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VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF SOMALINESS

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The Three Blind Men and the Elephant: In Search of a Holistic View of Somalia

A comment to Ahmed I. Samatar

1. Starting points

First, let me give you a synopsis of the main points of Ahmed Samatar's fine speech. What I have here is not really a critique of Ahmed's speech, but a modest attempt to contribute to the important debate raised by his talk and, indirectly, by the authors whose works form the basis for his inventory-taking. Ahmed expounds on five perspectives gleaned from books and articles by Somalist scholars. His aim is to sift through the rabble, if rabble there is. These five points are: clanism, psychopathology, militaristic despotism, nomadism vs. sedentariness, and finally, superpower rivalry. After giving us a cursory review of the literature, he delimits the scope of his attention to 'the moment of global attention (1990-1995) [which] did produce a relative plethora of publications'. This relative plethora of publications, Ahmed seems to suggest, is spurred on by the internationalization of the Somali tragedy.

Needless to say that Ahmed's argument does not take into account the burgeoning of publications inside the country. For those publications were not produced as a result of any global attention. By some account, several hundred novels and a great number of socio-political studies were published in the first three years after the abortion of the state. To account for this output, one has to understand something about the nature and extent of state censorship in place. My assumption is that some of these books were already in manuscript form and were only waiting for the opportune time to see the light of day. Here, I am not concerned with the artistic merit of these books; rather, a great number of them was published as a result of the unshackling of the imagination.

Ahmed's argument does not accommodate a contrary view. This is revealed by the structure of his sentence: the moment of global attention did produce a plethora of publications. At face value, my argument would seem much ado about nothing. But as anyone who is steeped in Somali historiography would know, much of what was written of Somalia relied heavily on official texts, both by Somali and non-Somali writers. This official history, both in its colonialist and liberatory disguises, supported its proponents. Ahmed's plethora of books does not take into account the collapse of the old master narrative which dominated both strands in Somali historiography. To account for the stranglehold the old hegemony had on Somali lives, one is forced to initiate a new language that can adequately capture the nuances of some of the books under Ahmed's scrutiny.

Ahmed, however, is not unaware of the effects of hegemony, academic or otherwise, in our lives; rather, his focus is on the sway of anthropology on our lives. He writes, 'Until that time [the academic famine days prior to the early 1980s'], with exception of a few discreetly dissenting views, 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'. See how Ahmed qualifies the famine days of the pre-1980s landscape: academic. Not only was the field of Somali studies academically famished, it was also under the sway of a dictatorial discipline, viz., anthropology. The allusion is to the hegemonic powers of a discipline which not only delimits

the scope, content, nature and form of discussion but also defines the parameters within which discourse is allowed. Ahmed does not really see the existence of other hegemonies. Perhaps the plethora of publication and the coming of age of scholars like him in the 1980s - 'a few discreetly dissenting views', as he puts it - were unleashed by a corresponding weakening of the hold of the old hegemony. Perhaps, such a plethora of publication is to be read as cogent analyses denied forum by the powers-that-be. While it is plausible to argue that unrestricted enthusiasm could lead to excesses, not all post-Barre publications were conceived of at the moment of the dissolution of the old truth. In this essay, however, Ahmed is not concerned with other hegemonies save anthropology and I.M. Lewis, its master practitioner in the Somali case. Thus the first perspective is a tussle between Ahmed and Lewis &co. The bone of contention, so to say, is clanism and with it Ahmed delves into the gist of his inventory-taking. Let's take a stroll with him.

2. Clanism: Lewis and Luling

While I share the tenor of much of Ahmed's critique of Lewis, I must, at the outset, state that I have a genuine respect for Lewis. Let me explain. Lewis, as Ahmed mentions, is a prolific writer whose work for the better part of the last century tried to grapple with some aspect of the Somali question. I do not doubt his sincerity and devotion to his subject. Curiously enough, in his eyes, Somali clanism refuses to become 'ethnography's disappearing object' (Clifford 1986:112). I also tend to believe that he takes his work rather seriously. His perspective is rooted in anthropology, and, I believe, some of our differences with him may emanate from ideological as well as disciplinary differences. Be that as it may, his view is informed by an etic-oriented approach. Here, my intention is not to defend anthropology, much less the kind of anthropology represented by Lewis.

Ahmed minces no words. He writes, 'As the oldest and still most pervasive, this orientation [undue emphasis on clanism] puts forth a 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.' I am not sure what is meant by austere pastoral structure, but structures are less innocuous than ideologies, for the latter sustain and nourish edifices.

That said, we cannot but agree with Ahmed that ossifying clanism in any context does not serve any purpose, and that it is indeed counter to the dialectical nature of reality. Lewis's depiction of a 'warped' clan identity is ironically closer to the Somali 'post-colonial' reality. (He does not deny them coevality.) He is not interested in depicting the forms of resistance the colonial encounter had provoked. Nor is he interested in computing the cost of colonization. His focus, I contend, is on the newly-formed colonial and post-colonial identity, without either seeing it thus or recognizing it as such. Ahmed's argument, on the other hand, seems to echo Frantz Fanon's 'Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it' (Fanon 1991:210).

Ahmed's second point is a continuation of his first. Here, he takes the anthropologist's fixation on clanism to its logical conclusion: '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.' Susceptibility, however, explains the splintering and the mutual antipathy that it breeds. It signals vulnerability, i.e. manipulation is possible. Ahmed unfortunately does not define what is meant by 'identities'. For me, the use of social identities and the term 'susceptible' in close proximity or in the same sentence, is counter productive as it augments the argument of his antithetical voice. Manipulation is possible, precisely because, identity is relational, dynamic and dialectic. In the hands of a

master manipulator, it could be used as a potent instrument to help achieve local aims. But this is not, I take, what Ahmed's interlocutors are saying. Listen to Lewis:

> [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.' (qtd. by Ahmed)

How could one escape from the call and howl of one's genetic destiny? Regrettably, however, this is to the extent that Ahmed deals with Lewis, so you don't really hear the latter's voice to the extent that you would want to hear and see the full spectrum of an opponent's argument. Ahmed could have focused on one of Lewis's books. He could have concentrated on Bone and Blood, because that book recycles much of Lewis's core arguments.

Ahmed's exasperation's with Lewis's work, at times, forces him to paint with a broad brush. No one could disagree that the policy ramifications of much of Lewis's expert pronouncements, which appeal to certain powerful circles, thrive upon the delegitimization of indigenous experts and their input. (The reasons are many, but the refutation of them does not fall within the purview of this essay.) Instead of taking Lewis to task, Ahmed focuses on Virginia Luling, whom he views as a Lewis disciple. Thus Luling's analysis of clan ignites his anger as it gives rise to 'the virtual naturalization of clan identity'. Now, there is, perhaps, much to quibble with Luling's work, but not, I believe, the following quote which Ahmed uses to prove how most followers of the master, 'even when they do try to transgress here and there,' do in the end fall in line with Lewis's master plan: the privileging of clan ontology. Luling writes, '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.'

Ironically, I use the same quote favorably elsewhere. I thought it means: the reconstitution of the Somali state may come at some future time; however, the reality on the ground is marked by clan mini-states and mosaic fiefdoms. This reality (no need to go into what/whose reality?) hinges on the logic of the genealogical grid. When the enemy goes away, the need for cohesion goes away. My gripe with the statement is this: the use of blanket terms such as 'people', 'enemy,' and the passive voice employed to transmit the idea and logic of the genealogical grid. Absent (concealed?) is the locus of enunciation. Whose identity? To be fair to Luling, however, real inventory-taking calls for an in-depth analysis, which, in turn, calls for more examples than Ahmed furnishes here.

3. The traveler as expert

Ahmed's second perspective is a critique of what he calls 'psychopathology'. It is a deformed offshoot of the first perspective. He writes, 'It is most jarring to note the degree to which such a view point [clanism] could be carried by a neophyte.' Psychopathology, then, is the domain of the apprentice, who, in characteristic haste, orders the magic broom to draw water, but who, to his chagrin and to the detriment of the environment that hosts his unholy experiment, can't remember the mumbo jumbo of the master. The genre is represented by one Jonathan Stevenson whose *Losing Mogadishu*, as Ahmed puts it, is a hastily concocted monograph.

The field teems with crude journalists and sojourners-turned-shrinks. These 'experts' are able to tap into a long tradition in the West in which travelers to distant corners of the globe could get away with. And gossip sustains and nourishes Mr. Stevenson's monograph.[1] Quoting from a Western diplomat, he writes, 'Telling a Somali to kill is like telling a dog to lick his balls - the problem is getting him to stop.' Once again, you are forced to deal with recycled trash. Notice the animalistic imagery and the terms employed to convey homicidal tendencies of the Somali. Killing for the Somali is instinctual. He is an animal - a recalcitrant dog, for that matter.

Here again, Ahmed misses a golden opportunity to first take the journalist to task, and then set the record straight. Ahmed also does not define what is meant by 'psychopathology,' and I'm at a loss as to the meaning of the term in this context. Stevenson's book is of much greater importance to understanding Western conceptions of social conflicts in Africa and beyond. Ahmed views the book's deliberations on Somali clanism as perhaps isolated, and one meant to dehumanize the Somali. Its tenor, however, goes beyond that narrow view, as it espouses a simplistic view of social conflicts, which ignores (or perhaps does not realize) that conflicts are indices of concrete reality which emanate from concrete material conditions. In a cogent analysis of communal conflicts in the Indian sub-continent, Beth Roy bares the locus of the ignorance of people like Mr. Stevenson. She writes, 'Students of social conflict have tended to work around such primary questions of psychology. In fact, the conceptual language of [psychopathology] is ill equipped to address them, couched as it generally is in ahistorical and asocial terms like instinct and drive. Social psychology needs more culture- and history-specific concepts if it is to develop adequate theories about groups in conflict.' (Roy 1994:139) But Mr. Stevenson is neither a cultural historian nor a social theorist.

4. Questions of power

From the domain of psychopathology Ahmed moves on to his third perspective 'Militaristic Despotism.' Here, Ahmed loses clarity as there is no specific model to oppose. Most of the purported proponents of this perspective are Somalis whose arguments could not so easily be brushed aside. In contradistinction to earlier perspectives in which Ahmed had Lewis, Luling and Stevenson to take to task, in this third section no particular name is mentioned. Huddled in a footnote are the names of scholars and titles of books. Most of the names belong to Somali scholars. Ahmed finds fault in the view that attributes Somalia's troubles to the Siyaad Barre dictatorship. Subscribers to this view, Ahmed argues, trace to Barre's military regime a kind of heavy-handedness unseen before in Somalia. Thus, the concentration of power into the hands of a single person allowed Siyaad Barre to be celebrated as 'the only permissible source of knowledge and wisdom.' Yet, Ahmed is aware that that is exactly what had happened in Somalia. The allusion is to the lyrics of a popular song in the 1970s, a song which evokes the name of Siyaad Barre, 'the victory-bearer, and the father of knowledge.' His argument is while that may be the case, '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' (emphasis added).

Let's pause here for a minute, and engage in some crude inventory-taking of our own. What is Ahmed really saying other than repeat what he had earlier negatively attributed to 'the observers of this genre'? Earlier, his argument had been that those scholars who invested too much energy into the view that equates Siyaad Barre with the woes of Somalia were off the mark. But that is an untenable view, and Ahmed knows it. Thus, the phrasing of his argument in a more cautious litotese fashion: Siyaad's elevation 'need not have resulted in the total ruin of Somalia.' If one were in the business of apportioning blame, one would then ask: Why did

Somalia suddenly snap and descend into a fratricidal binge and mayhem? The answer to this question subverts Ahmed's initial argument.

To account for 'the total ruin of Somalia,' Ahmed now shifts the emphasis from Siyaad's elevation to 'the license it [the elevation] gave for unlimited authority, megalomania, and clanistic manipulation...' The phrases that Ahmed uses to make his point tell the story: 'need not', 'the total ruin', 'a fatal blow', 'the license it gave for unlimited power', etc. But wrong assumptions are to blame for his predicament. All writings, we must remember, contain pluralities, and it does not make sense to isolate a strand from an author's book and view it as though it were the book's thesis. The authors that Ahmed mentions in a footnote include Somali novelist Nuruddin Farah and the present author. In Farah's case, Ahmed mentions Farah's trilogy as an example of the undue emphasis on dictatorship in the explication of the Somali tragedy. Yet, the overall title of Farah's trilogy is 'Variations on the theme of an African dictatorship.' The variants include Somali tradition, patriarchy, matriarchy, and Siyaad Barre. Whatever else one might say of Farah's trilogy, one thing is clear: it conveys unambiguously that despotism in all its guises and manifestations is efferent and destructive. The present author has elsewhere argued that to understand Siyaad Barre, we have to view him as an authentic manifestation of our post- (and perhaps pre-) colonial identity. Siyaad Barre's elevation is not only due to his coming to power through a coup. Analyzing the song *Guulwade Siyaad* 'Siyaad the victory-bearer,' this author wrote,

> The Somali intellectual came up with moral justifications from the lore of the people for Barre's ascendancy [elevation in Ahmed's sense of the term] to power: Songs like *Geediga wadaay* ('Lead the track'), *Guulwade Siyaad aabbihii garashada* ('Siyaad the victory-bearer, and the father of knowledge'), and *Caynaanka haay* ('May you hold onto the reins of power forever') became the hue-and-cry of the traditional intellectual. These traditional intellectuals seemed to confer legitimacy to Barre by delving into the lore of the people. Barre's actions were justified through an elaborate system that showed his brand of leadership not only had affinities with but also emanated from the deep recesses of Somali tradition. (Ahmed 1995:145)

We agree with Ahmed in his conclusion to this section: '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.' Ahmed here echoes the present writer's insistence on delineating the father/son dialectics between Siyaad Barre and some of his successors. 'If Barre was once given the title of pater patriae by the poets, then those who are now vying for political power are - theoretically speaking - his political heirs. (After all, we should remember that before modern technology - DNA testing, etc. - fathering as opposed to mothering was theoretical and could only be proven via syllogistic argument.)' (1996:153f)

5. Tell me how you live, and I'll tell you who you are

We now move onto Ahmed's fourth perspective: Nomadism vs. sedentariness: Ahmed writes, 'This line of thinking is relatively recent; it appeared at the height of civil war and famine.' I disagree. This is a perennial dichotomy that one could trace back to the beginning of time. In the Somali case, one need only examine Somali poetry, novels, oral narratives, and, indeed, Somali history to get a clear picture of the age-old rivalry between the two groups. In *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism*, Said Samatar gives the example of a feud between *daaqato* 'pastoralists' and *beerato* 'agriculturalists' (Samatar 1982:36-54). The feud took place in 1962-3, obviously predating Ahmed's timeframe for 'the appearance of this orientation'. Needless to say that farming is not an argument nor an orientation, but a mode of living for

millions of Somalis. But history is not the only evidence that contradicts Ahmed's observation. Somali poetry, and novels written in Somali, teem with illustrations that underline the rivalry and competition of the two modes of living. Without belaboring the point, let me just cite the example of what I called elsewhere 'the chicanery of the cheating Judge'.

> It is said that a farmer, whose maize was devastated by the cattle of others, took his case to the judge of the village. The judge heard both the plaintiff and defendants. He reached a verdict and to compensate the farmer he ordered the owners of the cattle to hold a walking stick upright and cover it with a mound of maize. One of the defendants reminded the judge that his (the judge's) cattle were among those eating the farmer's maize. The judge murmured and then sighed, '*La jiifiyaana bannaan*' [it is permissible to lay the stick down in a horizontal position]. Therewith it became easier for the defendants, including the judge, to cover a horizontally positioned stick with maize than a vertical one, which needs a five-foot high mound of maize to cover it. (Ahmed 1996:39)

The moral of the parable is that the mighty can always find a loophole around the law. But it also proves in the lore of the people the existence of frictions between *daaqato* and *beerato*. That the judge is a *daaqato* (pastoralist) is not lost on the audience, whether pastoralist or agriculturalist.

For Ahmed to argue that the friction between the two modes of living 'appeared at the height of civil war and famine' is a difficult proposition to sustain. If, however, his argument is that such a proposition was muted during the military dictatorship, which is what I believe he is saying, then I rest my case. Dictatorships stifle dialectic and pluralistic articulations of the national identity. To add to our disbelief, Ahmed attributes the appearance of the friction between the two modes of living to the cavalier and uncaring attitude of other Somalis toward the plight of the people in the riverine areas. '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 question addresses the heart of the locus of the Somali problem, but not in the way Ahmed frames it. How do we account for the nonchalant insouciance of our brethren when we are hit with catastrophes? Where does the spirit of the Umma go under such times? Where did it go when Hargeysa, the second largest city in Somalia, was razed to the ground by ex-Rhodesian mercenary pilots in the pay of Siyaad Barre? Where did the spirit of the nation go when water wells in central Somalia were destroyed by those paid to protect them from enemies? And, yes, where did it go when more than 250,000 Somalis perished in a man-made famine in and around Baydhowa (Baidoa)? These are questions we should reflect upon.[2] But they are also questions alluded to, albeit mischievously, by Lewis and co. To carry a meaningful debate with them would necessitate on our part to clearly define the Somali sacred center, if such center there be. As in the third section, this part is without quotes. It is as if Ahmed was giving a synopsis of other scholars' viewpoints, without bothering to give them voice. And with that Ahmed moves on to superpower rivalry, the fifth and final perspective in his inventory-taking.

6. The state of the future

The first thing one notices about this section is the return of the quotes, most of which belong to non-Somali scholars. Here, it is argued that a nation's importance during the cold war era was directly proportional to its geographical location. Location, then, like in all real estate dealings, is of paramount importance. Nothing to cavil about there. Somalia's strategic location - on the Red Sea coast and near the Straits of Hormuz - has its effect on the

consciousness of the Somali. Location is a valuable commodity that could be sold to the highest bidder. And with that Ahmed comes to the end of his inventory-taking. His conclusion is that 'Each of the preceding perspectives attempts to illuminate an aspect of Somali reality'. I hope that I have shown that the perspectives propounded by Ahmed do not really reflect nor capture the essence of the totality of any given work mentioned in Ahmed's endnotes. He views strands from books in isolation. As mentioned before, Farah's trilogy does not deal only with the Siyaad Barre dictatorship, but with other forms of dictatorship, some of which predate him and some of which unite Barre and his cohorts in a society of mutual admiration. Thus Keynaan, the despotical father in Sweet and Sour Milk, is, for example, a microcosm of the larger picture that informs and is informed by Siyaad Barre.

The first section is also a prelude to Ahmed's bold statement: 'I offer a more ecumenical but distinctive substitute - one conceptually different and complemented by key narratives in the movement of Somali history.' What Ahmed offers as a distinctive substitute is a reconfiguration of existing elements in Somali society which mitigate the negative aspects of the clan system. These are '*xidid* 'marriage ties' - that is, respect for in-laws, *xeer* or Somali customary laws, and al-Quran and al-hadith and al-Sunnah [sic].' Ahmed is right that 'the above set-up was the basis of Somali society for a large stretch of its existence'. And while any transgression of the elements of the set-up is not a total negation of them, it behooves us to explain, analyze and account for it, because much of the current bloodshed in Somalia flies in the face of logic and of the basic teachings of the four component elements that we all, to varying degrees, have assumed to be the cornerstones of the Somali identity.

Another distinctive substitute of Ahmed's concerns the state, which he believes, '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. ... [T]hese are: leader, regime, government, and collective consciousness'.[3] Leader, Ahmed explains, 'is the person most visibly identified with authority (chief executive)', while regime and government represent the cabinet and the civil service, respectively. Ahmed's division of labor rests on the acknowledged difference between authority and power. But his association of authority with only a leader and not with texts - both written and oral - that legitimate 'authority' itself forces him to take for granted the story that Somali culture tells about itself. In other words, it is important that we critically analyze Somali tradition - the oral text of authority, and Somali conceptions/interpretations of Islam - the written text of authority. In short, we must clearly define what is meant by authority and what it does entail. That said, we concur with Ahmed that regime and government should be viewed as conductors that allow authority to express and assert itself. As two important symbols of power, the significance of ministers and the function of the civil service should not be underestimated. Collective consciousness, the fourth element in the chain, denotes a shared code of reference, 'the shared understanding of 'we' or what Ibn Khaldun long ago called *asabiyah*'. Ahmed's arguments presuppose that a rational and astute juggling of these four elements would not only get us out of the present quagmire, but would lead us to a better future.

With a future Somali state thus reconfigured, Ahmed moves on to conclude his fine speech with a note on 'the challenges that face the Somalis in the diaspora'. Much of what I have to say about this section is said in the belief that this is only a 'note' and not an in-depth analysis of the challenges that bedevil the Somalis in the Diaspora. The arguments in this short section are, in the main, in inchoate form, and need both refinement and elaboration. With that in mind, let me start with what Ahmed sees as a prerequisite for transcending the paralysis of will that plagues those in the Diaspora. He writes, 'to form a diasporic community implies leaving behind the trauma and stigmatic helplessness of a refugee'. If Ahmed didn't use the words 'trauma' and 'refugee' in the sentence above, one would think he was referring to an earlier

group of immigrants, who left Somalia on their own volition. Here, it seems that Ahmed uses 'trauma' in its etymological sense, a physical injury, whereas trauma, in the sense of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, implies more than a wounded psyche. Trauma, in this sense, is a wound that is not known to the victim - the mind did not have enough time to process it at the time of its occurrence - but that returns to haunt a person when they least expect it. (Freud 1953; Lacan 1978; Caruth 1996) This is true of people who claim that they had 'cheated death' and had emerged on the other side seemingly unharmed. To explain this kind of a situation, the Somalis say to the 'lucky' person: *'Sadaqo ama kurbin ayaa kugu kacday'* ('A sacrificial offering is in order'). At times, the lucky person might indeed be that lucky in that he does not suffer any flashbacks of the painful episode. But there are some who aren't as lucky, and they are the ones who pay dearly for having cheated death. To understand some of the problems that pain the latter group of refugees in the Diaspora, one has to know something about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This kind of knowledge would help departments of social services in the host countries to adequately deal with many social problems that currently plague Somali refugee communities in the Diaspora.

7. Into the unknown

Finally, it is difficult to agree with Ahmed when he approvingly quotes from a Somali refugee woman, who claims, 'The country is totally crippled and for a long time: there is hardly anyone left except the *harame* (weeds)!' One could equally claim that those who destroyed the state now form a large percentage of those in the Diaspora. My aim here is not to apportion blame; rather, the words of the refugee woman betray the absence of a tangible, ameliorative, and alternative thinking in the Diaspora. Put it differently, the weed analogy appropriately captures the inanities and destructive behavior of many Somalis, whether in the Diaspora or back in Somalia. In short, Ahmed's analysis of the Somalis in the Diaspora does not show that 'a cultural, political, and spiritual ferment is very real but in exile...' (Certeau 1997:8).

To conclude, Ahmed's fine speech reminds me of an anecdote enacted on stage by the late German comedian, Karl Vallentin.

> [T]he curtain goes up and reveals darkness; and in this darkness is a solitary circle of light thrown by a street-lamp. Vallentin, with his long-drawn and deeply worried face, walks around and around this circle of light, desperately looking for something. 'What have you lost?' a policeman asks who has entered the scene. 'The key to my house.' Upon which the policeman joins him in the search; they find nothing, and after a while he inquires: 'Are you sure you lost it here?' 'No,' says Vallentin, and pointing to a dark corner of the stage: 'Over there'. 'Then why on earth are you looking for it here?' 'There is no light over there,' says Vallentin. (Heller 1975:196)

Perhaps that is what we all are doing: looking for answers in a place much traveled. After all, human footprints give solace to the traveler. And herein lies the irony: the path trailblazed by early footprints deny the new traveler the courage to survey a new path. Talk about dictatorships! We are still beholden to the past, whether it is anthropology, I.M. Lewis, clanism, or Somali tradition. The time has perhaps come to initiate a new way of looking at things, a new way that could take us away from the place lit by a solitary circle of light.

Notes

[1] In *Woman, Native, Other* (1989), p.68, Trinh Minh-ha writes, 'Anthropology is finally better defined as 'gossip' (we speak together about others) than as 'conversation' (we discuss a question), a definition that dates back to Aristotle. This profuse, idle talk between kinsmen (from the Old English *godsibb*) comes into being through boredom and the need to chat. ...Gossip's pretensions to truth remain however very peculiar. The kind of truth it claims to disclose is a confidential truth that requires commitment from both the speaker and the listener.'

[2] How can we transmute our loyalty to a particular moiety into another, more broad based loyalty that encompasses the spirit of the nation? Can we wish for our compatriots what we wish for ourselves? Remember the Prophet's analogy of the Umma to the body of a human being, where pain in one limb or organ affects all other organs, limbs. In the case of the atrocities in central Somalia, it is worth remembering the heroism of Abdullahi Warsame Nur, a former member of the Central Committee of the then ruling Somali Socialist Revolutionary Party. Abdullahi paid dearly for his stance on the rights of the people in central Somalia, especially the Majerteen, who were at the time persecuted for their support, real or imagined, of an armed group fighting against the regime of Siyaad Barre. Many Somalis, both in and outside of politics, could not understand why someone in his position should risk it all for defending the rights of a clan that was not his. Perhaps other Somali officials did not approve of the civil atrocities, but none, to my knowledge, came out against them.

In the case of Somalia's Guernica, there were Somali pilots, who refused to bomb Hargeysa. In *The Somali Tragedy: The Gang-Rape of a Nation* (1994), p.30, veteran Somali journalist Mohamoud M. Afrah writes, ' [One of the Somali pilots] dropped his bomb payload on the Red Sea and flew his Mig to Djibouti where he sought political asylum.' Similarly people in Mogadishu and its environs tried to legitimate their conscientious objections to the draft for the war efforts in the North through the use of *shirib*, one of the folklore dances popular in and around the Somali capital. Short, pithy poetic lines accompany the *shirib* dance. The following two lines capture the people's unwillingness to fight fellow Somalis: *Dalkaaga daafac diidi maa/ Isaaq ku duulse dooni maa.* (I have no objections to defending my country/But I refuse to fight the Isaaq.)

[3] Ahmed's 'four concatenating moments or sites' remind one of Ibn Khaldun's Ruler, the Wazirate (especially in his use of the term as it pertains to the Umayyad rule in Spain), governmental positions that include the police and the admiralty, and group feeling. See: Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, ch.3, pp.123-261.

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