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VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF SOMALINESS

edited by
Muddle Suzanne Lilius

Centre for Continuing Education
Åbo Akademi University

Ahmed I. Samatar

The Somali Catastrophe: Explanations and Implications

'Telling a Somali to kill is like telling a dog
to lick his balls – the problem is getting him to stop.'[1]

Dagaal gaalka, haddana gartiisa sii.
'Fight the infidel yet give him his due.'[2]

1. Introduction

Somalia has a new global reputation – the world's stereotype of abject, total and violent failure. This image is the consequence of the implosions of early 1991, subsequent events of mutual predation and mass starvation, failed international intervention, and a continuing absence of even the rudiments of viable national institutions. Given up on as an unsalvageable people and place, popular as well as official interest in Somalia has all but evaporated. What references to Somalia that are made, then, are usually uttered with a sense of combined foreboding and despair. Hence, a once proud people, grudgingly admired for their dignity and self-respect, are now reduced to either exist in the foul debris of their socio-economic and cultural ruin, or, for those who can flee, condemned to the status of scruffy refugees in almost every corner of the world.[3]

No one denies the visible condition of the Somali people, or that they are the first to have killed the post-colonial state. Up for debate, however, is why and how the Somalis have come to such a situation and what might they do about it. Even in quotidian life, concerns over 'why?', 'how?', and 'where to?' are always present as individuals search for a satisfactory intelligibility of their circumstances. This despite the fact that ordinariness rightfully conveys a time of familiar, if not well-orchestrated, rhythms. But I propose that shocking events disrupt the comfort of familiarity and, depending on the degree of their gravity and duration, expose to full view the ever-presence of seminal concerns. Such a situation, it seems to me, bulks large when catastrophe strikes. The posing of fundamental queries, then, generates great attention, particularly among those most affected; invites diagnostic claims; expresses refutations; and proffers alternatives. The Somali condition, I hold, is a time of heavy anxieties par excellence. Consequently, Somalis, wherever they might be, continue to be dumbfounded by what has befallen them and therefore persistently raise such questions almost to the level of neurotic obsession. Moreover, notwithstanding the fact that the rest of the world has largely left Somalia to its own devices, the moment of global attention (1991–1995) did produce a relative plethora of publications. Even to date, a stream of commentaries continues to appear. On the face of it, this temporary attention is a boon for Somali Studies. Unfortunately, however, a closer examination yields a series of disappointments, some of them rather strong meat even for hearty intellectual sensibilities.

This essay has a number of objectives. First, I engage in taxonomic stock-taking of the literature and, subsequently, I identify and critique five perspectives that purport to explain what went wrong in Somalia, their logical entailments, and implications for reconstitution. These lines of argumentation are not totally alien to one another – they often graze in the other's epistemological territory. However, each shows notable variance to warrant a place of its own. Second, I offer a more ecumenical but distinctive substitute – one conceptually different and complemented by key narratives in the movement of Somali history. Third, I present some preliminary suggestions towards practical vision for renewal. Fourth, I conclude with a note on the challenges that face the growing diasporic Somali communities, from Finland to New Zealand.

2. Bearings

In sheer output and variety of viewpoints, Somali studies have come a relatively long way since the academic famine days prior to the early 1980s. Until that time, with the exception of a few discreetly dissenting pieces, the field was also a monochromatic theoretical landscape; it was totally dominated by an anthropological monism that canonized clanism as the master concept of Somali society. We begin our inventory-taking here.

2.1. Clanism

As the oldest and still most pervasive, this orientation puts forth a number of well-known and worn propositions. First, and most fundamental, is the idea that the austere pastoral structure and logic of traditional Somali society continue to define and shape both social existence and cultural predispositions. From this follows the second point: that social identities reside in clan affiliations, with close affinity and special obligation to *mag*-paying (blood money) groups that are extremely susceptible to splintering and mutual antipathy. Third, since the traditional Somali never found a compelling need to create national institutions and practices, any attempt to establish macrostructures, such as a state, are artificial creations that are bound to be undermined by the centrifugence of primordial affections. Fourth, in contrast to civil identity, there is a syndrome of exaggerated individualism that is often accompanied by a high quotient of combustible egotism. The single most distinguished voice in terms of tenure, volume and emphasis belongs to I. M. Lewis. Here is a familiar declaration from his latest book.

> [T]he collapse of the colonially created state represents technically a triumph for the segmentary lineage system and the political power of kinship... Given, then, that like nationalism, clanship is a human invention, is it in the 1990s basically the same phenomenon that it was in the 1890s? Linguistically the answer must be "yes," since the same terminology has been employed throughout the recorded history of Somalis. Sociologically, the evidence also supports this view. Indeed, the argument of this book is that clanship is and was essentially a multipurpose, culturally constructed resource of compelling power because of its ostensibly inherent character "bred in the bone" and running "in the blood."[4]

Lewis' standing conceptions of the essence of Somali culture and character have been repeated so often by him and others that his postulate has become axiomatic.[5] Most followers, even when they do try to transgress here and there, hardly depart from the first principle – it is as if, in this opinion, such a fact has an aboriginal claim on the very ontology of Somalis that, in the end, little else matters. For instance, after some tentative but promising explorations, Luling returns to the fold with this definitive judgment:

> Unity by consent may come at some future time, the genuine underlying sense of Somali identity reasserts itself, but the reality in the meantime is a patchwork of "clan mini-states" and the old logic of the genealogical grid: that people unite to confront a common enemy, then split again.[6]

The policy ramifications of this perspective are multiple. However, none is as insidious as the virtual naturalization of clan identity. Consequently, before anything else can be discussed or engaged, so it is asserted, every Somali should be identified accordingly. The implicit points here are: (1) since Somalis are instinctively programmed according to the exclusive claims by their respective propinquity, none can fully escape the immanent sway of 'tribalism'; (2) even on rare occasions when a Somali does embrace others outside of his lineage, it is because of some external menace or temporary expediency; (3) those who insist that they, in fact, have succeeded in extending their sense of belonging, perhaps even transcended clan frameworks or loyalties, are

negligible deviants not to be taken seriously; (4) the current period of destructive rage is part of the normal ebb and flow of the traditional politics of descent and can only be deciphered in those terms; and (5) given the centrality of violence in clan dynamics, 'strong men' are, in the final analysis, the appropriate players to watch and to be given priority.

I propose that almost all of the highly publicized reconciliation attempts were informed by this grammar. For example, the 1993 UN-sponsored Addis Ababa and Nairobi conferences and subsequent meetings focused on individuals who demanded special attention and legitimacy by leading armed groups that represented a particular clanistic entity. Where, here and there, references were made to Somalis who refused to be so classified and even given seats, no individual or group ever received principled recognition, let alone serious and sustained material support to devise an alternative. At times, this impulse can be conjoined to sheer ineptness and instrumentalist interests of external sponsors.[7] In such unfortunate circumstances, both acute frustration and humiliation are the lot of those able and earnest Somalis eager for constructive deliberations and action. I will now give a synoptic description of two typical events in two continents I watched at close range.

2.1.1. Sanaa, April 1995

UNESCO announced an initiative to organize an invitation-only workshop on the theme of 'Creating a Culture of Peace in Somalia'. As an invited participant, I was assured that I would join 30-40 carefully selected, 'non-sectarian', 'clean', and 'educated' Somalis. Moreover, I was led to believe that UNESCO, by definition, was prepared to engage only in serious educational projects. The activities were to last four days, and the venue was to be Sanaa, the capital of the Yemen Arab Republic. My task was to prepare one of two keynote presentations, in which I would attempt to outline what I deemed to be the causes of the catastrophe, as well as to put forth concrete suggestions for moving towards a 'culture of peace'. Finally, UNESCO representatives emphasized that the occasion would be quite different from others in that it was designed to inaugurate a new intellectually engaging and high-quality discourse among the Somalis themselves as well as their transnational sympathizers. The other keynote speaker was to be Dr. Mohamed Abdi Mohamed, a Somali anthropologist and co-founder of the European Association of Somali Studies, who, at that time, resided in France. After many months of preparation and anticipation, we arrived in Sanaa. Well received by the Yemeni authorities, we were ensconced in the comfortable and private grounds of a major hotel.

After the evening registration, we were met with the first surprise – no printed program. Next, we heard that the familiar warring factions were demanding that their representatives should not only be invited but be received as 'official delegations'! On the first morning of the workshop, with the welcome formalities behind us, we were informed that there were some delays and we should expect new announcements. By the evening, the number of participants had swelled to nearly 100. In addition, word was put out that neither Dr. Mohamed nor I would deliver our prepared presentations.

We were bewildered by these developments and immediately sought audience with the UNESCO representative (the key organizer) for an explanation. He immediately confessed that he had lost control by giving in to the demands of faction 'leaders', who, upon arrival, insisted that the scholars' presentations be canceled. While the first 'request' was rationalized as a gesture of inclusion, the second decision was taken because I was labeled by some of the new arrivals as an enemy of General Aideed while Dr. Mohamed was identified as belonging to a 'guilty clan'. We were stunned by these developments and the obvious loss of nerve on the part of UNESCO officials. For the following three days, we were condemned to watch from the sides a calculated thuggery to abort a promise, and the reduction of all of us, including UNESCO, to a state of impotence and idiocy. But to salvage some value from the situation, a small number of the original

group arranged for an informal, almost clandestine, gathering during the siesta time of the last day of the workshop in which we delivered our ideas. Later, we learned that I had been confused with a namesake scholar! We left Sanaa, ashamed and bitter, the virus we were invited and eager to treat had once again triumphed.

2.1.2. Paris, October 1995

Partly disturbed by the continuing wretchedness of Somalia and partly alarmed by the waves of Somali refugees at the gates of many European countries, the EU set up an office to coordinate policies. The then director, who had been an observer at Sanaa, helped organize and finance a follow-up conference in Paris. Again I was approached, this time at the persistent behest of a Somali scholar I highly respect. The assignment was similar. After some serious hesitation and intense transatlantic exchanges, I agreed to come. In addition, and to be fully self-reliant, I paid for my air travel and accommodations for a four-day stay in Paris. This conference was not invaded by white-collar *mooryaan*.[8] Nonetheless, it was one of the most poorly organized activities it has been my misfortune to attend – a muddled program with no order or direction. Moreover, the Somali auxiliaries were most inexperienced.

Many of the invitees felt offended once more by the imperious yet lackadaisical demeanor of the sponsors. Over dinner on the last evening, a few of us Somalis somberly reflected on yet another disgraceful occasion. After some wide-ranging exchanges, we gravitated toward this question: Why do patrons of these occasions, particularly Europeans and Americans, fail to uphold minimum standards of performance and conduct, as they probably would attempt to do if this were happening in their own communities? We fell silent for a moment but our body language gave truth to the weight of the concern and our collective vulnerability. Finally, a colleague who had traveled from the Horn of Africa for the occasion offered this troubling answer: 'We have become a nothing people; no one takes nothing seriously. For the type of patrons we had encountered, however, these are moments of self-importance and amusement.'[9]

2.2. Psychopathology

If the clanism approach, in its most orthodox and experienced hands, essentialized blood-belonging in comprehending communal conflict in Somalia, with the deleterious consequences I outlined, it is most jarring to note the degree to which such a viewpoint could be carried by a neophyte.

Like numerous international journalists posted for sojourns to cover East and Central Africa, Jonathan Stevenson moved to Nairobi in the early 1990s. Since Somalia was the most compelling story of the region at that time, he filed many stories and comments on current happenings. His impressions on the country and its people, particularly in the wake of the international intervention, gelled enough for him to write a monograph. Losing Mogadishu, primarily concerned with how and why the U.S.-led intervention failed, begins with paragraphs marbled with sweeping psychological characterizations of Somalis and unqualified negativistic judgments about their capacity to affect history in a positive way. Quoting with enthusiastic approval from an observation offered by a Western diplomat, Stevenson moves immediately to register, in a rather lurid language, his own psycho-cultural pronouncements:

> Somalis are posed of a racist psychology – with inferiority complexes. Rendered ethnically homogeneous by generations of blending among Arab maritime traders from the North and East, and pastoral Cushite tribes from the West and South, most Somalis trace their lineage to a single mythical patriarch, the Somalle. They regard Arabs as gifted brothers, and black Africans as handicapped cousins. The upshot is resentment towards both.[10]

But this is not enough. Stevenson marches on to declare that 'all Somalis are complicit in clan

contentiousness'. Thus, he comes to the conclusion that there is no use in searching for anyone whose primary loyalties are to the large community. In what must surely be one of the boldest assertions in print on the current Somali situation and history, he continues:

> There is practically no such thing as a Somali patriot or a Somali nationalist. By tradition, Somali nomads are self-sufficient. From this heritage they developed a transcendental sense of individual superiority and the conviction that they are accountable only to God.[11]

These pronouncements mark the extremity to which primordialism is liable to fall into: add the eternity of narrow lineal definitions of the self to an extraordinarily asocial individuality and, ergo, the unchanging distillate of the Somali puzzle is exposed.

2.3. Militaristic despotism

Observers of this genre stress the deadly toxicity that accompanies misrule and the perversion of political authority – the antithesis of democratic principle and practice.[12] Accordingly, the rot started with the commandeering of state power by the armed forces after the assassination of President Sharmarke in 1969. Immediately, a culture of militarism descended on the country and displaced what until then was a relatively flexible and relaxed society. In addition, the rigidity of militarist ethos was accompanied by everyday demonstrations of force and fear as the primary tools for the management of public affairs, large military procurements, and high visibility of new privileges for officers. With the structure and staffing of the state redone in the image of a military garrison, centralization as well as concentration of power, hitherto unheard of, became the norm. Increasingly, the argument goes, those changes produced their own logic – one that would turn Siyaad Barre into the only permissible source of knowledge and wisdom.

By itself, Siyaad's elevation, while obviously antithetical to civic values, need not have resulted in the total ruin of Somalia. What did turn it into a fatal blow for the country was the license it gave for unlimited authority, megalomania, and clanistic manipulation at the cost of national development and well-being.

The Somalia of the 1990s is a continuation of the Siyaad syndrome. Almost all the dominant elements in all factions are remnants of Siyaad's officers or bureaucratic appointees. As a result, their leaders seem fixated on snatching an opportunity to make the same claims and act accordingly.

2.4. Nomadism vs. sedentariness

This line of thinking is relatively recent; it appeared at the height of civil war and famine. More than any other part of the country, the peoples of the interriverine paid the heaviest human and material costs that coincided with the crumpling of Somali national institutions and the savage wars over the ashes left behind. At the height of plunder and subsequent starvation (1991-93), farming communities of this region died by the tens of thousands, with the town of Baidoa turning into the epicenter of destitution and death. Jarred by a horrid mixture of deliberate dispossession and killings of members of these communities by various warring factions, and the absence of any concerted Somali cry over their dismal condition, new questions arose. None was more compelling than this: Why was the rest of Somali society so unconcerned and silent about the wholesale destruction of the least belligerent yet perhaps most productive of the population? This is the impetus for the appearance of this orientation.

The argument hinges on the capital assumption that the single most distinguishing feature of Somali society is the economic and cultural differences between those who are nomadic and those who are sedentary.[13] The first and historically the majority are, by the intrinsic proclivities of their way of life, unbound, self-overdrawn, aggressive, imperious and hostile to outsiders. In contrast,

sedentary communities are the antithesis – that is, they are settled and attached to a piece of land, industrious, diffident and benign, if not receptive, towards strangers. In view of these sharp dissimilarities, the sad and untold story of post-colonial Somali society has been the victory of the nomadic matrix. With all major institutions completely penetrated or taken over, it was only a matter of time before great damage was done. Siyaad Barre's regime, particularly in its last decade, epitomized this abomination while post-Siyaad happenings serve as the ultimate testimony.

There are significant and multiple connotations of this angle of vision. However, in my opinion, two seem most notable: first, that nomadism is a socio-economic and cultural mode of existence so full of drawbacks that it is best to repudiate it wholesale; and, second, that the values of agriculturalist Somali communities ought to become the basis for any attempts towards reconstitution.

2.5. Superpower strategic competition

The defining item in the Manichean international politics of the Cold War was the geo-strategic competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. In that milieu, no issue was more salient than military prowess, reach, and influence in the calculations for global hegemony. Consequently, every piece of real estate was deemed relevant, if not significant. Somalia, despite its peripherality and underdevelopment, was considered a prime attraction. Located in the Horn of Africa and so close to the oil fields of the Arabian mainland, the Gulf area and the vulnerable sea lanes of the western Indian Ocean, the United States and particularly the Soviet Union began to court the Somalis once independence had arrived.

But the Superpowers' involvement in Somali life was not a one-way street. The Somalis, much like their neighbors, were also pursuing their own national priorities, of which the acquisition of military hardware and financial aid were uppermost.[14] The first objective was tied to the quest of the reunification of all Somali-inhabited territories in the Horn of Africa; the latter was necessary to supplement the very limited domestic resources for state operations and urgent development plans. This mutuality of interest catapulted the region into a globalized and dangerous strategic calculus.

From 1960 to 1969, the Somalis received a modicum of military supplies as well as development assistance from the Soviet Union while the United States and the West, comfortable with the state of their influence in Ethiopia, Kenya and the Colony of Djibouti (French Somaliland), helped train the Somali Police Force and offered some contributions towards economic and educational projects. With the 1969 military takeover, however, came major changes: the Soviet Union and its allies and the new Siyaad Barre regime elevated the relationship to one of high intimacy. As a result, the Somali government decided to exchange their strategic hard currency, i.e., the spatial setting of the country, for increased military equipment and training. In that spirit, a Treaty of Friendship with the USSR was signed in 1974. By the onset of the Ogden War of 1977-78, Somalia deployed a relatively large number of armed men (nearly 20,000) and was reputed to have had one of the best-equipped fighting forces in Sub-Saharan Africa. With the war, the region was thrust into deeper complexity and chaos. The Soviets, dismayed by the fervor of pan-Somalism, shifted their alliance to the new revolutionary government of Ethiopia – pouring in vast amounts of weapons to buttress Ethiopian forces. In the end, what began as a series of victories for Somalia ended with the total routing of Somalis.

The 1980s began with the confluence of Somalia's search for another patron and America's post-Vietnam self-doubt about its global capabilities.[15] Soon, a marriage of convenience was consummated with the new Reagan Administration. By the decade's end, some military and economic assistance was swapped for the use of the very facilities (primarily seaports and airfields) left behind by the Soviets. A key result of entanglement with the superpowers was the deepening of the dependence of the Somali state on external fiscal transfusions. The latter point is the basis for this categorical statement by two keen observers:

> [T]here was never in Somalia's history a sustainable material basis for a viable central state authority. In the past, the Somali state was funded almost entirely by Cold War-driven foreign aid, leading to a bloated and artificial structure which collapsed soon after that aid was frozen in the late 1980s.[16]

Since this orientation accents Somali manipulative dependence, it follows that in the days when global politics had a Horn-of-Africa component, a rather good margin of maneuver was available for the Somalis. As a result, according to the argument, it was the misuse of those degrees of freedom that brought about the harmful consequences. Additionally, now that the era of Superpower geo-strategic competition, which gave Somali territory its global significance, has ended, Somalis must rethink and aim for the construction of a more modest state apparatus.

Each of the preceding perspectives attempts to illuminate an aspect of Somali reality. For instance, focus on kin ties foregrounds a salient element of communal definition and identity; a psycho-cultural view compels us to give some thought to specific behavior and the dynamics of consciousness; emphasis on militaristic dictatorship helps us to see the imperative of leadership; distinction of sedentary characteristics from those of nomadism deconstructs the Somali society itself and highlights important variations in values and habits; and, finally, discussions of strategic calculations underscore for the Somalis both the opportunities and vulnerabilities that accompany close tango with giants. But, there are also severe limitations to each of these viewpoints. By sidestepping other co-existent and quite relevant components of Somali tradition, clan-driven analysis relies on one factor that is assumed as originary, hard-wired and supremely 'immutable'. As a result, not only does its diagnostic value depreciate but, concomitantly, suggested remedies also run the risk of being at best partial or at worst an anachronistic chase of a reality long transmogrified. Psychological exercises, particularly those winged in a context of haste and little other knowledge about the milieu and the society, end up being utterly shallow and hackneyed. Attention concentrated on a dictator reduces the rich complexity that is the state to one of its elements. For, personal rule or absolutism, is both a contributor to as well as a mark of greater decay. The contrast between nomadism and sedentariness is too one-sided as it privileges farming communities (*beeraley*) and demonizes pastoralists (*xoolo dhaqato*). There is plenty of evidence to demonstrate that generosity, tolerance and rules were always part of the way of life of nomadic Somalis. Analysis that concentrates on involvement with superpowers comes close to deep-shadowing two critical ways that those relationships had affected Somali society: (1) easy procurement of weapons and money, so much coveted by the Siyaad Barre regime, that contributed to the hardening of the militaristic caste and the corrupt tendencies of the state class, and (2) the accentuation of force conditioned any serious resistance to act accordingly – a reflex that is now a dominant feature of the on-going civil strife.

Given these shortcomings, the next section of the paper offers a different framework – one that combines an alternative theoretical and historical narrative with some of the more viable insights of various orientations.

3. The dialectics of transition

The descent of Somali society into mutual hatred and full disintegration, best exemplified by the demise of the state, cannot be understood solely within the orbit of one isolated factor or another. Rather, the condition is better understood by seeing it as the total shattering of a mode of being in the world and a companion failure to invent a new one. This now defunct mode of existence included a lean but sustainable material production and reproduction; a cultural pattern, informed by a sense of the divine, which portrayed a moral code and common sense; and a loose political practice marked by local legitimacy and accountability. Buffeted by a compounded mixture of its own liabilities and a series of powerful external intrusions, however, the old 'form of life' gradually

lost its delicate calibration and grace. No other moment in contemporary Somali history so somberly reflects such a loss of way than the killing of civic politics. Here, then, I attempt to (1) recapture the substructure and nature of the old order, and (2) identify some of the major transformations (mostly focused on the state) that could be associated with the prevailing bloody disorder and destruction of virtue.

3.1. The constitution of *umma* [17]

Somalis of traditional time were not feral creatures, bereft of phronesis, who roamed lawlessly the range land of the Horn of Africa; on the contrary, they did create a very long time ago a pastoral, and later some agro-pastoral, political economy based on a thorough awareness of the vagaries of a very exacting ecosystem. This mode of livelihood, based on household and largely self-sufficient, had an intricate division of labor. For example, womenfolk were primarily responsible for the management of domestic concerns, including the condition of the portable home or *aqal*; men dealt mostly with issues of security, knowledge about the weather and the range, general welfare of the herd, and formal relations with the world outside, including relatives. Finally, young boys and girls were assigned to look after small ruminants grazing around the homestead. Such material existence had some notable communitarian characteristics that included *miilo* – a precise and transparent procedure for fair distribution of water, the most precious of all resources on the range, agreements on access to pasture, and an informal but reciprocal claim on each others labors.[18] But there was a down side to these arrangements. For instance, even in a good season, when the rains and pasture were plentiful, surplus was, at best, meager – turning economic activities into a perpetual effort of living on the edge. In other words, shortages and hunger were familiar shadows that haunted the Somali landscape. In the modern era of the late twentieth century – an age of expanding human and livestock populations, declining eco-systems, and changing appetites and habits of consumption – the old and precarious, if somewhat balanced, material life was bound to come under great stress.

The economic basis of early Somali society had a correlate of political institutions and practice: kinship – a combination of blood-ties and customary law. Each household, *reer*, was led by the oldest male, usually the father or grandfather, who was expected, particularly at a certain age, to have acquired a degree of competence in local history, culture, and values. Further, this person was connected to two kinds of immediate social networks. The first and most primary was the *tol*, a solidarity with male-kin based on a belief in a common male lineage; the second, though more shallow and of less weight, was based on marriage ties, or *xidid*.

Male-lineage identities performed many positive functions of which security and the payment of blood-money, *mag*, or restitution to the injured party, and mutual assistance in hard times like draughts were paramount. On the other hand, *tol* identity was totally exclusive, liable to group privilege and, in times of high stakes, susceptible to chauvinistic demonization of the Other. *Xidid*, bonding through marriage, was the first counterweight to the narrowness of *tol* in that it expanded a man's self-definition by obligating him to his in-laws and the people of his mother. A second element of kinship was *xeer*, an unwritten code of conduct that set specific guidelines for intra- and inter-kin transactions. Within the compass of *xeer* were the following: preservation of the wisdom of the ages and habits of community, delineation of obligations and entitlements, and supervision of criminal justice. The combination of *xidid* and *xeer* further offset the parochialism of *tol* by enlarging the range of affiliations. The incarnation of the confluence of these pieces of kinship culture was the elder, one of two foundations of traditional leadership. In larger and somewhat more structured kin communities, august appellations like Sultan or *Ugaas* were used.

The other part of the old moral order was Islam. Arriving on the Somali shores around the tenth century, Islam, through *Al-Qur'an*, *Al-Hadith*, and *Al-Sunnah*, infused new and powerful values into the existing Somali cosmology. Among these were a deeper spirituality and a greater sense of piety. At the worldly level, Islam also brought *qanoon*, a set of laws to guide the behavior

of the believers. Much more than *xeer*, Islam extended the margins of the relevant universe by linking Somalis to a world of co-religionists. The bearer of this new knowledge and, as a result, the leader in this realm was the *sheikh*, the learned and revered. Under the aegis of such leaders, the crucial affairs of the community were discussed in open meetings, *shir*. Finally, from the perspective of the modern world, it is worth registering that the old Somali order carried the seeds of two essential ingredients of democratic practice: separation of powers and open, participatory deliberations, albeit male-centered.

It is my argument that the above set-up was the basis of Somali society for a large stretch of its existence. Despite a rigorous environment, very modest economic base that frequently created tensions among various kin groups, and clashes with the neighbors, particularly Abyssinians, the Somali people of the Horn of Africa moved through history with a sense of independence and confidence. But that situation did not last forever; for new and momentous transformations that will dramatically alter the nature of political authority and culture were in the offing. I will present a thumbnail sketch of critical watersheds.

3.2. Key narratives

3.2.1. The imposition of the colonial state[19]

Somali contacts with the outside world did not start with the onset of colonialism. Earlier, as mercantile trade spread into the Indian Ocean littoral, coastal towns like Mogadishu, Merca, and Zeila appeared. The main purveyors of these activities were Middle Eastern and Islamic merchants. Although the center of gravity of Somali society continued to be located in the interior, or *miyi*, the establishment of urban centers underlined a growing economic and cultural interaction with other and distant worlds.

In short, Muslim traders became the first bridgeheads in the gradual 'incorporation' of Somali society into the expanding 'modern world-system'. New commodities began to find their way into the hinterland, slowly impacting social relations and habits. With their new wares and culture of literacy, Middle Eastern arrivals to the coast began to attract a few Somalis with their inducements. Here was, as I argued in another context, the genesis of the famous 'middleman' who will divide his loyalties between the merchants from other lands and kin group in the countryside.[20]

Whatever was the balance of forces between the urban/coastal towns and the hinterland, by the closing stages of the nineteenth century, a new and revolutionary force arrived: multiple colonizers. First there were the British and the French, and later the Italians, to be joined on the table for the scramble for Somali territories by the Emperor of Ethiopia, Menelik. By 1920, despite a fierce resistance on the part of Somali led by the legendary Sayyid Mohamed Abdille Hassan, colonial order in five guises was in place. Perhaps, for our purposes, the most visible of the consequences of the conquest were the following:[21]

- Persuasion of some Somali elders to become clients of the new colonial schemes represented by a governor or district commissioner.[22]
- Intimidation and humiliation, or ultimately dismissal, of those who failed to comply.
- Appointment of collaborators who were, in large measure, accountable only to the colonial authorities.
- Emerging class differentiation based on lowly bureaucratic appointments, participation in the colonial economy - particularly the export of livestock from the North - and land expropriation by the fascists in the riverine areas of the South.
- Calculated manipulation of differences and disputes among kin groups which frequently pitted one group against another and gave old communal antipathies new combustion.
- Conscious and frequent use of state violence to bring populations to heal.
- Relegation of Islam to a private affair with little relevance to the political order.

- Decoupling of the operational side of the state from a sense of righteous and inclusive community.
- Total defeat of Somalis by turning them into subjects of five different colonial administrations

Nearly half a century after the consolidation of colonialism, nationalist forces taking the inspiration from the heroism of the Dervish movement of Sayyid Mohamed Abdille Hassan, a general awakening of other subjugated societies, and emboldened by a moral as well as material weakening of the colonial metropole due to the circumstances surrounding the Second World War, won their campaign for independence. Precisely, on July 1, 1960, British Somaliland and Italian Somalia joined together to become the new Somali Republic, leaving the other three (Djibouti, the Ogaden, and the NFD) under foreign rule.

3.2.2. The post-colonial state

Typical of African decolonization, the Somali post-colonial state came into the world enshrouded in sharp contradictions. On the one hand, it effused a populist temper that promised both a retrieval of collective honor and peoplehood, and a quick march towards socio-economic development. On the other, there was very little understanding, particularly on the part of the new leadership and regimes, of the complexities of domestic reconstitution, let alone the difficulties inherent in profitably engaging a bi-polar international system.

Within a few years, the glow of independence began to dim. In fact, as early as 1961, signs of regional discontent appeared when a group of mutinous junior military officers from the North took over major towns in Somaliland. In that same year, in a referendum, a majority of the Northerners voted against the constitution which was designed to become the basis of the new polity. On both occasions, a significant component of the northern elite saw the new dispensation as biased towards the South. Looking at the distribution of the senior political leadership, regime portfolios, high echelons of the new bureaucracy and other state apparatuses, and the concentration of most significant decision-making in Mogadishu, the seeds of regional jealousy and suspicion were planted. Furthermore, while investments were made in a few agricultural and educational projects, serious socio-economic development was left on the back burner. Those early years, then, set the basis for three characteristics that will define a considerable part of the civilian tenure of the post-colonial state: relentless competition among a narrow elite over the spoils of state through reckless looting of a very precarious economy; fixation on liberating the other three Somali territories; and desperate search for international patrons that will supply both economic and military aid.

Obsession with winning a seat in parliament turned electoral polities into a fractious business in which over 60 parties were registered for 123 seats in 1969. Further, office-holding became a license for indulgence in *musuq maasaq*, that is, corruption and unethical behavior. The second item made the population somewhat schizophrenic in that the very regimes that were so offensive to them were, in the same breath, asking of them to mobilize selflessly for a continuation of the nationalist struggle. The third issue set Somalia on its reputation as beggar nation, heavily reliant on external contributions to both the annual budget and the financing of development expenditures. It also drove the whole region into the vortex of superpower competition. By 1969, nine years of civilian *musuq maasaq* culminated in the assassination of President Sharmarke, testimony to the widening gulf between the state and society. A few days later, the military stepped in.

General Siyaad Barre's regime's tenure (1969-90) can be divided into two broad periods: 1969-79 and 1980-90. Siyaad Barre and his cohorts (The Somali Revolutionary Council) came to power with the promise of eliminating corruption, rebuilding of the economy and social institutions, returning to a genuine democratic governance, and a re-enchantment of the sense of national purpose. The first few years were notable for a number of bold initiatives. For instance, an official orthography was set for the Somali language, accompanied by a successful literacy campaign. New

schools and roads were built, cooperative farms were established, and laws affirming the equality of women were introduced. All in all, despite an expansive nationalization of economic activity and the public shooting of two very senior SRC colleagues of Siyaad Barre and ten theologians, the regime enjoyed a modicum of popularity up to the middle of the decade.

The years from 1975 to 1978 were determinative. Nationalization bred incompetence and inefficiencies that began to enervate productivity and transactions, compelling many to withdraw from the official economy. Relationship with the Soviet Union and its allies had developed to a tighter embrace, with more military equipment pouring into Somalia and, in the process, creating one of the largest armed forces in Black Africa. Further, the rhetoric about democracy began to wear thin and voices of dissent started to speak about what they saw as the emergence of a harsh state and sycophantic politics. By mid-1977, with the Ethiopian regime of Col. Mengistu still reeling from gruesome internal power struggles, Somali forces in combination with guerrillas of the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) regime mounted a surprise and initially successful attack on the Somali inhabited region of Ethiopia. They captured almost all of the Ogaden, except the three large cities of Jigjiga, Harar, and Dire Dawa. By early 1978, the Soviets had shifted their allegiance to Ethiopia. Together with Cuban and South Yemeni troops and new Soviet weapons, the Ethiopians counter attacked.

Within a short time, the Somalis were decimated and then compelled to withdraw. By all accounts, the cost was enormous. In addition to the loss of thousands of lives, the war generated high inflation, as well as made the face of state power more militaristic. In the wake of intense recriminations that followed, a group of military officers staged a bloody but unsuccessful coup. 1979 closed with no external patron, deteriorating economic conditions, large refugee populations, serious damage to regime credibility, and the appearance of organized dissidence claiming the loyalties of their respective kin groups. Siyaad Barre and the regime responded by manipulating kin-based identities and, worse than the colonial administrations, pitted one segment of society against another, while the state was turned into a fortress. At this juncture, the Somali state clearly showed the same maladies that Clapham identified in many countries in the continent.

> The rapid increase in the militarization of Sub-Saharan Africa from the mid-1970s onwards was a response, not simply to external developments, but to the desperate attempts of autocratic states to impose themselves on increasingly rebellious populations. The result, generally speaking, was to accelerate the process of state decay, while vastly increasing the cost in human suffering.[23]

The period from 1980 to 1990 was the decade of real decay, unprecedented repression, civil war, and final dissolution. Despite aid from the new Reagan administration, including military training and supplies, the economy got worse.[24] Here, the most onerous of the burdens fell on the farming communities of the lands in between and adjacent to the Shabelle and Juba Rivers. For instance, tensions between customary land tenure and post-colonial state interventions in the form of leaseholding became acute. In addition, as the urban economy - including salaries and other amenities from state offices - declined precipitously, political power was deployed to arbitrarily grab a piece of land in these riverine zones. In many situations, this was tantamount to a full dispossession of the tillers of the land whose generations of intensive labor made these regions into the most productive parts of Somalia.[25] But economic suffering was not limited to the southern regions. In many parts of North, a growing privatization of the common range, more permanent settlements and supervision of communal practices of land use had pressed hard on the environment. In addition, by the end of the 1980s a combination of highly top-heavy state decisions, mounting and commodified economic activities, and changing habits of everyday life had created new and dramatic circumstances. An extensive study in the Erigavo District underscores these transformations. It is worthy of extensive quotation.

> The development of a cash economy, coupled with the remittances from the Gulf in terms of goods-in-kind for animals sold there, has meant that the average pastoralist now has greater access to consumer items such as mass-produced cooking utensils and clothing. Also now more readily available are substitute foods, in particular white flour and white rice. The pastoral women claimed that to a large extent these new foods were substituted for their traditional diet, based on meat and sorghum. This change in customary diet, while convenient for pastoralists as the new foods can be easily stored and transported, had a negative nutritional impact. The new foods are significantly lower in iron and the B vitamins than the traditional meat and sorghum diet... The Erigavo District has the dubious distinction of recording one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, a trend which could be markedly reversed if a return to the traditional diet could be achieved.[26]

New IMF structural adjustment policies triggered the devaluation of the shilling by more than 90 percent, further cutbacks on state employment and social spending, and worsening trade balance. In 1985, the national debt climbed to the tune of $1 billion. Further, armed dissidents started to mount guerrilla-style challenges, crippling the reach of the authority of the state. The momentous year was 1988 when the forces of the Somali National Movement (SNM) crossed from their bases in Ethiopia and fought their way into some of the major centers in northern Somali, including Hargeisa. A fierce engagement ensued in which the full military weight of the state was unleashed on Isaaq inhabited zones of the region. Tens of thousands were killed, two of the towns destroyed - Hargeisa with the help of aerial bombardment - and hundreds of thousands hurried across the border in search of refuge in Ethiopia.

These events awakened the world to what was happening in Somalia. Consequently, international aid, including nearly $680 million from the United States, began to dry up, further isolating the regime. In 1989, rebellion spread to many areas of the South. Siyaad Barre, in a last-ditch effort to salvage his authority, sent more weapons to his kin and cronies while, at the same time, doubling his efforts to weaken the opposition through greater exploitation of lineage differences. By the end of the year, the capital and a few other urban centers were under the effective rule of the regime.

In January 1991, Mogadishu itself exploded. After a month of hand-to-hand combat between the last remnants of the new fully clanized Somali army and the forces of United Somali Congress (USC) who had a large following in the capital, the regime expired. Tens of thousands died, and Siyaad Barre escaped to the territory of his kin, leaving behind a ruined country and people.

3.2.3. Hobbesian time

The period from 1991 to the present could be best characterized as years of misanthropy, blood-letting, greater destruction of whatever was left of the elements of the state, massive and concentrated starvation, break-up of the North and South, failed international intervention, continuing exodus from the country, and a generalized existential bleakness, especially for the majority inside the country.

As soon as Siyaad Barre fled, the leader of the civilian wing of the USC, Ali Mahdi Mohamed, was declared the interim president. Two immediate consequences followed: (1) General Aideed, the chairman of the USC and commander of their fighting forces was quick to anathematize the act as an unwarranted and unilateral power grab, and (2) he threw a gauntlet by announcing himself to be the rightful person to assume the office. These developments destabilized the already fragile alliance within the Hawiye lineage group, who was predominant around the environs of the capital. In the meantime, other armed organizations, or *Jabhad*, around the country, of which there were no less than a dozen, made their own counter claims. Personal ambition, combined with assumed

representation of local interests, and the disappearance of central authority gave aspiring individuals confidence to press for any advantage.

To compress, in quick time other developments transpired. First, some of the better-organized and armed kin groups declared war on the USC and, subsequently, helped spread the post-Siyaad Barre atrocities to many areas of the South. Second, the SNM proclaimed the northern region a new sovereign state - the Republic of Somaliland. Third, Mogadishu entered its second and longest phase of mayhem and savagery. Since the capital was the premium, the Mahdi and Aideed forces went at each other with unrestrained ferocity. Simultaneously, tens of thousands of armed hungry men and derelict youth gangs roamed the streets and neighborhoods, pillaging with great abandon. Fourth, hundreds of thousands were made destitute and displaced, causing greater movements of people inside the country and across the borders to the neighboring countries and beyond. Fifth, with total lack of security and disruption of economic activities, particularly in the agricultural zones of the South, widespread hunger turned into a carnival of starvation.

Offended and alarmed by vivid pictures of suffering and grim news from Somalia, in early December of 1992, a multinational force of over 34,000 troops, of which 24,000 were Americans, landed on the beaches of Mogadishu. By mid-1993, the immediate goal of delivering food to the starving was accomplished. However, other objectives like disarmament of clan militias, inception of national dialogue, and rebuilding of basic public institutions proved very difficult.

The United Nations, which took over the command of the multinational forces as well as the political mission, convened a number of high-profile conferences among the more than one dozen factions and a few representatives from other segments of the society. While these meetings came to be generally known for bizarre disagreements and petty jealousies among the participants, General Aideed became the most obdurate of them all. In addition, during the summer and autumn of 1993, two ugly and jarring events took place. First, on June 5, twenty-two Pakistani UN soldiers were ambushed and killed. Second, in early October, eighteen U.S. troops were killed and more wounded, while dozens of Somalis lost their lives. The day after, the body of one of the dead Americans was dragged through the streets. In the wake of all of this, a general consensus was reached that Somalis had their chance and, therefore, they should be left to their own devices. President Clinton set March 31, 1994, for complete American withdrawal, with the UN mandate to end soon after.

To date, Somalia is little more than a geographical territory. This judgment could be challenged on at least three fronts. First, while old Somalia is no more, there are now new political identities that have risen in the wake of the decomposition. Foremost is the self-proclaimed Somaliland Republic. Proponents of this new entity argue that since the declaration of secession in Burao in May 1991, a slow rebuilding of consensus among the kin groups of the region has resulted in a peaceful coexistence, order, and the creation of a form of governance characterized by executive and legislative branches that reflect the various kin communities.[27] In the eyes of such commentators, the only obstacle to Somaliland's entry into the universe of sovereign states is the reluctance of the rest of the world to acknowledge that reality. The second voice belongs to those who highlight the appearance of local administrative organs in other regions, perhaps best instantiated by the Northeast.[28] Here, it is remarked that a modicum of law, provision of social services, albeit minimum, and a functioning market are visible. Third are those who would point to the latest concordance signed in Cairo, Egypt.[29] This announcement states that after a month of negotiations, leaders of clanistic factions agreed on the restoration of a government of national unity. More specifically, the accord stipulates (a) the convening of a general meeting to be attended by 465 delegates representing different kin groups, and (b) the setting up of a three-year transitional authority to be followed by a national government. All of these would be preceded by the immediate suspension of armed operations and the reopening of Mogadishu's air- and seaports.

At the first blush, all three interventions are noteworthy. However, I suggest that none of them

truly undermines the validity of my assertion. Let me start with the Northwest, i.e., Somaliland. It is a fact that a modus vivendi had been established among kin communities in the region to contain any danger of full-scale descent into deadly fissures similar to those in the South. It is also true that a skeleton of governmental structures has been mounted, including an 'elected' president. But these rather positive developments do not obviate deeper maladies and failures that vitiate any hope that the Northwest might become a model for the rest of the country. A couple of issues would suffice to make the point.

First, the claim of separateness and sovereignty was never put to the test of the will of the region's people. On the contrary, based solely on rather maladroit and extremely hurried declaration in a small gathering in the town of Burao, the legitimacy of the act as well as the wisdom behind it continue to be, in the eyes of some Northerners, never mind the rest of Somalia and the world, a major problem. This is not so much a question of a break-up of an African state as it is an issue of democratic procedure and practice. For many, including some sympathetic to the cause, the Eritrean experience seems exemplary and instructive in this regard.

But even if one accepts the announcement of Somaliland as a new nation-state, there is precious little to show for nearly seven years of the go-it-alone policy. For example, domestic efforts toward institution-building are crippled by a chronic lack of competent political leadership and managerial cadres, worsened by a continuing flight of talent. Outside of the immediate moment, the 'big men' of Somaliland have yet to make any constructive contributions to the necessary thinking that must be undertaken to move Somalia beyond the stalemated peccancy. Further afield, in the international arena, no other nation has yet been persuaded to show sustained interest, let alone extend diplomatic recognition. To be sure, no one should underestimate the difficulty of the assignment, particularly at a time of international suspicion toward ethnic nationalism. Nonetheless, the failure seems to underscore more the absence of any strategic calculations as well as tactical intelligence.[30]

In brief, it is undeniable that many in the northwestern region count their blessings for the relative degree of peacefulness in the area - thanks to the tireless work of kin elders. This is a major gain in the context of contemporary Somalia. But, unfortunately, beneath this gain is a growing realization that the project of sovereignty looks less and less a promised land and more and more a dead-end trap.[31] Consequently, while politicians in Hargeisa busy themselves with the heavy chewing of Qat and the design of tricks to corner the meager local revenues (e.g., Berbera Port import/export taxes) and external aid, the people of the region add yet another cruel disappointment to their sad lives.

Northeastern Somalia did not act the same toward the issue of national unity. Rather, the idiom of politics there, despite internal refractions, has stayed within the fold of one Somalia. This is a crucial point. Moreover, it is the case that a semblance of peace prevails. However, some of the same liabilities that bedevil the Northwest are equally present here, too: fractious and wasteful jostling among political and religious egos; hardly any firm structure of legitimate authority or effective bureaucracy; and, most of all, no discernible effort to move national reconstitution forward. As an immediate case in point, some of the region's self-declared 'big men', including Colonel Abdillahi Yusuf, abandoned the conference in Cairo.

It is reasonable to give a chance to this most recent of initiatives. But it is equally understandable to cast doubts over its ultimate success. First, to continue to assume the primacy of armed factions' leaders as key in any deliberations on the long-term welfare of the Somali people has, over the past six years, proven to be disastrous. In fact, this habit seems to compound one of the factors that torments Somali society - the petty imperiousness and dysfunctional ambitions of those with the narrowest visions, the loudest and rudest clangor, and the meanest behavior that constantly highjack the agenda.[32] Second, despite the fact that half a decade of strife and fragmentation has largely decentered Mogadishu as the focal point of life, the personal and cliquish

in-fighting between the Aideed and Mahdi camps continues to be interpreted as the paramount act of Somalia's drama. This is particularly misleading in the wake of the death of General Aideed.

In the end, sonorous declarations by individuals, a kin group, or even a whole region notwithstanding, Stephen Ellis is still right to declare that Somalia has 'no president or cabinet, no national army or police, no national system of justice, no national system of piped water, electricity or telephones'.[33] In addition to this extensive destruction of the operational side of the state, I must hasten to add the exhaustion of any sense of civic community. In my opinion, then, all of these factors add up to a stunning conclusion: the Somalis are the first to smash the post-colonial state without putting anything in its place. These days, here and there, one hears Somali whispers, spoken with a sense of defeat and shame, that seem to echo the dire words of Vico, uttered so long ago.

> If the peoples are rotting in that ultimate civil disease and cannot agree on a monarch from within, and are not conquered and preserved by better nations from without, then providence for their extreme ill has its extreme remedy at hand.[34]

4. The state: a surrogate *umma*

No one denies the fact that there has been and continues to be a staggering volume of communal strife in many parts of contemporary Africa. There is no gainsaying too that the virulence and intensity of these conflagrations have become a debilitating undertow in the continent's effort towards development. But an acknowledgement of these grave troubles need not become a new license for old and recharged stereotypes of Africa as an eternally dark universe, cursed with crude and perpetual bloodletting.

On the contrary, my arguments from Somalia underscore both the complexity and historicity of such situations. This is a confirmation of Claude Ake's astute proposition that 'ethnicity is not a fossilized determination but a living presence produced and driven by material and historical forces'.[35] To be sure, kin identities are a mechanism for immediate intersubjectivities called forth by the yearning for belonging. However, they are also scaffolds for critical social institutions. In the most regular of periods, pressing contingencies of life are bound to affect both the spirit of a community and its practices. But in times of extraordinary interruptions, particularly those that carry accumulated contradictions, the very foundations of the society are severely tested, with the likelihood of the appearance of multiple diremptions.

The Somali catastrophe manifests itself most acutely in the death of public power. Therefore, any serious attempt at restoration of civic identity and productive coexistence must attend to the remaking of the state - a national state. Michael Ignatieff writes,

> The reliable antidote to ethnic nationalism turns out to be civic nationalism, because the only guarantee that ethnic groups will live side by side in peace is shared loyalty to a state strong enough, fair enough, equitable enough to command their obedience.[36]

This reasoning has no truck with the thinking that suggests that Somali society is doomed to 'radical localization' and, thus, the international community must accept and 'work with this stateless political reality'.[37] My position is this: few Somalis regret the shattering of the post-colonial state - particularly in its militaristic guise - however, the vast majority, like other human beings around the world, wish for a national governance that can act on their well-being (e.g., basic security, human and economic development, planning for the future, competent management of international affairs). 'Radical localism' is, as the Somalis frequently say, nothing more than a measure of the desperation caused by the acute fear associated with the disappearance of legitimate public authority. In Somalia, then,

> it is hardly possible to exaggerate the desire of ordinary rural people for continued peace and the responsibilities in this regard which they place upon people of influence.

> They know that only with peace can come proper returns on their continued industry, and also the other prize: appropriate aid.[38]

But what does one mean by the state, and how might the project of reconstitution begin? It is of utmost importance not to reduce the state, as is normally done, to just centralized power. In my conception, the state can only be a resource for the unavoidable revival of *Umma* when it is seen as four concatenating moments or sites, each with its own specific functions. Brought symphonically together, they make a strong basis for a viable polity. As I have argued elsewhere, these are: leader, regime, government, and collective consciousness.[39] Leader is the person most visibly identified with authority (chief executive); regime denotes the cluster of lesser but powerful individuals around the leader who occupy major portfolios; government is the apparatuses of administration (e.g., civil service, police and army, courts); and, finally, the collective imaginary is the shared understanding of 'we', or what Ibn Khaldun long ago called *Asabiyah*. It is common knowledge now that in Somalia all four moments are no more or highly damaged. Consequently, politics among the Somalis is best characterized as the triumph of extreme fortuna - that is, degenerative small-mindedness and civic entropy.

I propose, then, that the ascent from fortuna must begin with a reclamation of virtue - that is, practical wisdom and moral goodness. A first step in that direction necessitates a linking of the imperatives of survival and the restocking of common symbols that had worked before for so long,[40] as well as the invention of new ones fitting to the needs of the age. If kin culture and Islamic precepts were the anvils on which the old *Umma* was forged, any serious discussion of a new polity will have to begin with an extensive exploration of this cultural hinterland. 'For the past', E. P. Thompson tells us, 'is not just dead, inert, confining; it carries signs and evidence also of creative resources which can sustain the present and prefigure possibility'.[41]

This is not a call for the restoration of a vanished world of tradition, or to hold on to values that have lost their vibrancy; this is neither possible nor enough. On the contrary, to set the foundations for a shared form of regenerative social and civic life, a modernist version of reason, democracy, law, and competence must be injected. This requires the application of critical intelligence to craft an experimental - i.e., potentially corrigible - politics facilitative of recovery and origination.

Such is the difficult task of reclamation and synthesis that awaits Somalis; and they are in no shape yet to articulate it, let alone execute it, by themselves. An international community that understands the magnitude of the project, maintains genuine patience coupled with a no-nonsense attitude towards performance and results, and, above all, shows willingness to commit solidarity and resources for the long haul is indispensable.

5. A note on diaspora

While Somalis of the present carry the sole notoriety of killing the post-colonial state, by no means are they the first to leave home in great numbers and seek refuge in other near and distant lands. As a matter of fact, among the Somalis of the early and mid-twentieth century, a mixture of ambition and adventure called *tacabir* took some of them to the oceans and a few far away destinations. As a result, they found small communities in such diverse places as Aden, Rome, London, and New York. In those days, however, even among the most restless, there was a sense of confidence and anticipation of an eventual return to relatively stable communities.

Obviously, there are drastic differences between the age of *tacabir* and the present: the condition of the homeland (push factors), the quantity of those who have left and the range of their dispersion, and the type and quality of these departees. As I have urged in this essay and other works, unlike the earlier time, the current era is exceptional in terms of severity and velocity of the factors that have compelled Somalis to decamp. A shrinkage of the means of existence and subsequent deepening of pauperism on a mass scale, the destruction of macro political institutions

and a hemorrhaging of social and cultural norms have all merged to produce a context of both swift deterioration of quality of living and high existential anguish. The upshot is a profound sense of unprecedented hopelessness about Somalia's future. This, then, is the age of *qaxooti*, or desperation and exodus - one in which, beyond lingering and understandable sentiments, there is precious little preoccupation with a return, at least in the near time, to what is often referred to as a godforsaken place.[42]

The second issue concerns the numbers of those in flight. There are no precise figures for either the aggregate or the distribution, but the largest concentrations are to be found in such places as Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen, Italy, Britain and northern Europe, Canada, and the United States. Smaller scatterings are reported in dozens of other places, including the antipodes of Australia and New Zealand. Added together, there could be as many as half a million Somalis living outside Somalia - some in refugee camps and others very slowly getting integrated into their new countries. Furthermore, though the figures are down from the early and mid-1990s, when breathless intensity of violence and confusion were most rampant, it is important to point out that Somalis still exit in discernable numbers.

Third, the profile of fleeing Somalis is more complex, comprehensive, and damaging. Everywhere, these populations include both genders, all ages, most classes, the highly educated and the illiterate, urban and rural, and from all regions. But I hasten to add this qualification: despite the generalized exodus, the numbers are still dominated by those from cities and towns, and the relatively skilled. Peasants, pastoralists, and the lumpen proletariat, still the bulk of Somalis, continue to battle it out inside the country. Be that as it may, the magnitude and consequences of this fact cannot be underestimated. Indeed, this was brought home to me during a recent conversation with a fresh contingent from both the southern and northern zones. Unanimously, they stressed the debilitating effect of elite depletion, or the loss of, in W.E.B. DuBois' pithy phrase, 'the talented tenth', as one of the greatest damages left behind by the catastrophe. In fact, one of the group, a woman of some standing in her community, put it bluntly: 'The country is totally crippled and for a long time, there is hardly anyone left except the *harameh* (weeds)!'

Given the relatively large populations already in many regions of the world, as well as the continuation, at some level, of further arrivals, perhaps now additionally stimulated by calls from kin resident outside, the work of creating diasporic communities comes into view. This is the next stage after resettlement. To initiate the transformation from isolation or marginality, sustained only by the pity of the hosts, to a full and dignified membership in a larger multicultural society, Somalis of the diaspora must face up to the challenge of cosmopolitanism. In its bare bones, this undertaking is tantamount to a successful crafting of a mode of living and self-definition that are equally at home as a Somali/African and an aspiring citizen of the new country. If such a remaking of self and community is unavoidable, what, we may ask, must be done? I suggest that a first step is to realize that, neither in the broad sweep of human history nor in the contemporary era, are major dislocations of peoples uncommon. Examples of earlier waves include numerous Europeans who fled the harsh circumstances of their respective countries to begin again in other regions of the world. Here, one could add the Chinese in other parts of Asia, the Indians in the Caribbean and Africa, and the Japanese who have established in Brazil the largest and a prosperous diasporic community outside of their original islands. In our own unfortunate time, one can point to the plight of the Vietnamese, Salvadorans, and Nicaraguans. This myriad of old and new experiences, then, is full of inspiring achievements in the face of difficult and alien circumstances; they are worthy of disciplined study and emulation. Otherwise, privileging the Somali situation is liable to retrogress into perpetual forlornness and vagrancy.[43] A second act is to come to terms with the, admittedly painful, truth that the dismal fortunes of Somalia will not improve for a long, long time - making any eventual return a prohibitive proposition. And even if that day may not be as distant as I intimate here, one would still need greater capacities and reformulated intersubjectivity to make

the return into a qualitatively superior venture. It follows, thirdly, that one must undertake a thorough critique (i.e., debate with self and others) of Somali traditions and contemporary culture. The main objective is to affirm what could be valuable under the ordinance of the new time and tasks, as well as to shed what has proven to be or could be a liability. In due course, such an activity, if it catches on, will necessitate structure and organization. A fourth step is a serious appreciation that even in the most hospitable countries, real opportunities are created by the application of intelligence, will, and self-reliance. Dependency and parasitism, worrisome features of modern Somali behavior, are a quick way to the bottom and to the demeaning stereotypes that accompany such a condition. Fifth and finally, a calculated attempt to master the quotidian vicissitudes of the new reality and a persistent engagement with the inner logic of its culture are imperative. Typical of these endeavors are command over the language(s) and familiarity with the rules, ethics, and values of the host society.

To conclude, to form a diasporic community implies leaving behind the trauma and stigmatic helplessness of a refugee. The cultivation of a cosmopolitan outlook is key to such a project; it is a prerequisite for the necessary synthesis between what is ennobling of the Somali tradition and what is enabling of the new ambience. If those who remain in Somalia are condemned to radically recompose themselves in order to quest for a future different than the riven present, those of us outside are equally confronted with the inescapable test of productive adaptation. In both cases, only through a reinvention of self and the other, in pursuit of new collective identities, can Somalis move to a subjecthood that might measure up to the exacting demands of the age.

Notes and References

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[1] Judgment of a Western diplomat approvingly quoted in Jonathan Stevenson, Losing Mogadishu: Testing U.S. Policy in Somalia (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1995).

[2] A traditional Somali proverb that accents the unavoidability of rightness even in the teeth of battle with the enemy. This sense of judiciousness is akin to Justinian's that instructs 'the firm and continuous desire to render to everyone that which is his due'.

[3] A measure of how dispersed the fleeing Somalis have become was brought home to me in July 1996. While attending the annual Foreign Policy School at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand, I met two young Somalis. They told me that they had arrived in the country a year before as refugees and were both attending the university part-time, as well as working in a meat-packing factory in Invercagill, the southernmost city of the South Island, where a few Somali families had recently settled. Geographically speaking, beyond Invercagill is nothing but the vast desolation and deep freeze of Antarctica. Moreover, it was related to me at the moment of this writing that, outside of the Horn of Africa, the country with the highest per capita of Somali refugees is Finland!

[4] M. Lewis, *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society* (Lawrenceville, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 1994), 233. Also, *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics Among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); *Peoples of the Horn of Africa* (London: International African Institute, 1955); 'The Nation, State, and Politics in Somalis' in *The Search for National Integration in Africa*, ed. R. Smock and K. Beusti-Enchill (New York: Free Press, 1976); 'The Politics of the Somali Coup' *in Journal of Modern African Studies* 10, no. 3 (1972); 'Somalia: Nationalism Turned Inside Out' *in Middle East Research*

Information Projects Reports, no. 106 (June 1982); *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa* (London: Longman, 1980), 'Misunderstanding the Somali Crisis' in *Anthropology Today* 9, no. 4 (1993); and *Understanding Somalia: Guide to Culture, History and Social Institutions* (London: Haan Associates, 1993). In another even more recent occasion, Lewis writes, 'Somalia is both riven with conflicts and politically volatile at the best of times, but without the potential safety valve of irredentist enthusiasm, all of these conflicts imploded within the state itself and eventually destroyed it.' And further on, while updating a nineteenth-century traveler, Richard Burton, Lewis thunders, 'without their constantly changing political loyalties - at different levels in the segmentary system - the Somalis lived in what amounted to a state of chronic political schizophrenia, verging on anarchy.' See also James Mayall, in *The New Internationalism 1991-1994: United Nations Experience in Cambodia, Former Yugoslavia and Somalia*, ed. James Mayall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 99-100 and 101, respectively.

[5] A small sample of this echoic literature includes, Said S. Samatar, *Somalia: A Nation in Turmoil* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1991); and Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst, eds., *Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Humanitarian Intervention* (Boulder: Westview, 1997). There are some exceptions in this collection, particularly the piece by Lee Cassanelli. Also, John L. Hirsch and Robert B. Oakley, *Somalia and Operation Restore Hope: Reflections on Peacemaking and Peacekeeping* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1995); John Drysdale, *Whatever Happened to Somalia*: (London: Haan Associates, 1994); Samuel M. Makinda, *Seeking Peace from Chaos: Humanitarian Interventions in Somalia* (London: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1994); Robert G. Patman, 'The UN Operation in Somalia,' *in A Crisis of Expectation: UN Peacekeeping in the 1990s*, ed. Ramesh Thakus and Carlyle A. Thayer (Boulder: Westview, 1995); Allen G. Sens, *Somalia and the Changing Nature of Peacekeeping: The Implications for Canada* (Ottawa: Public Works and Government Service Publishing, 1997). How fixation on the ostensible seminality of clan identity, but founded on little knowledge about Somali society, can lead to gross mistakes is evidenced by this demographic statement by Sens: 'The Darod make up 35 percent of the population, the Hawiye 23 percent, the Isaaq 23 percent, the Dighil and Rahanweyn 11 percent, and the Dir 7 percent.' Two immediate observations here: (1) no one has ever taken any statistical count of different kin groups and, for that matter, reliable statistics on the whole Somali population are non-existent; and (2) putting forth such a statement, particularly by official agencies and governments, in a time of great contestation over the very existence of Somali people, pours more proverbial fuel into an already blazing fire. This is one of the ways in which even ordinary communal frictions could be turned into explosive tensions and, consequently, 'tribal' conflagrations.

[6] Virginia Luling, 'Come Back Somalia? Questioning a Collapsed State', in *Third World Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1997): 300.

[7] This perversion of the good Samaritan spirit, a cornerstone of genuine help to the needy, is not limited to the specific concerns of this paper. For a report at once revealing and devastating, see Michael Maren, *The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and Interventional Charity* (New York: The Free Press, 1997).

[8] *Mooryaan* is an epithet assigned to lawless, armed, and predatory young uneducated men that have been a common feature of urban life (especially in Mogadishu), particularly after the death of the Somali state and the inception of full-scale civil strife.

[9] To appreciate how much cynosures of Somali hopes are foreign actors in the current drama, it is worth to note this statement from a non-Somali analyst. 'For Somalis', observes Kenneth Menkhaus, 'the real external power broker has become the European Commission, which, armed with a large budget and an extensive team of European technical advisers and consultant, constitutes a virtual surrogate government based in Nairobi, Kenya.' Ken Menkhaus, 'U.S. Foreign

Assistance to Somali; Phoenix from the Ashes' in *Middle East Policy*, no. 5 (1997): 14.

[10] Jonathan Stevenson, *Losing Mogadishu: Testing U.S. Policy in Somalia* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 1. Also, Hazel M. Mcferson asserts that, '[A]mong the Somalis, force and the threat of force are always present, and violence is an institutionalized and socially approved means of settling disputes.' Mcferson, 'Rethinking Ethnic Conflict' in *American Behavioral Scientist* 40, no. 1 (1996): 3.

[11] Ibid., 3.

[12] David Laitin, 'Political Crisis in Somalia' in *Horn of Africa* 5, no. 2 (1982); Jama Mohamed Ghalib, *The Cost of Dictatorship: The Somali Experience* (New York: Lilian Barber Press, 1995), Abdisalam M. Issa-Salwe, *The Collapse of the Somali State: The Impact of the Colonial Legacy* (London: Haan Associates, 1994); Mohamed Osman Omer, *The Road to Zero: Somalia's Self-Destruction* (London: Haan Associates, 1992); Ali Khalif Galaydh, 'Democratic Practice and Breakdown in Somalia', in *Democracy and Pluralism in Africa*, ed. Dov Rowen (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1986); Mohamud A. Jama, 'The Destruction of the Somali State: Causes, Costs and Lessons', in *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st Century*, ed. Hussein M. Adam and Richard Ford (Lawrenceville, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1997); Ali Jimale Ahmed, *Daybreak is Near: Literature, Clans and the Nation-State in Somalia* (Lawrenceville, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1996); Nurrudin Farah, *Sweet and Sour Milk* (London: Allison and Busby, 1979), *Sardines* (London: Allison and Busby, 1981), and *Close Sesame* (London: Allison and Busby, 1983); Hassan Ali Mirreh, 'On Providing for the Future', in *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?* ed. Ahmed I. Samatar (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), and Hussein Adam, 'Somalia: Militarism, Warlordism, or Democracy', in *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 54 (1992).

[13] Mohamed Haji Mukhtar asserts that nomadic groups 'are belligerent, less law abiding, arrogant, destructive, and look down on any profession except herding', in Ali Jimale Ahmed, ed., *The Invention of Somalia* (Lawrenceville, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1995), 17; and 'Between Self-Determination and Chaos', in *Mending Rips in the Sky*. Also, see Omar A. Eno, 'The Untold Apartheid Imposed on the Bantu/Jarer People in Somalia' and Amina Sharif Hassan, 'Somalis: The Forgotten People', in *Mending Rips in the Sky*.

[14] Marina Ottaway, *Soviet and American Influence in the Horn of Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1982); Robert G. Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa: The Diplomacy of Intervention and Disengagement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Jeffrey A. Lefevre, *Arms for the Horn: U.S. Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia 1953-1991* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991). Lefevre writes: 'Uninterrupted access to large quantities of high-quality weapons, preferably with minimum political restrictions, was considered a sine qua non for the attainment of Ethiopia's and Somalia's security objectives. For this reason, outside power, particularly the superpowers, have been welcomed intruders in the Horn.' (p. 41) Also, William J. Foltz and Henry S. Bienen, *Arms and the African: Military Influences on Africa's International Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Assefaw Bariagaber, 'The United Nations and Somalia: An Examination of a Collective Clientelist Relationship' in *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 3, no. 4 (1996); and S. J. Hamrick, 'The Myth of Somalia as Cold War Victim' in *Foreign Service Journal* (February 1993).

[15] A highly emphasized element of the new Reagan Administration was the importance of unequivocal return to the days when America's global interest always superseded those of local/regional concerns. In other words, the moving force of international affairs was the global contest between the USA and the USSR. Accordingly, events should be always interpreted in that context. For a good exposition of this, see Robert Tucker, 'Reagan's Foreign Policy' in *Foreign*

Affairs 68 (1988/89).

[16] Ken Menkhaus and John Prendergast, 'Governance and Economic Survival in Postintervention Somalia' in *CSIS Africa Notes*, no. 172 (May 1995). David Rawson, in a cogent essay, stresses the paramount role of internal elite dynamics and Siyaad Barre's 'autocracy', but, nonetheless, identifies superpower pressure as a 'critical' factor. Commenting on United States' interests in the 1980s, he tells us:

> For its part, the United States sought those different security objectives from the Somali partnership. One was to counter growing soviet influence in the Horn by demonstration willingness to engage on the African continent "without building up threatening forces." Another was to guard the Strait of Babel Mandeb, thus expanding the projection of U.S. power in the Persian Gulf area into the Gulf of Aden and the Lower Red Sea. The third security objective was to provide a rare-echelon support for the operations of the U.S. Rapid Deployment Force to put out local fires in the Middle East. (David Rawson, 'Dealing with Disintegration: U.S. Assistance and the Somali State', in *The Somali Challenge*, 162.)

[17] This section of the paper borrows heavily from my 'The Death of a State, and Other Reflections', in *State and Sovereignty: Is the State in Retreat?* ed. G. A. Wood and L. S. Leland, Jr. (Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Press, 1997).

[18] Mohamed Said Samantar, 'Theoretical and Practical Frameworks of Analysis of Pastoral Common Property Regimes in Somali.' A paper presented at the conference 'Reinventing the Commons' in Norway, May 1995. Lidwien Kapteijns identifies four major functional values of the ideology of kinship: (a) access to the means of production; (b) structural division of labor; (c) basis for acquisition and deployment of political authority; and (d) a directive for marital relations as well as general conduct among women and men. In a brilliant article that helped change the theoretical debates on traditional and contemporary Somali society, Kapteijns states, 'The ideology of kinship was the ideology of a community of producers in which reciprocity (in the context of gender and age-group inequalities) was central. Clanism is the ideology of a community of parasites situated at the periphery of the capitalist economy.' Lidwien Kapteijns, 'Gender Relations and the Transformation of Northern Somali Pastoral Tradition' in *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, no. 2 (1995): 258.

[19] On this topic and the impact on the continent, see Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[20] Ahmed I. Samatar, *Socialist Somalia: Rhetoric and Reality* (London: Zed Books, 1988), Chapter One.

[21] Ibid., 11-41.

[22] Kapteijns retrieves this instructive internal statement from British colonial records. 'We must therefore endeavor to arrest the process of detribalization by restoring the influence and authority of the tribal Chiefs and Headman... We must pick out the really influential men.' Lidwien Kapteijns, 'Women and the Crisis of Communal Identity', in *The Somali Challenge*, 231. For experiences from some other parts of Africa, see René Lemarchand, 'The Apocalypse in Rwanda' in *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (Summer 1994), and Catherine Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). Also, John R. Brown, 'The Myth of Global Conflict' in *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 2 (1996).

[23] Christopher Clapham, 'Democratization in Africa: Obstacles and Prospects' in *Third World Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1993).

[24] Abdalla Jamil Mubarak, *From Bad Policy to Chaos in Somalia: How an Economy Fell Apart* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996

[25] There is an impressive scholarship that is emerging on the issue of land, class, state and identity in the agricultural areas of southern Somalia. Notable works include Catherine Besteman and Lee V. Cassanelli, eds., The Struggle for Land in Southern Somalia: The War Behind the War (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996); Catherine Besteman, 'Land Tenure, Social Power and the Legacy of Slavery in Southern Somalia' (Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 1991), and 'Violent Politics and the Politics of Violence: The Dissolution of the Somali Nation-State' *in American Ethnologist* 23, no. 3 (1996); Rakiya Omaar and Alex de Waal, *Land Tenure, the Creation of Famine, and Prospects for Peace in Somalia* (London: Africa Rights, Discussion Paper, no. 1, October 1993); Kenneth Menkhaus, 'Rural Transformation and the Roots of Underdevelopment in Somali's Lower Jubba Valley' (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1989); Michael Roth, 'Somali Land Policies and Tenure Impacts: The Case of the Lower Shebelle', *in Land in African Agrarian Systems*, ed. Thomas J. Bassett and Donald E. Crummey (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1993). These publications and those of scholars like Abdi I. Samatar, Lidwein Kapteijns, and Peter Little add up to what might be identified as a sixth and critical perspective that speaks to articulations of spheres of existence and accentuates the primacy of struggles over resources and the social cleavages that accompany them. It is a perspective that this author finds a great deal of affinity with; see Abdi I. Samatar, *The State and Rural Transformation in Northern Somalia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 'Structural Adjustment as Development Strategy?: Bananas, Boom and Poverty in Somalia' in *Economic Geography* 69, no. 1 (1993), 'Social Classes and Economic Restructuring in Pastoral Africa: The Somali Experience' in *African Studies Review* 35, no. 1 (1987), and 'Merchant Capital, International Livestock Trade, and Pastoral Development in Somalia' in *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 21, no. 3 (1987); and Peter D. Little, *The Elusive Granary: Herder, Farmer, and State in Northern Kenya* (Cambridge, England, and New York: Cambridge University, 1992), 'Conflictive Trade, Contested Identity: The Effects of Export Markets on Pastoralists of Southern Somalia' in *African Studies Review* 39, no. 1 (1996), and *Living Under Contract: Contract Farming and Agrarian Transformation in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. With Michael J. Watts (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, c1994).

[26] Julian Prior, *Pastoral Development Planning* (Oxford: OXFAM, 1994), 66-67.

[27] Hussein M. Adam, 'Hobbes, Locke, Burke, and Ibn Khaldun: Reflections on the Catastrophe in Somalia', in *Mending Rips in the Sky*, 109-11. Ken Menkhaus, 'Somalia, Political Order in a Stateless Society', *Current History* 94, no. 619 (1998); and Rakiya Omaar, 'Somaliland: One Thornbush at a Time, *Current History* 93, no. 583, (May 1994). Omaar's piece makes a few reasoned observations but is bedeviled by a number of erroneous readings of established historical facts and major silences. Here are some examples: (a) no mention of how the corrupt actions of Egal's regime, the last civilian one, and the subsequent mass disillusionment partly generated the enthusiasm with which Somalis received Siyaad Barre's military coup; (b) extraordinary gloss over major disjunctions between SNM's original public promises that vowed to keep the unity of Somali people and the actual policies since 1991; (c) indiscriminate assertion to the effect that all northern non-Isaaq kin-groups were collaborators of the Siyaad Barre regime; (d) presentation of the Isaaq as the *only* actor of notable significance in northwestern Somalia; and (e) no mention of either the many of the top SNM leadership who for years served Siyaad Barre or those Isaaqs who stayed loyal to the regime to its ugly end. Here, it is instructive to point out the fact that, despite the destruction of Burao and the great damage to Hargeisa, the last prime minister appointed by Siyaad Barre was a member of the Isaaq kin-group, Mohamed Hawadleh Madar. Madar, during his brief tenure, is on record to have threatened the residents of Mogadishu with the same treatment which was given to Hargeisa if the USC dissidents did not put down their arms immediately.

For another brief paper of similar tenor but which suffers from even greater shortcomings, see Gerard Prunier, 'Somaliland Goes It Alone', Current History 97, no. 619 (1998). Prunier's most glaring blunder is the portrayal of British colonial rule as 'benign neglect'. This is rather absurd given (a) nearly two decades of bloody Somali resistance that exacted a huge price in human life (a third of the population) and livestock, (b) betrayal of Somali communal sensibilities and unification by rejecting Secretary Bevin's plan to keep the Somali-inhabited areas under its own administration together - the fallout of this decision continues to plague the Somali psyche and political culture to this day; and (c) to assert that 'northern Somali people' were victims of the ''Greater Somalia' dream' and that 'the state for all of Somalia was not the state of all Somali people [but] it was the state of the Italian-trained southerners' is not only factually inaccurate but, more insidiously, adds another 'us' against 'them' in a situation already overloaded with fabricated and self-serving cleavages. In contradistinction, I suggest that there is plenty of evidence to demonstrate that Somalis from all regions (though quantitatively small and uneven) benefited from the windfall of decolonization and the post-colonial moment while, simultaneously, Somalis of all regions (quantitatively larger) suffered in all kinds of ways.

[28] Abdi-asis M. Mohamed, 'How Peace is Maintained in the Northeastern Region', in ibid., 327-32; and James C. McKinley, Jr., 'In One Somali Town, Clan Rule Has Brought Peace', The New York Times, 22 June 1997, 43.

[29] Douglas Jehl, 'Rival Somali Factions Agree to Form a Government', New York Times, 23 December 1997, 3; 'The Cairo Declaration On Somalia', (Cairo, Egypt, 22 December 1997), Stephen Lovgren, 'Somali's Hope for Peace', U.S. News and World Report 124, no. 7 (23 February 1998), and 'The Warlords Make Peace at last: Somalia', The Economist 346, no. 8055 (14 February 1998).

[30] A measure of these limitations is the recent unrehearsed and rather bizarre call by Egal on the United States, France, Saudi Arabia and South Africa 'to set up a state of Somali-inhabited territories in the Horn of Africa'. To date, no one knows either why Egal made this statement or the reasons behind singling out these countries. Moreover, the question at hand is not about Somali-inhabited areas but whether Somalis can step out of their current condition and create a form of governance - i.e., a state - capable of addressing pressing national needs. For more, see AFB news release, 'Somaliland Calls for State of Somali-inhabited Territories', Hargeisa, 3 January 1998. Also, 'All Eyes on Egal', The Indian Ocean Newsletter (May 1997).

[31] For alarming tidings that relate to human rights in the Northwest, see Amnesty International: Somalia Report (London: Amnesty International, 1997).

[32] Abdullah Mohamoud, 'Somalia: A Political Circus', *West Africa* (February 1998): 237.

[33] Stephen Ellis, 'The Strange Life of African States' in *African Insight* 26, no. 1 (1996): 2.

[34] Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (1744; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 423.

[35] Claude Ake, 'What is the Problem of Ethnicity in Africa' in *Transformation* 22 (1993).

[36] Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalisms* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1995), 243.

[37] Ken Menkhaus and John Prendergast, 'Governance and Economic Survival in Post-intervention Somalia' in *CSIS Africa Notes*, no. 172 (May 1995): 1.

[38] Julius Holt and Mark Lawrence, *The Prize of Peace: A Survey of Rural Somaliland* (London: Save the Children, 1992), 56.

[39] Samatar, *The Somali Challenge*, 128-46.

[40] Here, I concur with Dumezil that, 'the function of that particular class of legends known as myths is to express dramatically the ideology under which a society lives; not only to hold out to its conscience the values it recognizes and ideals it pursues from generation to generation, but above all to express its very being and structure, the elements, the connections, the balances that constitute it; to justify the rules and traditional practices without which everything within a society would disintegrate.' George Dumezil, *The Destiny of the Warrior*, trans. A. Hiltebeitel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 3.

[41] E. P. Thompson, 'The Politics of Theory', in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 407-408.

[42] Ikram Hussein, *Teenage Refugees from Somalia Speak Out* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 1997).

[43] A cautionary note: Even for those who succeed in welding together efficacy in the new environment and long distance activism, a nagging sense of impotence might not be easily avoided. 'Exiles talking about the plight of their situation and of the suffering back home', writes Breytenbach, '... are like fish learning to breathe on dry land - there will be much gasping and heaving, but ultimately we are only that: fish on dry land.' Breyten Breytenbach, *The Memory of Birds in Times of Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1996), 101.