Somali Vernacular Humanitarianism: Translocal Emergency Assistance During Times of Crisis

Ahmed M. Musa and Nauja Kleist

I. Introduction

With challenging environmental conditions, recurrent droughts and flooding, and decades of conflict and unrest, complex crises have a long history in the Somali regions. Disasters have "altered social and economic patterns,"[1] causing displacement and largescale destitution among the population. During crises, pastoralists have expected assistance from first the colonial and later post-colonial governments that mostly opened relief and refugee camps and settled crisis-affected people.[2] However, the collapse of the central government in 1991 left a vacuum, with the post-war administrations taking a backseat in the humanitarian response. This gap has been filled by "external response," led by international aid actors, and "local response," led by translocally connected Somali communities. While interventions orchestrated by the international humanitarian system have drawn scholarly attention, Somali-led humanitarian responses have largely been neglected in the literature.[3]

In this paper, we explore Somali "vernacular humanitarianism"[4] in Somaliland that occurs during crisis. We employ this term to refer to multi-sited and multi-scalar translocal practices of emergency assistance that Somalis in Somaliland and in the diaspora employ and that (mainly) take place outside the official humanitarian system. We show that such support practices have evolved from mainly taking place within the Somali regions to operate across borders, too, as Somali diaspora groups around the globe mobilize and channel humanitarian

assistance to crisis-affected areas in collaboration with actors and institutions in the Somali regions. Hence, rather than approaching vernacular and diaspora humanitarianism as two separate phenomena with different histories and distinct practices, we suggest that it is an issue of the scale of connectivity and embeddedness. Our article is organized around the following research questions:

- How do Somalis assist each other during times of crises and what social connectivity and embeddedness do these systems reflect and reproduce?
- How have these practices developed over time and what current and future transformations might take place with younger generation taking over?
- What terminology and mobilization repertoires do Somali humanitarian actors employ?

Our analysis examines the development of collective emergency assistance in the pre- and post-1991 periods. Empirically, we draw on 30 semi-structured interviews and field observations in Hargeisa, Burao, and Borama between May and November 2020. Our informants include leaders of hometown associations (HTAs), kinship association leaders, individual humanitarian volunteers, neighbourhood support associations, regional ad hoc emergency committees, officers from the UN humanitarian organizations, former humanitarian actors, leaders, and officers of non-governmental local organizations (LNGOs), traditional elders, and diaspora-led humanitarian organizations. All interviews and observations were conducted and translated by the first author. Many of the informants were formal or informal humanitarian practitioners, reflected by their use of relatively technical language in the quotations. The article starts with a conceptual discussion where we discuss terminology and present our conceptual approach. This is followed by an analysis of the origin and drivers of Somali vernacular humanitarianism, its operation, including the mobilization repertoires used, and, finally, a discussion of the (future) involvement of the youth. We include Somali terms, proverbs, and poems throughout, presenting three related arguments. First, that there is a long history of Somali-led emergency assistance, underpinned by social relations and institutions. Second, that these practices have transformed in scale, operation, and efficiency through the last three decades, owing to the dispersal of Somalis across the globe and the ensuing intensity and extension of social support practices. Third, an ongoing transformation

of assistance from being mediated by social ties to (partial) mediation by social media and internet platforms, entailing new mobilization repertoires and widening the group of potential humanitarian actors while diminishing the role of kinship logics.

II. Terminology and Conceptual Approach

The study of "new humanitarian actors" and humanitarian assistance occurring outside the international humanitarian system is currently gaining momentum (Hilhorst 2018, Sezgin and Dijkzeul 2016). However, much of this literature draws on insights and evidence from the Global North, in particular, studies that explore voluntary humanitarian engagement in response to the 2015 protection crisis. Practices operating across the Global South or between the Global North and the Global South are thereby eclipsed. With no consensus on terminology as yet, there is a flourish of concepts around. Fechter and Schwittay propose the overall term of citizen aid to emphasize "the agency of ordinary people making ethical decisions about providing assistance to others"[5]. The "citizen" in citizen aid does not refer to nationality, but rather connotes a global citizenship where transnational practices are pertinent. Locally oriented practices, in contrast, they term grassroots humanitarianism.[6] Other related terms include resilience humanitarianism,[7] solidarity humanitarianism,[8] vernacular humanitarianism,[9] voluntary humanitarianism,[10] diaspora humanitarianism,[11] civic humanitarianisms,[12] and everyday humanitarianism.[13] Each of these terms highlight different aspects of humanitarian activities, the relationship between humanitarian actors and crisis-affected populations, and the underpinning motivations and guiding principles. Thus, there is much inspiration for and resonance with our case in this literature. However, since we are looking for perspectives that specifically engage with questions of connections, embeddedness, and Somali terminology, we find that the nascent literatures on diaspora humanitarianism and vernacular humanitarianism, with their (combined) emphasis on multi-scalar and multi-directional practices and their articulation, are particularly relevant.

The notion of diaspora humanitarianism refers to practices that "grow out of transnational connections that link diaspora groups with their families and homelands" where a relational and affective dimension is central.[14] The diaspora term can be tricky, analytically speaking. It may attribute a sense of priori identification and belonging[15] and

risks ignoring local involvement. The global-local dichotomy may thus be reproduced. Yet, this perspective is nevertheless pertinent to consider because of the global dispersal of Somalis and the importance of Somali multifarious transnational engagement, including relief practices. Furthermore, the diaspora term is widely used in Somali society, indicating a certain resonance. This brings us to the vernacular dimension. Defined as "language or dialect native to a region or country rather than a literary, cultured, or foreign language,"[16] attention to vernacular perspectives emphasizes spoken or commonly used language as well as groundedness in local practices. As Brković states, vernacular humanitarianism emphasizes "socio-historically situated frameworks of giving."[17] In her words:

> Aid provided by various local actors in tune with their socio-historically specific ideas of humanness, as a response to an emerging need that cannot be adequately addressed through conventional channels of help. It encompasses practices of helping that follow the universal humanitarian logic, but in a different form.[18]

Brković's definition thus accentuates locally embedded practices. In the light of the rich oral tradition in Somali society, we find that the language dimension is important to highlight as well, and thus turn our attention to the Somali terms, proverbs, and sayings used when articulating and mobilizing emergency assistance. A related perspective traces processes of vernacularization that examine the translation and circulation of terms, strategies, and ideas and how they become appropriated and employed locally "to fit particular historical and social contexts."[19] Hence, while vernacular perspectives refer to local (linguistic and social) practices, vernacularization concerns how – and if – these have been translated and incorporated from other contexts. Together, the terms of diaspora and vernacular humanitarianism thus highlight socially embedded and translocal multi-scalar practices, with emphasis on senses of belonging and mobilization repertoires.

We now turn to our conceptual model, inspired by three interlinked literatures: translocality, embeddedness, and connectivity. The concept of translocality[20] refers to "simultaneous situatedness across different locales which provide ways of understanding the overlapping place-time(s) in migrants' [and other actors'] everyday lives."[21] Such practices take place within stratified social fields, or what Doreen Massey famously termed "power-geometries,"[22] whether within a nation-state

and/or beyond it. In other words, translocality may or may not incorporate transnational dimensions, such as networks, institutions, and activities that link localities in home and host societies.[23] A multi-scalar analytical attention and terminology is thus pertinent. We therefore refer to cross-border and long-distance translocal (rather than transnational) practices when this is relevant for the analysis. An inherent perspective of the translocality framework is attention to connectivity and embeddedness. Without connections there would be no "trans-", so to speak. Connectivity has been studied extensively in the literature on African migration and mobility practices, ranging from international or internal migrants and their families[24] to the social and material life of connectivity.[25] The bulk of the literature focuses on migration, mobility, and circulation as key subject matters;[26] still, it would be mistaken to understand translocal practices as the domain of migrants only or as an indication of fluidity or free-flowing social practices. Rather, connectivity makes links between places and between emplacement and mobility – "staying" and "moving" – possible. The last analytical dimension, then, is embeddedness.

Embeddedness literature grows out of Karl Polanyi's and, later, Mark Granovetter's work on how economic activities are embedded in institutional and social frameworks, rather than constituting an independent sphere. It has been taken up in studies of migrant entrepreneurship,[27] with emphasis on how incorporation in social networks and institutional contexts, so-called "mixed embeddedness," impact on strategies and careers as part of a broader "cultural turn."[28] More recently, the term has been used in a more general sense to indicate belonging to and engagement in one or more localities.[29] Horst proposes the term multi-sited embeddedness to highlight the "importance of particular locations in connections across borders."[30] We add that such a perspective is equally pertinent for connections between localities within a nation-state. Drawing on the scholarship above, we employ the concept of embeddedness to refer to actors' sense of incorporation and belonging to one or more localities where they (may) form part of social, economic, cultural, and institutional contexts. Or, differently put, while connectivity brings the attention to the links between people and places, embeddedness highlights how certain phenomena are grounded in sets of norms and belonging, whether these are mobile or situated in specific localities.

III. Social Embeddedness and Connectivity:
Kinship Support Systems

Traditionally, Somali pastoralists have rich terminologies for support-ing each other, such as *kaalo* (stocking the newlywed by his extended kinship group), *yabadh* (stocking the newlywed by his immediate fam-ily), *xadhig* (restocking the person who lost his livestock due to misfor-tunes by the community), and *goyn* (restocking the person who lost his livestock due to misfortunes by his close relatives). It was only after the 1990s, that (some) Somalis have started to call such support humanitar-ianism, due to the influence of the international humanitarian system and processes of vernaculization of aid terminology. This observation indicates that Somali vernacular humanitarianism has a long history. Thus, we need to pay attention to the underpinning social support sys-tems and livelihoods that it is based on. Here it is important to keep in mind that before the massive urbanization from the 1990 and onwards, the great majority of the Somali people were pastoral nomads.

Analyzing "social security strategies" amongst Somali refugees in the Dadaab refugee camps, Horst has suggested that practices and references to a nomadic heritage are pertinent. Three elements are cen-tral: "a mentality of looking for green pastures; a strong social network that entails the obligation to assist each other in surviving; and risk reduction through strategically dispersing investments in the family members and activities."[31]

The dimensions of migration, collective assistance, and diversifica-tions of livelihoods are amply examined in a range of publications.[32] They show that social practices and expectations of compassion and giving are pertinent dimensions of Somali social institutions and sup-port systems revolving around kinship and clan. The importance of kinship ties is also reflected in Somali proverbs, such as *tol waa tolane* – literally, you are stitched to your clan, or figuratively, you die or live with your clan. A second proverb is *ninna tolkii kama janna tago* — liter-ally, no one will go to paradise without his kinship, or figuratively, you can only win when your kinship wins.[33] A third proverb says, *tol iyo fardo, tol baan doortay* – between clanship and wealth, I choose clanship.[34]

The often pejoratively labelled kinship and clan system is thus central to the Somali social support system and underpins social connectivity and embeddedness that shapes how people cope with disasters, share risks, and respond to shocks. In the patrilineal clan structure, major clan families (*reer*) are divided into sub-clans (*haan*),

which are further divided into smaller sub-sub-clans (*jilib*) and more smaller families (*jifo*).[35] Six major clans inhabit Somaliland.[36] Each of them comprise about 100 *jifos*, meaning that there are over 600 *jifos*, encompassing between several hundred and several thousand households.[37] Kinship groups are bounded together regardless of geographic location and social class. For most clans, the kinship elite (*waxgaradka reerka*), in the country and in the diaspora, mobilize emergency assistance for their affected kinship members, mainly during recurrent droughts, or engage in development projects in kinship settlements to promote social welfare and resilience. Broadly speaking, the kinship social contract is more valued than the social contract with the state which largely does not exist or is seen as providing insufficient support; hence, one must contribute to the social protection of one's kinship. In turn, the person receives protection and social support when needed and collective pride from the improved welfare of the kinship group. The social contract between kinship members, whether they live inside or outside Somaliland, provides pre-existing trust, social bonding, and social networks, all important institutions for collective action. In the words of one key informant: "*Somali humanitarianism is informal, and trust is pivotal to it.*"[38] Different "layers" of kinship organization are also reflected in practices and expectations of giving and supporting one other, depending on the intensity of the crisis. For lower intensity crisis, it is the immediate family members (*jifo*) who are "obliged" to help. For intermediate intensity crisis, it is the kinship group (*haan or jilib*), while for the high intensity crisis and major disasters, the major clan family (*reer*) and 'Somaliness' (*Somalinimo*) support systems are invoked.[39] Hence, mobilization of collective assistance takes place at different levels within the (flexible) hierarchy of kinship and clan system. Due to the global displacement of Somalis in the diaspora, however, there is no given correspondence between these layers and the spatial proximity or distance of locations of kin, clan, and fellow (non-clan) Somalis. Or, differently put, proximate and long-distance translocal connectivity may be at play in all three layers, even if the number of different locations may grow.

The practical organization of vernacular humanitarianism depends on the severity of the crisis and the size of the affected community. Typically, one or more trusted individuals or an *ad hoc* committee, constituted for the purpose, volunteer to mobilize and deliver emergency assistance. Some kinship groups have multipurpose welfare associations that promote political representation as well as mobilize devel-

opment and emergency assistance in rural settlements. Many kinship groups also have social media platforms (*gole*) on WhatsApp where they exchange information and organize support between local and diaspora members.[40] They appeal and mobilize emergency assistance. Kinship members are further expected to contribute to the kinship resource pooling (*qaadhaan*) during crisis. Unlike blood compensation (*mag/diya*), the emergency resource pooling is voluntary and more inclusive as non-diya paying groups contribute. Another related notion is *gurmad*. This is the practice of providing a helping hand (financial or non-financial) to someone affected by crisis. Morally, the *gurmad* takes place when the crisis is beyond the resources and capacity of the affected people to respond to it. *Gurmad* has traditionally been used for conflicts but has been expanded to emergency assistance as well in the last two decades.

Not all kinship groups have similar mobilization capacity, however. Our analysis shows that three factors influence the size and effectiveness of kinship-based vernacular humanitarianism at the lower (*jifo*) kinship level. First, the kinship must inhabit the same settlements (*degaan*); scattered clans like the so-called Gabooye minority groups cannot make substantial humanitarian contributions. Commenting on this, an interviewed key informant said, "our Gabooye group do not have a settlement of their own in the rural areas, they are scattered, and this affects our mobilization capacity."[41] Second, there must be an elite group (*waxgaradka reerka*) in the urban areas. Third, there must be cooperation between kinship members. The cooperation factor can also be described as "bonding social capital" in Putnam's term, referring to principles of cooperation, trust, and reciprocity between "homogenous" social groups.[42] As stated by one informant, "crisis-affected people from kinship groups that lack these factors become marginalized and dependent on external aid."[43] These remarks show that while vernacular humanitarianism is *potentially* mobilizable in all Somali kinship groups, there must be factors that activate its *actual* mobilization.

IV. Transformations

Somali vernacular humanitarianism grows out of long-established support practices, primarily taking place within the Somali-speaking regions and the Horn of Africa. Over time, these practices have turned into a diasporic phenomenon as well, growing in scale and efficiency. This development is linked to the massive displacement and global dispersal

from the late 1980s and onwards, following the civil war and continued crises and emergencies. Somalis, especially those from Somaliland, have a long history of international migration, including age-old trade and seafaring with Aden and Kenya as well as Somali seamen settling in the UK from the 1880s.[44] They majority maintained a connection with their home country. Long-distance and cross-border connections and embeddedness thus have a long history in Somali society.

Mohamed Kaahin Feedoole, a labour migrant and poet in Aden in the 1940s, portrayed the challenges of Somali migrants at the time. In the poem *Tolow Ha Lay Dhoofsho* (Kinsmen Help Me Return Home), he writes about their connections to the home country and kinship group, and the support sought from them:

> *Talaatiin gu' qaar joogey baan*
> *Toob u xaasline*
> *Tana xoogsi kama soo taraan*
> *Taana laga waaye.*

> *Thirty years here (Aden)*
> *Yet they don't own a thing*
> *Without useful employment here*
> *And absent over there (home).*[45]

While the poem expresses an experience of suffering and disconnection, it nevertheless illuminates a sense of belonging to kin and the Somali homeland, also reflected in the title. It reminds us that (expectations and the mocking of the absence aside) cross-border connectivity is well established. This applies to Somali social support strategies as well. Yet, technological advances have facilitated transport and communication with implications for connectivity. As shown in the quote where an interviewee reflects upon the transformation of the speed and scale of communication and information sharing.

In the past, information sharing used to be slow and travelers brought news but today the news is mediated by the social media, mainly WhatsApp. Moreover, in the past, kinship members who migrated from the kinship territories were cut off from kinship information, or it took a long period for their news to reach their kinship members and for them to receive how other kinship members were doing. But today, technology has removed spatial and temporal limitations in sharing news and this benefits translocal kinship members who receive news instantly, including about emergencies.[46]

With increased interconnectivity, social support has increased in size and efficiency. Different local and diaspora Somalis from the same kinship group are connected through virtual platforms (madal or gole) where they share information on daily basis. A humanitarian volunteer interviewed in Borama stated that "today, the UK, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, Canada, USA, UAE, Qatar, KSA, and Kuwait are the catchment areas for Somali humanitarianism."[47] These "catchment areas" thus coincide with the countries that have a substantial Somali diaspora population. Similarly, during the 2011 famine in Southcentral Somalia, many of the affected people reported to have called their relatives in Nairobi and Mogadishu,[48] indicating differences in social connectivity that, again, reflect differentiated migration histories.

As Maxwell and his colleagues posit, it is the ability of translocal networks to mobilize resources that have "ultimately determined how well people cope with the [2011] famine, not the international response."[49] The strength and effectiveness of emergency response is thus shaped by the quality of social connectivity, that is the strength of the connection between the affected rural people, the urban population, and the diaspora.[50] This also indicates that there are significant inequalities in terms of access to resources because of the uneven representation of Somali kinship groups in the diaspora and major urban economies.[51] Translocal ties both inside and outside Somaliland are thus important to keep in mind. Furthermore, what is called Somali diaspora humanitarianism is not diaspora exclusive but intersects and overlaps with translocally embedded emergency assistance practices.

V. Mobilization Repertoires

We now turn to repertoires of mobilization drawn from the embeddedness of social support system in the narratives of pastoralism and a nomadic heritage. The level of mobilization, around kinship or non-kinship, influences what repertoires to be used. Broadly speaking, these can be divided into two overall types: mobilization targeting kinship groups, revolving around reciprocity, and mobilization targeting non-kinship groups, invoking moral repertoires.

A. Kinship Mobilization

This repertoire is mobilized around kinship ties (dun-wadaag or tol) and utilizes a mix of sayings and proverbs aimed at reminding kinship members – in particular men – about the kinship social contract and reciprocity. It also reminds the young generation how their parents strengthened social networks and embeddedness through connections and contributions to the kinship settlement. One common proverb is "bawdo rag, maalinba midbaa qaawan" – literally meaning, "every day, one man's thigh becomes naked," or figuratively, "everyone can be in need." In the kinship system, this proverb thus connotes that every kinship member might need the support of the kinship group some-time. As already discussed, there is an effective social contract between kinship members in traditional Somali society, prescribing that it is the duty to provide protection and support during emergencies to fellow kinship members. When asked if this sense of obligation appeals to elite kinship members or those in the diaspora, a key informant noted:

> It is not only lack of money that makes the Somali person in need but lack of justice and oppression. Somalis were brought in an environ-ment of poor justice system where state institutions were the oppressors instead of protectors. Today, if someone is arrested, it is his elders who speak for the person, settle the case, get the person out of the prison … there are many ways one will be in need without necessarily being without money or in disaster, and this is the reason why even those in the diaspora or the financially stable [who have access to formal social protection] have to contribute to the kinship because one never knows when and how he/she might be in need.[52]

Mobilization repertoires include short poems that remind kinship members about the importance of honoring kinship. When asked about the repertoires his kinship employs when mobilizing aid, one informant remembered verses from Saahid Qamaan, a well-known Somali poet:

> *Masalaha ninkaan ii dhigeyn*
> *Midig ma saaraayo*
> *Ninkii aniga iga maarmi kara*
> *Uma muraad yeesho.*
> *I will not shake hand with the man*
> *Who does not extend a mat to me*
> *And I will not need the man*
> *Who can survive without me.*[53]

While such poems and proverbs are employed to appeal to everyone, we note that they refer to men and hence may appeal more to male than female kinship members. Furthermore, some repertoires are more directed towards specific groups, such as youth, for instance. These include sayings such as "*waalidkaa dad wanagsan oo qaraabada xidhiidhiya ahaan jireen.*"[54] This means that 'your parents were generous and helped the needy people.' This is said to remind the person to fill the shoes of his or her parents. Moreover, kinship members may be reminded about the need to support their settlement (*deegaan*). As settlement ties (*degaan-wadaag*) and kinship ties (*dun-wadaag*) overlap, repertories such as *caawi degaankaga* – "help your settlements"–are commonly used within emergency assistance mobilization targeting kinship.

B. Cross-clan and Somalinimo Mobilization

When mobilizing non-kinship humanitarianism, repertoires revolve around moral messages. The *caawi walaal* initiative – literally, "help a brother" – is a voluntary, youth-led humanitarian campaign established in 2017 that aim at helping "millions of Somali families suffering from the drought and the famine."[55] While the *caawi walaal* campaign mainly used Facebook and Twitter, such sayings have a broader resonance and are commonly utilized for cross-clan and Somaliness mobilization. Here, inspiration may also be drawn from sayings that invoke Somaliness, such as "*cidi uma maqna, ceelna uma qodna*" – "those need to be supported are waiting only us."[56] Invoking faith is another powerful repertoire, such as reminding people about the reward (*ajar*) that Islam promises for those who help others in need. Cross-clan and Somaliness repertoires thus have a broad appeal, potentially targeting all Somalis no matter their clan or location. Moreover, while kinship-targeted repertoires are communicated to individuals or via kinship social media groups or gatherings, Somaliness or cross-clan targeted repertoires are communicated in public in mosques or via open social media. The fact that the Somali language plays an important role in the mobilization of vernacular humanitarianism accentuates the relevance of this concept. Both testimonies of crisis-affected people and emergency appeals (*qaylodhaan*) are communicated in Somali, appealing to relational empathy amongst Somalis living outside the crisis-affected areas. Arguably, the fact that most Somalis speak the same language or devote to the same faith plays a big role in such mobilization.

To reinforce moral messages, Somalis remind each other of the memories of displacement and suffering that many faced in late 1980s

and early 1990s, and sometimes later as well. Those in Western countries further remind each other to be generous to those facing crisis in the home country, just the way the host governments and communities have been generous to them by giving them asylum, health and educational benefits, and welfare. Commenting on this, one diaspora returnee in Hargeisa said, "we ask ourselves 'why are we not helping our own people who have needs similarly to those we had when we came to the diaspora?' Still our people back home have no government that can assist them."[57] Such a sense of moral obligation is based on the collective memory of suffering and reinforced by the social practices and expectations of helping each other during crisis, bringing a sense of urgency and obligation.[58] This observation also indicates that Somali diaspora youth – who have lived most or all of their lives outside the Somali regions – might have a different focus on vernacular humanitarianism than those who are motivated by kinship and collective memories of suffering. In the final section of our paper, we discuss the possible repercussions for the future of emergency assistance among diaspora youth and if they will remain translocally embedded in the same ways as their parents and grandparents.

VI. Youth and the Future of Vernacular Humanitarianism

Estimates show that diaspora groups donate 70 percent of kinship-directed humanitarian funds back home, due to a higher rate of unemployment and a lower level of salaries in Somaliland vis-à-vis Western and the Gulf countries.[59] However, the demographic structure of the Somali society is changing, due to an increasingly young population, with an estimated 70 percent of the Somali population being under 30 years old.[60] This gives rise to a concern over whether the younger diasporic generation will continue the practice of giving. This is not only a question of demography but also of transformation of experience as the next generation matures and, with time, takes over mobilization and emergency assistance practices. Concern about the youth is widespread among parent and grandparent generations who question the sustainability of social ties in the future and wonder if cross-border translocal activities and networks will slow down or cease to exist. While mainly voiced in the diaspora, these concerns are also gaining currency within Somali society and amongst analysts. Here, we identify four changes among youth in the diaspora and, to some extent, in major urban areas in Somaliland and comment on their implications.

First, a weakening of youth social connections to their rural kinship groups as they were raised in towns and/or outside the Somali regions and hence might not be familiar with their extended kinship members and the rural settlements where they live. Second, reduced emotional connections, due to the fading of experience of the mass displacement and social dislocations in late 1980s and early 1990s that provided their parents and grandparents with an emotional connection to fellow Somalis and collective memories of suffering that most youth has not experienced firsthand. Third, withering cultural connections to the practices and narratives of a nomadic heritage, as most youth is unfamiliar with pastoralist life that provides the impetus of social support in much of the mobilization of kinship-oriented vernacular humanitarianism. Fourth and finally, some diaspora youth experience language barriers in speaking, reading, or writing Somali, resulting in not understanding Somali-language mobilization repertoires or relating to the social, emotional, and cultural connections they reflect. They cannot take fully part in such vernacular humanitarianism, so to speak; they are not embedded in it and do not speak or practice it fluently, if at all.

The weakening connections of diaspora youth to their parents' home country was aptly summarized by a young professional diaspora woman who grew up and lives in the UK. When asked about the role of the diaspora in responding to Covid-19 crisis in Somaliland, she fumed, "why are those in Somaliland expecting something from the diaspora people when there are resources in the country? Let them manage what they have, here we have our own economic hardships."[61] This is in stark contrast to the parent generation who continue to respond to social, emotional, and cultural repertoires by providing aid. While kinship-based mobilization and its invocation of reciprocity may weaken over time, other activities may grow in importance, highlighting collective moral repertoires. There is evidence of emerging trends of diaspora youth engaging in non-kinship emergency assistance, such as volunteering and holding internships in health and educational institutions or international organizations. These tendencies indicate a break from kinship-based social support systems to a re-orientation to cross-clan, Somaliness, and even non-Somali humanitarian initiatives that may revolve around Islam or international solidarity. We also see that crowdfunding initiatives are growing in importance. For example, during the recent Covid-19 crisis, Somali diaspora youth relied "on online platforms as the principal mechanism for mobilizing

assistance and creating awareness" where educated Somali diaspora youth in different Western countries created various *GoFundMe* pages and online awareness raising campaigns which attracted contributions from non-Somalis as well. This indicates that young, educated Somali diaspora youth can use their connections to tap into humanitarian assistance initiatives outside the Somali social support system with which their parents are familiar. When asked about his views on the future contributions of Somali diaspora youth, the chairman of Amoud Foundation – a diaspora organization based in Texas – stated:

> The young generation are not strongly attached to clan and clan territory, but they have adopted Western liberal values and morals. For them the home country is Somalia or Somaliland, with no reference to kinship territories. Based on this, I can see two changes that will take place: reduction in the kinship-based support system and increase in cross-clan mobilization. This shift will benefit the non-kinship institutions, such as Amoud Foundation …[62]

Further reflecting on this transformation, the chairman continued that "older men of my age do not make contributions outside the clan, as clan is important for them." Younger people do, however. He thereby indicated a shift from bonding to bridging social capital in Putnam's sense (2000), this might point to external connections between groups with different social identities, such as the emergence of cross-clan youth voluntarism that has emerged during the last decade. The *Caawi Walaal* Initaitive, Somaliland Lifemakers, and Tawasil are examples of active youth volunteer groups that utilize moral repertoires to mobilize aid by targeting Somalis across the Horn of Africa. An example is a youth volunteer in Hargeisa, who recently came back from Southcentral Somalia where he was part of a committee that delivered $400,000 in response to the 2019 Beledweyne floods. He explained:

> I started my humanitarian activism in Somaliland in 2010. By then it was difficult to bring local volunteers together or to raise funds locally because the local people did not understand voluntarism but I got support from diaspora returnees who understood it. Within a short period of time, the local youth, including Somaliland Lifemakers and Tawasil, were active in humanitarianism.[63]

These youth volunteers are not organized around kinship, rather they engage themselves on ad hoc basis to lead nationwide emer-

gency campaigns. They are driven by a different set of motivations, in other words, where moral rather than kinship obligations are central. Indeed, some of our interviewees were concerned about who will take over the vital role in connecting youth to Somaliland when the parent generation is no longer there. Commenting on this, an interviewee in Hargeisa lamented:

> The current young generation make contributions through their parents who tell them who has genuine needs [or who is related to them since the diaspora are not familiar with extended familiar members]. Once the parents are gone, through whom will they contribute? Social institutions, such as kinship and trust that facilitate diaspora humanitarianism, will weaken from this generation to the next.[64]

Such concerns about the potential impact of generational change on diaspora engagement in the (parents' or grandparents') home country are common among many diaspora groups. In the Somali case, one crucial question is whether regional and clan affiliations will play a less significant role for the younger generation, as practices of connectivity and embeddedness transform over time. Yet, we may also see that emergency assistance will change character with new repertoires of mobilization and new humanitarian actors emerging.

VII. Conclusion

With their predominantly nomadic lifestyle, Somalis in the Horn of Africa have faced challenging environmental conditions and conflicts for centuries, compounded by the absence or insufficiency of social protection provided by the state. Pastoral Somalis have therefore devised emergency assistance systems, underpinned by kinship ties and logics. This system was further intensified and extended following the massive displacement and complex emergencies from 1988 and onwards that resulted in globally dispersed diaspora groups. Being engaged across short and long distances, Somalis in the Somali regions and in the diaspora practice translocal vernacular humanitarianism that is characterized by proximate and long-distance multi-sited embeddedness and connectivity. This has developed into what we and others have called diaspora humanitarianism.[65] M mobilization repertoires draw upon references to a shared nomadic heritage and experi-

ence of suffering, and with a strong ethos of giving and belonging are still relevant. Poems and sayings in Somali are also important elements in these repertoires, reflecting the rich oral tradition in Somali society and highlighting the importance of the vernacular dimension.

Notwithstanding the above, there is growing debate over the sustainability of this form of emergency assistance amongst local and diaspora humanitarian actors, particularly to what degree that diaspora and urban youth will follow the logic of kinship ties and respond to mobilization repertoires. Here, we see concerns over weakening social connections to kinship groups and less resonance with the narratives of a shared nomadic heritage. This situation could be understood as an expression of diminishing embeddedness and connectivity where the youth become alienated from Somali social practices. However, we argue that it is more productive to perceive such processes as reflecting re-embeddedness and new constellations of connectivity. This is related to alternative modes of mobilization that revolves around non-kinship-oriented emergency assistance. While such extended mobilization is already present in cross-clan and *Somalinimo* crisis response, there is evidence it also targets and include non-Somalis as well, revolving around Islam and international solidarity. Furthermore, (future) diaspora youth may not necessarily speak Somali very well, turning to their mother tongues or English, hence changing the mobilization repertoires. In such a situation, we may ask to what degree vernacular humanitarianism changes character and should be termed something else to capture its dynamics more accurately.

At the more conceptual level, we posit that the perspectives of diaspora and vernacular humanitarianisms mutually enrich each other, making three contributions. First, we argue that vernacular humanitarianism is not spatially delimited to a specific location but may in fact be practiced in multi-sited and multi-scalar manners. We further highlight the importance of paying attention to language that is less prominent in hitherto scholarship. Second, we show that diaspora humanitarianism is not necessarily diaspora-exclusive but intersects and overlaps with translocally embedded practices. Third, we call for attention to the transformations and reconfigurations of vernacular practices and mobilization repertoires, when and if a big part of translocal actors no longer share mother tongue or first-hand experience of the lifestyles that underpin these support systems.

Notes

1. Mohamed 1999, 510
2. Hitchcock and Hussein 1987; Mohamed 1999, 2004.
3. But see Hammond et al. 2011; Maxwell et al., 2016.
4. We use the term vernacular humanitarianism interchangeably with emergency assistance.
5. Fechter and Schwittay 2019, 1770
6. ibid., 1772.
7. Hilhorst 2018
8. Rozakou 2017
9. Brković 2016; 2017; 2020; Kleist 2021,
10. Sandri 2018
11. Horst et al. 2016; Phillips 2016
12. Anstorp and Horst 2021
13. Carpi 2014; Horstmann and Yu 2017; Richey 2018; Richey et al. 2020
14. Hassan et al. 2021, 1
15. Kleist 2008
16. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vernacular.
17. Brković 2017, 225
18. Brković, 2020, 224
19. Levitt and Merry 2009, 443
20. As our focus in this paper is emergency assistance, we analyze social structures and practices, rather than the production of (trans)localities or neighbourhoods (Appadurai 1996).
21. Brickell and Datta 2011, 4
22. Massey 1994, 3, cf. Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004
23. cf. Smith 2011).
24. e.g. Geschiere and Gugler 1998, Cole and Groes 2016
25. e.g. Bruijn and Dijk 2012, Kleist 2020.
26. see Brickell and Datta 2011; Greiner and Sakdapolark 2013
27. Kloosterman and Rath 2001; Kloosterman 2010,
28. Hess 2004.
29. Rusinovic 2008; Horst 2017
30. Horst 2017, 1345.
31. Horst 2007, 2.
32. e.g., Ahmed 2000; Horst 2008; Lindley 2009; Hammond 2010; Abdi 2015; Maxwell et al. 2016.
33. Abdi 2001
34. Marchal 1996.

35. see also Lewis, 1962

36. Habar Awal, Garhajis, Samaron, Habarjelo, Dhulbahante, Warsangeli are the major clans that control vast territories but there are also many other clans with varying sizes both in population and territory

37. It is estimated that Somaliland has 600,000 households of which 40% are in the rural areas

38. BOHSA, key informant interview, Hargeisa, October 13, 2020.

39. Maxwell et al., 2016; Musa 2022 forthcoming

40. See WhatsApp as 'digital publics': the Nakuru Analysts and the evolution of participation in county governance in Kenya.

41. HABA, key informant interview, Hargeisa, December 29, 2020.

42. Putnam 2000.

43. BURMA, key informant interview, Burao, -November 8, 2020. These remarks shows that while aid might be embedded in all Somali kinships, there must be factors that reinforce this embeddedness and those clans that lack these factors may not be able to activate their embeddedness

44. Hammond et al. 2011, 33; Kleist 2004,

45. Excerpt cited in Mohamed 2002, 207

46. BORAM, key informant interview, virtual, October 10, 2020

47. BOHSA, key informant interview, Hargeisa, October 13, 2020.

48. Maxwell et al., 2016

49. Maxwell 2016, 63.

50. ibid., 68

51. cf. Kleist 2022.

52. HASM, key informant interview, Hargeisa, November 25, 2020

53. HAHS, key informant interview, Hargeisa, May 19, 2020

54. HASM, key informant interview, Hargeisa, November 25, 2020

55. https://twitter.com/caawiwalaal

56. USAMFE, key informant interview, USA, November 3, 2020

57. HAYMH, key informant interview, Hargeisa, May 18, 2020.

58. cf. Hammond 2010; Kleist 2018.

59. Musa 2022, forthcoming.

60. https://somalia.unfpa.org/en/news/young-somalis-position-themselves-country%E2%80%99s-development

61. Musa et al. 2020.

62. USAMFE, key informant interview, USA, November 3, 2020

63. HAHOK, key informant interview, Hargeisa, July 21, 2020

64. HAJAD, key informant interview, Hargeisa, May 20, 2020

65. Bostrom et al., 2021; Hassan et al. 2021; Horst et al. 2016

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