CHAPTER 5

Algorithmic Power in a Contested Digital Public

Cryptopolitics and Identity in the Somali Conflict

Peter Chonka

Ongoing conflict in Somalia is conventionally understood in terms of a struggle between an internationally backed Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the Islamist militancy of Harakaat Al Shabaab Al Mujahideen (Al Shabaab). However, this basic alignment of actors intersects with a far more complex configuration of domestic and external political actors including regional/autonomous state administrations, local militia, African Union-mandated forces, and neighboring/international state actors. Al Shabaab—as a clandestine militant network and parallel form of governance—has often been described by local political commentators as working toward agendas that intertwine with those of a multitude of other political/military actors and identities across the region. In recent history, many of these cryptopolitical narratives have taken the form of different (and sometimes contradictory) conspiracy theories/beliefs that employ highly sensitive rhetoric around the contested history of Somalia's state collapse and the discursive construct of "clan" affiliation. Some of these conspiracies are articulated through demonstrably "fake" news published online by anonymous producers in the region and in the diaspora. However, these narratives can have tangible impacts on the stance and communications of "official" political actors, in what remains a highly contested security environment. Online platforms enable the spread and impact of these narratives but are not simply neutral spaces for the engagement of political actors and commentators. Instead, the chapter argues that it is also increasingly important to consider both human and nonhuman influences on the Somali-language digital public in which these cryptopolitical discourses play out. Different forms of algorithmic power may structure and encourage particular types of information retrieval that both reflect and

influence dynamics of political or military contestation in the Somali Horn of Africa.

Cryptopolitical understandings of Al Shabaab's militancy can be understood in relation to three factors. First, they have their roots in the unreconciled legacies of the wider and longer Somali conflict (the period before and after state collapse in 1991) and the distinctive (if disputed) anthropological discussion of clan differences as "invisible" among a regional population who largely identify in ethno-linguistic and socio-religious terms as Somalis and Muslims (Ali Ahmed 1995; Besteman 1998; Lewis 1998, 2004). Second, conspiracy theorization is also engendered by the complex realities of violent power projection by both local and external actors in Somalia and the remarkable robustness and reach of Al Shabaab's networks of parallel governance. The third factor, the chapter argues, relates to the nature of the modern Somali-language "digital public" in which these cryptopolitical narratives circulate and are debated. The chapter outlines a regionally and politically fragmented network of media producers that include "state" broadcasters, private local, transnational news organizations and diaspora commentators, all of which are intertwined through ubiquitous social media platforms and practices of online information retrieval through search engine algorithms.

Recent discussions of digital "cryptopolitics" have foregrounded encryption as a core technology of internet security—protecting data and (potentially) "stabilising the power of the state" in an anarchic and transnational digital realm (Monsees 2019: 2). Although this chapter focuses on the digital public of debates around the Somali conflict and state reconstruction, "cryptopolitics" here is understood more in relation to its earlier use to describe hidden agendas of factional politics (Rigby 1969). Central here is the idea that political actors are working in clandestine fashion toward particular goals and are part of wider—but often invisible—networks. Through conspiracy narratives, commentators make links and build networks of relationships. In this sense, the process is analogous to the structuring of the Internet, through which many of these theories are articulated. However, this digital public is not merely an open forum within which commentators publish and compete for attention. Access to content is mediated through technologies such as search engines. These are underpinned by commercial algorithms that enable or encourage user access to particular sources of information. Features such as search engine autocomplete "predictions" can influence the type of content searched for and accessed. They themselves make associations between different keywords and fields, based on a variety of factors that may include previous user searches.

The opaque and inscrutable nature of these algorithms makes them cryptopolitical technologies in and of themselves. Highlighting one example of Somali-language autocomplete search prediction, the chapter demonstrates how search algorithms may encourage users to "uncover" information relating to controversial identity markers of clan—the same types of markers that have been frequently engaged in cryptopolitical narratives around Al Shabaab and wider Somali political dynamics.

The chapter demonstrates the nature and significance of cryptopolitical conspiracy theorization to the recent history of ongoing political fragmentation in Somalia, and then problematizes the algorithmic power of search engines in this African-language digital public as a potentially important factor shaping understandings of identity and narratives of conflict. As such, I first outline relevant discussions in the anthropological and historical literature that engage with identity construction and political contestation in Somalia. This is followed with an introduction to local structures of digital media production. To demonstrate how the digital public becomes an important arena for identity-based regional contestation, I analyze several (predominantly Somali-language) texts that have disseminated specific conspiracy claims—coming from anonymous "journalists," named commentators, as well as prominent politicians. A case for the "offline" or "real-world" salience of these types of narratives is made by linking the texts to security dynamics that have been documented in relation to the ongoing conflict and the evolution of Al Shabaab as an organization. The data analyzed in this section is largely derived from my PhD fieldwork in different sites of media production in Somalia/Somaliland and the diaspora around 2015 and my previous experience monitoring Somali-language media in my role as an interpreter for an international humanitarian organization.

That digital platforms are conducive arenas for the circulation of conspiracy theories or other forms of mis/disinformation is hardly a novel finding nor one peculiar to the Somali digital public. However, after the chapter makes the case for the importance of such narratives for understandings and practices of violence within the Somali conflict, it then introduces another element in the digital semantic context that should also be factored into accounts of the Internet's impact on "fragile states": external search engine engagement with local language content. The chapter builds on the previous structural analysis of conflict media production with consideration of potential algorithmic influences on debates and practices of popular information retrieval. I present a systematic case study that examines how search engine "autocomplete" suggestions/predictions currently engage with Somali-language input and present users with keywords relating to "clan."

Consideration of how algorithms make visible or encourage user engagement with certain types of information provides a new lens through which to explore the broader concept of digital cryptopolitics that is the subject of this volume. The analysis around a specific digital practice relating to identity politics brings to light an emergent (and challenging) field for critical engagement with algorithmic power in conflict-affected states. Scholarship in this area has hitherto overwhelmingly focused on Western and English-language contexts and scrutiny must be expanded to explore the structuring effects of algorithmic technologies—such as globally ubiquitous search engines—on transnational African-language digital publics and discourses in conflict zones.

Historical Roots of Contemporary Cryptopolitics

Somalia has been without an empirically sovereign state exercising control over the entirety of its territory since the collapse of Siyaad Barre's military regime in 1991. The civil war of the 1980s fractured the country along multiple regional and clan-based fault lines that remain salient and (to a large extent) unreconciled to this day. Distinctive in the wider continental context, the Somali Horn of Africa is home to a population that largely identifies (ethnically) as Somali, speaks dialects of the Somali language, and are Sunni Muslims. A swathe of "Somali" territory stretches beyond the boundaries of Somalia into Djibouti, eastern Ethiopia, and northeastern Kenya. That these territories were not incorporated into the post-independence Republic of Somalia in 1960 was largely the result of prior histories of colonial contestation and boundary creation in which Britain, Italy, France, and Ethiopia played important roles (Barnes 2007; Clifford 1936).

Relatively high levels of ethno-linguistic commonality through the region should not be taken as an indicator of social homogeneity. Somali society is characterized by a range of cleavages that engage minority-racial, ethnic and caste-type distinctions, and the lineage "system" of clan affiliation and customary law that historically helped structure social relations among a predominantly nomadic pastoral population. These are all disputed (and, at times, essentializing) characterizations of "Somali society" that have been fiercely debated in the wider anthropological and Somali Studies literature (Ali Ahmed 1995; Besteman 1998; Lewis 1998). Nonetheless, there has come to be broad scholarly recognition that the idea of "clan" has never remained static. Instead, processes of economic and political transformation from the colonial encounter through the post-independence state-building era fundamentally

altered the political logics of the lineage system in ways unrecognizable from the pastoral context that was the backdrop for earlier ethnographies of Somali societies (Samatar 1989, 1992)

Three points within the clan and society debate are particularly salient for this chapter's discussion of cryptopolitical conspiracy narratives in digital and real-world arenas of conflict. First, the sharing of a standardized dominant dialect of Somali is central to the functioning of the transnational media spaces that serve as channels for debate across the multiple borders of the Somali Horn. In comparison to apparently greater heterogeneity in Somalia's neighboring multi-ethnic states such as Ethiopia and Kenya, the relatively high level of ethno-linguistic and socio-cultural homogeneity between Somalis from the main clan families has meant that differences between these groups have been described as "invisible" (Lewis 2004).[1] This notion of "invisibility" is important to consider in relation to the wider concept of cryptopolitics and conspiracy and the ways certain modern media technologies (e.g., search engine algorithms) facilitate—and potentially encourage—an uncovering of information pertaining to individuals and associated markers of identity.

The second point is that Somali politics in recent history has been understood by many local actors in terms of clan affiliation. This has been quasi-institutionalized in the so-called 4.5 quota system that has allocated political representation at the federal level on the basis of four main "clan families" and a half share for so-called minority populations. Despite attempts over the last decade to facilitate one-person-one-vote elections for Parliament and the Presidency, transfers of power have continued to be undertaken through indirect processes involving clan representatives and electoral delegates, a fraction of the wider population who vote for parliamentary seats allocated according to the 4.5 formula (these MPs in turn vote for presidential candidates, most recently in 2022). Some scholars argue that institutionalizations of "tribal" identity simply reflect the internalization of external narratives about the apparently primordial origins of clan within an essentialized Somali society that date back to colonial-era anthropological studies (Kapteijns 2004). Nonetheless, there remains a tension in the formulation of this 4.5 quota system (itself highly disputed) and general taboos in political discourse around the explicit public mentioning of clan identities (Kapteijns 2012).

These tensions are themselves related to the wider history of the Somali conflict. Although Siyaad Barre's "scientific socialist" regime (1969–1991) embarked on a "modernist" project of (literally) burying clan identities (Tahir 2016: 84), the repressive nature of his rule both

required and encouraged the widely perceived development of a particular (and clan-based) inner circle of power-holders (Compagnon 1995). In facing growing opposition, the regime responded by effectively mobilizing and militarizing the same clan cleavages that it had once railed against in the name of Somali ethno-nationalism and the irredentist project of unifying the territories of "Greater Somalia." Armed opposition to the regime came to be organized along clan lines, not as a result of overriding primordial attachments to lineage groups but because of the ways in which the regime had manipulated such wider divisions (Kapteijns 2012), and the logistical advantages that were presented to armed movements in their engagement of clan elders and customary law (Compagnon 1998). After Barre was overthrown in 1991, the civil war continued in the south-central regions and violence was often enacted along clan lines. Lineages (even loosely) associated with the former regime were "cleansed" from the capital (Kapteijns 2012), southern ethnic and racial minorities—particularly in agro-pastoralist areas—suffered disproportionately from the predations of armed groups (Besteman and Cassanelli 2000). This period (from the late 1980s till the mid-1990s) of mass violence, humanitarian crisis, and the "destruction" (*burburkii*) of the state has had profound implications for the modern territorial and political-social map of Somalia. To a large extent, what occurred through that period was the displacement and relocation of large numbers of people to areas (*deegaano*) traditionally associated with their clan groups (Hoehne 2016). This had the longer-term impact of crystallizing certain clan-territorial boundaries that had historically been characterized by a significant level of blurring, overlap, and mobility (Cassanelli 2015).

These processes contributed to the emergence of the post-1991 political authorities that this chapter discusses in relation to narratives of Al Shabaab's (later) militancy. These various secessionist, regional, or insurgent administrations require some historical introduction. The Republic of Somaliland in the northwest declared its independence from Somalia in 1991, largely as a reaction to the mass violence unleashed by the southern Mogadishu-based regime. Throughout the course of the civil war, Somaliland's capital, Hargeisa, was almost entirely destroyed by the regime in its offensives against northern rebels (Omaar 1993). Many in Somaliland have described this as a "genocide" carried out against the clan-family that predominates in the northwest (Jhazbhay 2009). Although sub-clans of this clan-family dominate politics in Somaliland, some other groups outside this lineage have been partially incorporated into Somaliland's (relatively democratic) independent political project.

The Puntland State of Somalia was established in the northeastern part of the Somali Horn in 1998. Puntland became a refuge for many people (including those hailing from the broad clan-family of deposed dictator Siyaad Barre) fleeing early 1990s violence in south-central Somalia (Marchal 2010). Puntland has remained largely autonomous since then and, like Somaliland, developed its own governing institutions and armed forces. Unlike Somaliland, Puntland now considers itself to be a Federal Member State of Somalia Federal Republic. Nonetheless its relationship with the FGS in Mogadishu has often come under serious strain. Somalia's other, more recently formed, federal member states (Jubbaland, Southwest State, Galmudug, and Hirshabelle) all took formal shape under the auspices of the wider (UN-backed) federalization project undertaken by the internationally recognized FGS in Mogadishu. The FGS came into power under President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud in 2012, after the expulsion of Al Shabaab from the capital the previous year. Under the subsequent presidency of Mohamed Abdulaahi Farmaajo (2017–2022) these center-periphery relations continued to be tested. Contestation has related to a lack of constitutional clarity on the federal division of responsibilities and revenue between the FGS and the federal member states (Somali Public Agenda 2018). Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud retook the presidency in May 2022, the culmination of a delayed, disputed, and protracted indirect electoral process for the legislature and executive. At the time of writing, center-periphery tensions over fiscal federalism remain.

International patronage is also an important factor in political fragmentation, for instance in relation to the engagement of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia (which have often dealt directly with the federal member states, and de facto independent Somaliland), and Turkey and Qatar (which have tended to maintain closer links with the FGS in Mogadishu). Turkey's humanitarian, diplomatic, and security-sector training support has been vital to the FGS since its formation in 2012. As such, Somalia has become an important arena for wider Gulf/Middle East rivalries. This has manifested itself in regional port/infrastructure development (Roble 2017) and extensive training to various federal and regional forces. Many other actors are involved in such military capacity building, such as British and EU trainers, as well as private security companies. Overall, however, the FGS has faced difficulties in consolidating the Somali National Army (SNA) and integrating regional forces into its command structures (Williams 2019). The FGS still exerts limited authority beyond Mogadishu. Although Al Shabaab has lost significant amounts of urban territory since 2012 under African Union (AMISOM), SNA, and US military pressure, it maintains an

active presence in many rural areas and the ability to continue to launch deadly conventional and asymmetric attacks across the south-central region (and Puntland).

This brings us to Al Shabaab's campaign itself and the parallel systems of governance it operates. The distinctiveness of the organization's strong, pervasive, widespread, and clandestine institutions is fundamental to popular imaginations of its cryptopolitical agency and its instrumentalization of social cleavages. Al Shabaab rose to power in Somalia in the wake of the (US-backed) Ethiopian overthrow of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in 2006 (Barnes and Hassan 2007; Hansen 2013). From the mid-1990s onward, the UIC had emerged as a somewhat "organic" alliance of local Islamic judicial authorities and business actors in many urban centers across south-central regions (Ahmad 2015). By the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, it was seen by many Somalis as constituting a relatively legitimate governance experiment that neutralized the power of warlords who had emerged through the 1990s, and improved general security conditions in cities such as Mogadishu (Kapteijns 2010). The specter of organized Islamist governance across its historically disputed border was troubling to the Ethiopian government, which effectively leveraged post-9/11 fears of Al-Qaeda penetration in the region to secure US support for an invasion. This violent regime change proved highly unpopular with many Somalis, and Al Shabaab—hitherto one armed faction within the wider courts system—positioned itself as a "nationalist" resistance movement and ultimately succeeded in expanding its administrative power even further than that previously held by the UIC. An ambiguous Ethiopian withdrawal and propping up of an unpopular Transitional Federal Government gave Al Shabaab the opportunity for this expansion. However, by 2011, multilateral international support for anti-Islamist operations had ramped back up to the level that AMISOM—the African Union's now longest serving "peace support" operation (Williams 2018)—was able to expel Al Shabaab from Mogadishu. This set the scene for the installation of the Somali Federal Government and successive SNA/AMISOM taking of other south-central cities and towns from the group.[2]

Al Shabaab's insurgency has continued, and the group continues to penetrate security measures in Mogadishu in its high-profile attacks against military, governmental and civilian targets. It attempts to justify the latter in terms of their association with the state, intelligence or foreign interests (Chonka 2018). Although Al Shabaab's targeting has not been entirely indiscriminate (Warner and Chapin 2018), the group has lost a significant amount of the popular support it once enjoyed

in its engagement with foreign forces on Somali soil. Relevant to the analysis that follows is the way that Al Shabaab has evolved as a multifaceted and clandestine military and administrative network across the Somali territories and beyond. This has consistently been evidenced in security, humanitarian, and policy-orientated literature on the Somali context over the last decade. Al Shabaab maintains governance institutions in areas that it still controls and extracts significant revenue. Truckers in south-central Somalia, for instance, have reported preferring to travel along Al Shabaab-controlled routes due to their more regular taxation of goods, in comparison to multiple local militias aligned with the regional states and/or the federal government (United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea 2017: 40). "Taxes" are levied on a wide array of businesses throughout Somalia (with the likely partial exception of Somaliland), while some of the poorest agriculturalists in central regions have been hit by extortive extractions. Al Shabaab also administers a parallel judicial system in many areas, including, reportedly, districts in and around Mogadishu (Bananay 2017). The organization's intelligence/counterintelligence arm, the Amniyat, is widely feared, both within the group and in wider society. The group has maintained a tight ideological core (despite internal purges and leadership changes) and also engages in practices akin to organized crime. Almost uniquely in modern Somali politics, Al Shabaab has often maintained a degree of cross-clan representation in its decision-making structures,[3] although centralization due to military pressure may have altered this and influenced the development of a rival Islamic State affiliate in Somalia (Hiraal Institute 2018).[4]

Cryptopolitics and Conspiracy in the Digital Public

Al Shabaab's militancy at times maps onto—or is imagined to conspiratorially intersect with—the regional fragmentations of political power across the Somali territories. The chapter now outlines the digital media environment in which these political-regional-clan narratives have often been debated across regional and international borders. It then discusses media texts that have both advanced and attempted to debate and debunk conspiracy theories around Al Shabaab's crypto-militancy. While these texts mostly date from the period of Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud's first presidency, similar types of cryptopolitical narrative were expressed throughout the term of his successor (President Farmaajo), where Al Shabaab violence continued and was often linked by commentators to broader political or commercial disputes (Elder 2022).

Local and diasporic understandings of political change and conflict in Somalia are debated across a Somali-language digital public of multiple overlapping media networks and social media platforms. Elsewhere I have outlined a broad typology of these media producers (Chonka 2019) drawing distinctions between (1) Somali-language media networks that are headquartered in the global diaspora and broadcast via TV, radio, and Internet news across all of the territories of the Somali Horn (e.g., BBC Somali Service or Universal TV); (2) "State" broadcasters of the various administrations that claim authority in different parts of the territory (e.g., Somali National TV, Puntland TV, Somaliland National TV); (3) private locally headquartered media houses that have the capacity to broadcast across the whole territory (e.g., online) but often have sectional audiences (e.g., media consumers who identify with particular regions/administrations and who may be located in the region or in the wider global diaspora); and (4) the media production of Al Shabaab itself and its affiliates/sympathizers (Chonka 2016). Importantly, ubiquitous social media platforms such as Facebook interlink many of these different networks and producers and individual commentators/politicians use these spaces to publish and publicize their work. Similar to other African contexts, political authorities across the region have recognized the security implications brought by increasing access to social media and the potential for (mis/dis)information to spread rapidly (Hassan and Hitchen 2019; Srinivasan, Diepeveen, and Karekwaivanane 2019). The capacity of authorities to regulate this media ecology varies widely, however authorities in Somaliland have blocked access to social media around election times (Walls et al. 2018), and the federal government in Mogadishu has recently emphasized their willingness to restrict access to such platforms in its attempt to hold national school examinations.[5]

Within this wider media ecology, certain administrations have carved out their own publics to debate "internal" politics. Somaliland-based media, for instance, cover developments inside the de facto independent republic that relates to its own political institutions and processes—"Somalia" here is very much defined as a foreign country. Nonetheless, even in Somaliland, multimedia transnational Somali-language broadcasting is consumed widely by citizens. It is within this broader Somali digital public that Somaliland articulates its status and claim to independence. Within these media spaces the different political directions of secessionist or autonomous administrations are also disputed. It is in relation to these discursive contests that the article examines the specter of Al Shabaab, as expressed in narratives from various political actors across (and between) the different regions in the post 2012 period of federal state reconfiguration.

One conspiracy narrative that has found periodic expression in macro-political debates involves Somaliland's alleged complicity with (or even active support for) Al Shabaab, as a means to perpetuate instability in southern Somalia and therefore bolster Hargeisa's claim to secession and international recognition. Such accounts often focus on the fact that Somaliland has not been a recent target of Al Shabaab operations (since large-scale bombings of state, Ethiopian, and UN interests in 2008), and that former leaders of the organization—such as deceased Emir Ahmed Abdi Godane—hailed from the region itself. This supposed relationship was outlined in a highly questionable (English-language) article that appeared in February 2016 on the (now defunct) Kenyamedia.net website. Entitled "The Nexus between Somaliland and Al Shabaab," the article's byline featured two named "Swedish Investigative Journalists." These individuals do not appear to exist, and it is unclear who the producers of the piece actually were. Although now irretrievable on the original site, copies of this article continue to circulate on other Somali websites,[6] in the same manner that much other digital content is copied and pasted across multiple locations. Of course, digital platforms also provide the spaces and tools for other commentators and "investigative journalists" to debunk such content, as was the case with the "nexus" piece in question. In this case, the website Solaportal.com presented evidence that these writers were fake, casting doubt on the claims made.[7]

Although the dubious "nexus" piece did not directly engage with narratives of clan, conspiracy theorization of this sort has intersected with wider clan/territorial narratives engaging with conflict in southern Somalia. Somali-language polemics such as that written in 2014 by an individual purporting to be an elder in the conflicted Lower Shabelle region (in southern Somalia where the conflict with Al Shabaab has been particularly acute) reference multiple external actors described in controversially explicit clan terms. Somaliland was labeled derisively as "Isaaq-land" (in reference to the predominant clan-family in the northwest), and the writer alleged their agents' involvement in the Shabelle conflict, and wider Mogadishu politics as a means to prevent state-building in the south and advance the interests of Somaliland.[8] The writer employed the colorful description of Isaaq MPs—for him "secret agents" of Somaliland—sitting around in hotels in Mogadishu plotting against Somali "unity" (this trope plays on the fact that there are politicians in the Somali capital who hail from Somaliland, but who nominally "represent" the northwest regions in *Somalia's* parliament). Although this piece constituted an extreme and convoluted form of clan conspiracy-based argumentation, it nonetheless shares many

rhetorical features with other similarly written polemics in Somali cyberspace. Different vocabularies, idioms, or euphemisms of clan here interplay with nationalist tropes of Somali cultural, religious, or linguistic homogeneity in the face of externally manipulated political fragmentation—in which Al Shabaab is seen to play a clandestine role.

Such conspiracy narratives could be dismissed as the inevitable ephemera of the vast digital spaces that provide platforms for fringe voices and seemingly unlimited scope for the propagation of misinformation. Nonetheless, just as scholars in the west are increasingly cognizant of the cumulative impact of "fake news" and "toxic" digital subcultures on "mainstream" political debate and electoral processes (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017; Gruzd and Roy 2014; Persily 2017; Wodak, Mral, and Khosravinik 2013), the Somali context also provides examples of how such narratives could be seen to both reflect and potentially influence "official" political stances.

An instructive case here relates to the conflicted relationship between the administrations of autonomous Puntland and secessionist Somaliland, which over the last decade has manifested in open hostilities in the regions of Sool and Sanaag that are disputed between them (Hoehne 2015). Clashes around the strategic village of Tukaraq in May 2018 were an escalation of these tensions and claimed the lives of dozens of soldiers on both sides. In the context of these long-running disputes with Somaliland, Puntland authorities have invoked the conspiratorial specter of Al Shabaab. The group has long maintained a presence in Puntland (particularly in the mountainous regions along the northern coast and close to the important port city of Bosaaso) and has carried out asymmetric and conventional attacks against Puntland state and military targets. Officially aligned against all Somali state actors, Al Shabaab considers Puntland to be an "apostate" administration, in league with foreign intelligence services and favorably aligned with UN-backed "stabilization" plans for Somalia. The Puntland authorities, for their part, have on several occasions made public statements to the effect that external Somali political actors (including Somaliland) have been supporting Al Shabaab as a proxy to undermine their control of the northeast.[9] In January 2015, those allegations from Puntland's Security Minister—while not backed up with specific evidence—related to a controversy over Somaliland's impounding of a ship containing international military cargo at the port of Berbera. I have previously documented how this incident was also accompanied by a flurry of dubious reporting and misleading images that circulated online at the time (Chonka 2019), and the Puntland Security Minister here expressed concerns that such equipment could be channeled by Somaliland to Al Shabaab in the Galgala hills.

Puntland authorities have also accused the Federal Government of Somalia (in President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud's first term) of facilitating Al Shabaab operations in its territory. As such, another Puntland Security Minister in 2016 accused the FGS in Mogadishu of allowing Al Shabaab forces to enter Puntland in order to destabilize its territory.[10] He claimed that this was related to Puntland's dissatisfaction with the 4.5 system of clan representation (being used at the time for parliamentary selection) advocated by the Mogadishu-based government. Around that period, a prevalent conspiracy theory in Puntland claimed that Hasan Sheikh-era FGS authorities in Mogadishu were manipulating or even directing Al Shabaab attacks for clan-political goals. The targeted killings of Daarood Members of Parliament (linked in these narratives with their "home territory" of Puntland) were alleged to be part of a "Hawiye" conspiracy against Puntland in the process of the reconstruction of a federal government. At that time, a popular Puntland-orientated news site published an article called "Muuq-disho" that played on the name of the capital as an "image of killing" and other puns to signify collusion between Al Shabaab ("Al Habaab/the lost") and the Dam Jadiid faction (or "Dulmi Jadiid"—the "new oppression") associated with the president.[11] Although such accounts tended to feature much more in the way of rhetorical flourish than evidence, they epitomized contrasts being drawn between clan "home" territory (*deegaan*) and the apparent dangers of the Mogadishu political environment.[12]

The wider conflict with Al Shabaab in Somalia is not only played out via regional forces such as Puntland or the Somali "National" Army, but also engages a wide array of foreign security "partners." In a highly opaque operating environment, various forms of security patronage and cooperation are open to accusations of manipulation and hidden agendas. For instance, Puntland security/intelligence agencies were themselves accused by the Galmudug regional administration in September 2016 of feeding US forces false intelligence that resulted in an airstrike against the latter's militia near the city of Galkacyo. Puntland and Galmudug dispute their border (and the city of Galkacyo itself is divided along clan-political lines) and Galmudug authorities alleged that Puntland actors had led US forces to believe that their troops were Al Shabaab operatives.[13] Further south, in regions such as Lower Shabelle, other botched raids involving US forces on the ground have also been attributed to false "human intelligence." A SNA/US Special Forces joint raid in the village of Bariire in August 2017 led to deaths of ten civilians (including children) and subsequent investigative reporting alleged that clan-political motivations lay behind misleading information that precipitated the operation.[14]

The Lower Shabelle region has itself been a particularly complex theater of operations for various clan militias, African Union and US forces, the Somali National Army, and Al Shabaab. The latter has itself proved adept at taking advantage of long-standing communal grievances from populations that consider themselves to be indigenous to the region against the encroachment of powerful Hawiye sub-clans into southern regions. This has a long history that stretches back into post-colonial industrial agricultural developments, post-state collapse predations of marauding militias (Besteman and Cassanelli 2000; DeWaal 2007), and more recent discontent around the role of the SNA—itself often structured around clan groupings—in extending political and economic power from nearby Mogadishu into the region. In this context, credible reports emerged in that period of SNA soldiers "moonlighting" as Al Shabaab operatives for financial gain and clan-motivated attacks on civilians by combined groups of SNA, clan-militiamen, and Al Shabaab fighters.[15]

All of the above narratives of conspiracy—some of which are grounded in stronger evidence than others—are partly engendered by Al Shabaab's organizational profile and the clandestine networks through which it operates. Important here are its aforementioned mechanisms for financing. A lack of regulation and relative ease of mobile money payments across the territory (as well as Al Shabaab's renowned use of SMS messaging for extortion) have meant that a wide variety of businesses have needed to pay the organization to continue functioning (Mubarak 2020). As such, it is frequently possible for commentators to imagine ways in which conspiratorial relations are enacted through flows of finance and information across a spectral regional network.

This section has presented a series of snapshots of narratives that connect Al Shabaab's militancy to various complex and contested political relationships involving regional and clan identities. These narratives have been frequently debated in the "real-world" political context of the ongoing reconfiguration of the Somali state, and in a digital public of media production across various political boundaries within and beyond the region. A myopic focus on "clan" politics—as a primordial signifier and determinant of conflict—is a deeply problematic approach (Kapteijns 2004; Samatar 1992, 2006). I engage the concept here only in the sense that its contested and ambiguous position in local political discourse render it a frequently engaged trope for conspiracy theorization in the digital public. Tensions are manifest in the relationship between its taboo status in acceptable public discourse (not always respected in online debates) and its continued institutionalization in

certain political structures—such as the 4.5 quota formula for clan representation in Somalia's legislature. Conspiracy narratives link various actors with different types of (often hidden) agendas, and often present themselves as making the invisible visible. The following selection continues this discussion of invisibility, taboo, and cryptopolitics but argues that analysis of controversial content in the digital public also requires consideration of the ways in which nonhuman actors (such as algorithms) may affect how people search for and retrieve information about a conflicted context.

Identity Politics and Algorithmic Power

Studies of online discourse globally have increasingly emphasized how sensational, controversial, and polarizing content can come to have disproportionate impacts on wider information environments (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017). Often this is discussed in terms of the power of "fake news" and other forms of "clickbait" that are driven by the commercial logics of internet traffic advertising revenue (Bakir and McStay 2018; Gray, Bounegru, and Venturini 2020). Also important are the ways in which social media platforms "curate" content into user's "newsfeeds" through algorithms that predict what those users will respond positively toward—thus creating "echo chambers" or "filter bubbles" that reduce users' exposure to alternative viewpoints (Bennett and Pfetsch 2018; Bozdag and van den Hoven 2015). This burgeoning literature reminds us that online platforms are not neutral spaces where ideas have an equal capacity to circulate and compete. Instead, nonhuman elements—like the algorithms that underpin social media platforms or search engines—play a significant role in directing users' behavior and providing access to certain types of information. Understanding the circulation of controversial cryptopolitical conspiracy theories in the Somali-language digital public requires similar consideration of the influence of such platform structures. Studies of these dynamics in non-Western/non-English-language digital spaces have largely been lacking, and the "black box" nature of proprietary algorithms makes it difficult to identify specific ways content in African indigenous languages is being processed by the platforms on which people search and access such content. Nonetheless, this section is able to pinpoint an example where a clear "algorithmic power" (Bucher 2018) is identifiable and demonstrates how this may reinforce or encourage online engagement with the cryptopolitical discourses of clan and conspiracy highlighted above. Presented here is a specific and systematic case study on digital information retrieval and

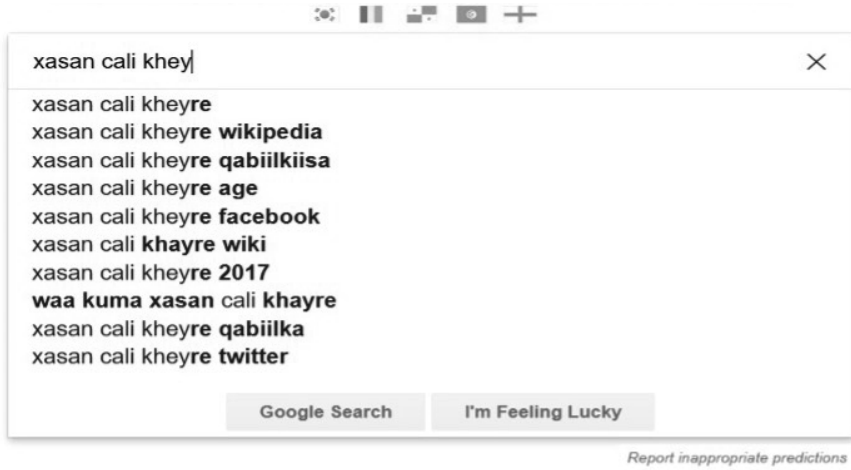

Figure 5.1. Selection of Google autocomplete predictions (18 June 2019). © Peter Chonka.

the role of Google's search engine query "autocomplete" algorithm, which offers users predictions in relation to their typed query. This data illuminates ways these technologies have the potential play into cryptopolitical understandings of political agency and the challenges they present to understandings of ethnic identity formation or construction.

While undertaking fieldwork in Somalia, I came across the phenomenon whereby entering the (Somali) name of a male political figure (for instance, the then Somali prime minister) into the Google search engine produced the following type of selection of autocomplete predictions (see Figure 5.1).

Aside from completing the spelling of his name and suggesting a search for his Wikipedia entry, the third autocomplete prediction is "*qabiilkiisa*," Somali for "his clan." Prompted by this experience, I later designed a systematic test to enter search terms for ten male Somali politicians (all contemporary, except former president Siyaad Barre) and to record the autocomplete predictions the algorithm presented. Out of the ten names, similar clan-related keywords were suggested for six of these. For three women prominent in Somali politics, one returned a clan-specific keyword prediction in the test. Recognizing the potential for the researcher's past digital traces to influence the operation of the algorithm, I conducted this experiment not only on my personal computer in the UK (which I frequently use to access Somali-language online material), but also on a UK colleague's computer, who had never accessed any Somali-language content). Although I had first noticed this

Author's computer (UK)												
Date of search	03.06.2019		Suggested/predicted Google autocomplete search term									
Full Name (Somali)	Position	User search input	M/F	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Muuse Biixi Cabdi	President of Republic of Somaliland	Muuse Biixi	M	abdi	snm	hooyadiii	**qabiilkiisa**	**waa qoloma**	twitter	iyo farmaajo	age	**qabiilka**	
Cabdiweli Maxamed Cali Gaas	Former Puntland President	Cabdiweli Gaas	M	wikipedia	taariikhda	madaxweyne	**qabiilka**	dr	gaas				
Maxamed Cabdiaahi Farmaajo	President of Somalia	farmaajo	M	twitter	somalia	wife	age	kheyre	iyo kheyre	pic	book	news	
Xasan Sheikh Maxamuud	Former President of Somalia	Xasan Sheikh	M	muumin	maxamuud	facebook	**qabiilka**	cali nuur	wikipedia	**abgaal**	jigjiga	iyo xaaskiisa	
Axmed Maxamed Islaam	President of Jubbaland	Axmed Madoobe	M	**qabiilkiisa**	2006	pictures	youtube	images	kismaayo	photos	iyo qalbi dhagax	wikipedia	
Shariff Xasan Sheikh Aden	Former president of SouthWest state	Shariff Sakiin	M	n/a									
Edna Aadan	Internationally renowned doctor in Somaliland	Edna Aadan	F	ismail	hospital	book	university	foundation	desert island discs	half the sky	quotes	a woman of firsts	midwife
Siyaad Barre	Former President of Somalia (1969-1991)		M	**iyo isaaq**	iyo diinta	sawiro	hooyadiis	quotes	iyo salaad gabeyre	1969	video	history	
Fowsiya Yuusuf Xaaji Aadan	Politician who has served for Somalia and Somaliland	fowsiya yuusuf	F	xaaji aadan									
Ayaan Xirsi Cali	Controversial, internationally famous writer	ayaan xirsi	F	cali	magan	oo dhimatay	hirsi ali	**qabiilka**	waa tuma				
Xasan Cali Kheyre	Somalia Prime Minister	Xasan Cali	M	kheyre	**qabiilkiisa**	kheyre		age	mire	geesey	maxamed wasiirka ...	twitter	wikipedia
Xasan Daahir Aweys	Former Al Shabaab ideologue (under house arrest)	xasan daahir	M	2017	2018	sheekh	taariikhda						

phenomenon when I was physically present in Somalia, a colleague in Mogadishu also conducted the same test for me on their computer in order to take into account any potential impact of location on the data returned.[16] The results showed minimal difference between the autocomplete predictions. This can be seen in Figure 5.2, which presents all of the keywords and autocomplete predictions across the three tests. As the searches were not completed (and the users did not enter the "*qabiil*" search terms themselves), they did not contribute to the further tendency of the algorithm to suggest these results—a recursive feature of the algorithmic phenomenon I return to below. Furthermore, none of the suggested keywords included in the sample shown below had derived from any of my (or my colleague's) previous searches. Google autocomplete predictions that are informed by a user's past searches are generally highlighted in purple, and include the option to remove them. Screenshots were saved from every search (thirty-six in total) and none include "previously searched for" keywords.

Because the tests all used the Somali spellings of the names, it is highly likely that the users whose searches had initially generated these terms were Somali speakers. The particular male figures whose names were entered were chosen given their high profile in contemporary and historical Somali politics. Women are significantly underrepresented in elite Somali politics and there are fewer well-known female figures. The three women included in this search

Figure 5.2. Autocomplete results of three search tests (clan-related suggested keywords highlighted in bold). © Peter Chonka.

engine test each have distinct profiles and have generated political debate or controversy: Dr. Edna Aadan is a former first lady of Somalia, a renowned physician and women's health advocate and also a vocal supporter of Somaliland's independence; Fowsiya Yuusuf Haji Aadan is a female politician who (uniquely) has served in both Somaliland and Somalia's governments; Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a writer of Somali descent who currently lives outside of Somalia and is well known (and highly controversial) in the region for her critical writings on Islam.

In most cases the autocomplete keywords appear to relate to a question—suggesting that a user employ that keyword to search for the clan-identity of the individual. In one case (for former president Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud), the autocomplete predictions include the actual clan identification of that individual. In the case of Siyaad Barre (former president and head of 1969–1991 military regime), the clan-related keywords are "iyo Isaaq" (English: and the Isaaq [clan]). Barre did not hail from this clan, and it is likely that this suggested keyword relates to users' intended retrieval of historical information about the Barre regime's activities in the northwest and mass violence against the Somali National Movement (SNM) rebels (and civilians) who were predominantly from the Isaaq. Of the three women included in the sample, Ayaan Xirsi Cali was the only one for whom the autocomplete returned a clan-related question keyword. For Dr. Aadan, all of the returned autocomplete predictions were in English. This is potentially indicative of her high international profile and the fact that the spelling of her first name is the same in both English and Somali—therefore English-language queries about her may also feed into the data that is then returned as autocomplete predictions to both Somali-speaking and non-Somali-speaking users. The same may also be true for President "Farmaajo"—his distinctive nickname can be spelled the same in English and Somali (being derived from the Italian for "cheese"), and this could blur the lines between the influence of search terms generated by both Somali and non-Somali-speaking Google users.[17]

How, then, should these autocomplete search keyword predictions be understood? How might they be significant within practices of political/identity information retrieval in the Somali digital public? From one perspective, the phenomena illustrates simply that some people *do* search for the clan affiliations of prominent political figures, indicating that this is information of interest to Somali-speaking internet users. The algorithm (presumably) operates by aggregating and ranking associated keywords that are "common and trending" in the searches of other Google users.[18] This is a presumption in that the precise parameters of the (proprietary) algorithm are not publicly accessible.

Google describes the autocomplete function as providing "predictions" as opposed to "suggestions" for search terms. Of course, this is a largely semantic distinction and one that may break down in the actual users' experience of searching (Miller and Record 2017). Imagine, for instance, that a user is searching for general information about an individual and not specifically anything to do with "clan." However, after seeing that "prediction" the user may then become inclined to focus their search on that particular keyword. Once that autocompleted search is clicked, it feeds back into the "trend" of searches for that topic. This recursive feedback loop would thus make it more likely that subsequent users will encounter similar "predictions."

Racist and sexist tendencies revealed (and amplified) through search engine technologies have become an important focus for scholars scrutinizing the impact of Google's (almost) global monopoly over information retrieval (Becker and Stalder 2010). Safiya Umoja Noble's work (2013, 2018) highlights how "porn-ified" racial identities are reflected and reinforced through searches for "black girls" (see also Baker and Potts 2013). Pip Thornton (2018) examines the ways language itself is commoditized through the value of keywords to marketers, explaining why a search for "WAGs" [male footballers' wives and girlfriends] with the term "sexist" will return results instead for the "sexiest" women. All of this research builds on the fundamental (but not always popularly understood) fact that Google searches are not neutral returns of what exists "out there" online. Search algorithms are instead (crypto)political technologies in and of themselves in that their operations are influenced by (largely invisible) dynamic keyword bidding processes by advertisers and significant amounts of human labor (Bilić 2016).

As for the autocomplete function (as opposed to the subsequent return of search results), Google itself recognizes the risk of "inappropriate" predictions: those that are "sexually explicit," "hateful," "violent," or related to "dangerous and harmful activity."[19] Here Google uses a "feedback" tool that allows users to flag predictions of this nature and thus polices the operation of autocomplete. The extent to which this can be policed is a complicated question and would depend on (1) the capacity for Somali-language digital content to be machine read (currently this is relatively limited); (2) the human resources a technology company like Google would invest in content moderation for such a context (a pressing question elsewhere); and (3) the input of Somali-language internet users in drawing attention to such data. Regardless, for Google to imply that this function constitutes a "prediction" rather than a "suggestion" of search terms seems to be a misleading obfuscation of a potentially more profound algorithmic power in an unstable

context. Elsewhere, colleagues and I—while analyzing misogynistic autocomplete suggestions for gendered keyword suggestions in various East African languages—describe inequalities in the capacity and inclination of Western technology companies to adequately monitor the interaction of their tools with marginalized languages as a form of digital colonialism (Chonka, Diepeveen, and Haile 2023).

Content moderation is undoubtedly a complicated, contextually dependent, and difficult task. Therefore, it is important to examine the extent to which the automatic appearance of such clan-related keywords would be considered "inappropriate" in the Somali digital public. If we regard clan differences to be, in part, "invisible"; and if we understand the (contested but important) role that clan has played in historical violence in the Somali context, alongside the taboos that exist around the public expression of these identities, then it is conceivable that individuals in the digital age would use Google to attempt to retrieve this type of information. This raises wider questions about the role of search engines in the shaping of historical memories around conflict. In the Somali context, there is no reconciled or "official" narrative of a civil war which is, in some senses, ongoing. Nor is there an agreed "national" curriculum on modern Somali history. These factors only increase the potential significance of information technologies, particularly for younger generations.

These digital practices of historical information retrieval are transnational in scope. The autocomplete data discussed in the test above has primarily been generated by Somali-speaking internet users (given that the search terms all used Somali spellings of names). It is less clear whether the majority of these users were located in the Horn of Africa or in the global Somali diaspora. Although diaspora contributions to civil society and post-conflict investment and reconstruction efforts in Somalia/Somaliland have long been recognized (I. Ahmed 2000; Majid 2018), the role of foreign-resident Somalis in discursively or materially fueling conflict "back home" is also a theme of diaspora literatures (Osman 2017). Indeed, many of the most controversial or inflammatory commentators on Somali affairs (and potentially some of those highlighted in the earlier part of this chapter) may be based outside of the region, and social media increasingly facilitates their engagement in day-to-day politics in the Horn of Africa. A different discourse relevant to this phenomenon relates to the oft-expressed perception that many (particularly young) Somalis abroad have "lost" cultural connections with the region and may be less familiar with particular lineage identities, either with regard to their own families or in the context of historical debates about Somalia. This is evidenced through the common

practice of *dhaqan-celis* (or "cultural rehabilitation") where diaspora youths are sent to the Horn to (re)acclimatize to Somali cultural norms (Tiilikainen 2011). It is possible that such individuals use search engines to retrieve "cultural" or "historical" data about Somalia, including queries relating to clan. Regardless, if external users make up a significant proportion of those deploying Somali search terms in this way, then their particular keyword habits may influence the recursive algorithmic dynamics of the technologies, which can return similar results to users whether they are in London or Mogadishu (as the search testing here demonstrated). This new potential form of diasporic influence could become ever more salient in the Horn of Africa itself, as local access to the internet increases and larger numbers of people engage with Internet search engines to retrieve information. The issues raised here are somewhat speculative, given limits to researchers' access to the (proprietary) Google data that could more precisely illuminate how Somali-language search practices actually work and who/where the users are. Nevertheless, the data presented above does point to a potential vector of transnational and algorithmic influence on local political discourse that has not yet been considered in the fields of diaspora media studies or conflict analysis.

Finally, from an anthropological perspective on (political) identity formation, it is necessary to highlight the potential for these opaque influences to add new elements into old debates around ethnicity in African political contexts (Berman 1998; Eller and Coughlan 1993; Tilley 1997). Whether "tribal" identity is an underlying or primordial attachment; something instrumentalized by elites for political or economic ends, or whether these ideas are all constructed through language and enactments in everyday settings; digital technologies are emerging as another element of recursive influence—potentially feeding back and amplifying particular framings of questions around cryptopolitical identities.

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed two phenomena relating to the digital cryptopolitics of the Somali conflict. The first part provided a comparative analysis of narratives of conspiracy relating to ongoing conflict that circulate within the (transnational) Somali digital public. The second part examined a very specific feature of this media ecology as an example of the potential impact of algorithmic power on the retrieval of information linked to related identities. The argument here is that analyses of

contentious digital debates in conflict-affected contexts need to begin to consider the role of digital platform structures and the ways they engage with African indigenous-language data.

The chapter has not intended (and is not able) to demonstrate a clear causal link between algorithmic features of search engines or social media and the perpetuation and evolution of conspiracy beliefs that engage "invisible" identities and agendas. Instead, it has demonstrated how features of the conflict context are conducive to cryptopolitical understandings of actors and agency. These relate to a particular history of constructions and fragmentations of ethno-national political identity; a divided but transnational digital media space in which these experiences continue to be debated; the wide array of different forces involved in the reconfiguration of the Somali state; and the evolution of Al Shabaab as a clandestine militant network across the region. The chapter's subsequent discussion of the search engine "autocomplete" results *does not* expose a popular Somali predilection for clan-related search keywords—indeed, Google's claim that this tool simply reflects what others have searched for in its "prediction" is deeply problematic in that this ignores the cumulative recursive impact of making visible a particular option for information retrieval. What it *does* illustrate are emerging forms of algorithmic power that have the potential to shape a digital public that is already characterized by multiple uses (and abuses) of information relating to an ongoing and historically unreconciled conflict. Consideration of digital algorithmic power adds another dimension to debates over the nature and enactment of cryptopolitical identity politics in African contexts. The potential transnational influence of diasporic information retrieval practices—combined with the increasing local prevalence of Internet connectivity in the Horn—mean that these technologies are in urgent need of further scrutiny. The expansion of the scope of scholarship on the politics of "search" beyond the West and the English-speaking world is essential here.

Peter Chonka is a Lecturer in Global Digital Cultures in King's College London's Department of Digital Humanities. His research explores how information and communication technologies affect mobility, politics, activism, and conflict in the Horn of Africa.

Notes

1. An exception here relates to the Af Maay dialect, significantly different from the Af Maxaa Tiri dialects formalized as "standard Somali." Af Maay dialects are commonly associated with the Digil and Mirifle (aka "Raxanweyn") clan family, one of the four "main" clan families represented in the 4.5 system described above (the other three main clan families are the Daarood, Dir, and Hawiye).
2. AMISOM was re-mandated as the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in April 2022. It is supposed to hand over all security responsibilities to Somali forces by 2024.
3. A "most wanted" list of Al Shabaab leaders published in 2015 by the FGS included clan affiliations, illustrating a diversity of backgrounds across the major Somali "clan-families." See "Dowladda Federaalka Soomaaliya oo lacag dul dhigtay 11 hogaamiye oo ka tirsan Al-shabaab" [The federal government puts money on the heads of 11 Al Shabaab leaders]. *Halgan.net*, 9 April 2015. Retrieved 16 January 2023 from http://halgan.net/2015/04/dowladda-federaalka-soomaaliya-oo-lacag-dul-dhigtay-11-hogaamiye-oo-ka-tirsan-al-shabaab/.
4. Some local reports—based on interviews with defectors—suggested that some of those leaving the south to join an Islamic State affiliate in Puntland were disaffected with Al Shabaab, whose leadership they perceived as increasingly dominated by Hawiye sub-clans. See Hiraal Institute (2018: 5).
5. "Goodaax Barre: waxaan heysanaa awood saacad kasta aan ku jooji karno baraha bulshada" [Goodax Barre: We have the ability at any hour to stop social media]. *Radio Kulmiye*, 27 May 2019 (No longer online, copy in author's possession).
6. Peter Wolfson and Greta Backstrom. 2016. "Somalia: The Nexus between Somaliland and Al-Shabaab." Sun Times, 16 February. Retrieved 16 January 2023 from http://sunatimes.com/articles/3743/Somalia-The-Nexus-between-Somaliland-and-Al-Shabaab (original Kenyamedia.net link no longer active, copy in author's possession).
7. Sola Portal, 17 February, 2016. "Wada shaqeynta Somaliland iyo Al-Shabaab ee la yiri waxaa soo soo qoray wariyaal Swedish ah maxaa ka jiraa? Sola investigates" [What's going on with this alleged cooperation between Somaliland and Al Shabaab written by Swedish Journalists? Sola investigates]. *Sola Portal*, 17 February. Retrieved 16 January 2023 from http://solaportal.com/Archive/2016/2/56solaportal.
8. Axmed Sheekh Maxamed. 2014. "Dagaallada Shabeellaha yaa hurinaya?" [Who's fueling the conflict in the Shabelle regions] *Keyd Media online*, June 14. (No longer online, copy in author's possession).
9. *Xog-doon*. 2015. "Puntland oo ku eedeysay Somaliland inay taageerto xoogaga Al-Shabaab ee Galgala" [Puntland accuses Somaliland of supporting Al Shabaab in Galgala]. *Mogadishu*, 31 January.
10. Horn Cable TV. 2016. "Puntland Oo Xukuumada Somaliya Ku Eedaysay Galitaanka Alshabab Gudaha Puntland" [Puntland accuses the government of Somalia over the Al Shabaab incursion inside Puntland]. YouTube, uploaded 15 March. (No longer online, copy in author's possession).
11. Ahmed Yusuf Ahmed, "Muuq-disho", *Dunida Online,* March 29, 2015 (No longer online, copy in author's possession).

12. Muuse Xaji Abees. 2014. "Digniin culus ku socota xildhibaanada daarood" [Strong warning to Daarood MPs]. *Dunida Online*, 20 July. (No longer online, copy in author's possession).
13. Abdi Sheikh. 2016. "US Accused of Killing 22 in Misdirected Somalia Airstrike." *Reuters*, 28 September. Retrieved 16 January 2023 from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-security/u-s-accused-of-killing-22-in-misdirected-somalia-air-strike-idUSKCN11Y0UC.
14. Christina Goldbaum. 2017. "Strong Evidence that U.S. Special Operations Forces Massacred Civilians in Somalia." *The Daily Beast,* 29 November. Retrieved 16 January 2023 from https://www.thedailybeast.com/strong-evidence-that-us-special-operations-forces-massacred-civilians-in-somalia.
15. United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, report S/2016/919 (October 2016) Annex 7.5. p. 161.
16. Thanks to Mahad Wasuge for his assistance with this.
17. This highlights the limits of the technique in exploring auto-complete returns for a wider range of relevant keywords: only terms with distinct Somali spellings (e.g., names) will likely give Somali language predictions. For example, for "Al Shabaab" (same spelling in English and Somali), auto-complete predictions are returned in English, given that the organization has been widely googled by a global audience.
18. Danny Sullivan. 2018. "How Google Autocomplete Works in Search." *Google*, 20 April. Retrieved 16 January 2023 from https://www.blog.google/products/search/how-google-autocomplete-works-search/.
19. Ibid.

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