Africa 74 (4), 2004

VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE DIFFERENCES: THE SOMALI PARADOX

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THE COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL FRAMEWORK FOR ETHNICITY IN AFRICA

Generally, Africa's colonial and post-colonial states share two striking structural features that are often insufficiently emphasised in discussions about their stability. First, as is well known, these 'new nations' were typically accidental aggregates of peoples and tribes thrown together within a single political framework by the colonial process itself.

Second, they were created by conquest ('pacification') or the threat of conquest. Consequently they bear the marks of what I call the 'conquest mode of state formation' to a degree which is rarely fully appreciated by those who, eurocentrically, seek to impose a uniform style of democracy in Africa.[1] Political scientists and politicians, particularly, grossly underestimate the difficulties this legacy poses for the development of what they understand as 'democracy' in contemporary post-colonial states.

That, as a result, most states are cultural (and ethnic) patchworks does not facilitate harmonious governance even under imaginative pluralist formulae. It is obviously much more difficult for one of the elements in the ethnic mosaic to establish its authority than it was for a group of foreign origin, blessed with technological superiority (the colonising Europeans).

Thus, the ethnic diversity characteristic of most colonial and post-colonial states compounds the problems of maintaining political solidarity—just as in the past it may often have facilitated external European control, on a divide and rule basis. At the same time, ethnic pluralism in the composition of states usually further encourages hierarchical rule and discourages egalitarian democracy. (Unfortunately, contrary to the opinion of the nineteenth-century political philosopher, J. S. Mill, the reverse does not necessarily promote democracy.) Hierarchical forms of tribe and state were, moreover, general—though not universal—in pre-colonial Africa.[2]

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[1] In terms of indigenous pre-colonial political structures, colonisation thus imposed, or superimposed, the conquest state (typified in Africa by Ethiopia) through a process which I have called the 'Ethiopianisation of Africa'. See Lewis (1999: 58–68).

[2] As will be seen, the Somalis were a striking exception. See Lewis (1983: 67 ff.).

https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2004.74.4.489 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In general, thus, the prevailing pre- and post-colonial political traditions in Africa favoured hierarchically organised states in which force, or its threat, played a crucial role in governance. In these circumstances, it is not difficult to see how the paradigm of ethnic divisions (usually denounced as 'tribalism') has come to play a dominant role in political discourse about African problems. Ethnicity in this context is typically seen as divisive (neglecting its lower-level, integrative function), the implacable enemy of African nationalism. However, as is equally obvious all over the contemporary world, ethnicity is also an ideal basis for nationalism. The celebration (and cultivation) of visible cultural differences in language, behaviour, dress, custom, and cuisine, frequently associated with in-marriage, is readily seen as linked to biology and hence to the (often overlapping) idea of 'race'. However spurious its biological claims, ethnicity is essentially a form of materially and visibly distinctive communal identity providing a ready basis for solidarity for those who, in its name, distinguish themselves from others.

PRE-COLONIAL NATIONALISM: THE SOMALI CASE

African nationalists in most colonial states, because of their multi-ethnic character, did not have the luxury of a ready-made, country-wide local foundation for nationalism.[3] They had to rely almost exclusively on opposition to colonial rule. In the mid-twentieth century, well-known for their vigorous ethnic nationalism extending into neighbouring states, the Somalis appeared, in this respect, unusually fortunate. They did not have to invent a suitable ethnic identity to sustain their nationalist aims, which were naturally reactively strengthened by the colonial experience of division and fragmentation.

Yet, this tailor-made national ethnicity, which arose from their traditional culture, rather than vice versa, came at a high price. It was accompanied by a pervasive system of *internal divisions based on the ideology of kinship, and hence invisible*, which carried the same emotional and subjective charge as visible ethnic distinctions elsewhere. Indeed, as we shall see, these kinship divisions, as they are formulated in Somali ideology, have many of the characteristics of race.

Family trees (genealogies) were, and are, thus, not simply quasi-historical documents, but, essentially, the fundamental principle of personal and social identity. From a European perspective, this is perhaps most readily understood in terms of aristocratic dynasties or, more generally, in terms of the 'Mediterranean' blood feud with its axiomatic evocation of kinship solidarity. The notion of genetically based political identity is also, of course, etymologically the foundation of Western understanding of the term 'nation' and of acquiring

[3] On the development of 'nationalism' at tribal level within African states, see Argyle (1969). Much of the literature discussing the supposed differences between 'tribalism' and 'nationalism' is, in my opinion, vitiated by ethnocentric assumptions. For a refreshing discussion, see Vail (1989). See also Lewis (1999: 58–68).

https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2004.74.4.489 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(adopted) nationality by a process of 'naturalisation'—implying (totally falsely) that this acculturation is actually biological, conferring a 'natural' status.

Similarly, the kinship groups or lineages[4] that are, as we shall see, the basic building blocks of Somali society, have a biological form, although they are entirely cultural products, the results, over a long time-span, of Somali 'social engineering'. The sociologically significant point about this form of social division is that it produces what appear to be axiomatic, 'natural' distinctions, with the same ontological status as botanical species or zoological breeds. Despite its lack of any significant visible markers, this is, consequently, a very powerful cultural construction of socio-political identity since, by definition, *it flows in the blood* and must be taken for granted. In this respect, as a number of Somalis now recognise, it is similar to scientific understanding of the biological concept 'race'. In popular thought, of course, 'races' are assumed to be observably distinct and so treated as what are properly 'ethnic groups'. (Ethnicity, which may also aspire to present itself as a natural force, relies, in contrast, on the accentuation of *external* markers—language, custom, costume, cuisine, etc.)

Whether conserved orally or in writing, the genealogies embodying the invisible force of clanship are, therefore, in effect genetic guidelines for the social and political interactions of those whose descent they record. The genetic assumptions implied here are further exemplified in the case of lineages of holy men, whose hereditary mystical power is conceived to be a direct consequence of their shared descent from a famous saint. Religious blessing here is assumed to be a genetic endowment (see Lewis 1998b).

Casting this demon in the atavistic role of out-of-date loyalties, unfitting for the modern age and hostile to progress, Somali nationalists gravely underestimated the catastrophically disintegrative forces that could be evoked in its name. Beating the drum of ethnic unity, modern Somali nationalists thus seriously miscalculated the divisive power of their traditional political heritage—as was so cruelly brought home to them by the collapse of the Somali state in 1990. They were not alone in this wildly inaccurate assessment. Others, including the present writer, attributed greater resilience and adaptability to Somali ethnicity as a political force than it has turned out to possess.

Despite their different foundations, I also tended to see traditional Somali democracy and egalitarianism as likely to contribute to the effectiveness of modern democratic structures in Somalia. This assumed, optimistically, that the Somalis would be able to arrive at a distribution of power among the major kinship groupings, based on consensus. In the event, alas, on the contrary, major lineage blocs sought to monopolise power and included others only on a token basis, or when they could be usefully employed to carry out awkward, unpopular coercive tasks.

[4] For a full analysis of the Somali segmentary lineage system, see Lewis (1961).

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SOMALI ETHNICITY IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As a single ethnic group in the Horn of Africa, with only one major internal division (that of the Digil Mirifle clans speaking a distinctive language/dialect),[5] the Somali people considered themselves bound together by a common language, by an essentially nomadic pastoral culture, and by the shared profession of Islam. Their common faith had made its appearance in the ninth/tenth century along the coast and thereafter gradually spread inland. The importance of religion was reflected in a pervasive distinction in Somali society and culture between two basic traditional male roles (or kinds of men)—'men of religion' (*wadaad*, pl. *wadaaddo*), and lay 'warriors' (*waranleh*, lit. 'spear-bearers'), the latter laity being in the majority. Only the former could be considered to constitute a kind of traditional 'civil society'. Both categories were equally prominent in the pastoral society and in the trading centres which, over the centuries, gradually developed along the coast and at watering places inland. These developments introduced the new category 'merchant', a role often combined with that of religious specialist—partly because both utilised Arabic. The high value attached to religion was also reflected in the practice of tracing Somali genealogies ultimately to noble Arabian origins connected with the family of the Prophet, Muhammad. This can at the same time be seen as an expression of Somali Islamic identity, in the normal Somali currency of descent and genealogy which ultimately underwrite all relationships.

The first known occurrence of the ethnic name 'Somali' is in the fifteenth century, in an Ethiopian hymn celebrating the victories of the Abyssinian king, Negus Yeshaaq (1414–29), at the time of the holy wars against surrounding Islamic principalities. The Somalis played an important military role here as expert 'cutters of roads', a specialisation for which in its modern form they are especially well known today. Later sources chronicling the course of these long drawn-out wars between Christian Ethiopia and the encroaching Muslim centres of power have occasion to mention Somali militiamen frequently, and even to record the involvement of individual clans who are still prominent today.

It is, however, only in the nineteenth century that we begin to have more detailed accounts, by European explorers, of Somali society and culture. These make it clear that, despite the internal clan and lineage divisions of the nation, there was already a sharp sense of Somali cultural identity. An important element in this was the extraordinary

[5] The characteristic features of this division are discussed more fully below. Other, unrelated ethnic groups caught up in the wider Somali society, and hence in Somali nationalism, include the riverine cultivating Bantu groups in the south of the country, who are attached to Somali clans and have adopted Somali genealogies; the Bajuni coastal fishermen and merchants of Brava and Kismayu; and the various Somalised Arab communities in the southern coastal towns (e.g. the Reer Hamar of Mogadishu).

https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2004.74.4.489 Published online by Cambridge University Press

egalitarianism and—except to some extent in the southern inter-riverine region—a marked absence of hierarchical political structures comparable to those elsewhere in Africa. The remarkable Arabist explorer Richard Burton, who understood their culture well and particularly appreciated their oral poetry, memorialised the Somalis appropriately as a 'fierce and turbulent race of republicans'. Later witnesses, including an outspoken sergeant in the King's African Rifles, deployed against the Dervish forces in the period 1900–1920, made the same judgement, complaining, 'Somalis no good, every man his own chief.' More analytically, the Somali historian A. A. Hersi (1977: 177) succinctly judged that in traditional Somali society, 'central political authority meant nothing. . .and does not even today'.

The concept of Somali identity, based on an awareness of common culture and language, thus *preceded* the development of modern nationalism. This long-standing sense of cultural uniqueness, it may be conjectured, developed in the interaction with neighbouring peoples over the centuries, and with increasingly cosmopolitan trade. Hence, as I have argued elsewhere (Lewis 1958, 1961, 1983, 2002a), what modern nationalism did was to *politicise* an existing cultural phenomenon: cultural nationalism became political nationalism in the modern sense and *not* vice versa. There was previously no tradition of political unity at this level of the transcendent nation and, a fortiori, no tradition of statehood based on Somali culture. This project became a modern aspiration in the context of the independence movement.

So, in the Somali context, as I have always stressed, the movement was from nation to state rather than—as mostly elsewhere in Africa—from state to nation. Consequently, in the Somali case it is not the nation that is artificial but the state, indeed doubly so in that hierarchical governance is foreign to the major Somali political tradition. Without going into all the details (recorded and analysed elsewhere), we may usefully distinguish the following phases in the growth and decline (or better, waxing and waning) of Somali nationalism. This is a force, I believe, that, like the inner workings of component clans and lineages, also tends to be segmentary in character, as the clan divisions of the nation tend to unify reactively in response to external pressures, and to disassociate when these disappear. At this ultimate level of solidarity—which is modern—this is not strictly phrased, however, in genealogical terms.

STAGES OF MODERN SOMALI NATIONALISM

As elsewhere, colonialism naturally provided the frame in which modern Somali nationalism developed. Given the fragmentation of the nation, colonialism here, however, was an unusually varied experience. Over the period 1860–1900, the Somali nation was divided into five regional groupings. From north to south these were: French Somaliland (also containing the Afar, a related pastoral people), the British Somaliland

https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2004.74.4.489 Published online by Cambridge University Press



FIGURE 1 Somali states and regions 2002 (source: Lewis 2002a)

Protectorate (with no colonial settlers), the Italian colony of Somalia, the Ethiopian Ogaden (named after that local clan), and British northern Kenya. The experience of these artificial divisions—involving different administrative traditions and languages—had a formative impact on the growing politicisation of Somali culture that ensued.

To understand how this multiple partition cut across internal Somali clan divisions, we need to refer to the Somali 'national' genealogy, an ethnic family tree which I hasten to stress *existed before the birth of modern nationalism*. Within this, the Somali as a whole are divided by family trees based on descent traced patrilineally in the male line, and named after their (eponymous) founding ancestors from whom each group takes its collective name. This system of grouping is not, as some misinformed commentators have supposed, a colonial artefact devised

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for administrative convenience. It existed long before colonial partition and baffled most colonial officials in its complexity.

The highest-level distinction between 'Samaale' and 'Sab' (see FIGURE 2) refers to the cultural and linguistic cleavage between the mainly nomadic pastoralists (Samaale) and the agro-pastoralists (Sab) which, as we have mentioned, is the deepest division within the nation. The latter occupy the relatively fertile area between the Shebelle and Juba rivers in southern Somalia and speak 'May', a Somali-related, separate language. It seems likely that the 'genealogisation' of this cleavage is more recent than that which locates the 'Samaale' groups in the national genealogy. However, since it is reported by nineteenth-century travellers, it clearly antedates modern Somali nationalism and is not a direct product of that movement. Of the six main groups which for convenience I refer to as 'clan-families'—the Dir, Isaq, Darod, Hawiye, and Digil and Rahanweyn (Sab)—the Darod are the most widely distributed and this is consistently reflected in their political aspirations and behaviour. After the Digil and Rahanweyn, the Isaq, who formed the backbone of what became British Somaliland (today the 'Somaliland Republic') are the most localised (see FIGURE 1). The Darod and Hawiye share what became successively Italian Somalia, independent Somalia (including Somaliland), the 'Democratic Republic of Somalia' (under military rule), and its residue today (excluding Somaliland, but tenuously including 'Puntland', based on an alliance of Darod clans).

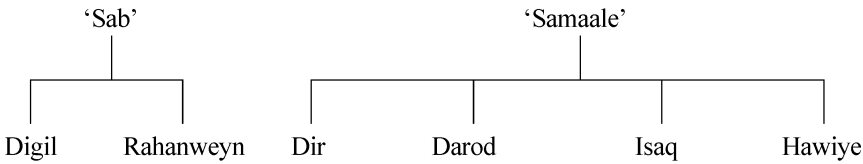


FIGURE 2 National genealogy of Somali 'clan-families': legendary Arabian ancestry (cf. Lewis 1994: 95–112)

FOREIGN INFLUENCE AND THE RISE OF NATIONALISM

Contrary to the picture presented by some recent writers of Marxist or 'Rococo Marxist'[6] orientation, who ethnocentrically seek to promote the virtues of 'primitive' pre-colonial Somali culture, which they associate with supposed geographical isolation, Somalis have for centuries been involved in a lively entrepôt trade. This traffic has extended from their neighbours in the Ethiopian highlands on the one hand, to the Arabian peninsula and more remote eastern ports on the other. Down

[6] This useful term, borrowed from Tom Wolfe, refers to the bizarre melange of post-modernism and politically correct pseudo-Marxism which many social scientists currently affect, especially in America.

https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2004.74.4.489 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the centuries, men of religion travelled both to inland religious centres (such as Harar), and overseas to famous Islamic cities—not least Mecca.

These travels naturally sharpened Somali self-awareness and their sense of the distinctiveness of their culture, language, and religion—perhaps most fully in the period before European colonisation in their involvement in the medieval religious wars in Ethiopia between Christian and Muslim. This exposure to other cultures and traditions was intensified by alien colonial rule, which included the opportunity for significant numbers of Somali men to serve as merchant seamen all over the world. They then returned to retire to the traditional nomadic life, often coming home with a fund of exotic knowledge and rich store of memories.

The Second World War, in which they served in the forces of their colonial masters, was another important source of new experience. The defeat of the Italians, in which Somalis played a significant part, certainly had an 'eye-opening' impact (to use a phrase common to both Somali and English), as had the British Military Administration which, from 1941 to 1949, governed the former British, Italian and Ethiopian Somali territories. About this time also, there was a significant development of other channels of foreign influence through the ever-expanding rise of radio and the press, with programmes in Somali as well as Arabic beamed to the Somali area from stations around the world. The establishment of local schools and, later, of scholarships for study abroad consolidated all these modernising influences.

Following the proto-nationalist Islamic jihad waged by the famous Somali sheikh and poet Sayyid Mohamed 'Abdille Hassan (1900–1920) against the Christian colonial authorities, the first recorded stirrings of modern political activity occurred in British Somaliland in the early 1920s. The main protagonist, who was justifiably critical of British rule, was exiled to Aden where he helped to found the Somali Islamic Association.[7] Nevertheless, by 1935 most Somaliland towns had embryonic political associations founded by local merchants, and the 'Somaliland National Society' was founded shortly afterwards. Further south, explicit political aspirations appear to date back to the last days of Italian fascist rule in Somalia, between 1937 and 1940, when the pioneer modern politicians were a handful of government employees mainly drawn from the Rahanweyn and Digil clans.

These trends received direct encouragement from the British military administrators (most of them civilians on war service, rather than career Colonial Office officials) who succeeded the Italians. The new authorities not only promoted Somali trade and business but also removed previous (fascist) restrictions on social and political activities. In Mogadishu particularly, between 1941 and 1943 numerous Italian societies formed, covering all shades of political opinion and held meetings which were sometimes also attended by Somalis. The Italian Communist Club which stressed racial equality and progress achieved

[7] See Jama Mohamed, 'Somali diaspora nationalism and Haji Farah Oomar', in press.

https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2004.74.4.489 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in the Soviet Union, attracted some Somali interest. At the same time, the British Political Officer (District Commissioner) in Mogadishu was holding weekly meetings and discussions on current affairs (cf. Lewis 2002a: 120 ff.). He emphasised how the Allies (in whose forces Somalis had served) were 'liberating' the world from Fascist oppression and that, after the war, all races and peoples would enjoy freedom. These pronouncements reinforced the growing aspirations of progressive Somalis and their nationalist aspirations, encouraging the proud sense of Somali cultural identity and exclusiveness which, to some extent, had been earlier expressed in the jihad waged by Sayyid Mohamed 'Abdille Hassan.

Bringing these currents of opinion together with the blessing and assistance of the British, the Somali Youth Club was formally launched on 15 May 1943, coincidentally the date when German and Italian forces in Africa were finally defeated. At its foundation, the Club had thirteen members representing the major groups and the ancient Benadiri population of Mogadishu. Members shared aspirations for self-government, literacy and education, and the eradication of divisive clan schisms. In the years immediately after, as the question of the future status of Italy's former colony, Somalia, became a general public as well as international issue, the Club spread its wings and attracted wider support. By 1948, when the Four Power Commission (representing Britain, France, the USA and the USSR) visited Somalia to ascertain Somali aspirations for their future status, the Club had changed its name to the Somali Youth League (SYL). With over 25,000 estimated members throughout the country, it was now well established as a political organisation, appealing in principle to young nationalists irrespective of clan allegiance (Lewis 1961: 285 ff.). An important element in its initial success, however, reflected its heavy Darod support which was similarly strong in the new Somali police force (the Somalia Gendarmerie) established by the British Military Administration.

The League now had a four-point programme:

> To unite all Somalis generally, and the youth especially with the consequent repudiation of all harmful old prejudices (such, for example, as tribal and clan distinctions); To educate the youth in modern civilisation by means of schools and by cultural propaganda circles; To take an interest in and assist in eliminating by constitutional and legal means any existing or future situations which might be prejudicial to the interests of the Somali people; And finally, to develop the Somali language and to assist in putting into use among Somalis the 'Osmaniya Somali script. [see Lewis 1958]

In this initial period, some ephemeral smaller political groups formed, the most significant being that calling itself originally the Patriotic Benefit Union or *Jumiya*, and mainly representing southern Rahanweyn and Digil, the Bantu riverines, and some local Arabs. This association originally benefited from Italian settler financial support and favoured more conservative policies than the SYL, aiming especially to protect the southern agro-pastoralists from the dominant northern nomads, who

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generally supported the League. In 1947, the *Jumiya* changed its name to the Hizbia Digil Mirifleh (HDMS) (*hizbia*: 'party'). In the heated public debates about the future status of Somalia, the SYL meanwhile campaigned on a wider front to bring all the Somali territories together under a single government, and to work towards full autonomy after a ten-year period of trusteeship under Four Power Administration. This programme excluded the return of Italian rule.

With Italian support, most of the non-SYL Somali groups formed a consortium under the name Somalia Conference, proposing a thirty-year trusteeship under Italian administration. The HDMS, however, broke away from this alliance and, like the SYL, advocated Four Power Trusteeship—but for the longer period of thirty years. In the event, although recognising that the SYL had the widest public support, in an effort to satisfy their own competing political interests, the Four Powers eventually decided in favour of an Italian trusteeship, under UN mandate, with ten years (1950–1960) to prepare the country for independence.[8] Following this, the British Somaliland Protectorate was re-established and, despite strong Somali opposition, the Haud and Ogaden regions were returned to Ethiopian authority. In the event, Somalia accepted its new status under Italian administration without serious incident and in 1954 the first municipal elections were held on a basis of male suffrage. The SYL won over half the available 281 seats.

In 1956, when I first carried out field research in the south, as Somalis were replacing Italians in senior administrative posts, the earlier Territorial Council was transformed into a legislative council composed of seventy seats. Ten were reserved for ethnic minorities: the Italian and Arab communities (four seats each), and one each for Indian and Pakistani immigrant groups. The SYL won forty-three seats; the HDMS, which campaigned only in its clan area, gained thirteen seats; and four others were won by two smaller parties, one (the Marehan Union) a frankly clan-based organisation. Thus, although the SYL claimed that it enjoyed significant support from the Digil Mirifle clans, the traditional division between this agro-pastoral May-speaking community and the 'Samaale' pastoralist clans was strongly reflected in the emerging modern party politics. The HDMS alleged that the SYL government, in which at this stage it held no ministerial posts, discriminated against its clansmen in the public service where it was certainly under-represented.

In the discussions that followed on a constitution for Somalia, which would enable it to unite easily with neighbouring ethnic communities as these became independent, the HDMS favoured a federal state while the SYL insisted on a unitary structure. Indeed, at this time, the HDMS went even further to advocate the formation of a separate state.[9] The

[8] Somalia's fate was complicated by its inclusion in the disposal of Italy's other former colonies, Eritrea and Libya. Earlier British proposals, including Somali unification and independence (the 'Bevin plan'), foundered through the mistrust and competing interests at the end of the war of Britain, France, the USSR and the USA (see Lewis 2002a: 127–30).

[9] For a detailed study of party politics in this period, see Lewis (1958).

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SYL for its part, was held together by a precarious alliance of Darod and Hawiye, some of the latter supporting their own clan party. In this first Somali government, with responsibility for internal affairs, there were three Hawiye ministers (including the prime minister), two Darod, and one Dir—but no Digil Mirifle. In this first phase of modern political experience, if the HDMS was actually a clan coalition party (like the SYL), there were still also unashamedly clan or (in the case of some minority groups) ethnic parties.[10]

However, with the rising tide of nationalism, the SYL government introduced legislation making it an offence for political parties to bear 'tribal' names. This may have been directly aimed at the opposition HDMS which, adroitly, retained its existing acronym by adopting the Arabic title 'Hizbia Dastuur Mustaqil Somali'. Legislation promulgated in 1959, to abolish the traditional status of client-tenant farmers, appears also to have been aimed at the HDMS, since clientship was a fundamental building brick in their mixed clan composition. The effect, if not the motive, was to encourage divisive tendencies amongst Digil Mirifle clients who belonged originally to other clans (as the majority did) to reassert their original identity. This move tended to discourage sentiments of Digil Mirifle identity, and hence paved the way for further SYL penetration (see Lewis 2002a: 159 f.).

In the same year, in the last national elections in Somalia prior to independence, now with universal suffrage, the SYL won decisively and formed a new government of fifteen ministers and under-secretaries, evenly distributed among the Darod, Hawiye, and Digil and Rahanweyn. This implementation of the implicit principle of clan-family balance did not, of course, represent a final resolution of the problem of competing clan allegiances, or *tribalismo*, as it was known in the Italian tradition. Equally, the ingenious invention of the Somalised neologism 'ex'(clan), which enabled the clan discourse to be conducted as though it existed only in the past, perpetuated rather than, as had been hoped, discouraged continuing clan loyalties.

This precarious clan balance was immediately disturbed by the union, at independence in 1960, of Somalia with the former British Somaliland.[11] In that embryonic state, party politics tended to follow the genealogical split between the Isaq clans of the centre of the country, who supported the Somaliland National Party, and the United Somali Party (USP), the bulk of whose support came from the non-Isaq clans on their eastern and western flanks, who belonged to the Darod and Dir clan-families. Since these two parties gained the majority of votes in the Protectorate's last elections, held a few months before independence and union in 1960, they were allocated two ministries each in the new government of the enlarged Somalia, formed in July 1960.

[10] For example, the Young Benadir (based on the Reer Hamar Arab settlers in Mogadishu), the Bajuni Fiqarini (for the Bajuni fisher folk on the coast round Brava), and the Agoi/Wardegle (based on the Geledi clan and their associates).

[11] On party politics in the latter country prior to independence see Lewis (2002a: 148 ff). For an excellent documentary history, see Mohamed (2002).

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The parameters of the clan equation at national level had widened, and the struggle for power had become more complex. Traditional kinship ties encouraged USP Darod to ally with their clansmen in the SYL while, for the Dir, USP tradition suggested alliance either with the Hawiye within or outside the SYL, or with the Isaq. In addition to traditional clan loyalties and cleavages, a significant new interface was that between the diverse British and Italian colonial experiences. This differentiation fostered a persistent sense among (British) northerners that they had lost power and were marginalised in the new united Somalia. The most dramatic early symptom of disaffection here was the short-lived, and abortive military coup launched at the end of 1961 in the former Somaliland by a group of British-trained officers.

Somalia's politics were thus essentially now divided internally by clan, and the tension between the ex-British and ex-Italian traditions (all the 'exes' one might say), but united externally by pan-Somali nationalist irridentism and the corresponding opposition of neighbouring states, especially Ethiopia, with whom there was a long-standing, and intractable border dispute (see Lewis 2002a: 182 f.). Such external pressures, however, did not end the continuing rivalry for power between leading Somali politicians who, within their parties, relied ultimately on clan support. The initial north–south rivalry was thrust into the background by the developments that followed the 1964 national assembly elections, won decisively by the SYL.

Now intense competition broke out within the Darod leadership of the SYL and led to the election of a new president, a former Darod premier, with the appointment of his ally, a prominent Isaq figure, as prime minister. This effectively consummated the union of north and south and brought Isaq politics centre-stage on a par with the other major clan blocs. The new premier soon judged it prudent to make peace with Kenya and Ethiopia, thus reducing external pressures, and in 1969 held what turned out to be Somalia's last civilian elections. Over 1,000 candidates representing sixty-two 'parties' (i.e. clan and sub-clan groups) contended but, with allegations of widespread corruption, the scene was set for considerable instability. The SYL as usual won and, at the first session of the new assembly, with the exception only of a single assemblyman all the members of the other parties crossed the floor to join the SYL government. Somalia had finally become a one-party state.

This meant that the League was now a cumbersome umbrella organisation for effectively all the clan interests in the country. The national assembly, itself, was widely recognised as a chamber of commerce where deputies cynically traded votes for money—as they had done with their electors in the election. The next step was the move to a one-person state and this followed more quickly than many had anticipated.

The assassination of the Darod president, while the premier was out of the country, provided a convenient opportunity for the military to seize power. Led by the head of the army (also Darod), General Muhammad Siyaad Barre, whose ruthless ambition and tyrannous rule surprised many who did not know him, the army quickly established

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their authority, ominously changing Somalia's name to the 'Somali Democratic Republic'. This was a sure sign that Somalia's chaotic democracy was judged to have gone too far, and was now gone for good: parliament and all constitutional provisions were suspended (i.e. abolished).

While quickly consolidating his grasp of the reins of power, General Siyaad launched Somalia into a new era of rhetoric where the only actual policies that mattered were those that controlled and punished disobedience and dissent. The coup became retrospectively a 'bloodless revolution' and, with East European support, was dedicated to the cause of 'Scientific Socialism', literally in Somali, 'wealth-sharing based on wisdom'. Socialism, Siyaad and his apparatchiks endlessly intoned, 'unites' while tribalism 'divides'. Of the various—largely theoretical—measures invoked in the fight against tribal (i.e. clan) loyalties, undoubtedly the most colourful was a national campaign that included the burning of effigies representing 'tribalism, corruption, nepotism and misrule'. The term 'comrade' (*jaalle*) was introduced to replace 'kinsman', and even the circumlocutory term 'ex' was outlawed as the 'Victorious Father of the Nation', also known as 'The Good Conductor', boldly led his people forward.

This elevated political discourse convinced some young officials with leftist aspirations: others saw it as a convenient vehicle for autocracy. As a friend exclaimed, in a heated exchange on the nature of Scientific Socialism, with a French Marxist anthropologist (C. Meillassoux): 'We don't need Marx; he needs us!' This imposing ideology was actually no more than a rhetorical facade, while Siyaad got on with the serious business of consolidating his power base, consisting of his own and related clansmen, and carefully selected members of co-opted marginal groups. Siyaad possessed an unrivalled knowledge of the Somali clan system, partly based on his earlier experience as a police officer.

As I found during my regular visits to Somalia throughout his reign, Siyaad's government was still evaluated in terms of clan inclusiveness—although it was a serious offence to say so publicly. Within this typical clan rainbow, three groups in particular exercised special power, a trinity known *sotto voce* as MOD after the initial letters of the corresponding clan names. M (Marrehan) represented the president's own clan, O (Ogaadeen) that of his mother, and D (Dulbhante) that of his most prominent son-in-law, head of the sinister national security service (NSS) established, with East European advisers, shortly after Siyaad's coup. Although officially dedicated to 'Scientific Socialism', it is more accurate to regard this phase of Somalia's existence as 'Scientific Siyadism', as I dubbed it.[12]

Two innovations of Siyaad's did, however, enjoy wide public popularity: the introduction in 1975 of a national Latin script for

[12] See Lewis (2002a: 223–225), Hassan (1980: 3–11), Haakonsen (1984). On Siyaad's character, see Laitin and Samatar (1987: 158 ff), Aden Sheikh (1994).

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the Somali language (hitherto almost exclusively unwritten),[13] and the launching of the 1977 war against Ethiopia which sought to liberate his mother's clansmen, the Ogaadeen. Both initiatives had nationalist implications, and capitalised on Siyaad's official policy of national solidarity. This sought to include the less powerful lineages and marginal groups, whose assimilation within the nation was strongly encouraged—with members of these groups co-opted to hold formally impressive positions (e.g. as in the case of the Ministers of Defence, and Education). Discrimination against such minorities was quite strongly discouraged and this enlightened attitude, I found, made considerable headway amongst the educated elite. Final authority, of course, was firmly centralised in the hands of the Leader and his MOD clique: indeed, even leave and promotion applications by humble members of the police force and government officials were personally scrutinised by the Head of State. Imagine how difficult it was to secure an exit permit or passport. Somalia was now a prison presided over directly by the tireless tyrant Siyaad who had immense energy and by preference worked through the night, sustained by endless cups of black coffee. This bat-like work pattern was especially irksome to foreign ambassadors who had to sacrifice their sleep if they wished to see the 'Old Man' (as Somalis called him).

This two-dimensional political structure, with clandestine clan politics at the core and surface socialist nationalism for everyone else, became less clearly differentiated following Somalia's traumatic defeat in the Ogaadeen war of 1978. The military collapse brought hundreds of thousands of Ogaadeeni Somalis and Oromo refugees flooding into Somalia. These refugees were distributed around the country, in huge hastily assembled and poorly equipped camps (often 40,000 strong) which produced significant demographic changes in local clan composition—especially in the north-west, the former British Somaliland. Predominantly Ogaadeeni (Darod) refugees, strongly supported by the MOD government, were thus brought into direct competition with the local Isaq and Dir residents, who were already poorly served in the delivery of state services, except that provided by the hated NSS.

Clan tensions were also inevitably heightened as the causes of the bitter defeat were debated—of necessity clandestinely. Insurrection was in the air. The arbitrary execution of a group of critical officers, an abortive coup (led by Majerteyn officers) in April 1978, a train of government reshuffles, and the imprisonment of several high profile former ministers, all indicated the level of divisive clan turbulence now confronting the regime. The predictable response was an attempt to

[13] See Lewis (2002a: 213–241). As I have argued elsewhere (Lewis 1999), there is abundant evidence that literacy is not, as has generally been supposed even by such a well-informed comparativist as Gellner (1983), an indispensible condition for nationalism. It may, as here, nevertheless fortify orally based nationalism.

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turn the screw of MOD control even more tightly (see Lewis 2002a: 245 ff.).

But the writing was at last on the wall. The first formal opposition militia movements—both launched in the north in 1981—were the Majerteyn (Darod) SSDF, which developed out of the 1978 coup attempt, and the Isaq-based SNM, a direct response to Siyaad's vicious Darod military dictatorship in Somaliland (see Prunier 1992: 107–120; Lewis 1994: 177–220). These pioneers in the armed struggle against the Siyaad regime were soon joined in a loose alliance by other groups (e.g. the Hawiye-based United Somali Congress). With the further blow to residual national solidarity delivered by Siyaad's negotiated peace with Ethiopia, their combined efforts culminated in 1990/91 in the collapse of the dictator and his ignominious flight from Somalia. His pathetic appeals to his Darod clansmen to come to his rescue only resulted in their being singled out for vicious retaliation and 'clan-cleansing' (as Somalis called it) in the ensuing chaos of Mogadishu.

THE 'RE-EMERGENCE' OF NAKED CLAN LOYALTIES

Taking appearances for realities, it is sometimes claimed—by apologists for Siyaad and others—that the Ogaadeeni disaster brought clan factors into play for the first time, forcing Siyaad to employ them also for his own survival. As indicated above, the evidence on the contrary shows clearly that, for all the frothy rhetoric of Scientific Socialism, the crucial political forces remained throughout the Siyaad era those of clan loyalties. As time went on, in this segmentary society these traditional forces, with their modern elaborations, simply became increasingly important and conspicuous.

Throughout Somali society, and especially in the rural areas where the bulk of the population lived as pastoralists, the segmentary clan structure continued to provide the individual's primary identity and political loyalties. Scientific Socialism was primarily rhetorical, and at best patchy and superficial in its distribution. The substance of the nation's political diet remained that based on clan and kin ties, mobilised and exploited by entrepreneurs who were mainly urban-based. Despite superficial cultural differences in lifestyle, town and countryside remained closely linked by clan ties and mutual economic interests in livestock and land.

On the surface, townspeople lived differently, to some extent wore different clothes, and ate different foods, and lived in modern homes with domestic equipment rare in the interior. Yet, the principal security lines, safeguarding the individual's personal security and property remained the kinship system which, in rural areas, comprehensively held sway, whereas in urban contexts these were supplemented—variably—by the agencies of government—where they existed. The backbone of economic co-operation and trust in town as in the countryside remained that founded on kin ties. As the national economy declined in the 1970s and 1980s, male labour migration (called

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by Somalis the 'muscle drain') to the oil-rich Arab states became a vital source of additional income much of which—in kind or cash—returned home along kinship lines. Somalis placed much greater trust in such connections than in deposit banks which were in any case running into financial difficulties.

As the judicial and police systems collapsed into corruption and anarchy in the late 1980s, the security function of kinship became as important in urban areas as it had been throughout Siyaad's rule in the countryside. As we have seen, the final overthrow of Siyaad was achieved through the clan-based militias and guerrilla organisations[14] which, with the addition of Islamic forces, have shaped the post-Siyaad Somali political scene. The resultant polities vary in size and scale and in their readiness to adopt civil forms of government—the most impressive and progressive so far being the 'Somaliland Republic' (formed in 1991), and the so far less successful Puntland State of Somalia (proclaimed in 1998).

The first had grown out of the Somaliland National Movement, based on the Isaq clans, allying with the local Dir clans in the west (the Ise and Gadabuursi) and, more uneasily, with the Darod (Dulbahante and Warsangeli) in the east, to reassume the shape and demography of the former Somaliland Protectorate. Puntland had developed from the Somali Salvation Democratic Front guerrilla movement and was, similarly, essentially based on a single clan, in this case the large, multi-segmented Majerteyn clan of the Darod clan-family,[15] which was the last to fall under Italian rule in 1925 (see Lewis 2002a: 99 f.). Puntland has not yet claimed complete independence as Somaliland has done and remains (at the time of writing) committed to being part of a federally organised Somalia—on the assumption that this format will eventually be adopted.

Both states, which jointly must make up about a third of the total population of the former Somalia, are heavily engaged in the livestock export trade, with thriving ports, and are gradually establishing social services to levels which are in many respects already well above those achieved during Siyaad's rule. Although there are deficiencies in hospitals, there are more medical doctors in practice in both territories than there ever were before. Electricity is widely available, and banking, telephone and fax services extend throughout the world. Somaliland has two universities, Puntland one. These developments have been achieved under democratically appointed governments with in both cases heads of state elected by a combination of traditional and Western procedures. That Puntland[16] has so far opted for local rather than full autonomy is largely a consequence of the fact that thousands of Majerteyn clansmen

[14] For a remarkable insight into how these were recruited, and how their formation literally changed the lives of young city 'sophisticates', see A. Y. Osman's brilliant novel, *In the Name of our Fathers* (1996).

[15] Other Darod minorities are included.

[16] See Helander (unpublished ms. 'Rumours of Rain: Ideas of centralisation, social fragmentation and the nature of power in Post-Government Somalia').

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also live in the Kismayu region of southern Somalia, which discourages it from breaking away completely. Somaliland is subject to no such comparable constraint.

Since clanship remains the fundamental—but not unique—basis of security in Somali society, its prominence, as we have seen, waxes and wanes with the availability and adequacy of alternative agencies of social control. Another crucial factor, of course, is the volume and acuteness of threats to security in the broadest sense. In periods of tranquility and prosperity, and when government agencies provide an acceptable and trusted level of social control, the primacy of clanship diminishes. Under the reverse conditions it develops in importance correspondingly. So, the forces which led to the collapse of Somalia, and which continued thereafter, promoted the influence of divisive clanship and reduced the strength of nationalist sentiments. Since, moreover, clan and lineage ties are most crucially focused at local level, this is the level at which peace has to be negotiated by traditional populist procedures if progress is to be made. This is what was successfully achieved in Somaliland (see Farah 1993) and, initially, in Puntland. Its disregard elsewhere largely explains the continuing failure over subsequent years of—generally misconceived—high-profile international negotiations to produce a national government for Somalia.[17]

As I see it, what has happened up till now can be regarded as the crystallisation out of the Somali maelstrom of two effective states—Somaliland and Puntland—with a third state, containing the Digil Mirifle clans in the Bay region between the rivers, in the process of consolidation. Further developments in this process with the formation of additional regional polities are to be expected. It remains to be seen how such new entities will relate to each other and whether they will eventually join together in a wider reinvented Somalia. This might, of course, take the form of a loose association of states (see Lewis and Mayall 1995).

TOWARDS A RE-EVALUATION OF ETHNICITY AND CLANSHIP

The continuing power of clanship as an ongoing basic component of social cohesion—not a determinant—is obvious, even, interestingly, at that shrine of modernity, the internet, where each of the main Somali clan blocs has its own website, indeed often several. At a wider, more general level, the clan and lineage genealogies which underpin the clan political system provide the basic system of personal identification utilised by Somali refugees throughout the world to send remittances to their kin at home. This form of indirect aid from the countries where the refugees had found asylum, was estimated in 2001 to have an annual value of more than US$800 million and to constitute between

[17] The UN and EU efforts in this regard at the Djibouti 'peace conference' amounted to an outrageous farce (see Lewis 2001).

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twenty and forty per cent of per capita income in Somalia. The global process (known as *hawilaad*), producing this huge volume of family aid, operates by telephone, fax, and radio. These modes of communication enable the sender to transfer funds instantly, through his local office (which often also operates as an internet café) or bank, to his kin in Somalia, via one of the hundreds of informal remittance points scattered throughout the country. The sender specifies the genealogical identity of the addressee, and the recipient in Somalia has to identify himself in these terms to collect the funds transmitted. Trust here, as in other commercial arrangements, is based on kinship connections (cf. Lewis 1962; Little 2003).

The resilience of this social system in adopting, and adapting to, the forces of 'modernisation' is impressive and quite baffling to those whose Eurocentric bias encourages them to regard kinship as an archaic, primordial relic incompatible with 'progress'. The negative loading—also associated with its divisive role in a nationalist context—which this term has carried in the minds of poorly informed foreign commentators, and westernised Somalis alike has, as will now be evident, distracted Somali politicians from acknowledging its reality and so facing up to its implications, and seeking realistically to come to terms with them.

It is an interesting, though sad, commentary on the force of a widespread delusion that it has taken the tragic collapse of their state to bring home this conclusion to the majority of westernised Somalis who tend to call themselves 'intellectuals'. More humble Somalis (i.e. the majority) never doubted the efficacy of this everyday aspect of their traditional heritage, nor, of course, in practice did politicians—although they professed hypocritically that clanship, which they lived by, had died. If the continuing force of clanship had been frankly recognised and acknowledged and means sought to accommodate it politically, rather than pretending it did not exist, things might have turned out differently for Somalia. There would still, of course, have been the handicap of no pre-colonial experience of centralised government.

Is the form of organisation I am calling (segmentary) clanship here the same now as it was in pre-colonial times? Neo-Marxist and 'Rococco Marxist' interpreters of Somali institutions do not think so.[18] They paint a rosy picture of the pristine innocence of the pre-colonial world, and assert—without offering any evidence—that modern Somali clanship is a distinct, degenerate form, a mere tool for unscrupulous, self-serving urban politicians to employ in manipulating their ignorant countrymen. It is also, they assert, a malign legacy of the colonial presence which, similarly, in their eyes invented clan warfare. As Bernhard Helander

[18] This is claimed by the most intellectual former minister (in a modern sense) in Siyaad's government (who belongs to Siyaad's clan), Dr Mohamed Aden Sheikh (1994), as well as by some American academics, Somali and non-Somali. See, for example, A.I. Samatar (1994), Besteman (1996), Kapteijns (1999).

For a more realistic account of the bellicose character of traditional Somali institutions, and one less patronising in its implications since it does not deny Somali agency, see ICRC (1997).

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(1998) wryly remarked, few writers in this vein exceed the tortuously contradictory logic of Besteman (1996, 1998) that 'clans do not exist; if they do they are constructs by a British anthropologist [i.e. the present writer] and CNN, which obscures real, class and regional issues'!

A. I. Samatar, a political economist, even goes so far as to claim that kinship relationships (*tol*) are to be distinguished conceptually, as well as linguistically, from this debased contemporary form of clan politics which he identifies with the Somalised Arabic term *qabila* (A. I. Samatar 1994; see also Lewis 1961; S. S. Samatar [the historian] 1998: xiii). A. I. Samatar does not cite any evidence for this alleged linguistic distinction between old fashioned 'benign' kinship (*tol*) and politically destructive new clanship (*qabila*). This is not surprising since in fact there is none: both terms are used interchangeably and this is not a modern development.

I found both words used without distinction in my earliest field research (in the 1950s) amongst the northern pastoral nomads. *Qabila* is, of course, an Arabic loanword. It is interesting, also, that the preference for the more authentically Somali term (*tol*) is reflected in the modern construction *tolnimmo.* This term may be used to translate 'nationalism' (the opposite of *tol* in the narrow sense!) and, more generally, social cohesion at other levels.

From the earliest records we have of Somali political institutions, it is clear that elders of influence (based on family strength, livestock wealth, oratorial skills, shrewdness, etc)—in short pastoral 'big men'—endeavoured to manipulate their clansmen in traditional politics to their advantage. Given the extreme individualism and democracy of the nomads, very rarely, however, did such figures succeed in establishing hereditary power—except in exceptional circumstances where they were able to monopolise external resources (e.g. those obtained through trade or plunder).[19] Amongst the Digil Mirifle, with their mixed clan composition and agro-pastoral economy, this trend towards hierarchical organisation was, as we have seen, stronger, but it did not constitute a role model for pastoralists who affected to despise cultivation (see Lewis 1969: 59–78; 1994: 133–148; Helander 1996: 195–204).

Naturally, the development of towns, communications, and economic and technological change (including the availability of modern weapons) provides a wider range of resources and choices with which politically ambitious entrepreneurs today can accumulate influence and power. As I wrote several years ago, 'Clanship is, of course, an elastic principle, differentially manipulated by ambitious power-hungry individuals. In the modern setting, with their privileged access to external sources of economic and political power, to sophisticated weapons and Swiss bank

[19] The closest political formation to a more durable, hierarchical structure amongst the nomads occurred in the Majerteyn sultanate, controlling incense cropping, pearl-fishing and piracy along its coastline. On a smaller scale, a similar pattern was found amongst the coastal Warsangeli clan. See Lewis (1961: 208).

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accounts, successful big-men like Siyad and his successors, the so-called ''war-lords'' can in this egalitarian society pluck the strings of clanship to their own advantage to an extent and on a scale beyond anything realised before' (Lewis 1994: 233).

So, for those who have significant sources of wealth and power outside the traditional system, clanship falls into place as one resource amongst a number of facilities to be exploited to the full. It is striking how frequently it is invoked to mobilise support—either alone, or supplemented by money and payments in kind—and as a source of trust for economic and other purposes. Its salience throughout the decade following the collapse of the Somali state in 1990/91 is indeed remarkable. Clearly, when Siyaad proclaimed that he had 'buried' clanship he might well have added, 'The clan is dead; long live the clan!' He meant, of course, all forms of lineage solidarity, but particularly that at the level we call 'clan-family'.

This is the inescapable and paradoxical price of Somali cultural nationalism (ethnicity) which comes ready-made, off-the-peg, but with this deadly, divisive undertow. For the student of comparative social institutions, this might be seen as demonstrating the greater significance of sociological than cultural factors. Cultural cohesion here is undermined by social structure, by the centrifugal pressures of the Somali segmentary system and the pervasive force of the call of clanship, literally. Unfortunately, despite the considerable impact of literacy (see Lewis 1999: ch. 5), Somali nationalism has not been transformed by modernisation into the 'organic' mode of social solidarity envisaged by Durkheim. The extreme, not to say excessive, democracy of traditional Somali political culture, with its acute emphasis on individual decision-making, is a further major impediment to the formation of stable, centralised political units. Ethnicity alone is not remotely enough.

Thus, the struggle for Somali social cohesion is a real and continuing battle and, even when achieved by remarkable efforts at regional levels (as for example in the Somaliland Republic), is always menaced by the hazard of erratic centrifugal segmentary forces. This can to some extent be offset by developing a political structure with balanced representation and power-sharing at the clan level (as in Somaliland and, initially, in Puntland), and a correspondingly more equitable distribution of state resources and services.

Above all, if further progress is to be achieved in state-formation, Somali politicians will surely have to come out of 'denial' and start seriously exploring how clan and lineage ties can be utilised positively. Perhaps they could learn from their nomadic kinsmen who unashamedly celebrate these traditional institutions. Here a less Eurocentric and less evolutionary view of lineage institutions by Western commentators, social scientists, and bureaucrats might help to create a more productive environment for rethinking clanship (i.e. agnation)

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positively.[20] However ancient its origins and historically 'primordial' (to use a banal and generally misleading term), clanship—as we have seen over and over again—is no stranger to 'modernity': it is not that it is incompatible with modernity, but rather that it is all too compatible with it!

In line with this, and despite their earlier attempts to keep clanship at bay, at least officially, the most recent efforts to re-establish government in Somalia have indeed sought to base political representation on a clan basis. The main building blocks of the nation (the Dir,[21] Darod, Hawiye and Digil and Rahanweyn clan-families) have been allocated quotas of representatives to elect 'transitional governments'.

The first experiment along these lines was the 'transitional national government' established under UN auspices at the Arta conference in Djibouti in August 2000, after almost seven months of gruelling debate and argument among the 2,000 or so people who attended. Under the stage management of the president of the host state, Djibouti, this remarkable event, produced a 'transitional national assembly', which, after the usual horse-trading, in turn elected a 'Transitional President' and, under his aegis, a government. The person chosen as President was a well-known southerner who had been a minister under Siyaad. Since, like so many of the Mogadishu warlords, he was a Hawiye of the Habar Ghiddir clan, it was assumed by some of his supporters that he would be able to establish his leadership in that conflict-ridden city. This optimistic view, however, did not take adequate account of the internal, segmentary clan dynamics. The effect of the appointment, thus, was to promote a struggle for power amongst the various established Habar Ghiddir warlords and the Transitional President and his followers.

With, additionally, constant controversy over how 'representative' its members actually were, by 2003 the 'Transitional National Government' had degenerated into being regarded—and behaving—as simply another armed faction. It controlled only a few streets in Mogadishu, with a militia which could not contend effectively with

[20] At the (May–August) 2000 Djibouti 'peace conference', designed to resurrect a unitary Somali government, this issue surfaced in a complex argument, as to whether the new national assembly should contain members on the basis of clan or regional representation. For what it is worth in relation to this highly hypothetical body, it is interesting to note that the advocates of clan representation won the argument. This example of distributing representation—by clan blocs (i.e. 'clan-families', Darod, Hawiye, etc.)—was repeated in the successor 2002/2003 further 'peace conference' (signalling the failure of Arta) which for the first time adopted a federal constitution for Somalia (excluding Somaliland). The Somalilanders strenuously refused to compromise their independence by sending any representatives. This did not stop some southerners pontificating about 'Somali unity' and claiming that Somaliland was included by virtue of the clan-bloc name 'Dir', from which the Isaq clan-family, that forms the backbone of Somaliland, is historically a breakaway group.

[21] This category has caused sharp controversy: the Isaq no longer accept that they are included as 'Dir' and no official representatives from the Isaqis in Somaliland attended Arta or the successor conference in Kenya. The only official Dir delegates were from the Dir of southern Somalia (i.e. Biamal): the Ise and Gadabursi Dir of Somaliland did not send official representatives (nor of course did those from Djibouti).

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the hostile forces of the other southern Somali 'warlords' (cf. Lewis 2002a: 302 ff.)

Racked by internal financial scandals, and without advancing the cause of reconciliation or being able to hold any of the public elections that would have been necessary to establish its bona fides, this doomed regime[22] had virtually collapsed by late summer 2003, when its mandate expired. At this juncture, Somali politicians, large and small, military and non-military, were busily engaged in yet another exercise in their long-running saga of high-profile international 'peace' conferences: the thirteenth major performance in a little over a decade!

This time the location was in Kenya, where the participants again decided that, in the future assembly, seats should be allocated by clan quotas. Clans had definitely come out of the closet, as had the warlords who had been officially discouraged from open participation in the Arta manoeuvres. The problem was now to find a consensus on power-sharing among the principal military figures. Proudly claimed as a major achievement was the adoption, after nine months of acrimonious and tortuous debate, of a complex and far from easily workable federal constitution (which was still being bitterly opposed by some factions long after it had been officially adopted).

The viability of this framework, and of any other positive conclusions reached, would obviously be severely tested by whether or not it proved possible to restore public security and order in Mogadishu and its hinterland. This would require the local warlords to agree to modify their claims to control those sections of the city that each sought to monopolise, and to surrender authority to some form of collective administration. Such a far from likely development would be required to pave the way for the reopening of major public facilities like the air- and seaports that had been closed for over a decade.

Without this, no progress would be possible in the south. Disarmament would be the next challenge and would certainly test to the full the patience and endurance of the force of African 'peacekeepers' which it was optimistically envisaged might be deployed.

Not surprisingly, many Somalis considered that, faced with such formidable obstacles (previously defying all attempts at practical resolution), the volumes of rhetoric and money disbursed in Kenya would, as in the past, soon disappear with little trace beyond the temporary enrichment of an army of conference hangers-on and cynical operators. But, however little of the conference's official decisions would actually bear fruit, the invisible man of Somali clanship, enhanced in conspicuousness as always in times of insecurity, was now openly dominating political discourse and being frankly accorded an official presence at the centre of political life. What was not being adequately discussed was how the proposed new (? federal) government structure would accommodate the traditional decentralised decision-making power of the elders within 'modern' government.

[22] See Lewis (2002a: 296 ff.; 2002b).

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Southern Somalia was still a long way from developing political structures designed to include traditional leaders in the political process, along the lines pioneered in the bi-cameral system of representation followed with considerable success in Somaliland. Unfortunately, the external pressures on 'peacemaking' exerted by the representatives of the European Union and the UN, etc. were too ethnocentric and lacking in cultural sensitivity to be helpful here. For various reasons, all sides at the Kenyan 'peace conference' preferred to ignore the demonstrably viable local model, combining traditional and modern government, in operation in Somaliland (see Drysdale 2000: 174 ff.; Bryden 2003). While certainly not perfect, this offered a more locally appropriate form of democratic government than the structures envisaged by the southern Somali leaders and their external mentors.

CONCLUSIONS

On a more abstract level, this analysis of Somali politics at the beginning of the twenty-first century highlights the strength and persistence of clanship at the expense of ethnic nationalism. Somali identity, based on shared language, culture and religion, still has widespread currency in the rhetoric of political leaders and those who define themselves as 'Somali intellectuals'.

Ethnicity here, like clan identity, is also of course relational vis-à-vis non-Somali peoples of other ethnic groups such as Ethiopians, Arabs, etc. However, as we have seen, although it lacks comparably external 'markers' and depends formally on orally recorded genealogical criteria, clanship remains a more comprehensively powerful focus of identity in Somali society. A Somali friend recently expressed this succinctly: 'There is only one loyalty all Somalis share. It is not Islam. It is not nationhood. It is not love of country, it is clanism—a phenomenon I like to call the Hidden Religion.'

This incisive definition is true despite the fact that 'clan-family' is the ultimate agnatic level of political identity in a cumulative system of seamless segmentary lineage divisions that make it always provisional and subject to schismatic centrifugal pressures. Solidarity is more commonly mobilised at the level of 'clan' within the more widely encompassing 'clan-family'. What is involved here is Durkheim's 'mechanical' rather than 'organic' solidarity.

In contrast, the formal aspects of ethnic identity—culture, religion, language, etc.—are not susceptible to comprehensive internal division and subdivision in the same consistent and seamless manner. Divisions within the ethnic group are based on characteristics other than those used in defining the ethnic group itself which does not have a systematic segmentary structure. These differences between clanship and ethnicity are formal distinctions which have, however, a practical outcome: in the Somali case, solidarity at the level of the ethnic group (the nation) is less binding than that within the clan structure, segmented though that is.

https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2004.74.4.489 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is based on my field research among the Somali in rural and urban settings which began in 1955 and continued intermittently until 1992 when health problems stopped me continuing fieldwork in the Horn of Africa. Visiting Somaliland and Somalia year after year, I was extremely fortunate to witness at first hand most of the major political developments between 1955 and 1990/1 to which reference is made here. I am grateful to Markus Hoehne for comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and to Brita Pouget for sorting out my muddled footnotes.

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ABSTRACT

In exploring the difficulties experienced by the traditionally politically uncentralised Somalis in establishing a stable and effective state, based on their ethnicity, this article compares ethnicity, nationalism and lineage identity. In this case, ethnicity and nationalism are local products, influenced but not created by the colonial experience. They have had to contend with the intractable force of segmentary lineage identity, which has proved extremely difficult to adapt and accommodate to the requirements of modern statehood. In its cultural context, agnation is all the more pervasive and powerful in constituting an 'invisible' bond, conceived by Somalis as a biologically based distinction like 'race'. Unlike race, it is almost infinitely elastic and divisible. Ethnic identity, which rests on external distinctions such as language, culture and religion, cannot be broken down into a series of formally equivalent segments, but is less binding as a social force. Today, after the collapse of the state of Somalia in 1991, following protracted grass-roots peace-making between clans, two parts of the nation—the former British Somaliland, and the north-eastern region of Somalia ('Puntland', based on the Majerteyn clan, and other closely related clans)—have developed separate local states. Although Somaliland claims complete independence, which Puntland does not, both polities incorporate parliamentary institutions that accommodate traditional, and modern political leaders and processes. The ex-Italian residue, Southern Somalia, still without any form of government, is in what appears to be the final throes of its long-running, fourteenth grandiose international 'peace' conference in Kenya. Thousands of delegates, in various configurations, have

https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2004.74.4.489 Published online by Cambridge University Press

already spent over eighteen months in these talks. Although its embryonic constitution now recognises 'clans' as constituent political units, this attempt to re-establish Somalia is based on the usual 'top-down' approach, rather than on spontaneous local negotiations amongst 'stakeholders' on the ground, such as those on which Somaliland and Puntland are founded. With contingents of foreign 'experts', the whole process seeks to reinstate a familiar Eurocentric state model, unadapted to Somali conditions.

RÉSUMÉ

En examinant les difficultés rencontrées par les Somaliens, traditionnellement non centralisés sur le plan politique, à fonder un État fonctionnel et stable sur la base de leur ethnicité, cet article compare l'ethnicité, le nationalisme et l'identité du lignage. Dans ce cas, l'ethnicité et le nationalisme sont des produits locaux, influencés mais non créés par l'expérience coloniale. Ils ont été aux prises avec la force irréductible de l'identité du lignage segmentaire, qui s'est révélée être extrêmement difficile à adapter aux besoins du statut d'État moderne. Dans son contexte culturel, l'agnation est encore plus répandue et puissante à constituer un lien ''invisible'', conçue par les Somaliens comme une différence à fondement biologique comme la ''race''. Contrairement à la race, elle est quasiment infiniment élastique et divisible. L'identité ethnique, qui repose sur des différences externes comme la langue, la culture et la religion, n'est pas divisible en une série de segments formellement équivalents, mais elle a moins de pouvoir liant en tant que force sociale. Aujourd'hui, après la chute de l'État somalien en 1991 puis l'instauration d'une paix prolongée entre les clans au niveau local, deux régions du pays, l'ancien Somaliland britannique et la région du Puntland (des clans Majertine et autres apparentés) au nord-est de la Somalie, ont créé des États locaux séparés. Tandis que le Somaliland revendique une indépendance totale, ce que ne fait pas le Puntland, ces deux États possèdent des institutions parlementaires qui concilient les responsables et processus politiques traditionnels et modernes. Le sud de la Somalie, ancienne colonie italienne toujours dépourvue de gouvernement d'aucune sorte, semble arriver au terme de sa longue et grandiose quatorzième conférence de paix internationale au Kenya. Depuis dix-huit mois, ces discussions mobilisent des milliers de participants de configurations variées. Bien que sa constitution embryonnaire reconnaisse désormais les ''clans'' comme des groupes politiques constitués, cette tentative de rétablir la Somalie repose sur l'approche descendante habituelle, plutôt que sur des négociations locales spontanées entre ''parties prenantes'' sur le terrain, telles que celles sur lesquelles sont fondées le Somaliland et le Puntland. Assisté de contingents d''''experts'' étrangers, le processus global cherche à réinstaurer un modèle d'État eurocentrique familier inadapté aux réalités somaliennes.

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