

Order in Chaos: Understanding Governance in Somalia

Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) Thesis

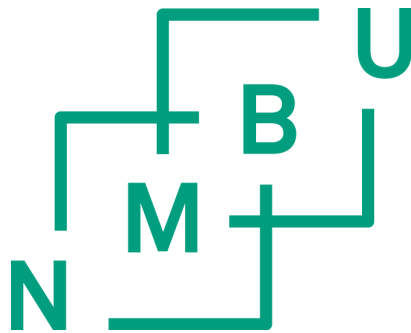
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Thesis summary

This thesis explores how governance has been established in Somalia, a country that lacks a functioning state and, thus, is considered as an ungoverned space. By combining theoretical frameworks from political sciences, anthropology and sociology, and drawing from qualitative data collected through participant observation, semi-structured and in-depth interviews with key respondents and a literature analysis, the thesis seeks to contribute new knowledge on governance, society, institutions, conflicts, and actors in the country's current context. The thesis consists of three separate but interrelated papers, which provide unique insights on subject matter.

The thesis finds that Somalia is not an ungoverned space, but rather is a space governed differently than the typical Weberian state. Although the Somali state collapsed in the 1990s, some of its governance institutions have not completely disappeared, and continue to function, albeit in a different form. Further, other forms of governance provided by social institutions and performed by non-state actors, such as clans, religious actors and regional states, continue to operate and exist in the absence of a Somali state. However, these institutions and identities founded thereupon are fluid and flexible, and their manipulation is characterised by bi-directionality and duality. Contemporary Somalia is, therefore, an example of a hybrid, multi-level type of governance, which is both different to and shares similarities with the Eurocentric model of governance and, therefore, needs to be analysed with a sensitivity to its social, institutional and cultural specificities. The effect of this is that the tendency to understand governance through a eurocentric state does not capture the Somali case. State development occurs based on the local context, social norms and political culture.

Thus, what we are dealing with in this case is not an ungoverned space, but an ‘order in chaos’ characterised by the coexistence of institutions and violence. This condition of order in chaos permits certain degree of order and predictability yet is characterised by the persistence of violence and may promote social and political fragmentation and susceptibility to external manipulation. Therefore, to better capture governance in the country, the current political trajectories should be seen through a wider lens of hybridity that constitutes these elements rather than being viewed pathologically as an ungoverned space.