

# **DEATH IN MOGADISHU**

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Translated by  
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## PREFACE:

Hassan Osman Ahmed has written the first eye-witness account, in a European language, which I have read of the self-immolation of a Third World capital city as it tears itself apart in the course of a merciless internecine war. This was literally a war of all against all, as the nation shattered into a myriad of fragments. Ferocious blood-letting did not merely follow the traditional clan fault lines. Gangs of heavily armed and often drugged street children turned against their elders, sometimes close relations, and intoxicated by the thrill of firing automatic weapons, engaged in protracted orgies of looting and murder. The country of course is Somalia, and the city, Mogadishu, which since the collapse of the state has become a notorious symbol of chaos and violence.

Hassan O Ahmed, his wife and young family lived through this hell from its beginning in 1990 until the late summer of 1991 when they managed to escape to Rome. The author, an Italian-trained linguist who now teaches Italian in London, was at the time a young graduate living in the ancient Arabised quarter of Mogadishu. The account presented here is written in the form of a daily diary, directly recording what was happening under his eyes and how it affected himself, his family and his wider circle of kin and friends. Hassan Osman writes with vigour and precision, presenting the harrowing facts of daily life and death in Mogadishu in crisp, cool prose. I found this tragic record immensely moving and so gripping that it is difficult to put down. With its beguilingly unpretentious style, it is immensely more revealing and informative than all the accounts of the collapse of Somalia by Western journalists put together. It is also the most dramatic and chilling record of the obscene impact of a seemingly inexhaustible supply of deadly small arms in what was formerly one of the safest and most orderly of African cities. Those who manufacture and supply such weapons, with their deadly modern fire-power, have at least as much to answer for as those who so casually use them.

Although the specific cultural context is Somali, this account transcends these circumstances and celebrates the triumph of the human spirit, under the most savage and precarious conditions. I think it is a small masterpiece.

I.M. Lewis

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## PREAMBLE

Somalia is one of the few African Nation States where only one language, Somali, is spoken, and where the official religion is Islam. The Somalis are divided into six large family clans. Four are chiefly nomadic and pastoral, the Dir, the Isaaq, the Hawiye and the Daarood; two are involved in agriculture, the Rahanweyn and the Dighil. The Dir and the Isaaq are found in the north, in Somaliland; the Hawiye occupy the centre of the country; the Dighil and the Rahanweyn the mid-south, whilst the Daarood consist of the Majerteen in the north-east, the Ogadeen along the entire border with Ethiopia, and the Majerteen, Marrehaan and Ogadeen in the far south of Somalia and Northern Kenya. Other Somalis of Arab origin live mainly in the cities along the coast of Southern Somalia; these people are generally known as gibil cad, or the white-skinned.

Living along the rivers Shabeelle and Juba are people of Bantu origin, who live by farming and hunting. These peoples are defined as jareer, or the curly-haired, in contrast to the rest of the Somalis, who are called jileec or straight-haired.

In the Spring of 1960, a referendum ratified the uniting of the British protectorate of Somaliland with Southern Somalia, which was administered by Italy, and known as AFIS. Whilst those in the south were completely in favour of the union, in the north, 90% of the population felt otherwise. On the 26th June, 1960, Somaliland obtained its independence and on the 1st July 1960, it was the turn of Southern Somalia. With the union of the two states the Republic of Somalia was founded.

After a brief experience of parliamentary democracy, on the 21st October 1969, a coup d'état brought a military regime into power, led by General Mohamed Siad Barre, nicknamed Af-weyne (big-mouth), an officer trained at the Firearms Academy of the Florence Carabinieri. In 1970, after the coup, also known as the "bloodless revolution", the country came under Soviet influence, electing socialism as the ideology of the single party.

Until the Ogadeen war of 1977, the regime managed to gain large popular consensus. Military support given to Ethiopia by the Soviets led to the regime changing political direction, leaving the eastern sphere of influence, though not thereby changing its ideology. After the defeat, there was less consensus and Siad Barre, in order to strengthen his personal power, favoured the Daarood clan, which was his own, and in particular the sub-clans of the Marrehaan, the Ogadeen and the Dhulbahante. Command of the army was given to the Ogadeen, the secret service was assigned to the Dhulbahante, and the key posts in the administration and the party were given to the Marrehaan. This phase of the dictatorship came to be known as Darodism.

In the meantime, Barre pursued the acquisition of all levers of power, placing members of his clan within the government. All the relatives of the President arrived in the capital from the distant region of Gedo, and were installed in the economic and political administration of the country. But the largest slice of power was retained by Af-weyne himself, his wife, Khadija, and his half-brother Jaama Barre, and numerous children and sons-in-law. This phase was defined as Siadism.

The Majerteen, who were the strongest sub-clan within the Daarood and who had the greatest experience of government, did not consent to being subordinated to the Ogadeen and Marrehaan after the disastrous war in Ethiopia. In fact, the Marrehaan were accused of taking cushy jobs during the war and then taking the places of dead officials, despite lacking merit and experience.

This climate brought about the attempted coup d'état of the 9th April 1978, led by Colonel Mohamud Sheekh Osman Cirro. He was captured, along with seventeen officials, mostly from the Majerteen clan, and was condemned to death. The Majerteen reacted by forming, with the help of Ethiopia, the first armed resistance movement, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (the SSDF).

Other victims of Siad Barre's regime were members of the Isaaq clan, located in Northern Somalia, ex Somaliland. In 1981 Finance Minister Addow deprived the farmers and traders in the north of customs facilities for the exportation of live animals to Arabic countries from the port of Berbera. The Somali National Movement (the SNM) was formed in response to the regime's heavy repression of the Isaaq. For a decade, the entire northern part of the country was laid to waste.

The Peace Accord between Somalia and Ethiopia, signed on the 29th March 1988 at Djibouti, brought an end to Menghistu's armed support of the opponents, particularly the SSDF and the SNM. The SSDF crumbled, and almost all its members returned to their homeland after being reprieved.

However the SNM, forced to abandon the sanctuary offered by the Ogadeen, launched a desperate offensive on the night of the 31st May, which took the government's army by surprise and put them to flight. On the 1st June, the SNM guerrillas, led by ex-Colonel Ibraahim Abdullaahi, entered Hargeysa.

In retaliation, the city was bombarded by the artillery and the air-force and was razed to the ground by the government. Mohamed Silanyo, the President of the SNM, declared that 30,000 civilians had died, and 400,000 refugees had fled to Ethiopia.

In 1989, the Minister of Defence, Aden Abdullahi Nur Gabyoow, from the Ogadeen clan, was arrested, and this caused the desertion of numerous Ogadeen officials, amongst whom was Colonel Omar Jees, with his whole battalion. The Somali Patriotic Movement, or SPM, thus came into existence, led by Omar Macallim.

Finally, in 1989, the Hawiye also joined the opposition and Cali Wardhiigley founded the United Somali Congress, or USC, in Rome.

This was the political situation at the time I returned to Somalia, in April 1990.

## DIARY OF WAR

### ***1990, I return home***

On the 15th May, 1990, I had just returned to Mogadishu when to my great surprise I received from a friend a photocopy of a document in Italian and signed by a group of 114 opponents who called for the resignation of the Government and a return to democracy. For some time, numerous opposition leaflets had been circulating in the capital, but this was the first time that a document bore the signatures of persons present in the country. This was the birth of Manifesto, an unarmed, clanless movement, whose members were mostly politicians and traders who had belonged to the Somali Youth League, or the SYL, during the sixties. This council of wise elders, which included a number of clan chiefs, sultans, religious leaders and traders, managed to gain the support of the Italian Government and the sympathy of public opinion.

Taken by surprise, the regime reacted with repression. Fifty members of Manifesto were imprisoned, but public opinion reacted with demonstrations and marches to demand the freeing of political prisoners.

They were released on the 15th July after a summary trial and, apparently, also following last minute intervention by the Italian Ambassador.

We intellectuals played a marginal role in this whole period. There was no political debate amongst us. Each one of us identified with his own clan movement and acted covertly.

On the 2nd June the Italian embassy held a reception to mark the Day of the Republic, and invited some of the representatives of Manifesto, but the Somali secret police who guarded the diplomatic headquarters prevented them entering, provoking a diplomatic incident.

The 6th July 1990 would be remembered for the massacre at the Chinese stadium at Mogadishu. That afternoon, from my house, which was close to the stadium, we saw thousands of young people filing past, on their way to attend the inauguration of the regional football tournament.

At around dusk, I heard deafening shots like a burst of firecrackers, with yellow and red flames that reminded me of fireworks. I remember pointing this out to my wife. After a few moments, I saw hundreds of young people running past, some limping, others with their

clothes splattered with blood. Several mothers of youngsters from our quarter went out into the street, and knowing about the gunfire began to shout and cry for their children at the stadium. Later, we learned from a boy who had saved himself by diving over the wall which encircled the stadium, that the president's speech had been interrupted by whistles, and the red berets, Af-weyne's notorious guards, had opened fire on the spectators, mostly young people who had flocked to watch their friends playing.

Those who had managed to reach the exit gates were greeted by machine gun fire from the president's guards, who thought there had been an attack. It was never known how many young people were killed, as their bodies were never returned to their families.

On the 22nd July, the lawyer Ismail Jumaale Ossoble, one of Manifesto's founding leaders, died in Rome. The news shook the whole opposition profoundly. The people showed their grief publicly, and in spite of prohibitions, thousands of people picketed the airport, waiting for the body to be repatriated. It was feared that the regime would act in the same way as they had at the funeral of the president of USC, Ali Wardhiigley, who had died the year before. On that occasion the police, in order to avoid demonstrations, had confiscated the body, and only relatives had been permitted to attend the funeral.

On the 28th July, about half a million people took part in Ismail's funeral; fortunately there was no incidents.

In the second half of 1990, the city of Mogadishu would become uninhabitable: there was no supply of electricity, petrol was rationed and food prices increased week by week. Strikes and blocked roads were the rule, and almost all vehicles had their windows broken by stones. Hospitals filled with the injured, and every day there were between 30 and 40 deaths from firearms. Many preferred to bury their dead in secret, to avoid trouble from the police. The regime's press attributed the robberies and homicides to burcad, or terrorists, but in the city the word was that it was the Red Berets who were committing these crimes.

However, in every quarter there were plenty of small gangs of pickpockets. The most famous was the ciyaal faay Cali (Mrs. Ali's kids), who controlled Medina; the ciyaal sakiin (the razor blade kids), located in the great market of Ceel Gaab; the ciyaal colla (the glue-sniffing kids), and many others. These gangs operated swiftly and then fled, but they were not very dangerous as they were only armed with knives. Deserters and armed bands, however, were more dangerous and operated mostly on the outskirts or on the major communication routes.

In fact, the situation was more dramatic in the provinces; scheduled buses and lorries were attacked by armed gangs. When passengers were questioned about which clan they belonged to it was a matter of life or death, they were often executed on the spot; if their assailants were thieves, the outcome was better as the gangs were satisfied with just robbing their victims.

Foreign citizens lived in terror after some of them had been kidnapped and killed. One need only remember the assassination of Mons. Salvatore Colombo, bishop of Mogadishu, on the 9th July 1989, and of Giuseppe Salvo, who disappeared on the night of the 17th and 18th June, 1990 from the barracks of the 77th Division under the command of general Maslah Mohamed Siad Barre. Other victims included the Lufthansa technician Richer Bernd, and his companion who had been raped.

Following these events, all foreigners received orders from their embassies to carry a transmitter with them at all times, and to keep in contact with the radio listening station based at the embassy. Once I had the opportunity to read a circular from the Italian embassy in which co-workers were warned about being away from home after 7 p.m., when the authorities would no longer assume responsibility for them.

For us Somali citizens, it was the same; after dark we barricaded ourselves into our houses and did not open the door to anyone, not even our neighbours. In fact, word went round about thieves who had managed to enter some houses, pretending to be friends or neighbours.

In November, the radio announced the distribution of rice, "a gift from the people of Italy", to all quarters. In order to find out in which quarter the rice was being distributed, one only needed to listen for the quarter from where gunfire was coming, and also, unfortunately, the dead. In order to avoid the rice being ambushed by the Somali authorities, the Italian ambassador, Mario Sica, had ordered that it be distributed directly to the people. He had not anticipated that starvation would raise a mob, and that the guards would not hesitate to shoot those dying of hunger. In the end, the Italian rice was stolen in the port by the big shots of the regime and sold to the market.

During this period, the nightly exchanges of fire devastated the lives of the citizens. The houses of all the Marrehaan, the President's clan, and the rich were watched over by armed guards. The slightest noise was enough to set off shooting and even in our quarter, which was inhabited by many Marrehaan soldiers, there was gunfire all night.

Once, whilst we were enjoying some fresh air on the balcony, our next door neighbours opened fire on a car which was passing under our window. We rushed inside, and my wife, who was pregnant, tripped and fell. She lost the baby.

## THE FIRST NATIONAL RECONCILIATION CONFERENCE

On the 11th December round table talks were held in Cairo for national reconciliation, which gathered representatives of the opposition and leading figures of the Somalian government. The Italian government, as well as the Egyptian, were to prepare for transition to post-Siad government. The conference should also have included the participation of representatives from Manifesto who, however, were in prison. Because of this the opposition consisting of the United Somali Congress, whose members belonged to the Hawiye clan, the Somali Patriotic Movement, of the Ogadeen clan, and the Somali National Movement, of the Isaaq clan, in a joint communique issued from London on the 4th December refused to participate in the conference. To tell the truth, the opposition in Mogadishu was more disposed to continue the dialogue with the regime, but the detachment between the two groups had brought about an opposite outcome.

Adding to the tension in the city was the war between the Gaalgale and the Abgaal. These two clans had lived peacefully together for centuries, but Siad Barre had discovered the weak spot in this alliance: the Abgaal had always considered the Gaalgale to be of a lower caste; the latter therefore agreed to collaborate militarily with the regime.

The clash, both sudden and extremely violent, took the Abgaal by surprise; after a week of confusion, the Abgaal armed themselves and exterminated their enemies. Some of my wife's relatives were also involved in this engagement. Their house was attacked at night by heavy weapons. The few survivors took refuge at Hamarweyne, in my mother-in-law's house.

The Abgaal occupied the Benaadir region, and constituted the majority of the population of Mogadishu. They are peaceful people and it was a grave political error to provoke them. Now, they had arms and they used them against the true culprit of the carnage, the regime of Siad Barre.

During the month of December, massacres were daily events; the most serious were at the animal market, at the northern edges of the city. One morning, at about seven o'clock, some lorries full of soldiers encircled the animal market which, was as usual crowded, and they opened fire, slaughtering people and animals.

Thanks to the Christmas festivities, foreigners had left the country en masse. Businesses which operated in the various regions had received orders to suspend work and to go home. Eight Italian co-workers of the Italian Medical Team, who worked in Jalalaqsi, where they had opened a hospital for the Ogadeen refugees, were kidnapped and then released by the guerillas.

News from the front reported the advance on the capital of the guerillas of the opposition forces (known in Somali as *jabhadda*) from the north and the south. The advance guard had already infiltrated into the city and made contact with the resistance which operated in the various quarters.

On the advice of my wife Udi Khalif, and numerous friends who wanted to remember what was happening day by day before our eyes, I decided to keep this diary.

***Mogadishu, 30.12.1990, we are getting used to it***

Last night, as usual, our quarter was the scene of battles. The objectives were the houses of the guards chosen by the president and of some Marrehaan high officials who had been responsible for the massacre of the defenceless population. The most sought after was Dhegabeceer, a young colonel who had the bad habit of slaughtering the nomadic Hawiye whom he encountered on the road. Unfortunately, he has been living right next to us for about a month. Because of this, we are sleeping with mattresses on the floor, in fear of a grenade landing on our house by mistake.

At dawn we went down to the street to check the result of the night's attack. All the cars parked in the street were damaged and some people were covering pools of blood with sand. The guards went around with heavy machine guns and inspected the prickly pear scrub which separates us from the road and which the guerillas use as a base for their nocturnal attacks.

There is continual fighting, which no longer surprises us much. By now we are getting used to it.

Towards nine o'clock, we went to the Italian Embassy to collect my wife's endorsed passport and to confirm my booking on the Somali Air Lines flight on the 1st January. There was also shooting coming from the area of the Sinaay market, which has been going on for many days. It is from people who are trying out guns to buy. On all the

streets there was a coming and going of police and soldiers, but fortunately we arrived back safe and sound in Hamarweyne.

The market was in turmoil, there were hoards of people everywhere, all speaking of an imminent attack by the opposition army. At about 11 c'clock, shots were heard, it was not the usual skirmish. From the noise, it would appear that heavy arms were being used. We were worried about our nephews and nieces who stayed at home. We called them. They told us that Hamar Bile, north of Mogadishu, was under siege, that trenches were feverishly being dug, and that non-residents were not allowed to enter the quarter. Public transport had stopped, and we were trapped in the city. Fortunately, the telephones were working. I warned my nephews and nieces not to leave the house, and not to open the door to anyone they did not know, and to be ready for a possible evacuation. We also kept in contact with neighbours, Udi's colleagues, and we asked them to call us if things worsened.

We spent the night at my mother-in-law's house, within reach of the phone.

### ***31.12.1990, in search of a car***

During the night we kept in telephone contact with my niece Hasna. They are all fine, even though they were very frightened because there was fighting under their window. At dawn, Udi and I went in search of a car in Via Egitto. After laborious bargaining, we finally found someone willing to take us to Hamar Bile. We had to change streets often, because there was fighting in every quarter. On entering our quarter, we were stopped and searched by a Marrehaan military patrol. We were not the only ones, in front of us there was a truck belonging to a merchant who transported foodstuffs. The soldiers, knowing that the proprietor was Hawiye, began to beat him with the stocks of their guns. Their wives and children came out of their houses to give a helping hand in plundering the goods. It went better for us. One of the soldiers, a neighbour of ours, recognised us and signalled us to pass. Behind us there was a furious outburst of firing; we knew that we were between two fires. As soon as we reached home, we grabbed the essentials, carried the children to the car, closed the house and, in great fear, returned to Hamarweyne.

Suddenly, the streets were deserted, the only ones roaming the streets were armed boys who were shooting wildly. At a certain point, Udi had a fit of hysterics and wanted to stop the car and get out. The driver, with great composure, managed to get us to our destination. He was a Darood and, knowing that he had taken a dreadful gamble by rescuing members of the Hawiye clan, admitted to us that if he had known before he would not have agreed to transport us for any amount of money.

Fortunately, Hamarweyne was peaceful, people were circulating in the streets, though all the shops were closed as a precaution. In all the conversations there was a sense of incredulity and surprise because the jabhadda had been reported at Jowhar, about 90 kilometres from the capital. The sequence of events was not yet known nor which forces were involved. The radio downplayed events and promised that order would be reestablished once more. Alarming news was coming from all quarters.

### ***1.1.1991, New Year's Eve***

We spent New Year's Eve holed up at home, without managing to close our eyes because of the racket of gunfire. We are slowly getting used to the idea of being at war, a war which is going to last for a long time. Even though we all knew it was coming, it has caught us unprepared. The shops are closed. Fortunately, at Hamarweyne the covered market is still operating. We are trying to take measures to stock up with provisions. Prices have gone up considerably and fresh foods are beginning to become scarce. Thank God there are still bananas and mangos. Canned foods as well as pasta and rice are being snapped up. Every so often cars arrive, filled with armed people; they are Marrehaan who, until yesterday, considered themselves the leaders of the country.

I went to Hamar Bile to check my house. The roads were literally overrun with the homeless and evacuees. Fear and hunger has forced people to confront the hard fact of being refugees in their own country. They are fleeing south towards the city of Afgooye or north towards Balcad, carrying with them the few possessions they have managed to save, and children, many children, in their arms. There was still fighting going on in my quarter; it was impossible to enter, snipers were shooting from the rooftops. I returned to Hamarweyne. I saw many guerrillas along the road. They were poor people, not well armed, who had suffered every kind of oppression from the dictatorial regime of Siad Barre, and who had at last found the courage to say 'enough!'

### ***2.1.1991, gunshots at Villa Somalia***

There is fighting going on in every quarter, day and night. From our house we can hear gunshots coming from Villa Somalia. The most tortured quarter is Wardhigley, located down from the President's residence. A group of guerrillas is stationed less than a hundred metres from the wall of the Villa and they are returning fire with light arms. The north of the city is held firmly by the jabhadda, and all the Marrehaan families, who in the past few years had built themselves the most sumptuous villas, have suddenly fled.

Karaan, an area in the north-east of the city, is also in the hands of the guerrillas and is under artillery fire. There is fighting near the navy barracks.

Passing close to the Ministry of Health, at Bondheere, I had a shock. A group of faqash (bandits, the name given to the government soldiers) were at work around a safe, and others were forcing the doors of off-road vehicles. Our eyes met, I raised my hands and unhurriedly continued on my way. I was lucky. The faqash are like ferocious wild animals, they compete for the honour of who kills the most.

The Prime Minister, Mohamed Hawadle Madar, continues to launch appeals on the radio, urging the armed forces to remain in their defensive positions and then to return to their barracks. Civilians should stay calm, fighting must cease and stability must be restored.

The tone of his radio messages has changed. Two days ago it was threatening. The government's watchword had been to sweep away the rebels, bombard the city and scorch the earth. Now they want to deal with the opposition. The guerrillas, waiting for reinforcements, interpret the requests for a truce as a sign of giving in, they will not accept any form of dialogue. Experience has proved that Af-weyne never keeps his promises (such as calling for free elections in February).

The exodus of tens of thousands of people continues in the meantime, mainly women, children and the elderly. USC has launched an appeal to the population to leave the capital. On the main arterial roads leading out of the city there are endless queues of desperate people whose goals are those places where the war has not yet arrived. Many of the fugitives are from the Darood clan and they are afraid of future retaliations and blood vendettas. Many injured, without any form of transport, are being carried on stretchers or in wheelbarrows.

In the afternoon, two MIG 17s flew over the city northwards, where the reinforcements of the guerrillas are said to be amassing.

### ***3.1.1991, the stampede and the BBC***

To understand the frame of mind of the members of the regime, one only needs to spend a few hours in the area around Mogadishu's international airport. There is a general stampede, the Marrehaan and all those who have compromised themselves (ministers, members of parliament, high government and party officials) are in desperate search for a seat on a plane. They arrive escorted and armed to the teeth, the guards actually remain in the luggage compartment of their cars. The airport is incredibly packed, and the Somali

Air Lines offices are being besieged. All bookings have been cancelled, all available seats have already been taken. The passengers have haggard faces, as if they have not slept for many days. In one corner, many Arab citizens with their wives and children are gathered, waiting for their governments to evacuate them.

Outside the airport soldiers are continuously firing to keep away the crowds who are trying to break down the gates and swarm over the runway. A C130 arrives, with Italian markings. It has to take some Italian citizens on board, but it is besieged by the crowd, and in the confusion even the military guards take advantage of it by getting rid of their uniforms and slipping into the capacious belly of the plane which starts off with the hatch open. In the afternoon, the only Somalian plane also arrives, but it is surrounded by armoured vehicles and commandeered. Shortly afterwards, in fact, numerous cars arrive from the direction of the barracks, discharging a large number of people, probably relatives of the Old Man (the President's nickname).

All hope of leaving is lost; I returned to my friends who advised me to spend the night at their house. They were well protected, and had five soldiers guarding their house.

At 5.30 p.m. we listened to the BBC, London, on the radio. This is a ritual which for years has been repeated in all houses, in public places throughout the country, and which not even the war has changed. In fact, now we are even more interested in hearing the news and comments about our country. It is odd that other European countries have not followed this example. The BBC, in a programme in the Somali language, said that the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Butros Ghali, is trying to make contact with all the conflicting parties to attempt a mediation. Scepticism spread amongst us listeners. By now, USC's objective is to depose the dictator and now that the objective is close there is no time for discussions.

#### **4.1.1991 *guerrillas and the faqash***

News has reached us of bitter fighting in the Karaan quarter. All night, government artillery has been hitting the positions of the jabhadda, who are besieging the government troops entrenched in the Navy barracks and in the old port. From there reinforcements are being sent to the troops who are defending the villa belonging to the President's wife, near the Bar Fiat, and the arms factory, all in the same vicinity.

In the morning, I went to Hamar Bile. The entire area was under cannon fire, and you had to be very careful of shots, even when they fell a long way away. I met a group of guerrillas who searched me thoroughly. In fact, word is around that they are infiltrators who are signalling targets to the government artillery with two-way radios. The guerrillas,

seen close up, are pathetic. It could hardly be said that these few poorly armed ragamuffins can manage to hold in check one of the best armies in Africa. Their clothes consist of hoosgunti (a length of material tied at the waist), a shirt and worn out rubber shoes. A few of them are armed with old rifles, and weapons taken from their enemies, but most of them have only bayonets. Many of them, organised into gangs, procure arms through lightning strikes against government targets, and they are greatly feared by the soldiers because of their courage.

The situation in the city is still confused, the government strongholds are Villa Somalia, the radio, the ports, the airport, the barracks, the hospitals south of the city, the Somalian ironworks where arms are repaired, and the villa belonging to Khadija, the President's wife.

The police, mostly belonging to the Hawiye clan, are considered to be on the rebels' side, helping to arm them and partly organising them.

The markets and shops have been closed for days and it has become quite an undertaking to find food and medicines; in some parts, people have taken state-owned stores by force.

The faqash, as the government forces are now known, have begun the work of sacking and destroying. The primary objectives are the ministries and state entities. After forcing the safes and stealing any objects of value, they take away all classified documents. In many cases, they have set fire to the records.

### **5.1.1991, the looters**

Our quarter of Hamarweyne is quiet, the shops are still closed and the only point of commercial exchange is the kotka, a labyrinth of alleys about two metres wide, situated in the heart of the old centre. A few cereals, oil, sugar, and sometimes vegetables (but not really fresh ones) can be found on the black market.

For the time being, there are still goods in the warehouses and the bravest try to secure them under cover of darkness and under escort. Day by day, prices are rocketing to dizzy heights. There is no longer electricity in large parts of the city and we don't even have water.

But what worries us most is security. The faqash replenish supplies and medicines directly from the warehouses in the quarter. They always use the same technique. They block the road with armoured cars, signal their presence with a liberal discharge of shots,

carefully choose the shop or store and, without ceremony, force the locks by even using bazookas. They firstly search for the safe which they drag into the street. Then, if they are suitably equipped, they demolish it immediately, load it up or drag it away. In the last couple of years no shopkeepers have had any faith in depositing money in the banks, because the government was not able to return it to them, and now the faqash are making raids. As soon as the soldiers recede, it is the turn of the looters.

In the city one can see people coming and going, carrying all kinds of goods on their shoulders. All the abandoned houses and villas are systematically looted.

In the mosques the Imaam preach against this immorality which has touched everyone in some way, even if distinctions are made; stealing from the State, and from the houses of the gaal (infidels) is permitted.

For the looters a new word has been coined: bililiqo, which derives from the words belo or balaayo and laqe (to feed on disasters or impurities).

Meanwhile, all foreign embassies have evacuated all their personnel. Two French warships have anchored off-shore, whilst a helicopter shuttles back and forth. A large number of foreigners have taken refuge in the American embassy, where enormous helicopters are transferring them board the warships.

We watch this flight with anger, because it is thanks to them that Siad Barre was in power for twenty-one years, thanks to their money and their arms, but now that the ship is sinking, the rats are fleeing. Is it really true that they could not foresee all this? Why was nothing done to prevent this bloodbath? Now it is easy for them to dismiss this tragedy as a "tribal war" and then wash their hands of it. If years of cooperation had to lead to this result, then everything has been a colossal fraud, and the only ones to pay for the consequences of it are ourselves.

### **6.1.1991, a great game**

Fighting has resumed with unheard-of violence, after the relative calm of yesterday. Many foreigners have taken advantage of it by going to the airport and getting on planes which Saudi Arabia and the Yemen have provided.

Today Af-weyne unleashed his secret weapon - aviation. Two old MIG 17s have repeatedly flown over the capital, fortunately without bombing it. This new danger has forced many people to leave the city. Our family has also organised the evacuation of all the children to Afgooye, to acquaintances. We adults are staying in the city. My mother in law, a good Muslim, says that our lives are in the hands of God, and we must all die when

we reach our time. Besides, we know from experience that those who leave their houses empty will find them looted and with new lodgers. However, to give us courage, we have obtained a Russian double-loading AK rifle. It is only a small thing compared to the bazookas and heavy artillery of the faqash, who drive around every day in our quarter, looting and raping.

To save our girls from rape, we have decided to hide them in the two main mosques, Jaamacadda and Marwaas. At dawn, the women and children are taken to the mosques, and at dusk they are brought back home. We men take turns at guarding the mosques, whilst the wadaad (holy men) read the Koran.

The war has had terrible consequences on hygiene and public health. An epidemic of rubella is causing a plague amongst the children. Many women are aborting, or giving birth to still-born babies. Many people have become insane due to the shock of bombardment. But the chosen victims are the youngest of both sexes. For them, the war is a great game. They throw themselves headlong into looting, they play with guns as if they were actors in a film and they give themselves nicknames like Rambo. The most resourceful organise themselves into armed gangs; they use alcohol and heavy drugs. The girls are fascinated by these youths and imitate their attitudes. They are always on the streets, they smoke and continually flaunt new clothes and perfumes. If you attempt to talk sense into these young people, they laugh in your face, and sometimes threaten you with their guns. At home we have about ten young nephews and nieces, and we do whatever we can to keep them under control, but events have caught us unprepared and we feel impotent. These youths are not bad, and show this by apologising for their behaviour, they are simply intoxicated by events greater than them. What terrifies me, and what I try to make them understand, is that guns are made for killing and being killed, and if they go around with guns, they must know how to use them, to kill or to be killed. However, when they see soldiers are around, they have the good sense to hide in the first open doorway they find.

The news reaching us about the development of this strange war is confusing. No information office has been organised by the guerrillas, it is said that they have a radio but I have never managed to pick it up. Word is going around about fighting in the north, between the SMN and government troops; also in the south in the region of Bey, there seems to be fighting in which a new organisation called the Somali Democratic Movement, or SDM, has taken part. The Dighil Rahanweyn clan, who live in the high Juba, have joined this group. The opening up of this new front blocks reinforcements to government forces in the south.

In the meantime, the evacuation of foreigners continues. A Saudi plane managed to land and take away Egyptian and Yemeni citizens to safety.

There are persistent reports around about the death of Mussa Boqor and Haashi Weheliye, two leading members of Manifesto, the political group which was formed in May of 1990, which enjoyed the immediate support of the Italian government because of its non-violent stance, and which merged together influential personalities from all the Somali clans. Manifesto, which came out in the open with a document signed by 114 members of the political class of the sixties, is the only movement which proposes a change in political life without the use of force. The document suggested the end of the dictatorship and a return to democracy, thus gaining both national and international public support, and encouraging internal political debate which had been lacking in the country. The regime's reaction did not take long to come, and fifty members of Manifesto were immediately imprisoned. For the first time, a chorus of protests was raised against Siad Barre at international level and many countries blocked funding of the regime and withdrew their delegations. In Italy there was much debate about whether to cease cooperation or to continue it in reduced form. A second theory became widespread, with the almost certain hope of being able to develop a "post Siad" phase, giving full support to the Manifesto group. In this connection, Italian diplomacy was initiated for the releasing of the Manifesto group who were in prison, obtaining a rapid acquittal and mobilising Egyptian diplomacy into a meeting in Cairo on the 12th of December of all the opposition forces with a government delegation. The purpose was to reach a cease-fire agreement and the beginning of a transition period for the re-establishment of democracy. Unfortunately, events proved otherwise, and today we are paying for the errors and delays.

### ***7.1.1991, armed women and children***

News circulating about the death of Haaji Mussa Boqor and Haashi Weheliye is conflicting. A friend said he had been at the SOS Children's Hospital, the only hospital building functioning in the city, under the control of the USC. This friend reported that the two leaders of Manifesto had both taken part in a delegation sent by Siad Barre and led by General Ganni, in which General Morgan was also included. After the session in which an agreement had been reached for the formation of a new government and the holding of presidential elections in February, a shot came from the area controlled by the army, and hit the place where the meeting had been held, soon after the two Generals had left.

Fighting has resumed again with unprecedented violence and after two days of relative calm. I was under the impression that the government soldiers had regained control of the situation after heavy bombardment of the Kaaraan, quarter east of Mogadishu, whereas it

was just a manoeuvre to take the pressure off the guerrillas who have finally managed to occupy the Navy military base, and are now aiming at the Shibis, quarter east of Mogadishu , where there are two vital objectives: the armament factory and the villa belonging to Khadija Macallin, Af-weyne's wife. The looting of our quarter continues, even through the night; entire families of Marrehaan, after having left their "paradise" in great haste, are going out "shopping". They break down the rolling shutters of the shops and calmly load up their cars and trucks with all kind of merchandise. For the first time, I saw women and children with guns. Sometimes after the looting, they set fire to everything.

The radio, which has not been transmitting since Sunday, has broadcast a message from Af-weyne with an appeal for national reconciliation and urged the mediation of Italy and Egypt.

### **8.1.1991, the red suitcase**

Early this morning, together with my friend Sittin, an Ogadeen policeman living in hiding in our house, I set off for the airport, hoping to get onto some plane with the foreigners.

The roads were blocked with refugees bound for Afgooye to avoid the atrocities of the war. Four kilometres along the road, there was fighting. We turned onto the road skirting the airfield, the refuge, it is said, of Siad Barre, who had a bunker constructed by the Chinese. There were many of us, and so far nothing happened. We left behind us the great suuk (market) of Ceel Gaab, reduced to a sea of black ash. Many corpses were blackening in the sun. We entered Hamar Jabjab, an infamous quarter, full of delinquents who are mad with joy in this war. Many young men were around, displaying bottles of alcohol, and kids sniffing cans of glue; they all had long knives and pistols in their belts. Near the military airbase, we noticed many soldiers looking at us with boredom. My red suitcase attracted the attention of one soldier who called me out of the line. My suitcase is confiscated. I tried to hint at a little reaction, but the barrel of a gun pointed in my face convinced me to beat a retreat. It was just as well that I did, for a little further on I saw a pile of corpses which gave off an unbearable stench. We returned home by a different route. We passed by my brother's in-laws , but the whole area was deserted. We walked along little streets we did not know and which were sometimes blind alleys. We came out at the big crossroads where the equestrian statue of Ahmed Gureey stands. Some military vehicles blocked access and we turned back. The embassies of Iraq and Egypt have been devastated, just like all the shops. On a wall I read some writing made by a spray gun: USC + SSD (United Somali Congress + Somali Salvation Democratic Front) = Victory. Little by little, as we proceeded towards the centre, the writing increased, which confirmed the information which I had received, that is, that the Majerteen guerrillas of the

SSDF have joined with the Hawiye USC and with the Ogadeens of the Somali Patriotic Movement against Siad Barre.

### ***9.1.1991, in search of a doctor***

We slept little and poorly; our little girl is not very well, she has diarrhoea and vomiting. The guerrillas have made an incursion into our quarter. There is shooting under our windows. Udi insists we move house and always keeps a bundle of our few possessions at the ready. At dawn I went to the mosque, which is also the meeting place for exchanging information and stocking up with water. The firing was getting ever closer, there was fighting in the bank district and close to the Curuuba hotel, the base of a group of faqash. I walked around the area in vain looking for a doctor and some kind of medicine for the diarrhoea and vomiting. Fortunately, I met my friend Cabdi, and continued looking with him. He advised me to go to Sheikh Abba, the spiritual leader of the Reer Hamar (Hamar is the ancient form of the name Mogadishu). His house was literally overrun by refugees and sick people. It was my lucky day because we came across a pharmacist friend of Cabdi, who had managed to save a lot of medicine. He took us to his house, where, thank God we found the medicines we had been looking for. He gave them to me for nothing because I didn't know how to pay for them, I was penniless.

In the afternoon, I observed the usual scenes of sacking and looting. Word is going round that the faqash are ransacking the banks.

### ***10.1.1991, a piece of life going up in smoke***

The whole quarter is enveloped in a black cloud, they are burning the cathedral. From the third floor of my mother-in-law's house I watched the drama of a piece of our history, and mine in particular, which was going up in smoke. In my youth, when I was in the Franciscan missionary college, I went to pray every morning and evening in the cathedral of Monsignor Filippini, who had baptised and confirmed me. I also knew Monsignor Salvatore Colombo very well; he was murdered last year in front of the cathedral and buried in one of the aisles. My father had been a mission boy and wanted us to have a Christian education; Father Goffredo had taken me with him to Italy when I was 13 years old, and put me in a seminary because, according to him, I had a vocation for the priesthood.

In 1968, I returned for a brief period in Somalia, and lived within those walls which were now in flames. There are many people in the quarter who are happy that the cathedral is burning. In their opinion, it is a symbol of colonial oppression. For my friend Ali, an

awuaan muslimiin (brother Muslim), the symbol of the gaal (infidels) has finally collapsed. I am sad about everything that is happening in my country.

The looters must have been working since daybreak, because they had managed to carry away everything from the cathedral. There were people everywhere carrying crosses, sacred vestments, and cases of communion wine.

### ***11.1.1991, devastating frenzy/Udi's brother-in-law***

I could not resist the temptation of going to see the smoking ruins of the cathedral. The gate of the vicariate had been torn up, the fire had left nothing, even the floors were shattered. Only the outside walls were standing. There was a steady flow of people searching through the rubble, but there was nothing left. The palace of Benaadir province has been looted and set on fire. I passed the Southern Cross, one of the best hotels from the colonial era. Here, too, the devastating frenzy had left nothing. There was indescribable confusion. All the most beautiful shops in the centre had been looted, and the pavements were littered with paper and objects.

There is fighting in the area round the Interior Ministry; Udi's brother-in-law, who lives near there, came to find us and did not manage to go back home. I hope that at least the Italian embassy, which is near there, has been evacuated. I had intended to go over to that area to see if it would be possible to get an air passage, but I could not risk setting off with Imaan sick.

### ***12.1.1991, hams and alcohol***

The quarter of Hamarweyne is surrounded, we are caught in a trap. The front has moved, and now we are in the front line. The bullets whistle around near us, armed men guard the streets and it is not even safe to peep out of the window. Many people have lost their nerve and are preparing to leave the city at the first opportunity. The fighting is ever more intense and the area of Bondheere is under government fire. At intervals, the radio sends out messages to cease fire; Siad Barre, with a tired voice, launches appeals for peace and fraternity; a week ago he was incredibly arrogant and threatened the rebels with exemplary punishments.

Word is also going around that even the Italian embassy has closed, it seems a miracle that they were able to survive the inferno which had been unleashed around their headquarters; those in the know say that sacking has already started and that the people

have carried off even the hams, not knowing that they were the meat of pigs, forbidden by the Islamic religion. We are worried about our young people who continue to bring home cartons of beer and strong liquor; every embassy had a large reserve of alcoholic drinks which are now flooding the city.

### ***13.1.1991, dogs and chickens***

I cannot bear being closed inside the house and early this morning I popped over to see my brother-in-law in the Shibis quarter. The main streets were guarded by tanks, but they were filled equally by refugees and by corpses; nobody thinks of burying them and with the heat they were swelling and bursting. The smell of blood attracted stray dogs who fed on the bodies. These animals have become ravenous and terrorise the population, they are only afraid of armed men. I also saw chickens feasting on cadavers. I don't eat eggs any more. The war has left its mark everywhere; houses demolished, electricity poles and trees torn down, blackened carcasses of cars and trucks, armoured cars beyond use and whole districts like ghost towns. It was no longer possible to get anywhere near Sinay, it was under fire. A black pall rose from what used to be one of the largest and most picturesque suuq in the city. I returned home, choosing streets through the Bondheere and Shingaani quarters. But the two districts are separated by a wide arterial road; Viale Somalia. A knot of people had formed and, in small groups, we tried to cross the road which was under sniper fire. I plucked up courage, put my life in God's hands, and hurled myself headlong across it. In fear, I continued running until I reached Hamarweyne. I am alive!

### ***14.1.1991, the children cry***

The Commercial Bank is burning. The faqash, having looted it, set it on fire. Money makes the guerrillas greedy, and consequently there is fighting day and night in our quarter. Their method is urban guerrilla warfare, there are no fixed positions and their targets change hands continuously. The racket of gunfire and the stench of gunpowder have become unbearable. In the house, we keep the women and children in the most interior rooms, and I am never separated from my rifle. The children cry continuously and we do not know how to distract them; some of them are ill, they vomit and have diarrhoea. There is no drinking water, and the water from the well at the mosque is brackish. Provisions are becoming scarce for some days now we have been eating only a little boiled wheat and lentils. We have no oil and we have forgotten the taste of sugar.

### ***15.1.1991, the old man is heavy handed***

The situation is unbearable, everyone is wondering why the jabhadda has not managed to catch Siad Barre. After an devastating beginning, the war seems to be marking time. The old man is obstinately hanging on and is heavy handed. Day and night we hear overhead rockets and grenades which spread terror and death. Some shots landed only a few metres from us and the whole house shook. It seems like the end of the world.

### ***16.1.1991, the spy is recognised***

Finally the jabhadda guerrillas with USC badges entered our quarter around eight in the morning. As usual, the faqash had come to loot the shops but today there were about ten guerrillas waiting for them. There was a violent exchange of gunfire with chasing through the alleys of the old centre. My brother-in-law Muriidi was almost killed as he went out to look for cigarettes. One of the gangsters was shot dead a few paces from him. The stolen property was recovered together with some light machine guns and a bazooka. When oil had been poured onto the troubled waters, I went down to give the guerrillas a hearty welcome, and I was able to take a photograph of the gangster who had been killed. There is enormous unrest in the quarter. A guddi (committee) has been formed, together with a fund of money to finance volunteers who will defend the quarter. Private houses took in and fed the fighters. Towards midday a government patrol fell in an ambush. Later, a spy was recognised and he tried to flee to the Marwaas mosque, where the duhur prayers were taking place. I was also there to pray when a man plunged through us and reached the front row where the Imaam was. Five or six armed men followed him and reached him; they surrounded him and let off several rounds from a sub-machine gun. There was confusion and the prayer was interrupted. There was blood everywhere; the body was dragged into the middle of the road and it was forbidden to bury him. The day ended with another death, a youth from the quarter who had gone to visit relatives. He had been mistaken for a guerrilla, and killed by soldiers in an exchange of gunfire between the guerrillas and the faqash.

Finally, some good news. The government and the USC have agreed to a cease fire. The BBC does not say anything these days about events in Somalia.

### ***17.1.1991, the armistice***

The night passed peacefully. This was because of the cease fire, but for the first time since the beginning of the year no shots could be heard. The armistice has had a good

effect on transport, because some fresh vegetables have finally reached Afgoooye. They are expensive . . . but there's a war.

For the whole day the quarter was on the alert, the regular army has been trying to take control of the old centre, but the assault was repulsed. The government soldiers attacked from all directions. There was a battle along the coast, in Via Roma and close to the electricity centre (ENEA). Fortunately, there are no dead, only one guerrilla injured in the leg, and a couple of civilians.

### ***18.1.1991, the old people do not want to leave***

The day started well, a stray bullet entered the house with the smash of breaking glass, fortunately it did not cause any damage but only gave us all a dreadful fright. It was a high calibre bullet, the kind used by heavy machine-guns and made in America, which is called bron (Browning) by people here. It came in the window of Grandmother's room, which overlooks the road, and then went into the wall of the living room. Our house is on the corner of a cross-road, and for several days we have abandoned the rooms which face the street, which are the most exposed.

We have thought about leaving the city, but our old people do not agree. They prefer to die at home rather than on the road. Our neighbours, conversely, have fled to Marka. Exchanges of gunfire and cannon shots have restarted and it is dangerous to leave the house, bullets whistle from all directions. In the morning, my friend Ahmed came to collect his rifle, a Russian AK, which he had lent me. Although I never used it, at least it gave me some courage.

We spend a dreadful night. We were kept awake by a government sniper who was firing on ENEA and a small group of guerrillas who returned fire from an alley behind the house.

My daughter Imaan still has diarrhoea, it is impossible to find a doctor and medicines.

### ***19.1.1991, a white bundle***

Early in the morning, before hostilities began, I plucked up the courage to go to see my house in Hamar Bile. Total confusion reigned in our quarter; hundreds of people were out on the streets, armed with rifles and crowbars. They were working with alacrity behind the shutters to loot the shops. We may have been freed from the nightmare of the faqash, but what was happening here before our eyes was worse. From all the outskirts of the city, hundreds of people were converging on the old city centre, till now saved from cannon

shots and fires, and they were laying down the law. It was the law of the strongest. I stopped to watch the show. The shutters were smashed in and the doors taken off their hinges; several armed men guarded the booty whilst their accomplices got their hands on the safes.

For two years in this area the banks have not been able to give back monies deposited by account holders because of a lack of liquidity. Corruption had reached such a level that the National Bank had become the private fund of Af-weyne, and all his numerous and insatiable relatives.

A law, which was also a declaration of bankruptcy, allowed anyone who had deposited up to a hundred thousand shillings, to retrieve his capital. To other merchants and industrialists the government guaranteed only the restoration of 20% of his entire capital. After this law, no merchant deposited any more liquid money into the bank and the government found itself without any funds, to the point where it could no longer guarantee the payment of government employees' salaries. On more than one occasion, the army had to intervene, confiscating by force, and by presidential decree, keeping the money in the safes of large traders and entrepreneurs. The looters, knowing this, were certain to find a lot of high-value notes. After they had been, the first thing one noticed was the forced safes, abandoned on the pavement; thousands of documents scattered everywhere, and many people hoarding passports, especially foreign ones - Yemeni, Indian, etc.

Hamarweyne has the highest density of shops and department stores in the whole of Mogadishu, so there was little wonder that thousands of common delinquents, to whom the war has given every license, have taken advantage of it. Besides, it is not difficult to find weapons and there is no law against using them. But what strikes me most is that after word went around throughout Somalia calling for the recovery of the enormous treasures from the shops the thieves have been joined by ordinary people attracted by the illusion of riches, who, risking their lives, descend upon the old city and start looting. At the beginning there were only a few of them, and they were very scared; then, day by day they became more numerous and more inured. Women joined the men, as well as old people and even children.

After generously helping themselves, the armed men left the field open to the small-time looters who shamelessly snatched everything, and with enormous bundles on their shoulders set off home. The spectacle was shocking, we are in a state of total war, the government army still maintains control of parts of the city, but it would appear that the main preoccupation of the people is to abandon themselves to looting. The aim of both parties is the same and it is not uncommon to see a furious clash between armed people

defending their booty. This is what has happened in the banks, where dozens of people surprised in the act of stealing were massacred by others who had the same objective.

At Bondheere, the situation is calm. Some people are burying their dead, killed in the previous night's bombardment. I met a man who was carrying a white bundle in his arms; he was looking for a space to bury his child. This sight affected me profoundly - children are the innocent victims of this war. My little girl Imaan, too, is suffering from diarrhoea and vomiting still. She is terribly weak, she can no longer keep her eyes open. It is impossible to find medicine. When I reached Sinay, the scene was chilling. The largest market in the capital was no more than twisted sheets of metal, blackened by smoke. The mortar fire had not spared the nearby apartment buildings; Mohamud Sheekh, my sister-in-law Safiya's uncle, was standing with his hands in his hair in front of his hotel; the facade was no longer standing. From a distance, through the General Dauud Cemetery, I caught sight of the broken door of my apartment on the first floor. My legs turned to jelly, I advanced with difficulty, I felt sick. I went up the stairs resigned to the worst. The door which I had strengthened by nailing planks onto it, had been ripped off. The looters had left nothing. The lamps were smashed to pieces, all the windows were shattered, and the few remaining items of furniture were destroyed. I peeped over the balcony which overlooks the Marehaan's houses and the spectacle was identical; the whole street was strewn with broken furniture. Hamar Bile was completely derelict, many apartment buildings bore the visible signs of the war. The bombardments have knocked down entire walls and from some houses there is the stink of decomposing bodies. I rummaged through the rest of my things and recovered several documents and some photographs. On my way home, in the district of Monopolio, I saw a blackened armoured car. I gave it a wide berth because it was giving off a powerful stench of decomposing bodies. On the road between Bondheere and Shingani, there was a Mercedes, with three people still in it, burnt to cinders. I crossed the roads with extreme caution, there were snipers everywhere; every now and then I exchanged information with people coming from the opposite direction, about the state of security in the area. A couple of times I dodged snipers, and finally returned to my own quarter safe and sound. A few hundred metres from home all hell broke out - there were armed men everywhere, and they were in civilian clothes. I had no idea whether they were faqash or the USC. What used to be the Bank of Rome was in flames. The shelling was close, and deafening. I saw an open door and dived inside, it was what used to be the printing office of the Apostolic Vicariate. I could do nothing but wait. Meanwhile I looked around inside. The printing office had been turned into a building materials store, and in one room I found a mountain of medical supplies tossed haphazardly. I filled my pockets with bandages, plasters, disinfectant and various medicines. Fortunately, I even found a syrup for diarrhoea, and one for reducing fever. When peace returned, I put my head out of the door, checked to see that there were no armed men nearby, and ran for home. They had given me up as missing.

In the afternoon, the looting continued. It is a ritual which has been going on since the beginning of the war. The most astute traders hire armed personnel to guard their goods. The night began with the usual concert of shelling, fireballs whistled over our heads, we did not manage to close our eyes, and we held Imaan close to our chests to keep her quiet.

### ***20.1.1991, it is not easy to leave***

The battle began at dawn. There was an engagement between the faqash and the caretakers of the Benaadir hotel which is in Via Egitto, two hundred metres from our house. Two people are dead and another two have been injured. The injured came to our house to be treated, one had his left hand crushed and the other had a nasty injury below his knee. We had no medicines to stop the haemorrhaging, fortunately Abdullaahi, a nurse who is a first aid worker at the De Martino hospital, near Via Roma, brought some surgical needles for suturing.

In the afternoon there were some other clashes, and the looters have returned. My mother-in-law went down to the street and stopped in front of her shop, there was a heated discussion with some looters who, fortunately, changed their objective.

People have had enough, many have left the city and have somehow reached Marka and Baraawe, but it is not easy to leave. On the way, one meets armed gangs who strip the refugees of their pathetic luggage and often kidnap the girls, of whom nothing more is heard.

The news on the radio at 8 p.m. announced the dissolving of the government led by Mohamed Hawaadle Madar. The task of forming a new government has been entrusted to Omar Arte Khaalib, formerly Minister of Foreign Affairs in the seventies, then fired and put in prison. This is the result of a compromise between the regime and the opposition forces who identified themselves in the Manifesto declaration.

### ***21.1.1991, everything has become booty***

It is still dark and there is already fighting on the streets. People are sceptical in their comments about the new government. The USC, which was short of provisions, came to stock up from our quarter. Without the slightest hesitation, the guerrillas broke into some shops and loaded the provisions to three convoy trucks. As soon as they were gone, pandemonium broke loose. The people, who had been pinching and scraping for a month,

fell upon the provisions and everyone tried to snatch as much as possible. Then came the usual invasion of barbarians and the ritual of looting was repeated. The coming and going of the looters was uninterrupted. The people of the quarter were afraid that after finishing with the shops, they would attack their houses. The old people had had various meetings with the leaders of USC, but without any concrete results. For the moment, they have too much trouble with the war to think about public order. The reality is that there is no strategy, and there are no leaders capable of making people obey them. The nomadic fighters use a traditional style of making war: as soon as they have overcome the enemy, they throw themselves headlong into sharing out the booty. The whole of Mogadishu has become a battlefield and consequently, everything has become booty, without any distinctions whatsoever. Even the shops and hotels belonging to the Hawiye are sacked and looted.

### **22.1.1991, *The Shankaroon tea***

It is seven o'clock in the morning. The bustle of the looters' cars has already started. A curious detail: they all bear the initials USC. By now, the front has moved and the war is winding down. The army of looters has swollen, now there are thousands of them, they are everywhere. They set their sights on the shops, forcing open the doors with any means at hand, they shout, they fight continually. It is dangerous to look out of the windows. I went down into the street to see these people close up, they are the same people who have been around in this quarter for years, pushing a handcart with wares. Lately, the council has allotted them a space at Ceel Gaab for their trade. Last week, all the market stalls were burned and now they will have to be rebuilt. They are unerringly certain - they know where to find valuable merchandise and full cash boxes. Only the most ingenuous stop you on the road to ask what is written on the shop signs; if they are disappointed, they smash everything. The roads and alleys are overflowing with abandoned goods. When they are unable to break down the door, they break the walls.

I went to find my friend Abdi, his shop had been cleaned out. Some days ago I had advised him to take all his merchandise home, but he had been afraid; now he looked on desolately and impotently at years of effort and work going up in smoke. Abdi, like many other merchants, had invested his capital in the shop, now he owns nothing. Yesterday he was a well-off person, now he hasn't even got the money to buy something to eat. Like others, he too will try to leave the country and start all over. An uncle of his had been involved in the civil war in Uganda, and he lost everything, then he rebuilt his life. He will probably try to reach him.

On the way back, I went into an alley and was met with a hail of bullets which grazed my head. I raised my hands, and slowly edged backwards. I had disturbed the work of a group of looters who, one by one, had been clearing out all the shops in the alley.

I returned home, watching my step carefully. Not far from home, I stopped for tea with Shankaroon, a lady who, in the midst of this indescribable bedlam, lights a fire every day and sells tea and focaccine bread to everyone. I stopped to talk with one of the looters to try to understand his way of thinking and why he was acting this way. He replied angrily that the Hamaar Reer have not lifted a finger, not even materially, to oust the dictator, whilst he and his people have given their lives; another one intervened and said that it was hunger and desperation that pushed him into stealing; a third accused the rich who supported the regime all these years, and that they deserved to be punished for that; another one showed me his gun, declaring himself to be the strongest and therefore having the right to lay down the law.

They called me because a wild bullet had injured a child in the thigh. The entrance hole could be seen, but not the exit. Fortunately, he had lost only a very little blood. I reassured his parents that the injury was not serious and it had not penetrated a major blood vessel; I bandaged his thigh and administered an anti-tetanus injection, and an antibiotic. They took me to a young man with an abdominal injury. We got him quickly into a car full of stolen property and took him to the SOS Children's, the only hospital in the entire city which is functioning, and which is run by the French Médecins Sans Frontière. This is in the north, towards the road for Balcad, in the sector controlled by the USC. In the afternoon, at around 4 p.m. a sortie of government soldiers took some looters by surprise; they had been loaded up with booty and were returning home. There was a bloodbath, there were about 50 killed and dozens of wounded.

### ***23.1.1991, the mosque is hit***

The pattern is repeated with chilling precision: armed people, cars circulating all areas, and then cries, broken locks, gunfights and confusion. The fear of the early days has passed, now we go down to the street and keep close guard on my mother-in-law's two shops. Every so often, I pop over to see if my sisters-in-law are OK. Then, in order to eat, I have to go about tracking down food and paraffin for the lamps. Sometimes we get provisions from rather dubious sources, and this kindles religious discussions in the family. Unfortunately, we cannot do anything else; it is impossible to find a shop open in order to buy things, therefore we eat what we find. In our family we are careful not to get involved with the general drunkenness of looting which seems to have infected many people, especially the young.

There are two youths in our family, aged fifteen and seventeen, who, risking their lives, are always going around rummaging in the shops with a gang of kids of their age. Every so often, I go down to their room. It has become a bazaar, everything you can imagine is there. Their grandmother has tried everything to keep them at home, both the stick and the carrot, but nothing works. Not knowing the value of things, they misuse them: they use mineral water for washing themselves, they wear a shirt once, and then throw it away. It's the same thing with shoes.

Just before ten, a furious battle broke out, a tank entered the area and began to fire wildly. There was the usual general stampede. I ran to barricade the door, when our alley was filled terrifyingly with armed men. A tremendous explosion was heard, followed by three more. All three floors of our house shook. Flakes of plaster and dust fell on us. I ran to look for Imaan who, fortunately, was in my nephew's arms. Then we went to check on the upper floors which, thank God, had not been damaged. The shells had landed not much more than 20 metres from our house. We awaited news which was travelling from mouth to mouth. From downstairs someone shouted my name. I grabbed the first aid kit, and dashed down. Marwaas mosque had been squarely hit by shelling, the air was thick with dust and a horrible cloying smell wafted past. Four corpses were lying in a corner near a wide breach made by the shells. Death had caught them praying with the Koran in their hands. A young man was lying on the ground, white foam coming out of his mouth and nose. I checked his pulse, it was absent. I put my ear against his chest, but his heart had stopped beating. He had a small wound on one leg. The tremendous explosion had caused his death. It took some effort to convince his brother Hassan, our neighbour, that there was nothing we could do. My nephew Awees rushed up, a friend of the victim. He cried in a corner. The victim was called Huseen Al Qaasim. Yesterday evening, together with some friends, I managed to save the goods in his shop. He had told his family that he was going to pray, to thank God.

They called me from the floor below, where the baths are. A boy was lying in a pool of blood, his legs crushed, I called on God's help. We tried to comfort him. After stopping the haemorrhage, we ran to find a car to take him to the first aid station. We got him into a car belonging to the looters, which left at full speed. An old man had a bullet in one shoulder, I fumbled with the tweezers and pulled it out. Fortunately, he was in shock and so did not feel the pain. A man had been injured by shots in his abdomen and back; another one on his face, and on his chest. I saw many women and children coming down from the upper storey of the mosque, about 50 of them. For some days now, this has been their refuge from dawn to dusk, because there have been acts of thuggery and rape by armed gangs. They are the sisters and children of those who have died whilst guarding

the mosque. The mosque has been hit by three cannons, if the upper floor had been hit, there would have been carnage.

#### ***24.1.1991, minister friends***

This morning too, all the women and children have been taken to Jaamica mosque, a long way from the road, with stronger walls. From the beginning of the war the old quarter of Hamarweyne has sustained every kind of looting and violence. Only the Haaji Diriye family, the owners of many shops, was armed beforehand. Now they keep the looters away, and are feared. It is dawn, and the looting has already begun; many families have left the quarter, which has become unlivable. The abandoned houses are immediately looted. The first to leave the city were the Indians, now it is the Yemenis who are fleeing. The army placed some armoured cars close to the Curuuba hotel and opened fire on the looters. We witnessed the usual scene of mad rushing: scattered bundles everywhere, dead bodies, injured people. Finally there was a little peace. The children went down onto the street and rummaged through the shops and bags. They found all kinds of things, even weapons lost in the flight. The children play with guns, pistols and hand grenades; the first mortal accidents have begun.

The evening news on the radio brought us a surprise; a new government has been formed. In spite of the battles, dialogue between the regime and the opposition has been continuing; Omar Arte Khaalib is the Prime Minister, and two of my colleagues from the university have also entered the government, Abdulhamiid, president of Veterinary Sciences, has been nominated Minister for Tourism, and Saalim Caliyooow has been nominated Minister for Livestock.

#### ***25.1.1991, Khadija and Yasmiin***

With terrifying punctuality, the ritual of looting has been repeated today. People, as numerous as ants, sifted through the entire quarter, not even the artisans' little shacks have been spared. A female friend of ours, who did not want to go with the other women to the mosque for security, saved herself by jumping from one roof to another; she received a nasty sprain on one foot, but she was safe. In the morning, Khadija and Yasmiin, two of our nieces who went out to find some vegetables at Hamar Jabjab, a nearby quarter, had an unpleasant experience, fortunately without serious consequences. At a crossroads they were stopped by some soldiers and accused of carrying foods to the guerrillas. Fortunately, they did not lose heart, they even retorted that their few greens could hardly feed an army. The soldiers reacted by hitting them with the butt of a rifle and threatening to kill them. After some time, they were released. Unfortunately, we are

forced to send the children and the girls to circulate; for us men it is impossible to do so, if we are taken by the faqash, a shot in the back is the least we can expect.

For some days we have been without running water; we replenish our supply at the wells of the mosques, after queueing for hours. If the looters are thirsty, do not ask for a drink; they point their guns at us and steal the bucket with the water.

We have learned that the government soldiers have withdrawn from the Shibis quarter, abandoning it. Two important objectives are in this quarter, which USC has thrown every means at in trying to capture: the arms and munitions factory, and the house of Khadija, the wife of president Siad Barre. The military column, escorted by tanks, fell into an ambush, and they were engaged in a furious battle to free themselves. The tanks fired at point blank range, destroying many houses in Bondheere. The bodies of the faqash were strewn along the whole of Somalia Avenue. All the large blocks, including the post office, the Juba hotel, the Sacred Heart church, banks and schools, bear the visible breaches made by shells. Not even the trees, the lamps and the traffic lights were saved. Numerous tanks lie destroyed and decomposing bodies of the crews pollute the air. It is tacitly forbidden to bury one's enemies, even those who fell in battle.

### ***26.1.1991, Villa Somalia is hit***

The sun had not even risen when the gangs of looters started work in our quarter. Finally, drinking water has returned, and we make the most of it by laying up a reserve supply.

At about seven in the morning we heard fighting from the direction of Ceel Gaab. The usual general stampede, cars and lorries leaving the scene at full speed, tooting their horns. The truce was brief, after scarcely half an hour they returned again and resumed their work which had been interrupted. The usual music restarted again, doors smashed in, shots and shouting. By now there were only a few shops left to loot, but there were a lot of people and for this reason scuffles broke out, with the sound of gunfire. At times too many people went into one shop, and then more of the merchandise was destroyed than was carried away.

Our days pass monotonously, we are using up all our strength just to survive.

At dawn, after prayers, we go out looking for water. Then, after negotiating the faqash or guerrilla roadblocks, each time undergoing interrogations and threats, we go from one quarter to another, in search of paraffin, oil, flour, sugar, rice and pasta. If we are

particularly lucky, we might find an onion, a potato or a tomato. There is no point even thinking about meat or fish, and we prefer not to eat eggs, since the time I saw a hen feasting on a human corpse.

So far, we are O.K., but there are a lot of people who are undernourished and the children have been decimated by diarrhoea. In these daily explorations sometimes I find myself under bombardment, with bullets flying in all directions, or else I am caught between two lines of fire. This is a strange war, everybody is armed and is constantly fighting. If I meet armed people, I raise my hands as a precaution, and if they ask me my clan, I say that I belong to the Reer Hamaar. The Reer Hamaar are neutral, and generally respected by all. The struggle against the dictatorial regime has been superimposed by clan conflict. The two major clans, the Daarood (Siad Barre's clan) and the Hawiye (the founding group of the USC), are now engaged in open warfare.

I made my usual round of reconnaissance; the quarter was unrecognisable. All the doors of the shops have been smashed in, I was walking on a carpet of goods which have been thrown out as rubbish. It was amazing the number of electric fans which had been thrown onto the street; it would seem that people did not know how to use them; most of the looters came from the bush. All kinds of things were on the ground, packets of goods which had been tipped out, coffee, flour, perfume, exercise books, pens and an infinity of other things. A large number of women filled up bags with these leftovers. With infinite patience, they gathered up all kinds of things. One woman was spreading spermicidal cream on her face, another was perplexed by a large quantity of chamber pots, whose use she did not understand, the same with rolls of toilet paper. Paint was emptied out of tins, so that the containers could be used. Someone else walked miles with a huge box on his shoulders, only to find out that it contained mineral water, and in disappointment, he kicked the bottles. Two boys were going round trying to sell a pair of shoes, one had the left and the other had the right.

In the afternoon, exchanges of fire began. From the roof, we could see Villa Somalia hit squarely by shells. It was the end of this cursed regime and of the hyena of Garbaharrey, one of Siad Barre's nicknames. The shelling continued until the evening. We are one kilometre as the crow flies from the presidency and we were afraid of being hit. The advance of the jabhadda is unstoppable, they are everywhere and are marching towards the airfield, the last stronghold of the regime. They are fighting house by house. The snipers are everywhere, but this time there is a great deal of determination. At night, the fighting usually ceases, but not today. The fighting goes on, the presidency and the radio are surrounded. Some people say that Siad Barre has already fled.

Fear of a bloodbath has forced many people to leave the capital, and in the early morning, some young people from our family also left in the direction of Balcad. From there they will continue to Afgooye, they are planning to get on a ship at Baraawe for Kenya. We were awake all night, ready to flee if the situation worsened. The gunfire exchanges have stepped up, the glowing bullets and the explosions look like fireworks; the air is unbreathable.

### ***27.1.1991, Siad Barre has escaped***

The news bulletin on the radio at 6.30 announced that Villa Somalia has been taken by storm and also that the military air-base, the last refuge of Siad Barre, is in the hands of the USC. It would seem that the old man has found safety by fleeing overland, towards Garbaharrey, his homeland. Thank God, the nightmare is over. The "bloodless revolution" has thus finally ended. Somalia has payed dearly, and we will need to think immediately of peace and reconstruction.

The city is flooded with people, the traffic is in chaos, even donkey carts are out on the streets. The target is the port with its enormous warehouses and hundreds of containers, then there is the police college arsenal, the airport and the Halane barracks. The number of people armed with rifles and pistols is truly amazing; they come from the various barracks which have been looted. Men, women and children carry as many guns as they can. The young men from our house are no exception either, they carried two machineguns, several carbines and hand grenades. Wherever arms are shown and there is fighting, there is a tremendous racket, but the people's faces do not show fear. We were all down on the street to see the tank near the National Theatre and the wide-open gates of Villa Somalia where anyone who wanted could enter and see the mountains of cartridge cases and military uniforms. The looters had already been here and taken everything away. Nothing remains of the German Embassy, and in the Chinese Embassy people are even gathering coal which these days is a rare commodity. Casa d'Italia (Italy House) has been cleared out, two people were taking apart the generator. I went into the Cathedral, being careful where I placed my feet, the flames had devoured everything, from the floor to the ceiling, only the two belltowers remain, and some boys were playing with the bells.

At lunch, we finally ate some goat meat, and discussed the news; at the moment there is a huge drunkenness of freedom, but facing the ruin caused by bombs and looting, one wonders if this poor country will ever be able to return to normality. For the time being, there is no new government and the radio broadcasts vague news; appeals are being launched for nurses and doctors, ENEA electricians, post office workers and water

technicians to go back to work. The difficulties are immense, however; many people have fled and the systems have suffered considerable damage. For example, most of the street lamps are not working and the electricity cables are on the ground.

Word is going round that Siad Barre has fled to the South and that he has requested political asylum in Kenya.

Unfortunately, fires continue; around five o'clock this evening, the Shabeelle hotel went up in smoke.

Our youngsters, who yesterday were fleeing, have returned. The main roads were blocked, nobody could either leave or enter the city.

### **28.1.1991, into the chasm**

There are regular broadcasts from the National Radio, but there is clearly a power vacuum, there is no definite policy. The heads of the jabhadda are still meeting, and meantime word is around that USC wants the presidency. But this position is very tempting to the other groups too. Looting continues, people go around like swarms of locusts, nothing is spared. Even the garesa (the ancient fortress built by the Sultan of Zanzibar, Saciid Barqash, more than a century ago) has been sacked. As I heard the news this morning, I ran to the old fortress. The guerrillas, who are based near there, had taken advantage of this by raiding it. Many "partisans" carried away swords and objects taken from the museum as trophies. The heavy gates had been thrown open; entering I saw all the cases and the cupboards broken, valuable objects carried away and the rest destroyed. The National Library and Theatre have suffered the same fate.

These days, the greatest danger consists of the armed youngsters who play at being cowboys; they fight wildly, and sometimes injure passers-by. In our house, my nephews go about armed with MABs (Beretta automatic rifles) and every so often they open fire; Mamma Halima and all of us live in terror and we do not know how to keep the situation under control.

Finally, Imaan is better. We do not know where to go, we have lost our home and all our possessions, we hope we can manage to emigrate.

Liberty, or xornimo, is still being spoken of, whilst the rape and destruction of everything continues; normalisation is still a long way away, and reconstruction is still not even being mentioned now. The chasm draws us like a magnet. We have heard that even the Medina quarter, saved from the war, is without water and that the people are leaving;

there is a complete lack of any kind of organisation. Today, for the first time, a car with the USC slogan went about with a loudspeaker at full volume, telling people to stop the looting and to reopen the shops. Apart from the fact that there are very few shops still intact, who would guarantee their security? Everyone is going about armed and they just take whatever they want.

### ***29.1.1991, our house is occupied***

This morning the radio announced the formation of the new government, temporarily led by Ali Mahdi as the President, and Omar Arte Khaalib as the Prime Minister. Comments are generally positive; the President is a rich merchant, the owner of the large Makka al-Mukarrama hotel; in the last free elections in March 1969 he was elected deputy and in 1990 he had supported Manifesto.

Today is a peaceful day, the looting has ended; people continue to return, but many have the unwelcome surprise of seeing their homes destroyed, looted and sometimes occupied by new tenants. I went to see my house at Hamar Bile. Like all the houses in the quarter, it is occupied by a group of armed youngsters who crave drugs and dedicate themselves to looting. I hope that in the future my house will come back into my possession, but for now I am a refugee and also without money, insha Allah!

Finally, I had a visit from my brother Cali who was evacuated to Basra, to the house of a religious confraternity. He had to travel more than fifty kilometres on foot with his pregnant wife and elderly mother-in-law. Udi's sister Amina, has also returned from Afgooye, with all my nephews and nieces. There are no means of transport, and so even the youngest had to walk thirty kilometres, in two stages, sleeping in the bush under the acacia trees.

I heard from my nephew Ibrahim that my brother Huseen managed to reach Baraawe and from there boarded a ship to Mombasa. I hope that he manages to reach his wife and children who are in Sweden. We do not know what has finally happened to my sister Fahmo, she is the daughter of the ugaas (the clan leader) of the Marrehaan and probably followed our father who is very loyal to Siad Barre. I have no news yet about my mother and my brother Ahmed, who are at Beledweyn; I hope they are safe and well.

For the second consecutive evening the quarter has been visited by thieves, but now people are reacting with every means; in the middle of the night we were woken up by shouting, calls for help and hails of stones and shots began, which chased away the ill-intentioned visitors.

### **30.1.1991, the camera, life**

Finally this month is coming to an end, the most terrible one for Somalia and for us all. During the morning I had an awful incident. I had gone out with my wife Udi for a walk around the quarter, and I took my camera with me. We visited the Southern Cross hotel which, apart from being looted has not suffered serious damage. The Regional Headquarters building is semi-destroyed, the cathedral is reduced to a ruin. All that is standing of the Shabeelle hotel is a smoking shell.

We entered the Casa d'Italia. I was photographing the havoc left by the looters, when two armed men ordered me to stop. The camera attracted their attention; they accused me of being a spy because I did not have permission to take photographs. As usual, a group formed of curious on-lookers, who were divided into those who judged me guilty and those who said I was innocent. Fortunately, my wife intervened decisively, and asked for the intervention of the jabhadda. In the end, I handed over the film and, taking advantage of the armed men's indecision, we left without looking back. These days, life has such little value that a person can be killed for less even than a camera. What makes me most angry is that the regime can change, but it is more difficult to change the mentality of the people; all you need is a gun to lay down the law.

Little Imaan is really ill; she has a fever, vomiting and diarrhoea; we have not managed to find a doctor and the hospitals are crammed with the injured. We have used various medicines, but without success.

### **31.1.1991, the absent intellectuals**

It is the last day of the month, we take a deep breath, the war is almost over and we have survived. The 'almost' is required, because nobody knows what has finally happened to Siad Barre. Besides, the leaders of USC do not agree with the nomination of two representatives of Manifesto at the State summit; problems are also being created by the President being an Abgaal and the Prime Minister being an Isaaq. Colonel Omar Jeess wants an important position, that is, the Presidency, in order to be part of the coalition of the government, but nobody wants the army in the government, and the new government is leaning towards civil appointments. The Hawiye have discovered their strength and intend to occupy all the key points of power. Meanwhile, the new mayor of the capital has been appointed: Abdullahi Gacal Sabriye, an Abgaal, and others from the Hawiye clan are on a waiting list for the division of the spoils of power. It is not a very happy situation. We need the collaboration of everyone in order to put all the country's structures back into

operation, otherwise we run the danger of forming numerous local governments with the stamp of clans.

Now we are finally freed from an oppressive and totalitarian regime, every clan is independent and the combatants of the jabhadda only obey the leaders of their own clans, who only finance their own men.

Yesterday, at the first government meeting, at Villa Baydhabo, all the responsible clan elders were summoned, and today all the religious leaders. In this historic moment, the intellectuals are completely absent, traditions and customs are being passed over. All ideology is dead, and even the word democracy has no meaning, because only the strongest, the best armed, can give orders.

### ***1.2.1991, the jam-packed house***

We are waiting for water, in some quarters it has already arrived; we are still going to the well at the mosque.

This morning I went in search of a doctor, fortunately, I found two; they visited my little girl and prescribed medicine. With the prescription in hand, I went to look for the medicines. I went back to the ancient Somalian system; I knocked on my neighbours' doors, but only received a lot of advice and assurances of solidarity.

It is Friday, the city is tranquil; my family is a little better. One of the boys had a squabble with his brother; they challenged each other to a duel to the tune of rifles, and avoided a disaster by a narrow squeak. The bullets entered the walls of their rooms, grazing the boys who were sleeping. Mamma Halima knocked their heads together as usual, but unfortunately she has refused to take my advice to banish arms in the house. She maintains that in case of danger the boys will defend us; I take the opposite view, the only danger we have to defend ourselves from is these armed kids.

The house is now bursting with people: Mamma Halima, her daughters Udi and Amina, her firstborn Muriidi with his four sons; then Faduma Musse, Mamma's sister, with three of her sons; six of Mamma's grandchildren who took refuge after the bombardment which destroyed their house at Bondheere; five of my nephews who took refuge from Beledweyn, and finally, four other guests. This makes a total of some thirty mouths to feed. Mamma tries to keep the situation under control, but the climate of social disorder has also infected our family. The kids form a gang which is feared in the quarter; there is no way of holding them back when the banks and shops are being looted. I recognise that

in this most critical period of the war, they have sometimes been helpful in bringing provisions home, but on the other hand, there are furious quarrels for trivial motives, every day. The boys will not be separated from their weapons, not even when they go to the bathroom; they go around the house with their loaded rifles, and every so often they fire into the air to scare the girls.

Today in our quarter they have begun to clean up and to bury the corpses which have been putrefying in the streets for weeks. I went down with a shovel to lend a hand; the rubbish which had accumulated in the alleys was incredible, fortunately no epidemics have broken out. We gathered the rubbish into the middle of the street and set it on fire. The crackling of the bonfire was heard throughout the district; the air is unbreathable.

As usual, I went in search of provisions; the market has been tentatively open for three days; at this time one can find different kinds of vegetables and, finally, lemons too, and chilli peppers. The prices are inflated; fortunately the merchants accept small denomination banknotes; 50 and 100 Somali shillings.

These banknotes have been out of circulation for some months, and when looting the banks, the people recovered sackloads of them. For many days in our quarter, which has the highest concentration of banks, we were walking on a carpet of low-value banknotes, which the looters had thrown away.

At the market, I went with a bag full of paper money; as a precaution I kept my Beretta in full view. These days, life is worth less than a bag of shopping.

### **2.2.1991, *the blood-tie***

What everybody has been fearing has unfortunately happened; Khalif has injured his Grandmother's shoulder whilst playing with an S and W .45 calibre handgun. It was at about nine o'clock in the morning, Khalif had just got up and came up for his breakfast. In his belt he carried the handgun which he had acquired the evening before from my nephew Huseen; he was sitting down and had begun to play with the weapon. At that time, Udi and Mamma Halima, with Imaan on her lap, were seated before the fire, preparing coffee. I had gone to the airport in the hope of getting on a plane. Udi told me the details when I got back.

When the gun went off, the shock paralysed everyone - Mamma Halima grabbed her shoulder with her hand, later she would tell us that it felt as if she had been burnt with a cinder, then she fell backwards. Just in time, Udi caught Imaan, who was crying, and

rescued her mother. Khalif, as white as a sheet with terror, threw the gun away and cried on his knees, begging for forgiveness. Mamma Halima was clutching her wounded shoulder with her left hand and tried to console her grandson.

Within a few seconds, word went round the whole quarter about Mamma's accident; the house filled up with relatives and friends. Udi and Amina, after binding the wound, went out to look for a car to take her to hospital, but in vain. There was no alternative but to go on foot to the Casualty department of the De Martino hospital; fortunately, it is only a couple of kilometres from our house. At the hospital, she was promptly treated; the bullet had exited without damaging any vital organs or blood vessels. A nurse accompanied her back home and put in a drip. By then, Khalif had fled the house, his father Muriidi set out after him with the intention of teaching him a tough lesson.

When I got home, at around 11, the situation was under control; Mamma Halima went to bed, assisted by the nurse; the procession of relatives and friends, even from other districts, had begun. Khalif Dooró's family is well known in Hamarweyne. The head of the family, Khalif Mohamed, was the last sultan of the Reer Hamar and the religious leader of the Qadriya confraternity. The emotion brought about by the narrow escape from danger, and anger for not being at home in the moment of need, remained with me all day.

I spoke at length with my nephew Huseen, to try to understand the reasons for his behaviour; a week ago I had complained to Khalif, because whilst he was playing with guns he had fired a machine gun in the boys' room. The bullets had lodged close to his bed, just a few centimetres from his head. I tried very hard to convince Khalif to get rid of the gun and yesterday evening my nephew returned home with the handgun, and he sold it to Khalif. I hope that he understood the seriousness of his action. In the meantime, I have sent him to his maternal aunt. Imaan is fine, fortunately her head was resting on her Grandmother's shoulder, the one opposite to where the bullet struck. There is now a hole as big as a fist in the kitchen wall.

The political situation of the country has taken a turn which convinces no-one. First of all, the same guddi (assembly) has been set up again, which had negotiated with Siad Barre a little before his fall, and the same government has been proposed as well, with the same ministers who represented all the Somali clans.

After the victory against the dictatorship we expected a surge of freedom and democracy, but instead we find ourselves alone and naked again. We have lost everything in material terms, but more than anything else we no longer have any point of reference. All that remains is the most ancient ancestral value: the blood tie, the clan family. All the power is in the hands of the clan, we are witnesses to the carving up of power between the various

victorious clans. The losers, that is to say, the Daarood clan generally, are fleeing from Mogadishu; entire quarters such as Case Popolari or Siigale, mainly inhabited by Majerteen (Daarood) and people from the north, seem to belong to a ghost city. The few remaining people have barricaded themselves into their houses, whilst most of them have chosen to return to their places of origin. A family friend told us about 500 Majerteen who gathered at Lafoole and are trying to reach Galkacayo; the road north towards the region of Garoowe. The same applies to the Ogadeens, who came to Somalia in hundreds of thousands after the disastrous war against Ethiopia in 1977-78.

This morning, on my way to the airport, I crossed various quarters; everywhere there is destruction. The provisional government makes appeals on the radio for the merchants to open their shops, but one only needs to walk around the city to see that everything has been looted, nothing has been left.

### **3.2.1991, all kinds and all makes**

Early in the morning Abdullahi, a nurse at the De Martino hospital, came to change Mamma's medication. Abdullahi is an old friend of mine; in this war we have often worked together, even during the bombing. Doctor Awees, an orthopedic specialist, also came by; he was going to visit the injured children, and I accompanied him. These were two boys with firearm injuries to the lower limbs. The younger boy had been hit in the ankle by a stray bullet; the older one was injured in his leg whilst he was playing near his house, by an adult who let off a gun which he thought was unloaded. The hospitals are full of people injured by firearms; there are too many people in possession of war weapons which they do not even know how to handle.

After the collapse of the dictatorial regime the barracks and police stations remained unguarded; thousands of people, including children, got hold of all kinds of hand guns. The consequence is that half the people circulating the streets are armed and have their fingers on the triggers. The cheapest gun is the MAB (Beretta automatic rifle), which had been supplied to the police; and nicknamed shimbir lays ("good for bird hunting"), or saaxiibkiis dile ("friend-killer"). Everywhere, shots can be heard, most of them accidental; they often cause fatal accidents. Hand grenades cause the most damage, there are all kinds and all makes; the most dangerous are those in the shape of a hammer, they have a little cap which should be removed only when using them, most people do not know this, and so there are often deaths and injuries.

Furthermore, with the arms unheard of violence has been unleashed; now, every squabble, even the most banale, ends with gunfire. Boys are the most dangerous

because threats often turn into deeds; almost every day in our quarter we see young boys running after each other, firing guns, after deciding to challenge each other to duels. Now it is not advisable to watch the innocent football games amongst the kids; with each goal, the supporters express their joy by firing into the air; if the fans begin to tease each other, they usually end with blows or shooting with guns.

Another kind of accident is caused by fires; we are in the hottest season of the year and the monsoon blows relentlessly from the north-east. To escape from the mountains of rubbish which have invaded the streets, we make huge pyres each evening; sometimes, however, the boys take the initiative and often the situation slips out of their control. Today, we watched helplessly as an apartment blazed; fortunately, the four families of the Reer Haji Mungaana who lived there managed to escape. Now these fires are so frequent that we have set up a patrol in the quarter, which aims to discourage the children from playing with fire.

After last night's shooting, we have established a group of armed vigilantes, who, with the jabhadda's approval, have the task of enforcing the curfew from 9 p.m. until dawn.

It is 9 p.m., and the concert of shooting has already begun. The vigilantes have taken their duty seriously, and let off their guns at anything which moves; unfortunately, somebody was killed, a poor, completely innocuous, mentally disabled person, known throughout the quarter. The boys had ordered him to halt, then as a joke they began to fire some shots into the air; the joke turned into a tragedy; a bullet hit the middle of his forehead, killing him.

For the last two months we have not managed to sleep at night; the children cry; we are all increasing in nervous tension and physical and mental exhaustion. We had hoped that with victory there would be a ceasefire, but the proliferation of firearms has more than doubled the delinquency which sows the seeds of terror in the city. During the day, if you have money, or carry even a small bag, you can be sure you will be stopped by armed men who pass themselves off as the jabhadda and, with the excuse of searching you, rob you; if you protest, you are accused of looting and are shot on the spot.

The government is struggling to re-establish order, the appeals on the radio continue, to persuade the ex-police to present themselves for work, but all that is left of the police stations are the walls. The same goes for all the organisational structure of the state, which is powerless, lacks authority, and is without consensus.

In my quarter, people say that what we have suffered in this last period is so enormous that it has made us forget the 21 years of dictatorship.

#### **4.2.1991, the support of the USC**

Today I met with the jabhadda of my clan. Early in the morning I went to Hamar Bile to try to regain possession of my house, occupied by a gang of armed youths of the Murusade clan (Hawiye) who have transformed it into a brothel. The neighbours are terrified because these boys live by robbery and there is often settling of accounts by shootings amongst them, even in the middle of the night. The jabhadda advised me to apply to the elders of the two clans in order to reach a compromise. I went to my uncle Ahmed Nero's house and I learned from him that all the youths of our clan are being enlisted to form a jabhadda; their present base is the great villa of Bashiir Lugeey.

When I reached the saldhigga (the guerrilla base), a kind of barracks, I found a great commotion. What most amazed me was that I only had to say my name and my father's surname, when I was instantly recognised. They knew all there was to be known about me and my life, and of my brothers and sisters; I only personally knew a couple of people. The agenda was about the acquisition of arms from other clans or from the black market. There was no need to go in search of the merchants, they came in person with samples, allowing people to try out the guns on the spot.

My clan is known throughout the country for its devoutness, in fact, sheekhaal is the plural of sheekh (elder), the title which is given to men of prayer. The fact that the elders have decided to enter the war, in my opinion, is a political strategy. From the time when the provisional government began to carve up power on the basis of the number of guns in each clan, in order to not be left out, our elders have supported USC and now all the families have paid contributions for the acquisition of arms. This political choice has greatly damaged the image of the clan, now we are identified with the USC.

At the saldhigga I also met Colonel Shabeele, who is said to be the liberator of Mogadishu; he was explaining to a group of guerrillas that if they had given him a free hand, he would have swept away Omar Jees from the whole of lower Shabeele and reopened communications from Afgooye to Kisimayo.

In the afternoon, I acted as a surgeon; I managed to extract a fragment the size of a £1 coin from the shoulder of an old man; he had had the fragment inside him since the bombardment of the Marwaas mosque. Finally, I found a phial of chlorophenycol for Imaan; her diarrhoea has stopped.

## **5.2.1991, Forlani library**

This morning there was a meeting of all the teachers at the National University of Somalia in the assembly hall of the old premises, in the presence of the new minister. The meeting was very useful; first we counted ourselves, many were absent through lack of transport, others because they had left. Four were established as having died. The minister replaced the missing deans; we were divided into groups to take a census of what had been saved from the devastating frenzy of the war and looting. From what we could personally ascertain, the University has suffered the same fate as the rest of the country; only the walls are standing. Some students and teachers tried to save at least documents and books. Unfortunately, blank degree certificates and stamps have been removed.

The Forlani Library is safe for the moment, the thieves were interested in the bookcases, but it is located in the centre of town and is exposed to looting. I am particularly fond of this little library, rich with rare volumes of Somali history; if I were able, I would take them to safety in my own house; I am sorry to see part of our history being destroyed.

In the afternoon I went out into the city; houses are torn down everywhere, whole apartment blocks collapsed, the shutters on the shops smashed in, the piazzas and courtyards turned into cemeteries. In Shingaani there was the blackened shell of a Mercedes, with the skeletons of the occupants still inside after about three weeks; it is rumoured that the car probably belonged to one of af-weyne's sons. Viale Somalia from the Shabeelle Hotel to the Fiat bar, has a dismal appearance; all the facades of the buildings are riddled with holes; not even the trees and lampposts are spared. In order to protect the villa belonging to Khadija, Siad Barre's wife, the faqash have kept the surrounding streets under heavy machine gun and artillery fire, riddling all the houses with holes. The church of the Sacred Heart has also gone up in smoke. When the dictator's faithful soldiers retreated, they had to go down Viale Somalia, and they fell into an ambush; the residents of the quarter told us that there was a brief but incredibly violent battle. The mortar fire could even be heard in Hamarweyne; many missiles fell on Bondheere and a grenade hit the house next to the one owned by Udi's sister. The bodies of the enemy remained unburied for about a week, then the residents, fearing an epidemic, buried them in a common grave. The fact that both sides leave the bodies of the fallen unburied seems to me an act of unwarranted wickedness, and extremely dangerous for the entire population in that it could result in epidemics, quite apart from the wild dogs which only feed on the bodies. In our quarter, we have improvised a cemetery behind the market; throughout even the most terrible days of the war, we buried all the bodies. Sometimes the work would be interrupted by armed men who wanted to know the clan of the dead person, we would say that he was a gibil cad (white skinned), a reer hamar, neutral in this tribal war.

The winds of war have not yet blown over; now we are afraid of the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM), the jabhadda of the Ogadeen clan, led by Colonel Omar Jeess who, with a few well-trained soldiers, has liberated the Bay region and is now occupying Afgooye, blocking the road south from Mogadishu. I learned from friends who came from Marka, that the Jeess soldiers are looting all the farms in the region of the two rivers, Juba and Shabeelle.

### **6.2.1991, *The Ministers from the clans***

Today I met the Minister for Health, Nur Elmi; I went to his office near Benaadir hospital, now unfit for use as it is without water or electricity. Because of its strategic position it became a base for the Government troops during the war, and from here the artillery kept all the southern suburbs and the quarters of Hodan, Howlwadaag and Medina under control. The square in front of the hospital is still cluttered with the cartridge cases of the artillery. Nur Elmi is a doctor, but the means at his disposal are not sufficient for the responsibility he has assumed. The Medina hospital, the best equipped, has reopened, but it is almost completely lacking in medicines and provisions; fuel is very scarce and there is no way of paying the medical and auxiliary personnel. There is a continual increase in people injured by firearms.

The Ministries have been shared amongst all the clans, that of Health is the Sheekhaal. The leaders of the clan have supplied their Minister with office equipment, a car and an armed escort. This is also true of all the Ministries. This carving up of spoils has reached incredible levels, for example the airport is controlled by the Hawaadle jabhadda who claim a rake-off for their work; the Petroleum Authority is in the hands of the Abgaal; the radio is in the hands of the Habargidir; the port is controlled by the Murusade. This scandalous situation is going to bring huge problems in the future.

Meanwhile, Mohamed Siad Barre is alive and kicking; it would seem that he is reorganising his forces in his native region, Gedo. His brother Jaamac Barre is declaring to the international press that Siad Barre is still the legitimate president.

### **7.2.1991, *burning temples***

The whole of lower Shabeelle and the Bay region are in flames; word has reached us that the Rahanweyn and the Dighil have also formed a jabhadda; the Somali Democratic Movement (SDM). There is little news, and what there is considerably out of date. There is fighting in the cities of Dinsoor, Bardheere and Baydhabo.

Meanwhile, in the city thousands of guerrillas are leaving for the front; it is said that two thousand Majerteen soldiers, nicknamed dhafoorqiiq, (literally "smoking temples"), who went to the aid of Omar Jeas, have tried to enter Mogadishu from the south but have been pushed back by the USC and have retreated towards Kisimayo.

### **8.2.1991, the Dhulbahante refugees**

A quiet, domestic day. With the doctor, we changed Mamma's dressings, she is healing nicely; it is Imaan who keeps us on tenterhooks. From the time the war started she has never been well, now the doctor has prescribed ampicilline ampoules; she has lost a lot of weight and refuses to walk or eat.

The war continues in lower Shabeele and in the Bay; there is a rumour that many armed Daarood are looting and killing the Hawiye. There is fighting in Shalambod and Qorioley. Since the middle of the seventies, there have been thousands of Dhulbahante refugees living in these areas, which have been hit by drought, and which have been involved in the programme for the settlement of nomads.

The clash between the USC and the SSDF was ferocious and has been mirrored in the city. Now all the Daarood are fleeing Mogadishu; they are afraid for their personal safety.

### **9.2.1991, Masters for twenty years**

Imaan is better, she has regained her appetite and is more lively. The city is slowly returning to normality. The traders are finding it difficult to get started again, a few eager ones are improvising stalls with foodstuffs. Law and order are strongly maintained, armed personnel circulate; in some cases armed men are loaded forcibly onto lorries and sent to the front.

The jabhadda are sending numerous forces to Baydhabo and Kisimayo, in an attempt to capture Siad Barre from between two fires; his days are numbered now.

Omar Jeas has taken the lead of the SPM, and is now fighting against the USC and the SDM. Many of the Daarood have gathered in the area near Jelib and Mogambo, to create a centre of resistance, but the series of victories by the USC has demoralised its adversaries, who are slowly returning to their original homes. In the city, they keep repeating that the Daarood have been the masters of the whole country for more than

twenty years, in possession of the best land, and now they are fleeing northwards where they are hoping to find a little peace. The blood bath continues.

### **10.2.1991, *the Marka rebellion***

Every time that words are useless, violence takes their place; the most primitive instincts prevail. The Somalis are great talkers; every time there is a problem, a shir (an assembly) is called and discussions take place until agreement is reached or the problem is resolved. This time there were all the makings for an agreement, but Siad Barre cheated. He made people believe that he wanted democracy, and meantime he imprisoned or physically eliminated all those who thought differently from him. Besides this, he systematically sabotaged every meeting until the day before his fall. Unfortunately, as everyone expected, he was thrown out by force rather than reason. Everybody is paying the price; there are neither winners nor losers, now everything has to be rebuilt from the beginning.

Analysing the events of this month, I find it difficult to understand why people looted and destroyed everything that had been built in a century; there is no justification for it. All communications have broken down, and even the national radio was silent for two days and is now very disrupted. The telephones do not work, and most of the lines are on the ground, to say nothing of the electricity cables which have snapped, getting in the way of the traffic. Much damage has been caused by the war, but even more by the looting. Speaking of looting, as soon as the war in lower Shabeele was over, the looters of the jabhadda entered Marka last Friday, and sacked the city, raping the women. The population rebelled and, fortunately, the guerrillas retreated. At Marka there were only seven policemen and they were more than enough for keeping public order, given the peace-loving nature of the people; now the Biimaal have promised to provide a peace-keeping force of twenty armed men. Hamarweyne has finally got its nighttime peace-keeping force, composed of mixed forces from the jabhadda and youths from the quarter. The people have heaved a sigh of relief, because the thieves had achieved a rule of terror; it was impossible to sleep at night. The thieves knocked on all the doors and the empty houses were ransacked without any hesitation.

### **11.2.1991, *guilty of being a Daarood***

Today, at last, the elders of my clan accompanied me to the premises of the Murusade jabhadda, the clan to which the people occupying my house at Hamar Bile belonged. Unfortunately, the person concerned was out of Mogadishu with the gang of looters, we have to wait for his return. In the morning, I went to the Wardhigley quarter. This area has

the bad luck of being below Villa Somalia, and for the entire period of the war was under fire. Not a single house has escaped damage. Fortunately, the number of dead and injured is not very high; the inhabitants of the quarter left immediately. A half-destroyed armoured car ominously controls the street. Almost all the quarters, in varying degrees, have been heavily hit. Twenty days of mortar fire was a nightmare difficult to forget. Hatred for the enemy is so ferocious that unfortunately nobody is spared, not even peaceful people who have never done any harm. Today, only being Marrehaan or a Darood in general, means you are persecuted and often physically eliminated. God have mercy on this country and its people.

### ***12.2.1991, underground radio. News from the interior***

1. General Morgan, chief head of Siad Barre's army, has been captured with nine men of his escort.
2. Siad Barre died on Wednesday, a sheekh has sworn that he participated in his funeral ceremony.
3. Kisimayo has surrendered to the USC, many Darood who wanted to continue the struggle have been persuaded by their friends to leave the city.
4. Sixty Gaalgale captured in battle yesterday have been shot and buried in a school in the Argentine quarter.

Some of this news is unfortunately true, such as what was then confirmed by the papers, the shooting of the Gaalgale; other news, however, is only rumour.

When the USC was fighting to liberate Mogadishu, other jabhaddas were united in the struggle, amongst whom were the SNM, the SSDF and the SPM; the first is Isaaq, the second Majerteen and the third Ogadeen. Now these groups are included in the provisional Government. I do not know precisely what has happened, but the divergences have already started; the first defection is the SSDF which has rejoined Siad Barre.

Now, on one side are the Hawiye and on the other the Daarood. Omar Jeas, having occupied Baydhabo, controls the road which after seven kilometres leads to Afgooye. Logical reasoning would suggest that he should enter Mogadishu to start negotiations for a government of national unity; it would seem that problems of power have arisen between the SPM and the USC, both want the presidency. To complicate the situation, there is also the suspicion that Omar Jeas has not only allowed Siad Barre to escape, but is also covering the retreat of his army. However, the roads controlled by the SPM are not secure, all the cars which go to Afgooye and Marka are confiscated or looted; many people have been murdered.

The clash between the SPM and the USC broke out when the capital was left without water; the soldiers of Omar Jeess sabotaged the aquaduct, they wanted to take Mogadishu through thirst. The battle was short but extremely violent, the enemy was chased as far as Kisimayo. Now the war is between all the Daarood.

Bad news has reached us from Marka, the city is in the hands of gangs of jabhadda youths; to start with they chased out all the Daarood. They say that some of them tried to save themselves in a little boat, they were reached by fast fishing boats loaded with soldiers; many passengers died, others tried to save themselves by diving into the water and ended up being a meal for the sharks. As usual all the shops were looted; unfortunately the usual violation of women was repeated, until the population, tired of suffering oppression, demonstrated in the piazza and persuaded the guerrillas to leave. The jabhadda youths are nicknamed the cavallette, (locusts), because wherever they go, they destroy everything. They are useful to the leaders of the guerrillas because they are brave and fierce in battle, but also intolerant of order and discipline. In addition, they make wide use of alcoholic drinks and drugs.

In the city of Baraawe, where there has not been a battle, the same routine of sacking and violence is repeated, here too, the population rebelled and chased them out by force. Now the dream of the brigade of looters is to get their hands on Siad Barre's booty, booty which has been accumulated over the years of dictatorship.

Finally, for the last couple of days water has been running from the taps; in the evening in some quarters electricity has returned. In our area they have not yet inspected the electricity lines, as they have in most of the city, where the main cables cut by the mortar fire are on the ground, and threaten the safety of the people.

The postal service is partially functioning, letters are being sent through the aid planes, since Somali Air Lines has not yet resumed service.

The telephones are still dead, perhaps within the month the number 2, which links the old city, will be functioning, providing that all the faults are found. In the old city the major part of the Government offices are, or rather I should say were found, including the presidency, as well as many embassies and international agencies, and work needs to be put in hand urgently to re-establish them. The radio continual asks people not to fight needlessly. It seems that to carry arms and fight has become a sign of virility and so the calls fall on deaf ears. In the Argentina quarter, where the greatest market for arms is located, and where the spark of popular revolution was set off, the people are exasperated by the kids who play with arms day and night, causing accidents and also fatalities. In our quarter, the

patrols do nothing other than shoot at every shadow and threaten people who are going about the quarter; thank God there have so far not been any accidents, but our nerves are being stretched to breaking point. We have had enough of the fighting and these armed men and boys sicken us. At the moment, about fifty thousand armed men are outside Mogadishu, but when they return the trouble will start. The Government launches appeals for the police to return to work, but they forget one small detail - whoever works deserves to be paid, and there is no money. The police stations are empty - even these have been looted - with not even a chair left. The police have no uniforms, and without officers they are powerless in the face of the proliferation of arms.

All the delinquents, even the worst ones, are out on bail; jails have been "liberated". In addition, if someone is arrested, the same evening his relatives and friends arrange to release him by force.

Imaan, after being treated with five injections of penicillin, is definitely better, she eats with enjoyment. She is improving. A curious fact - from morning to evening she wants to eat, she has reached the point when if someone lights the fire, she runs to sit on their lap and she asks for food ("am"). Now she says "am" to ask for food, "bia" to ask for water (biyo in Somali), "kac" (stand up), "aiq" (leave it) "ne" (no), "ijii" (isii in Somali). When she has to have an injection, she cries like crazy, and sulks.

In the afternoon, some twenty armed youths burst into the quarter beseiging the house of Jilalow, a very rich merchant. Jilal is the season from January to April, it is hot and dry. The grandfather, founder of the dynasty, was given this nickname, that is "shortage" or "famine", because he went around poorly dressed and without shoes, in spite of being a millionaire. The bandits had been well informed. The merchant, in fact, had taken his goods from his shop to his home in time. However, anticipating such an eventuality, all of us had a supply of whistles to warn our neighbours and raise the alarm. At about four in the afternoon, we heard the whistles at the same time as some Falk rifle shots; there was a burst of solidarity and an inferno of shooting. The thieves were caught by surprise by the rapid reaction of the neighbours and took flight. Fortunately, there were neither dead nor injured; for the thugs this was a salutary lesson. For too long we have put up with the arrogance of the armed gangs, now it is time to defend ourselves.

### **13.2.1991, a bullet, a cigarette**

Last night, after a long discussion with Udi, I have decided to attempt to leave the country. Many have chosen the longer but safer way of the sea, and thousands have reached the refugee camps of Mombasa in Kenya or Djibouti. We have decided to try the way to

Europe by air. The only thing is, there are no Somali planes; every so often planes arrive from Arabic countries. However, this morning we took the first step; we went to the villa of the president, Ali Mahdi, and we met his wife. Mrs. Nurta Mahdi received us well, and promised help. Tomorrow, a plane will probably arrive with the Italian embassy Consul. God willing, we will have a passage to Rome. For the moment we are wishing on our lucky star! In the morning, Udi visited our house and spoke to the occupants. Now, even if the house were free, we are not materially able to go and live there; there is not a stick of furniture, the thieves have carried everything away. We are not the only ones in this position, the popular rebellion had sufficient strength to devastate the entire country. It was the revolution of the poor; they chose to not look anyone in the face, they tried to snatch as much as possible and occupy the most beautiful houses. These repressed desires were expressed in the most unprecedented violence. At a certain point it became not just a political struggle to oust out a corrupt and cruel president, but a war against a whole system which had favoured a minority and kept the majority of the Somalis in destitution. Now there is an attempt to stop this havoc, but with little success.

A momentous event this evening - we have electricity after more than a month without it. This occasion was greeted with shouts of joy, and shots. After running water, we finally have light as well. If this government continues this way it will easily obtain general consensus.

This afternoon, a stray bullet entered the corrugated roof of the house and injured my nephew Faduma Suufi's hand. This senseless shooting, which goes on all hours of the day and night throughout the city is the national tragedy; hundreds of people turn up at the hospitals every day for treatment of firearm injuries.

Going around the city, shots can be heard no stop, and people are afraid because the arms are in the hands of children as young as ten years old. The bullets cost a trifle, and they are sold on the stalls together with cigarettes and sweets. A medium sized bullet costs the same as a cigarette.

### ***Underground Radio***

The provisional president expressed his powerful displeasure at the unauthorised shooting of 60 Gaalgales in a school in the Argentina district by people of his clan, and has threatened to hand in his resignation. The sixty were captured in the fighting with the Hawadles; knowing they were wanted for the ferocious reprisals against the Abgaals, they handed them over to the latter, who then executed them summarily, without authorisation, shooting and burying them in the courtyard of the school.

#### **14.2.1991, to *Casualty in a wheelbarrow***

The aircraft with Italian aid, carrying the Embassy Consul, Dr. Pacifica, has not arrived. The underground radio says that general Aidid, in an interview, has declared that the civil war is in full swing and that it is not safe to visit the country; this has persuaded the Italians to postpone their visit.

Well informed sources are saying that the general to whom the responsibility of the presidency had previously been refused, is trying to sabotage normalisation. It is also suspected that he wants to seize power by force. Fortunately nobody is interested in being governed by the army, the experience of Siad Barre is more than enough. Besides, a true and proper army does not exist, most of the guerrillas are civilians and so far all they are thinking of is getting rid of the old regime. There is no chance of a coup d'état, because the entire population is armed.

Udi and I visited Mrs. Nurta; we passed close by Villa Somalia which dominates the entire Wardhigley quarter. The signs of heavy artillery fire are easily visible; only a few people have returned to their own houses.

Reconstruction is facing difficulties; the country's economy is paralysed and we are completely dependent on international aid.

Meanwhile, the deaths continue. A young boy, a distant relative, has mortally injured one of his cousins with a rifle; he had taken off the cartridge but had not checked the round in the barrel. The bullet cleanly severed his femoral artery. The boy was loaded onto a wheelbarrow and taken to the casualty department; when they reached the hospital, the wheelbarrow was full of blood, and in a few hours he was dead.

Unfortunately, these episodes are not just examples, this evening as usual, the majority of the members of the patrols of the quarter are groups of fifteen-year-olds armed with sub-machine guns, pistols and hand grenades.

Imaan is fine, the treatment has halted the diarrhoea and vomiting, and brought back her appetite, but now she is suffering from constipation and she cries whenever she has to empty her bowels. Now she has learned a new word: dolsce, from when a neighbour brought us a gift of a little home-made cake.

Yesterday we passed the house of Khadija, wife of Siad Barre, in the bus. The soldiers have defended it for twenty days; they also positioned an enormous tank there which blocked the street and terrorised the whole neighbouring area. Also, the area where the "Ferri Somali" arms factory was located is a disaster. The factory belonged to Hassan Mohamed Siad Barre and is in the Shibis quarter, in the locality of Sheekh Muhiddiin.

It was defended and attacked with violence, it reduced all the neighbouring houses to rubble, including the house belonging to Udi's uncles, who had done well to go to Balcad. Now it is in the hands of the jabhadda, but it has been taken, lost, and retaken many times.

### **15.2.1991, *Mamma is alive***

Good news, at last! My mother is alive and has managed to save her three cows. The house at Beled Weyne has been destroyed; only the smallest shed is left standing. When the battle began to oust the government forces, mainly Ogadeen, out of the city, my mother, together with my brother Ahmed and his large family, left the city to take refuge in the bush. When they returned, half the city had been burnt to cinders and hundreds were dead.

Beled Weyne is a city on the border with Ethiopia; after the Ogadeen war it became the centre for refugee camps. My mother's district was composed of barns and sheds, leaning against each other, and so the fire raged freely.

The war has now moved to the central regions of Bakood and Gedo; there are fierce battles and many dead on both sides. In this fratricidal war, it seems to me that on one side are the Daarood groups, SPM, SSDF, SNF - who have a professional army which is well armed and disciplined; on the other the Hawiye guerrillas, mostly volunteers, poorly equipped and undisciplined, but determined to win.

The number of volunteers grows daily, many leave for the front unarmed, they capture arms from the enemy. Various kinds of arms can be seen in circulation; some are the military remnants from the second world war, but there are some also from the great war.

The most sought after are the Kalishnikov and American M16 rifles. In general, on the market there are carbines, Beretta sub-machine guns, far-west type S and W pistols and a vast range of guns from every country. Bazookas and hand grenades are much sought after too.

This morning we received a visit from a group of volunteers from the USC; they are part of the first nucleus of guerrillas to come into our quarter. We have converted a room for them to be used as a relief post and first aid centre. With my brother-in-law Muridi, I have treated the first casualties.

Today my brother Ali also came; he was evacuated out of Basra. We have decided to send my nephews and nieces back to Beled Weyne to help their Grandmother set up the house again.

### ***16.2.1991, loose dogs from every clan***

What a strange war we are fighting in Somalia! I try to talk about it with as many people as I can; nobody can understand anything. Sometimes, one gets the impression that everybody is fighting against everyone else. For example, the jabhadda, according to the rules of a "liberation war", should be united, and should have precise ideals, but instead, there are at least five factions with various aims. The largest and best organised is the USC; after ousting Siad Barre from Mogadishu they are now chasing him across the entire south western part of the country. But the USC does not have a prestigious leader, each clan forms one faction of USC, and obeys its own clan leader. There is no logistical centre to provide arms, food and petrol. Each clan has occupied a strategic position in the city and runs it for themselves; the Hawaardle control the airport, the Habargidir control the radio, the Abgaal control the oil tanks, and the Murusade the port. In addition, each clan has been given a job in the provisional government.

The SNM controls central Somalia, for the time being it is refusing to dialogue with the USC because it does not agree about the kind of government installed in Mogadishu.

In the south is the Somali Democratic Movement (SDM), a federation of Dighil and Rahanwen people from lower Shabelle and the Bay region. They are allied to the USC; but they are farmers without a tradition of fighting and for this reason they have suffered violence from both sides.

The Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) is composed of soldiers from the Ogadeen clans. The Ogadeens are along the border with Ethiopia and Kenya; the most numerous group lives in Ethiopia in the region which takes their name. After the disastrous war of 1977-78, thousands fled as refugees into Somalia. Siad Barre, whose mother is Ogadeen, always helped them and he used them to reinforce his dictatorship. In fact, he assigned to them the lands of the Isaaq and recruited them into the army. Now this group has faltered for a long time between loyalty to Siad Barre and alliance with the USC. Colonel Omar Jees

reached as far as the gates of the capital; his intentions, however, were not very clear. When the raping and looting began, and Mogadishu was without water, sudden and violent war broke out between the USC and the SPM.

The SSDF is composed of the Majerteen clan, located in the north west of the country; it was the first armed opposition group to emerge soon after the Ogadeen war. This group was also initially allied to the USC. When Siad fell, they chased him as far as Kisimayo where a large Majerteen colony has been living since the end of the nineteenth century.

In addition, there are other little groups which are vague and without any military strength - such as the Somali Africans Muki Organisation (SAMO), composed of farmers from Gosha, of Bantu origin - or the Gibil cad of Benaadir, of Arab origin who did not want to take part in the killing.

But the most worrying and frightening are the loose dogs from all the clans; by now they have become known as the bililiqo brigade, the looters. They are well armed, loaded with money, and have transport. After every battle, the city or region that has been liberated, is left in their hands. They lay the cities and the countryside to waste, they murder, loot, rape and torture; nothing stops them. They use alcohol, soft, hard and psychotropic drugs, all without moderation; they become inebriated, and then murder and burn. Their signature is faeces. After burgling a house, office or shop, they have an irrepressible urge to do their business there. This happened in my house too. I asked many people for their opinion on this phenomenon, but nobody managed to give a plausible explanation. After they pass through, there is faeces everywhere. They carry all their booty to the great open suuqs in the Argentina and Huruwaa quarters. It is no longer possible to live in peace in these two quarters, there are hundreds of drunken and drug crazed hooligans who molest people, they will fight over the slightest thing and challenge each other to duels like in the movies. There are also those who play Russian Roulette and it is not uncommon for them to blow each other's brains out. At the first aid stations they are sick of treating people who have been accidentally injured by firearms; they have more work now than during the war. The arms market is expanding. There are more arms on offer than buyers; ammunition is sold on market stalls with cigarettes and sweets. Now, a cigarette costs more than a bullet. The hooligans from the looting brigades are not short of money, and if they do run out, they have no hesitation in breaking into houses to steal; they are so feared that if you ask the jabhadda for help, they tell you to sort it out yourselves. Those pacifist citizens who thought that once af-weyne was evicted, there would be peace and security, have been forced to arm themselves to defend their own homes. On the radio yesterday they promised that each quarter would be sent fifty policemen to maintain order, but we have not seen a single one so far.

Sometimes, if the war cools down, the looting brigades devise a new front. Generally speaking they are very well armed; they obey nobody and, when there is nothing left to loot, they go home. Additionally, they have doctors and medicine and they bury their dead. We are afraid of the war ending; the looters who are helpful now, will tomorrow be very troublesome.

### **17.2.1991, *underground radio***

News from the south front. The war is in full swing, the fighting so far is between the Hawiye and the Daarood; but the acronyms mean little. For the Hawiye it has become extremely important to take Kisimayo, but the objective is more difficult than they had thought. Several hundred militants from the looting brigades fell into a Daarood ambush; there was a massacre. A boy from our quarter, who saved himself by hiding in the thick bush, reported that the Daarood allowed a large number of cars filled with armed men to enter the city, and at the right moment they sprang the trap. Few were saved. The jabhadda have born this experience in mind and are now entrenched on the bank of the Juba, on the outskirts of Kansuuma; now only one bridge separates the two armies. Reinforcements, especially heavy artillery, have been sent from Mogadishu. Yesterday, Migs made a reappearance in the skies above the capital; they have probably been used in combat. We are all awaiting the outcome of this great battle, on which the future of the country depends.

From the northern front: Not very reassuring news has come from Galkacayo. The city has always been divided into two, on one side live the Sacad sub-clan of the Habargidir (Hawiye), and on the other the Majerteen (Darood).

There has always been a love-hate relationship between these two factions. Siad Barre, who is a Darood, favoured his own people. There is now open warfare between the two clans. The strangest thing is that in order to strengthen peace, these two clans had created kinship relationships intensifying marriage ties; but this was not enough, it would appear, to avoid a bloodbath. Bad news has also reached us from Jalalaqsi, in the region of Hiraan; the Ogadeen government troops who fled after the surrender of Beledweyn have joined their fellow countrymen who settled as refugees in this region after the Ogadeen war. Now they are trying to resist, and possibly return to Ethiopia.

From an initial analysis of the present situation in Somalia, one can understand the tragedy which Siad Barre cast the country into. Af-weyne dominated too long with a rule of terror, and fear has been exchanged for consensus. In the city there is a rumour that he

also had chemical weapons, given to him by his friend the Libyan president Ghaddafi. It had also been feared that there would be airforce intervention in the battle of Mogadishu; in actual fact, a couple of Migs surveyed the city for a few days. However, heavy artillery played the main role in this war. The indiscriminate shelling sowed the seeds of death and destruction for more than twenty days in all quarters and forced half of the population to leave the city. The material damage is staggering; the number of dead incalculable.

Those wounded by fragments and firearms are heading towards certain death, only a few have received help from the only health centre functioning during the entire conflict, the SOS Children's, where the group Médecins sans Frontières operated.

### ***18.2.1991, Everyone against everyone else***

A strong wind has been blowing all day. It raises dust and sand which penetrates everywhere. It has also brought a lot of illness. The Reer Hamar call it the staqfrou (to beg for pardon). It resembles this war which has created such confusion. At this point, it is impossible to know how it will end. As with all civil wars, this one has reawakened hatreds and vendettas, and all have taken advantage of the situation to resolve unsettled scores. Every clan has its own private war; the Abgaal are eliminating all the Gaalgale they take; the Sacad are against the Majerteen; the Murusade against the Dhulbahante; the Hawaadle against the Ogadeen; the Suleimaan sub-clan of the Habargidir against the Marrehaan and so on. The crossing vendettas have reached an incredible level and involve the entire Somalian population; no prisoners are taken. A friend from Beledweyn told me that the Ogadeen, located at the refugee camps at Jalalaqsidug, for some days were entrenched, defending themselves, then in view of the circumstances, gave themselves up. They were loaded onto a lorry and taken to Mogadishu but on the way about fifty of them were murdered.

The aircraft which should be bringing the Italian Embassy Consul is still stuck at Nairobi. The usual well-informed people report that this is because of the extreme caution of the Italian government, which is still in contact with the officials of the ex-government of Siad Barre, exiled in Kenya and Italy. Besides, the provisional government of president Ali Mahdi has not obtained official recognition from any state; for this reason, there are two governments in Somalia and there is still the civil war which has neither winners nor losers.

The provisional government should have the 28th February as a deadline, when a great assembly will gather to decide on the future of the country.

### ***19.2.1991, London defends the Isaaq***

The BBC from London has announced that Kenya has complained of two shells from Somali territory hitting one of its cities on the border. Besides this, it would seem that the flight, the long and extended flight of the troops faithful to Siad Barre, has reached the end of the line; they have no alternative but to surrender to USC or the Kenyans. There is no news yet of Siad Barre, but the curtain is falling for him, too; this absurd tragedy is about to come to an end, and we are all waiting with bated breath.

Maslah Mohamed Siad was interviewed in Nairobi and could not explain the source of the seventy million dollars which he had with him. For years, we Somalis have been hungry and this spoilt boy goes around with a staggering amount of money in his pocket, enough to take care of the whole nation. There are more surprises, in twenty years of power Siad Barre and his family have accumulated a fortune abroad.

The SNM, through its spokesperson from London, the ex-minister Suleiman "Gaal", has made known to the Mogadishu government the dissatisfaction of the north, that is of the Isaaq, for the way in which the negotiations were conducted for the formation of the new government. The attention of all the Somali clans focuses around the apportionment of power.

It is likely that tomorrow the awaited Italian delegation will arrive, probably in a Russian Aeroflot plane.

God willing, we will be able to get onto this plane. We hope!

### ***20.2.1991, the lady solves everything***

Today I went again to the villa of the President to meet Nurta. I don't know if Ali Mahdi and Nurta have taken a crash course on being a president, they know their parts very well. The President is direct, courteous; the first lady is always busy receiving guests, always ready to listen to everyone. When you leave the villa, you have the feeling that all your problems have been solved.

### ***21.2.1991, no news of my sister***

After a monotonous day in our quarter we had an evening of gunfire. Just after dusk a group of thieves managed to get into a house behind ours and robbed the family of all their

goods. The thieves, to cover their exit, fired shots like crazy; it seemed like the end of the world.

After half an hour a small group of drunks tried to get into the house next door to ours; fortunately they were disarmed and taken to the premises of the jabhadda. My brother Ali came today, and we talked about the advisability of sending our nephews and nieces back home; in the meantime they will go to Huruwaa to some relatives so that they are nearer to the area where the coach leaves for Beledweyn.

There is no news from my sister Fahmo; but I am told that my mother is well and is trying to rebuild the house. I am very tired, I cannot complete anything and I want to leave for Nairobi or Djibouti as soon as possible. Insha Allah!

### **22.2.1991, *Muridi protests***

A peaceful day, we are in pieces physically, but still all alive. In some quarters like Huruwaa (a place where you do not stop), people are dying at the hands of drunks and thieves.

One thing which has struck me forcefully is political satire. A great exhibition has been on for some days on the walls of the city; they mock the old regime, especially Siad Barre.

The drawings are rather naive; the message and captions express a repressed anger which has been there for a long time. Siad Barre and his family are depicted as blood-sucking vampires; they are surrounded by hydrophobic dogs with red berets (the symbol of his notorious guards). The artists display their drawings everywhere. One of the favourite places is a wall in front of the Tofiq hotel, headquarters of the USC. For the first time, people are not afraid of expressing their own ideas. Let's hope that this courage will continue in the future, too.

There is a lot of excitement in the quarter; representatives from the clan of the Reer Hamar have to be elected to the congress which takes place on the 28th February to decide on the future of the country. About three hundred people have participated in the popular assembly; however, what has happened is that a limited committee has already decided on behalf of everyone. Many people, who for twenty years have been accustomed to this way of doing things are content with grumbling; my brother in law Muridi, however, has reacted animatedly, questioning the actions of those who had illegally given themselves the right of deciding on behalf of the assembly. All hell broke loose. People are not yet used to huge change which has happened in the country; the

usual lies from the teachings of Siad Barre have been kept in mind, now we are learning from them. Democracy is difficult to put into practice. At the assembly there were some representatives of USC who were excluded; the Reer Hamar in record time have formed a party called the National Somali Union (UNS). If this move goes ahead, it will be a backwards step, back to the nineteen-sixties when there were about 80 different parties in Somalia.

### **23.1.1991, *the glue-kids***

In our quarter, near the Marwaas mosque, about ten youngsters under the age of 15 have taken refuge. They have the same vice in common - getting high by sniffing glue all day. They are undernourished, they have a slovenly appearance and idiotic expressions. During the day they hang around the quarter with their inseparable tin cans; they sniff continuously. They are known as the glue-kids; they are not dangerous, they are utterly pitiable because their habit stupefies them and ruins them forever. Their brains are obfuscated by the vapours of the synthetic glue which is generally used by furniture makers or shoe repairers. This glue is deadly, it causes irreversible cerebral lesions; the user very soon becomes mentally disabled. The glue-kids are usually war orphans or the children of the numerous refugees from the drought which has hit the country in the last twenty years. The phenomenon has been known for many years; the government chose to ignore it and now it has grown completely out of control. The city is full of stray children and youths; they try to fend for themselves to survive. Many are armed, and they form themselves into gangs. These hooligans make use of alcohol and drugs. Also, old gangs of razorblade-kids, addicted to pickpocketing and bag-snatching, have sprung up. However, these kids also have their good points; in many cases they are known in battle for their courage, and for their strong tendency to recklessness. For the moment, a State has not yet been formed and there are no laws; we are at the mercy of gangs of youths who run around the city shooting and challenging each other to duels, as in the films. In every quarter they have their bases and their traffic; they sell everything, from shells to stolen goods. For us adults it becomes ever more difficult to keep children and grandchildren under control; sometimes they come home drugged or they stay out for days at a time. Even the girls are getting out of hand.

### **24.2.1991, *gazing around in bewilderment***

As usual, I popped over to the presidency, this time there is more reassuring news. It is likely that Doctor Pacifico, the Consul of the Italian Embassy, will arrive on Monday and, God willing, we will leave. In the afternoon I went over to the jabhadda of the Murusaade clan to see if I could resolve the problem of my house; nothing definite. But I had the

chance to see how justice is administered; not having repealed it, they are using customary law and shari'a, the Islamic law. In this first phase, they are not using imprisonment, not even for serious crimes such as homicide, but fines paid by the whole clan. On the way back one of the famous bron cars, which were so feared during Siad's regime, gave me a lift. These all-terrain vehicles are equipped with powerful machine guns that shoot heavy calibre bullets. The noise they make freezes the blood in one's veins. Usually, it only takes one of these vehicles to appear to disperse any kind of demonstration. Nevertheless, Siad Barre was ousted, and with less powerful weapons than those at his disposal. The city is strewn with tanks which look like great elephants in agony. The disasters which they caused are still visible, but they, too, have been silenced.

Hamarweyne becomes more crowded every day; by dawn the streets are already full of people, but there is a jarring note; it is the people, who all look like vagabonds. The old city was the beating heart of business, where the largest banks, the luxury hotels, large stores selling foods and fabrics, national and local government offices, ministries, courts, legal and notary offices were located. Every day, thousands of people poured into the streets of the old quarter which teemed with shops and stalls; the chaotic traffic had become a characteristic all our own. Now everything is finished; shops with their doors smashed open, their displays just empty boxes; the vagabonds use the offices as public toilets, the banks have been broken into, etc. In short, it is a depressing spectacle. People continue to go to the centre, they gaze around in bewilderment, as if they are in the wrong city. The only ones doing any business are those who themselves were the looters yesterday. Hundreds of shanties are rising up, the entire golden square has been invaded; it is tiring just walking around on foot.

### ***25.2.1991, the gangs are increasing***

I have read the new newspaper which has just come out in a reduced format, and only in the Somali language, called Dalka (The Nation). There are also other "independent" newspapers, but I have not yet had an opportunity to read any of them. Dalka has the appearance of the regime's daily paper, the news is all agency news (Sonna) and the comments are all against the old regime. The journalists, if they can be called that, are all slaves of the new powers; they have only changed their bosses. What the people think and want, and what the new government is proposing, are complete opposites. From reading the articles, it is clear that the government is mostly concerned about normalisation. People are urged to return home, to report for work regardless of the fact that many of them have had their homes destroyed or are occupied; their places of work no longer exist, or at best only the walls are standing. There are no means of transport and a ticket for the few buses running costs a thousand shillings a ride.

Naturally, salaries are not mentioned. All the evacuees have had their homes burgled and lost all their possessions; many have also had the unpleasant surprise of finding their homes occupied. Then there is the problem of survival, already difficult to resolve before the war, now it has become a drama. Where can one find money? Many manage by turning to robbery and looting, in some places they rent out guns, payment is in the form of part of the booty. But what prospect do honest people have of overcoming this transitional period? Everything can be found at the market; family jewellery, property and even personal effects. Loan sharks lie in wait and give discounts because they are the only people who have any cash. What is most worrying is that there is still a lack of security; too many armed people are in circulation and the gangs are increasing. The provisional government continues to promise to reorganise the police; their intention is good, but how are they going to pay for uniforms, arms and salaries?

The thieves, after finishing their looting of shops and department stores, now have houses as their objectives. If it becomes known that there is gold or money in a house, that is enough to be certain that very soon there will be a visit from the thieves.

This evening, there is music in the quarter, there has been fighting for an hour already; after the successful robberies of the past days, the thieves are trying again.

### **26.2.1991, *there is no leader***

"The situation in Somalia is deteriorating day by day". In view of the fact that this is said by Nurta, the wife of president Ali Mahdi, one gains a certain feeling; it is the eve of the great national assembly of the 28th February 1991 that has to decide the fate of the future government and peace in the country. For the moment there is no leader capable of asserting himself or a force which can be politically accepted by all; the only thing which prevails is the nomadic spirit of anarchy. Twenty years of political dictatorship weigh heavily and have created distrust in power.

Once more, bad news has reached us from Marka; a lady who is a friend of Mamma told us that a week ago about a thousand kids from the looting brigade on their way back from Kisimayo occupied the city. What was saved from the previous looting, could not be saved this time. After finishing with the shops, the thieves went through house after house, not being satisfied just with stealing, they have committed every kind of violence, including rape. For the families of the Daarood clan there was no escape; only a few, with the help of friends, managed to save themselves. This news really made me very sad because at Marka I have many Majerteen friends, family friends from a long time ago, they helped me with my historical research on the city.

There is no flying today, once again; unfortunately, I missed the chance of getting on the Egyptian delegation's plane for Cairo.

### ***27.2.1991, the assembly of all the peoples of Somalia***

The delegation sent by the Italian Overseas Ministry has finally arrived in Mogadishu. I have not had the opportunity of meeting them to resolve the problem of my departure. There is an insistent voice going round that yesterday evening Kisimayo has been liberated. The city was the last bastion of the forces faithful to Siad Barre and also the Daarood who fled from Mogadishu. There are others who maintain that the old man has been captured. In the meantime, some people are claiming that Galkacayo has also fallen into the hands of the Sacad (Hawiye).

Galkacayo is a border city; to the north is the territory of the Majerteen, to the south extends the territory of the Sacad. These two clans have lived peacefully together for a long time, and to strengthen peace they have intermarried. Unfortunately, af-weyne's regime, favouring the Darood, ruined the balance. The feud which has by now lasted for years, seems to have ended in favour of the Sacad; well informed sources speak of three hundred Majerteen prisoners in the hands of the enemy.

These days, the great assembly of all the peoples of Somalia is being held. There are also delegations from Saudi Arabia and Egypt who are present as observers.

We are without electricity; the city is calm and gunfights are rare. The new government is beginning to organise the Public Security Service and is trying to disarm the kids.

### ***28.2.1991, arms dealers***

The awaited assembly for reconciliation and agreement of all the Somali peoples has come unstuck; it has all been postponed until the 14th March.

There is no agreement within the USC. Two scenarios have been outlined, one led by the provisional president Ali Mahdi and the other led by General Aidid. In an interview for the BBC, Aidid has announced that he has been elected President of the USC, during the Addis Ababa meeting of all the forces against Siad Barre; the appointment had never been revoked and in addition he is critical of the nomination of Ali Mahdi as president because the nomination should have been carried out under electoral regulations. In short, we are in complete chaos. To complicate the situation there is also the war which is marking

time; moreover, the usual well informed sources report that USC has suffered heavy losses at Kisimayo. It would seem that the Majerteen obtained reinforcements and especially arms and that they want to march on the capital. In the meantime the situation in Mogadishu is worsening. There is complete anarchy, they are unable to organise anything; the law of the strongest prevails. Thieves and assassins continue especially at nighttime. Arms, too many arms, are in circulation, including those of high calibre, providing you have money. In the residential areas every evening is a living nightmare. The biliqo continues, and if you do not defend yourself, you are as good as dead. The ungovernability leaves room for all the rioters. Trade cannot resume because of the continuing robberies in the port. Every so often there are roundups to confiscate arms; until they hit the mighty arms traders there is no hope of peace; unfortunately there are many people who take advantage of the arms trade.

We went to the airport to find out about international flights; the only flights are to and from Kenya and Djibouti.

### ***1.3.1991, leave the country***

A day meditating on the possibility of leaving the country. It is all a matter of dollars. Poor us, we hope to make it. I am behind in my doctoral studies.

### ***2.3.1991, an Islamic republic***

It is the hottest month of the year; we are without provisions, without water and without electricity. We live in terror; too many armed people are everywhere, burglaries are increasing day and night; the gunfights are deafening. They fight over nothing; the hospitals are jammed with the injured and the dead are beyond counting. A voluntary armed force has been established to function as police, they are ignorant and mercenary. The prisons have been demolished, there is no longer anyone to administer justice, delinquency is rampant.

We are always waiting for help from abroad, but the port continues to be deserted ; rumour has it that it is Kenya obstructing the arrival of planes and ships for Mogadishu. It is said that the Kenyan Minister of Defence is from the Ogadeen clan and that he is trying to favour the Daroods in any way he can.

In the city people are now talking about open war between the Daarood and the Hawiye. The southern part of Somalia is solidly in the hands of the Daarood; Baraawe and Marka have also fallen into their hands.

Now we can no longer get even those few vegetables which came from Shalambod.

The negative progress of this war is worrying us; if the forces faithful to Siad Barre manage to retake the capital, there will be the most colossal blood bath in the history of Africa. The USC guerrillas have been stopped at the port of Kisimayo by the relentless resistance of the Daarood; this has laid bare organisational and logistical deficiencies. Each clan goes to battle with its own means, the volunteers only obey their own leaders who are mostly devoid of any military strategy. Officials are looked on with suspicion, nobody has enough trust to place themselves under a general; the experience of twenty years of military dictatorship has burnt their fingers. Because of this, they go on the attack with few munitions; if a breakthrough does not happen at the first cry, they decide to return home.

Now the faqash are advancing just a few kilometres from the capital.

We are in the middle of Ramadan, the month of Islamic fasting.

This year it is particularly difficult because provisions are becoming scarce and basic goods have gone up in price; we have no source of income; we are starving. The malcontents foster the extremists who want a military government; the strong man who is trying to advance his candidature as president is Aidid, an army general.

General Mohamed Farah, known as Aidid (he who rejects insults) participated in the coup d'état in 1969 with Siad Barre; then because of internal disputes he was arrested and imprisoned for six years. Once out of prison, Siad Barre promoted him to first general and his aide-de-camp, then his deputy, and finally, in 1988, ambassador to India. A year later, he went over to the opposition; he joined the armed guerrillas of the USC.

Aidid is considered the liberator of Mogadishu; he has a newspaper financed by his clan, the Shabelle Press.

Yesterday there was a demonstration in favour of Aidid; he promised the participants, several thousand people, internal order and national peace.

Meanwhile, it seems that the provisional government has achieved its first objective - to form an army of 10,000 professional soldiers. General Aidid has been given command of this interclan force.

In the city, it is rumoured that a religious party has also been formed, called Akhwaan Muslimiin (Muslim Brothers) that wants to transform Somalia into an Islamic republic,

governed according to the dictates of the Koran. They have started to gather signatures at the mosques, and have started speaking about their programme on the radio. So far as internal order is concerned, minor offences would be punished by flogging; for more serious offences (such as robbery, rape and homicide) the law of retaliation would be applied. People are talking a lot about lashings, cutting off of hands and shooting. In view of the enormous power vacuum, the Muslim Brothers have gained wide approval by the population; we are tired of this anarchy and would welcome any form of law.

### ***15.3.1991, the Muslim Brothers***

General Aidid has established his general headquarters at Afgooye, thirty kilometres south of Mogadishu; the war continues.

The Muslim Brothers have set up a tribunal where people who have committed offences are condemned to being shot in the square.

Offences are decreasing as well as gunfights. I do not know if this has happened because most armed people are in the war, or if the Islamic tribunal acts as a deterrent.

### ***10.4.1991, listening to the BBC***

Evening, 8 o'clock. As usual, I went to Sharafo's house, a rich merchant from Hamarweyne, to listen to the BBC from London on the radio with some friends. It has become a fixed appointment, even under fire. Just after the news, I went home to prepare myself for the maqrib prayer. A rifle shot exploded in the kids' room; I rushed to reprimand them - our nerves are all in shreds and we cannot stand the firing any more. I heard a cry from the floor above; Mamma Halima, Udi and Amina are in a cloud of dust. Mukhtaar, one of my Mother's grandchildren, was trying to repair a rifle which had jammed, and then let off a shot which went through the ceiling. The fragments grazed my mother, Udi and Amina who had just finished washing, and went into a kitchen cupboard a metre away; plates and pans were destroyed. We have been on the verge of tragedy.

### ***15.4.1991, the national drug***

Ramadan is over! In this first half of the month, numerous events have taken place. The Darood armies have occupied the whole of lower Shabeelle and arrived to occupy the city of Afgooye, 30 kilometres from Mogadishu.

We awaited the jabhadda's reaction, but finally a counter attack was organised. When the battle started, the shelling could even be heard from our house. I learned what happened from my friend Sittin, who was at Afgooye to get some kat, our national drug. The clash was so violent and instantaneous that the front was fractured into two; one part of the Daarood retreated towards Kisimayo, seeking safety in the farming region between Webi Shabeelle and the Juba; another group fled towards the Bay region. The mopping up operations are still continuing; unfortunately they are resorting to burning, one group covering the retreat, the other flushing out pockets of resistance, they have scorched the earth. Whole farms of hundreds of hectares have gone up in smoke. The whole farming population of the region is starving.

#### ***17.4.1991, salaries are promised***

Finally ships have arrived with goods and petrol. The government has managed to replenish paper currency and has promised to pay salaries; they are beginning by paying salaries to the army, the police, doctors, nurses, and emergency water, electricity and telephone engineers. Now we have running water and it looks as if we also have fuel. Petrol, which costs 30,000 Somali shillings on the black market, can now be found at the filling stations for 3002 shillings. Food has also become more accessible; sugar is now 9,000 shillings rather than 20,000.

In general, there is an air of optimism; there is greater public order and even the war is going in the right direction; the army is besieging Kisimayo.

The Italian ambassador, Mario Sica has returned with the news of aid; telephone contact with the outside world will be reestablished, and the electricity centre repaired. We can now sit outside our house in peace in the evening; passing cars no longer scare us. Shooting has diminished, along with armed robbery. It may be a coincidence, but every time that the men are at the front, the city is calmer.

#### ***18.4.1991, by candlelight***

Udi has not been very well all week. In the afternoon, she started having contractions and losing blood. At the beginning, we did not give too much weight to it, but towards the evening she went into labour properly, with strong pains. It was already dark when we decided to take her to hospital. We went in search of a car; Hamarweyne boasted a large car park before the war, now it is impossible to recover private means of transport, all the cars have been stolen or looted.

The young men of the quarter volunteered to stop a passing car by force; we formed a little army and we waited in ambush, but because it was late no cars passed. We tried the police station; they did not have a car either. There was nothing for it but to comb the area for an obstetrician or gynaecologist. We knocked on the doors of all the houses, finally we found an obstetrician. Her name is Siti Cadded. Meanwhile Udi, aided by her mother, her sisters and nephews, failing other choices, was given the appropriate traditional medicine, a mixture of honey with sesame oil; fortunately it works as a pain killer. The obstetrician, after visiting by candlelight, tried to stop the haemorrhage with an injection of vitamin K. Meanwhile, there was a storm going on with thunder and lightening.

Going around the quarter, I was struck by the peace which reigned here. Everywhere, people were sitting outside their houses; many played cards in the square, or listened to music.

#### ***21.4.1991, Naples has won***

Finally, today is a day of relaxation. I went to watch a match in the football Tournament Cup for the victory of the Somali guerrillas. The team from Shingaani beat Bondheere by 3-2. I do not much like going where there are a lot of young men, too many arms are in circulation and every time there was a goal, they fired into the air. Football is the most popular sport, each week, the papers report on the results of the Italian football championships. We have nothing to eat, but we know that Naples won against Lazio by 2-0, Sampdoria-Bari 3-2 and Milan has unfortunately drawn.

#### ***22.4.1991, the flogging***

The most astonishing event of this Friday morning was the flogging of some people in front of the largest mosque in Mogadishu, Masaajidka Isbaheysiga. Everybody is talking about it, since the administration of justice was entrusted to Islamic law, which intended to apply Shari'a law to the letter. From dawn, an immense crowd amassed in the huge piazza of the Mosque to witness the public flogging. The flogger, in order to not be recognised, was dressed in a wide black tunic, with a hood.

However, a group of relatives and friends of the sentenced men, armed with rifles, opened fire on the crowd, murdering and injuring some of the spectators. I took off. The prompt response of the guards avoided a bloodbath and some of the assailants were captured. The show was postponed until the afternoon. I chose to stay at home. I learned from my friend Ali that there was also a new attack in the afternoon.

This time, the attackers used grenades and took hostages. They are said to be part of the ciyaal moriyaan gang, composed of kids who abuse alcohol and drugs; they live on plunder and profiteering; their base is in the ex-Villa Somalia. These kids do not recognise any authority, much less Islamic authority; according to them, as the akhwaan muslimiin did not participate in the liberation war, they have no right to pass judgement.

It is 1 o'clock in the afternoon. A ship with 900 passengers, expelled from Saudi Arabia has docked in the port. The news immediately went round the city; thousands of people flocked there.

Udi's nephew, Abdullahi M. Cubeyd also disembarked from the ship. The journey by sea from Jeddah to Mogadishu usually takes a week, they were at sea for 45 days and used two ships. The first, a Saudi pirate ship, took them to the port of Berbera, but they refused to continue to Mogadishu because of the war. The passengers, all from central Somalia, refused to disembark at Berbera; after numerous appeals, Yemen offered to accommodate them at the port of Aden, but without permission to land.

Nine hundred people were therefore left crammed in a small space without water or food. Chaos broke out; the ship was seriously damaged. The Yemeni authorities rented the only available ship to go to Mogadishu, an old Pakistani trader, almost dismantled, by this time stationary for nine months for repair.

On the high seas, the ships engines were unable to maintain the effort; they packed up at least seven times. And so the journey from Aden to Mogadishu which normally takes a couple of days, lasted eight days. However, for Abdullahi and all the others, everything went well enough, they had the help of the Red Cross and the High Commission for refugees. All's well that ends well.

### ***Evening, 18.30.***

I returned from the maqrib prayer, Udi called me into the room and showed me a sheet of white paper with something on it which looked like a piece of bloody meat; she told me that she had spontaneously aborted, without pains.

It was a powerful shock; I had prayed so hard and hoped so much that this miscarriage would not happen; the second in six months. This cursed war does not cease sowing death.

I folded the piece of paper and I went to bury my child in a quiet and clean corner close to the mosque. We had already chosen it's name: Ayaanle, lucky.

### **23.4.1991, popular joy**

The news on the radio at 1400 officially declared the liberation of Kisimayo and Baydhabo; numerous Marrehaan officials and soldiers have been captured, amongst whom it would seem is also Maslah, son of Siad Barre. Joy amongst the people is enormous; for about half an hour there were continuous shots. The taking of Kisimayo had become a question of honour being the main base of the Darood. Kisimayo is Somalia's second largest city, it has an international airport and the country's largest port. The faqash obtained a great deal of support by land and sea from Kenya; Kisimayo had become the Darood's new capital.

Now everybody wants the war to end and a return to normal life. Besides, the rainy season has begun and the fields need many hands for sowing.

I have probably found a job. I have to report to the Ministry of Health; they need an adviser.

### **3.5.1991, the Ministry**

This month began under an unlucky star. Word is going around that during the battle for Kisimayo, Mohamed Abshir Muuse, vice Prime Minister and Minister for Justice and Religious Affairs for the provisional government, was captured. Immediately after the revolution of 1969, Abshir, ex police-general and fellow soldier of Siad Barre, went over to the opposition and so has been in prison or under house arrest for the last twenty years. It would seem that he had been sent to Kisimayo by the government in order to negotiate the surrender of the Darood, but he actually joined forces with the enemy.

Now Mohamed Abshir circulates freely and he has lost none of his responsibilities. There is a mood of discontent within the USC.

### **7.5.1991, the clash between Ali Mahadi and Aidid**

Chaos has broken out; from our quarter one can clearly hear shelling from nearby. They say that it is a clash between the Sacad, sub-clan of the Habargidir, and the Abgaal guards of the President. There is a growing conjecture that the clash is between General Aidid and the President, Ali Mahadi.

The presidential palace has been hit by two shells; there are dead and wounded on both sides. This civil war has delighted those who still hope for the return of Siad Barre; fortunately after a meeting of USC, peace returned.

Fire, however, smoulders under the ashes. At the front, movement has been restricted by the torrential rain which has transformed the bush into a huge lake; all mechanical transport is blocked. Word is around that Siad Barre has a little Cessna plane with which he has gone to the north of the country to seek an alliance with the Majerteen, but it appears that he was given a flat refusal.

### ***8.5.1991, help from Huseen***

Food and fuel replenishment by sea is quite regular, but we still do not have electricity and the phones do not work.

My mother has arrived from Beledweyn; the war and hunger have destroyed her physically, but not in spirit. My brother Ahmed, my sister-in-law Habiba and all the nephews and nieces are fine. Today I am lucky, Sheekh Abdi, my brother's father-in-law, brought me a letter from Huseen who wrote to me from Nairobi. I am quoting his letter because his odyssey is incredible.

### ***Nairobi, 29.5.1991***

Dear brother Hassan,

I am writing you this letter in the hope that you are all in good health. I am in Nairobi in the best of health. On the 19th January 1991 I left Brava for Mombasa. After two days and two nights I landed at Mombasa. Words cannot describe the Kenyan reception. They left us on board for a night and a day, without food or water. After a lengthy check they transported us to a provisional refugee camp, which was originally a trade fair. The most fortunate spend the night in little cubbyholes or wooden shacks, the rest are under the stars, with not even a sheet. The food is given by the Islamic community of Mombasa and consists of rice flour, bread and milk. As a group leader I am responsible for the collection of food. For a number of days I have been managing with bread and shahi (tea) because I have no pan to cook with. By enormous good fortune I managed to get into contact with my wife Safia who sent me a traveller's check from Sweden, which I only managed to cash in March. I left Mombasa for Nairobi by train on the 17th February 1991.

Now I am living in a kind of hotel, in a small room which costs as much in rent as the most luxurious hotel in Somalia. Here everything is very expensive, the Kenyan shilling is very

strong, but now a dollar costs 27 shillings, whilst two months ago it cost 24, and it is still falling. The only thing which is cheap is kat. I have been in touch with the Swedish Embassy and I hope to obtain a visa in two months time. Communication with Mogadishu is a problem, even private planes are no longer permitted. I hope I found the right way, Sheekh Abdi will take steps to put me in contact with you. I asked him to send 200 dollars to Mamma. This sum is sent from Safia to Mamma. Send my greetings to Mamma and to Ahmed, and Ali and Fahmo. Cheers, Huseen Osman.

Thanks be to God, with the money my brother Huseen sent we have bought some provisions from the black market, and sent them to my brother's family in Beled Weyne, via my nephew and niece Huseen and Hasna. Hunger is the greatest enemy, which we fight against every day; there is no longer any source of income and people do whatever they can. Some people have discovered the lucrative copper trade; they obtain it by stripping the high tension cables; it is said that there are also some cunning people who even blow up munitions dumps. One week, at Afgooye, two arsenals were blown up, and the explosions could be heard as far as Mogadishu.

#### ***10.5.1991, provisions for state employees***

Finally, after many promises, the distribution of provisions to state employees has begun. Everywhere they are making lists; then you have to listen to the announcements on the radio to find out where the distributions are taking place. Sometimes armed gangs attack the shops, they generally get their calculations wrong because the number of people on the lists is greater than the merchandise available. Delinquency is on the increase; it is not wise to go about wearing a wristwatch or carrying a package.

We are in the fifth month of the war and the situation has still not be normalised. It seems that finally a glimmer of hope has appeared; this time, perhaps I will manage to leave for Djibouti and from there to Italy.

#### ***12.5.1991, in Parliament***

Early this morning I set off for the University, seven kilometres outside the city; today they are finally distributing provisions to the teachers. The University has suffered the same as the whole of the country; it has been looted. Nothing remains, only the walls. I learned from colleagues who live on the campus that the registers, the documents and also a few books have been saved. We teachers have had a few meetings in the old centre near the Shabeewille hotel. About half of us have dispersed, especially those of Darood origins who preferred to emigrate; for the moment we know of only four who have died. The

provisional government has furnished a nomination for the Rector; in addition we have been called together for a week-long seminar on the situation of the country.

In the opening of the seminar President Ali Mahdi asked for our collaboration in reconstruction and promised to take account of our proposals. Whilst we split into work groups to discuss security, the economy, politics, etc., in parliament they follow meetings of clan leaders, feminist organisations, religious leaders and commerce. Personally, I feel useless, what matters most today is who has a gun.

The distribution of provisions has taken place in a very orderly manner. The teachers and personnel have each been given 4.5 kg of rice, 1.5 kg of sugar, 1.5 kg of beans and 1.5 kg of oil. These goods are part of the international aid, but they can be found on the market where they are sold for a high price. Thieves specialise in the stealing of provisions, sometimes they turn up in the middle of a distribution and shoot wildly as well as grabbing the goods and then they resell them at the market. Markets have become the most highly defended places. Every trader has a bodyguard and various kinds of arms under the counter. Shoppers also have to defend themselves; usually, one hand holds the shopping and the other holds a rifle or pistol.

#### ***14.5.1991, the camel herder***

We are in the middle of the rainy season and the abundance of water gives us good reason to hope, even though there are only a few farmers who have sown their crops, because of the war. My mother, who had sown a little corn, saw her field destroyed, just as it germinated, by a herdsman who let his camels graze there. When my mother protested, he just let off a volley in the air with his rifle.

The political situation is worsening day by day; there is a struggle going on within the USC. With nothing better to do, the government has formed a central committee composed of eleven worthies entrusted with coordination; in practice it has created a government within the government.

#### ***15.5.1991, financiers of the war***

The distribution of provisions is the topic of the day. This international aid according to the intentions of the donors, should be to relieve the hunger of the population stricken by the war and destruction, whereas in reality we only receive the crumbs.

The government has also promised to pay salaries to state employees, in fact we appeared at the University and were registered on payslips. An increase of 130% of our salary, which just been announced on the radio, has been frozen. All the money, provisions and fuel have been swallowed up in that enormous bottomless pit which is the war.

There is an insistent rumour going round that the great Hawiye merchants, known as the afar jeeble (four pockets) are the true financiers of this war.

The government pays these merchants with what they have: the aid. It is also said that the government sent five billion Somali shillings to the SNM, since the north of the country is without any currency and the banks are empty. Day by day we are seeing more clearly the proportions of the tragedy which Siad Barre has inflicted on us.

#### ***16.5.1991, blood-money***

There is absolutely no security in the city, there are too many delinquents. Hunger drives too many people to do whatever they can, and there are numerous wild youngsters who spend their days in search of adventure. The war has undermined all middle-class and Islamic morality; we are at a point where even when we go to pray in the mosque we need to hold our sandals tightly or they will be stolen. Now, defending ourselves against the delinquents has become doubly dangerous; in the first place because they are armed to the teeth, and also because if you injure or kill them then you are hounded by their relatives and have to pay many millions of shillings for diya, that is, blood-money.

The police are too few and incapable of carrying out their duties; they are composed of untrained people, if not delinquents and drug addicts often in collusion with thieves.

#### ***17.5.1991, talk of widening the conflict***

The war continues. It is said that a new front has opened in the north, in the region of Galgaduud, chiefly inhabited by the Suleyman from the Habargidir clan and by the Marehaan. It seems that the Marehaan, overthrown in the south, are trying to widen the conflict in the north, with the help of the Majerteen and the Ogadeen, where the Daarood are more numerous and where the well-equipped port of Bosaso is located. It is also said that the Suleyman came off worst in the war against the Marehaan because they had participated in the battle for Kisimayo, leaving only their women and children at home. The Sacad, also belonging to the Habargidir clan, seem to have retreated in time. Now it is believed that there are about 1500 people held hostage, mostly Suleyman; a bloodbath

is feared. Meanwhile about 4000 men have left Mogadishu, armed by the USC who have decided to regain control of the region.

This clan war spares nobody; the Darood and the Hawiye are being pursued throughout the country. The few remaining Darood in Mogadishu are now living barricaded in their houses; and if they are seen outside they risk their skin.

Actually, many of them are under the protection of the Hawiye with whom they are intermarried.

### ***18.5.1991, nobody want's us***

One of the main consequences of the civil war is that all political plans have come unstuck; now in Somalia the only voice which is listened to is that of blood. No wonder the men compromised by the dictatorial regime of Mohamed Siad Barre now occupy important posts in the provisional government. Jaamac Barre, brother of af-weyne, had the courage to say on BBC radio that the previous government has not fallen. All his men still control the levers of power.

Bipolarism is continually being consolidated as well as the struggle for power between the Hawiye and the Darood. For the moment, the former has the upper hand, but the price which is being paid for this fratricidal war is enormous; the seeds of hatred are taking root in everyone, putting relatives and friends one against the other. For many people, the only solution is to flee the country, but at this point in time, nobody wants us. Kenya, Yemen and Djibouti are turning back Somali refugees who have been forced by hunger and the war to emigrate. People falsify passports found at the embassies and besiege the ports and airports in search of a passage for any destination.

### ***20.5.1991, independent Somaliland***

The situation is ever more entangled. For the last couple of days, there has been talk of the secession of ex-Somaliland; now it is official. The news has caught us by surprise. In fact, just a week ago, a large delegation of representatives from all the clans in the north and members of the SMN met here in Mogadishu, with the USC and the SDM, and they signed an alliance pact. Nobody had had even the slightest doubt about the unity of the country. We ask ourselves the reason for this sudden decision. Somalia is economically depressed; in the north the population of the city of Hargeysa was bombarded with the artillery and airforce in 1988 on the orders of Mohamed Siad Barre; they are still refugees in Ethiopia.

Siad Barre was not content with razing Hargeysa to the ground, he also ruined the surrounding area, so that now those who return home (or animals grazing in the periphery) step on mines. But I think that the difficulties are not overcome simply by separating themselves. In fact not everyone is in agreement with this decision to separate from the rest of the country. There is already talk of internal conflicts between the various clans of the region.

### ***25.5.1991, the family of a saint***

It is a day of mourning in our quarter and for the Reer Hamar. This month, we have already had two deaths, but yesterday evening's episode has shaken everyone by its gratuity, ferocity and barbarism.

The quarter of Sheekh Suufi, which was behind the national theatre, a short walk from the residence of the president, Ali Mahdi, was invaded in the middle of the night by armed bandits who searched all the houses, robbing people of their possessions.

The population did not offer resistance, but the delinquents, not satisfied with their booty, seized six girls between the ages of six and fifteen years and repeatedly raped them. In the quarter there were numerous women, but the fact that they planned to rape children and especially because they came in force and well armed, makes us think that wanted to hit these poor people in particular; they are respected by everyone, because they belong to the family of a saint, whose tomb is venerated and is the object of siyaar (pilgrimage). Another strange fact is that many Somali families who live in this quarter have not been disturbed; in fact they came to the defence of the Shanshiya, one of Reer Hamar clans, and opened fire, killing one of the delinquents and injuring two, now recovering in hospital. It was possible to establish from those injured, the clan to which the delinquents belonged; it is said that they are from the Abgaal and Habargidir clans. The President of the Republic has offered his condolences to the family of the girl who died from firearm injuries and has promised to have the area guarded. The people of the quarter are in shock; they are people dedicated to teaching religion, who do not believe in violence and who, even in the most difficult times, have always refused to use arms.

Yesterday evening we heard two shells, we do not know who fired them; unfortunately a whole family of 15 people was wiped out whilst they slept.

Now, not a night passes without some foolhardy people playing with heavy armour regardless of the damage that can be caused; their actions are completely free from any consequences.

We intellectuals and university professors continue our meetings in Parliament and call for order and security, not to mention unity in the USC, but nobody listens to us.

In this chaos, there are those whose interests are served by creating and maintaining disorder. These groups, who do not want to show their cards at the moment, are the supporters of the strong man, of a military government. Thus, after the dictatorship of Siad Barre, we can expect a dictatorship of some disciple of his. Twenty-one years of dictatorship have created a mental distortion in many people. Siadism has become a virus which has poisoned just about everyone. Now we go on as before, worse than before. Excessive violence is used brazenly; tribalism has become a dogma and whoever does not subscribe to it is the enemy to be attacked; stealing and the abuse of power are openly practiced and everyone poses as little Siads. No wonder there are two or three presidents of USC, each with his own followers and armed forces; in Parliament the tribal chiefs lay down the law; now they are the bosses of Somalia.

### **2.6.1991, *four-pockets***

In this civil war, a new oligarchy has emerged, the businessmen, the only ones who have any capital to finance it. People have immediately coined a nickname for them, afar-jeoble, because they always wear safari jackets with huge pockets filled with paper, because they are the only people making money and who have shops full of foodstuffs. In fact, one of the first laws brought out by the provisional government conceded them the privilege of importing and exporting without paying customs dues. Now it is in the public domain that they are the financiers of the jabhaddas. Isn't the government even capable of providing for hospitals for the sick, and for the military and civilian disabled, who are aided directly by their respective clans? In these conditions, what power does the President have if he also depends on his clan? Even the ministers are not able to get even a chair for their office without the help of their clans. We are at the mercy of the businessmen-politicians and the clan leaders; the first provide the capital, the others the cannon fodder.

### **3.6.1991, our friends in Italy**

This morning, I went over to the SOS Children's to see if Professor Elio Sommovilla had arrived; I had given him some letters for my friends in Italy, and hoped that he had some replies for me.

The letters have been posted, but it is impossible to get a reply other than through friends.

When I arrived the hospital was in turmoil; one of the guards, who is also my wife's uncle, had been murdered the evening before whilst he was returning home after work. Thieves shot him in the back in order to steal the bundle which he had under his arm, a pair of work-trousers; they must have thought that it was something valuable.

Luckily for me, Elio was there; he had been to Rome and had a letter for me and one for Udi, at last!

Professor Annarita Puglielli of the technical committee of the faculty of languages in the national university of Somalia told me that my friends from the Italian-African Institute have made a collection for me, and they are sending the money via Gureey, who is the brother of our friend Nurta Haji, President Ali Mahdi's wife.

I rushed home; Udi read the letters and translated them to our relatives. There was a festive air, finally, after so many months of anxiety, we can see a ray of hope.

At last we can do a little shopping and help all our relatives. It is the first time since the beginning of the war that we have received any help.

### **7.6.1991, I leave with Amina**

For the last few days, all we have talked about is leaving. But the money is only enough for two people. Udi's family is in continual discussion, we have to decide who will leave with me. It would be logical if my wife and Imaan were to leave. However, there is Udi's little sister Amina, who has been living in terror for a long time; she no longer leaves the house and only dreams of fleeing from this hell.

Finally it is decided that I should leave with Amina; Udi and Imaan will be taken follow later.

It is not easy to leave the country, however. There are only two ways, to somehow reach the ports of Baraawe and Kisimayo and try to get on a boat for Mombasa (Kenya), Djibouti

or the Yemen; the second possibility would be to catch a plane for Nairobi or Djibouti. A third possibility would be to get to the Ethiopian or Kenyan refugee camps on foot, but this is the route of desperation.

I discretely find out about flights and prices.

There are masses of people involved in the business of expatriation; without their agreement it is impossible to leave the country.

I placed myself in the hands of Aqil, one of our neighbours. First of all I have to get a foreign passport since there is no need to get an exit visa. Fortunately, the market is full of passports of every nationality. I chose a Yemenite passport, it is less risky to try and pass as an Arab rather than a European or American. I only have to obtain photographs, an almost impossible undertaking. There is not a single laboratory open in the entire city. I am directed to a person who has set up a photo lab in his house. The photos are taken in the street because there is no electricity for lighting; the whole system is powered by car batteries. Finally I can replace the photographs on the passport.

Now we are waiting to get on the first possible flight.

### ***12.6.1991, my friend Kulan***

The overall situation is deteriorating. There is fear of an armed confrontation between the factions of General Aidid and the interim President, Ali Mahdi. I go frequently to the headquarters of Aidid, with my friend Dr. Kulan, whose contacts at the airport enable me to obtain two seats on the African Air flight to Nairobi; the way the wind is blowing is not good. Many people maintain that Aidid wants to take power by force. Ali Mahdi is accused of being in favour of a national reconciliation, even with the Darood clans, and it would appear that the General does not like this. There is also concern in the villa of the provisional President. It seems that the situation is getting beyond anyone's control. The tension is palpable.

### ***13.6.1991, like a couple of survivors***

I went into the city. The centre has begun to live again. Many people have returned to Mogadishu. Everywhere people are setting up improvised stalls, everything is on sale at bargain prices. These days, I cannot imagine that anyone would want to buy an outboard motor, laptop computers, televisions, books in all languages, lamps and other stuff. I stop

to flick through some books; some of them are from the National Library, others from the University Library.

Every time I meet a friend or relative, we embrace like a couple of survivors of a catastrophe. I am afraid to go looking for relatives because more often than not I only find the ruins of their houses, and I do not know if they have been spared.

#### ***15.6.1991, the two little strips of paper***

Early this morning, I went with my friend Kulan to the man in charge of African Airways. The office is in a reinforced restaurant. After being searched, we were taken to a man to negotiate the purchase of two seats on the plane. There is no fixed price. There are many people nowadays who speculate on the desperation and fear of the people. Today the price is \$500. Instead of tickets, we are issued with a body pass from Saudi Airlines, with our own names and a number.

I now have these two little strips of paper in my hand, which have cost me \$1000, our entire fortune, but with no guarantee of leaving, according to a man whose name I do not even know. But I have no other choice.

In the evening I ran an awful risk, whilst returning home from Kulan's house I found the street blocked by several armed men, who open fired on me for no reason. I took flight, and thanks be to God I arrived home safely. It was the first time that I truly felt afraid. Until now I had always taken heart because I had to set a good example to everyone at home, but now that my departure is imminent, I jump at every gunshot.

#### ***16.6.1991, no kat, no guerrillas***

The airport is, as usual, in chaos. It is under the control of the Hawaadle clans. The new bosses are completely lacking in imagination, they have replaced the old employees with illiterates who do not know how to read and write, but are armed to the teeth. There is even a band of kids who search the luggage and there are also the usual porters. The aim of all the "employees" is to bleed you of your last cent. The plane arrived in the afternoon and let off the few passengers who wanted to return to Somalia. They are mostly international dealers and merchants of kat, the deadly drug which is imported from Kenya, without which no guerrilla would lift a finger. Kat is a plant which is not even considered a drug by the World Health Organisation (WHO), and in fact throughout East Africa and the Yemen it is used habitually. The most tender sprigs are chewed for a long time, and they ease tiredness and hunger. In theory, they are not addictive, but once the habit has been

established, it is very hard to do without it. In this whole period of the war, there was no water, food and medicine were scarce, but kat always arrived fresh every day from Kenya. At the airport at Ballidoogle, near Daafeed, around ten light aircraft land every day to replenish the market. The price of a bunch of kat is equal to the price of fifty kilos of rice. In order to be able to get this drug, armed gangs would offer themselves to anyone who would guarantee a bunch of kat per day.

At around four o'clock in the afternoon, we began boarding. We were placed in single file, and for some unknown reason, were made to march for an hour along the runway. From far away, I kept waving to Udi and Imaan and finally I boarded. It was an old Boeng 742 with considerable patching on the fuselage; it belonged to African Airways, with a mixed crew. You need a strong stomach to fly over Somali territory and only mercenaries risk their skins on these old wrecks. Inside, the upholstery is falling apart, we hope we manage to arrive in Kenya.

In the middle of the flight, a passenger stood up and informed us that in order to not have trouble with the frontier guards, we had to pay a wad of money. He told us that he knew someone who would help with the formalities, but we had to immediately give him a share of our money. Another passenger agreed with him and together they began to gather money; twenty dollars a head. I don't know why, but I was not convinced about this.

After a couple of hours we were in Kenyan territory. The international airport at Nairobi impressed me by its profound silence. Later on, I realised that it was the complete lack of war noises which gave the country such a sense of peace. After spending long months watching our backs and living with gunfire, I had forgotten that just a short distance from us there were people living in peace.

Amina and I filled out our landing cards, passed through customs without problems, and gave tips when we were asked and in a short time we were out of the customs. There was no sign of the two rogues who should have facilitated our disembarking.

I reclaimed our luggage, and at the exit I saw to my great surprise my brother Huseen waiting for us. Huseen had managed to flee Mogadishu in January and sailed for Mombasa. We hugged for a long time. He wanted to know all about the family, but emotion choked my words in my throat. We went to Amina's uncle's house, and finally I relaxed. Huseen did not want to stay with us, he preferred to return to his hotel.

***Nairobi, 17.6.1991, the ultramodern centre***

I got up early in the morning, went out into the garden and looked around. There was absolute peace. It was also fresh. At breakfast I met our host; his name is Diriye and he is the Deputy Minister of Labour in the Kenyan government. Uncle Ismail has a strong and longterm tie of friendship with Diriye, to the point where he is like a brother. My visa for Italy is ready, now I just have to wait for an air ticket which has been prepaid by the Oriental Institute of Naples.

Numerous friends have described Nairobi to me and I had also seen photographs and documentaries of the city; but to see it with my own eyes and walk about on my own feet made a strong impression on me. In the first place, there is an enormous contrast between the ultramodern centre which is the window of the nation, and the working class neighbourhoods and the endless shantytowns. I do not know the population of Nairobi, estimates vary from seven to eleven million. The climate is mild, but in this period which is the equivalent of winter, it is cold, especially at night. One detail which is very apparent is the large number of Indians in the city. The Indian community is so numerous that many Kenyans have been converted to Buddhism and wear a white turban on their heads. In general, they are traders; almost all the shops and restaurants in the centre belong to them, and most of the hotels.

In the city there are numerous Christian churches, Buddhist temples and mosques. Public order is widespread.

#### **18.6.1991, the police**

My brother Huseen has had trouble with the police. He told me that for some time the guards have been keeping the Eastleigh quarter under control, where almost all the Somali people in the city live. Whilst he was sleeping, there was a check; all the rooms were searched and many clients, generally Somali, were taken to the police headquarters. All went well for him, he only had to pay a small amount of money. The issue of raids has become a pastime for the Kenyan police; the Somalis have no diplomatic representation and they are almost all "illegals" as refugees. Usually, in order to not be transferred to the refugee camps which are like lagers, people prefer to pay; if they do not have any money, word goes around and someone from their own clan comes to their aid. Many Somali immigrants have been living in Kenya since the beginning of this century; in slang they are called somali sujuu. They belong to almost all the Somali clans, they are Islamic and have maintained their usual customs. Some of them, like Diriye, have made a career in politics and sit in parliament, but the majority of them live along the confines of the border with Somalia and are devoted to herding. Unfortunately, the Somali-Kenyan community is not united and they are unable to help us politically. Only the group with Darood origins,

which includes the Chief of Staff, of Somali origin from the Ogadeen clan, seems to be aiding the forces faithful to Siad Barre who have found refuge in the border city of Mandera.

#### ***20.6.1991, the collection made by friends***

Finally I managed to get in touch with the friends in the Association of Italian Women for Development, with whom my wife Udi collaborated in Italy. It was wonderful to hear a friendly voice and to know that somebody was concerned about me. I have to call them back because they have made a collection to pay for Udi and Imaan's journey, and as soon as possible they will send the money for the air ticket and visa for Italy. Thank God that I have been given friends like these.

#### ***21.6.1991, the ever present gangs***

I received a letter from my wife. The situation in Mogadishu has worsened. The Habargidir and the Abgaal declared war on each other the very day of my departure from Somalia. In fact, Udi, who had accompanied me to the airport, had not been able to return home. The two major clans which form USC, were not able to agree on the management of power. It appears that the source of the armed confrontation are the moriyaan, the gangs of armed youngsters who by this time were beyond all control. These moriyaan are generally war orphans, or simply kids who have suddenly discovered the pleasure of freedom and anarchy. Their nickname probably comes from the word marajuana. There have always been gangs in the city; each quarter had at least one. They are generally involved in robbery and bag-snatching. In my quarter, Hamar Bile, they had their headquarters in a field of fig trees which even in broad daylight was unwise to approach. As soon as war broke out, the gangs fought in the front lines with arms seized from the enemy. Then they turned to looting. These kids discovered the thrill of danger and drugs. Now that the provisional government intended to disarm them, there was a fracture within the USC; it is said that the Habargidir came to the defence of these gangs. Personally I do not believe this version of events, because in the past there had already been clashes between the two clans, sooner or later the clash had to happen. Aidid wanted the presidency at all costs, just as all the heads of the various factions did; to reach their goal they were all prepared to fight to the bitter end.

#### ***27.6.1991, my wife's visa is also ready***

I spend an entire night without sleeping; today I had an appointment at the Italian embassy to collect my visa. As soon as morning came, I went into the city; I was among the first to enter the Italian delegation. I collected my passport with a visa valid for three months. They told me that they also have my wife's visa ready and it can be collected whenever we want. I went to look for somebody who is leaving for Somalia, I must tell Udi to get to Nairobi by any means. Then I went to Alitalia to see if the prepaid ticket which the Oriental Department of Naples had promised to send me had arrived. Now that a door had opened in my life, I wanted everything to be resolved instantly.

### ***29.6.1991, a neighbour***

I managed to get in touch with my friends in Italy, they are doing everything they can to accelerate our return. I also have good news from Udi's friends, one of them has to come to Kenya to work, and she will get in touch with me so that I get an air ticket for Udi and Imaan. To find somebody to whom I can give a letter to Udi, I went to the airport; fortunately I met one of our neighbours who agreed to take it to my family in Somalia. The African Airways plane is the only reasonably regular weekly link with Mogadishu; on the flight to Mogadishu it is almost empty, and is used for the transportation of all kinds of goods. The passengers carry rice, pasta, oil and sugar; it is their luggage. But the biggest cargo is still kat.

### ***3.7.1991, waiting for Udi***

Now that I have an exit visa, I want to regularise my residence in Kenya whilst I am waiting for Udi and Imaan to arrive. Uncle Ismail, who is a Kenyan citizen, promised to be my guarantor. I went to the police to ask for residency; they have retained my passport.

### ***4.7.1991, the lost passport***

I went into town with my uncle; we have an appointment to collect my passport. Since I also had to drop by Alitalia, uncle Ismail offered to go to the police headquarters; we agree to meet at the Corner House bar. My ticket had not yet arrived at the travel agent. I went to meet my uncle who was already sitting at a table with a friend. He asked me to sit, and ordered something to drink; then he told me that my passport had been lost. I was taken aback. The news was unbelievable; how could they lose a document in the police headquarters? It is absurd. My uncle had already made a statement in the police station. I read the document which he was holding: "Loss of passport. The complainant reports

loss of his passport No. 1184772 which got lost at the immigration offices at Nyaya House. This passport has Italian visa N.933242 of 27th June 1991”.

The shock was so great that I felt ill and had to run to the bathroom.

It is as if I had lost everything. My country no longer exists; we have neither an embassy nor a consulate. To aggravate the situation, there is the fact that I already had the visa for Italy; I only had to wait for the air ticket.

I went to the Italian embassy and explained my problem to the member of staff. She listened patiently to me and then told me that I must get a new passport and take the police headquarter's statement about the loss of the document to their offices. It is easy to say.

I returned home. I have never felt so down in all my life. I thought I had left desperation behind but I did not expect such a hard blow from fate.

### ***6.7.1991, the last consul***

After a couple of days of research we found the last Somali consul, that is, the person who was the last consul of the Republic of Somalia before the war. He no longer has an office, but, thank God, he has kept stamps and documents. In a short while I had a brand new passport. I only needed the statement from the police headquarters about the loss of the passport. My uncle advised me against going back to the police headquarters. I could be declared as illegal and taken to one of the refugee camps by the border, where three hundred thousand people are crammed together with little food and water. Vice-minister Diriye, whose guests we are, is not much help, either.

### ***8.7.1991, my friend Elio Sommavilla***

Udi and Imaan have managed to leave the country with the help of my colleague and friend Elio Sommavilla, and they have reached Nairobi by air. With my wife at my side, I feel able to confront all difficulties.

### ***10.7.1991, to leave as soon as possible***

How lovely to go for a walk round the city with Udi and Imaan! With the money which Udi's friends have sent us, we can finally do a bit of shopping and buy some toys for

Imaan. I tried to convince Udi to leave as soon as possible, now that she has collected her visa, and also has her air ticket. Whilst she is in Kenya she cannot help me; besides, I will be more at peace knowing that she and Imaan are safe.

***12.7.1991, I phone every day***

Every day I go into the city and phone my Italian friends, in the hope that someone can help me. But my situation seems to be at an impasse. It has now become impossible to get into the Italian embassy without an appointment; in spite of the fact that I telephone every day, my name does not appear on the list left at the entrance.

***16.7.1991, I hope they will call me soon***

Udi and Imaan left with the Kenyan airways night flight for Rome. I feel a huge emptiness; but I am comforted with the thought that at least all is well with them. I hope they will call me soon.

***17.7.1991, Imaan was sleeping***

I stayed at home all morning waiting for a phone call from Udi. Early in the afternoon I was called to the telephone - it was Udi from Rome. They had an eventful departure, the Kenyan authorities did not want to grant them permission to leave because there was no entry stamp on the passport, and besides, she had no residence permit. They had already taken the steps away from the aircraft, when her permit to board arrived. Fortunately, Imaan was sleeping; in the turmoil she had lost the doll which I had given her.

Finally, she gave me some good news; it seems that some of our friends have taken my problem to heart and are doing everything possible to resolve it. However, I have to go to the Italian embassy again to await news. The ticket from Naples is not a problem, the prepaid ticket has been issued.

***18.7.1991, the danger of going mad***

Early this morning I went to the Italian embassy with my heart in my mouth. My name was on the list of people who have an appointment. A good sign. When it was my turn, the clerk smiled and had me complete a form and gave me an appointment for the following day, to get my visa again.

I could not believe my ears. As soon as I was outside, I could not hold back my tears. I let the tears fall to release the tension that had accumulated in this whole period of time. I went to the mosque and stayed a long time to pray; I thanked God for freeing me from the danger of going mad.

### ***19.7.1991, I wished I could leave today***

I went to the city to collect my passport and air ticket. I wished I could leave today, but there are no Alitalia seats until the 24th. I tried to get in touch with my brother Huseen at Mombasa; he wished me well and asked me to phone his wife Safiya who is in Sweden. My brother was waiting for a visa to rejoin his family.

### ***24.7.1991, at Casalina (Rome)***

These last days in Kenya have gone by in a flash. I arrived at the airport with my few possessions and the desire for a peaceful future. I was expecting difficulties because of not having a residence permit, but a few tips resolved all problems. On the plane I felt like a prince; I couldn't eat or sleep. At Fiumicino after going through the customs formalities, I was surprised to see my friends Silvana and Francesco who had come to meet me. They hardly recognised me - I weigh 58 kilos instead of my usual 80. We embraced at length. They took me to Casalina where Udi and Imaan live with cousins Mugne and Halima. I was finally home.

## **Conclusion**

In these two years we have lived in the hope of the civil war finishing soon. However, the little news which reached us from home has been ever more worrying. We have learned that Mogadishu has suffered the same fate as Beirut; divided into two by a green line. People have named the part which is under the control of the provisional president Ali Mahdi, Manifesto, and the part under Aidid, Manicomio. How have the people lived in these two years? In terror. I do not think there is another word to describe the situation into which the entire population has been hurled. I jealously guard the recorded cassettes which our relatives sent us as soon as they could. They update us on the living and the dead. My nephew Khalif Muriidi, 15 years old, decapitated by cannon fire; his sister Samira, 13 years old, died with about 20 other people, in a fight between two gangs; cousin Abdullahi Mahamuud, 17 years, hit in the stomach by a stray bullet, dead. The rest of my family is scattered in refugee camps in Kenya, Ethiopia and the Yemen. The most fortunate, after various adventures, have reached European countries and finally America.

My mother managed to keep the family together at Beledwyn. We have had no news of my sister Fahmo for two years. Somebody said that she is probably in a refugee camp in Mombasa, but the efforts of the Red Cross, to whom I appealed for help, have not had a positive outcome.

Udi's family is scattered over all the continents; Khadija, one of the sisters in India, Amina in United States, Muriidi is dead in Kenya, Fathia in Canada, Abdikarim and Awees in London, Hashim is the only one still in Mogadishu as a consequence of the Restore Hope operation, two sisters in Arabia, seven nephews and cousins in the Yemen and us in Italy. I almost forgot Abdulqaadir, who ended up in Moscow and now is in Holland. We do not know if one day we will all be able to see each other, nor if we will ever be able to return home.

At home only the old people remain, for them death is less harsh than exile. It is better to live in your own house, die in your own house rather than be like a stray dog on the side of the road, or in a foreign country.

The latest news from home talks about hope, of reconciliation. Mamma Halima has told us that she has reserved a little apartment for us which has been vacated by the tenant. I really like this apartment, it has a beautiful terrace from which you can see the sea.

## EPILOGUE

### ***What happened next?***

Twelve years have passed since the beginning of the civil war in Somalia. During this period, the old dictator, Mohamed Siyaad Barre, has died in exile in Nigeria, and his great rival, Mohamed Farah Cayiid has also died. Eleven years of anarchy have passed with a complete absence of either State or laws. The north of the country declared secession in 1991 and founded the state of Somaliland, taking as its boundaries those of the English colonial period. Until now it has not been recognised by any other country, but nevertheless continues to run itself democratically with a government elected by the people. The same attempt has been made by the so-called Puntland, the North-East region with two capital cities, Bosaso and Garoowe. This autonomous region corresponds to the area named Migiurtinia during the Italian colonial period, because it was mainly inhabited by the Majerteen clans. Central Somalia, the seat of the present provisional government with its capital Mogadishu, has not managed to find a compromised solution which would allow the rival populations to live together in peace, in spite of it being mainly inhabited by the Hawiye clans. The feuds for the control of the city have led to furious battles, with the use of heavy artillery reducing the city to a pile of rubble. Some districts, such as Shingani and Bondhere, no longer exist; their inhabitants have fled to Kenya or the Yemen, and for years they have lived in refugee camps. This year, another state has emerged 262 kilometres south of Mogadishu, in the Bay region, with its capital Baydhabo. The Southwest Somali State was taken by the guerrillas of the Rahanweyn Resistance Army (RRA) and its president is Hassan Mohamed Nur Shatigudud.

### ***I return to Italy***

My return to Italy in 1991 was like a homecoming after a dreadful adventure. My friend Silvana Motta who was waiting for me at the airport, hardly recognised me. Now I can appreciate that I must have looked like a bag of skin and bones. My friends at the Italian-African Institute, and my friend Sandro Triulzi who had helped me gain my freedom, were also shocked to see me. Dr. Carla Ghezzi told me that although she knew about the tragedy suffered by the Somali people, because a friend was involved, she had lived through it with powerful emotions. My friends were really happy that their efforts to rescue at least me and my family had been successful. I immediately resumed my studies for my doctorate at the Institute of Oriental Studies at Naples University, which had been interrupted, even though it was difficult to concentrate because my mother and three brothers and their families had been left behind in our country. Because of the war they

could not work, and so their maintenance fell on my shoulders. Thanks to God and with the help of my friends, I managed to successfully complete my studies. Once I completed my doctorate, my scholarship ended and so our survival in Italy became more difficult daily. I was reminded, with some bitterness of the proverb "if a man is hungry, do not give him food, teach him to fish". I had been given a wonderful education, but nobody wanted my talents. We then considered emigrating. It was very hard leaving Italy because by now we regarded it as our second home, and so the choice was very painful. We thought about England, because Udi's mother and siblings were there. Fortunately, we were accepted as refugees. Because Udi was then five months pregnant, she was immediately given a house and health care. Iman began school, and very soon began to learn English and make new friends.

### ***London: first impact***

The first difficulty we encountered was the language. English was not my forte and it was the first time I had set foot in the United Kingdom. I had many prejudices against the English, but fortunately they were unfounded. I soon learned to appreciate their efficiency and reliability. The lawyer who was dealing with my affairs with the authorities enabled me to obtain immigration status. Then I managed to attend some English courses for adults, and also took a diploma in Information Technology. My academic qualifications helped me to find a position as a teacher in Italian language and culture at the International School of London, where I am still working.

### ***The Diaspora***

During these twelve years of diaspora I haven't been able to stop thinking about Somalia. In 1992, when the international Restore Hope mission took off, I believed for a short time that the chapter of civil war could be concluded, I could return home and begin to help rebuilding the Somalian State. An attempt was made in Somalia to use military force to achieve peace. The American president, George Bush, on the eve of elections and after Desert Storm, wanted to mount a humanitarian mission to Somalia, a country wrecked by civil war, oppressed by famine and in complete anarchy. Just what the purpose of Restore Hope was is not known - was it to distribute food to the people stricken by famine and violence from the warlords or was it the reestablishment of law and disarming of the militias? Unfortunately we know what happened in the end. The experiment failed because the goals were not clear. I will not dwell on this painful chapter of Somalian history, I am only sorry that it was a missed opportunity.

## ***The Peace Conferences***

Over the course of these years there have been attempts to find other solutions, which have met with little success. The president of Djibuti, Hassan Guleed, made some admirable efforts towards Somalian reconciliation. At Djibuti two peace conferences have been held. The last one, sponsored by a club of donor countries, was held at Arta, a village not far from Djibuti. Two thousand traditional chiefs from all the Somalian clans took part, representing Somalian civil society. Hussein Mohamed Farah Aidid, leader of the Somali National Alliance (SNA) was absent; as were representatives of the self-proclaimed Somaliland and also those from the autonomous region of Puntland. The purpose was to create a new Somalian government. To this aim, 225 members of the new parliament were nominated. The seats were distributed amongst the clans: 44 to the Dir, 44 to the Darood, 44 to the Hawiye, 44 to the Dighil-Mirifle, 24 to the minorities and 25 to women. The president was named as Abdiqasim Hassan Salad, the ex minister of internal affairs from the deposed regime of Siyad Barre. I initially gave my support to this government because the country needed to return to legality, even though I think that governments should be elected by the people whom they represent, and not from outside. I do not think that it was a good idea to give recognition to the legitimate authority of the clans, thus making them stronger and enabling them to take all the power, leaving the minorities and the women angry that they counted for nothing in the political arena. Besides, each clan was represented by persons compromised by the old regime; thousands of people had sacrificed their lives fighting against it. Consequently, after one year the provisional government was not recognised at an international level, and in fact is accused of financing Al Qaida. The government actually only controls some districts of the capital Mogadishu. Anarchy still reigns.

## ***The Afarjeble***

Merchants continue to tyrannise the country. They have their own private mints which stamp out coins which they force into circulation. They support the warlords, giving credit in exchange for protection. Somalia has become a crossroads for all illegal trafficking, including arms, drugs and radioactive waste. One can only wonder how they obtain hard currency. Today, the Somalian economy is sustained by emigrants who represent more than 80% of the wealth of the country. Unfortunately, it is we Somalis living abroad who send them all the dollars they need for their trafficking. They know full well that we can do no less than help our relatives and friends who have remained in Somalia. In exchange for the dollars we send, the merchants give them paper slips which can be spent in their shops, at prices which they determine. The provisional government has not only not managed to block this infamous traffick and reopen the National Bank, but in turn stamps

out their money, thus increasing inflation and confusion in the circulation of money. Now the exchange rate for the dollar has doubled, \$100 are worth 2 million Somali shillings. The poor people try to show their anger at this state of affairs, but without success. The government is impotent. Furthermore, with regard to security, everyone had been expecting greater peace. The police force was formed but armed gangs, largely supported by Ethiopia, continue to range around the city and often get the better of the police when fighting them. Too many arms are in circulation and in every feud heavy artillery is used.

### ***The relatives***

We keep in constant contact with our parents and relatives. Even my mother has a telephone in her farmhouse in Beledweyne. On the one hand, the phone makes us feel less worried because we can get real information, on the other hand, it is our nightmare because bad news hits us hard. Both Udi's family and mine have suffered deaths, some have died naturally but most have suffered violent deaths. The latest one hit my family: one of my cousins was murdered by two men armed with Kalashnikovs, whilst he was leaving the mosque after evening prayer. Now, every time the phone rings in the early morning or late evening, we know that it concerns our relatives and the first question we ask is "wax daran ma jira?" (has something serious happened?). Fortunately, most of the calls are made to ask for help.

### ***The women***

Our women have always been the pivot of Somali society and one can always count on them. Even in this most difficult time for Somalia, it is still the women who take on the economic burden of looking after the family and the country. It is the women who through their hard work maintain the relatives left behind in Somalia and those scattered in refugee camps, it is the women who teach the children their language and traditions. In the UK, the women try to keep in touch, meeting up for marriages and funerals especially.

### ***The men***

Generally speaking, Somalian men do not bear the diaspora well. Few men have accepted the fact of being refugees, especially the old men. For many of them, religion has become a safe refuge. The young have successfully integrated, for them school and friendships are fundamental. In London, unfortunately, ghettos have been created where members of the same clan have rebuilt micro-communities. For example, in Tower

Hamlets, in the East End of London, there is a strong Isaaq community; at Wembley and Southall, the Somalis are from the south; Streatham is known as Ceel Dheer because mostly Abgaal live there, and so on. In some cases, entire communities have moved to other cities, such as Manchester or Liverpool. Unfortunately, the Somalis have also brought their vices from their country, such as that of Kat. This social scourge has caught on rapidly, largely thanks to the complete disinterest of the British authorities who have not banned it, unlike the Italian and Swedish authorities. In Canada and the United States they too have forbidden the importation and consumption of Kat. Kat ruins families because the men spend all night chewing it and then they sleep all day. This creates both family and economic problems because it upsets the balance of the family; it also debilitates the body and causes mental illness. Many consider that Kat is linked to Somali tradition, this is only partly true, because originally it was only used in the north of the country and only during the seventies was it imported south.

### ***The intellectuals***

In Somalian, anyone who has intellectual or cultural knowledge is known as aqoonyahan. In the past, this title was given only to the elders because they were the custodians of the traditions and the historical memory of the country. Today, however, anyone who has pursued a degree course is given this title. In London, numerous papers, journals and books have been published by Somalis. All this, however, rather than creating a cultural debate within the Somali community, only creates confusion. The reason is very simple: the aqoonyahan have become the mouthpieces of the clans to which they belong, save, naturally, for rare exceptions. The intellectuals, also, who participated in the conference at Arta in Djibuti for the formation of the new provisional government, represented the clans they belonged to in spite of coming from all over the world. This state of affairs makes me extremely frustrated because this virus of tribalism obscures understanding and does not allow objective and independent thought. As a consequence, a few powerful clans have claimed the right to govern the country, following which it can be said that the north of the country has become an Isaaqland, in the centre a Daroodland and in the south a Hawiyeland. This explains why, after eleven years, the situation in Somalia rather than improving, is continually deteriorating.

### ***What can be done?***

Yet more reconciliation conferences? The warlords first met three months ago in Eldorat, Kenya, for the ninth conference on the re-establishment of peace in Somalia. At the time of writing the conference is still ongoing. With the help of the Kenyan government they are

even trying to form a government. Unfortunately, once again the Somalis have felt they had to meet abroad, as they cannot discuss or agree on anything at home. Why? The reason is simple - none of the warlords wants to be the first to give up arms; indeed, whoever is the strongest will take the largest slice of power. Will it work this time? Few people think so. Many hope at least for an armed peacekeeping force or some form of protection from the United Nations. Personally, I believe that the solution might be otherwise. All the Somali people, especially those who live abroad, must try to achieve a profound internal change. Each and every Somali should learn to think individually and not believe that whatever is good for the clan or tribe is good for him or her. We are the ones who have created the warlords and without our moral and economic support they would not last another day. My dearest wish is that each of us seeks peace within ourselves, and, please God, also for Somalia.

## **ANNEX**

### ***The list of liberation movements in Somalia***

The following are a list of Somali factions to facilitate the understanding of different major Somali movements. The clans they belonged to are provided.

#### ***Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF)***

Col. Abdullahi Yusuf, Chairman

An Majerteen based movement founded after the war of Ogaden in 1979. The organization based among the Majerteen occupied much of north-east region and declared the territory independent of Puntland.

#### ***Somali National Movement (SNM)***

Mr. Dahir Riyale Kahin, President of self-declared Republic of Somaliland

An Isaaq based movement that led the opposition to Siad Barre in the late 1980s. The SNM was formed in 1981 and was supported by Ethiopia during much of the 1980s. In 1988, the SNM occupied much of northern Somalia and suffered brutal attacks from Siad Barre. The SNM won control over the north (former British Somaliland) in 1991 and declared the territory the independent (but as yet unrecognized) Republic of Somaliland.

#### ***Southern Somali National Movement (SSNM)***

The SSNM was founded by the Dir and Isaaq living around the city of Marka, in the south of Somalia. In 1992 it joined with 4 other factions (USC, SPM, SDM) to form the SNA (Somali National Alliance)

#### ***Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM)***

The SPM was originally organized by the SNM in 1989, as a liberation movement of the Ogaden clan to oppose General Barre. The SPM coordinated their military operation closely with the USC. After the declaration of the self-proclaimed "interim government" of Ali Mahdi and subsequent attacks against the SPM, it split into anti- and pro-Barre.

*Somali African Muki Organization (SAMO)*

Mr. Mohamed Ramadan Arbow, Chairman.

Represents minority populations of Bantu origin in the southern riverine regions, the most vulnerable victims of the war and famine. One faction was allied with the Somali Salvation Alliance and another was allied with the Somali National Alliance.

*Somali Democratic Alliance (SDA)*

Mr. Mohamed Farah Abdullahi, Chairman

A Gadabursi (Dir clan) organization from the northern Somaliland region around Boroma, formed in 1989. The original SDA supported Siyad Barre during the war of liberation, but reconciled with the SNM to form the Republic of Somaliland

*Somali Democratic Movement (SDM)*

Mr. Abdi Muse Mayow, Chairman (SSA)

Col. Mohamed Nur Alyow, Chairman (SNA)

The SDM is an organization based among the Rahanwein people. They live as farmers between the two rivers (Shelelle and Juba), particularly around Baidoa. They suffered some of the worst consequences of the famine. The SDM, active around the town of Baidoa, split and reformed a number of times. At different times various factions have been associated with both the SSA and the SNA.

*Somali National Democratic Union (SNDU)*

Mr. Ali Ismael Abdi, Chairman

The SNDU represent and protect the interests of the Leikased and Aurtoble clans, both of which belong to the Darod clan. They live intermixed with the much larger Magerteen clan.

*Somali National Front (SNF)*

General Omar Haji Mohamed Hersi, Chairman

The USF claim to represent the interests of the Marehan (Darod), clan of Siad Barre. Marehan loyalists to Siyad Barre formed the SNF in March 1991, after they were driven out of Mogadishu.

*United Somali Party (USP)*

Mr Mohamed Abdi Hashi, Chairman

The original USP was founded in the mid 1950's by Dhulbahantes in British Somaliland. The new USP claims to be based upon the Warsangeli and Dhulbahante clans of the Darod group who live in Somaliland, around Erigavo.

#### *United Somali Front (USF)*

Mr Abdurahman Dualeh Ali, Chairman

The origin USF was a small liberation movement of the Mamasan clan in the Isa group of clans, who live in Somaliland. After the January 1991, the USF joined with the SNM in forming the Republic of Somaliland.

#### *Somali National Union (SNU)*

The SNU is an older political party that was active in the 1960s, but was revived in 1991 under the old name. The SNU represents the Reer Hamar clan. They are people of Arab descent who live primarily in Mogadishu, Marka, Barawe and Kismayo. These urbanized groups have had weak clan links to the rest of Somalia but strong trading links to the Indian Ocean. As a relatively wealthy minority, they suffered greatly during the civil war. Different factions of the SNU have been allied with the SSA and SNA.

#### *United Somali Congress (USC)*

This group, with support among the Hawiye, seized control of Mogadishu in 1991. The USC split into two sub-clan-based factions. The faction, allied with the SNA is led by Hussen Aideed, General Mohammed Farrah Aideed's son and many of the Habir Gedir sub-clan. It maintain control over southern Mogadishu and some regions in central Somalia. The faction allied with the SSA is led by interim president Ali Mahdi Mohamed and many of the Abgal sub-clan, maintaining control of northern Mogadishu.

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