people who saw the Ogadeeni nationalism as a threat to Somali Nationalism. Up until today, organisations such as AIAI and UWSLF contest the Ogadeeni nationalism with ideas of Ummah or a Greater Somalia. However; it is unclear how many people really engaged in the Somali-Ethiopian war with the idea of creating a Greater Somalia. As mentioned earlier, most of the interviewees said they were fighting for Ogadeeni Nationalism. Did some of them change their motivation in retrospect, witnessing the Somali civil war? It is possible. If they did, the motives for this ‘shift in ideology’ would have been complex. People might have converted to Ogadeeni nationalism when Somali nationalism proved to be difficult. Others might have been so determined to get rid of Ethiopian rule that they switched ideology according to its success rates, abandoning Somali nationalism when it turned out to be

443 ‘Civil servant’ (age unknown): 02-04-2011, Central Business District, Nairobi, Kenya
444 Mohamed Warsama, BBC monitoring services Somalia during Ogaden War (at least 60 years old): 15-03-2011, New Town, Mombasa, Kenya
445 Hasan Isse (41 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 1), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
447 Mahmoed Derrie (age unkown): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya, and ‘Zamzam’ Faduma Mohamed Abdikadir (41) 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya,
counterproductive. Probably wanting to be on the ‘good’ sight of the fight is also part of it. Or do these people adhere to Ogadeeni nationalism out of fear for the ONLF, an organisation that is willing to kill Ogadeeni who do not support their cause?

The ‘shift in ideology’ can also be found in the literature on Somali issues. According to Daniel Compagnon, the ‘myth of a ‘natural’ Somali nationhood, based on ethnic homogeneity’ was very strong in the academic conceptualisation of Somali politics until the late 1980s. Afterwards, the focus shifted to the fragmentation of Somali society into conflicting kinship groups. This is thought to be a result from the civil war in Somalia.

One could ask whether these political issues where reflected upon by all Ogadeeni involved in the conflict. It seems obvious the goal of independence from Ethiopia was one that all Ogadeeni fighters were supportive of. But did they inform themselves on the agenda’s of both the Somali government and the WSLF? Where they aware of the conflicts within the latter? Some informants claimed many people involved in the war were ‘ignorant’ of the political struggles. This makes it all very hard to reconstruct, retrospectively, what the real political reasons for joining the fight were. The personal motivations for participating in the war are even more obscure for they are dwarfed in all interviews by these undecided political motivations. Here, however, a difference can be found between the Ogadeeni and the other Somali people. For many Ogadeeni people, either living in the Ogaden or in Somalia at the time of the war, helping and protecting their relatives in the region was also an important motivation to engage in the Ogaden war. Whether they should be protected against the Ethiopians or against the conflict in general, varies. Mohamad Ali, for example, joined the WSLF as a teenager because he wanted to ‘fight the problem caused in our family, our people [by] the Ethiopian military regime that time.’ He recounts how he felt pain when ‘they hit our people, our country’ by stealing and killing livestock, confiscating land, raping women and killing people. So he states that ‘as a human you need to defend your life’ but he seemed more determined when he declared that ‘we try to fight for our dignity.’ For Ogadeeni who

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449 ‘Civil servant’ (age unknown): 02-04-2011, Central Business District, Nairobi, Kenya and Mohamed Warsama, BBC monitoring services Somalia during Ogaden War (at least 60 years old): 15-03-2011, New Town, Mombasa, Kenya
450 Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
451 Ibidem
fled to Somalia, getting involved in the Ogadeeni movement felt like a natural thing to do, especially for those who fled to Somalia at a young age:

‘I fled from my home country when I was less than 10 years. ... From the 1977 war ... and I was in a refugee camp, ... , I get that I’m ... , a refugee in another country. Then I began to ask questions and I get to people who makes me understand well, the reason I fled and the reason I'm refugee and the reason I am this way. Then, after I got that understanding, again I get to people who are working the solution of the problem, therefore I was not forced to use motivations to participate to whatever looks like a solution.’

Other Somali people without kinsmen in the Ogaden region do not have such an emotional bond with the conflict and tend to linger in the irredentist or nationalist discourse. It also needs to be stressed that many did not even have a motive for fighting in the Somali-Ethiopian war: Somali soldiers were sent to the front *nolens volens* by the Somali government and sometimes even military commanders had no special affinity with the region they had to conquer. They had to abandon the life they led in Somalia, including their wives, children, friends and family, for a cause that would barely improve their lives. These Somali soldiers made up the majority of the forces and although they were told they were fighting for a Greater Somalia, it seems unlikely that all of these men were willing to die for this cause alone.

When discussing the motives of Somali women who were active in the war, a different situation unfolds. These women all engaged in the conflict voluntarily. They were determined to fight the Ethiopians, help the soldiers, ‘defend their people’. These women were not
ignorant (most received good education) and knew exactly why they were putting their lives at risk.\

Another motivation for involvement in the Somali-Ethiopian war was revenge. One woman explained to me that after two of her brothers died in the Somali-Ethiopian war, she decided to go into the Ogaden and help wherever she could.\[460\] In the current conflict, revenge is certainly an important motivator. Several interviewees told me they wanted to go back to the Ogaden and fight the Ethiopians because they killed their mother, imprisoned their siblings, etc.\[461\] This motive is however always politically expressed: people do not want revenge on the specific person who killed their loved ones or burned their houses but they want revenge on the Ethiopian state by separating ‘their land’ from it.\[462\]

Interestingly it seems that religion was not one of the main motivations for rising up the Ethiopian central government. The idea of Muslims fighting Christians was strongly rejected by all the respondents who mentioned the subject. They recognised the existing differences between these religions but they did not consider them justifiable reasons to start a war.\[463\]

‘Female soldiers, like male soldiers, decided to risk their lives in a rebel-lion only after a complicated calculation that involved pragmatism as well as conviction.’\[464\] This statement about women in Mexico is equally true of female soldiers in the Ogaden, whether they fought for an independent Ogadeenia or an coalition with Somalia. There are always specific social, economic and emotional forces that encourage or discourage women to start fighting.

\[459\] Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya, and ‘Zamzam’ Faduma Mohamed Abdikadir (41 years old) and Ifrah Asayr (around 40 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
\[460\] ‘Volunteer’ (50 years old): 19-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
\[461\] Mohamad Ali (52 years old): 14-03-2011 (nr. 2), Lighthouse, Mombasa, Kenya
\[462\] ‘Zamzam’ Faduma Mohamed Abdikadir (41 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
\[463\] Intermariages are not alowad for example. [‘Volunteer’ (50 years old): 19-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya]
The Ogaden war as coping strategy

When discussing the psychological impact of conflicts, Summerfield feels the individual level is insufficient to determine the true repercussions of war. He believes the social memory is also very important since every society has a certain memory based on previous conflicts and traumata. By comparing the current traumata with the social memory, one can determine the real impact of a certain event. I was not able to collect enough information to completely reconstruct the social memory as it existed in the 1970s but while talking to Ogadeeni living in Kenya it seemed to me the memory of Somali-Ethiopian war of 1977 had become a dominant feature of this social memory. As a memory that holds both good and bad elements it might just be the best collective memory the Ogadeeni have.

Today tales about the Ogaden war are definitely part of a collective historical memory within the Somali community: all Ogadeeni and most Somali can tell you stories from the war with great detail and they will explain how the conflict influenced their own lives, even if they are too young to have participated in the conflict. Everybody knows people who fought in the war, died in the war or had to flee their homes. Many of them lost friends and relatives in those years. Others started a new, sometimes even successful, life in the country they fled to. The Ogaden war is still vividly remembered by all Ogadeeni and all know how strong its impact on their lives was.

However, the situation in the Ogaden has changed dramatically in the last five years and today the children and grandchildren of the war veterans face atrocities that were unimaginable in the 1970s. After the Ogaden war, the Ethiopian army took revenge on the Ogadeeni and when the ONLF was founded, the Ethiopian government had an extra political enemy to fight. This led to a long and vicious conflict in the region that turned especially violent when the ONLF attacked a Chinese oilfield in 2007 and Meles Zenawi, the current prime minister of Ethiopia pledged to crush the Ogaden rising. People living in the Ogaden now witness rape, torture, hunger, executions, kidnapping and disappearances on a daily basis. The forgotten conflict between the ONLF and the Ethiopian government lays waste to

466 Fadumo Elmi Muse (66 years old): 12-03-2011, Nairobi West, Nairobi, Kenya, and ‘Volunteer’ (50 years old): 19-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
467 S.n. ‘Scores die in Ethiopia oil attack’ on http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6588055.stm (consulted on 25-07-2011, 16u49)
the Ogaden and its people. Thousands are being jailed without trial and severely tortured, hundreds are executed by hanging, virtually every woman without a gun is gang raped in the most brutal ways, food and international aid is confiscated and sold only to those loyal to Addis Ababa, random villages are burned down. The whole region is blocked of, no one can enter the Ogaden without permission, whether it be a western journalist, an African diplomat or a Somali tradesman. This blockade has had two major interrelated effects. First there is hardly any awareness in the rest of the world on what is going on in this region since journalists cannot report the issue. Secondly, no humanitarian aid can enter the region since it is too dangerous and politically impossible. This means that even though people today face incredible hardship no psychological help is available. As reading the cases discussed, the existing social support networks based on clan and family, also, fail to offer enough support.

As I argued in the last chapter, politics turned out to be extremely important when people express their suffering: they went through all these courageous actions to ‘liberate their land from Ethiopia’. Today politics is still the most expressed motive for (military) action in the Ogaden. The ONLF rebels want to form an autonomous Ogadeeni state, led by Ogadeeni people. Whether this fight is a legitimate fight is a question I do not wish to discuss here. What I do want to explain is that the (memory of) Ogaden war, in time, received a new status in the minds of Ogadeeni people. In a sense, it became a coping strategy.

First of all, stories about the Ogaden war function as a proof that the Ogaden struggle as performed today is not a lost cause. The Ogadeeni today are not bitter about their loss like other peoples sometimes were, for they saw their defeat as a near-victory. During the 1977 war the Ogaden people almost succeeded in separating from the Ethiopian state. For a short time during the war Somali people were in charge of the Ogaden, calling it “the first independence”. When people today recount the Ogaden war they always claim Somalia and


471 ‘Volunteer’ (50 years old): 19-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya

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the WSLF would have won the war if the Soviet allies would not have intervened in it. The Ethiopian troops were thrown out the Ogaden in a very short time and it was only with help of Cuban soldiers and Russian arms that they recaptured the Ogaden.\textsuperscript{472} Even though this story is too simplistic to be a convincing argument, it is frequently used. For many Ogadeeni, remembering this “almost-victory” of 1977, proves that there is hope for the seemingly lost cause of the ONLF. The memory of the Ogaden war is the ideal stimulus for those still fighting: it has become the Ogadeenis’ heroic story. This heroism is no Hollywood-like awe towards one or several war heroes, such as heroic honour to the Fula of Masina.\textsuperscript{473} Rather, it is a glorification of a collective attempt to defeat Ethiopia and its allies.

Second, memories of the Ogaden war legitimise the struggle of the ONLF by historicising their claims. Here, the stories of the Somali-Ethiopian war are not the only factor, we have seen that the struggle is very old and produced several heroes, most notably the ‘Mad Mullah’. Yet the Ogaden war holds a special position in this respect because in this conflict the Ogadeeni movement can be portrayed as if it was betrayed and taken advantage of. They were not the ones to start the war: they claim Siad Barre started it.\textsuperscript{474} Yet, after losing the war, they were left to suffer the consequences and had to put up with the Ethiopian revenge. Again, this is not the correct account of the war but the common view of the war held by most of the Ogadeeni community in Nairobi. Thus the ONLF can easily portray itself as the underdog fighting for the forgotten cause of the Ogaden.

Third, and most notably, the heroised story of the Ogaden war are told today to help the Ogadeeni to cope with the suffering of the current conflict. The roles of the memories of the Ogaden war within current political discourse make sure the suffering of those active in the Ogaden war is clear to all, and is almost lifted to the level of exploits. By referring to these historical and heroic periods, people today can contextualise their own experiences and claim to be a part of a historical movement. Thus contemporary Ogadeeni see themselves as playing a part in what is a long and bitter struggle even though the circumstances are comparatively worse today than they were during the Somali-Ethiopian war.

It follows that the veterans of the Somali-Ethiopian war occupy a higher and more respected position in society since their suffering is central to this collective remembering of the

\textsuperscript{472} Mahmoed Derrie (age unknown) and ‘Ugas’ (82 years old): 16-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya

\textsuperscript{473} Iliffe J. \textit{Honour in African history} (Cambridge, 2005) p. 28

\textsuperscript{474} Mohamed Warsama, BBC monitoring services Somalia during Ogaden War (at least 60 years old): 15-03-2011, New Town, Mombasa, Kenya
Ogaden war as a coping strategy. This increased respect can also help in coping with the traumata the veterans have to endure.475

475 ‘Zamzam’ Faduma Mohamed Abdikadir (41 years old) and Ifrah Asayr (around 40 years old): 20-02-2011, Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya
Conclusion

The chapters written above are the particles, the pieces, I would like to add to the still skeleton-like history of the Ogaden war and the even thinner herstory of Somali women. These particles or particulars are not ‘recovered’ as if they were once lost, or ‘discovered’ as if they were never known, but they are created. They are constructed by the author of this text, by the people who were interviewed, by the journalists covering the conflict, and by the academics who wrote the books used in this paper. The answers to the questions raised in the very begging of this essay produced one possible image of the roles women played in the Ogaden war and the ramifications of this conflict for them. This image is the result of a research which had limited resources at its disposal and therefore is bound to be incomplete. This image cannot become complete nor all-encompassing as long as this Master’s thesis is the only research done on these questions. But I hope that this thesis has provided at least some clues about the experience of (Somali) women in (the Ogaden) war.

The first particle discussed in this essay are the roles Somali women took up during the Somali-Ethiopian war or the Ogaden war. Women played many different roles in the war and were therefore no less influential in the conflict than men were. Women were fighters, nurses, communication experts, cooks, chauffeurs, lobbyists, recruiters, politicians, military leaders, carriers, demonstrators, etc. This variety of roles and the fact that some of these roles might be associated with male virility could surprise many people with a superficial knowledge on Somali Muslim society. Yet it is crucial to repeat that existing gender roles in a society can become more flexible in wartime but they will not be done away with. The roles women took up in the Ogaden war might have been problematic for some conservative forces but were accepted by the public who knew these were exceptional circumstances. This explains the humorous remarks people made at the wedding of Hasan and his wife Qasad: strong women occupying tough positions were still considered to be slightly peculiar. Yet, not only women occupying roles that involve violence and or leadership are confirming the agency women had in society. Those roles that are more congruent with the prevalent gender roles, such as nurses or cooks, are also of great symbolic importance. They, too, mark a shift in gender patterns, albeit smaller and therefore less visible. All this should make clear that even though most women, as most men, were victims of the Ogaden war, they were also active agents crossing borders others have installed.
The second piece elaborated in this essay are ideas of psychology in the context of the Ogaden conflict. It shows a specific Somali psychology should be constructed that is neither based on Western cultural ideas nor on stereotypes of Somali society. In order to do so, a detailed analyses needs to be made of many different layers of Somali society and culture. I did not have the means to do so, which explains why so few conclusions are drawn in this essay when it comes to Somali psychology. Nonetheless, some important findings need to be repeated. First, there is the fact that many Somali people themselves doubt the ‘traditional’ support networks that are supposed to exists in their society. Psychological help and moral support among clan and kinship lines are omnipresent in the Somali society but their scope is limited and they are seriously overstretched by the long history of dire situations in the region. Psychological support networks based on political ideas, such as rebel movements, are much more efficient in helping people cope with the (psychological) problems they face from day to day.

Second, the real motives why people engaged in the Ogaden war were probably different than those described in most academic literature. These motives were most often based on discontent concerning Ethiopian rule and were thus always politically expressed. Yet the presupposition in most texts that a Greater Somalia motivated most actors is generally wrong since many genuinely fought for an independent Ogadeenia, both separated from Ethiopia and Somalia.

Third, it is likely that the traumata of the Ogaden war I tried to detect are transformed, on a community level, into a coping strategy for the traumata faced today. By turning the Ogaden war into a momento of heroism, the Somali-Ethiopian war becomes something to live up to. The Ogaden war is seen by Ogadeeni as a prove that the struggle in the Ogaden today is both legitimate and feasible. This, in its turn, gives meaning to so many people’s suffering and might give people the strength to carry on.

When, one day, a Somali psychology is created based on extensive knowledge on the Somali context, the crucial work still needs to be done. With this Somali case in hand comparisons with other psychological contexts should be made. At this stage it will be crucial that researchers will look further than Africa and compare the Somali psychological context with communities all over the world. Only then trustworthy generalisations on psychology can be made. Personal experience taught me, for example, that Mongolian pastoral communities share many features of their lifestyle with the Somali people. Even though their religious and
linguistic differences are obvious, a comparison of their coping strategies and psychological concepts might be an interesting research topic.

When we bring gender and psychology together to fill in the historical skeleton of the Ogaden war, it is striking that the existing psychological literature uses a very typical gender perspective. Both western psychologists and organisations operative in the Horn hold very conservative gender perspectives. Since most psychological literature on the Horn of Africa strongly relies on the aid industry, this is no surprise.

‘The idea that [women] may be fighters as well as victims challenges the black and white ideas of conflict in Africa many in the West hold. As such, the image is intentionally or subconsciously repressed, much to the detriment of the empowerment of women that many in the West claim to advocate.’

Thus not only history and psychology need to cooperate more often, psychology should also look into the findings of gender studies to contextualize their theories. Knowledge on power relations within a society would help the psychological processes at work.

This being said, it is clear that ‘the consequences of the 1977’s war are still visible up until today’. The women active in the Somali-Ethiopian war lost friends and relatives, they witnessed killings and war wounds, they were raped, lost their homes and livelihood, they feared for their lives and for the lives of those around them, they lived in constant stress and insecurity. Their male friends and companions went through similar situations and the WHO considers such situations as main triggers for mental disorders. Yet, since some women were fighters, it were not only men who were responsible for all this suffering. Nor were Ethiopians the only ones committing atrocities, Somali troops did also assail Ogadeen people.

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477 Macdonald A. ‘New Wars: Forgotten Warriors’ p. 142
478 Laplantine F. ‘Maladies mentales et thérapies traditionnelles en Afrique Noire’ p. 22
479 ‘L’. (at least 55 years old): 17-02-2011 (nr. 1), Pumwani, Nairobi, Kenya
481 The official orders one of the leading commanders of the Somali regular army received from Mogadishu were that ‘he and his troops were not allowed to kill Ethiopian soldiers they
It might be ambitious but this paper hopes to encourage interdisciplinary relations between historiography, gender studies and psychology. It also tries to give Africa’s Horn, and the marvellous people living there, the attention they deserve.
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Appendix

The traditional, western, diagnostic construct of PTSD as described by Duncan Pedersen:482

1. The repeated reliving of memories of the traumatic experience (intense sensory and visual memories and intrusive recollections of the event, accompanied by extreme distress).
2. Avoidance of reminders of the trauma, including emotional numbing, detachment and withdrawal, associated with an inability to experience joy and pleasure.
3. A pattern of increased arousal (hypervigilance, irritability, sleep disturbances, and an exaggerated startle response).

In chronic forms of PTSD, the pattern of hyperarousal and avoidance may be the dominant clinical features.

ACD according to the American Psychiatric Association:483

1. The patient witnessed a traumatising event where:
   a. Real or threatening death or serious injury was involved, or a threat to the physical integrity of the patient or others occurred. And
   b. Among the reactions of the patient: intense fear, helplessness or disgust.
2. During, or immediately after the traumatizing experience, the patient shows at least three of the following dissociative symptoms:
   a. Subjective feeling of numbness, alienation or lack of emotional reactions
   b. A loss of awareness of the environment
   c. Derealisation
   d. Depersonalisation
   e. Dissociative amnesia
3. The repeated reliving of memories of the traumatic experience
4. Avoidance of reminders of the trauma
5. A pattern of increased arousal and fear
6. The disorder causes suffering or restriction of social and professional functioning.
7. The disorder lasts at least two days and maximum four weeks.

The geographical outlines of the Ogaden are unclear but most accounts will definitely include (parts of) Hararge province. Hararge’s capital is Harar and the province has 12 regions (called awrajas). From the North-West to the South-East they are: 484

- Adal & Isa
- Chercher
- Weberra
- Gara Mulleta
- Dire Dawa

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482 Pedersen D. ‘Political violence, ethnic conflict, and contemporary wars’ p. 184
483 Nederlandse Vereniging voor de Psychiatrie/American Psychiatric Association Beknopte handleiding bij de Diagnostische Criteria van de DSM-IV-TR (Amsterdam, 2007) pp. 269-270
Sometimes, the eastern regions of Bale province are also included. These are:
- Ghirnir
- El Kerre

Graph on collective distress in Somalia anno 2010.\textsuperscript{485}

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