

**FROM PIRATE PORTS TO SPECIAL ECONOMIC
ZONES: VIOLENCE, REGULATION AND PORT-
MAKING IN THE SOMALI PENINSULA**

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Acknowledgements

Funding for this research was provided by the Wenner Gren Foundation, Social Science Research Council and the National Science Foundation (#1559658). I would like to thank Brenda Chalfin, Tobias Hagmann and Finn Stepputat for their insightful feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

GOVSEA PAPER SERIES

Editors: Tobias Hagmann & Finn Stepputat

The GOVSEA PAPER SERIES publishes ongoing research on the governance of economic hubs and flows in Somali East Africa. It is part of a collaborative research and capacity building programme funded by the Danish Consultative Research Committee for Development Research (FFU) and coordinated by Roskilde University. See more about GOVSEA at govsea.tumblr.com.

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DIIS WORKING PAPER 2017: 12

DIIS · Danish Institute for International Studies
Østbanegade 117, DK-2100 Copenhagen, Denmark

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E-mail: diis@diis.dk

www.diis.dk

ISBN 978-87-7605-904-0

DIIS publications can be downloaded free of charge from www.diis.dk

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ABSTRACT

Locating itself within a series of port cities, this paper elaborates a port-centered view of polity, economy, and sociality in the Somali peninsula. The paper begins with a historical and theoretical overview of port cities before turning to a specific set of case studies from the three port cities of Benderbeyla, Bosaso, and Djibouti. The interplay between violence and regulation in channeling and re-channeling mobility within seemingly distinct spaces becomes thus apparent. The comparison of these port cities highlights different modes and scales of port-making. Benderbeyla port exemplifies a space from which global circulation is violently re-channeled, be it through the capture of ambergris or by piracy. Bosaso corresponds to a mode of port-making that is also framed by violence, but provides a safe and cheap haven for circulation. While both port cities have a relationship to regulation, trade and state-making do not fully overlap in the first two scales of port-making. Djibouti represents a third scale of port-making where sovereignty emerges as a resource in order to re-channel trade. Providing a corrective to the land-centered writing that has dominated Somali studies these port cities reveal a polity and sociality that emerge through claims over mobility as opposed to territory or population. In so doing this paper provides a new vantage point to understand the arrivals and departures that constitute everyday life in the Horn of Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Zone interdite.¹ A uniformed port security officer suddenly appeared in front of our car. 'Zone interdite' he repeated, this time holding up his hand and gesturing us to stop. We had been snaking our way through the Port of Djibouti on a hot June day in 2015, with the marketing manager of the port. Upon arrival, the manager had thrust a glossy pamphlet into my hand that noted the locational advantage of the port as the gateway to Ethiopia and East Africa, listing the steady increase in tonnage and numbers of vessels that used Djibouti as a port of call. After visiting the special area reserved for the transshipment of goods to and from Ethiopia, we were heading towards the container terminal when the security officer had suddenly halted our tour. 'We have a boat from Yemen,' the officer explained as he instructed us to wait. Ahead of us an ambulance and two police vehicles were idling and a buzz of activity seemed to fill this otherwise quiet corner of the port. I watched as a Yemeni family emerged from a small car-ferry, repurposed to transport a family of six and all sorts of household items from fans to kitchen appliances, across the Bab-el-Mandeb. 'The rich Yemenis they come straight to the port of Djibouti, they get processed here and then rent a house. The ones without contacts or money, they go to Obock and stay in tents in the middle of the desert,' the marketing manager explained, referring to the small port town situated on the northern shore of the Gulf of Tajoura. We watched the migrants being interviewed and processed. Amidst the world of cargo, deadweight tonnage, glossy marketing brochures about vessel turnaround times and container safety, amidst the lurking navy vessels and an Indian Ocean-wide surveillance architecture, the port of Djibouti is also a place of these mundane arrivals, of those seeking refuge and of those returning.

Nestled between parched and jagged mountains and the hazy blue of the sea, the port cities of the Horn of Africa appear at first glance, to borrow the historian Thomas Spear's words, 'strange foreign jewels on a mournful silent shore' (Nurse and Spear 1985: 2). Most of these towns are collections of drab concrete buildings, shops and warehouses connected by rough, potholed roads. The relentless and harsh sun is a constant reminder of why the *saaxil* (coast) remains relatively peripheral and often inaccessible to the Somali peninsula's pastoral heartlands. Offshore, the sea is briny and tepid, with air so stifling, as one medieval traveler wrote, 'it turns wine sour within ten days' (quoted in Lapidoth 1982: 4). Yet, this vision of geographical inhospitality belies long histories of interaction and exchange. From the verdant 'forest-and-sea' region that begins in Mozambique in southern Africa to the desolate 'desert-and-sea' region that extends from Mogadishu across the Horn of Africa, the East African coast is lined with a series of port cities whose gaze extends simultaneously in to the hinterland and out across the water. A series of wind patterns and oceanic currents circulating between Asia and Africa, between the Red Sea and the Western Indian Ocean, create a rhythm to life both on land and at sea and, prior to the coming of steam, an infrastructure to transoceanic movement. This dynamism of hinterland and coast, of wind and currents, is central to the varied interactions that have shaped the coastal Horn of Africa from Massawa, in the north on the Red Sea coast, to the Bajuni Islands off the southern Somali coast and the Lamu archipelago in Kenya, linking these towns to

the flow of goods, people, and ideas that created cross-continental and trans-regional networks of connectivity.

Locating itself within a series of port cities this paper builds a port-centered view of polity, economy, and sociality in the Somali peninsula. At one level the view from the port city is a corrective to what the photographer and theorist Allan Sekula (1995: 32) terms 'sea blindness'. For Sekula, in the contemporary imaginary the sea remains invisible and only appears briefly as 'the site of intermittent horrors and extraordinary but brief expenditures of energy, quite distinct from the dramas of everyday life' (ibid). In opposition to this, Sekula's work, and an emergent interdisciplinary literature in the humanities and the social sciences, seeks to bring into view the centrality of maritime worlds – ships, ports and seas – in transforming understandings of histories and regions.² Drawing from this oceanic turn, this paper argues that sea blindness is particularly relevant in the ways that the Somali peninsula is understood in deeply territorialized idioms.³ Somali port cities offer a corrective to this vision and extend the geographies and histories through which we comprehend the Somali peninsula, thus opening a new vista onto region-making and place-making. Highlighting connectivity with the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean emphasizes the centrality of the Somali coast within a wider Indian Ocean world and the role of the maritime domain in shaping this region. A focus on Somali port cities also productively moves questions about the economy beyond the framework of the national economy. A port-centered view of the Somali peninsula indexes histories and futures of capitalism in this region that focus on trans-regional exchange and circulation, where the economy exceeds the spatial frame of the territorial state, rather than processes of production and consumption spatialized within the national frame. Through these interrelated enquiries we can ask: what might the gaze from the threshold of land and sea tell us about projects and processes through which mobility is enabled and interrupted?

Based on fieldwork in three distinct port cities, Benderbeyla, Bosaso, and Djibouti, this paper focuses on port-making as a project, bringing to the fore the mix of regulation and violence that, as this paper argues, is central to region formation and re-channeling circulation. While bringing three very different port cities into the scope of one paper means eschewing some of the particularities of the individual spaces, viewing them within the same framework highlights important continuities between otherwise discrete locales. Benderbeyla, Bosaso, and Djibouti reflect essential scales of port-making framed through a specific relationship between violence and regulation. Highlighting this interplay of violence and regulation, as well as its embeddedness within larger circuits of redistribution, reveals the politics of mobility as one sustained and expanded through technologies of violence. Port-making, as this paper will show, is a contingent and dynamic process where locations wax and wane in prominence. It also offers a lens through which to understand the centrality of circulation, its channeling and re-channeling, in shaping political life in the Horn of Africa. Beginning with a historical and theoretical overview of port cities, the paper turns to the three port cities of Benderbeyla, Bosaso and Djibouti, highlighting the port city as a site through which to engage with broader processes of mooring and moving.

BEYOND COSMOPOLITANISM: THEORIZING PORT-MAKING

In *Invisible Cities*, a series of fragmentary reflections on mythical urban spaces, Italo Calvino (1972: 55) describes the port city of Despina as a 'border city between two deserts'. Straddling two elements —land and sea—the geographic liminality of port cities and their location as borderscapes is central to processes of moving and mooring, of circulation and exchange. As the *Annalist* historian Fernand Braudel noted, port cities produce a society oriented simultaneously towards land and sea:

...its life is linked to the land, its poetry more than half-rural, its sailors may turn peasants with the seasons; it is the sea of vineyards and olive trees just as much the sea of long-oared galleys and the roundships of merchants, and its history can no more be separated from that of the lands surrounding it than the clay can be separated from the hands of the potter who shapes it. (Braudel 1992: 17)

In his masterful study of the Mediterranean, Braudel turned the historical gaze away from a narrow view of territoriality to a geo-history of the interaction between land and sea. Geography and the movement of people and goods through space and time – centered on a series of key port cities – gave unity to this world of the Mediterranean and created a world economy (*Weltwirtschaft*). Constituted by circulation and exchange – of goods, capital, people and ideas – this city-centered economy of the Mediterranean 'ignored the frontiers of empires – whether the Spanish Empire completed by Charles V (1519–1555) or the Turkish Empire... it also ignored the well-marked and strongly felt boundaries between the civilizations which divided up the Mediterranean' (ibid: 22). This port city-centered world is thus an alternate mode of imagining region, beyond the grounded vision of territoriality, as well as providing a history of capitalism that focuses on trans-regional exchange and circulation.

Influenced by Braudel's insights on the Mediterranean, scholars working on the Indian Ocean such as K.N. Chaudhuri (1985), Michael Pearson (2003), and Sugata Bose (2009), have sought to move beyond an idea of the Indian Ocean as a series of regions divided by water, seeing it rather as forming a zone of connections created through centuries of cross cultural exchange and the mobility of people, ideas and goods. Given the Braudelian influence, early scholarship on the Indian Ocean emphasized trade and exchange over the *longue durée*. In his sweeping history of the Indian Ocean, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean*, K.N. Chaudhuri focuses on the centrality of Islam in giving shape to the trans-regional space. He proposes, from the eleventh century, a segmentation of the trade into three main circuits centered around the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and the South China Sea. Similarly, Janet Abu-Lughod (1991) notes the emergence of an Indian Ocean-centered world system from around 1250. The port cities along the shoreline epitomized this 'creole cosmopolitan' (Ho 2006) ethos, and numerous scholars have highlighted the centrality of towns from Mukalla to Malacca in the circulation and exchange of goods, people and ideas. Port cities, in this scholarship, can thus be seen as the trope through which to understand the Indian Ocean 'before European hegemony' (Abu-Lughod 1991).

Alongside this vision of cosmopolitanism and flow are forms of violence and coercion that were and remain equally central in creating port cities. Port cities have historically combined *entrepôt* and fort, trade and cannons. This interweaving is clearly visible in the fact that the precursors to contemporary forms of military and navy are found not in the territorial states that emerged in Europe from the sixteenth century onwards, but from before then, in the private militias regularized by port cities like Venice from the fourteenth century onwards (McNeill 1982). In the Indian Ocean, as scholars like Prange (2011) and Margariti (2008) have emphasized, forms of predation and violence accompanied the peaceful cosmopolitan flow of people and goods in the historical period prior to the arrival of European imperialism.

One of the clearest chronicles of this mix of coercion and cosmopolitanism appears in the venerable Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta's encounter with the Somali coast. In 1331 Ibn Battuta reached Somali shores and landed in the northern port of Zeil'a in present day Somaliland. Within a day he had set sail again, glad to have left behind the 'most desolate and smelliest place in the known world,' a condition he attributed to the presence of a large fish market in the center of the town and the blood of the numerous camels that were slaughtered daily. Travelling south for fifteen days and fifteen nights he finally arrived in Mogadishu, a city far more to his liking. Ibn Battuta's arrival at this cosmopolitan and urbane port city is a chronicle of the slippages between cosmopolitan hospitality and the policing of this hospitality through coercion. In describing the Somali practice of *abaan* (protection), Ibn Battuta noted that immediately upon mooring:

...when a ship arrives at the anchorage, the *sanabig* (local small boats) come out to it. In every *sanbug* (sing.) is a group of young men from town and every one of them brings a covered dish with food in it. He offers it to one of the merchants of the ship and says, "you are my guest." Each *sanbug* does similarly. When the merchant disembarks from the ship he goes nowhere but to the house of his host... When he lodges with the host, he [the host] sells the merchant's goods and buys on his behalf. He who buys from him at too low a price or sells to him without the presence of his host—that transaction is considered rejected... to break this rule would result in great misfortune to the hapless visitor. (Dudd 1989: 245)

Battuta's writings, as well as the works of other medieval travelers, are filled with descriptions of a similar mix of cosmopolitanism and coercion. This intermingling of trade and raid was central to historical forms of port-making and is a process that continues, albeit in different guises, in an era of containerization and logistics.⁴

Depopulated, in a literal and analytical sense, the contemporary port city is often rendered as a mostly silent, shimmering monstrosity of cranes and containers loading and unloading with clockwork precision, fulfilling the logics of a just-in-time mode of supply chain capitalism (notable exceptions to this being Chalfin, 2010 and Simone, 2004). The logic of channeling and flow that emerges from the port is also central to a set of related spaces, from enclaves to exclusive economic zones, that dot the contemporary globe. Within the ethnographic archive a number of scholars have focused on this 'variegated process of segmentation, hierarchization

and logistical coordination' (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013: 206) that occurs in spaces that are simultaneously within and outside national jurisdictions. In the case of sub-Saharan Africa James Ferguson (2005) has argued for the emergence of 'enclave capitalism' as a concept to understand contemporary modes of African engagement with the global economy. Contrasting between 'thick' social investments as exemplified by the Zambian Copperbelt and 'thin' extractive enclaves that involve no social investment, Ferguson notes that these 'new forms of capital investment are intersecting with new techniques for establishing political order on the continent' (Ferguson 2005: 377). This resonates with a wider set of literatures on regimes of 'graduated sovereignty' (Ong 2006) where tax regimes, along with labor and safety regulations, are channeled to meet the needs of neoliberal extraction. Port cities are exemplary, then, of these new logics of governmentality and extraction. Yet these are also spaces marked by heterogeneity (Tsing 2009) that engender new possibilities of contestation and resistance (Cowen 2014).

Drawing from these varied literatures on enclave capitalism and port cities as well as on longer histories of trans-regional exchange and circulation, the rest of the paper emphasizes port-making as a process and project of region- and place-making that is productive of certain forms of politics and sociality. Focusing on the three port cities of Benderbeyla, Bosaso, and Djibouti, which vary in terms of demographic size, economic importance and political attachment, I nonetheless draw a common thread between them. Specifically, I highlight these cities as revealing scales of port-making that emerge through different configurations of violence and regulation. This is a world of mobility sustained and expanded through technologies of violence that re-channel circulation. Benderbeyla, Bosaso and Djibouti highlight three distinct, but interlinked, scales through which this re-channeling occurs, and its importance in creating networks of connection across trans-regional space. From the unpredictable and mostly ephemeral possibilities created through the capture of ambergris and container ships, to ports as havens of arbitrage within a war economy, to finally channeling trade by transforming sovereignty into resource, these three port cities reveal the varied possibilities through which one transforms the liminal space between land and sea into a location of profit and possibility. Discussing these three locations within the same frame also importantly reveals port-making as occurring within wider currents that are often not of one's making, thus bringing to the analytical forefront the role of contingency and historical transformation in shaping economy and politics. As opposed to a mode of politics that is dependent on claims over people through a language of citizenship, port politics highlight the centrality of circulation, coercion and regulation in shaping political life in the Horn of Africa. Before turning to these three port cities, the paper first highlights the longer history of Somali port cities within a world of Indian Ocean commerce and exchange.

SOMALIA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN WORLD

The central role of coastal East Africa within the Indian Ocean has only been belatedly recognized within the scholarly archive. In one of the first prominent texts on the Indian Ocean, the historian K.N. Chaudhuri excluded East Africa from discussion. As Chaudhuri noted:

The exclusion of East Africa from our civilizational identities needs a special word of explanation. In spite of its close connection with the Islamic world, the indigenous African communities appear to have been structured by a historical logic separate and independent from the rest of the Indian Ocean (Chaudhuri 1985: 36).

Themes of separation or connection of East Africa to the Indian Ocean world reappear within the largely tedious debate over the nature of the Swahili language and peoples as either authentically 'African' or 'Arab'.⁵ Coastal communities are either seen as replicas, mere shadows, of their Arab and Persian progenitors across the waters or, in opposition to this narrative of foreign-ness and other-ness, a countercurrent of historical and archaeological scholarship locates these societies as 'authentically' African. Eliding all connections across the Indian Ocean, this counter-narrative constructs a history of coastal East Africa within the grand narratives of African nationalism. Between these two poles and their reductive quest to locate the coast as either foreign or authentically 'African,' a sophisticated and ever-expanding anthropological and historical literature has emerged that highlights coastal settlements as places where 'people and culture mix; a perfect lieu de métissage, a locus of intermixing par excellence' (Miran 2009: 18).⁶ Writing primarily about the Swahili coast (notable exceptions being the work of Jonathan Miran 2009 and Scott Reese, 2008) these studies have convincingly refuted the alien origin theory of coastal societies while simultaneously recognizing the importance of trans-regional linkages and long-distance trade in shaping these locales.⁷ The connections forged between Somali port cities and the wider Indian Ocean world is a crucial, if less emphasized, dimension of this Indian Ocean archive as well as of Somali studies, which have privileged territoriality in opposition to linkages across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

The Somali peninsula's importance to the Indian Ocean world can be dated back to the first century AD, when tales from ports in the 'land of Punt' appeared on papyrus in ancient Greece. These parchments, compiled into the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* by the 10th century, note a rich trade in myrrh and frankincense (*lubban* or *foox* in Somali) that brought traders from across the world to ports like Berbera and Mogadishu. Following the *Periplus*, in the written record, the Somali coast appears in the early Islamic works in the ninth century, including notably the *Kitab Mu'jam al-Buldan*, a geographical dictionary that noted the importance of Mogadishu as the central trade emporium on the East African coast. Based on these geographical treatises and archaeological evidence, scholars such as Lee Cassanelli (1982), I.M. Lewis (1999) and Laitin and Samatar (1984) have noted that by the:

...first half of the tenth century a ring of coastal emporia had been created, largely as a result of Arab enterprise, and through these ports Islam and Arab trade had gained a foothold which, consolidated and strengthened in succeeding centuries, was to become the foundation for Muslim expansion in North East Africa (Lewis 1999: 22).

The genealogies traced by contemporary Somalis reach backwards towards this tenth century milieu and, specifically, the arrival of two notable saints from the Arabian peninsula.

In their oral traditions the Darood, one of the large Somali clan families, trace their ancestors back to a certain Abdirahman bin Isma'il al-Jabarti (Darood). According to oral retellings and the *manaaqib* (collection of glorious deeds) of Sheikh Ahmad bin Hussen bin Mahammad entitled *Manaaqib as-Sheikh Ismaa'iil bin Ibraahiim al-Jabarti*, the Sheik fled his homeland in modern-day Yemen following a familial argument. During the 10th or 11th century AD he is believed to have then settled in northern Somalia, just across the Red Sea. He subsequently married Dobira, the daughter of Dagale (Dikalla), the Dir clan chief, which is said to have given rise to the Darood clan family. Similarly, the Isaaq, the dominant clan in the present-day breakaway Republic of Somaliland, trace their lineage back to Sheikh Ishaq ibn Ahmad al-'Alawi, a Banu Hashim who came to Somalia at around the same time. While Somali records on Sheikh Darod and Sheikh Ishaq abound with tales of their piety and virtue in converting the non-Muslim Soomals of the Horn, little exists about these sheikhs or their families in hagiologies recorded on the Arabian peninsula.

According to I.M. Lewis, these genealogies threaded into everyday life through the practice of *abdirso* (recounting of ancestors) correspond to a historical timeline, and what these narratives represent in genealogical terms is a historical record of trade and social relationships across the Red Sea:

Here the genealogies become charters for the Islamic foundations upon which Somali culture is built, and they also serve to express in religious terms the political prestige and exclusiveness of large autonomous lineages. At the same time, although the particular genealogical claims they make seem completely untenable, they nevertheless record a tradition which is true—that of long historical contact between Somaliland and Arabia. (Lewis 1994: 47)

Whereas clan, for Lewis, often works in static terms, thinking genealogy through the vantage point of the Indian Ocean provides another vision of clan, one that is less rooted in a reductive structural functionalism, but more a pathway to traverse the Indian Ocean world.⁸ On a more mundane level, in addition to providing a genealogical and mythical connection to the wider world, the emergence of these port cities connected the worlds of pastoralism and oceanic trade. As Laitin and Samatar note:

Contact with coastal communities helped transform the Somali economy from a single mode based on pastoralism to one in which pastoralism went hand in hand with long distance trade. These elements combined to create, or stimulate two principle trends of Somali history in the next several centuries—namely the occurrence of a second great Somali migration and the development of centralized state systems. (Laitin and Samatar 1987: 8–9)

Lee Cassanelli has noted how an important byproduct of this connection between port cities and pastoralism was the spread of Islam into the hinterlands that drew the ‘Somali peninsula into sustained contact and a measure of interdependence and conflict with the Abyssinian hinterland and with the Oromo lands in the southwest’ (Cassanelli 1982: 9). This intermingling of coastal cities and pastoral hinterlands throughout East Africa created a rich and vibrant caravan-trading world from the tenth century onwards. A dense assemblage of routes brought littoral worlds into contact with the pastoral roaming grounds and agricultural production zones of the Horn of Africa. A list of the products that moved back and forth along these routes highlights the complex relations of production, distribution and consumption, and the global circuits that tied coastal and interior East Africa to the wider oceanic economy. Ivory, ostriches, hides and skins, frankincense and myrrh, coffee, livestock, slaves and gold all traveled along dusty paths from the interior; textiles, rice, dates, swords and, beginning in the nineteenth century, firearms, flowed inland from places as far away as India and China.

This ‘cross-cultural’ contact significantly shaped political and social identities in the region, a process accelerated with the nineteenth century scramble for empire. Although there was a British military presence in Aden from the late 1830s, it was during the latter half of the nineteenth century that the British administrative machinery in the port began to grow, firmly establishing it as a colony of the Government of India. The port of Massawa, on the coast of what is now Eritrea, emerged as an important regional meeting point for goods coming from India and Arabia and precious commodities from the Horn itself, including pearls, ivory and hides, but also more mundane goods such as meat, mats and fruit. At different times it fell under the imperial ambit of the Ottomans, Egyptians, Italians, and British. Jeddah, farther up the Red Sea, served as the entry point into the Hejaz for pilgrims and traders from all over the Muslim world. And just around the Horn of Africa the port city of Barawa, on the coast of Somalia, established itself as a key transit center for goods coming from the interior and those arriving from across the Indian Ocean. It, too, became the target of imperial expansion by the Sultanate of Zanzibar, the Italians, and finally the British.

Within this shifting world, these port cities also deftly shaped their own commercial and political destinies. Merchants and tribal chiefs in the port of Barawa in the early nineteenth century maneuvered strategically among different regional powers, alternatively aligning themselves with the Sultan of Zanzibar or the Qasimis in Sharjah and Ras Al-Khaimah in their bid to drive British ships out of the Gulf of Aden. And, as Aden rose in commercial prominence, it circulated its own scholars, merchants, and statesmen between the Persian Gulf, East Africa and Southeast Asia,

underscoring its centrality to regional networks of trade, knowledge and politics. With commercial opportunity came optimism, drawing in fortune-seekers from far and wide. By the late nineteenth century, other ports could at least boast similar populations to that of Aden: Massawa was home to a range of Arabs and Africans, but also a sizeable community of Gujaratis, Italians and Greeks. Within this broader world, the port cities I discuss below emerged into prominence and the rest of the paper now focuses on these individual cities and the logic of port-making that is revealed in these disparate locales.

BENDERBEYLA: PIRATES, AMBERGRIS AND SOVEREIGNTY

Extending from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, Somalia has one of the longest coastlines in continental Africa and is home to some of the world's richest marine resources. During the months of June to September the warm southwest monsoon churns the waters off the coast of northern Somalia. Merging with the Findlater jet, a narrow low-level atmospheric jet stream that blows diagonally across the Indian Ocean, these currents combine to create a coastal upwelling that brings nutrient-rich waters to the surface attracting tuna, snapper, and other coveted piscine delights. The northeast monsoon, which occurs from December to February, causes a reversal of the Somalia current, moving the coastal waters southwest. As air from the north cools the water, more nutrients arrive to the surface creating one of the most productive marine ecosystems in the world. In contrast to this fecund world offshore, the coastal region is a sparsely populated mountainous world, interrupted by small settlements and port towns. One such settlement is Benderbeyla, a fishing village on the windswept Indian Ocean side of the coast, whose fortunes, like those of other ports in this region have depended on its ability to access the bounty of the sea. Benderbeyla also highlights the first stage of port-making: a contingent and violent mode of capture, embedded within circuits of redistribution, through which to insert oneself into circuits of trade and circulation, as explained below.

In addition to teeming with fish, the maritime currents offshore from Benderbeyla also create a highway for lumps of ambergris, jettisoned by whales, to travel across the Indian Ocean and find their way up into the bottleneck formed by Somalia and the peninsula of southern Arabia. Ambergris is an unusual flotsam of the sea. Produced in the digestive tract of sperm whales in order to ease the passage of hard, sharp objects – such as squid beaks – that the whale may have ingested, ambergris was valued for its medicinal properties and as a fixative for perfumes (allowing scents to last much longer). By the early 19th century a boom in the global ambergris trade led to the establishment of 'ambergris ports' along the northern Somali coast, such as Benderbeyla, where communities earned their livelihoods by collecting this valuable wax. In the nineteenth century an ambergris craze developed globally as perfumes became central to a new olfactory regime of marking class and related ideas of taste and sensuality (Kemp 2012). Ambergris was seen as a 'gift from the ocean,' whose bounty tied these newly populated coastal villages to wider economies in the region.

Echoing rules regarding the distribution of salvage from shipwrecks in the nineteenth century,⁹ this ambergris economy was built on a mix of capture and redistribution. Few restrictions existed at sea for its appropriation, and chance and risk were crucial to the acquisition of this bounty. Once the flotsam washed onto shore rules regarding property and ownership were strictly, and often violently, enforced within the local community. In 2011 in one such former ambergris village, Sheikh Usman explained to me the principles of property allocation. According to the Sheikh, village elders (*oday*) allocated a section of the beach to each family in the village, with the sole right to collection. Like plots of precious farmland these were zealously tended and handed down from generation to generation. The

transformation of profits from ambergris into livestock or payment for laborers, such as *askaris* (guards) or cleaners for the sea frontages, created a redistributive network built around clan payment groups.

In addition to creating this redistributive network, ambergris was central in place-making. Villages like Benderbeyla were, prior to the ambergris boom, seasonal settlements or small fishing villages isolated from wider networks of trade that connected the hinterland to the coast. The ambergris boom transformed these settlements into port towns. As the Sheikh recalled, 'if you were successful in finding ambergris at sea you could bring the merchants and traders to your village and prevent them from going elsewhere.' The ability to capture ambergris at sea channeled trade and brought merchants and other assorted hangers-on to the doorsteps of Benderbeyla and other villages. Indian and Arab traders visited these locales annually to purchase the substance and the resulting cash provided villagers with access to livestock and other commodities, creating semi-permanent settlements. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and British imperial expansion into the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean transformed northern Somalia's incorporation into currents of global capitalism.¹⁰ Within the world of ambergris capture, possibilities for profit and access to a wider world greatly increased, along with the violence associated with this practice as rival groups sought to channel this increased flow of goods and capital along the coast. Coercion marked both an entry into this world of trade and was also a key tool of place-making where, through violence, potential rival port towns were excluded from this sea of trade.

With the development of synthetic substitutes demand for ambergris decreased as the perfume industry became able to use cheaper substances to fix scents. Additionally, the possession and trade of ambergris was prohibited globally by the mid-twentieth century as part of a wider ban on the hunting of sperm whales. While ambergris continues to enjoy a niche market, mostly for its reputed properties as an aphrodisiac, the ambergris economy is no longer a mainstay in coastal Somalia. Many ambergris ports faded into obscurity. Others, like Benderbeyla, continued to be fishing villages. In the early 1970s Benderbeyla once again came into prominence, this time in channeling another bounty of the sea: fisheries.

In 1972 the Somali government decreed in 'Law No. 37 on the Territorial Sea and Ports' that the Somali territorial sea extended to 200 nautical miles (as opposed to the traditional designation of 12 nautical miles). This move was followed by the launch, primarily through Soviet assistance, of a deep-sea trawling fleet and the construction of fish factories and processing plants along the coast. The drought of 1974 that devastated large portions of the livestock throughout the region also created a new impetus for the establishment of fishing cooperatives along the coast. By 1975 new settlements along the coast were built for the resettled nomads at Eel Haamed, Eyl, Adale, and Barawa – stretching from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean. Through a mix of international assistance, namely Soviet, and later Australian and Italian, capital and advisors, these settlements sought to settle nomads impacted by droughts and transform them into fishermen. Prior to these settlement programs, fisheries accounted for less than one percent of the country's GDP. As the Food and

Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) noted in their 2005 report on fisheries in Somalia that:

...with the introduction of 500 mechanized boats in the early 1970s, the annual catch increased from about 5,000 tonnes to a peak of 8,000 tonnes in 1975. However, due to the lack of maintenance and spare parts for the new boats that had been distributed to the fishermen, about two-thirds were out of operation after only two years, and, as a direct consequence, by the late 1970s annual fish production was back to 5,000 tonnes. (FAO 2005)

Mohamed Hershi, a clan elder, explained the licensing system that his village developed with the state-backed fishing cooperative SOMFISH in the early 1980s.

When SOMFISH wanted to fish near our village, they agreed to pay us \$1000 a month so that we stayed out of their way. They also hired a number of men from here to give protection to the trawlers and make sure no other vessels came into the area. Most of the time we were just keeping the area free from fishermen from Bossaso or other places around the coast.¹¹

Villagers recalled that the fishing trawlers began to arrive from other countries around 1986. While most of these vessels stayed away from the coast or were chased away by the local protection group, many interviewees recalled Norwegian trawlers attempting to make similar protection deals with the local community. A number of these trawlers had obtained licenses from the regime in Mogadishu and hired groups such as the local protection group in Benderbeyla to keep other fishing boats out of the water. As with the world of ambergris, coercion and redistribution were intimately related in this mode of fishery development. Violent confrontations between local protection groups and foreign fishing vessels, especially those that attempted to fish in the area without official or unofficial 'licenses', grew increasingly commonplace in the 1980s, especially after the fall of the Barre regime in 1991. In addition, foreign trawlers, in particular those using bottom trawling techniques, greatly harmed local fishing grounds and impacted the artisanal fishing communities along the coast. Following the collapse of the Somali state, with the intensification of foreign trawling this system of protection and licensing was transformed and rescaled when semi-autonomous regions, such as Puntland, contracted foreign private security companies to both protect coastal waters from illegal fishing and create a revenue base for these regions through extracting rents from the sea.

This was a key moment in villages like Benderbeyla. The development of private coastguard initiatives by the Puntland government along with a host of new technologies including mobile phones, global remittance systems, the proliferation of small arms, and access to skiffs with powerful outboard motors, allowed for the scaling up of possibilities of inserting oneself into the sinews of global trade. The arrival of private security helped, with mixed results, to deal with illegal fishing. But crucially it also impacted the informal licensing systems that already existed in

coastal communities throughout Puntland. Licensing itself became a matter of contestation. While a few coastguard initiatives attempted to create an inclusive and salaried employee pool, most attempts at coastal regulation were built on logics of capture tied to existing patronage networks and often led to violent confrontations at sea. Armed skiffs would intercept fishing trawlers and ‘sell’ a license to boat captains.¹² The fees from this license would then be divided amongst the crew and authorities on land. Often these licensing regimes came into conflict with pre-existing systems. In Benderbeyla, Mohamed Hershi noted that, starting from 2001, official coastguards consisting of militia groups with ties to the government in Garoowe – the capital of Puntland – attempted to shut down their informal licensing system. Conflicts over jurisdiction sparked, often armed, confrontations between competing coastguards over the ‘right to tax and issue licenses.’

When the Puntland government started issuing fishing licenses, the Thai trawlers that used to pay us to fish in our area stopped paying and said they would deal with the Hart people [Puntland Coastguard which was trained by a British private security firm Hart Security Maritime Services Limited] instead. Since this was our right to issue licenses we fought the Hart boats if they came close to our area. This was a time when even a fisherman had to take a gun when he went out to sea because everyone was trying to become a coastguard.¹³

The rise and fall of various coastguard initiatives was deeply tied to contestations over political power on land and they underscore the close relationship between profits from a ‘sea of fish’ and political authority in Puntland. The short-lived coastguard initiatives also had a major consequence that is linked directly to the upsurge in maritime piracy. As official coastguards fell in and out of favor depending on their connections with the ruling elite in Garoowe, these multiple and scattered attempts at regulation left behind a well-trained, unemployed labor force along the coast that took to the seas in order to extract revenues from fishing vessels, *dhow*s and cargo ships.

Hashi, a former private coastguard, exemplifies the experience of a number of Somali coastguards from the early 2000s, who found themselves without a salary when shifting political alliances left their employers (in this case Somcan)¹⁴ out of political favor.

Many of us had been trained in GPS and also to do boarding of ships. When the Taar brothers lost their contract, I decided to join another group and we became our own private security. At some point we decided to move from capturing fishing vessels to capturing even bigger fish and we moved to capturing oil tankers and other vessels. At this point, this is our work. Why would anyone go back to catching tuna when you can catch an oil tanker?¹⁵

The transformation of Benderbeyla from ambergris village to pirate port highlights a continuity of port-making achieved through coercion and violence that is nonetheless rooted in idioms of redistribution and obligation. From ambergris to

fish to container ships, Benderbeyla operates through logics of force: inserting itself into channels of circulation and profiting from this violent form of extraction. Benderbeyla exemplifies, thus, a historically situated mode of port-making where force provides an entrée into a world of trade and is the central logic in keeping competition at bay.

The next section shifts scale to look at the channeling of goods and services that sits on the line between legal and illegal. Here it is not force but rather circulation, specifically locating oneself within the underbelly of various economic and political flows, that provides the possibility of becoming a port city.

BOSASO: NODES OF CHEAP TRADE

The cheap and casualized ports of Somalia have become centers for the export of livestock. Animals are often brought from as far away as northern Kenya and the lowlands of Ethiopia. Peaking during the annual *Hajj* season, and involving networks of herders, traders and brokers, the trade transcends national, ethnic, religious, and geographic boundaries. The ports connect the sea to the crisscrossing hinterland paths of camels, cattle, sheep and goats. The seasonality of the trade gives a certain rhythm and routine to the passage of ships. In the weeks and the days preceding the *Hajj*, holds are unloaded and loaded with livestock in a matter of hours, while during the lull of the rainy season boats lie idly at dock. Crews, primarily from India and Pakistan, mill around in an unusual mix of boredom and companionship, as they exchange stories, watch movies, cook meals, drink tea and 'time pass'. Occasionally, they may leave port for the market, mosque or for meetings with brokers and traders. Sometimes, they buy *qat* and attempt a group chewing session on board, though, for the most part, they prefer paan leaves or tobacco.

Once cargoes and itineraries are arranged, then the portside bustle begins anew. Holds are kitted out with two or three layers of temporary decking, each furnished with pens made from planks and lined with straw. A procession of livestock arrives from nearby quarantine stations. These are run by Saudis and Emiratis and have been key in rescinding the ban on the export of livestock from Somalia to the UAE following outbreaks of Rift Valley Fever in 1998 and 2002. The quarantine stations provide the paperwork and test results necessary for the export of livestock. During the summer livestock are loaded at night, the ships slipping away before the port is bathed in ferocious morning sunlight. At other times, the sights, sounds and smells of livestock being loaded intermingle with the other daily rhythms of port life. Livestock and hides make the journey to the ports of the Emirates, as well as those of the Red Sea.

While livestock retains primacy within this trade network, a whole host of goods ranging from used cars, charcoal, foodstuffs, and building supplies arrive and depart from ports like Berbera, Bosaso, Mogadishu and Kismayu. Standing at these ports watching wooden *dhow*s glide in and out, it is tempting to imagine the *dhow* trade as a timeless vestige of an Indian Ocean past. However, a closer look reveals a more dynamic and contingent mode of port-making that is deeply tied to considerations of transaction costs, taxation and regulatory regimes as well as wider currents of circulation of global shipping and constantly changing political dynamics. These currents of circulation create new routes and openings as others fade or lose prominence. The region's trading communities are quick to adapt, shifting only slightly from inside their vast network of godowns where commercial life continues uninterrupted. Unlike Benderbeyla, where coercion was key to accessing and channeling the sinews of trade, Bosaso represents a second stage of port-making. The logic through which ports like Bosaso come into prominence depends on a mode of circulation that emerges through arbitrating location.¹⁶ Although violence and larger geopolitical currents do shape these port cities, it is

their ability to provide safe havens and sit at the nexus of legality and illegality that matters here. These are locations constituted by their ability to provide both cheap alternatives and to productively exist in the underbelly of a variety of political and commercial systems.

Considering the rise of Bosaso in recent years, we see a story that is unfolding similarly on the coast of western India as in Somalia. In western India, on both sides of the Gulf of Kutch, are small port cities that have historically supplied the maritime infrastructure including boats, credit instruments and sailors essential to seagoing trade in the Western Indian Ocean. In recent years, as special economic zones and dredging projects for real and imagined container ports have been constructed along this coast, these small port cities continue to connect places outside the major trading routes. Primarily transporting bulk goods such as rice, cement, foodstuffs and charcoal on wooden *dhow*s and other small bulk carriers, this shipping network can be understood as an economy of arbitrage.

A boat captain explained the logic of this trade network as he waited for his ship to be loaded in Bosaso in July 2013:

We pick up things from Dubai, Sharjah and Oman that are unloaded from container ships... We get tea from Kenya, cement from India, sugar and wheat in Oman and bring it to Somalia. Some boats also go to Iran. Twenty years ago we started this job. At that time we picked up things to take to Iraq from Dubai because ships were not going to Basra in those days [due to trade sanctions and insurance costs].

For this captain and many others the logic is simple: traveling to places where container ships cannot or will not go due to expenses, port capacity, or security. In addition to these global and regional shifts, this world of circulation and the process of port-making it engendered were also shaped by the rise and fall of the Siad Barre regime in Somalia.

As the military regime of Siad Barre consolidated power in Mogadishu in the 1970s, traders from Northern Somalia moved to Mogadishu in order to benefit from the protection of the state. Nonetheless, as Alex de Waal notes, in the early 1980s livestock exports from the port of Berbera accounted for approximately 75% of Somalia's recorded foreign income (de Waal 1996 quoted in Hoehne 2016). The subsequent crackdown on the Isaaq clan, beginning in the 1980s as the country inched towards civil war, initially directed all maritime traffic to Mogadishu. The fall of the regime and the civil war in Somalia that led to the closure of the port of Mogadishu for almost a decade from 1991 onwards, once again reconfigured these patterns of movement. Markus Hoehne (2016) has described a reterritorialization of Somali clans following the civil war, a reterritorialization that, *inter alia*, led to the rise of ports like Bosaso that sought to provide outlets and safe havens for Majeerteen and other Harti traders who were 'returning' to their clan homelands following the civil war. Berbera and Bosaso in the north were revived by the return of these traders and merchants, highlighting how old ports reinvent and re-emerge in the shadow of violence to provide safe havens. Some twenty years after the fall

of the Somali state these traders continue to map itineraries and facilitate the movement of goods and commodities within this trading loop of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. These networks of circulation that emerge within the shadows of global and regional geopolitical upheaval highlight a logic of port-making as facilitation. These are port cities that arbitrage location, providing cheap, safe and quick access to frontier markets and networks. These are also locales that exist at the intersection of legality and illegality.

In 2011 one was greeted by a sign at the entrance to the Bosaso port. Posted by the International Migration Organisation in the 1990s, faded and almost illegible, it warned of the dangers of *tahrib*, youth migration.¹⁷ Amidst a visible and legible world of trade and movement, of customs forms and port declarations, the decrepit sign pointed to the existence of another realm – an invisible realm of mobility, where bodies circulate around the Red Sea, rendered visible only at times of tragedy and state intervention. High demand for labor in the Arab Gulf states, as well as continuing instability in the Horn of Africa, have led to the re-emergence of human smugglers amid other forms of passenger traffic, a process increased with the civil war in Yemen. The vessels from Gujarat intermingle with general coastal passenger trade, and sometimes share itineraries, diesel, payment methods, and passengers with other vessels. Amidst this world of *tahrib*, has flourished an illicit economy of human smugglers and kidnappers, often at tremendous cost to those who attempt the perilous voyage.

Musa, a three-time veteran of the *tahrib*, spoke to me from his shop in a back alley close to the fish market in Bosaso, of his preparations for crossing the Red Sea. He was originally from the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, from a group opposed to the government, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Some years ago he had taken the decision to escape to a better life in Dubai or somewhere else in the Middle East. With two companions he walked from Ethiopia to Bosaso to find a boat willing to take them for \$500 per head. After two failed attempts to find a boat, the third time he undertook the crossing, but the overloaded vessel began to sink. He saw the captain take out his gun and throw people into the water. He was rescued by another ship and returned to Bosaso. He said that he would try again after Eid and that this time, *inshallah*, he would make it across.

The simultaneous presence of legality and illegality is certainly not unique to Bosaso. Ports, including the hypermodern, mechanized worlds of Long Beach, Hamburg and Singapore, are central nodes through which illegal commodities traverse the globe. What is important here is that the size of these small ports means legal and illegal cargo intermingle in more obvious ways. This highlights a larger truth about global circulation as a process woven together through the movement of legal and illegal commodities.

As Peter Little (2003) has pointed out, the rhythms and geographies created by the world of pastoralism exceed the frameworks of nation-states and trans-regional trade. Especially in the aftermath of state collapse, they have been central to reconstituting everyday life in the context of state collapse. Making the maritime connections of this world of trade visible reveals both the longer histories within

which mobility is framed as well as reverberations of events near and far. From containerization to liberalization in India, to the collapse of the central government in Somalia—all participate in shaping the rise and fall of ports. Port-making is less about an insertion through force into the sinews of global capitalism, but rather about deftly maneuvering in the underbelly of this system. The final example of port-making shifts scale again – to Djibouti where port-making and state-making as well as contestations over state authority meld together.

DJIBOUTI: SOVEREIGNTY AS A RESOURCE

So far I have highlighted two scales of port-making. Beginning with capture, where port cities emerge as spaces from which to violently re-channel global circulation, to a mode of port-making that is also framed by violence, but here to provide a safe and cheap haven for circulation. While both port cities have a relationship to regulation, trade and state-making do not fully overlap in the first two scales of port-making. Djibouti represents a third stage of port-making where sovereignty emerges as a resource in order to re-channel trade. Djibouti exemplifies port-making as a form of place-making through the reorganization of space and political authority. For the port of Djibouti this is a process that began with the 19th century scramble for the Gulf of Aden.

The French were relative latecomers when they arrived on the shores of northern Somaliland in order to exert influence over the Red Sea. From 1883 to 1887 French emissaries established a presence on the coast through signing a series of treaties with local Somali and Afar groups. Central to French ambitions in Somalia was establishing a railway line that connected Addis Ababa to the coast. The *Chemin de Fer Franco-Éthiopien (CFE)* was a 'monopolist company that was financed and controlled by French state guaranteed capital' (Killion 1992: 583). However, unlike other railroad projects throughout the continent, the bulk of the CFE ran through the ostensibly independent Ethiopian Empire creating a precarious position of 'attempting to enforce a colonial monopoly without the benefit of direct political control.' (Ibid.) As Tom Killion highlights, through this railway line the French sought to exploit the Ethiopian empire as a colony without assuming any of the responsibilities of colonialism. In the early decades of the twentieth century the French state invested heavily in the construction of the CFE and in developing the port facilities in Djibouti. It was during this period that the port of Djibouti emerged from being a small ramshackle set of settlements into one of the most significant ports in the Horn of Africa, primarily due to its location as the terminus of the Addis Ababa–Djibouti railway.

The railway line overlaid the caravan paths traversed between the hinterland and the coast, specifically the caravan trade between Harar and Zeila. The caravan trade, as noted earlier, was central to commercial and social life in the region. The establishment of the Addis Ababa–Djibouti railway sought to interrupt this flow through re-channeling these goods to train carriages and shifting the coastal locus from Zeila (which was under British control) to the port of Djibouti. This mode of re-channeling extended from land to sea, transforming not only the routes and itineraries of overland caravans, but also of marine traffic and flows in the Indian Ocean. As Erik Gilbert (2004) has highlighted in the case of 19th and 20th century Zanzibar, British control over the Indian Ocean was framed in a language of regulation. Exemplifying, for the British, the traditional pre-modern trading world of slaves and spices, the dhow trade was seen as an anachronism in an era of free trade and steamers. Gilbert and other historians of East Africa (including Sheriff 2010, Bishara 2017, and Mathew 2016) have pointed to a wider European imperial discourse that included British, French and Italian attempts at transforming the

dhow economy in East Africa into an informal/illegal economy by the late nineteenth century.

The development of the port of Djibouti meant re-channeling trade away from the caravan routes to the railway but also from Obock in the north and Zeila in the south. This was achieved through a series of regulatory measures including the creation of lighthouses, the use of ship identification papers and various decrees that regularized the flows of ship traffic, including the establishment of quarantines (see Bezabeh 2016 for a discussion on these measures). As Brenda Chalfin (2010: 573) observes, '[i]n Africa, as elsewhere, ports are a telling indicator of the tenor of political power and the contests and shifting fortunes among ruling groups'. The Djibouti case highlights the complete intertwining of state-making and port-making, a process that continued with the transition to independence in 1977. Political authority in Djibouti has continued to rest on transforming location and sovereignty into a concession and resource. Alongside this, the port of Djibouti is home to numerous military bases. Initially a strategic outpost for the French military, the number of bases has expanded to include countries like the US, China, Saudi Arabia and Japan in a post 9/11 and post-Somali piracy world. The port and military bases are the main sources of revenue and the *raison d'être* of Djibouti. Djibouti's primary revenues all depend on its location. As Jennifer Brass notes,

The country benefits not only from its position at the gateway to the Red Sea on the shipping routes between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, and its military-strategic location next to the Arabian Peninsula, but also from being the most expedient trade route for Africa's second most populous country, land-locked Ethiopia. The Government of the Republic of Djibouti (GoRD) relies on its location for the vast majority of its revenue. Money comes primarily from three sources: first, the International Port of Djibouti, 86% of whose business involves Ethiopian trade (EIU 2006). Proceeds from the port, combined with the second rental source, the Djibouti-Ethiopian Railway, account for one third of the country's GDP (FH 2007). Finally, Djibouti earns rents from several foreign military bases, especially large French and American ones; both countries pay US \$30-\$36m yearly, alongside considerable bilateral assistance aimed at fighting endemic poverty. (Brass 2008: 525)

The recent rehabilitation of the Addis-Djibouti railway further promises to increase this reliance on location, a dynamic that Brass calls 'Djibouti's unusual resource curse.'

This emphasis on location was repeated numerous times while doing research in Djibouti in 2016. In the summer of 2016, in the small bustling office of the Djibouti Ports Authority, an energetic team of young marketing graduates were hard at work. 'We're branding the port as the crossroads of Asia and Africa,' explained Fatima, the chief of port-marketing who was responsible for producing the glossy brochures that I had been given when I arrived at the office. Over the next few weeks I observed Fatima and her team sell berthing space at the port to clients from around the world, in addition to arranging tours of the port for a variety of visitors.

'The port is really our selling point,' Fatima remarked when we chatted in between her client meetings. 'Our location is what makes Djibouti very different. We have the Ethiopia market since they are landlocked and in conflict with Eritrea. No one is really dealing with the port of Assab or Massawa [in Eritrea] and on the other hand you have Somalia.' Fatima emphasized Somalia with a big smile, as if just uttering the word made it obvious why the port of Djibouti was the obvious choice. 'Location is what makes Djibouti; we're a small piece of land otherwise. It helps us that we're surrounded by war on all sides.' Fatima smiled knowingly again as she uttered the last sentence. Then, perhaps recognizing that she might be coming across as a bit callous, she clarified, 'I mean strictly from a business sense. War is obviously not something to wish on one's neighbors, but it's good for business!'

While location is central to both Benderbeyla and Bosaso, in Djibouti this is also about branding – specifically the promise of the port as a regulated space, legible within a world of international standards and technologies. As the port manager in Djibouti explained in 2016, 'what you get when you choose Djibouti is both access to Ethiopia and East Africa, but also a port that has all the standards of a global port. In fact we are launching a green initiative and plan to be one of Africa's first green ports.' This aspect of branding was also central when the port of Djibouti created a partnership with Dubai Port World. Inaugurated with much fanfare in 2000, the partnership between Djibouti and the Dubai-based DP World was meant to solidify Djibouti's claim as the main port of call on the Bab-el-Mandeb, eclipsing Aden across the strait. In addition to establishing a container terminal in Doraleh adjacent to the old Djibouti Port, DP World also constructed a dry port and special economic zone modeled on the Jebel Ali Free Trade Zone in Dubai. DP World was a signifier of regulatory stability. However, this partnership hit rough waters in 2014 and had ended by 2016.

But these modes of regulation in port or at sea, then and now, were never without resistance or other modes of protest. When state-making and port-making become deeply intertwined, resistance to the port becomes a mode of making claims on the state, reminding us that violence is simultaneously an infrastructure for port-making but also a mode to contest these forms of place-making. In the nineteenth century, far from being docile subjects the itinerant sojourners who traversed these waters sought to contest these measures through the idiom of petitions that appealed to French authority, or they sought out alternative authority structures (Ottoman, British, and Italian) in order to make their claims legible.

In addition, a rich archive of oral traditions, including poetry, documents the experience of those who toiled on and those who resisted colonial infrastructural projects. The host of a long-running radio program, Baddon, had been recommended to me as the person to meet to find out about the history of Djibouti during my fieldwork in 2016. 'There are many poems about the railroad that I've heard and collected over the years,' Baddon mentioned when we met at the archives of Djibouti Radio and Television on the edge of downtown Djibouti. 'I used to recite them in my radio shows.' Interspersed with didactic programs on Islamic ethics, news commentaries ranging from the war in Somalia to the Palestinian crisis, his shows wove in poetry on historical events in order to draw lessons from the past. A

number of these poems spoke of the railroad and the disruptions it caused to the caravan trade. Some were on the labor and danger of working on railroads and a number deftly and alliteratively mentioned various acts of sabotage. In one there was extended praise for a local Afar who would undo the work of track-laying every night. Another praised local Hadrami ship pilots for sinking a French ship in harbor. These poems reveal a distinct mode of politics and engagement with infrastructural projects. As the railway and port came to be seen as physical manifestations of the colonial state, opposition to these projects (from Afar and other non-Isa Somali groups) became a mode of contesting state power. This fusion of state and port, and also of military and trade, highlights the threads that connect locales like Benderbeyla to mega-projects like Djibouti. Port-making, as this paper has argued, is deeply imbricated in the management of force, whether through privatized forms of capture at sea or through a state and global apparatus of concessions and naval and military bases.

In the early twentieth century Djibouti's rise as a port of call in the Red Sea was tied to a wider ability to channel – through a mix of trade and raid – distinct temporalities of long-distance commerce from the caravan trade to the newly emerging routes of empire built on steam and undergirded by the infrastructure of international law. Port-making allowed for French expansion into the Red Sea, as well as sparking modes of resistance that articulated themselves in vocabularies old and new, through strikes and in sabotage. Since independence in 1977 the state of Djibouti has sought to manage these flows of trade and, in a post 9/11 world, to also host a security apparatus that has sought to police the littoral world of the Indian Ocean. Location, in addition to this intimacy of trade and raid, is key to the success of port spaces, whether in small ambergris villages turned pirate ports, in the flows of 'cheap' trade that operate in the underbelly of the logistics revolution or in the multi-modal transit hubs like Djibouti. But location, then and now, is a fickle friend. Ports wax and wane, appear and disappear. Today Benderbeyla is a sleepy village once again, with ambergris and pirates long gone. Djibouti, too in the summer of 2016 woke up to a similar possibility.

By 2014 shipping and transportation accounted for one third of Djibouti's GDP and the container port in Doraleh was scheduled to process over three million containers per year. In the midst of this revenue boom, the government of Djibouti canceled the contract with DP World and began arbitration proceedings in the UK against DP World and Mr Boreh for corruption. In 2016, now Dubai-based Mr Boreh reappeared, this time negotiating a deal in Berbera, Somaliland with DP World to develop a 'new Djibouti' on the Red Sea. Berbera's closer proximity to Ethiopia was always acknowledged by port officials in Djibouti as a potential impediment to Djibouti's hegemony over the Ethiopia trade. DP World's investment plans were viewed as a direct attack on the port of Djibouti, an attempt at port-unmaking through re-channeling trade further south on the Red Sea. In another setback to Djibouti, the UK High Court dismissed the case against Mr Boreh in early 2016. However, an unlikely ally for Djibouti emerged when the new president of Somalia, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmaajo, during his first official state visit to Saudi Arabia in February 2017, sought Saudi intervention against UAE's plans to open a

military and counter-piracy base in Somaliland as well as DP World's port expansion plans. Citing the non-recognition of Somaliland's sovereignty, Farmaajo's administration has challenged Somaliland's ability to make contracts that should be under the purview of the central government in Mogadishu. In these dramas of recognition, ports become sites to articulate and litigate the spectral and real figures of sovereignty. The coming battle between Djibouti, Berbera and Mogadishu will seek to redraw the maps of mobility—of goods, people, and capital – that determine the rhythms of life on land and sea in the Somali regions.

CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on port-making as a project of re-channeling mobility. By taking three radically different port cities: Benderbeyla, Bosaso and Djibouti, this paper has emphasized the three scales and forms of port-making. Beginning with a form of violent capture of global circulation, be it of ambergris or of container ships, Benderbeyla exemplifies the first scale of port-making. Violence is the mode through which to make a claim on global mobility; a violence that, as Benderbeyla highlights, is nonetheless nested within systems of redistribution and reciprocity. Violence connects this first scale of port-making to that exemplified by ports such as Bosaso. Violence is often central to the making of these ports, but here it is the ability to provide a haven from violence, an alternative itinerary through a global sea of trade, that makes these into sites of profit and possibility. Finally, when port-making and state-making merge we enter a scale of port-making exemplified by Djibouti, where regulation, branding and other signs of the 'global' are central to re-channeling trade and in the making of these port cities.

By viewing these three port cities within the same analytical framework of port-making this paper has sought to highlight a line of connection that ties together three otherwise very different sites along the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. This is not, however, a linear story and this paper brings to the forefront the role of contingency by emphasizing the waxing and waning of ports and economic hubs more generally. Providing a corrective to the land-centered writing that has dominated the field of Somali studies, these port cities reveal a form of polity and sociality that emerges through claims over mobility – as opposed to territory or population – thus providing a new vantage point to understand the arrivals and departures that constitute everyday life in the Horn of Africa.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Restricted zone.

² On the oceanic turn in the social sciences and the humanities see Benton (2009), Blum (2010), Desai (2013), Helmreich (2009), Ho (2006), Rediker and Linebaugh (2000), Wick (2016).

³ See for example Barnes' (2006) argument that *u dhashay* (belonging to family) and *ku dhashay* (belonging to place) are central idioms shaping Somali modes of belonging. These conceptions are seen as territorial idioms of belonging. Kleist (2004) is one of the few authors to highlight Somali engagements with the ocean, specifically focusing on the 19th century recruitment of Somalis as seafarers by the British merchant navy.

⁴ On the history of containerization see Levinson (2016).

⁵ For a good overview of earlier views of coastal African (primarily Swahili) society see Nurse and Spear (1985).

⁶ See Simpson and Kreese (2007) for an example of the newer historiography of the Western Indian Ocean that focuses centrally on this mode of understanding and engaging cosmopolitanism.

⁷ Beyond historiography, an emergent literary archive focuses on cosmopolitanism as the frame through which to understand trans-local linkages across the Indian Ocean. See Ghosh (1994) and Vassanji (2004) for two exemplary works. For a critical assessment of this literature through a focus on South Asian writings on East Africa and the Indian Ocean see Desai (2013).

⁸ See Ho (2006) for a discussion on this and on the ways genealogy provided modes of engagement and encounter in the Indian Ocean.

⁹ In the nineteenth century, the northern Somali coast had become infamous for shipwrecks due to whirlpools and other treacherous conditions as ships moved from the relative calm of the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean. As a result of these shipwrecks an economy for plundering vessels and ransoming those who had the misfortune to be stranded along this desolate coast developed, at the same time as these waters were becoming key to British, Ottoman, French, and Italian imperial designs. See Cruttenden (1844–46) for an account of this shipwreck economy from the perspective of a British Navy officer. Durrill (1986) and Dua (2013) locate this shipwreck economy within wider Somali engagements with colonial powers in the nineteenth century.

¹⁰ For an analysis of the shifting nature of this incorporation of northern Somalia within global capitalism in the immediate aftermath of the opening of the Suez Canal see Kapteijns (1995), Laitin and Samatar (1984) and Reese (2008). For a broader discussion of the role of the British in the Red Sea see Marston (1961).

¹¹ Mohamed Hershi, Benderbeyla, interview with the author, March 2011.

¹² This resonates with Tilly's (1985) reflections on protection rackets where individuals offer protection from threats that are often produced by them in the first place. Protection then becomes a source of extraction and a mode of establishing political authority.

¹³ Mohamed Hershi, Benderbeyla, interview with the author, March 2011.

¹⁴ Somcan was one of the numerous private maritime security companies that were involved with the Puntland government in providing licensing to foreign fishing vessels and 'anti-piracy activities'. Unlike its predecessor Hart Security, Somcan was locally owned, although registered in the UAE. The Taar family who had close personal relationships with former Puntland president Abdullahi Yussuf ran the company. It was this personal connection that has been seen by many as resulting in the rapid deterioration in relations between the company and the administration, following the election of Mohamud Muse Hersi.

¹⁵ Hashi Eyl, interview with the author, March 2011.

¹⁶ Arbitrage entails taking advantage of price differentials in two or more markets. Anthropologist Miyazaki (2013) draws on this idea to explore the lifeworlds of financial traders in Japan as they use arbitrage to shape their personal and intellectual endeavors beyond their professional role as

financial traders. Drawing on Miyazaki, a recent PhD dissertation explores how seafarers use a similar logic of arbitrage to quantify the risk of maritime labor (Mannov 2015).

¹⁷ See Ali (2016) for a discussion on the transforming political economy of tahrir in contemporary Somalia.