

## Computer Mediated Communication: Mailing List as Modern Meeting Place

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** *The paper uses as case study a discussion mailing list created in April 1998 (and still exists) by a group of the Somali diaspora. The mailing list, known as Puntland/Jubbaland mailing list, was formed to give its members an interactive online. The purpose of Puntland & Jubbaland mailing list is to, but not limited to, facilitate privately the discussion of Northeastern and Lower Juba social, economic and political affairs and to solidify the views of Puntland Somalis in the Somali Diaspora. The interaction of the group is meant to create a feeling similar to the intimacy characteristic of primary groups. Since social ties deepen in time, primary groups are relatively permanent, as relationships involve an identity of ends. In primary groups, the relationship is in itself an end and only secondarily or incidentally a means to an end.*

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** *Members in the Puntland/Jubbaland mailing list organised themselves into helping and contributing to home development, helping the newly elected Puntland administration, pooling skills of professionals, and promoting the interests of Puntland and Jubbaland regions. The list had its ups and downs. At its height of existence, it created and helped*

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Mailing environment became the arena where the Somali factional Diaspora has been taking place enabling the groups to organise and communicate. In a way the mailing list medium has facilitated the some groups to take the Somali conflict outside the country. On the other hand, it is also where groups aiming as the supra-national level to meet and get together to help their folks at home. Whatever the objectives of the mailing groups, what influenced their discussions are mainly events at home (Issa-Salwe *et al*, 2008).

The crisis of 1991 in Somali led to the collapse of the state institutions and the creation an international Somali Diaspora. Somali mailing lists have been created mainly by the Somali Diaspora for different purposes. There are different types of mailing lists: (a) national level where groups of national interest meet virtually, (b) professional types where professional people communicate and (c) lists where groups meet below the national level.

### **DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH**

This paper focuses on the use of computer-mediated communication by a group Somali Diaspora around the world. The text addresses here will be used as case study. Rhetorically, CMC as an inherently liberating and democratising medium, this case study demonstrates its use as in both peaceful as well in conflict situation. Puntland/Jubbaland mailing list was established on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1998 by the Somali Diaspora. The mailing list is known as the Puntland/Jubbaland mailing list and was intended to help this community to pool skills of professionals, and promote the interests of Puntland and Jubbaland regions.

**Rq1:** For which purpose does the Diaspora use mailing lists?

many useful projects for the people of Puntland (an autonomous region of Somalia).

**Findings:** *The results of the research shows that despite mailing list technology can be used as modern meeting place and tools to enable people to work for a purpose. Nevertheless, the mailing medium has also environment become the arena where the Somali factional Diaspora has been taking place enabling the groups to organise and communicate. In a way it has facilitated the some groups to take the home conflict outside the country. On the other hand, it is also where groups aiming as the supra-national level to meet and get together to help their folks at home. Whatever the objectives of the mailing groups, what influenced their discussions are mainly events at home.*

**Originality/Value:** *The paper illustrates how mailing technology enable members of one Diaspora community to use it as the modern meeting place and at the same time keep in touch with a political situation at home that is exceptional, and to involve themselves in its development and its controversies, should they wish to do so. It also shows how the discussion technology has facilitated the groups in a new dimension to traditional methods of meeting.*

**PAPER TYPE:** Research Paper

### **KEYWORDS**

*Computer-Mediated Communication; Mailing Lists; Discussion Group; Politics; Somalia; Social Development; Diaspora.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

**RQ1:** What role do Somali mailing lists take in the process of group communication?

**RQ1:** What has facilitated the forum members to cooperate in this environment?

The authors spent time observing the activities of the mailing list. Call and Simmons offer the following suggestion, "Studying people in their natural settings can help to understand the meaning that is used in that world" (Fielding, 1993; Adler *et al*, 2008). By being a member of mailing lists the researcher has been an integral part of the researched world.

Following the loss of the national identity caused by the collapse of the state in 1991, Somalis were forced to go back to their clan roots. In such a situation such people endeavour to reconstitute their identities and social meaning by articulating and identifying with alternative discourses. The effect of the rollback of the state "virus" has been that every community has been attempting to rediscover itself. The web page and mailing list as computer-mediate communication offers such a venue (Issa-Salwe *et al*, 2008).

Particular interest is that mailing environment (Adler *et al*, 2008) becoming a major arena where the Somali factional Diaspora has been taking place enabling the groups to organise and communicate. In a way the mailing list medium has facilitated the some groups to take the Somali conflict outside the country. On the other hand, it is also where groups aiming as the supra-national level to meet and get together to help their folks at home. Whatever the objectives of the mailing groups, what influenced their discussions are mainly events at home.

The case study is a "realistic tale" (Van Maaneen, 1988). Studying people in their natural settings can help to understand the meaning that is used in that world (Fielding, 1993: 156). Being a



member of mailing list of other web list gave one of the authors an opportunity to become an integral part of the researched mailing list. Electronic and face-to-face contact with a number of key individuals was maintained during the course of this research. Findings are being passed on to participants through e-mail and other ways.

The study focuses on Somali Diaspora CMC technology, particularly the mailing list. An email survey is appropriate for a topic such as this. This is because, firstly, Somalis are geographically dispersed and to reach them individually is expensive (Baym *et al*, 2009). Secondly, an email survey is less time consuming than other methods. Thirdly, users could reply at their own convenience and have time to review the questions. One additional benefit of using email is that duplicate responses can be eliminated (ibid.). Duplicate responses are possible where there is website based-survey.

The intention here is to know what users choose. In other words, their preference and the reason for their preference. By looking at the samples of the answers received, users demonstrate what they think might be true (their belief) and why they actually do (their behaviour). Polland states that,

*“The survey is an appropriate means of gathering information under three conditions: when the goals of the research call for quantitative and qualitative data, when the information sought are specific and familiar to the respondents and the researcher has prior knowledge of the responses likely to emerge”.*

The success of survey research rests on how closely the answers that people give to survey questions matches reality, that is, how people really think and act. According to Polland, there are three things that must be done to increase the response to a survey:

minimise the cost for responding, maximise the rewards for doing so and establish trust that those rewards will be delivered (**Polland, 1998**).

Building trust between the interviewer and the respondent is also a very important incentive to get responses if the researcher wishes to get good reliable data (**Issa-Salwe et al, 2008**). Knowing many of the interviewees personally through the mailing/ list discussions is very useful for the researcher. This helps build trusting relations with most of the interviewees. Some of the members even encourage others to reply to the survey.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE PUNTLAND/JUBBALAND MAILING LIST**

Hosted under the name of `puntland_lj@world.std.com`, the Puntland/Jubbaland mailing list was established on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1998 by the Somali Diaspora from Majeerteen, Moorasaante (Dishiishe) and Arab Mohamud Salah communities – also known as Meheri. The group is known also by the acronym MMM or 3M. Members are found almost on all over the world, including the Puntland region of Somalia. This is what it says in the mailing group's purpose,

***“The purpose of Puntland and Jubbaland mailing list is to, but not limited to, facilitate privately the discussion of North-eastern and Lower Jubba social, economic and political affairs and to solidify the views of Majeerteen, Meheri and Moracase clan members in the Somali Diaspora”***  
***(Mailing group purpose).***

Ethnically the inhabitants of Puntland are mainly from the Daarood and Meheri clans. The territory covered by Puntland is estimated as 186,385 square kilometres with a population of

3,200,000 (**Puntin, 2003**). Jubbaland is the southern part of Somalia. These groups live particularly in Kismayo and its adjacent area. The first group, the Majeerteen and Moorasaante (also known as *Dishiishe*) came under the Harti of the Daarood clan-family. The Harti clan is the most scattered of the Somali clans residing in Puntland, in the eastern part of Ethiopia and as far as in Kismayo in Lower Jubba region.

The group formed a method to discuss and exchange news and information about their homeland from around the world. Other reasons for the formation of the mailing list were:

- Finding missing relatives,
- Meeting old friends and making new ones,
- Helping and contributing to home development,
- Helping the newly elected Puntland administration,
- Pooling skills of professionals, and
- Promoting the interests of Puntland and Jubbaland regions.

The interaction of the group is meant to create a feeling similar to the intimacy characteristic of primary groups. Since social ties deepen in time, primary groups are relatively permanent, as relationships involve an identity of ends. In primary groups, the relationship is in itself an end and only secondarily or incidentally a means to an end (**Issa-Salwe et al, 2008**).

Initially, the discussion forum, known also as the Gole, was a fee-based mailing list. A fee of 50 US dollars was required to be paid by the prospective member {**Article 3, (6)**}. Subsequently, members had to pay 100 US dollars every year. Beside the service fee, the subsequent money was to vary from time to time, depending on the needs and activity of the Gole operations. However, on 15 January 2002, the Gole was moved to a free yahoo group mailing host under

the host name of [puntland\\_lj@yahoo.com](mailto:puntland_lj@yahoo.com).

Despite the Gole moving to a free mailing list hosting, it was still supposed to be a private list. There are two types of accessing electronic list mails as far as accession is concerned: private and public. Public lists are those where members can subscribe or unsubscribe as they will. Private lists subscription is controlled.

### ➤ **FORMALISING OBJECTIVES**

Once the group established the Gole, the next phase was to draft rules and regulations to formalise the objectives and tasks. This included a constitution. The preamble says,

*“Keeping in mind the development and general support needed for Somalia, particularly, Puntland and Jubbaland, we founded this forum to enable members to share the task of development of the homeland” and “to unite their political views, economic, social of the Somalis, particularly, that of Puntland and Jubbaland wherever they are”*  
*(Gole constitution).*

The Gole is steered by a committee of seven members. It is further divided into sub-committees: the executive, the technical, disciplinary, and finance committees. Members elect the committee once every year **(on every 15 December)**.

In case a member breaches the rule, his/her case is taken to the Discipline Committee. The Disciplinary Committee arbitrates also between members. However, it rarely happens that the accused is expelled from the Gole.

As in many cases, discussions are sensitive, and thereby, confidentiality is paramount in the Gole. To ensure and verify membership, a set of safety checks is in place. For example,

prospective members are required to send a request of membership to a member of the list who should ensure the identity of the prospective member. This activity is primarily to prevent 'infiltration' and prove that the prospective person is 'truly' a member of the community {Article 3, (5)}.

*This Gole could join those who are from Puntland clans and who are ready to take part of the purpose that has been set for this list (Article 3).*

Attention is given to those who use free mailing accounts, particularly, those who subscribe to MSN (Hotmail), Yahoo, Dejanews, Mailcity, and Geocities. As those mailing lists are free, they can be registered by anyone pretending to use false identity(ies). Even if an account holder is genuine, some of these services could be easily breached.

In early 1999, hackers infringed MSN Hotmail free email service. Just a few days before, Microsoft had many complaints that expired Hotmail accounts retained the linked MS Instant Messenger buddy lists, and those lists were available to the next person who registered the same email address on a Hotmail account. Microsoft later patched the security hole in its MSN Hotmail free email service. This, nevertheless, remained a concern in the Gole (Issa-Salwe et al, 2008).

In late August a non-member named Ali Salaad sent an email which frightened the members. Ali Salaad's email was never supposed to reach members as he was not a member. Barre Mohamed, the founder and expert in mailing list security, send an email (Email 1) assuring the Gole.

**Email 1**

From: BarreMohamed <barremoh@yahoo.com>  
Reply-To: puntlandjj@world.std.com  
To: puntlandjj@world.std.com  
Subject: Re: Who knows this man? I know!  
Date: Fri, 1 Sep 2000 09:01:58 -0700 (PDT)  
-BarreMohamed <barremoh@yahoo.com>  
Mahamed iyo Gole,

AliSalad. From the North, Toronto, writer,  
free thinker, real Somalilander. [hence +/- real Somali], community  
developer, big mouth etc. I knew him @ soc. culture. Somalia in the  
early 90's.

Mr. Salad is not in our gole and Ahmed wouldn't dare to add him to thegole - infact he  
didn't, unless the unification of the two regions is a reality. Ali Salad of Minncapolis,  
we know you well.

Once you compile a long list of real email addressees and openly send it to all  
organizations and media, it becomes a public domain.

Ali Salad is only at the tip of the berg. Wait for the dirty dozen followed by all kinds of  
unsolicited sales and tempting advances. Mr. Salad's mail in not coming from the  
Gole. Please don't get confused and disconcert the good standing security history of  
the gole. Mr. Salad is directly copying to your private email address. It is very easy to  
shut him up, be my guest and block him.

I will discuss the issue of the SomaliForum with the technical committee members in  
due course when it stops raining in Memphis a... Stay tuned.

Thanks

Barre Mohamed

Collaboration is directed into two ways: (i) to share resources and  
knowledge, and (ii) to unite the group with their region (alias clan)  
against the 'enemy'. In the preamble this is the wording:

*... unifying the political views, and helping each  
other in the struggle of life.*

The prospective member is required to provide details such as name,  
place of residence, profession and education (**Appendix A**). These  
details are used for a database to pool the skills and professionals of  
the homeland so they could help in the development. Members are  
classified according to their profession. As mentioned earlier,  
following the civil war in Somalia in the early 1990s, the majority of  
the educated of every region in Somalia fled the country.

## ORGANISING THE TASK

By mid 1990s as the Somali civil war was abating, the civil war entered in to a new situation: a phase that can be defined as an era of media war. This also coincides with the booming of global communication, especially with the introduction of the Internet. Besides being a medium for contact, the Gole's task was also to utilise the Internet technology in their mission (Issa-Salwe et al, 2008). And to ensure its share of the Internet, the Gole, as early as 1998, created the Puntland State of Somalia website ([www.puntlandnet.net](http://www.puntlandnet.net)). Despite using the name of the self-autonomous region of Puntland State of Somalia, this website was never under the direct management of Puntland administration. Nevertheless, it was intended to facilitate the administration's correspondence with outside organisations. To facilitate member tasks, the list was to include members of Puntland administration. For example, one of these was Ismail Haji Warsame, the Head of Cabinet whose base was Garowe, the regional capital of Puntland.

This is how the constitution emphasises the matter,

*So the news and advice could be shared with Puntland leadership, particularly, the administration of Puntland and Jubbaland [community]*

To manage its task professionally, the Gole also formed Puntland Intelligencia Network (<http://www.Puntin.org>) and Somalia Watch (<http://www.somaliawatch.org>). Puntland Intelligencia Network (Puntin.org is structured and featured as a '*think-tank*' type while Somalia Watch website as a web front.



## THE GOLE AND DEVELOPMENT TASKS

Health and education have been the two main tasks which the Gole focussed on in their developmental goals. Some of the most successful are the East Africa University (Bosaso), Mudug health centre, and Galkayo Education Centre for Peace and Development (GECPD).

Generally, there have been two ways to fund development projects: from the Diaspora financial support, and campaigning to the international community, particularly, the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), the United Nations, the Somalia Aid Co-ordination Body (SACB), Organisation of the African Unity (now African Union), and the Arab League.

The international communities' attention was generally focused on the southern part of Somalia and particularly Mogadishu, the capital, as this part of Somalia was the most affected part of the country. This made the international community to neglect the peaceful part of the country. The Gole had problem with redirecting the intentional communities' attention to their local area, namely Puntland and Jubbaland.

According to Puntland Intelligencia Network, if most of the international aid given to Somalia were allotted to developmental projects in areas where there is stability, much of Somalia's problems would have been solved by now. It says that "instead of carrying out capacity-building projects in the areas where there are local administrations" (Puntin, 2005), the International community is trying to extinguish the outer flames of Somalia's fire instead of targeting the source. If Somalia is to be rebuilt from scratch, the peaceful areas need to be supported and nurtured by the concerned international organisations and individuals. According to Puntin, "These [areas] are the building blocks of the solution to the Somali



crisis" (Puntin, 2005).

The existing administrations of Puntland and Somaliland are confronted with the awesome tasks of reviving the public utilities, rebuilding the necessary institutions and pacifying their fiefdoms. They claimed that their efforts, however, are being hampered by the lack of resources and the continuous dry spell that depleted the Somali livestock, the backbone of the Somali economy. Puntland Intelligencia Network also raised issues such as the looting of Somalia's marine wealth by international companies which remained unabated, and these administrations have no means to exploit it or to prevent this illegal fishing (Puntin, 2000).

The approach of developing the stable areas of Somalia is believed to "create a kind of constructive rivalry in the country, a substitute for the very destructive power rivalry". This, in turn, creates enough stimuli for peace and stability and would pave the way for a power-sharing formula among the hostile clans and the reunification of Somalia. The international community must build on the policy of helping the reviving of the public infrastructure if difference is to be made in Somalia.

Puntin.org reiterates that the aid organisations must be relocated in Somalia. The administration of Puntland has asked the local aid organisation to submit a report on their activities in order to make themselves transparent. This is the direct result of the Somalis' lack of confidence in the activities of the aid organisation. Somalia has many peaceful areas that would host them and where their genuine activities are very much needed and appreciated.

In Puntland, there is a well-known joke about the waste of Somali aid organisations. In Somalia there are daily flights of khat to the major cities in Somalia (the khat are green leaves imported from Kenya and Ethiopia. They are chewed for their narcotic effects). The inhabitants know the looks and the sizes of the all the flights that

frequent the areas. An inhabitant in Galkayo asked if khat has come to the city. The other responded, "I think so, two planes came. The other is most likely the khat-flight (Issa-Salwe *et al*, 2008).

Another person who overheard the response of the other man asked, "and what does baakad-la-wirwira mean (baakad-la-wirwira literally means the midday-packet-collector). The man said, "Have you ever heard of a plane dispatched from a distant country to collect a small packet of expired medicine from the Galkayo hospital? Compare the cost of that flight to the cost of that expired medicine. And that is how the aid organisations fool the world (Issa-Salwe *et al*, 2008).

Many Somalis, including Gole members, doubted aid organisation services. One of the Gole members said this,

*"Do you know why aid organisations prefer to do jobs in the violent area than the peaceful areas? I tell you why. It is simple. In the violent areas they benefit. There they can cheat by reporting false information such as looting aid material. They are here to make money..."*  
(email message, 12/01/2005).

## HEALTH DEVELOPMENT

As part of their health development task, Puntin.org as the mouth of the Gole, has listed the names of over 100 medical doctors in the Diaspora who hail from Puntland alone. It also helped founding the Puntland Medical Association (PMA). PMA later established its own website hosted under <http://www.angelfire.com/sd/pma/Main.html> and elected Dr Mohamed Jama Salad, a former professor of Neurological Sciences at the Somali National University, as its president.

PMA was established as a professional association that unites all Puntland State Medical doctors in one organisation. Later, PMA

became Puntland State Medical Organisation representing the majority of medical practitioners in both the public and private sectors and it is dedicated to promoting, educating and protecting the workers in the Puntland State medical field.

***“PMA activities intended to promote the welfare of the Puntlanders through the quality of medical aid. Its aim is to promote the development of State's Medical field, to disseminate medical knowledge, to train health care workers and to improve the health of the population through collaboration with medical scientists, technologists and other professionals in Puntland State and other regions of the country. Our presence on the Internet is another method for the association to acquire assistance from its members living abroad” (PMA, 2008).***

The objectives of the Puntland Medical Association are as follows:

- To promote the medical and allied sciences in Puntland State;
- To safeguard the honour and interests of the medical profession;
- To promote continuing medical education and medical research among the medical profession;
- To foster and preserve the unity and aim of purpose of the medical profession as a whole;
- To voice its opinion and to acquaint the Government and other relevant bodies with the policies and opinions on problems of health in Puntland;
- To publish reports regarding Puntland health status and other materials in furtherance of these objectives;
- To maintain a high ethical standard among the medical

- profession; and
- To promote international and local fraternisation of the medical profession;

## THE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Puntlanders in the Diaspora started a fund-raising project for the restoration of adult schools in Puntland. In their first attempt to respond to the call for participation in the Puntland Development drive, and following an appeal from the Galkayo-based Puntland Development Centre, the fundraising campaign started in September and concluded its first phase in December (**Issa-Salwe et al, 2008**). According to Ahmed Mohamud Haji Jama (known as Nero), the project co-ordinator, in the first phase of this fund-raising project, volunteers raised around \$10,000 U.S dollars for a project intended to restore the adult school premises and the development of girl's education in Galkayo, a city that bears the enduring scars of the civil war. One successful project was the *Galkayo Education Centre for Peace and Development*. The campaign brought together Puntland communities living in North America, Europe and the Middle East to join ranks in lending a hand to their brethren back home (**email message, 12/12/2001**). Their initial contribution of \$11,927 was to play a role in the reinstatement of many other educational projects.

Hawa Adam, the head of the Galkayo Education Centre for Peace and Development, said that the money “enabled the Centre to build premises consisting of five classrooms and a teachers' hall in Galkayo” (**Issa-Salwe et al, 2008**). The premise has been used for giving vocational training courses to the residents of Galkayo.

## FIRST GOLE CRISIS

In the first year and a half, Gole's work was harmonious as this depended on the political atmosphere at home. The mood was dominated particularly by the euphoria of the creation of the regional administration of Puntland state. However, from the year 2000 the harmony was changing.

In mid 2000, the Somali crisis was again under world attention when, on 23 September 1999, the Djibouti president proposed an initiative at the 54th General Assembly of the United Nations. President Ismail Omar Guelleh proposed a new approach to the Somali case when he proposed to shift the peace talks to the civil society. In other words, the victims of the civil war were to lead the peace process. The objective was to revive the conflict management of Somali society which broke down during the civil strife. This method was seen as the practical way which could lead to a sustainable peace in the country.

Puntland administration leadership welcomed the initiative. However, in a bizarre circumstance, before the meeting could begin, in late April 2000, Puntland withdrew. Puntland argued in this way,

*“Violating the regional administrative structure of the Somali Republic by proposing and working towards re-making and re-inventing unfairly new districts based on bias to support certain Somali clans, a Djibouti syndrome known to the past participants in the Djibouti I and Djibouti II of 1991. Somali nationals had been barred to access the few documents that came out of the Djibouti Government. These documents were distributed in a restricted manner to only members of the diplomatic community and forums of foreign countries, not to Somalis” (Puntin, 2007).*

The administration's explanation for the rejection of the peace

talks did not convince many of the Gole members. As the Gole's reaction is the reflection of event at home, the Gole was to face its first major political crisis as it was divided into those supporting Puntland's decision and those who disagree with the unilateral withdrawal of Puntland from the peace talks. Similarly, at home in Bosaso, riots broke out which led to two people being killed when the police opened fire on the rioters. In Puntland as well in the Diaspora, a line was drawn between supporters of the administration's stand and those who opposed the boycott.

### **DJIBOUTI SOMALI NATIONAL PEACE BACKGROUND**

The Somali National Peace conference was the thirteenth Somali peace meeting since the disintegration of the Somali state in the early 1990s.

In theory, the Djibouti proposal advocated a peace process which could lead to many stages at different levels. "*Process*" defines a means to an end and not an end in itself. The aim was to resuscitate the Somali central state by using the "*building blocks*" approach. The "*building blocks*" approach concept was raised following the continued failure of Somali factions to respond to efforts to create a unitary Somali administration. Basically, shifting the focus of the peace process from the factions to the civil society was meant to turn the responsibility to the local administrative units arising out of a genuine consultative process.

Many groups objected to the Djibouti initiated Somali peace conference some of which were Somaliland, Puntland, RRA and some of Mogadishu warlords.

The Gole's initial crisis was over Puntland participation in Somali peace talks. Soon the crisis was transformed into an issue which centered on the personality of Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf, the head of Puntland regional government. Members were divided into

two groups: the for-participation and against-participation. And both groups were further divided. The for-Participation group argument was based on the virtue of participation (Turkle, 2008; & Blanchard, 2008), arguing that Puntland should play a leading role wherever Somali peace reconciliation is held. However, some of this group remained opposed to whatever Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf stood for. Nevertheless, the other group within this group had the notion that participation should not be taken for granted, but decided upon on the merits of peace talks. Their view was that the administration should withdraw if judged contradictory to Puntland's interest.

Soon in the Gole the whole notion of the Djibouti peace conference was transformed and began to be viewed as part of 'Irir plot'. Under the Irir came the Dir, Hawiye and Garre. President Ismail Omar Guelleh belongs to the Issa Somali ethnic group of the Dir clan-family. Inhabited mainly by two ethnic groups, during the colonial time Djibouti was known as the French Territory of the Affars and Issas.

*"We believe that Djibouti mishandling of the new Peace Initiative will contribute more damage to the Somali national crisis since it's geared towards the destruction of the Building-blocks and planting new seeds of contradictions, confrontation and mistrust among the Somali civil society. We are strongly convinced that the right course of any peace conference is to build upon what have been achieved already: The Regional Administrations, which restored peace, law and order that led to stability in the areas under their control"*

**(Puntland administration statement, 2000).**

To line up the Gole behind the decision of Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf, one of the members proposed a questionnaire called "Fact-finding of



*Djibouti Conference*” (Xog-doonka Shirka Jabuuti). The proposal was written in a form of questionnaire, however, it was intended to have two results: the first to align the Gole behind the boycott, while at the same time to 'sieve' the Gole. Whoever opposes the position of Puntland was seen as siding with the 'enemy', namely, the Irir clan (Hawiye, Dir and Isaaq). One email said this,

***“The history will record every ones action” (email message, 15/04/2000).***

Another email threatens,

***“those who are nostalgic of Mogadishu would better say frankly that you want to side with the Hawiye” (email message, 16/04/2000/).***

## **SECOND GOLE CRISIS**

The second Gole crisis started at the beginning of 2001. The year 2001 was the period which the three-year transitional period of the Puntland administration were expected to expire. Puntland declared itself autonomous in 1998, following a conference of local elders.

The process of the formation of the new administration had begun in March 1998 in Garowe with the Garowe Consultation Conference. On May 15, 1998, the conference laid the ground for what became known as the *Garowe Constitutional Conference*, which established Puntland State of Somalia. The constitutional conference took three torturous months, and finally, elected Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed and Ahmed Abdi Hashi as president and vice-president respectively, for a three-year term.

The transitional period and the arrangement set under **Article 28 (4)** and **Article 13.5 (vi, vii)** of the Provisional Charter, which emphasised that the Government should carry out a population census, drafting a new constitution followed by a referendum. The



three tasks were so ambitious that the Constitutional conference could not realise their enormity. For example, a similar task has taken eight years to accomplish in Somaliland. According to **Article 34 (2)** of the Puntland Charter, once the mandate expires on 30 June 2000, the mandates and term of office of the executive and Parliament and power should devolve to the Supreme Judge, Yusuf Haji Nur, as caretaker president (**Alnajjar, Commission on Human Rights, 14 January 2002**).

*“The Charter mandated the caretaker president to open a second constitutional Garowe conference to elect a president and vice-president and approve the Puntland Charter for a further three years”* (**Alnajjar, Commission on Human Rights, 14 January 2002**).

By the time of the end of the three-year period, the Administration and the House of Representatives, could not accomplish any of the assigned tasks. Colonel Abdullahi had all the reasons to refer the case to a General Conference which was the only legitimate place to deal with the case.

Rather than undertaking the presidential and parliamentary elections that were required under the Puntland Charter, Abdullahi Yusuf's administration sought a three-year extension of its term. He convened unconstitutionally some selected traditional elders and called for an extension. On 27 June, the House of Representatives voted for an extension of four year for itself and for the executive a three-year term (**Issa-Salwe et al, 2008**).

However, this was declared unconstitutional by the Chairman of the Supreme Court of Puntland, Yusuf Haji Nur, who announced that, in accordance with the Puntland Charter, he was assuming the office of the interim President of Puntland, pending the organisation of a “community conference” within one month, as stipulated in the

### Transitional Charter.

In the meantime, Puntland's traditional elders meeting in Garowe rejected Abdullahi Yusuf's extension, and confirmed the rule of law and therefore acknowledged Yusuf Haji Nur as the acting president until the election of a new administration was held.

Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf, who at this period was not any more the constitutional president, tried to use force. On 6 August, he unsuccessfully attempted to take over Bosaso Airport. An uprising which forced him to retreat to his hometown, Galkayo (**Issa-Salwe et al, 2008**).

The Chairman of the Supreme Court stated that he had no political ambitions and that he would organise a community meeting, as provided for in the Charter, to set the future course of Puntland. The conference was officially opened in Garowe on 26 August, with over 400 participants representing all five regions. Meanwhile, Colonel Yusuf announced on 12 August that he remained President of Puntland, claiming that Galkayo was the interim capital and blaming "fundamentalists" and the TNG for his difficulties. He also publicly declared the conference in Garowe to be illegal and refused to participate.

The *Second Puntland Conference* was held until the 26 August, and on 14 November 2001 elected Jama Ali Jama as president and Mohamud Goonle as his vice-president. The new president was sworn in on 18 November 2001.

The contest which had been expected to go into three rounds if no candidate got 235 votes from the 468 delegates, ended in the first round. Jama Ali Jama got 283 votes in the first round, making him the outright winner.

**Table 1 Result of Votes Presidential Candidates**

Candidates	Votes Received
Jamac Cali Jamac	283
Muuse Xaaji Abees	103
Cabdiraxman Ahmed Cayrow	47
Cabdirisaaq Sheekh Osman ( Cali Baadiye)	11
Maxamed Abdirashid Cali Sharmarke	4
Osman Abshir Cigaal Yeey	2
Cabdi Cabdulah ( Jinni Boqor)	1
Maxamed Haji Aden	1
Total Votes	452

*Source SomaliTalk, 14 November 2008*

The former president rejected the outcome of the elections. And in disregard of the popular will, with the support of Ethiopian arms, he returned with force on 21 November 2001 to Garowe, killing several innocent civilians and nearly capturing or killing the newly elected president and persecuting all those who opposed him.

For the Gole events at home were a nightmare as this led to a division within. Not only the problem at home region continued, but also it continued to worsen. Once Colonel Abdullahi came back to power, he began persecuting his prominent opponents. For example, shortly afterwards, Colonel Farah Dheere, a prominent businessman in Garowe, was a key figure opposed to Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf. The bodyguards of Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf killed Mr. Farah. In similar fashion, on 17 August 2002, Sultan Ahmed Mohamed Mohamud (known as Hurre), one of the traditional leaders who opposed the unconstitutional extension of Col. Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, was killed in Puntland (Issa-Salwe *et al*, 2008).

The act of killing a traditional leader disgusted many in the Gole as it was an unprecedented occurrence in modern Somali history. As one of the Puntland Isim, Sultan Hurre stood firm in the defence of the popular will and interests, the nascent grassroots

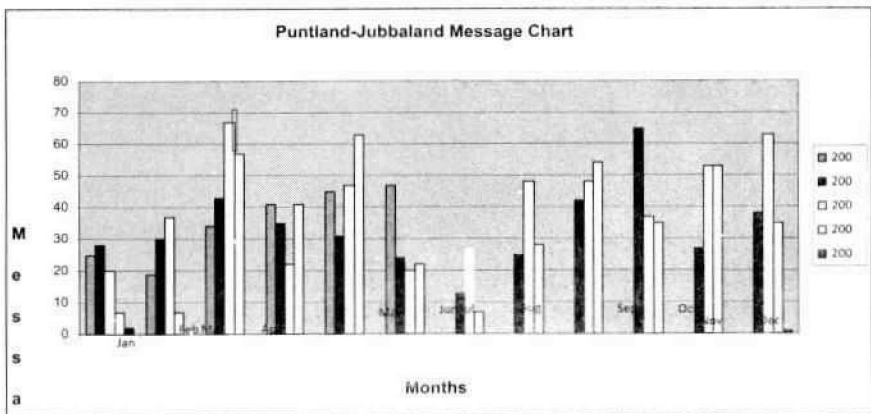
democratic institutions and the prevalence of the rule of law which began in Puntland State of Somalia following the collapse of the Somali state in the early 1991.

Many felt Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf's action could take Puntland to the brink of total anarchy by breeding a wave of tribal feuds. This was seen to upset and to curb the nascent grassroots-based democratic institutions which flourished in Puntland State of Somalia following the collapse of the Somali state in the early 1991. Since then Puntland people and the Gole members worried by what the future portended for their regions, a hitherto peaceful large swathe in Somalia. Already the signs are a symptom of Somalia of late 1990s was evident. Indeed, a good parallel can be drawn between Puntland in 2000 and Somalia of late 1980s. Some of the similarities are (Issa Salwe *et al*, 2008):

- **Instability:** the instability created following the constitutional crisis triggered by Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf following his unconstitutional extension of the presidency;
- **Feud:** the state sponsored clan-based feuds;
- **Personal Arms:** the clan rivalry and feud creating a strong demand for personal arms;
- **The breakdown of the institution:** the failure and collapse of the rudimental governance institutions which could not survive beyond the mandated first three-year period;
- **Failure of source of leadership:** the manipulation and the suppressing of the source of leadership led to the failure of the traditional leadership which has been the fundamental source of stability of Puntland;
- **Elimination of political opponents:** political assassination, repression and elimination of the political opponents a trademark;

- **Impediments to development:** closure of local and international NGOs;
- **Suppression of free press:** closure of local mass media; and
- **Abolition of basic human rights:** disregard and contempt for human rights and the abolition of the foundation of freedom and justice;
- Using violence to legitimate leadership.

FIG. 1 PUNTLAND/JUBBALAND MESSAGE



### ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION

The frequent contact (through electronic mails) creates strong ties between groups. Unlike face-to-face interaction, the Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) offers opportunities for social interaction that do not depend on the distance between parties. Face-to-face interaction accompanies some important particularity, such as facial expression, vocal cues, body language, posture, gestures and non-verbal mannerism in general together with style of dress and hair (Chandler, 1997; & Blanchard, 2008).

There is no doubt that Internet technology is having an effect on

society (**Baym et al, 2009**). However, it is not always clear what these changes are and whether they are for better or worse. Some researchers argue that the Internet is causing people to become socially isolated and cut off from genuine social relationships. Others argue that the Internet leads to more and better social relationships by freeing people from the constraints of geography and isolation. According to this view, the Internet allows people to join groups on the basis of common interests rather than convenience (**Baym et al, 2009; Rheingold, 1993**). The Somali case favours the latter view. The Internet has provided the Somali Diaspora with a new social environment in which to communicate and organise themselves as groups based on their traditional social groups.

Email may be the most important, unique method for communicating and developing relationships since the telephone. People also find it familiar and safe because it is similar in many respects to writing letters (**Adler, 2008; Suler, 1998**). Of all the methods for developing relationships on the Internet, it is the most common - and perhaps the most powerful.

Email is not just electronic mail sent via the Internet, but it creates a psychological space in which groups of people interact. It creates a context and boundary in which human relationships can unfold (**Adler, 2008**).

People have always wanted to communicate with each other in the fastest way possible, short of normal conversation. Email is the most prevalent application of this in computer networking. It allows people to write back and forth without having to spend much time worrying about how the message actually gets delivered (**Brandon et al, 2007**). As technology grows closer and closer to being a common part of daily life, the need to understand the many ways it can be utilised and how it works, at least to some level, is vital (**Kehoe, 2000**).

A variety of softwares are able to manage electronic mailing

lists. Some of these are *Majordomo*, *Mailserv*, *lisproc* and *listserv* (Kannel, 1996). The main purpose of a mailing list is to distribute email messages to a particular list from one address to all of the other addresses or subscribers linked to that list. Listserv technology supports electronic mailing lists automatically: some of these are maintaining subscriber information, generating message archives, preparing digests of messages, and interpreting and processing keyword commands (Kannel, 1996).

Lists can be public or private, open versus closed, moderated or unmoderated (Kannel, 1996). There can be one central list owner, or the responsibilities can be shared amongst several people, each having equal or varied levels of access.

Email topics are carried out into two ways: *non-regulated (or causal)* and *regulated*. Any member can start both types. The subject of the mail is usually the title of the discussion. The subject is always at the beginning of the email text, followed by the date, sender's name and email address. Repliers are required to answer without changing the title of the discussion. Usually these non-regulated discussions begin casually and are conducted informally. There are many topics open at a time. Members can reply and add their opinion by choosing any topics. At any given time, a member can participate in as many discussions as he/she may wish.

## CONFIDENTIALITY AND THE GOLE

Puntland/Jubbaland is a regulated mailing list. Regulated topics are those lists, which are regulated and have moderators to guide. These kinds of discussions are related to matters which require an action to be agreed by the members. It requires a quorum of 70 % of member votes {Article 4 (4)}. The results of the discussions are compiled and send to members to reach an appropriate plan of action.

Members are required to abide by the rule of the Gole as they



are obliged to submit themselves to the loyalty of the Gole by filling an oath form. The form emphasis as the loyalty of the its new members,

***“Are you ready to take part the tasks of the Gole, such as voting for the selection of the committee and sub-committees. And to respect the decisions reached by the Gole”***

Nominated by the Committee, moderators are nominated for major issues which require considerable attention. **Article 7** gives significant weight on moderators and their task. Moderator's main tasks include conducting debates and discussion timing. They also organise voting to reach an action.

Required quorum for validating discussion requires only 25 % whereas validating decisions require 70% of the participants. This demonstrates that many of the discussions are not participated in by all members. The quorum has been put in place to ensure that nothing escapes from the attention of the Gole.

Traditionally, the clan meeting was only for members of the clan. This was supposed not to be different from the Gole where discussions were expected to be confidential in the wake of the civil war in Somalia. Discussion could be general where every member participate, or for sub-groups where professional groups discuss their own topic or subject.

The Gole emphasizes the importance of discussion and open and democratic rules. Nevertheless, the notion of consensus is always the expected mode in every discussion. In the traditional Somali meeting, members are expected to reach consensus on community issues. Despite accepting debate, the need for cohesiveness suppresses the freethinking. The cohesiveness tended to suppress the critical thinking, since members place high value on their



relationship. In a way, it can be said that the Gole discussions create a kind of groupthink. This is not different as, traditionally, Somalis seek consensus in meetings in general, instead of taking decisions by majority vote (Lewis, 2008).

The principal study of the impact of cohesiveness on decision-making is the work of Irving Janis on "groupthink". Janis' central conception is that high cohesiveness will tend to suppress critical thinking, since group members who place a high value on their relationships with colleagues will not be willing to risk those relationships by challenging dubious ideas during group discussions. According to Irving Janis (1982),

*"... groupthink is a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action."*

Pressing the Gole member to strive for agreement discourages dissensions. To Janis, groupthink is a disease that infects healthy groups, rendering them inefficient and unproductive. During groupthink members respond to people who oppose their plan with suspicion and hostility.

The groupthink experience may distort thinking by rendering group members incapable of making a rational decision (Cho, *et al*, 2008). In such a group, members refrain from speaking out against decisions, avoid arguing, and strive to maintain friendly, cordial relations with one another at all costs.

In one of the surveys in this research, a large number of list members said that they do not feel comfortable to discuss political issues, such as that of Somalia, with people they 'do not know'. In the Somali context, this knowing means to know the interlocutor's

political affiliation and also his clan (**email message, 12/01/2006**).

Although in Puntland/Jubbaland members do not know each other personally, there is a probability that a member may be known from his family name or his/her genealogy. Genealogy constitutes the heart of the Somali social system. The clan, which is the basis of the collective Somali inclination towards fusion, is traced through males from a common male ancestor. Lewis reiterated that,

*“Children learn their ancestors' names by heart back to 20 generations and more. A Somali does not ask another where he is from but whom he is from.”* (Lewis, 1983).

Ebyan Salah says that *“when you are truly discussing an issue that matters to all of you, you don't have to know who the person is, but you will judge their contribution, ideas, and their arguments toward the issue. Of course sometimes when you see someone who is very articulated and well educated about the issue, and talk about it more in-depth it is human nature to feel, you should know him/her”* (**email, message 16 Nov 2006**).

### **THE GROUP'S FEELING**

As what keeps the group together is shared values and objectives, one of the main reasons for the formation of the mailing list was to *“create a means whereby the group could communicate outside their homeland”* (**email message, 12/01/2007**). Besides the intimacy feeling, the Gole is also meant to create a sense of belonging among members. With this feeling, members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together (**McMillan et al, 1986; Booth, 2008**).

As part of the sense of belonging, members identify with the group and feel a sense of buy-in (at least partially) to the group's

purposes and values (Blanchard, 2008; Booth, 2008). Another effect of this feeling is trust where members feel safe with group members generally acting for the good of the whole as members feel a moral imperative and desire to participate in activities and contribute to group goals. At the social level the group's roles include supporting, harmonising, and tension relieving, showing solidarity. At the task roles, group work towards information giving, elaborating and co-ordinating activities.

### **CONCLUSION: THE GOLE IN LATE 2008**

Members in the Puntland/Jubbaland mailing list referred as the Gole above organised themselves to take part in the Somali civil war as well as the developments at home. The Gole experienced its ups and downs. At its height of existence, it created and helped many useful projects for the people of Puntland.

In the year 2000, however, the Gole experienced its first crisis, which followed the peace and reconciliation conference, held in Djibouti in mid 2000. In mid 2001, a second crisis began developing when in June 2001 Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf, the former president of the self-autonomous region, sought to retain presidency by force.

Despite that the two crises were not being directly connected, it seems that the second became the sequel of the first. This, however, was a detrimental to the Gole's collaboration which almost ceased to exist. The crisis led some groups to form their own sub-clan mailing lists. The Gole still existed during the last stage of this research. In mid 2003, some members even proposed the closure of the list.

*“What is the use of the Gole if we cannot deal with the problem at home? We lost the mood and moral to collaborate. No need to be even here”*

(email message, 02/06/2003).

**Table 2 Puntland/Jubbaland List Message history**

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2009	70	31	7	15	24	8						
2008	52	39	49	25	36	38	59	47	43	48	58	54
2007	22	33	35	20	23	19	22	29	25	51	26	37
2006	25	19	34	41	45	50	50	41	26	47	24	35
2005	28	30	43	35	31	24	13	25	42	65	27	38
2004	20	37	67	22	47	20	27	48	48	37	53	63
2003	7	7	57	41	63	22	7	28	54	35	53	35

On May 2004, the list had 78 members compared to 215 in 2001. This meant a drop of almost 70% of communication among the members. In the early period of the Gole formation, the average monthly messages were roughly 126. By late 2002, the monthly average message rate dropped to almost 1.5 compared 74 in 2000. In 2004 the number rose to 40.8 and in 2005 it dropped to just to 23.7 (*Table 17 & Fig. 29*). This fluctuation seems to have been affected by the election of Abdullahi Yusuf as interim President of the Federal Somali Republic.

Although the number of messages has fluctuated since 2002, there has not been a major issue discussed among members since 2001. One positive thing was that members were willing to send to each condolence messages after the death of a member of the community.

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