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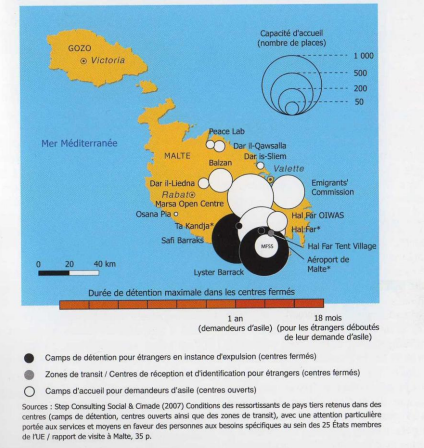
EuroBroadMap

VISIONS OF EUROPE IN THE WORLD

Migrants and Borders
Somali women in Malta

From deliverable 3.4

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Visions of Europe among Somali Women in Malta

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Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities

SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

Abstract: This EuroBroadMap working paper, issued from the final report of the work package 3 (migrants and borders), focuses on Somali women in Malta. Malta is a small island state with the highest population density in Europe. Traditionally a country of emigration, the island has experienced a new immigration flow in the last decade. The research was based on semi-structured interviews and observations undertaken with Somali women in May and October 2010. Somali women vision of Europe is ambivalent: Europe is both seen as a space of opportunity where one can get protection and legal capital for the whole family and a space where one experiences racism, detention as well as several institutional obstacles. This vision is highly connected to institutional factors that determine whether they should go into detention or not, their possibility to get protection, to circulate within the EU space as well as to reunify with their family. Moreover, the knowledge, the experience and the image of Europe is constructed alongside the trajectories. This construction of Europe is connected to a process of redefinition of one's own identity and projects as well as a negotiation of social boundaries.

Key-words: Malta, Somali women, Asylum seekers, borders and boundaries, gender, detention, racism, family

Cover: Clochard and Migreurop, 2009

Introduction

The Maltese situation

Malta is a small island state with the highest population density in Europe (410 000 inhabitants in an area of 316 km^2). Traditionally a country of emigration, the island has experienced a new immigration flow in the last decade.

The phenomenon of irregular immigration in Malta began in 2002 with the arrival of 1,686 illegal immigrants, mainly from Sub-Saharan Africa. These arrivals have continued till today. Since March 2002 there have been around 12 500 arrivals of illegal immigrants to the Maltese shores, more commonly known now as "boat people". Many of the immigrants that arrive irregularly to Malta apply for asylum: in 2009 for instance, 2 575 applications for asylum were made, 1 690 of which had positive outcomes: 20 were granted refugee status, 1 660 a subsidiary protection status and 10 had humanitarian protection.

This influx of illegal immigrants in recent years represents a major challenge for Malta. The Maltese situation is often addressed as a continuous emergency situation, especially when considering the number of immigrants in proportion to the Maltese population[1].

Table 1: Boats arriving in Malta with irregular immigrants (2002-2009)

Year	Number of boats arriving	Total number of people on boats	Average number of people per boat
2002	21	1686	80
2003	12	502	42
2004	52	1388	27
2005	48	1822	38
2006	57	1790	31
2007	68	1702	25
2008	84	2775	33
2009	17	1475	87

Source: National Office for Statistics, Police General Headquarters, Immigration section, Malta.

Methodological approach

The research was based on semi-structured interviews and observations that were undertaken at the beginning of May 2010 and in October 2010.

[1] http://www.socialwatch.eu/wcm/documents/Malta.pdf

We made different interviews with cultural mediators, open centres managers and NGO representatives (JRS, Emigrant Commission), and most importantly, ten formal interviews were conducted with Somali women. Some of the women were interviewed twice in May and October. The interviews were conducted in the Hal Far women centre and in the Hal Far family centre. Camille Schmoll also embarked on a short period of participant observation in October 2010 in Balzan, where many Somali migrants live[2].

All the centres we visited are open centres. However, most of the women we met spent some time in closed detention before going to the open centre (see annex).

We decided to interview Somali women for different reasons:

- Somalia is, according to statistics, the first country of origin of immigrants reaching Maltese shores. In 2009 for instance 2 387 applications for asylum were made in Malta of which 1 446 were of Somalis (20.5% of which were of women). Unfortunately we have reason to think that Somali women embarking on their way to Europe are more numerous than 20% of the Somali migrant population. But since they are more vulnerable than men, there are more women than men that get stuck or die during their journey to Europe (the number of dead women's bodies that are being extracted from the Mediterranean is to this extent revealing, according to Maria Pisani, an ex representative of International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Malta now researching migrant women).

- Albeit women represent a minority within the Somali population, the issue of women's experience and more broadly the gender issue is still under-researched. As stated by G.Hopkins "while there has been increased focus on refugees, including women, in research and policy, how gender impacts on the issues faced by a refugee woman [...] her responses to situations and strategies for resolution [...] requires further investigation" (Hopkins 2010). It is interesting to focus on this specific population, not only because women are particularly vulnerable subjects, but also because migration policies and migration trajectories are gendered as we will show in this paper.

The interviews were conducted following the enclosed guidelines (see EuroBroadMap working paper, *Migrants and borders, methodological guidelines*[3]). The goals of the interviews were to collect narratives on migrants' trajectories, current situation and projects. We also encouraged the women to discuss a map we provided them with of Africa and the Euro-Mediterranean

[2]Hal Far Single women centre hosts around 70 women. Hal Far Family centre hosts around 150 persons (around 50 families). Most of them were Somali families.

[3]http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/EUROBROADMAP/

area. Interviews were conducted mostly in English. About half of our interviewees spoke English. The other half had their responses translated by other Somali women that kindly accepted to help us. Of course the women we interviewed took the decision by themselves to participate in the research and without any kind of pressure from ourselves or from the centre's staff.

Anna Spiteri and Camille Schmoll conducted the interviews. As regards our positions, we found that being two women from two different backgrounds, made researching women easier and proved quite advantageous during the research process and interpretation. We felt it was probably easier for women to address specific issues (such as their relationship with their partners or with their children...) and we felt ourselves to be quite empathic to their stories. However, we are aware of the uneven relationship the research situation creates. This is particularly relevant in a context of strong institutional dependency of the interviewees, which is currently the case in Malta. The period during which we conducted the interviews was particularly sensitive because there were reallocation procedures taking place (see below). In this context, we had to make clear to the women, from the very beginning of the interview, that we had no means to help them individually. We told them we could just collect their story and try to raise awareness of the public opinion and the institutions on their situation.

This was not always properly understood. This raises the issue of language which was another difficulty we had to face: many of the women did not speak very good English so the narratives we collected sometimes lacked precision and are difficult to treat precisely as "narratives". The filter introduced by the translation process is, of course, also a problem.

Another difficulty is connected to the issue of doing short-term research. We did not have enough time to go create a deep relationship based on trust with women so they remained very reserved regarding specific issues (such as sexuality and sexual abuse for instance). However, we had the opportunity to discuss quite extensively with women, details regarding their trajectories and representations (some of them have been interviewed twice) and Camille's returns and observation in the centres added some important features to our understanding of how women related to Europe.

1 Memory, History and Culture

At the time they lived in Somalia, women had little specific knowledge of Europe. Due to the 20 years ongoing conflict situation, they had little access to the media, so that the media is not a strong vector in shaping their image of Europe.

The colonial legacy does not have a strong impact on their representations of Europe. Though Somalia had been an Italian colony from 1889 to 1941, there were few references in the interviews to a common history or colonial

debt. Only one of our interviewees referred to Somalia as a place colonized and divided by the colonizers (the French, the Italians and the British).

This is connected to different reasons:

- there is a first historical reason: the Italian imperialism was not as culturally strong as the British of French one. For instance, Italian schools were intended only for Italian citizens. After decolonization, the Italian cultural and political influence tended to fade away from its former colonies.

- the ongoing civil war has cancelled part of the memories. The women we interviewed referred explicitly to the war, stating that basically since they are born their only recollections are of the war and they do not have any other memory of anything else than war.

- school is a crucial vector for the transmission of national history. Many of the women we interviewed did not go to school or left school very early (only three of them had a school degree and two tried to engage on a path to higher education)[4].

In contrast, their perception of Europe is connected to the current conflict situation and to the idea of getting some help from western people and countries. In Somalia, images of Europe and more broadly of Western countries are shaped by the presence of NGO workers helping Somali and particularly displaced people in Somalia. Some (few) references were also made to the US army intervention in Somalia from 1992 to 1994.

History and culture were also used as a reference to a common historical and cultural background between Malta (or sometimes Europe) and Somalia: a couple of women we met in Balzan highlighted the fact that Somalia and Malta were both part of an Arabic-speaking area (the Maltese national language is a dialect of Arabic) and that, for this reason, it was not difficult to engage in communication and even friendship with the Maltese people.

L., a Somali cultural mediator, made a short presentation during the workshop on Somali women organized by IRMCo in October 2010. She showed some pictures of Mogadisho and one of them represented a church. More than a reference to colonialism, showing a picture of a church was interpreted by the Somali cultural mediator as a way to show the Maltese people that there was somehow a common cultural background between the two countries and that people of Christian belonging may be found also in Somalia.

[4]Somali women tend to drop out of school in their early teens, when they have reached 'mature' womanhood. Mothers encourage their retirement from school out of apprehension for their safety and 'honour' (Mohamed Abdi 2007).

In opposition to Europe, some of the women we met in Balzan referred to the Islamic world (*Dar al Islam*) as a cultural and solidarity area. It is referred to in three cases:

- when referring to the human and financial support they got from their Somali "travel-mates" when travelling through Africa. Women refer to a "built community alongside the trajectory", a kind of community of brotherhood that is made of Somali people sharing the same fate and stories. Many women said they made very good "travel mate" friends.
- when referring to Islamic informal credit systems such as *hawala* that are crucial to the success of the migratory experience.
- when referring to the disappointment they felt when they were in Libya which should have been, according to one of the women we met, a welcoming country because it was a Muslim country. All the women we met experienced violence, humiliation and racism from the part of Libyan people.

2 Europe as a possibility of access to modernity

2.1 Europe as a safe haven

The women we met perceive Europe as a safe haven, as opposed to Somalia, Libya and the Mediterranean.

The first reason why Europe is perceived as a safe haven is the ongoing civil war in Somalia (see annex). All the women we met experienced or lived in fear of violence due to the current conflict. Indeed, all the women we met said that violence was the first reason why they decided to leave Somalia.

We met with J. in the single women Hal Far centre. She is 30 years old and says she left Somalia because of the ongoing conflict. Her husband, her parents, one sister and her 8 month old baby died in 2002 because a bombshell fell on their house. She decided to leave the country in 2008. She left 3 of her children in Somalia. She lost all contact with two of them. She has another son living in the UK.

More often however, economic reasons are intertwined with political ones. Women decide to move abroad to help their families. JA., 20 years old, says:

> *I left Somalia because of the fights. You don't have any peace, anything. I live in front of the university. The government armies and the union court they always fight and fight. I cannot go to the university where I study. I was studying nursing: I had to go 6 months to university and then 3 months internship to hospital. But I had to leave my university because I don't have*

any money. My family is really low. My husband does not have any education.

There are also reasons to leave Somalia that are specific to women: the current conflict in Somalia generates gender-oriented violence. Such a violence has taken on a number of forms. Soldiers and civilian men have utilised sexual violence against women as a weapon of humiliation and a punishment on them and their men.

Single women in particular - not married yet, divorced or widows - are particularly vulnerable. It is worth noting here that female headed households in Somalia have become more common as a result of the conflict claiming lives of Somali men (Hopkins 2010). As a matter of fact, most of the women arriving in Malta are indeed either single mothers or single women.

In moments of crises and conflict women's social roles, identity, self-representation and other modes of embodiment become the focal points for "male identity constructions" (Mohamed Abdi 2007: 184). This is seen in the extremist interpretations adopted in post-war Somalia by Islamist far-rightists, which focused on the control of women's sexuality and led to an increase of violence against women, thus creating an environment of fear and insecurity[5] (Mohamed Abdi 2007).

Many of the women we met said they left because they were kidnapped or because they feared being taken by force.

We met S. at the single women Hal Far centre. She is 33 years old and comes from Mogadisho. Last time she saw her family was in 2001. She had been kidnapped in 2001 by army militia with three other girls, one of whom was her sister-in-law. Her husband was killed by the Al Shabaab militia. She has 8 children but got some news from only 2 of them.

We met Sa., 22 years old, at the single women Hal Far centre. She arrived in Malta in June 2007. She left Somalia because of the fights. She says she

needed a place to save herself. In Somalia there are so many men that want to take you by force. Many men use force. They use force to marry you, you are taken by force. If you are a married woman you are safe but if you are a girl alone, with no marriage, no husband, somebody can take you by force.

When we ask H., 22 years old, to tell us why she decided to leave Somalia she replies:

I did not decide anything, I did not decide to leave. I wanted to live with my family but there was more and more fighting. My

[5] In saying this we are not stating that Islam is a violent or discriminatory religion. The interpretations or rather 'misinterpretations' of Islam allow for the construction of a dogma motivated by a political agenda that reinforces the establishment of a patriarchal social-structure.

father said if you stay here there will be more problems. He was afraid I would be kidnapped. The militias kidnapped my father, they asked for money and let him go. So he was afraid for me. Also my mother was worried for me [...] They take the women that are not married, they rape the women, the militias. I went through Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Libya. I left Somalia on my own. I had some money from my father, enough to pay everything. I used to call him on my way because I could not take everything, all the money, with me.

M. 25 years old says "One day some men came home, they were from the militia and wanted to rape me. They hurt all the women". She ran away. Her grandmother told her to escape, she gave her cash. She did not have time to say goodbye, and left her children with her mother.

The perception of Europe as a safe haven is not only shaped by the vision and the situation in the country of origin but also influenced by the experience of the migratory journey. Europe is perceived as safe compared to the difficulties, violence and obstacles women have to face alongside their trajectories, especially in Libya and when crossing the Mediterranean.

Libya as a site of increasing vulnerability

The journey to Europe is long and arduous. Women have to cross Ethiopia or Kenya and Uganda, then Sudan and finally Libya to arrive to Europe. Throughout the journey to Europe women tend to be more vulnerable than men, because they are more prone to gender-oriented violence (JRS Malta 2009b).

Over the last decade Libya has become a major transition point for refugees and migrants attempting to infiltrate Europe's borders by boat. Scores of migrants invariably end up in Malta, Lampedusa and Sicily. Although many are granted asylum, the recent trend with Italy has been to return migrants to Libya following a deal forged between the two countries in 2004[6]. Once in Libya migrants face an uncertain future, with reports and testimonials filtering out, of unacceptable detention conditions, torture, beatings and murder at the hands of the Libyan police and armed forces[7]. Recent agreement between Italy and Libya, which provoked a stop in the arrival of boat people, is particularly alarming as regards the situation of immigrants in Libya.

There is no system of protection of refugees and Libya is not a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention. Furthermore, UNHCR is not recognised in Libya

[6] Andrijasevic 2006: 121-122.

[7] Baldwin-Edwards 2006, JRS Malta 2009, RDCI (Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland) 2009, http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com

and effectively Libya has no immigration policy that makes a distinction between legal and illegal immigrants (Baldwin-Edwards 2006).

In the last two years Somali migrants detained for periods of up to eighteen months in Libya have given testimonials of their treatment. They have been subjected to beatings and torture and bear the marks of operations carried out without anaesthetic. Migrants and refugees are crammed into tiny cells with contaminated water and inedible food. They are refused medical treatment and many have contracted diseases and perished. Escorted to the desert beyond the Libyan border, many die through lack of water and food[8]. Immigrants confirm that the only way out of a Libyan prison is to pay, usually up to a thousand dollars. Many times immigrants are re-arrested shortly after exiting the prison (JRS Malta 2009).

S. went to Libya, to Benghazi. In Benghazi she got closed in a room with a guy that locked her up because he wanted money. There were 18 persons in a small room. Eventually she got some help from her family living in the US (her mother's uncle, whom she never met).

Ja. says: "I crossed the Sahara by Lorry. Then I came to Trables. I stayed for one month in jail in Libya (Trables), because I had no passport".

> *I crossed Libya by lorry (the lorry was driven by a Libyan guy). In Libya I went to Benghazi. I stayed in jail for 20 days in Benghazi. I had only a Somali passport* [she paid 100 dollars for this passport at the market] *and the police took me when I was going from Benghazi to Trables. In jail there were 800 people from Somalia and Eritrea. People had to pay to get out but I did not have any money.* (Faouzia)

So. says she stayed for 10 months in Libya. She stayed for 3 months in jail (in Trables and Kufra), and had to pay 200 dinar to get out of the jail.

Undoubtedly the issue of gender-oriented violence in the case of Somali women in Libya leaves little to the imagination (Mohamed Abdi 2007, Schafer 2002). In one particular case on 30th August 2009, a boat carrying 81 Somalis from Tripoli to Italy was rejected by the Italian authorities. During their journey immigrants stated that they would rather risk the war in Mogadishu, rather than return to Libya. They were returned to Libya and on arrival, the 17 women on board were separated from the men, who were taken to separate detention centres[9]. Due to the stigma attached to rape, it is common for Somali women to deny being assaulted (Ahmed 1999, JRS Malta 2009b, Schafer 2002).

The fact that many Somali migrant women travel unaccompanied by their husbands raises serious questions as to the arrival of so many pregnant

[8] JRS Malta 2009, http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com

[9] http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com

Somali women in Malta and Italy, following extended periods of detention in Libya (JRS Malta 2009, http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com).

M., 25 years old, was pregnant when she arrived in Malta. The father of her now 18 months baby is from Libya. She has no contact with him: "I don't want to hear about him" she says.

The women we met, when they were not in detention, used to work in Libya. Indeed some of them had to spend quite a long period of time in Libya either because they had to gather some money, or because they were waiting for their husbands to cross the Mediterranean. They all complained about their working conditions in Libya.

Sa., 22 years old, lived in Tripoli for 10 months. She did not like it: "Libyan people are racist if they see you they will tell you go back to Somalia, they ask you if you have money, a thousand dollars, you will pay if you don't have you have to go back to Somalia". The family she worked for was not nice. They gave her only 200 dollars for 10 months. "In Libya it is difficult to live, you are always frightened, that is why I wanted to go away".

So., 27 years old, lived in Libya. She used to work in homes, to clean. Sometimes her employers did not pay her and told her that if she complained they would call the police. She worked at the hospital in Libya in cardiology. They also did not pay her sometimes.

Women's narratives about the Mediterranean

The second important site of increasing vulnerability along the migratory path is the Mediterranean.

Women paid around 1 000 dollars to embark on the boats. When they are on the boat they are given a GPS, but the direction the boat will take is mostly dependent on the winds. Women do not have a precise idea of where to go. Though the reputation of Italy seems to be better compared to Malta, they have a quite fatalistic approach to the journey and see it as a matter of luck or fate. The most important words that come to women in referring to this journey is "thirst", "hot", "fear" and "overcrowded boats".

> *There were 118 persons on the boat. There were some other Africans - Nigerians - and they wanted to kill us, to throw us in the water. The Nigerians did not want Malta. They left for Italy. When they arrived in Malta they said they do not want to stay here. So the soldiers helped them to fix their boat and then they left for Italy.* (M., 25 years old)

The above reported situation is interesting because it tells us about the difference between groups, the Nigerians having stronger ethnic networks in Italy, and most significantly, not claiming for protection status in most of the cases.

J. did not know that she was in Malta when she arrived. She doesn't remember it because she stayed in hospital, she learnt that she was in Malta when she woke up in the hospital. When she was on the boat, she knew she was going to Europe, but did not know where exactly. People told her Malta was in Europe so it was ok and of course it was not possible to choose a destination between Malta and Italy... "But compared to Somalia, you know, life is normal here."

S. arrived in Malta in 2006 by boat. There were 28 persons on the boat, there were big waves. Some people fell into the water and died during her trip. "It is your luck whether you sink or you cross". It was June. They were rescued by the army. When she arrived in Malta she went to the closed detention in Hal Far for 4 months. Then she was given rejection and was sent to the open centre. She appealed again and had a second rejection.

Sa. did not know where she was going, she just wanted to leave the country. She arrived in Malta by boat. "When I was in the sea the boat got broken. Then the Maltese police saved us. After that they took us by boat". On the boat there were both women and men, also children. Then they took her and the other travellers to detention. She stayed for 7 months in detention. The 26 persons that were on the boat with her were taken to detention with her to the same detention centre.

Ja. took the boat from Trables. It was two days and three nights travelling. "It was hell" she says. She was 8 months pregnant. "Nothing to drink nothing to eat. I was fearing". She did not know where she was going. She knew she was going to Malta or to Italy. When she arrived in Malta, she went to detention. One day after they took her to Mater Dei Hospital. Then she was sent back to detention and after one week was sent to the open Centre. Then after two weeks she went to hospital. She gave birth in Mater Dei and stayed there three days. Then she was sick in January and stayed for one month in Mater Dei. "Now it's over I am better". The doctor and the nurses were very good to her she says. My friend took care of the baby when I was in hospital. She met her here. She has one other friend here from Somalia.

Z. waited for her husband to join her in Libya and then she directly took the boat. There were 27 persons on the boat. They had GPS. "I did not know where I was going. I just knew I want to go to a safe place" They told you "sometimes you can go to Italy, sometimes you go to Malta". She paid 900 dollars for the boat. When she arrived in Malta she stayed in detention for 5 months. Her husband also stayed for 5 months and then they went to the tents. "In detention you do not have anything, there are many people". She was not in the same room as her husband.

Fa. did not know she was going to Malta when she was on the boat. "In the middle of the sea, there was a storm", she says, "I was frightened". She travelled for two days and two nights. She did not eat anything. The police

rescued her because the boat was sinking (there were 90 persons on the boat, a small boat, with only Somali people, women, men and children). "Malta is good because they saved us". They gave her water and a jacket. Then she went to the migration office (everybody sees a doctor and they have an interview when they arrive) and then she went to detention. She stayed in detention for 3 months (in Ta' Kandja). "Detention is different compared to Libya because when we are in detention in Malta we have a bed, we have everything, in Libya, we have no bed, no mattress, no clothes". They were 14 women in two big rooms. She says "detention was good" (But you could not go out?). "Yes you cannot go out but you had everything that you needed in detention [...] They bring us food. It is like Somali food". They gave her a card to call her family. Then she stayed at the hangar - in a container - for 4 months ("the hangar was good") then she went to the open centre for single women.

Some of the women we met were rescued at sea and taken to Malta[10]. Others were taken when arriving on Maltese shores. In any case, women's narratives tell us that the arrival to Malta corresponds to the moment you can rest in a safe place and finally get some water and some proper food.

M. arrived in Malta in 2008. The Maltese army took her on the boat when she arrived. "When I arrived in Malta, they changed my bad life into good life. I found peace here". She was put in detention but she left soon because she was pregnant and sick: "I stayed in detention for 2 months and 15 days then I was taken to hospital because I was 3 months pregnant and I was bleeding".

2.2 Europe as a place to be granted protection status and some "legal capital" for the family

Europe as a place to be granted protection status

Europe is not only seen as a safe haven compared to Libya and the Mediterranean. It is also considered as a whole under the juridical aspect of the laws and agreements regulating immigrants' mobility (Schengen and Dublin) and a place where to get protection status[11].

Women, at the time they leave Somalia do not really have a specific idea of a country to live in or a final specific destination. They just know

[10] With a total land area of 120 square miles, Malta has a vast and disproportionate search and rescue area, which is in excess of 250,000 square kilometres. The Armed Forces of Malta (AFM) is responsible for the monitoring of this area and offering assistance to vessels and illegal immigrants in distress within this area (http://www.sarmalta.gov.mt/).

[11] Under the 1951 Geneva Convention, especially following the war in Yugoslavia, the EU is obliged to grant asylum to Somali refugees and provide security, in the case of women within the context of gender-oriented violence (Baldwin-Edwards 2006, JRS Malta 2009, Schafer 2002). Malta became subject to the Dublin Convention upon joining the EU in 2004.

they want to get protection status in a country where they can get a better quality of life. For those who do not have the opportunity to fly (to the United States for instance), Europe is seen as the best destination to be granted protection.

The most important vector of representation of Europe as a place to be granted protection status is the Somali community in Europe. Many European countries were known by the women we interviewed because they had contacts (friends, neighbours, family) there:

- the UK (which is the first destination country for Somali migrants in Europe with 70 000 migrants).
- France.
- Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Norway).

The women we interviewed however had also some contacts in other countries around the world[12]. Europe is seen as part of a broader differentiated framework of opportunities that covered the United States (Minneapolis), Uganda, Kenya and Yemen[13].

. . . and where to get a "legal capital"

Europe is seen as a place to gain a "legal capital": being granted a protection status provides opportunities that benefit the whole transnational family network (Al-Sharmani 2006). Interestingly enough, all the women we met were the eldest daughters in their families: it seems that within the "family economy", the eldest daughter is the one that endorses the responsibility for engaging in a migratory journey (but also maybe because she is the most vulnerable). Many of the women we met were given money from their family counterparts (father, mother, grandma. . .) to engage on their journey. From this point of view, women trajectories were strongly embedded within household strategies.

> *My brothers and sisters they would like to come like me, because there are too many problems. . . but they would not take the same path as me. I did it because I was the eldest, it will not be so difficult for them.* (So.)

[12]It is worth noting here that the Somalis are considered as one of the most dispersed migrants groups with large refugee groups in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, North America and Australia (Al Sharmani 2010).

[13]Yemen and Kenya are countries where the largest groups of Somali refugees in the world live (about 290 000 Somalis live in Kenya and 150 000 in Yemen; UNHCR 2009).

A place to start a new life

The choice of Europe as a destination is thus embedded within family strategies. More rarely Europe is seen as a way to emancipate from the family: only one of the women we met made her decision in conflict with her own family - and particularly her father. She says that it is the first reason why she left Somalia, the only example we have in our sample of what we could call "love migration".

> *I married with the man I love. But my father and his father they do not want me to marry him. My father said I will kill you [. . .] My husband is from a different clan and my parents wanted me to marry somebody else"* [A friend of her helped her to cross the border to Ethiopia by car. Now she is in touch with her parents] *"now I am there and they cannot do anything to me* (Z., 23 years old)

Europe may be also seen as a place to start a new life, when women meet a new partner or get pregnant - in short, when they build a new family - alongside their trajectory.

Two of the women we met fell in love with one of their "travel counterparts" on their way to Europe. As a consequence they may have ambivalent feelings between loyalty to the part of their family that stayed in Somalia (especially their children) and the possibility to start a new life in Europe with their "new family".

2.3 Europe as a differentiated space of opportunities

Ambivalent feelings regarding Malta: disappointment and difficulties

During their stay in Malta, women's vision of Europe is refined and précised and they have to face ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, they feel their situation notably improved. On the other hand, they experience several difficulties and problems on a daily basis that are detrimental to their image of Malta and Europe. First, they experience detention and legal obstacles to family reunion (see above). Then, they make the concrete experience of racism: two of the women we met, for instance, told us about the fact that when they are waiting alone at a bus stop, very often the bus does not stop.

Women's daily experience and difficulties are actually gendered.

The Maltese management of migration and migration policy is gendered: women have to live in separate centres and the length of the stay in detention differs according to gender (there are specific centres for single women and families as stated above). When they move to open centres, women are still

separated from men and usually get better accommodation than men. Separation is of course a way to protect women from possible problems arising from the presence of their male counterparts and an answer to NGOs criticisms on women vulnerability in detention. However, separation and control of women lives is also a feature of what can be called, following geographer Rachel Silvey, an uneven "spatiality of power" (Silvey 2006). For instance, visits to the Hal Far single women centre are forbidden at night time and visits from men are always forbidden.

> *I meet other Somali men from the other centres. We meet outside because men cannot come here in the centre. I have a boyfriend for one year and a half. He is nice. But he cannot come here.* (X.)

In the family centre women have to obtain an authorization from their husbands if they are to receive any visit from other men. For the women that got married in Malta, the marriage is not recognized as valid by the open centres' managers so that they have to live separately from their husbands even when they have kids together.

Another gendered feature of women's daily experience in Malta regards their experience of the labour market. Women find jobs in an ethnically and sexually segmented labour market: some of the women we met worked in factories, but most of them had experience in cleaning homes or hotels. All the women we interviewed said it was difficult to find a job especially in the current context of economic hardship. The women that had children with them did not find time to work. They then had to rely upon the small allowance they get from the state and people's charity.

The relationships between women are also critical to the understanding of the gendered experience of Malta. Women - differently from men - prefer to live with women sharing the same national origin. They usually share activities and household duties with other women. However there is a kind of climate of mistrust in the way they relate to one another.

> *I do not have friends here... I don't have time for friendship. I prefer to pray.* (J.)

Women often say they suffer from the too close proximity with other women in the centre. In the Hal Far single women centre, for instance, 7 to 9 women have to share the same room. This, as well as the unsanitary situation, creates many tensions between women.

Moving within Europe and the institutional context

Due to the difficulties they experience in Malta, women want to live in another European country. As a matter of fact, most of the women we

met already had some experiences of mobility in Europe (the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Norway) where they applied for asylum[14]. All of them were resent or came back to Malta due to the Dublin agreement as it states that illegal immigrants must remain tied to the EU country in which they first arrive, and in which they first apply for asylum.

The Dublin Convention has placed Malta at a disadvantage in comparison to the rest of the EU. The convention excludes indeed the difficulties faced by countries occupying the external borders of the EU. The concept of "burden-sharing" in response to this "oversight", allows refugees to resettle in other EU states that are better equipped to cope with such an influx of immigrants [15].

Recently around 500 beneficiaries of international protection from Malta were resettled to the US. About another 300 persons were relocated to other EU countries. The European Re-Allocation for Malta (EUREMA) pilot project is trying now to follow up this task[16].

This new institutional context - which is usually referred to as the European "burden sharing" policy - is very important to the understanding of immigrants' visions of Europe. This context of reallocation policy contributes to give migrants a sense of hope but also a sense that their situation in Malta is purely transitory. This procedure became the most valuable opportunity for the women we met so that their migratory project completely changed in the last two years. All the women we met desired to be resettled in another country, be it European or not.

This desire for resettlement is embodied, for instance during one of the observations Camille Schmoll conducted at the Balzan centre where she was involved in a hair dying session for a woman that was going to be resettled in the US (Arizona). This desire to be resettled is of course connected to

[14]When they started their asylum application procedure in Malta, they were granted a travel document.

[15]http://www.socialwatch.eu/wcm/documents/Malta.pdf,
http://www.tppi.org.mt/cms/reports/Irregular-Migration/Report.pdf

[16]This project which stems out of the European Union's Pact for Immigration and Asylum implements one of the European Council Conclusions of June 2009. The departure follows a referral process conducted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the IOM, the governmental Agency for Welfare of Asylum Seekers and the Malta Emigrants' Commission and a selection mission by the host country authorities. The requirements for resettlement regard basically status and vulnerability, language and professional experience. To date several persons have already moved to the other participating Member States: France (95 + 95 in 2009), Luxembourg (6), UK (10), Germany (96) and Portugal (6). The project is still going on. It is coordinated by the Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs and co-financed by the EU, and it is intended to benefit around 255 persons with international protection and includes the participation of 10 other Member States, namely: France, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the UK. The project, set to be concluded in 2011 includes a number of cultural orientation sessions conducted in Malta as well as an integration package in the hosting country.

the evolution of the regulatory framework. However, it is also connected to the fact that Malta still perceives itself as a transit country. In other words, it seems that women, when they arrived in Malta, had the idea of obtaining protection status on the island and to set off in another direction to a certain extent. Their project completely changed when they started to experience the fact that Malta was scarcely prepared to welcome them.

Regions of Europe

Somali women see European space as differentiated into regions which correspond to a geography of asylum, social networks, opportunities, travelling experiences and reputations. At least three different Europe(s) may be found in their narratives: the first one is the Europe of Somali transnational networks which covers the UK, the Scandinavian countries, and the Netherlands. It covers the countries where traditionally the Somali transnational communities used to settle. This Europe is experienced by women through travel and contacts (e-mails, telephone calls).

Ji. has a son living in the UK. She calls him frequently. He goes to school, he is doing well. He tells her about his life. Sometimes she sends money to her child in the UK when she earns enough (60 euros). She writes to her son through the internet, she has pictures of him. She uses e-phone. But she has no contact with her children in Somalia.

This first Europe differs from the "new Europe of reallocation" (France, Germany, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia) which is not very well known by the women but represents a kind of hope for their situation to improve and especially to reunify with their family. Ji. says "I am not lucky. 3 women of my boat a year ago left for France, and I am still staying in Malta."

The third Europe regards Malta, towards which women have ambivalent feelings, of bitter disappointment and gratitude.

3 Europe and its borders

At the moment they arrive in Malta Somali women do not have a very clear idea of the European and local migration policy framework. Very soon, the concrete negative experience of Malta and European migration policies contributes to deteriorate their image of Europe. Three particular moments and experiences contribute to deteriorate their vision of Malta and Europe.

The experience of detention

All the women we met - with the exception of one who was very sick - stayed in detention for a period of 2 months to 7 months. According to Médecins du Monde's report on detention in Malta, detention conditions are particularly

detrimental to immigrants' physical and mental health. This is particularly true for women. UNHCR representatives we discussed with reported for instance that women in detention did not have any separated space from the men to shower. Médecins du monde reports states that:

> *Main areas of concern are the existing conditions of overcrowding, and cohabitation, disastrous sanitary facilities, a lack of bottled drinking water especially for pregnant women, lactating mothers and babies and the lack of meaningful activities. A major point of concern is the detention of single women together with men in Hal Far detention Center.* (MDM 2007)

Impossibility to reunify

The impossibility to reunify with their family and, as a consequence, to think of a life project locally because Malta does not recognize the possibility for immigrants under subsidiary protection to reunify with their family. J. says "Anywhere I would go. I wanted only my son. Only my son". W. says as well:

> *Malta is a good place to live, they give me money, it is very good, but every time I think of my children I cry. I cannot stay in Malta I have to go to another place where I can take my children. Malta cannot help me because they cannot give me my children... I would go to any European country that would take my children... If Malta would have taken my children, it would have been the best place in the world.*

Applying for asylum

Deportation and the embodiment of the juridical borders many women have experienced when applying for asylum in other European countries. Their experience of the Dublin convention is embodied in the process of finger imprints (because of the recent Eurodac European finger imprint system) and forced return. There is a process of self-identification with the Dublin convention (some of the women we met used to say "I am Dublin" to refer to the fact that they were registered in the Eurodac database).

J. says: "In Sweden, the problem is finger imprint. They told me. If you did not have it we would have kept you." X. says: "Some people said Sweden is a good country, my friends in Sweden. I have a girlfriend in Sweden, sometimes she sends me e-mails and she says 'Sweden is a good country'. So I called her I said 'I want to come to Sweden'. She said you can come. I stayed 3 months and then I decided I want to come back to Malta. I decided to go back because in Sweden I lost my chances... When I was in Sweden I asked for asylum but they did not take me because I have finger imprints."

Conclusions

Different conclusions can be drawn from the results we have presented in this paper. First of all, Somali women's vision of Europe is ambivalent: Europe is both a space of opportunity where one can get protection and legal capital for the whole family and a space where one experiences racism, detention as well as several institutional obstacles. Somali women's visions of Europe are highly connected to institutional factors that determine whether they should go into detention or not, their possibility to get protection, to circulate within the EU space, to reunify with their family, etc. Other factors are also important though, such as gender, their family situation, social networks and the presence of the Somali community in Europe.

Moreover, the knowledge, the experience and the image of Europe is constructed alongside the trajectories. This construction of Europe is connected to a process of redefinition of one's own identity and projects as well as a negotiation of social boundaries. Because, as described above, the reality of Europe is not as expected at the beginning, since women made friends and sometimes fell in love and even got pregnant during the migration process, because the regulatory framework is continuously evolving, for all these reasons, women's material experience and image of Europe evolves continuously. From this point of view, visions of Europe are connected to women's concrete experience and they are embodied in them.

Another conclusion that we can draw from our results is that we need a critical approach to the idea of a "transit country": the idea of transit and the migratory projects evolves according to the evolution of Somali women single situations and the evolution of the institutional and policy framework.

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Detention in Malta

From closed detention to the Open Centres

Malta is the only EU member state that has a policy of automatic detention for any illegal immigrants arriving at its shores[17]. There is no indication in Maltese law of a specific period or maximum length of time for the detention of illegal immigrants. The normal period climbs up to 18 months - following the UE regulation - even though there have been cases that have exceeded this time frame[18]. Immigrants are taken to one of three closed detention centres, namely: Lyster Barracks, Safi closed centre and Ta' Kandja centre. Illegal immigrants spend months in the closed detention centres waiting for their applications for asylum to be processed[19]

The closed detention centres and Malta's 'automatic detention' policy have been under attack by various NGOs, as well as the Council of Europe, on the grounds that they are in violation of human rights and the 1951 Convention on Refugees [20]. Furthermore, a UN working group on detention described the Maltese closed centres in 2009 as appalling, and the conditions detrimental to detainees' health. In fact immigrants are detained before undergoing 'proper' medical screening. They are placed in quarters where they are in very close contact with one another and thus sick individuals risk placing the healthy in danger[21]. Maltese authorities justify the detention policy, stating that it is needed to ascertain the personal identities of the immigrants, and to process their requests for asylum. The Maltese authorities also state that the long periods of detention allow for the gradual release of immigrants into the community, which minimises the social consequences a large influx may have on the Maltese society [22]. Single women, women with children, couples and families with children live in separate closed centres. The immigrants are forced to live in extremely cramped conditions in the closed centres, and lack privacy. There are very few toilets and showers to be shared amongst hundreds of immigrants and they are extremely unhygienic (JRS Malta 2009b, http://www.kirchenasyl.de/).

The closed centres are especially daunting for women, who are detained in Hermes block at Lyster barracks. Although women liven in separate closed

[17]http://www.tppi.org.mt/cms/reports/Irregular-Migration/Report.pdf

[18] http://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/europe/malta/introduction.html

[19]http://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/europe/malta/introduction.html, http://www.tppi.org.mt/cms/reports/Irregular-Migration/Report.pdf

[20]http://www.tppi.org.mt/cms/reports/Irregular-Migration/Report.pdf

[21]http://www.socialwatch.eu/wcm/documents/Malta.pdf

[22]http://www.kirchenasyl.de/, http://www.socialwatch.eu/wcm/documents/Malta.pdf, http://www.tppi.org.mt/cms/reports/Irregular-Migration/Report.pdf

centres, they still have mixed-sex accommodation. This makes them all the more vulnerable through lack of privacy and safety, as well as cases of rape being recorded. There have also been many recorded instances of abuse, both verbal and physical from the part of staff. On top of this there is a lack of basic needs, including access to adequate food, water and medical attention, and they are denied access to open air or social visits from persons outside the detention centre (JRS Malta 2009b).

Once an irregular immigrant has gone through the application for asylum, his/her application may be accepted or rejected. If rejected, the irregular immigrant will usually have to remain in the closed detention centre. The applicant is rejected on account that there are no identifiable grounds or reasons for offering him/her protection. Rejected applicants are not entitled to any social benefits or allowances[23] and will remain for a minimum of eighteen months in the closed detention centres, after which they are released to fend for themselves. There are very few deportations, because of the lack of diplomatic ties that Malta has with other African nations and the unavailability of joint flights to immigrants' respective countries in Africa. Most rejected applicants are labelled as "economic migrants"[24]. Those applicants whose claims are accepted, are granted asylum and are entitled to social benefits and allowances depending on their status. Furthermore they are allowed to leave the closed detention centres and are entitled to free accommodation in the open centres. Since January 2007, immigrants in the open centres are entitled to different daily allowances according to their status. Immigrants with 'subsidiary protection' receive a daily allowance of 4.65 euros, are allowed to remain in Malta with freedom of movement, access to employment, appropriate accommodation and medical care. Under this status, an immigrant with subsidiary protection is also entitled to a residence permit and travel documents. This status is issued to people whose country of origin is deemed too dangerous to return to[25]. Applicants who have been awarded refugee status are given the same benefits as those with subsidiary protection. However, in addition they are also entitled to travel freely within the EU without a visa, family dependants are also rewarded refugee status and they receive a weekly allowance of 81.20 euros plus 8.14 euros for every dependant[26].

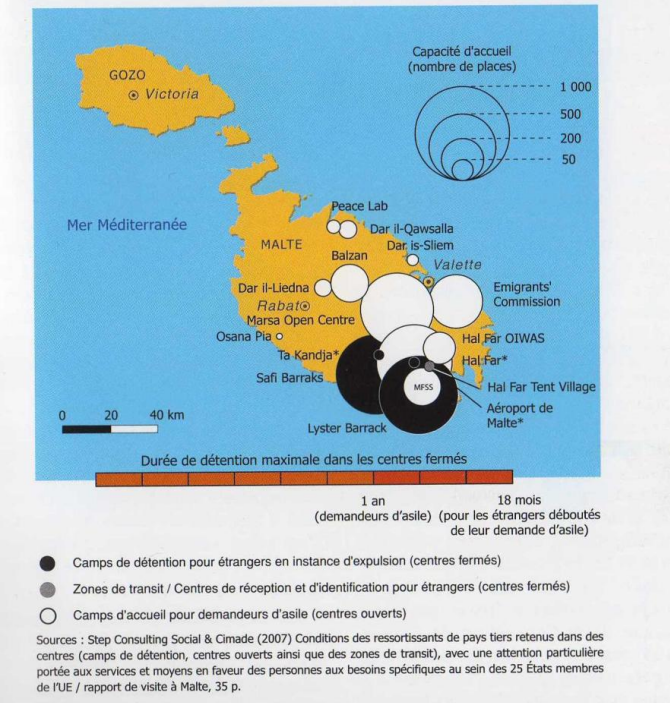
Rejected asylum seekers were entitled to 3.5 euros a day. However since April 2009 a new policy put forward by OAIWAS (Organisation for the Inte-

[23]Following their forced departure from open centres after 6 months. This point is elaborated on further on. However, there seems to be confusion as to the status of rejected asylum seekers and what they are entitled to once liberated from closed centres. In reference to this see: http://www.kirchenasyl.de/, http://www.socialwatch.eu/wcm/documents/Malta.pdf and http://www.mjha.gov.mt.

[24]http://www.kirchenasyl.de/

[25]http://www.mjha.gov.mt, http://www.socialwatch.eu/wcm/documents/Malta.pdf

[26]http://www.socialwatch.eu/wcm/documents/Malta.pdf



Source: Clochard and Migreurop, 2009.

gration and Welfare of Asylum Seekers), limits the stay for rejected asylum seekers in the open centres to six months. Following this period rejected asylum seekers are no longer entitled to social security benefits, and were it not for independent NGOs they would not even have the means for basic survival[27]. This goes against the objective of the open centres, which are meant to provide support to immigrants and help towards their integration into Maltese society.

Civil war in Somalia

A Brief History of a 'Failed State'

Situated on the East coast of Africa, bordering the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, Somalia shares a border with Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. The encompassed area is known as the Horn of Africa. Somalia has a population of 10.112.453 spread over an area of 627.337 km^2, which is mostly flat undulated plateau rising to hills in the north[28].

Somalia saw an end to its Colonial era in 1960 following a ten year pe-

[27] http://www.socialwatch.eu/wcm/documents/Malta.pdf
[28] https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/so.html#top

riod of Italian trusteeship over the area, with the aim of preparing the region for independence. After only five days of independence from 26-30th June 1960, the separate states of Somalia and Somaliland confederated (Anonymous 2002)[29]. The region of Somalia has always been plagued by strong clan divisions and sub-divisions, resulting in internal conflict and competition over limited resources. This particular aspect of Somali social structure is essential in understanding the ongoing conflicts in the region. The Italians distorted and politicized clan hierarchies by rewarding loyal elders and punishing disloyal elders and by retaining a monopoly over trade and commerce (ibid. 2009). In this way local structures for conflict resolution and reconciliation were distorted.

In 1969 a coup placed General Mohammed Siyad Barre in power of the newly formed socialist state of Somalia, thus opening up Somalia to the support of the Soviet Union. He outlawed clans and rejected tribalism and stripped elders of judicial authority (Draper 2009). During this period Somalia was accused of supporting revolutions and armed conflicts in the 'Somali' areas of the neighbouring countries of Ethiopia, Djibouti and North-Eastern Kenya. Of particular importance was the invasion of the Somali-dominated area of Ogaden in Ethiopia in 1977. Although initially successful the invasion was repelled in 1978, following the Soviet Union's support of a newly-established Marxist state of Ethiopia. The latter conflict has been the cause of continual tensions between Somalia and Ethiopia since. Siyad Barre was ousted in 1991 by Hawiye militias and Somalia has not had an officially recognized government since (ibid. 2009).

The Root of the Ongoing Conflict

Months after the removal of Siyad Barre, the north-western region of Somaliland declared its independence. In 1998 two more secessions took place with the north-eastern formation of Puntland and the southern formation of Jubaland. Although relatively more stable, the independent government of Somaliland has failed to gain recognition by the international community. This is due to the fact that newly emerging political entities in post-colonial Africa have the reputation of turning sour and are viewed with suspicion as they tend to lead to turmoil and conflict (Anonymous 2002). The Somali National Peace conference held in Arta in 2000, established that since clan rivalries had torn Somalia apart, then reconciliation could only be achieved through the reconciliation of these clans. The formation of the TNG (Transitional National Government) in 2000 was internationally recognized as the way forward for creating a united Somalia (ibid. 2002). The TNG in 2004

[29]The article (referenced below) was written by an active member of an international organization in Somalia and thus, his/her identity has been concealed in order to protect the anonymity of the organization involved.

became the TFG (Transitional Federal Government)[30]. By the end of 2000 the TNG had resumed Somalia's seat at the UN as well as membership to all other relevant regional organizations.

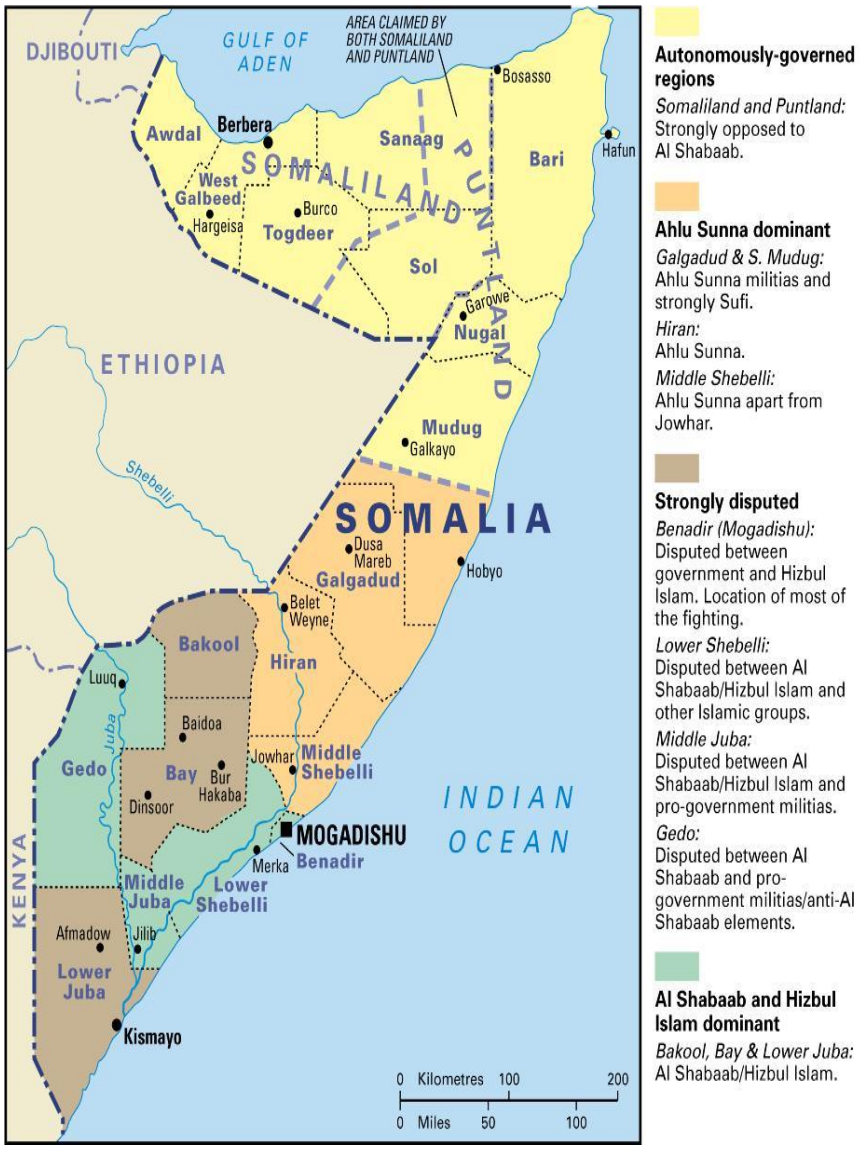
However, the incapability of the TFG to maintain control and authority in the major part of Somalia and indeed in the capital of Mogadishu, has led to further conflicts throughout the region. In fact Somalia as a whole represents a model for 'complete state failure' (Anonymous 2002: 252). Ethiopian military have continually intervened in south-western Somalia, especially following numerous terrorist attacks by Somali insurgents in Ethiopia, most notably in Addis Ababa in 1996 (and continually since). Since the Arta process, the socio-political situation has continued to decline. The chaos has invited a hoard of foreign fighters who view themselves as involved in a global jihad. The northern coastline has become a base for pirates attacking sea traffic between Europe and the East. Rural and to an extent urban Somalia has become home to Islamist extremist militia. Most notable amongst them is the Al Shabaab.

Besides ongoing conflicts between Islamist groups and between Islamist groups and the TFG, there was also an invasion in 2006 (the war lasted till 2009) by Ethiopian troops to oust a short-lived Islamic government (Draper 2009).

The region of Mogadishu from which the women we interview come from, is a major site of conflict as a contested capital city and is disputed by the government and Al Shabaab militias.

Since the removal of Siyad Barre in 1991 in Somalia, and the resultant breakdown of the country into chaos, over a million Somalis fled their homes for neighbouring countries. Many migrations have embarked on gruelling journeys outside the conflict zones to refugee camps located in Kenya, Yemen and Somaliland (Draper 2009). The difficulty presented by the precarious human rights and economic situations in neighbouring African and North-African countries, provides very few options for refugees attempting to find asylum (Schafer 2002). Others have attempted the arduous journey across Sub-Saharan and Saharan Africa to Europe. Most countries recognize Somali passports issued before 1991, the validity of which are now expired. There is no recognized Somali Authority to issue travel documents, hence Somalis outside of Somalia find themselves in an illegal position without the possibility of reversing their stance (Anonymous 2002).

[30]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Somalia



Autonomously-governed regions

Somaliland and Puntland: Strongly opposed to Al Shabaab.

Ahlu Sunna dominant

Galgadud & S. Mudug: Ahlu Sunna militias and strongly Sufi.

Hiran: Ahlu Sunna.

Middle Shebelli: Ahlu Sunna apart from Jowhar.

Strongly disputed

Benadir (Mogadishu): Disputed between government and Hizbul Islam. Location of most of the fighting.

Lower Shebelli: Disputed between Al Shabaab/Hizbul Islam and other Islamic groups.

Middle Juba: Disputed between Al Shabaab/Hizbul Islam and pro-government militias.

Gedo: Disputed between Al Shabaab and pro-government militias/anti-Al Shabaab elements.

Al Shabaab and Hizbul Islam dominant

Bakool, Bay & Lower Juba: Al Shabaab/Hizbul Islam.