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# Democratisation and ethnic conflict: the kin connection*

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ABSTRACT. This article posits that individuation is a determining factor in making democratisation efforts workable or, where it is absent, ethnic conflict likely. Somalia serves as a case study. Since the Somali state has not been able to secure individuals' social welfare or their futures, citizens use genealogies, which chart trustworthiness, to construct social welfare safety-nets. There is also a moral dimension to genealogy. This is quite different from what occurs in the democratic West, where the state has guaranteed individuals a significant measure of social welfare security over time, and where identity can be considered situational. I argue that under conditions of uncertainty, such as have existed in Somalia, identity is not at all situational, but is fixed and fixes individuals in ethnic groups. The push to democratise can then lead to armed ethnic conflict.

In cases where the state is viewed as a country's richest source of resources the rhetoric of democratisation may prove particularly dangerous. It also rings hollow so long as certain key elements are still not in place: namely, faith in a secure future and the opportunity for individuals to choose their own political identities, two features which happen to be intimately connected. The argument this article sets forth is that when individuals have a choice about identity and are able to feel secure about the future, democratisation proves workable. But when individuals live in an insecure environment which precludes individuation and choice, democratisation will likely precipitate ethnic conflict.[1]

I use the case of Somalia as an exemplar of just how intertwined insecurity and the lack of individuation can be, and how damaging calls to democratise can prove. My aim is not to argue that democratisation is impossible in certain places. Rather, it is to suggest that democratisation be considered problematic *so long as* the state cannot guarantee individuals a secure future yet competing entities, such as kin groups, can. I make this distinction to emphasise that the usefulness of kin-based safety-nets is neither confined to certain cultures nor to certain eras. Instead, it inheres in situations of uncertainty which Somalia (for a host of reasons) currently exemplifies.

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In terms of logic alone it cannot be coincidental that violence has followed calls for democratisation in Nigeria, Zaire, Kenya and elsewhere (Ottaway 1995). Too often autocratic leaders hope to accomplish one of three things by stirring up ethnic contestation under the guise of loosening control: (a) divide their oppositions; (b) prove the stability of one-party/one-person rule; and (c) demonstrate why they should be the ones to remain in charge (Horowitz 1994: 45). Nor is this done for domestic consumption alone. Proponents of democratisation often have strong external supporters in the West who, for their own reasons, seek the spread of democracy. In fact, these are exactly the pressures Somalia's former president, Mohamed Siad Barre, pretended to accede to before his demise in 1991 (see Simons 1995).

Initially General Mohamed Siad Barre was hailed as a saviour when he seized power in 1969, only a scant nine years after the merging of British Somaliland and Italian Somalia. At independence, in 1960, the newly formed Republic of Somalia possessed an array of formal democratic institutions, including a parliament, nationally elected leadership and scheduled elections. And at the time, there was even more optimism regarding democracy in Somalia than in many other places in Africa because there was also the background presumption that 'traditional' Somali society was itself democratic. One easy proof could be found in the title of I. M. Lewis's classic ethnography, *A Pastoral Democracy* (1961). But then, too, as part of the nation-building enterprise, nationalist Somalis trumpeted the notion that they were an egalitarian people, who also just happened to be ethnically, religiously and linguistically homogenous.

Only recently has Somalis' alleged homogeneity come in for demythologising (e.g. Ahmed 1995). Likewise, attention has been paid to revising the idea that Somalis are egalitarian, which they are not. Never mind issues of gender difference, Somalis hierarchically categorise one another according to occupation and origin. More significant still are the 'traditional' ways in which loyalty nests in family, lineage, clan and clan-family, and in contractual bloodwealth-paying groups (which likewise have a basis in relatedness).[2] This was more than apparent just prior to the coup which vaulted Siad Barre into power, when 62 parties put up 1,002 candidates for 123 seats at the national level. Dispassionately then, we might conclude that Somalia's first national experiment with democracy failed, thanks both to what there was, in terms of indigenous and inherited institutions, and to what there was not, in terms of what took hundreds of years to develop piecemeal in the West (see Wraith and Simpkins 1963 for a related argument regarding Nigeria).

### Somalia: a political argument

Although Siad Barre started off as a dictator, he seemed to be a benevolent dictator. During the early 1970s he committed himself to rooting out clannism and corruption, and initiated a number of programmes to heighten Somalis' attachments to the state and secure their loyalty for the nation. Unfortunately, either irredentism fed into this or off of it, and led to Somalia's unsuccessful bid to wrest the Ogaden away from Ethiopia, a war which Somalia lost. Not only did the 1977–8 Ogaden War lead to the infamous Horn of Africa flip-flop, with the USSR switching support from Somalia to Ethiopia, and the United States inheriting Somalia instead, but the Soviet abandonment of Somalia proved an unforseen boon in at least one regard. Suddenly, Westerners were back in Mogadishu, supplying money and projects, while along with this aid flow came a range of Western influences, democratisation among them.

In fact, democratisation received two pushes during the early 1980s. First, there was the push (or pull) from the West, which sought to make Somalia over. Second, was the response of Somali citizens to the economic, military and refugee crises which stemmed from (and/or were exacerbated by) Somalia's defeat in the Ogaden War. Opposition movements emerged. And in response to these, Siad Barre tightened his grip. The president increasingly relied on members of his own and related clans to help him run what was, increasingly, his government. Meanwhile, this circumscription occurred just as Western assistance came pouring into the capital. Not surprisingly, when large sums then got siphoned off, most Somalis had little difficulty assigning blame. If it was high-ranking government officials who were pilfering state coffers then that meant it was members of the president's own, and related, clans, who were stealing from everyone else. Evidence was just too easy to find: in new expensive villas, or business ventures which required substantial start-up.

Members of the international community could hardly ignore what was taking place (and particularly not when it was their largesse which was funding corruption). But so long as the cold war was extant, serious pressure could not be brought to bear on Siad Barre from without. Instead, he was able to promise reform and no one held him accountable. Provided certain gestures were made funds still flowed his way. Actually, this game was played with two effects. Siad Barre's network of kin increasingly profited, and Somalis who were not at all privileged kept having their hopes for democratisation (which they kept being promised) dashed.

Obviously, then, it was not democratisation efforts *per se* so much as the realisation that all the rhetoric was hollow which helped foster dissolution. Siad Barre was unusually skilful at manipulating Somalis' preoccupation with genealogical links. He would reward key members of competing clans with ministerial posts, then jail them, turn critics into ambassadors in order to 'exile' them, and otherwise manage to keep everyone guessing, but *in* competition. The more inter-clan mistrust then threatened the nation which young Somalis, especially, believed in, the louder their cries for democracy, while the greater the clamour for liberalisation, the more aggressively Siad Barre reacted by tweaking inter-clan tensions. The state decreasingly served as any sort of repository for supra-clan trust. Worse, still, was the fact that too many political promises went unfulfilled while the only realistic counter to frustration – prosperity – also went unrealised for most people, yet all too realisable for a few.

## Somalia: a structural argument

Somalia clearly represents a 'state' of extreme flux. Flux is the norm for pastoral nomads, whose ideology (at least until recently) prevailed in Somalia. Not only do herders have to follow their animals, but their animals move because environmental conditions (rainfall and grazing) are rarely the same from location to location and year to year. This constant movement of personnel indicates that nomads employ a quick and foolproof method for being able to identify competitors and compatriots. But even urban Somalis have lived in an unpredictable environment. For instance, there has been a merry-go-round of colonial and post-colonial arrangements (under British, Italian, Soviet and US tutelage) leading to a variety of forms of government (colonial, mandate, democratic, dictatorial), economic programmes (colonial, Soviet, Western, bilateral, multilateral), and development regimens (export promotion, import substitution, structural adjustment). Despite twenty years of one-man rule, Siad Barre's patrimonialism also ensured that fluctuation persisted all across the board in terms of individuals' political fortunes. In a whole variety of ways, then, Somalis in all walks of life were forced to deal with uncertainty.

Elsewhere (Simons 1995), I make the argument that urban Somalis were able to respond to such turbulent conditions by utilising pastoralist strategies which, for generations, had proven successful for coping with unpredictability in semi-arid conditions. These strategies, common among nomadic pastoralists around the world, are grounded in the trust and obligation encoded in genealogical relationships. Put most succinctly, what genealogies chart are links among kin, links which are essentially only kept if people prove worth remaining tied to: if they are reliable, helpful and do not cause strife within the group. Otherwise, irreconcilable disputes and differences (even among brothers) are marked by breaks, as families split into separate lines and begin to go their separate ways.

In practice what genealogies really represent are charts of trustworthiness according to which connected individuals can presume that, based on past relations among their forebears, they *should* get along. By embodying a history of mutual obligation genealogy can easily act as a ready-made safety-net, and as a moral order(er).

The safety-net aspect of kin helping kin should be self-evident. The fact that this implies a moral order, though, has meanings for relations outside the genealogical orbit.[3] At the state level, in situations where such extensive kin networks persist, nationalism proves hollow as *the* social glue. While leaders, politicians and other officials may well be expected to be responsive to all citizens, they are still expected to be responsive to relatives more (Ekeh 1975). This is what relatives themselves expect. And with everyone possessing but not all sharing the same genealogical heritage it is what non-relatives also expect those in power to do.[4]

At bottom we already know the ways in which literal practices among kin can undermine equitable government – through nepotism, corruption and prebends (e.g. Sandbrook 1985, 1993; MacGaffey 1991; Bayart 1993). But the state, not being able to be equitable, only winds up reaffirming the value of kin. This amounts to a vicious tautology which can explain state collapse, and then what persists once states have collapsed. Representative government becomes a sham, at least at the level of individuals. In fact, when individuals share a government but are not granted equal protection, equal rights to participation, or choice about who they identify with or how they are identified, they seem far likelier to engage in conflict at the level at which they do have fair representation from their perspective: the kin group. Also, the historical precedent of having kin to rely on (as encoded in genealogical links) makes for at least one axis of stability in an otherwise shifting landscape.

What confirmed instability in Somalia was that the Somali state never sufficiently proved itself credible as the guarantor of a secure future to any of its citizens, not even to those citizens who most benefited from securing their own fortunes by controlling the state. After all, the suspicion that they would not stay in control forever was one rationale for the elite's kleptocratic behaviour. Nor can there be any surprise that this then rendered them among the very first targets *for* liquidation (and also, not uncoincidentally, as members of *a* group).[5]

## The existence of individuation

By contrast, in a very different type of environment, in the West (for instance), the state does tend to be regarded as *the* guarantor of the future. The state remaining, not *becoming* stable, is what most citizens count on. And while there are many possible explanations for why this is so (e.g. control is not consolidated in the hands of a single ethnic group; an accountable government grew up together with a strong economy), all relevant explanations have historical roots, while the fact of history, regardless of the details, suggests that it is only *through time* that structures of state prove trustworthy. Or to turn this around, only once state structures prove (largely) solvent (largely) stable, and (largely) responsible over generations is the state likely to be credibly viewed as *the* guarantor of security by large enough numbers of its citizens.

In a sense this argument is circular. In another sense it alludes to the kind of spirals Robert Putnam (1993) describes projecting different regions of Italy along different trajectories. Essentially it is, as John Hall (1985), Michael Mann (1986), and others might call it, conjunctural.

Whereas in Somalia traditional social relations have never been fully dissolved and vital social welfare services historically have had to be provided for by the extended family (extending into the lineage and clan), non-genealogically organised institutions guarantee these same services for citizens in most Western states. Bureaucracies impartially assist individuals to secure employment and/or unemployment benefits, health care, even housing and enough to eat.

In all societies individuals require more than just the physical security which police or soldiers provide. They need a belief system and a system of rules. But they also need social welfare security – the conviction that when they fall ill, grow too old to work or are struck by disaster, someone will be sure to assist them (and/or assist members of their immediate family if they can not). This is security through time. It is exactly what genealogies represent to Somalis and what citizens in Western democracies count on the state guaranteeing (either directly via something like Medicare, or indirectly, by insuring bank deposits). At the same time, states which have such guarantees firmly in place also protect individuation.

What I mean by individuation is that individuals are able to stay apart, construct their own political identities if they so choose, and deny the claims of others. Again, the contrast I am drawing is with Somalia, where none of these are options over which individuals have sufficient (if any) control.

Why individuation developed in the West, and what prompted the success of protective institutions, is a matter of lengthy and considerable debate (see, for instance, Braudel 1981, 1982, 1984; Gellner 1983, 1994; Giddens 1987; Hobsbawm 1990; Anderson 1991). Still, at least one turn in the spiral is clear: while all sorts of liberating devices may have fostered, encouraged and even necessitated more and more cleavage from the family, cleavage could only *be* accomplished so long as kin did not have to count. Meanwhile, the more kin-as-safety-net could be (successfully) circumvented the more easily attachments between individuals and individuals and institutions at all levels could be reconfigured. For instance, so long as citizens felt they had a stake in a government protecting them and theirs, they could be encouraged to feel bound to nation and responsible for upholding rather than subverting laws of state – feeding further developments in solvency, accountability and good government. Standardisation of language, institution of public education, revolutions in communications and transportation – all things which government could facilitate or fund

once it was solvent – breathed further life into the twin modernising ideals of unity-through/unity-despite individual diversity and the safeguarding of individuals' freedoms, rights and responsibilities.

From this perspective, and as E. J. Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and others describe, individuals choosing their own identities emerged together with, and not antecedent to, the development of a national sensibility (or morality) in the West. Or to recast this in broader terms, what occurred in the West (and what now, to a great extent, defines the democratic West) was the nationalisation of individuals who, *as* individuals, then became free to regroup subnationally. This is the sense in which I approach situational identity.

## Situational identity

In those states where the individual really is treated as the unit of account, the national need to secure trust and unite all individuals across heterogenous religious, cultural, class and other cleavages has also required that government be separated from church, politics from business, work from leisure, and public from private spheres. This makes room for people to get along regardless of their differences, and gives bureaucrats (among others) space in which *to be* impartial. Accordingly, who one is loyal to, when and what one's responsibilities are, have also had to become separable and situational at the level of the individual. For instance, one's religious convictions cannot preclude having to follow federal, state and local laws in public, although the ultimate proof of the extent to which separabilities are built into Western democratic systems may simply be the extent to which it is individuals who are held accountable for their actions. In Somalia, by contrast, responsibility also devolves on pre-arranged bloodwealth-paying groups [*dia*] whenever crimes or accidents occur between two people.[6]

Meanwhile, having to be situational also means individuals' identities cannot be unitary.[7] *Having* to be situational means people have to be allowed to selectively display or hide their multiple allegiances to or from a wide variety of entities: family, party, church, friends, work. Nor are these loyalties automatically (or even) nested. Rather, citizens recognise that they can reveal or deny all sorts of affiliations by choice. This is what freedom, for many people, amounts to. We also see this in the ways in which government ultimately protects us, when (as individuals) we utilise the legal system to assist us in denying the claims of others. To us *as* individuals the state offers a whole array of legal protections, such that children are able to successfully deny the claims of their biological progenitors while adoptive parents likewise counter claims made against them which are predicated on blood.

It also seems significant that the same government which alone has the right to curb or deny individual liberties (through taxation, calls to jury duty, selective service), is also the only entity which has any real right to permanently 'fix' identity (with birth certificates, social security numbers, passports).[8] Outside of such control (but still within the confines of the law) all adults are otherwise free to remain as autonomous, anonymous and/or unsocial as they might choose. Of course, as Edward Banfield (1958), Robert Putnam (1993), Francis Fukuyama (1995) and others have pointed out of Americans, few people are quite so anti-social. Many belong to all sorts of associations. But belonging to these is, again, a matter of choice. More to the point still, belonging to them is a matter of *individual* choice and how identity is then constructed out of who individuals join up with, in order to do what, when, is largely up to individuals. Ironically, this is not the case in situations of true flux, such as those persisting in Somalia, where the government (even prior to the state's dissolution in 1991) did not secure the future for individuals and where, as a consequence, no one has been able to remain anonymous or choose the affiliation(s) by which they would be judged.

## Identity in conditions of flux

While the idea of situational identity may well be realised in Western democracies (and even elsewhere), it requires sleight-of-hand to derive it from, or apply it to, how people identify themselves and identify one another in situations of uncertainty. At first glance this might seem to present a paradox: where people are most uncertain about one another identity is fixed. But on further consideration we should be able to recognise this for what it is. A set of rules has to exist to enable people to sort friend from foe when there is no higher authority that can be counted on for protection, and when there is no permanency in terms of who should be judged friend or foe when (since the usefulness of even distant kin can expand or contract with conditions). In fact, even in the very works which underlie much of our thinking about situational behaviour in fluid societies it becomes clear that situational *identity* is actually a chimera.

E. E. Evans-Pritchard is the anthropologist who should receive credit for first describing such situational behaviour. In his classic ethnography, *The Nuer* (1978), he describes how 'Nuer' is essentially worthless as an identifier among this nomadic southern Sudanese people. Two Nuer must get far more specific than 'I'm a Nuer, are you a Nuer?' before judging one another trustworthy. To find their point of connection Nuer begin increasingly to ask one another where they come from in a series of open-ended yet simultaneously loaded questions. The entire sequence requires people to be able to pinpoint either their territorial or genealogical origins precisely, and in relation to one another. Evans-Pritchard is never entirely clear which of these two criteria – territory or genealogy – is paramount. However, this is less a flaw in the ethnography than it is an indicator of how complex the inter-relationship between the two really is. For instance, every inhabited place in Nuerland has one kin group (lineage or clan) which is regarded as dominant there, while every lineage or clan has an attachment to a dominant group somewhere. Not only does this make local knowledge cross-referential, but it also means that what outsiders might regard as two different criteria for identity really boil down to one for those who know – itself then a test of who *does* know.

This distinction between the situational nature of how narrowly one identifies oneself (which depends on who one is identifying oneself to) and the absolute nature of what one is identified by – one's father's place – is critical. It means that the determinant of identity never changes or depends; it is invariant.

Another way to get at this is to examine how exactly identity is elicited. The pattern of questioning is *as* integral to what is being plumbed for – truthfulness, reliability, a connection – as are the answers sought. In fact, built into the order of questions is a whole series of related tests. Do both parties recognise the same order? Do they fully understand what one another is saying? This is the purpose of even something so mundane and routine as daily greetings, although as Paul Riesman (1977) points out for the nomadic Fulani (in West Africa) the more intimately people know (and the more often they see) one another the more nuanced their ability to read what one another is *really* saying as they say the same things every morning.

In contrast, under conditions of suspicion the danger is that such tests become too routinised. Even as Somalia was beginning to fall apart it quickly became clear that belonging to the wrong clan could get someone killed. Consequently, some individuals began to use others' genealogies. In some cases this could work.[9] For instance, if a Darood was being interrogated by men he suspected of being Hawiye he might claim to be from a third group the Hawiye were not targeting. He would not claim to be Hawiye though, since there would be no way to fake all the connections he would not know (and in case one of the Hawiye holding him proved to be distantly related to whoever he falsely claimed as kin).

More often, however, a person could not tell who he was being questioned by and could be tricked. For example, if his interrogators suspected a man of being Darood they might use a word which only Darood in northeastern Somalia would use, as a signal that they too were Darood. If he responded as a Darood he would give himself away. If he did not, and they were Darood, he then risked not being able to convince them that he was, too.

To summarise: if it is nuance which tests true (and not just feigned) closeness then it is *knowing* nuances which signifies belonging.[10] Meanwhile, the fact that initial (and not just hostile) questioning routinely probes where one's family is – both literally and genealogically – should serve as yet another proof of how identity is actually circumscribed in situations of permanent uncertainty and flux.

## Controlling time and rethinking ethnic conflict

Conflict itself is a source of flux. But so is an uncertain future. In the West we tend to think of the future as open-ended and unknown but (technologically) controllable. This is epitomised in the view 'master technology and we can master destiny'. By contrast, for citizens of many states the future is closed (time is viewed cyclically) but up for grabs. A dominant Somali philosophy in the late 1980s seemed to be 'master destiny and we can muster technology'. Because Somalia was so underdeveloped all sorts of assistance flowed into state coffers. Because state coffers were such a concentrated source of resources for those in control of the state, assistance from without was always solicited.

The state as a source of resources offers a convincingly material explanation for why people might then kill to exert or wrest control. But, as has so often been remarked, what no version of materialism can then manage to explain is the unfailingly specific ethnic dimension to ethnic conflict: why shared blood (masquerading under shared religion, language, common history) inevitably winds up the most salient diagnostic.

In most analyses of ethnic conflict far too little attention is paid to the simple fact that often people are killed person by person, quite wilfully, and at close quarters. To begin with, how does someone even know who should be killed? Presumptions about who should be slain call for some entry into local knowledge. Also, wielding hand-weapons, even just facing a victim, demands far more personal control than weapons of mass destruction do. At every level the details of *ethnic* killing suggest some unbelievably deep-seated motivation. This might be revenge. Alternatively, killing may simply be reflex, and you obliterate others who you believe would kill you if they could. This is where the internally consistent logic of mistrusting non-kin (because only kin are trustworthy) ultimately leads – not to senseless destruction, but to eminently sensible, pre-emptive, and fairly precise, yet expandable violence.

Of course, violence which may be pre-emptive and defensive from one perspective is often regarded as offensive by those on the receiving end. As the logic of 'I can't trust you because I know you don't trust me' spins itself out, killing inevitably blurs a number of categories: victims who are known lead to strangers who are not. Meanwhile, ripple effects pull in wider and wider areas for inclusion. Also, once killing begins it tends to prove who *should* (now) distrust whom, which quickly turns killing into a fight over the future as well.

That the forward-looking nature of ethnic conflict is so implicit for actors may be one reason why it is so underrecognised by observers. Although academics continue to criticise the media when journalists describe tribal hatreds as 'ancient', academics' own correctives that these are usually modern animosities being acted out under the aegis of megalomaniacal political leaders may be equally short-sighted. Killing women and children in all societies is all about denying people a future. It is the future, then, that ethnic conflict may most devastatingly aim itself at.

This becomes especially clear in cases like Somalia's, where genealogies are larger than villages and kin groups have never been neatly contained on the ground.[11] Not only do families extending into lineages and beyond not have neat borders, but there is no mandated end to how far they can extend. All of this depends on numbers: how many wives, how many offspring, how many children those offspring produce. Consequently, there is no way – beyond massive wilful killing – to successfully obliterate a competing genealogy which, so long as it persists, will always be able to broadcast competing claims. This is one reason *ethnic* slaughter winds up being such a numbers game – and why even if women and children are not targeted they also are not chivalrously saved.[12]

## What *about* individuals?

The ways in which genealogy ultimately circumscribes trust – keeping it within the group (according to how the group defines itself) – means that any imposed arrangement to share, delegate or rework state control can itself become a source as well as a formula for ethnic conflict. This has to do with the internal moral compulsion to assist kin (discussed earlier) which those who advocate democratisation often do not recognise *as* moral compulsion – or, as Robert Frank (1988) might put it, passion within reason.

Most people writing on the subject of ethnic pluralism only look at the challenge of state insolvency from one of two perspectives: either they seek to make the state a more worthy actor, and/or they strive to balance actors within the state. The political advice is that existent groups must either be taken for granted, and then accommodated – ergo consociationalism, federalism, etc. – or alternative groupings must be built up in order to create or strengthen civil society (e.g. Horowitz 1991; Chazan 1992; Decalo 1992; Hawthorn 1993; Parry and Moran 1994; Thomas-Wooley and Keller 1994; and *African Studies Review* 37 (April 1994)).

In contrast, some authors have accepted the unbridgeability of certain gaps. Peter Worsley (1986) pointed out many years ago that states exist in an acephalous world and that without an overarching entity which can bring force to bear, no state need live up to its end of an international bargain. The same might be said of ethnic groups when central authority is bankrupt. James Fearon discusses credible commitments in similar terms and describes how commitment problems arise 'when two groups find themselves without a third party that can credibly guarantee agreements between them' (1995: 3). Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle believe that 'the logic of politics in plural societies' makes democracy impossible to sustain for these (and other) reasons (1972: 66). But even given the incontrovertible logic of these arguments, they too focus largely at the level of groups and collectivities and do not discuss the issue of individual social welfare security or treat it as any sort of starting point. Yet as William Miles points out in an article on the relationship between security and democracy in Chad, 'in general, the free movement of persons and property without risk or fear of molestation is a precondition for all other expressions of democracy' (1995: 58).

Indeed, by focusing on ways to break the link between economic insolvency and political mismanagement at the top, many writers simply disregard the pressures of lived reality: that if the state (as inherited) is already insolvent individuals cannot afford to stay separable when genealogy (which maps inseparability, as well as group separations) provides a cradle-to-grave (and beyond) 'civil' society.[13] They also disregard the fact that with ascribed identity comes a sense about obligation, and that the ethnic moral imperative *is* to secure the future – something which having children (who automatically push genealogy into the future) demands.

Again, the future needs to be considered as a weighty matter for individuals, and as relevant a component in ethnic conflict as the past is deemed to be. For instance, Donald Horowitz comments that, 'one of the ironies of democratic development is that, as the future is being planned, the past intrudes with increasing severity' (1994: 40). But would it be any less accurate if we turned this phraseology around so that, as the past is being forgotten, it is the future (and fears for the future) which intrude?

## Civil society and other conundrums

So far the issue of individual security as a critical component in ethnic conflict seems overshadowed by preoccupation with broader concerns. Even in those instances when individual interests and a common future are broached, the emphasis remains on how best to find common ground that self-interested individuals can share. The prescriptions are that political leaders think strategically in terms of their own longevity and/or that efforts be made to bolster the middle class. Lurking beneath such suggestions is the presumption that so long as *enough* people across *enough* ethnic groups have vested interests in stability, democratisation will have gained a sufficient foothold.

Doubtless this desire to foster and support new alliances helps explain the current preoccupation among Africanists with civil society as *the* state-building, democratising, wealth-generating (civilising) glue (see Barkan 1994; Robinson 1994). A whole panoply of emergent or increasingly vocal associations – women's groups, elders' councils, health organisations, religious centres – are being heralded as the harbingers of a new kind of order even in war-ravaged Somalia. But do these groups really represent stepping stones to more democratic (or even viable, accountable and equitable) government?

In Somalia few of these associations are democratically organised in and of themselves. Many are not at all alike, do not regard themselves as interchangeable, and in fact rarely interact as if they are equals. They may not even be complementary. But also none is self-sustaining. Many require donations. More significantly, all require members. And where are members drawn from? All individuals, we must remember, still remain genealogically fixed (or fixable) even if men and women do join councils, religious bodies, self-help organisations, etc. as individuals.

As a piecemeal development, then, civil society hardly addresses the real genealogical challenge: Where kinship assumes a moral imperative, everyone has to be made 'as if' kin to be included. But where kinship assumes a moral imperative, only true kin really count.

When push comes to shove and conflict or hardship threatens, it is then relatives (or competitors or enemies) who offer no choice about this, or about which identity they regard as most salient. Indeed, in moments of crisis there is only ever one identifier, when it is the same one for everyone, though of course it groups people differently: blood.[14]

Without question, being of the same blood makes for connections that people the world over privilege, though the extent to which they do so depends on what they believe best secures the future: relatives or the state, an exclusive or extensive morality. Security is one half of the challenge all humans face. Regulation (if not provision) of a social welfare net is the other half of what individuals in groups attempt to achieve. The true catch for how this is done, though, inheres in the timing: how do individuals prove now that they will still be trustworthy in the future?

Genealogy does this ingeniously well by colonising the future and charting trust for individuals according to past relations embodied in who people are related to. It also does so by grouping individuals before they are even born. While many anthropologists have described the ways in which blood ties may be altered or amended, through adoptions and fictive kin relations, in moments of conflict these emendations are forgotten and people's blood roots get proven primordial. Only when something more overarching promises individuals secure social welfare do genealogies wind up marginalised and atomised, although as slaughters in the former Yugoslavia and Nazi Germany suggest, these unassailably primordial ties can always be rediscovered no matter how urbanely they have been buried or for how long they seem to have been ignored.

Thus, conditions of insecurity and lack of individuation do worse than just go hand in hand. The more entrenched both become the more circular people's thinking, and the likelier it is that fear and concern about future *individual* social welfare will compel people to react, without thinking, according to how they can (already) be grouped.

## Conclusion

Currently it is genealogy-based groupings which render the Somali state dysfunctional. Yet, to fit into the international fold Somalis are expected to (re)construct some sort of state-like entity – with a head of state, national treasury, international representation and so on. Realistically, too, the international community will continue to regard the-space-that-is-Somalia as a state no matter how few state structures ever did, or likely can, effectively exist for all Somalis – if for no other reason than because Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya hem it in and, by default, give the space-that-is-Somalia stately form.

This presents Somalis with a virtually impossible challenge. Most 'unconventional' thinking seems to favour some sort of federation in Somalia, if not throughout the Horn of Africa. Terrence Lyons, for example, reviews the ways in which Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti comprise a *de facto* regional system. Nevertheless, as he notes, 'many observers have enumerated the mutual gains of cooperation, but fewer have analyzed the structural hurdles to obtaining these benefits' (1994: 200). Indeed, too many sticky questions remain (see Simons, forthcoming). Just to pose a few: even were a federation to be worked out among Somalis, who would coordinate it? Where would its coordinating body be located? Who would be brought in to determine this? And, more significantly, who would be left out?

These questions are paramount because no matter how cleverly new boundaries may be drawn to accommodate territorial decentralisation the social problem of how to accommodate authority remains. Even if distinctions between force and authority could be made clear, Somali social relations are still not (re)structured such that all Somalis can morally accede to the same centre. At the same time, without an overarching central authority of some sort, how can anything approaching credibility between groups be nurtured, let alone sustained?

Theoretically, genealogical morality has to completely fission in Somalia, or it has to fuse. Either individuals must be pried out of the extended groups in which they nest or solidarity has to be made far more inclusive from the top down. Different kinds of futures inform each scenario. Family members must be given tangible, secure means to a guaranteed future in order to individuate, or for a more inclusive morality to take hold there had better be the promise of a far fairer afterlife. The problem is, either pathway essentially requires that Somalis be de-Somalicised and become something other than members of this or that lineage, clan and clan-family. But, so far, the largest number of Somalis have consistently rejected Westernisation or Islamicisation. Somalis would have to lose faith in one another at the most elemental of levels before it is possible to imagine either transformation taking root. Of course, it is also difficult to imagine either transformation occuring without it being imposed. But even if Muslim clerics or foreign powers were willing to destroy Somalis' moral universe(s), this still might not yield peace-loving individuals or charitable members of a national *umma* (not that either of these options is being publicly explored or promoted).

Without question, Somali loyalties may make Somalia seem more rather than less unique and Somalia's problems intractably Somali. But as a whole, 'the state of Somalia' can still serve as an exemplar. When identity is wrapped up in circumscribed awareness, awareness is not at issue, circumscription is. This is why the Somali case has to be considered resonant. Individuation is still absent in many countries. Yet, the West, and the United States especially, continues to push democratisation – a compulsion that is all too likely to shove groups already caught in spirals of defensive worry that much faster into one another's arms.

## Notes

1 As for what I refer to when I use the term 'ethnic conflict', it is both something less and more than is usually implied. 'Ethnic' has become an over-used, even misused umbrella term employed to describe groups defined according to all sorts of commonalities: linguistic, racial, religious. This is unfortunate. All civil wars might as well be viewed as ethnic wars. But more dangerous still, we elide the significance of all sorts of differences and the motivations behind people's actions.

The position I take is that there has to be a traceable genealogical basis to ethnicity, whether people materialise what they feel they share in a common language, history, mythical heritage, set of practices, etc. Why else do people purporting to belong to the same group share these things in the first place if not because they are, at some level (and even if only at a fictive level), related?

The meaning of genealogy and its relationship to morality (which is something this paper considers) has long been debated in the literature. For example, in the late 1950s through the early 1960s a number of anthropologists disputed Meyer Fortes's contention that kinship is irreducibly emotive (see Bloch 1973). More recently similar views have resurfaced in Walker Connor's contention that national bonds, predicated on notions of kinship, are neither conscious nor rational in their inspiration (1994: 204).

2 Different Somalists use different terms for these nested groups, such as lineage, sub-clan, clan and clan-family.

3 And as Gananath Obeyesekere points out, what has so often been described as 'amoral familism' (following Edward Banfield's classic study, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (1958)) can just as easily be viewed as 'moral familism' if only looked at from a different perspective (1992: 205).

4 Ekeh, though, disregards the safety-net function of genealogy, perhaps because he is not talking about conditions of flux.

5 Of course, anyone who had attachments to Siad Barre was eventually targeted, but there was general public approbation of all members of his particular clan, the Marehan.

6 Or, alternatively, *qaaraan* is collected. Elders solicit donations which individuals *always* pay. *Qaaraan*, like *dia*, is a form of group assistance provided to individuals who are temporarily and suddenly in need. Paying *qaaraan* is morally compulsory.

7 A point well captured by the title *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Waters 1990).

8 These then require another governmental act to change.

9 What follows is a generalised account drawn from the personal testimony of Somalis who described such escapes to me.

10 This seems to be true particularly where there are no obvious physical markers to set people apart (e.g. different physiognomies, deliberate scarification).

11 I would also suggest that there are many resemblances between this and the situation in the former Yugoslavia, where local populations were notoriously mixed.

12 I would suggest that is what occurs in cases of famine. For example, in the recent Somali case many of the Somalis who did have resources they could have shared felt no more related to Somalis who were starving than they would have to Cambodians or Peruvians. Not only were there no ties worth reaffirming, but *not* helping would also weaken the starving groups' numbers. In a world where might makes right and there never *seem* to be enough resources to go around this could prove more beneficial than investing resources in people who are not already kin (and are starving in the first place because no one else has found them useful). Again, there are subtle differences in how even famine can be used as a weapon. It can be initiated, perpetuated and/or just not stopped. This all depends on who is doing (or not doing) the organising – e.g. states, warlords or 'people'.

13 The state which was inherited in many post-colonial situations was already insolvent prior to independence. There are also cosmological implications in who might be included in the 'beyond' of cradle-to-grave (e.g. ancestors, spirits).

14 I would contend that even in the United States when there is a serious accident or crisis individuals turn to family members (e.g. close kin) for assistance and support. Certainly there are exceptions, but it seems that if people could go home or appeal to family they would.

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