IDENTITY AND BODY BORDERS: THE PERCEPTION OF THE KENYA SOMALIA BORDER

Agnes Wanjiru Behr

PhD. Candidate, United States International University-Africa

Email: abehr2015@gmail.com

Abstract:

Purpose: The study sought to understand how the identity of the ethnic Somalis and the geographic settings inform the perception of the Kenya-Somalia border.

Methodology: The research took a poststructuralist approach via qualitative methodology where information was derived from five focus groups, key informants and one on one interviews from Garissa and Mandera Counties in the period of 2016-2017. Besides, observations, field experiences, films, and documentaries helped to triangulate the findings for validity purposes. Additionally, historiography was employed through archival materials from the Kenya National Archives.

Result: The study shows that body borders elasticizes the Kenya-Somalia border and makes it spatial. Second, ethnic Somalis elastic view of the border through the body is a means of survival but gives the perception to the Kenyan government that the border community does not recognize the international border. Furthermore, the pastoral-nomadic norms of the ethnic Somalis shows elastic view of the Kenya-Somalia border due to the arid to semi-arid territory which calls for negotiated living spaces as opposed to the static view of the same by Kenyan governments.

The unique contribution to the theory, practice and policy: Cognitive psychology, Constructivism and discourse analysis used together shows a pattern derived from everyday discourse and behaviors that shape the thinking on border studies. Language goes beyond verbal communication to a psychological tap that shows the behavior of a community as informed by fears and the need to alleviate the fears. The behaviors shape the norms, and therefore, constructivism displays state behaviors and actions or inaction. Also, transfer of the social-cultural to the state norms shows a divide in border thinking where two or more identities come together. The issue should, therefore, be how to alleviate the fears both current and historical from both the state and ethnic Somalis instead of looking at each as the threat to the other.

Key Words: *Border, Identity, Kenya-Somalia, Body, Power*.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The Kenya-Somalia border carries the history of border contestation between Kenya and Somalia that culminated in the Shifta War of 1963-1968 (Bakpetu, 2015; Nene, 2005). At independence, Kenya insisted that its borders remained as per the colonial government demarcations, (Kenya House of Representatives Debates, 1963). Kenya fought for independence/self-determination of the whole including the contested border districts of the Northern frontier. Somalia had an opposing view that its borders were where ethnic Somalis occupied [The Republic of Somalia Constitution, 1960, 2011, Article 5(4)]. Somalia viewed the lands occupied by ethnic Somalis that were under different colonial governments as lands awaiting self-determination. Somalia did not see it as a border issue with Kenya instead, an issue with colonialism (Simala & Arrous, 2009).

The Republic of Somalia insistence that its borders were where Somalis live became apparent that ethnicity of the Somalis determined the border. Kenya with a multi-ethnic composition could not agree because it meant balkanization of the country into ethnic enclaves. Body borders became a point of contention not just in the physical appearance of the people but also of the land. The NFD Somali inhabited lands differed from non-Somali lands. NFD was arid to semi-arid and promoted a pastoral-nomadic lifestyle other than agricultural. Arid to semi-arid lands require constant movements to allow pasture to grow while at the same time to seek pasture through negotiated communal land use (Nunow, 2014).

The norms of the colonial government and the Somali people separated ethnic Somalis from other Kenyans. This research argues that body borders facilitate negotiated spaces to enhance ethnic Somalis survival but problematizes how Kenya understands ethnic Somalis perception of the Kenya-Somalia border.

1.2 Statement of the Problem.

The Kenya-Somalia border carries the history of the Shifta secession war which took place immediately after independence. The Shifta war was a bid by ethnic Somalis to secede and join the Republic of Somalia. The latter supported the secession move through the Pan-Somali ideal. The ideal looked at the identity of the ethnic Somalis as a means to curve the state borders hence body border. The view of the border did not show how the idea of 'Somaliness' came about, and neither does it inform how it shapes the perception of the Kenya-Somalia border today. The research, therefore, helps to understand the identity and body borders concerning the Kenya-Somalia border.

2.0 THE NOTIONS OF IDENTITY AND BORDER

Identity is complex (Sahlins, 1989). No single identity fully explains who a person is; instead, every individual carries multiple identities. Circumstances at a particular point in time call for a constructed identity while silencing its alternatives. Identity carries significance to the identified and the identifier. To arrive at a consensus on a persons' identity requires an intersubjective agreement of both the identifier and the identified (Wendt, 1991). The question becomes how does a person identify themselves? What informs the chosen identity? How does identity affect the perception of the international border?

Borders create identities and vice versa. Therefore, the idea of fixity or fluidity of identity emerges where debates show two sides in the process of identity creation. The first views identity as fixed. Fixed identities come from the notion of observable, tangible features such as ethnicity, race, and geographical landscape features as a model for constructing identity. The second debate looks at identity as fluid. As a social construction made by man and as such can be un-made and remade through norms and practices.

Identity becomes an agreed feature which captures similarity in a community, geography, ideology, and where both the designer and the designee appear to have consent (Lebow 2008,). In the end, identities are negotiations in daily lived lives of a people. The process involves constructing and reconstructing meanings through the body or spoken language which becomes a norm. Identities are therefore, arbitrary and in constant formation.

Self-identity raises philosophical questions. A person rarely identifies with what he/she perceives as 'bad.' The individual or group identification occurs with the perceived 'good' which means a person elevates an aspect of identity perceived as best while suppressing other aspects qualified as worst. A person or a group interweaves self-conception with good (Taylor, 1989). It follows that an individual or group identity distances self from the bad. Therefore the individual or group curves a moral space with maximum privileges and preferences that places the good within and the bad out there (Ibid).

For a group or person to choose good, bad must be in existence otherwise there is no need for choice. The person, therefore, carries the capacity to locate the good and its' opposite. For example, for a group to identify as marginalized, the affluent must be present in the same space. A location of self thus uses reason, sense, and imagination making identity complex. The self inextricably intertwines with the 'other.' A person constructs their identity using what they visualize as the other (Steans & Pettiford 2005). For example in politics, identity is constructed as a struggle against the adversarial other (Schmitt, 1976). A state identity is considered unique from other bodies of states (Ibid). As a state acquires an identity, its people gain the same status.

Identifiers pair some identities with the physical manifestations such as landmarks, skin color, hair texture, and human body shapes/sizes/features. However, such identities lack meaning when stripped off their social-political meanings, moral space, and privileges. Identity, therefore, informs power to the identified and the identifier. The empowering or dis-empowering of identity could be through the linkage of a persons' physical features to a geographic territory or civic rights in a state. The social-constructions then serve as a mode of governmentality (Foucault, 1982) in managing state borders. It appears that the way a group or individual claims to be known can be un-known and constructed again (Calhoun 1994, p. 7). The process of knowing, therefore, relies heavily on the society embedment of the daily language which creates the norm.

The binary of identities is a fallacy. First, a binary becomes necessary to identify the "us" versus "them" because there is a similarity in the identified. It is useless to separate let us say cows from goats because they are already two different species. If there is a need to separate members of the same species, it implies they are similar which necessitates a further differentiation to create a privileged space for some and not others. In short, the "us" versus "them" emerges because of fears of what sameness brings. Similarity creates competition and the latter constructs differentiation and power (Foucault, 1980) making identity a continuous process with arbitrary stops (Calhoun, 1994).

3.0 THE POWER IN BORDERS

The process of state border formations takes an empowering view, meaning all borders are arbitrary and in constant formations informing shifts in power too. In the late 1960s African states in the Horn underwent decolonization. The colonies were under different administrations such as the British, Italians, and French. Kenya and Somalia were colonized by the British and Italians respectively. Italy also colonized Eritrea. The French colonized Djibouti. Ethiopia did not undergo colonization creating yet another issue on whether it should be considered a colonizer (The Times, 1963). Following Italy defeat in the World War Two, the United Nations General Assembly placed the Italian colonies under the different administrations. Eritrea became a province of Ethiopia and Italian Somali was placed under the UN trusteeship council for ten years to prepare for independence. Somalia preferred Italy to overlook its trusteeship because it was considered weaker compared to other colonizing powers (Interview with a lady from Somalia, 2017).

Italian Somalia was among the decolonizing territories in the Horn. Somalia carries Ethnic Somalis majority. The colonial powers appear to have split ethnic Somalis into five different colonies of Kenya in Northern Frontier Districts (NFD), Ethiopia-Ogaden region, British Somaliland, French Djibouti and Italian Somali. In 1960 British Somaliland became independent followed by Italian Somaliland and the two merged and formed the Republic of Somalia (Hesse, 2010), hereafter Somalia. It appeared the Somali ethnic identity informed the basis for the merger. Somalia symbolized a need for further mergers with ethnic Somali territories through the Pan Somali idea symbolized with a white-five-pointed-star on its light blue flag. The white symbolized unity while the blue color borrows from the United Nations. The flag translates to the United Somali nation.

Countries neighboring Somalia had problems with the idea of an ethnic Somali state. The idea had two problems. The first was that Somalia suppresses the existence on non-Somali ethnic communities within it such as the Oromo and the Bantu (Munene, 2015). Second, an ethnic Somali state meant revising the borders of all countries with ethnic Somalis. In Kenya, it meant ceding NFD to Somalia. Kenya was against NFD secession despite the colonial governments' perception that it was unproductive.

NFD territory is arid to semi-arid, and similar to the Somalia geographic terrain. These similarities inform part of some individuals' perception that the two territories are identified as one. For example, during a focus group discussion in Mandera town, one elder took the researchers to the border and asked us whether we could see any differences in the soil. We responded that it appeared similar. The elder then stated that "when you people think of the border you imagine there is a line running through the land, or a mark that differentiates the two countries, but in reality, the land is the same and so are the people." Body sameness appeared to silence an imagination of the border. The ethnic Somalis also base the similarity of the people on the physical features.

Another elder in Garissa County stated that an ethnic Somali is identifiable by the facial features. According to him "A Somalia has a long thin face with a narrow pointed nose and soft curly hair" (Interview with Abdille, 2016). These attributes separate ethnic Somalis from non-Somali Africans in Kenya. Another Elder in Mandera stated that based on physical features an ethnic Somali from anywhere in the world could travel into Somalia and secure a job or own property (Interview with Mohamed, 2016). Body identity appears to inform civic rights in Somalia.

State identity confers civic rights such as a right to own property, to vote, live anywhere in the country, public service, and goods. These rights are not accessible to outsiders. In Somalia, however, body borders matter. The idea of physical appearance as an identity means that any ethnic Somali is identifiable as a Somalian citizen. The state border becomes spatial, with existence only on papers routing its mobility in the body. To an individual outside the state of Somalia, it implies that citizenship of an ethnic Somali is always in question because, the construction of ethnic Somalis as one in the early 1960s and before that during the colonial period distorted the identity of ethnic Somalis.

3.1 The Colonial Construction of a Somali Race

The colonial construction of the Somali race reflects how colonialists viewed themselves through the 'other.' The often mentioned Caucasian features present in ethnic Somalis such as a narrow pointed nose, long face with somewhat soft hair formed the opinion of colonialists. In a bid to engrain Caucasoid superiority over the "other,' the colonist constructed 'Somaliness' as a race (Nene 2005). In 1905 Sir Charles Elliot recommended that the colony should use the Somali race as *askaris*/Soldiers because "there can be no doubt that they are the most intelligent race in the protectorate," (Elliot 1905, pp. 121-122). Besides in the late 1890s, another British official indicated that "the race, in my opinion, has no equal in this part of Africa either in intelligence or courage" (Foreign office Memo, July 13, 1896). The protectorate appeared to treat the ethnic Somalis as a race superior to Africans. However, it was the colonist bid to elevate own identity against the 'other.'

Concerning administration, the colonial government was paradoxical where ethnic Somalis were concerned. The colonial governments introduced the idea of natives versus non-natives to manage the colonies. Natives were indigenous to the land and were ruled using common law/locals law (Mamdani, 2001; Mamdani, 2012). The non-natives were foreign and assumed civilized thus colonial government used civil law (Ibid). The administration of the ethnic Somalis was ambiguous. For example, the Native Tribunal ordinance and the Pass Rule excluded ethnic Somalis from the definition of "natives." The other Africans in Kenya were subject to native courts. However, the Native Authority Ordinance and Stock Produce Theft Ordinance regarded ethnic Somalis as natives as opposed to the Arabs and Europeans. The colonial policies constructed ethnic Somalis as both natives and non-natives depending on who the other was. Where the 'other' was African, the ethnic Somalis were non-native, but where the 'other' was European or Arab, they became natives. The constructed identity reflected the identifier more than the identified. It led to a creation of an ambiguous Somali identity (Weitzberg, 2017).

In the 1900s the Isaaq Somali rejected a native identity and agitated for a non-native status (Turton, 1974). The Harti Somalis who were also urban business people joined the Isaaq in the agitation. In 1919 the colonial government constructed the Somali Exemption Ordinance (KNA: NFD/1/6. Castagno, 1964) which exempted 'certain Somalis' from poll tax (Turton, 1974). The ambiguity in the ethnic Somali identity was also within the Somali people hence 'certain Somalis' in the exemption ordinance. The ambiguities created regulatory loopholes that allowed construction of a people different from Africans yet not equal to either white Europeans or Arabs. The Somali people, therefore, appeared to internalize the idea of a superior race over the Africans. The division also appeared in the geographic landscape of NFD.

The colonial government separated the administration of NFDs' arid to the semi-arid region through oppressive ordinances. The ordinances restricted the residence from leaving the region or other Kenyans from entering the territory without a pass. One such ordinance was the Special District ordinance of 1934 which lasted up to the immediate pre-independence period. Besides, there were other earlier restrictions such as the sale of animals to other regions in Kenya. The reasons attributed to the ordinance and the restrictions were fear of a continued interaction of Somalis regardless of the state borders and fear of animal diseases that could spread to the white highlands settlements.

The colonial government isolated the NFD and imposed an administrative border between the two halves of the colony. The government required of the Somalis to acquire a special pass to sell the animals outside the NFD (KNA: PC/COAST/1/11/324, 1922). Equally, the colonial government restricted non-Somalis from entering the NFD unless with a special pass. The colonial administration appeared to fear the Somali culture and its potential spread to the rest of the country which led to the declaration of the NFD as a closed region (KNA: PC/NFD/1/4/4, and KNA: NFD/1/4/5, Isiolo District Annual Reports 1955, 1956, and 1959). In 1915 colonial government placed a Martial Law which restricted ethnic Somalis from migrating into British East Africa (KNA: PC/COAST/1/1/229, 1922). The colonial administration separated NFD physically owing to the pastoral-nomadic norms of the residence and the barren land deemed unproductive. The separation enhanced ethnic Somalis affiliations across the colony borders while it restricted the interactions with the heartlands.

In 1962 the colonial government census identified Somalis as a stand-alone race among the Arab, Asians, white European, and Africans (Kenyan Population Census, 1962, p. 76). A Somali was not an African then. Previous manners of governance instilled the notion of a race between Somalis and non-Somalis in Kenya. Around 1962, the NFD had reached its peak with the desires for secession. The closed district ordinance became one of the reasons for separatist call whereby the people felt marginalized, underdeveloped and poorly treated. However, the NFD did not mind the colonial governments' preferential treatment of ethnic Somalis compared to other ethnic groups in matters of race.

Racial hierarchies in the Somali social-cultural identities derive from the myths of origin (Kusow, 2004; Eno, 2008). The Somali Clans are not equal in status, especially when compared to the Madhiban and the Somali Bantu communities. The Madhiban communities include the *Tumaal*, *Yibir* and *Gabooye* whose means of subsistence like iron works, woodwork, hairdressing among others and 'unholy' origin is looked down upon by other 'noble' Somali clans. A Lady from Somalia stated that "you know in Somalia we have that thing like the Indians? The caste system, the people though bound by religion, are not equal" (Interview with a Somalian Lady, 2016). Equally, Eno and Kusow observe that the idea of the Somali homogeneity hides the fact that the Somali Bantu and the Madhiban communities are treated as below status classes (Eno & Kusow, 2014). Whereas the Madhiban communities are underclass by their origin, the Bantu is because of the African geneticist roots considered inferior (Eno, 2008).

4.0 BODY BORDERS IN KENYA'S NORTHEASTERN REGION

Body borders use identifiable physical features to construct an identity. The idea of a separate Somali region begun in the late 1800s and over time became engrained in the social-political system. At Kenya's independence, therefore, ethnic Somalis had internalized these differences and wanted nothing to do with the 'black' government that was soon to take over

from the British colonial government (Weitzberg, 2017; Nene, 2005). These racial connotations continue to pervade the region. In a Citizen Television Documentary an individual remarks that "Even us Somalis we are guilty of thinking of ourselves as better than the others." (Mohammed, 2013). The colonial enslavement of the Bantu and Nilotic communities links the thinking of ethnic Somalis in northeastern Kenya with references to non-Somalis as slaves/*Adoon* (Eno, 2008). The youth focus group in Garissa explained that they keep away from non-Somalis because their peers tease them and refer to them as *Adoon*/slaves when they socialize. To avoid the slave tag, they avoid the '*Nywele ngumu*/hard hair' (Youth Focus group Garissa, 2016).

4.1 Hair Bordering

The hair otherwise considered as an aesthetic feature on a human being with functions such as keeping the scalp protected from the heat or cold has over time acquired social-political meaning. After all, Apartheid South Africa used hair texture to separate whites from non-whites. Those considered to have hard hair texture were below the status of the soft-haired Caucasians. In Northeastern Kenya there is a division between *Timor Jareer* versus *Timor Jileec* meaning hard hair versus soft hair. Jareer is conceptual for a non-Somali African type of hair. Though these terms are mostly used in Somalia, in Kenya border region some ethnic Somalis use the Swahili version *Nywele ngumu/* hard hair to refer to non-Somalis. On the other hand, non-Somalis refer to Somalis as *Waria/* a Swahili slung word for curly to infer to the curly nature of the ethnic Somalis hair.

The texture of hair, therefore, appears to create a physical and social border between Somali and non-Somali Category. What this means is that the state border is spatial. The physical border on the map is silenced on land but finds mobility in the human body through body bordering. An interviewee observed that there is no such thing as a Somali-Bantu because a Somali cannot be a Bantu as they are two separate human beings (Interview in Garissa, 2016). The interviewee refuted the idea of mixing the Somali ethnicity with non-Cushitic identities based on the physical manifestations of bodily features.

The research requested the interviewees to indicate how an individual usually identifies themselves at the border using concentric circles. The interviewees pointed out the clan as the core identity, followed by Somaliness, Cushitic, and the State. The last one was outermost and considered not core to the safety of the individual. The individuals' state identity appeared not to matter as Somali refugees would quickly acquire a Kenyan status through fraudulent means while Kenyan-Somalis falsified their identities through the acquisition of refugee status too (Balakian, 2016).

The ethnic Somali interchangeability of the state identities is for social-economic reasons. With a refugee status, an individual can attain asylum status abroad (Youth Focus Group, Garissa 2016). Equally, refugees who acquire Kenyan identity papers can travel within the country and invest (Interview with Abdi, Hagadera, 2016). In another incidence, a chief indicated that the Somali identity provides cushions such as evading the law in Kenya for those who commit atrocities since they can go and hide in Somalia without fear of exposure (Interview with a Chief, Mandera, 2016).

A Somali identity is international. An individual observed that in his living room when there are ten people present, there can be up to six nationalities/countries represented (a forum Discussion at Weitzbergs' book launch, Nairobi, 2018). The Somali identity became

borderless with the disintegration of the Republic of Somalia in 1991. The collapse of Somalia enabled its citizens to seek asylum not just across the border in Kenya and the Horn countries, but eventually worldwide. In the end, Kenya struggles to identify its' citizens among the ethnic Somalis. The interchangeability of state identities creates a perception of a lack of patriotism. However, the pastoral-nomadic culture of frequent movements and negotiated spaces appears to inform the ease with which an individual can adopt a new identity to fit the circumstances.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Identity and body-bordering affects the Kenya-Somalia border through perceptions of the border mobility as informed by the human body. Body borders using human physical features is a means of empowering some while disempowering others to reduce competition. The Kenya-Somalia body bordering is rooted in colonialism and its aftermath. The colonists used the human body to elevate their identity and reduce the threats from the 'other.' The Kenya-Somali border eventually suffered from the historical notions of body identity which separated ethnic Somalis from the rest. From the late 1800s to independence, Somalis were handled differently from other Kenyans. The notion of a Somali race was constructed but failed to either fall in the Arab, European non-native category or integrate to the native African category. The ambiguity was made worse by the enslavement of the non-Somali Africans creating the notion of inferiority of the African non-Somalis.

Equally, body bordering was geographical. The NFD received a different administrative strategy, primarily through the 1934 ordinance. The colonial government declaration of the NFD as closed districts enhanced the separateness of the region. As a pastoral-nomadic community, it promoted interactions with other pastoral regions hence the idea of oneness with the Republic of Somalia. The latter also enhanced body bordering through the pan Somali ideal as symbolized by the five-pointed white star on its blue flag. Body bordering both of the human and the land gives latitude to ethnic Somalis whose pastoral-nomadic norms promote the idea of negotiated living spaces and identities to enhance survival as opposed to inelastic borders.

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