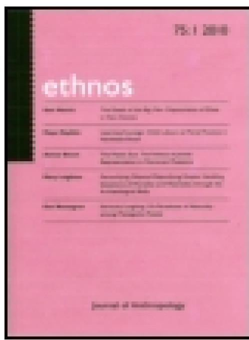

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The Role of Somali Kinship in Sustaining Bureaucratic Governance around Dagahaley Camp in Kenya

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ABSTRACT
Bureaucracy is often portrayed as having an unrivalled capacity to shape human relationships in states and organisations. By contrast, however, ethnographic studies have suggested that bureaucracy cannot easily take root among Somalis and other Muslim nomadic societies where kinship is ostensibly supreme. Based on ethnographic research at Dagahaley refugee camp, this article challenges the idea that Somali kinship and bureaucratic structures are rival governing technologies. I demonstrate that kinship and bureaucracy play similar roles and are, therefore, not incompatible. Kinship provided traction to bureaucratic procedures in the way people used it alongside bureaucracy as means of governance and resource access. The article contributes to legal and political anthropology, as well as the burgeoning field of ethnography of bureaucracy by attributing common portrayals of civil wars, ethnicity, and nepotism as 'nomadic' or 'African' problems to commentators' failure to grasp the value of kinship in these societies.

KEYWORDS Humanitarianism; bureaucracy; Dadaab; kinship; Somali

Extant ideas about the political intractability of nomadic societies have largely been entrenched by reductionist anthropological discourses. Ernest Gellner (1983), for example, famously posited that the strong nomadic cultures of Muslim societies have historically undermined the project of state-making. Political power is ostensibly precarious in such societies because the urban bourgeoisie are unable to control nomadic tribes which routinely depose city ruling dynasties in a cycle of tribal-urban rule.

However, throughout my year-long fieldwork in a village inhabited by local Somali nomads next to Dagahaley refugee camp in northeastern Kenya kinship provided a necessary context for actualising bureaucracy's rules and procedures. Five committees managed village resources: the food committee distributed relief food; the water committee ran the village borehole; the resettlement committee was charged with allocating land to new arrivals; the school committee ran the village primary school; while the youth committee commonly articulated villagers' 'rights' during stakeholders' meetings

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with humanitarian and state officials. Every committee had a male and a female representative from each of the five village lineages. Kinship also shaped the bureaucratic functioning of the chief and village chairman who often relied on the numerical strength of their respective lineages to manage village affairs.

This set-up should move us to rethink how nomadic societies in Africa are portrayed as eternally opposed to the Weberian version of the modern state. Earlier functionalist reifications of nomadic people flourished under the influence of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's (1940) co-edited work on *African Political Systems*, which became an established pattern for analysing these societies. Anthropology has largely turned its back on functionalist reifications, but by not speaking strongly against the reductionism that it helped to set in motion the discipline appears to have set the stage for the persistence of such essentialist views in media and scholarly accounts. For example, a columnist in a leading Kenyan newspaper remarked recently that Kenya's military incursion into Somalia was an opportunity for fixing the 'bandit economy' of its Somali inhabited region (Warigi 2013). This is a term used in political circles to designate the unregulated, untaxed consignments of goods and capital from Somalia that the government associates with piracy activities on the Indian Ocean. These comments allude to common stereotypes in Kenya that attribute piracy, banditry, and other illegal activities to Somali intransigence.

The idea that Somali kinship is incompatible with modern state practices was popularised by I.M. Lewis' colonially grounded ethnography that basically depicts Somalis as Gellner's quintessential 'Muslim society'. For Lewis,

> Somali people have no traditional commitment to state government … historically their encounters with state structures have tended to be fleeting and predatory … the collapse of the colonially created state represents technically a triumph for the segmentary lineage system and the political power of kinship (Lewis 1994: 233).

Somalis are supposedly intolerant towards state governance because they are egalitarian, unwilling to submit to authority, have strong clan consciousness and generally subscribe to segmentation ideals (Lewis 1999 (1961)).

I show throughout this article that perceiving Somalis as a recalcitrant people obscures the complexity of their daily life. Recent scholarship has shown that the character, meanings, and functions of Somali clan and lineage structures have evolved in line with the circumstances and contexts under which Somalis perform their kinship (Kapteijns 2011). Many Somalis who fled the civil war in Somalia in the early 1990s have, for example, been operating under state and humanitarian structures in diverse destinations. Adjusting to new environments often prompts them to deploy innovative strategies that are 'constrained or enabled by structural forces in a particular settlement' (Abdi 2015: 17). The circumstances of Somalis in different environments are, therefore, too different to warrant labelling Somalis as an insular egalitarian people.

This article sheds light on oft-misunderstood dynamics of Somali people by showing that kinship and bureaucracy are not competing systems. Rather, Somalis flexibly utilise the two as means of governance and resource access. Contrary to the view that nomadism is the antithesis of modern state governance, I argue that Somalis are astute

operators of bureaucracy who simultaneously seek to limit the state's reach in their own affairs. They strategically adopt what works for them and reject measures that are not in tune with their lived realities. What is more, state bureaucracy similarly manipulated kinship dynamics to further its own agenda through strategic disbursement of state funds. It was, therefore, not just kinship that was bent on hijacking bureaucracy. People exploit bureaucracy by, for example, acquiring rubber-stamps as an alternative means of accessing resources in the absence of kinship connections. I argue that the deployment of bureaucracy by a section of Somalis to circumvent and manipulate the set-up of acquiring resources through kinship claims did not merely represent bureaucratic authority nor symbolise the corruption of rational bureaucracy. Rather, it was an example of how bureaucratic tools enabled kinship and bureaucracy to work as hybrid forms. Bureaucracy is, therefore, less autonomous and dispassionate than we might think.

This hybrid Somali set-up seemingly strengthens the position of those who write against patrimonialism and corruption of the African state. Chabal and Daloz (1999), for example, argue that modern states with independent, professional bureaucracies have failed to take root in Sub-Saharan Africa because states are not divorced from society. Leaders, we are told, prefer such hollow polities for their disorder which is instrumentally harnessed for patronage, corruption and political traction. However, this analysis misunderstands basic realities about the value of kinship in Africa that often renders separation of state from society impractical. Moreover, it glosses over the shortcomings of bureaucratic practice that oftentimes allows irrational, subjective decisions to pass as universal policy. Such shortcomings commonly prompt people to device innovative ways of resisting unrealistic bureaucratic prescriptions.

Local people in many non-Western contexts have often resisted bureaucratic measures that do not serve their interests (Gupta 2012; Mathews 2005; Mathur 2010; Mosse 2005). This is why bureaucracy is sometimes portrayed as all-powerful and at other times as negotiated – a fact that is often lost on those who write about Africa's corruption. The suggestion that Somali kinship is supreme, for example, runs counter to common perceptions about the dominancy of bureaucracies. In its 'rational', formalistic Weberian sense (neutrality, documents, record keeping, etc.), bureaucracy has often been portrayed as having an unrivalled capacity to order state and organisational affairs. But what makes bureaucrats so powerful is that they often get away with decisions that are opaque, irrational, and inefficient, which is the opposite of what bureaucracies are supposed to represent (Hoag 2011; McGoey 2007). In humanitarian contexts, the power of bureaucrats is particularly unparalleled, given that they often have a monopoly over access to livelihood resources. This is tied to the larger system of the office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that is mostly non-transparent and characterised by power inequalities between its staff and the refugees (Harrell-Bond 2002; Sandvik 2011; Thomson 2012). At the same time, ethnographic literature on bureaucracy, the state, and development schemes has tended to portray bureaucratic action as dialogic, capricious, less autonomous, and largely based on compromise (e.g. Mathews 2005; Mosse 2005). The

anthropology of bureaucracy has, moreover, taught us that although practices such as documentation commonly act as a technology of power for state bureaucracy (Thomson 2012; Riles 2006), local people are capable of deploying bureaucratic modes of legitimation to resist unrealistic state measures (Gupta 2012; Mathur 2010). This echoes the dynamics at Dagahaley where neither kinship nor bureaucracy completely dominated the other. It is precisely the problematic UNHCR set-up that demanded creativity on the part of Somalis to circumvent unrealistic measures. In turn, state and humanitarian actors sought to minimise tensions in social relations by embracing some local practices.

The article builds on these studies to show how Somalis deftly deployed kinship as a lubricant for bureaucratic governance and resource access. It is based on 12-months of ethnographic research (August 2011-August 2012) in a village bordering the camp where locals and the majority of refugees belong to the Somali ethnic group. Somalis are a patrilineal people of Islamic faith who are divided into clans, sub-clans, and lineages. Historically, they have interacted across the porous Kenya-Somalia border based on kinship ties and their nomadic lifestyles (Lyons 1994). I first conducted research at the Dadaab camps in 2003. On my return in 2011, I approached one of the local chiefs for permission to stay in his area of jurisdiction. He introduced me to the village chairman who generously hosted me for my year-long stay in Dafa[1] village. My participant observation was based on a mixture of Somali and Swahili languages since I only had a basic command of Somali language from my previous research. In the initial stages of fieldwork, I hired a Somali language teacher who doubled as my guide inside the vast camp. If I was not attending village *barazas*[2], I would typically visit the 10 families I had established close ties with inside the camp before returning to the village.

My discussion is animated by two fieldwork observations that illustrated the everyday interaction between kinship and bureaucracy. Firstly, although humanitarian agencies had included all local Somalis in their assistance programmes, highly coveted humanitarian benefits such as jobs and contracts were few and the object of stiff competition. The person most likely to value such opportunities was one with influential relatives and who was also versed in the cultural knowledge of interacting with officials through bureaucratic modes of legitimation, including letters, rubberstamps, and files. Secondly, Somali locals resisted attempts by government officials to sedentarize them through creation of villages and introduction of agricultural projects. Almost every household owned cattle and camels that were herded by close relatives who practised nomadism in the wider region.[3] Locals, in fact, appeared to have considerable success in blocking and diverting humanitarian initiatives that did not agree with their interests and lived realities.

In what follows, I first describe the study's context, followed by an exposition of how the village was administered, before analysing how bureaucracy together with kinship operated as a hybrid to regulate resources and relationships. I then discuss how locals resisted initiatives that were aimed at promoting the self-interest of bureaucrats.

The Setting

Dagahaley camp is part of what is commonly referred to as the Dadaab Complex – a group of three camps that are clustered around Dadaab town. When these camps were set up following the breakout of civil war in Somalia in 1991, many locals moved in and registered as refugees in order to benefit from humanitarian aid. In the late 1990s, many local villages started to spring up next to refugee camps following the move by humanitarian agencies to include locals in their assistance programmes. In response, many locals from surrounding areas and those who were residing inside the camps moved into these new villages. An example of someone who followed this path was Jama, my host father who moved out of Dagahaley camp with his family in 2007. He was born in Kenya in 1955 but when a drought wiped out his livestock in 1980s, he moved to Somalia before returning to Kenya in 1992 as a 'refugee'. Many so-called 'locals' had followed similar trajectories. Shared Somaliness had, therefore, created unstable notions of 'locals' and 'refugees' since the setting up of the camps about 75 km from the border and had apparently intensified previous cross-border interactions. However, UNHCR still drew distinctions between 'locals' and 'refugees', which forced people to contextually inhabit categories that would give them material benefits (Ikanda 2014).

Somali sociality is also replete with clan rivalries that continue to fuel the on-going civil war in Somalia. During my fieldwork, kinship dynamics were often reflected in the distinction that people made between 'new' and 'old' arrivals. 'New' refugees were categorised by earlier arrivals (who defined themselves as 'old' refugees or locals) as those who became exiles following the catastrophic drought of 2011 in the Horn of Africa. However, the old-new categorisation was implicitly a distinction based on lineage and clan dynamics since a majority of the earliest arrivals shared kinship ties with members of the Ogaden sub-clan who inhabit the camp area (Ikanda 2018). These kinship dynamics played a major role in determining who benefitted from bureaucratic resources. The 'old' arrivals' connections and monopoly of leadership positions gave them unfettered control over bureaucratic tools, which they selectively used to endorse their relatives as beneficiaries of humanitarian resources. The Somali cross-border interactions are usually circumscribed by the Kenyan government due to the area's history of insurgencies, which has led to a fear of Somalis in Kenya (CASA 2001). Commentators (e.g. CASA 2001) have hypothesised that the government located the camps in the remote semi-arid area to isolate and monitor Somalis whom it often blames for the proliferation of firearms in the country.

There was, however, a thaw in relations between Kenyan Somalis and the state during my fieldwork as evidenced by the many projects that the government was initiating in the area which served to increase the attractiveness of a local status. Villages became the most potent embodiment of the local[4] status and identity. The term 'local' had evolved into a catchphrase that was authenticated by a profusion of symbols of localness, including rubber-stamps, documents, and a local primary school in the village. The village where I conducted fieldwork was founded in this context in the late 1990s. Dafa is inhabited by the Aulian sub-subclan of the Ogaden

subclan. The Aulian trace their origin to Ethiopia's Ogaden region and have a big presence in Somalia as well. They are descendants of Aulian's two sons who are the founding ancestors of the nine Aulian lineages. A surge in the arrival of Somali locals and refugees was witnessed throughout 2011 and early 2012 following the drought that drove close to 200 local households from neighbouring areas into the village. The village was increasingly fractionalised into lineage-based clusters consisting of about 550 households as the new arrivals settled next to their lineage members.

The government's previous minimal influence in improving the remote area around the camp left kinship in charge of maintaining order. The importance of kinship in structuring social relations was often reflected in the way people applied the word *reer* (family) in nearly equal measure to members of a household as well as those of the entire lineage. It was hard to discern finely drawn distinctions in the way people treated lineage and household members during my fieldwork insofar as individual problems were perceived to affect the entire lineage. On the whole, however, presence in the limbo of refugee life and space has increased the proximity of Somalis to state and relief agency structures. As I demonstrate below, the closeness of these organisations merely expanded the range of governance options for Somalis rather than seriously diminish the importance of kinship in people's lives.

The borehole was the most important resource. It provided all the village's water needs and served as a venue for *barazas* due to its centrality. Its reputation as a pivot of village life was further cemented during my fieldwork when it became a venue for an open-air market, along with two simple restaurants. It became a focal point for organising settlement patterns in the village. The earliest newcomers settled closer to the borehole while later arrivals settled further away from the centre. Agencies were located between the village and Dagahaley town, about 800 metres away from the village centre. An empty space separated the village and the agency compounds. Locals coveted this space given its proximity to agencies and the town, but settling there was out of the question. The chief told me that it had been set aside for the future expansion of humanitarian agencies in exchange for village projects. During my fieldwork, therefore, semi-circular rings of settlements kept forming around the borehole in the general direction of the recently established Ifo II camp as those fleeing the drought continued to arrive. These new arrivals increasingly occupied a peripheral position in the village, spatially and metaphorically. Unlike their 'old' village counterparts, they did not receive regular food rations. They also had to walk longer distances to draw water from the village borehole. As the chief once told me, their village stay was untenable because they had not been catered for in government and agency planning.

Village Administration

The village was organised around various levels that were shaped by agency and government influences, as well as the old-new kinship realities. One individual who personified the privileged position that earlier arrivals occupied around the camp area was Aden. Although he stayed inside the camp, Aden won most construction and transport

contracts set aside for locals through his often-stated claim that he co-founded the village with the chief. The chief's and Aden's special status was almost instantly recognisable as soon as one arrived in the village: they were the only ones getting water for free from the village borehole. The chief's village home was supplied with piped water from the borehole. Similarly, Aden had connected underground pipes from the borehole all the way to his restaurant in Dagahaley town – a distance of about two kilometres. The rest of the people in the village – who paid 5 Kenya shillings (Kshs)[5] for every 20-litre container of water, and 5Kshs and10Kshs for watering each cow and camel, respectively – never contested this arrangement.

Given that the government was a major stakeholder in locals' lives, village structure and authority relations were significantly shaped by its practices. The provincial administration was in charge of maintaining law and order and coordinated security issues through the chief and police forces. Three government departments were most active in the village: the agriculture department which was running a series of projects revolving around greenhouses and manually irrigated farms, the livestock department that was running monthly animal immunisation clinics, and the water department that was concerned with encouraging villagers to dig water pans through the Food for Assets (FFA) Programme.

The nascent village was also being visibly transformed by the many refugee agencies. Two to three households shared pit latrines that had been constructed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), which also gave locals priority in construction contracts for building refugee shelters. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) had supplied almost every family with a donkey cart and a wheelbarrow. CARE international sunk the village borehole and constructed various water storage tanks. Medicines Sans Frontiers (MSF) Swiss ran the hospital that treated villagers and refugees. The Relief and Reconstruction Development Organization (RRDO) coordinated the monthly food aid supply from the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Nearly ten other organisations visited the village in the course of my fieldwork to provide a range of medical and social services. In addition, workshops were held to train locals on, *inter alia*, agriculture, conservation, and peace-building initiatives. Villagers often perceived these humanitarian efforts as a right that was meant to compensate them for the burden of hosting refugees.

The most pressing need for many villagers was how to meet the bureaucratic criteria of accessing either local or refugee resources, which was often achieved through kinship claims. It was, therefore, not unusual for Somali refugees to settle with their relatives in the village, or for villagers to get food rations under the guise of being refugees, which meant that refugees and locals benefitted from each other's presence. Lewis (1999 (1961): 30) suggests that the supremacy of kinship ties among Somali people emanates from the 'highly segmentary and exclusive character of the Somali political system (that) makes it impossible, or at least extremely difficult, for one who is not a kinsman to be trusted'. What ostensibly turns a society into a segmentary one is the necessity of aligning oneself to close kinsmen as a means of governance and resource access (Gellner & Munson Jr. 1995). Operating outside the circle of kinsmen would, therefore, be perceived as the ultimate form of isolation for many Somalis.

Rules were, in fact, forged in lineage struggles over livelihood resources, which were often embodied in the working of village committees and the offices of chief and chairman. As mentioned above, the village functioned by tempering bureaucratic ideals with kinship realities. If this contributes to Africa's disorder as Chabal and Daloz (1999) suggest, however, it is worth remembering that the need to heed Western democratic ideals of separating state from society might not necessarily outweigh the positive aspects of kinship among nomads as Lewis (1999 (1961)) and other segmentary lineage proponents have shown.

Lloyd Fallers (1965) highlighted the difficulty of treating a person as a kinsman in one context and as a non-kinsman in another according to the practice in Western societies. There, people are prohibited from sitting as jurors at the trial of their relatives and kinsmen are generally discouraged from meeting in non-family contexts. By contrast, Somalis lacked this bureaucratic disinterest and impersonality. As I show throughout the article, officials prioritised lineage interests even though they were elected to serve the entire village, which explains why each committee had two lineage representatives. Akhil Gupta (2012) describes a similar dynamic in India where the private and public roles of state officials at the base of the bureaucratic pyramid often collapse the distinction between the state and society. Rather than perceiving such an occurrence as proof that Third World countries are incapable of adopting efficient institutions – as modernisation theorists commonly do – Gupta indicts the theories for failing to explicate lived realities in non-Western societies. Similarly, Somali kin-based units exposed the inadequacies of solely relying on bureaucracy as an authority-structuring principle. Consequently, people commonly accessed resources through either kinship or bureaucracy. However, the necessity of alternating between the two structures on some intricate issues produced an on-going sense of tension in people's life courses as they sought simultaneously to comply with kinship and bureaucratic demands in the changing political landscape.

This tension was particularly highlighted by the way the chief constantly relied on kinship alliances to legitimize his bureaucratic functions. He acted as a liaison person between villagers and the agency and government officials who were implementing village projects. All officials wishing to introduce development programmes were, therefore, obligated to involve him in the logistics of arranging for *barazas*. This entailed picking him up at Dadaab where he stayed with his first wife, before proceeding to the village and ferrying him back afterwards. This arrangement had given the chief considerable power throughout the village's history, not least thanks to the showiness of arriving in the village accompanied by agency or government officials in UN-branded four-wheel drive vehicles. Rather than engendering a sense of administrative vacuum that one might associate with an absentee leader, the chief's stay in Dadaab had captured the villagers' imagination of a leader close to the source of most aid programmes. Villagers – especially those from his lineage – would often praise him for 'bringing visitors', and his time spent away was explained as him being on a mission to 'search' for opportunities. With time, Dadaab came to be increasingly seen as a symbol of opportunity and power as regular delegations led by the chief kept streaming into the village.

The chief's actions, therefore, took centre stage throughout the village's history. His standing was particularly enhanced by the numerical strength of his lineage and the support he often received from Aden, who had amassed considerable wealth through firewood, construction, and transport contracts. Many villagers often attributed Aden's success in winning contracts meant for locals to his proximity to the chief, and the partnership between them was often extended to members of their respective lineages. The villagers' feelings for the chief were however mostly ambivalent. Although they rarely challenged his preferential treatment in water use and contract awards, they privately accused him of favouritism. People said that he had often proposed close relatives to go to workshops, that he had constantly interfered with the work of village committees, and that he had unfairly benefitted from projects meant for the whole village. These allegations sometimes resulted in open rebellions.

One such rebellion occurred about halfway through my fieldwork. An Islamic organisation had previously promised to sponsor a village women's group with credit facilities, but six months later the chief was still telling people that the money had not been disbursed. A rumour rapidly gained traction that the chief's first wife had been given Kshs750, 000 on behalf of the village women's group. In response, Osman – Jama's nephew – quickly mobilised a group of youths who vociferously confronted him with corruption claims on one of his village visits. The chief was at pains to deny the allegations even as he conceded that he had recently bought a Toyota land cruiser which he had hired out to CARE International. To shield the chief from further attacks, Aden told people in several informal discussions that he had facilitated the vehicle's purchase through the money he had lent the chief. Surprisingly, the issue died down as suddenly as it had erupted and when I asked Osman what had transpired, he told me they had been bribed. The chief had invited them to a lavish party at his Dadaab home where he gave each of them Kshs5, 000 and the best quality *miraa*[6] before conceding that his wife had indeed received money from the Islamic organisation. He had also given Kshs10, 000 to each of the five women lineage representatives from the beneficiary group. He did this 'just to assist' them since the money that his wife had received was a loan that she would repay. 'If you were the one in my position, you could not have resisted the offer', Osman explained.

When the chief allocated part of the coveted space next to agency compounds to Aden shortly afterwards, the coincidence was not lost on locals. People linked the land allocation to the loan that Aden had advanced him. Despite the repeated assurances from the chief that his friend had decided to relocate from the camp to build a home on this land, allegations that Aden was considering selling the land parcel to agencies continued to grow. Once more, Osman started mobilising youth from rival lineages, saying they wanted the chief to explain why particular 'families' were the only ones getting the sought-after land. It became obvious that another confrontation was in the offing but again, the issue died down unexpectedly. When I asked Osman what had happened, he burst out with laughter before replying:

> He gave one of my cousins a plot next to Aden's before we could act. That has totally neutralized us. I learned that he has also given plots to three other influential people from different families. Nobody can really complain now.

For most locals and refugees, siding with one's close relatives seemed to hold an allure that outshone loyalty to other entities. That is why the chief neutralised rival lineages through bribing vocal opponents and why rivals used the threat of revolt as a tactic for wringing concessions from him. For the same reason, many rifts often assumed a lineage dimension, which created a bureaucratic environment where access to resources was shaped by lineage loyalties.

Jama's move from the camp to the village happened against the backdrop of similar lineage intrigues. His ascendancy to the position of village chairman is particularly illustrative of the indispensability of lineage in administration and resource access. According to informal discussions with Jama and Osman, villagers had often accused the former chairman of colluding with the chief to steal relief food. A meeting of friendly lineages was convened in 2007 to look into ways of removing the chief. Jama was asked to relocate to the village and vie for the chief's position. A letter addressed to the District Commissioner (DC) detailing the chief's unfairness was also drafted. However, an influential elder from Jama's lineage vetoed the move on the grounds that the chief's position was not elective. In retrospect, Jama conceded that the move to oust the chief was ill advised because he lacked formal education to qualify for the position. The alternative was for him to replace the village chairman. He mobilised his lineage network and was elected as chairman on 11 August 2010, according to a letter that was written by Osman.

The content of this letter highlights the significance and influence of the work of government and agency to village life. It listed Jama as chairman and three other officials as vice chairman, secretary, and woman representative-cum-treasurer. It was addressed to the District Officer, but was also copied to the local Member of Parliament, area councillor, chief, UNHCR, Lutheran World Federation, CARE International, NRC, MSF, National Council of Churches of Kenya, GIZ (working on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development), WFP, DRC, Save the Children, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and RRDO. The officers representing these organisations were asked to be aware of the village changes. The letter then elaborated on the responsibilities of the officials:

> … settling misunderstandings … maintaining a peaceful environment, ensuring a better co-existence among the locals and the neighbouring refugee community, co-operating with the local NGOs and international agencies so that development extension could be achieved, and encouraging agencies to offer help in terms of social development projects in the area.

Jama always walked around with copies of this letter and made sure to distribute them to all government and agency officials who visited the village. The move to distribute copies of the letter was precipitated by the former chairman's refusal to concede defeat and hand over 'files', according to Jama. The letter's significance was instantly felt shortly afterwards when both Jama and the former chairman turned up at an agency meeting. Jama recalled how he was given recognition as the new village

representative on the basis of the letter, which was a defining moment in resolving the leadership row. Following this move as I show below, the habit of dealing with bureaucratic officials through documents was increasingly absorbed into village life.

Rendering Kinship Visible: Bureaucracy and Kinship as Hybrid Systems

As Jama's letter shows, the importance of documentation was sharpened by the presence of state and agency actors. Keeping records, or 'files' as many people put it – which often entailed tucking group registration certificates, important letters and other documents in large manila envelopes – attained what Mathur (2010) calls a socially efficacious status. It also became an important feature of making claims that was often endorsed by the use of a rubber-stamp that Jama always walked around with. Osman was the first to draw my attention to the genesis and importance of the rubber-stamp in the village. As he put it:

> You know agencies now require applicants for jobs, contracts and group funding to be locals. What I did was to make a rubber stamp that the old man uses to endorse applications. You can't get anything here without the chief's or chairman's rubber-stamp!

One consequence of Jama's move to acquire a rubber-stamp was that it created an alternative centre of power. The chief was the person who was duly authorised to carry an official rubber-stamp. However, his Dadaab stay had largely rendered him inaccessible to villagers. Thus, Jama's homestead became a popular destination for those applying for jobs or contracts.

In devising the rubber-stamp, Osman evidently uncovered an approach that firmly entrenched bureaucracy in the village. He claimed to have stumbled upon the rubber-stamp idea by chance. He initially hoped to buttress the new chairman's legitimacy at agency meetings by using the rubber-stamp as a leadership symbol, but the whole idea assumed unprecedented significance when it was recognised in agency circles as a mark of localness. During my fieldwork, paperwork had become so ubiquitous that a week hardly passed without seeing villagers with large brown envelopes – a phenomenon that always portended an impending *baraza*. Without the rubber-stamp, however, the documents lost their potency (cf. Thomson 2012).

The importance of making bureaucratic claims through kinship was vividly brought home to me about halfway through my fieldwork when villagers were asked to participate in a DRC tendering process for constructing refugee shelters. That evening, Jama arrived home with Osman and ten other members of his lineage and proceeded to extract a bundle of forms from an envelope that Osman started filling in. Members of his lineage were surrounding him on all sides – each beaming light from their spotlights to enable Osman to see what he was writing. The information he filled in the more than ten forms was almost identical, except for the names of the applicants. When all the forms were filled out, he read out the information on one of the forms to check if the group agreed with what he had written. He then put back the forms in an envelope and handed it back to Jama, who promised to hand them to the DRC the following day. The next morning, the greenhouse attendant came into my house while I was still asleep. He

requested that I fill in a form for him similar to Jama's. A few minutes later, Bashir – an old village friend – arrived with six of his lineage members with similar requests. He looked at the greenhouse attendant's form that I had just finished filling in and asked me to fill in the six forms he was holding in 'exactly the same way'. When I protested that the required information – such as past experience – might vary from one group of applicants to another, he assured me that it would work. I continued working for two hours because I was attending to two entire lineages that did not have a qualified person to fill-out the forms. Each form was listed as having three or four group members – all from the same lineage. We then proceeded to the village borehole where a *baraza* was about to take place and a representative from each of the lineages handed over a batch of forms to Jama for rubber-stamping and onward transmission to the DRC.

If incomplete filling out of forms renders moot the data gathering function of documents (McKay 2012), filling forms uniformly as happened above strips them of their evaluative potential. The standardised responses that the form produced probably denied DRC bureaucrats a chance to apply their evaluation criteria. This also illustrates why some bureaucratic practices are inadequate in attending to lived realities – in this case the high illiteracy that forced all applicants to rely on writing services of a few people (cf. Gupta 2012). In the end, everybody 'won' the tender – as each applicant was given Kshs11, 000 to construct a single refugee shelter. With time, however, those seeking the rubber-stamp started accusing Jama of favouritism, which was ironic considering that similar claims against the chief and the former chairman had propelled him to his current position. One month after the DRC tender application by villagers, an elderly man stormed Jama's compound and engaged him in a heated conversation about unfairness in job allocation:

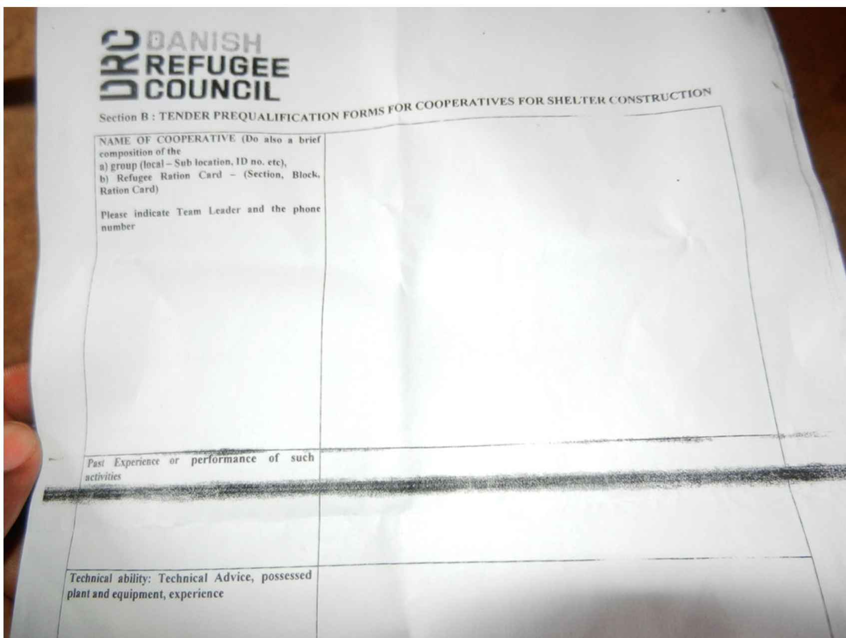
> I have been around for a year but I have still not been considered for anything, yet some people who came six months ago have already been given jobs. Am I not a local? I only want to be employed as a watchman and take the Kshs30, 000 they are giving people. If I were walking with you in UN meetings, I would have succeeded. I know jobs are being shared out in those meetings!

Jama replied that he had no powers to force UN to give villagers jobs and reminded the man that everyone had been given Kshs11, 000 from DRC to construct refugee shelters. 'If I was favouring only my family, you wouldn't have been awarded that contract', he said. This infuriated the man even more: 'What is Kshs11, 000 compared to what others are getting? Why are some of us excluded from the FFA programme when all of us here are hungry? I paid people to construct the refugee shelter and ended up with nothing', he answered bitterly before walking away. Unlike the DRC tendering process that incorporated everyone, the FFA programme had locked out new arrivals (see the next section) who could not, therefore, use kinship connections to benefit from the programme. This man's complaint is not a mere case of corruption of the rational bureaucracy by kinship ties as Chabal and Daloz (1999) suggest. Rather, it was his inability to deploy kinship links to influence bureaucratic procedures that narrowed his chances. His lineage was the least significant insofar as it was the smallest, lacked influential figures, and was mainly comprised of recent arrivals who occupied a marginal position

in the village. Thus, he was unable to get a job either through kinship or bureaucracy and he never succeeded in escorting Jama to agency meetings throughout my fieldwork. He eventually blamed this failure on discrimination from 'people with rubber-stamps' (Figure 1).

Many of those disadvantaged by the set-up where bureaucracy operated as a hybrid with kinship tried to deploy paperwork as a means for establishing and intensifying interactions with bureaucratic officials at Dadaab. This idea was particularly inspired by the chief's flashy village arrival and the sense of discrimination experienced by recent arrivals. Bashir, for example, once approached the DC with a letter that stated that he was a leader of a group of elders that had volunteered to work with the provincial administration to identify criminals 'for the purpose of maintaining security in the area'. He was initially hopeful of getting recognition because of the area's endemic insecurity and the fact that he was among the few villagers who could speak the national Swahili language. He confided in me, following one of his Dadaab visits, that the DC had agreed to work through the group of elders he was chairing but as time went by, he talked about it less and eventually stopped visiting Dadaab altogether.

Another popular tactic was forging documents. This practice was mainly fuelled by the agency practice of requiring people to show documentary evidence of group membership. The stated aim of this requirement was to increase local participation and accountability as a form of performance audit for the projects that were being



DRC DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL

Section B : TENDER PREQUALIFICATION FORMS FOR COOPERATIVES FOR SHELTER CONSTRUCTION

NAME OF COOPERATIVE (Do also a brief composition of the a) group (local – Sub location, ID no. etc), b) Refugee Ration Card – (Section, Block, Ration Card) Please indicate Team Leader and the phone number	
Past Experience or performance of such activities	
Technical ability: Technical Advice, possessed plant and equipment, experience	

Figure 1. The DRC tender form for shelter construction.

sponsored. However, it inadvertently produced endless lists and certificates of fictitious groups that people used to apply for funding opportunities. The fact that documentation is often invoked whenever transparency, accountability, and many of the current buzzwords are pronounced (Riles 2006), does not, therefore, mean that it is a panacea for eliminating deception (Mathur 2010).

People also came to perceive that owning rubber-stamps would substitute for their lack of kinship connections. When his attempts to dilute the chief's dominance failed, Bashir decided to form another group named 'Lagdera Self-help Group'. He visited me one morning with a typed letter addressed to the IOM – requesting financial assistance to help the group 'initiate projects' and asked me to check if it was well written. When he delivered the letter, he was informed that his application could not be considered because neither the chief nor the chairman had rubber-stamped it. The chief and Jama refused to endorse his application when it emerged that most of the people listed as group members were fictitious. Consequently, he told me that he had resolved to make his own rubber-stamp and was in the process of doing so when I left the village, saying the chairman and chief had refused to approve his proposal because they were motivated by a desire to block some 'families' from accessing agency aid. This is an example of how state practices were reshaping kinship dynamics on the ground.

Like elsewhere (see Thomson 2012), stamps, signatures, and documents had acquired extraordinary power. But as Bashir's experiences have shown, the diffusion of a particular governmentality (using letters and rubberstamps to seek recognition) did not always guarantee success, especially in the absence of kinship links that contoured the ground for the enactment of bureaucracy. The proliferation of these bureaucratic practices also helps us to discern an important point: villagers adopted bureaucracy because of its instrumental value in accessing resources. This resonates with Kipnis' (2008) view that governing technologies are accepted because of their capacity to shape the management of social relations locally and not simply because they are forced on locals by governing agents. People, moreover, largely incorporated bureaucratic measures that they found attractive. As I show in the next section, they actively resisted measures that were incompatible with their lived realities.

Resisting Bureaucratic Control

The zeal with which state actors attempted to bring 'development' through constant *barazas* was a striking turnaround for an area that has experienced a long history of marginalisation. The development discourse that state officials spoke about often translated into attempts to induce villagers to abandon nomadism by giving them money to initiate agricultural projects. However, locals sought to have leeway in the way the money would be spent. They resisted bureaucrats' attempts to control their socio-economic lifestyles and would often invest agriculture money in livestock. One consequence of this resistance was that bureaucrats were caught up in their own bureaucracy. They could arrange numerous *barazas* to give the impression of on-going engagement even when little was happening. I use a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) funded project that was

implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture to highlight the interaction between villagers and bureaucrats as recorded in my field notes.

It is 25 May 2012 and three agricultural officers (one Somali woman, the District Agriculture Officer (DAO) and a non-Somali Kenyan man) and the chief arrive in a four-wheel drive vehicle. They explain that they are here to organise a baraza for a forthcoming project being funded by JICA and UNDP through FAO while also checking on the tomato seedlings in the greenhouse. They seem disappointed because the tomato crop is gradually wilting away. A man steps forward and offers to water the crops in the future. He claims that he is a refugee with farming experience and understands the job. The DAO promises him half of the proceeds from the tomato sale in exchange for his labour before we all proceed to the village borehole. On the way, they explain that they picked the chief at his Dadaab home to assist them in mobilising villagers for a baraza. Within minutes of their arrival, villagers quickly converge at the village borehole and the chief announces that a baraza would be held tomorrow to introduce 'new projects'.

It was the next day and everybody was seated by nine o'clock when the chief and the agriculture team arrived. *Several group leaders have envelopes with lists of group members and registration certificates inside and women are sitting a short distance away from men. The chief is the first to speak. He introduces the visitors, saying two among them are already known. He asks everybody to clap for them. He then tells the meeting that he has deliberately avoided introducing me because I was part of the village. The DAO then addresses the gathering in Somali. He explains that UNDP and JICA are bringing 3 million shillings for agricultural projects in the village. All they have to do is form groups. Bashir explains that there are 25 groups comprised of between 10–20 members but some are not registered. It is agreed that the unregistered groups will initiate the registration process after the meeting. Almost everybody springs to their feet when the officer explains that the project will use the 3 million to buy implements and farm inputs. When the chief finally restores calm, a middle-aged man tells the officials that many groups already have these implements from previous projects. Amid cheers and clapping of hands, he suggests that groups should instead be allowed to spend the money based on specific needs. It is thus agreed by consensus that each group will be given Kshs120, 000 to purchase the implements that they might require and share the balance equally as payment for the work they would do on the respective groups' farms. In what apparently is his idea of a sense of humour, Bashir triumphantly declares that the money is enough to make everybody grow a tummy. When the meeting ends, everyone retrieves registration certificates and lists of group members from envelopes for validation* (Figure 2).

After the meeting, I asked the DAO how they would monitor the expenditure of the groups now that most preconditions for funding had petered out. He replied that he would have preferred to go by the guidelines outlined in the proposal but it would have been illogical to dismiss the villagers' views, as that would doom the project. He pointed out that Dafa has shown receptiveness in adopting agriculture alongside pastoralism and FAO was enthusiastic in funding similar projects as a mitigating factor against droughts. But he also added that he was disappointed by the attitude of some village elders, including the chief who had asked for a stipend before agreeing to accompany them to the village.

Figure 2. A village *baraza*. Notice the brown envelopes that people are carrying.

The reality on the ground, however, was that the few areas where success in agricultural projects could be claimed involved refugees from farming backgrounds. It, therefore, became easier to connive with villagers in perpetuating a sense that Somalis were integrating agriculture in their pastoralist lifestyles. In return, government officials justified their relevance and earned allowances for going to the 'field'. Ultimately, each group member received Kshs300 each day for a total of 40 days. According to the funding proposal, this was supposed to be a pilot project that was meant to equip locals with farming tools in line with the programme's long-term goal of self-sustenance. However, only five out of the 25 groups that participated in the scheme bought some hoes, wheelbarrows and machetes but the project managers deemed it a success nonetheless. Jama and a few others told me that they had combined the proceeds from the project with other savings to restock their livestock herds that had been wiped away by the drought. But officials attributed the lack of progress on the agricultural plots to the scorching sun that had ostensibly discouraged villagers from planting. If it rained a little, they would urge villagers to plant and supplement the meagre rain with manual irrigation, the DAO explained. It still had not rained four months later when I was exiting the field but the agriculture officers would come around fortnightly to hold *barazas*. The meetings continued until the money ran out and villagers stopped attending the *barazas*. The proclivity for holding *barazas* emerged as the embodiment of state and agency bureaucracy. But like elsewhere, they often translated into empty rituals (Gupta 2012; Mathur 2010) unless there were resources to be allocated.

Another case in which project goals were incommensurate with the locals' agenda and where villagers out-manoeuvred bureaucratic agents involved the FFA Programme that was run by the food committee. According to the government official in charge, the project, which was co-funded by the Kenyan government and the WFP, was started in 2010 as a way of 'minimising the negative feelings among locals' that refugees were the only ones receiving food aid. It was preceded by a baseline survey that identified 266 households in the village in 2009. Each household provided a family member who participated in digging water pans and practising greenhouse farming. In return, each of the participating members was given a monthly food allotment after a 12-day work programme.

The officer in charge would announce an impeding food delivery in a *baraza* and ask people to start digging water pans. Villagers would then employ refugees from farming backgrounds to dig the pans from the proceeds of a previous delivery. When I questioned the programme's viability in light of villagers' avoidance of the work, the government officer retorted: 'I am aware that the refugees are the ones digging but they will not carry the water pans back to Somalia when they repatriate'. In the long-term, however, the programme generated endless lineage squabbles because recent arrivals were excluded. The officials in these cases seemed to be preoccupied with proving to donors that pastoralists could be converted into farmers and took great pains to convince locals to participate in the programmes. This was at odds with villagers' rising infatuation with fast returns (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Signpost announcing the FFA village programme.

Bureaucrats' gatekeeping role often imbues them with power (Hoag 2011; McGoey 2007), but as this section has shown, their clients are not completely helpless. These cases also show that ways of creating accountability through urging people to keep files and giving money to groups as opposed to individuals were not always successful despite the officials' attempts at enforcing management practices.

Conclusions

My analysis has shown that Somalis are not entirely opposed to the Weberian model of state governance as earlier writings about nomadic people suggest. Bureaucracy operated as a hybrid along with kinship to shape governance and resource access issues. The two play similar roles and are, therefore, not rival governing technologies. People kept bothering Jama and the chief because of their links to bureaucracy. Since kinship gave traction to bureaucratic procedures, however, these officials understood their remaining in office as hinging on the support of their respective lineages. The failure to grasp the value of kinship in Africa has often led the Western media and other commentators to uncritically label vices such as tribalism and nepotism as 'African problems'. But positing the West's political 'modernity' as the antithesis of Africa's 'disorder', promotes essentialist models that have no empirical basis. Similarly, culturist explanations have entrenched the idiom of nomadism as a concern with feud and anarchy. Such explanations largely exaggerate the role of ethnicity and other kinship practices in accounting for Africa's civil wars and other vices, such as piracy and cattle rustling. Apart from presenting a narrow perspective on current events in Somalia, such views conveniently overlook the positive aspects of kinship, including its importance in providing traction to the working of state governance. They are also blind to the fact that for people like Jama, there really is no incentive to draw an indelible line between either bureaucracy and kinship or 'local' and 'refugee' categories. This is an example of how problematic bureaucratic measures do generate creative responses. It also illustrates the importance of social relations in enabling the functioning of bureaucracy. In this vein, my analysis contributes to concerns raised by scholars who oppose reified culturist explanations and those who expose the inadequacy of bureaucratic theory in apprehending lived realities of non-Western contexts.

The propensity for adopting bureaucratic modes of legitimating localness was largely informed by bureaucrats' requirement to present claims in institutionally acceptable ways. What clearly emerges from how bureaucratic modes came to be part and parcel of village affairs, however, is that Somalis adopted bureaucracy not because governing agents forced it on them, but because of its instrumental value in shaping social relations. The fact that government and humanitarian structures sought to maintain their legitimacy by limiting their power (through partly depending on local institutions) also means that bureaucracies do not have exclusive control over people's lives, especially in non-Western societies. This concurs with developmental ethnography that generally shows that governance brought by such set-ups cannot be imposed as their success commonly depends on collaboration and compromise.

Notes

1. I use pseudonyms to protect the identity of my informants. Dafa was named after the current chief who is regarded as its founder.
2. *Barazas* are public meetings that are mostly convened by officials to disseminate government policy.
3. Villagers referred to their nomadic pastoralist relatives as 'people in the bush' or those 'who follow camels'
4. Despite their high illiteracy levels, villagers deliberately deployed the English version of the word 'local' in public engagement with government and agency officials to directly convey their host status.
5. During my fieldwork, 1pound sterling (£) was changing for around 137Kshs.
6. *Miraa*, also called *khat*, is chewed by most adult Somali men as a mild stimulant

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