

**THE AFRICAN STATE
AT A CRITICAL JUNCTURE**



**BETWEEN DISINTEGRATION
AND RECONFIGURATION**

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have in different time periods elsewhere in the world. This observation ought to give pause to those who view the degeneration and inversion of existing African states as an unmitigated disaster and tragedy. In truth, a longer view suggests that new political configurations, even if they do not imitate the basic structures of modern Western states, will be constructed atop the complex social terrain of the nonstate political world and that some of those configurations will rise up from hybrid local authority structures or from warlord bands immersed in clandestine markets.

Conclusion

On the basis of the evidence presented in this chapter, it may be concluded that in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, political history does not "end" or continue on an upward development path so much as to give rise to a continuing cycle of state formation, consolidation, inversion, and reconstruction. These transitions take place in distinctive ways and the degree of state inversion varies widely, but this cycle of political change appears to characterize ever-widening portions of the African continent.

Similar forms of political change are observable in other world areas. Crises in the former Yugoslavia and in the former Soviet Union suggest that state inversion in Africa reflects a natural process of "imperial overstretch" that afflicts great—as well as small—powers over time (Kennedy 1987). Pressures toward state inversion are currently being reinforced by the failure of the international state system to produce mechanisms to bolster state power in some world areas.

In this regard, in thinking about the current crisis of state authority in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, it may prove more intellectually profitable to focus our analytic attention on historical cycles than on a teleologically oriented effort to rebuild and reform modern states. In particular, our analytic field of vision should be widened to include the potential for (a) nonstate forms of political authority to emerge, and (b) indigenously authentic "states" to evolve that reflect empire-like systems of decentralized rule.

Notes

1. These include Angola, Benin, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Mauritania, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, and Zaire.
2. The concept of state "collapse" (Zartman 1995b) is similar to that of "inversion," but "state inversion" is preferred here because it emphasizes the fact that states become inwardly focused rather than directing their actions toward society.

Somalia: The Structure of Dissolution

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In 1991 Somalia essentially dissolved as a viable, functioning state. In part Somalia's collapse is attributable to the success of a social structure that proved to be at odds with the requisite structures of the juridical state. This chapter examines one critical aspect of this rupture: how circles of trust circumscribed information flows. In turn this provokes us to address widespread assumptions about the situation in Somalia. If Somalis retain a social structure, perhaps there is structure to dissolution; this is significant because, despite the extent to which Somalia exemplifies anarchy in the minds of many, it suggests that Somalis do have a future, even if Somalia does not. The acephalous nature of information flows in the setting—that was-Somalia begs us to reconsider the components of dissolution. More broadly, the Somali case also raises questions about the suitability of a state form for all peoples.

A Structural Political History

Hindsight now suggests that not only was Somalia's dissolution thirty years in the making, but indeed that dissolution began with the state's birth.¹ Arguably, the fracture lines were there even before Somalia formally became an independent entity in 1960, with its own flag, formal borders, a representative at the United Nations, and all the other trappings of juridical statehood.

Analytically Somalia is easily divisible in several different ways. First, as a geographical entity this country in the Horn of Africa can be divided into at least four parts: a coastal zone, an interriverine area, a mountainous north, and a semiarid interior. Second, as an ethnic entity it splits into six clan-families, most commonly identified as the Raxanweyn, Daarood, Hawiye, Isaaq, Digil, and Dir. Third, there is a significant division of labor in Somalia or—to put this in a more indigenous context—the division

of labor among Somalis has traditionally held tremendous significance. Historically, Somalis have long categorized one another according to their occupations, so that distinctive cultural differences are recognized among pastoralists, agriculturalists, craft specialists (e.g., blacksmiths, leatherworkers, etc.), and traders. Finally, with independence two different colonies were joined to make the country of Somalia: British Somaliland in the north and Italian Somalia in the south.

Not surprisingly, there has been substantive overlap between all of these various cleavages. For instance, agriculture predominated among Raxanweyn Somalis in the interriverine area, while pastoralism was practiced by Isaq and Darood Somalis (among others) in the country's semiarid reaches. The interriverine area, located in the south, fell under Italian (and not British) colonial control. Hence, even something as simple as the choice of a national capital at independence bore all sorts of implications. Mogadishu's location would prove significant not only for those Italian-oriented Somalis in Mogadishu's immediate vicinity (the Hawiye among others), but for English-speaking (and particularly Isaq) Somalis in the more distant and Aden Gulf-facing north. At the same time, despite their proximity to Mogadishu, Raxanweyn Somalis gained little political advantage, largely because of their lower social status as agriculturalists.

In other words, the privileging of place, as well as of certain social categories—whether real or imagined—created all sorts of room for new meanings to be attached to old differences just prior to independence. Who did the new government employ, assist, benefit, look out for? Most importantly, who peopled it? As individual Somalis jostled to take charge of their country's destiny, numerous other inequities (again, both real and imagined) emerged, thanks to an insolvent economic legacy (the result of colonial subsidies and underdevelopment) and to widespread local inexperience in running a national government.

As in many other places in Africa, at independence the state itself resented Somalia's most concentrated source of resources; alternative sources of substantive wealth tended to be locked away in widely dispersed herds of livestock or foreign-controlled banana plantations. With the levers of political and economic power collapsed into one another, government positions offered untold (but quite visible) rewards to those who managed to secure them. Through time Somalis increasingly competed to control these state offices, although individuals did not seek such positions on their own. Rather, interest groups developed and individuals with joint interests coalesced.

Prior to the colonial and postcolonial consolidation of Somalia as an entity, most Somalis were embedded in locally grounded social networks. Only in moments of conflict and/or with the introduction of larger arenas of competition (e.g., towns, government, a country) did people find it necessary to identify themselves with larger groupings. As it happens, a basis

for such groupings already existed for pastoralist Somalis, who are still renowned for being able to trace descent twenty generations and more back through their father's line. Moving out from family through lineage—which is where most daily interactions stopped—most individuals could go much further yet in determining who might be an ally and who a competitor, all based on the extent to which there were shared genealogical links. Meanwhile, the more that different people interacted and the more competitive the world became—whether we think of this as the world of Mogadishu, of government, or of high finance—the more compelling and useful genealogical affinities proved to be. In fact, one reading of Somalia's brief (1960–1969) history as a democratic country is to view genealogy as political compulsion. Certainly this seems evident in the country's last free election, held in 1969, when 62 parties put up 1,002 candidates for 123 seats at the national level.

Ironically, this compulsion about genealogical affinity was made all the more compelling once it was officially driven underground by General Mohamed Siad Barre, who took power in a coup shortly after the 1969 national elections. The officially articulated rationale for the military takeover was to stem clan-based corruption. Consequently, Siad Barre promised to root out "clannism," which he attempted to do by banning any discussion of clans. But simply restricting speech proved to be too little, too late. Regardless of Siad Barre's intent, the structured way in which clan-family allegiances were both presumed and expected to operate had already become too useful and too well-entrenched. For instance, no matter how carefully Siad Barre balanced government ministries among members of different clan-families and clans in order to dispel any hint of favoritism, that he did so only drew attention to the extent to which even he was still having to pay attention to genealogy.

A Series of Events

Chronologically, of course, there is a different way to explain Somalia's dissolution, which has to do with the interplay of events both within and without the country. Most often the Ogaden War has been singled out as the turning point both for Siad Barre's regime and the fortunes of the Somali state (see Lewis 1994; Samatar 1994; Lyons and Samatar 1995). The war, fought in earnest between Ethiopia and Somalia between 1977 and 1978, actually marked four turning points. First, it precipitated the switchover in Cold War superpower allegiances. Prior to Somalia's invasion of Ethiopian-controlled, Somali-occupied grazing lands, the Soviets backed Somalia while the United States backed Ethiopia. However, as fighting grew more serious, Ethiopia's new Marxist government successfully wooed the Soviets away from Somalia. Significantly, only once

Somalia had been defeated on the battlefield did the West (and oil-rich Muslim states) begin to support the Siad Barre regime in the Soviets' stead. This support in and of itself then marked a second turning point. Whereas the Soviets had supplied industry and military materiel to Somalia, Western assistance amounted to unprecedented quantities of money and goods. The refugee flow that justified this aid represented a third turning point. Having lost the war, Siad Barre's government nevertheless gained a whole new lease on life in the form of these refugees, and the lucrative resources that flowed their way. Tellingly, too, these refugees happened to belong predominantly to one particular clan-family (Ogaden/Darood), numbers of whom were then relocated to areas of the country traditionally dominated by others.

The defeat, the influx and relocation of refugees, and the concomitant avalanche of aid all combined to produce the fourth turning point, which was Siad Barre's increasing reliance on members of his own clan and clan-family. There was already discontent over his handling of the war. But then, not only did refugee assistance pour into Mogadishu and through the hands of high government officials (who too often were Siad Barre's relatives), but his subsequent attempts to pin blame for the loss on others, while blatantly benefiting his own kin, made all Somalis pay even more attention to genealogical links as they noted whom Siad Barre protected and promoted, and whom he persecuted. Significantly, by the mid-1980s the opposition movements also reflected this same clanist cast.

In large measure the clan- and clan-family-based proliferation of opposition groups explains why it was not until 1988 that Siad Barre's opponents finally began to make real headway in their efforts to oust the regime. This occurred in the wake of a historic agreement between Siad Barre and Ethiopia's Mengistu Haile Mariam, whereby both leaders agreed to stop supporting one another's opposition. In one fell swoop the northern (and predominantly Isaq) opposition movement, the Somali National Movement (SNM), not only lost its Ethiopian base but was forced to (re)enter Somalia the hard way. The SNM did so with a major military offensive in May of that year.

It was essentially this 1988 civil war, precipitated by the SNM, that marked the beginning of Somalia's formal dissolution. Although the ensuing fighting was largely confined to the north, it nonetheless involved Somalis from all over the country as young men in Mogadishu were conscripted by the government, refugees from the Ogaden War (still living in refugee camps in the north) were armed and encouraged to fight against the Isaq, and civilians from the northern capital, Hargeisa, and other towns, fled as refugees themselves. As the war progressed, opposition groups throughout the country opportunistically seized ground elsewhere for themselves (e.g., the predominantly Majertein Somali Salvation Democratic Front in the northeast), while more recently created movements

rose to protect other clan and/or clan-family interests (e.g., the Somali Patriotic Movement to promote/protect Ogaden in the south and the west, and the United Somali Congress [USC] to promote/protect Hawiye claims in the center). With the countryside being carved up, it was late 1990 before the fighting finally reached Mogadishu.

In January 1991, numerically overwhelmed, Siad Barre and the remnants of what had become increasingly his own clan-based (Marehan/Darood) army were driven from the capital. While this certainly represented a victory for the opposition, the opposition itself was hardly unified. Rather, the opposition groups simply shared the same immediate goal: to remove Siad Barre from power. Within short order the city fell under Hawiye/USC control.

Three things are generally said about Somalia's divided opposition: first, that this was a direct result of Siad Barre's own skill in keeping his opponents divided along genealogical lines; second, that this inability of Somalis to cohere is exactly what allowed Siad Barre to remain in power for twenty-one years. Throughout the 1980s Siad Barre proved remarkably adept at stirring up sufficient suspicions between movements, clans, and clan-families to keep them divided. But, as the rest of this chapter suggests, this was not just the result of Siad Barre's skillful manipulations; there also had to be something to manipulate. A consideration of this fact requires us to view the third element often invoked in discussions of opposition disunity—namely, the strength of clan ties—in order to better understand how anarchy in Somalia is structured.

Analyzing Invisible Social Structure

Dissolution and anarchy are often talked about in tandem, and Somalia is now widely cited as an exemplar of what happens when states dissolve into anarchy. However, dissolution and anarchy may well be two very different things. If we define anarchy as an absence of government, then Somalia in the 1990s does indeed qualify as anarchic. However, if (as is more commonly the case) anarchy is used to mean an utter lack of organization, then conditions in Somalia hardly fit the definition. Despite the absence of any internationally recognized, functional state-level or even municipal government, there has still been organization in Somalia. To an anthropologist—and, one hopes, to other social scientists—this is a pat and hardly revelatory statement. Nor is there anything necessarily novel about the next: that the international community, comprised of states, accepts others as relative equals regardless of the coherence of the social structures encapsulated within the state container.

Various Africanist scholars have pointed to the disjuncture between the international (juridical) face of the state and its domestic (empirical)

reality. Thus, Robert Jackson (1990) describes states that could not survive economically if they were not granted sovereignty and then financially shored up from without, while Patrick Chabal (1994) explains why, despite African states' outward similarity to European states, historical developments render them so different. Nevertheless, states like Somalia have still been treated *as states* by others. Like money, states amount to an acultural, generalizable unit of account, convenient in the realm of international relations and global economics. At the same time there is the historical legacy. Colonial powers were disinterested in coming up with a new, non-state shape of political organization for stateless societies, despite Somalis (among others) having proven time and again that state borders hardly suit them. Turn this around and we may find that the only real coherence to Somalia was imposed by borders and institutions recognized only by outsiders.

If we consider recent fighting in Somalia, we can also see that it does not reveal a lack of structure, no matter how unorganized fighters might appear. Even if an assailant does not know who his victims are, he knows who they are not (e.g., they are not members of his group). Structure, in this sense, is concentric, from ego out. It can expand or contract, all according to a logic carried around by each individual in his or her head. If Somalia is unique, it is largely because this dominant Somali-wide ideology is predicated on something that to the outsider is at worst invisible and at best appears to be of a confused if not confusing acephalous type.²

Genealogy (or, more accurately, descent) is critical to Somalis' moral order, and so far has taken precedence over Islam as the governing factor in Somalis' lives. While this invisible morality does not look like government to outsiders, it does govern.³ Kinship not only determines how people should regard one another situationally (as compatriots or competitors) but also dictates specific roles, duties, rights, and responsibilities.

What genealogy does, beyond charting trustworthiness, is provide individuals with a moral compass that indicates how individuals should interact with one another, depending on who (in genealogical terms) those others are.⁴ The catch to genealogy, though, is that it does not enfold all Somalis under a single umbrella. Not all Somalis are related to one another, yet all are related to some other Somalis. At the broadest level, Somalis are separable into something like six mutually exclusive groups (the clan-families listed above).⁵ This means that there are essentially six different societies in what we still refer to as Somalia, although none substantively coalesced or even existed as a politically solvent unit on the ground prior to 1991. For instance, during the late 1980s an individual might have been identified, and might even have self-identified, as a member of the Darood clan-family. But the Darood could not be located as a political, let alone territorially fixed, entity. At the same time, "the Darood" still served as a rallying cry and catalyst for a sense of (but not a systemic) unity among non-Darood.⁶ For the Isaq such a "calling" did lead

eventually to the formation of their own state in 1991—the Republic of Somaliland, located in the former British Somaliland, where the Isaq predominate—but this is a self-proclaimed state that the international community still refuses to recognize, a fact that further illustrates non-Somalis' general discomfort with a political order that situationally crystallizes out of genealogical identity.

Actually, regard for Somali realities has been misguided on almost all counts. In large part this is because culture has been granted primacy over social relations. No Somali government successfully restructured social relations. Instead, Somalis' apparent homogeneity in language, dress, diet, and attitudes was extolled. By focusing on a livestock-based culture, for instance (glossing over the fact that some Somalis were agriculturalists, craftworkers, etc.), nationalists could make Somalis appear as though they already comprised a coherent nation (see Ahmed 1995); only state governance was really new. This served irredentist as well as nationalist purposes. The state itself, meanwhile, encouraged other requisites of modern nationalism, like language consolidation and literacy programs. But, no matter how noble or well-intentioned, none of these government-sponsored efforts overcame the pull of familial obligations. Indeed, one reason culture could appear so uniform in Somalia was that all Somalis did have these same obligations. Having was hardly sharing, however.

Without placing or being able to place themselves above or beyond the reach of their own obligations to kin, government officials themselves demonstrated the relational hollowness of an overarching culture. From independence onward, their partiality and parochialism put the lie to a pan-Somali morality. And their behavior, which actually may have been nothing but moral according to lineage (or even subtly different clan) standards, rendered a national government impossible, and thus subnational allegiances critical to individual survival.

The persistence of an "economy of affection" and the conflation of public and private spheres has now become a rather standard explanation for the failures of many states in Africa.⁷ But kin-based loyalties should not be viewed as confined to social welfare or national resources alone. Assuming, as many moral economy theorists do, that everything is predicated on obligatory social relations, then nothing is exempt from being thought about in these terms—least of all information, as it applies to (and explains) the distribution of services, resources, wealth, and power.

Indeed, it may well be information that lies at the heart of how competing moral economies come to be so exclusionary. The whirlpool-like effects of tautology are clear: the state does not work for everyone because certain people work the state for themselves, which means the state cannot work. This in turn colors how state actions and pronouncements are read. In this regard Somalia may not be at all unique on the African continent (or indeed elsewhere). Consider, for example, the description of Sierre

Leone in the *Los Angeles Times* where, according to one headline, "In a Paranoid Land, Contagion of Fear Spreads: Sierra Leone's military government downplays a rebel threat, but the people aren't listening. Rumors abound."⁸

Competing Logics and the Role of Rumor

In the Somali case all information was similarly suspect for two reasons: there was no credible news media and far too often (mis)information was purposely manipulated by those in power. The lack of credible news media may reflect dictatorial preference or colonial legacy. Misinformation, on the other hand, may simply be a governmental tool, employed everywhere but at least challengeable where there is a free and largely credible press.

In Siad Barre's Somalia it was commonly asserted that misinformation was broadcast by government officials or the government-controlled media, or that fake papers were left lying around in order that rumors circulate, itself an unprovable assertion. Still, the logic ran, the powers-that-be did this to gauge public reaction either to something they were tentatively thinking of doing or to whatever they hoped to spoil for opponents or critics.

Because of such suppositions, government-generated information meant to answer questions only served to provoke new ones, while what was said was carefully combed for what was left out. For instance, when the government announced ministerial changes—invariably explained as performance-based personnel shifts—people automatically assumed this could not be the real reason behind a demotion/promotion. Instead, they concentrated on what had not been publicized: genealogy, the one thing never explicitly discussed, yet the idiom most central to popular explanations of such events. As soon as Siad Barre said that genealogy no longer mattered (in the early 1970s), he essentially threw down the gauntlet and dared Somalis to pay attention and prove him wrong. Meanwhile, given genealogy's subversive prominence, it could never be disproven as the causal factor many Somalis believed it to be.

The fact that circuits of information themselves were so genealogically based contributed to the perception that genealogy was key. Given the lack of a credibly authoritative news source, the only explanations of events not suspect from individuals' points of view were explanations that came from people they already knew they could trust. Kin shared a common morality; kin could automatically be trusted.

In contrast to analyses suggesting that it was a lack of information or "facts" that would have caused Somalis to leap to conclusions, and at each other's throats, there was more often than not a surfeit of facts. When explanations for events were neither verifiable nor disprovable, there was no

shortage of evidence to support numerous hypotheses: addressing, rationalizing, and analyzing why X had been transferred where, or why Y had been granted a letter of credit, building permit, university entrance. Inevitably everything could be boiled down to clan or clan-family membership. Essentially the story line was rote: "they" were in business for themselves, guilty of excluding others. History confirmed this—in genealogies and in the gaps charted between lineages, clans, and ultimately clan-families on family trees. Even if whatever "they" were guilty of was not wholly discoverable in the present, guilt still had to be presumed. After all, "they" would not be "they" if they could be trusted.

The tautologies are neat, and they build on one another. It was not just that Somalia's constituent societies were acephalous in and of themselves, but that Somalia's history and environment rendered decentralization so likely. Who or what could be trusted? In the space of less than three generations, the British, French, Italians, Americans, Soviets, Saudis, Iraqis, Libyans, and the Chinese (to name some) had interfered. Government had been colonial, then mandate, then representative, then dictatorial. Or what of economic regimens: colonial, capitalist, socialist, and capitalist again, with all the attendant experimentation from import substitution through privatization and structural adjustment?

Obviously, given such kaleidoscopic changes at the state center, nothing centralized could be counted on. Rumor became not just a substitute for, but also the only source of information. "Rumors" in this sense should not be understood simply as misinformation or untruths. Rather, each rumor confirmed a truth for a specific audience. This is somewhat different from what has been suggested about rumors in other studies of African political culture.

One description of rumors depicts them as a potent brew of what is not known in the here and now linked to what may or may not be known by those able to manipulate the supernatural (Kastfelt 1989). Another consideration of rumors traces their legitimacy to African oral traditions (Ellis 1989). In analyzing the significance of *radio trottoir* in Togo, Stephen Ellis writes, "it is evident that in oral societies the spoken word has a quite different value from that which it has in literate ones. . . . In pre-colonial Africa oratory, politics and religion all intertwined, not least because politics in an oral culture require a far more intensive use of symbols to preserve an orderly system of laws and a constitution" (1993, 474). But, by privileging the construction of myths out of traditional symbols, such an explanation pays too little attention to the importance of the skein of logic that does the actual constructing.

It seems to me that logic is not only critical to the story line, but that in many ways it defines that line, tying miscellaneous gleanings together into a coherent, compelling narrative. Essentially logic is suspicion confirmable by evidence (just as most suspicions are invariably logical).

Interestingly, Ellis cites Jan Vansina to bolster his argument. But as Vansina himself suggests in a very different context, there may be more to what people find compelling about an explanation than mere "tradition":

The quality of a hypothesis varies with the density of interconnections between the parts and with the number of the elements it attempts to explain. The more features it addresses, the higher the quality of the hypothesis, because the number of potential alternative hypotheses decreases with the number of features which have to be accounted for (1990, 250).

Rumors are hypotheses. Rumors link facts together; the more facts that can be linked, the more convincing the rumor. As Ellis points out, in places with no authoritative news or information source rumors do not just titillate; they are currency. There is a continual "trading up" as more facts are gathered. More significantly, which rumors are bought depends on who is doing the selling (Ellis 1993, 470). As Allport and Postman (1947/1965) describe in their classic study of rumors during World War II, the issue of trust and trusting the source is critical to believing the rumor.

But there may also be another way to think about rumor: as the product of science rather than myth. For instance, there was a definite method to how rumors were constructed in Somalia. As with any scientific thinking, rumor mongering was self-correcting: the underlying logic that hooked the facts together did not just align the facts, but also sought for the most plausible explanations, sorting through, and accepting or discarding what was and was not relevant as fact. The facts could change but the logic did not. Its consistency, in turn, assured that those who believed belonged and vice versa.

Multiple logics thus coexisted and competed in Somalia for three reasons. First, no one had any more proof of what was fact than anyone else. Second, every logic could make any set of facts seem self-evident. And third, anything was fair game to be used as fact. Finding and interpreting facts were not separable activities.

The Center: Misperceived

Conditions were decentralized in Somalia in two senses: in terms of the extent to which Somalis felt morally bound to each other and in terms of information flows. Clearly the two hook together and help constitute a vicious cycle. Because the center was disbelieved, rumors became the coin of the realm. Information was a matter of faith and rumors informed. People responded to, and with, whatever could help them make sense of a perhaps coercive but nonetheless authority-less situation. But again, a critical distinction must be made. The situation was not senseless. Sense was

merely decentralized, so that all participants had their own version, and these versions were often at loggerheads.

At the broadest level this was more than evident in relations between Somalis and non-Somalis, which in and of themselves helped promote a particular view by outsiders of Somalis as *Somalis* (and not members of constituent Marehan, Majertein, Isaq, or Darood clans and clan-families, etc.). Paradoxically, Somalis' own presentation of themselves helped enforce the illusion of cohesion. This came in two forms. First, so long as assistance kept flowing into the country, Somalia held value as a coherent entity worthy of garnering assistance. Second, these assistance flows, which proved Somalia to be a juridical entity at the international level, both promoted and required a center.

One way to read dissolution is to study events at this center, since the center was so pivotal to the whole—and tended to represent Somalia, even for outsiders. In fact, it is possible to argue that it was Mogadishu as the center, and Marehan (Siad Barre's clan) at the center of Mogadishu, that caused Somalia's peripheries (and non-Marehan) to seek their own autonomies. On the one hand, inequity emanating from Mogadishu inspired rebellion. On the other hand, rebellion in the peripheries only highlighted the significance of Mogadishu as the linchpin of Somalia. After all, Mogadishu served as the centerpiece of the juridical state and the source of virtually all of its services. Arguably, despite a civil war in the north and increasing instances of social banditry and rebellion elsewhere, it was not until violence burst through and into the capital city that Somalis in Mogadishu were finally forced to confront the question of the meaningfulness of Somalia itself. Otherwise, as long as the center had retained its cohesion, the illusion of the juridical state could be maintained.

The event that was the harbinger of fighting yet to come in Mogadishu occurred on 14 July 1989, when government troops opened fire on Muslim worshippers as they were leaving Friday noon (*juma*) prayer. According to some reports, the death toll from these shootings numbered in the hundreds, although Somali opposition movements claimed fatalities in the thousands. Regardless, the violence sparked fear in the capital and further fighting in its hinterlands. This in turn had a number of effects, perhaps one of the most significant of which was the onset of the Western withdrawal from Somalia.

While some Mogadishu residents feared a complete Western withdrawal in the aftermath of Black Friday (14 July), to many it was unclear why Westerners would leave at such a critical moment.⁹ Because no policy statement was made by the United States (or any other) embassy addressing the Somali people, the latter were free to put whatever gloss they chose on widespread rumors of a pullout. To some, any departure looked like abandonment. After all, with their own government acting beyond the bounds of reason, many Somalis (particularly the small but significant

urban population employed by Westerners and/or by Western-sponsored aid projects) were puzzled as to why they, "the people," were about to be forsaken in their moment of greatest need by those who purported to be their friends. Certainly many Somalis wondered why more outside pressure was not being brought to bear on Siad Barre.

Once a Western withdrawal of project staff did begin, speculation shifted gears. Rumors now worried over who was likely to replace the expatriates, with many young Somali civil servants assuming that the Soviets would return. In part it was assumed that the Soviets would be back because it was known that at least one highly placed government official had traveled to the Soviet Union. Also, because people remembered the previous flip-flop of the 1970s, when the Soviets were ousted and the Americans invited back into Somalia, there was the widespread expectation that Somalia would have to be supported by one or the other of the superpowers.

What is interesting about this essentially automatic reaction on the part of many people—a minority of whom actually looked forward to the Soviets returning, since they remembered a time of little corruption—is that this also revealed a strand of Somali thinking concerning Somalia's importance in the world. Many Somalis clearly realized that much of what accrued to Somalia came by way of tensions between the USSR and the United States, the proximity of the Gulf, and Somalia's geopolitical location on the coast of Africa, as well as its long-term enmity with Ethiopia. For instance, the military base at Berbera was often cited as *the* reason why the United States was interested in Somalia, while its importance to U.S. security was dramatically overblown by those Somalis who also commonly asserted that the base had to be of top importance; why else would the U.S. government have so many of their citizens dispensing aid in Somalia?

Because of U.S.-USSR rivalry in the Horn, and the history of switchovers in allegiance, these Somalis felt there was little reason to worry about the possibility of Somalia losing assistance altogether. Because there was so much apparent competition in the wider world, Somalis from all clans believed that Somalia was still well positioned to reap geostrategic benefits. Indeed, since long before independence there had always been aid to count on. Without stretching the analogy too far, Somali social structure itself was predicated on there being wet seasons and dry seasons, bountiful years and drought; even in the midst of drought, eventual rain could be assumed.

However, by October and into November 1989, as it became increasingly evident that the Soviets were not rushing to replace U.S. citizens—who could be seen packing in various compounds—expectation began to give way to despair and people openly wondered who, if anyone, would intercede in the threatening dissolution. As no one stepped in, tension palpably heightened. I would suggest that, in no small measure, this "sudden"

lack of an interested outside party was the first real sign Somalis received that Somalia was perhaps less important than they had led themselves to believe. It also signaled the onset of true collapse.

Or so it seemed in December 1991 when I first committed such an analysis to paper. Within a year events would prove this view both right and wrong.

For a variety of reasons, the Somali state was indeed allowed to dissolve without international intercession.¹⁰ However, once there was no functioning center at all, the international community rushed back into the space that it still thought of as Somalia to "restore hope," and attempt to revive a Somalia it still wanted to regard as having a center, and even a capital.

This new aid onslaught, in turn, had two ironic (but arguably predictable) effects. First, it once again lent Somalia prominence on the world stage. Second, it gave particular significance to Mogadishu. Mogadishu had the port, the airport, and its own civil war. By making Mogadishu the fulcrum of U.S./UN operations, Operation Restore Hope of course made control of Mogadishu something for Somalis to fight over—all over again.

Meanwhile, for what purpose was hope being restored? With the best of intentions, Operation Restore Hope was an ill-chosen name. Was the operation all about granting Somalis a respite from famine or installing a new government? If this was not made clear to the U.S. public (or to U.S. congressmen), then it was certainly never made clear to Somalis. The debate on what was meant to happen is still intense.¹¹ Almost unnoticed, though, was the unspoken restoration of Somalis' own assumptions concerning Somalia's significance. Operation Restore Hope sparked endless conjecture among many Somalis, as rumors ricocheted back and forth between Somalis in the United States and Somalis elsewhere: Why had Somalia and not Angola, Liberia, or the Sudan become the focus of such intense Western attention? Intervention could not have just been about starving Somali farmers, since there were starving Africans in many other places as well (and even plenty of hungry people in the United States). Consequently, Somalis and those reporting on them developed all sorts of logical rationales as explanations: intervention was about oil, Islamic fundamentalism, practicing techniques for establishing new world order, or passage of a tar baby from outgoing President Bush to incoming President Clinton.

That there could be so many different explanations for a single set of incompletely known facts is in and of itself revelatory. It simply seems to reaffirm that when there is no centralized, credible source of information or authority, people not only assume there are hidden agendas, but invariably find them. For Somalis the United States had long since proved that while it was perhaps credible in terms of the strength it could bring to bear, it was not credible in terms of the level of honesty with which it addressed Somalis. Significantly, too, not only was there no credible authority that

overarched both the United States and Somalia, but there had also never been an overarching source of information to which all parties could turn.

To some extent, then, the dissolution of Somalia must be attributed not just to hollowness at the core and lack of a credible, overarching structure at the subnational level, but also to the persistence of very particular and even particularizing structures. The institutions with which Somali elites had constructed the juridical state since independence—clientelism, genealogy, and rumor—proved unsustainable in the face of the new challenges of the 1990s. Again, the kinds of social relations that could destabilize a juridical state had never been sufficiently altered.

Conclusion. And Lessons?

Put most succinctly, genealogical social structure easily decentralized the kind of power necessary to maintain political order (and orderliness) within the putatively republican Somali state. Meanwhile, the survival value of genealogy means that Somalis face two conundrums today. To fit into the international fold, they are expected to (re)construct some sort of state, although the very requirements of state form—having a national capital, head of state, national treasury, etc.—invite contraction. Contraction around a single center is precisely the reason the Somali National Movement was founded in the first place in the early 1980s (northerners felt they were being shortchanged by the central government, located as it was in the south), precipitating the country's civil war and ultimately its dissolution.

At the same time, as wearying and wasteful as all the bloodshed has been, it has proved unerringly self-fulfilling, in one indisputable sense. Now more than ever, knowing genealogy *does* chart who can and cannot be trusted. Nor is time likely to erode the usefulness of "genealogic" for Somalis in the near future. For one thing, time is genealogy's tool, stretching memories forward as well as backward. Even more importantly, there is the weightiness of genealogy, as the only logic on which all Somalis can now agree.

That lineage-, clan-, and clan-family-based fighting has helped render Somalia a dysfunctional state is already well documented. To go a step beyond what is known though, and attempt to predict the future of the Somali state by suggesting that perhaps no centralized structure will work for Somalis, takes me onto much less stable ground. Realistically, 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 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.

But what if one or two of these other states were to wither, implode, or collapse?

Not surprisingly, given all the fighting in the Horn of Africa over the past several decades, there has been considerable talk of regional or other political configurations emerging, even of redrawing boundaries (Ravenhill 1988). Most "unconventional" thinking seems to favor some sort of federation in Somalia, if not throughout the Horn. For instance, Terrence Lyons 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, 199–200).¹² Indeed, myriad sticky questions loom. For instance, 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 the boundaries may be redrawn to accommodate Somalis' territorial decentralization, the social problem remains: how to accommodate central authority? Even were the distinctions between force and central authority to be made clear, Somali social relations are still not (re)structured such that all Somalis can morally accede to the same center. Thus, centralized control itself, given the structure of Somalis' social relations, remains the real problem—and is bound to persist as the obstacle to any new configuration.

At the same time, without regard for an overarching centralized authority, it also seems unlikely that gaps in information flows can be bridged. This bears all sorts of implications for the production and reproduction of (mis)trust, since in a segmentary situation it also becomes a truism to say that credibility gaps between groups wind up circumscribing logics within them, with circumscribed logics then reinforcing people's presuppositions about whom to trust. This is one way to link logic to genealogy and the logic of genealogy to mutual suspicions between genealogically composed groups. However, such a portrait of Somalia may also be too closed. It alludes to no interference from, or interactions with, the outside. It also renders Somalia more—rather than less—unique.

Certainly Somalia is at one end of a historical but also specifically pastoralist continuum; the effectiveness of circumscribed morality coupled with circumscribed logic in an environment demanding fluidity provides a persuasive explanation for why Somali social relations have persisted as they have—and why they have corroded the juridical state. Nevertheless, even in places where such conditions are not the norm, the Somali example may offer two broader insights.

First, the Somali case suggests just how short-sighted it is to assume that parties to a dispute share a universal logic, or that parties to disagreement are simply misinformed. Facts are not necessarily the source of

misunderstandings. Logic is, and mistrust and suspicions are always logical. Rarely are people suspicious out of ignorance about "the facts." Rather, they are suspicious because they know what to fear and already feel they have plenty of facts. Second is the question of what does count as fact. When forced to forage for information, people display true genius. To extend this analogy one step further, when people are hungry they will make a meal out of anything they think might be edible. So it goes with the construction of rumors, which, without question, do inform. Is feeding more information to people the most logical solution then?

It has been suggested that increasing the world flow of information might be one antidote to interethnic conflict, and that we could squelch rumors and propaganda if only we jammed evil voices and broadcast more truth.¹³ But whose truth? Is information alone really enough to alter logic? In cases such as those of Eastern European countries during the Cold War, where centralized authority was discredited, alternative sources of information supplied from other centralized authorities (e.g., the U.S. government via Radio Free Europe and the British government via the BBC) did prove decidedly helpful. But where there is no tradition of being able to place faith in any single overarching authority, the task may not be nearly so neat. Offering alternative explanations might only add to the rumor mill while attempts to speak with any sort of authority can themselves feed irrepressibly circular logics. Certainly our own misunderstandings about anarchy in Somalia might serve as one proof of this.

Notes

1. This is an argument I make in far greater detail in Simons 1995.
2. See note 6 below on the significance of a dominant cultural ideology.
3. Numerous Somaliists (e.g., I. M. Lewis, David Marlowe, and Ahmed Samatar) have commented on the role of *heer* (or contract) in securing moral order among Somalis. But as Ahmed Samatar points out, some time in the past several decades *heer*, as an institution that overrode the exclusivity of descent, became decoupled from descent, and descent began to take organizational precedence (Samatar 1994).
4. Trust is delineated by breaks between lineages, clans, and clan-families. Put most succinctly, what genealogies chart is a history of links that document who has trusted whom among kin, and whom one can expect to trust. Links are essentially only kept if people prove reliable and 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 different lines and begin to go their separate ways. This is a point I argue in Simons 1995.
5. Significantly, affinal ties (or ties through marriage) are not confused with agnatic ties (or ties through descent) in patrilineal societies. Inter-marriage does not change the rule of descent, which is the predominant rule of genealogical organization in Somalia.

6. The gist of my argument, which cannot be fully fleshed out here, is that there has been much confusion about Somalia's allegedly homogeneous culture. Notions of a homogeneous culture are erroneous. For instance, Somali agriculturalists and Somali pastoralists engage in different modes of production, speak different languages, and have noticeably different sets of customs. I believe "society" is a far more relevant diacritic. Given the content of social relations, it should be clear that Somalis do not all participate in the same society, or treat one another as if all Somalis are one and the same.

7. See Hyden 1983; Berry 1985; Sandbrook 1985; Bayart 1993.

8. *Los Angeles Times*, 4 February 1995, p. A2. For more on this, see Chapter 6 in this volume.

9. Significantly, after being broadly hinted at, it took months before this withdrawal was finally enacted. Assumptions among many expatriates were that it would take place much more quickly than it did. Thus, delay itself inspired numerous rumors in expatriate and Somali communities.

10. These reactions are explored more fully in Simons 1996.

11. There has been a flurry of books and articles written by key participants in the humanitarian intervention (e.g., Robert Oakley and Mohamed Sahnoun, among others) as well as by journalists and senior research analysts, both civilian and military. See, for example, Lyons and Samatar 1995 and Stevenson 1995.

12. For a consideration of reconfiguration, see Lyons 1994 and also Gurdon 1994.

13. Keith Spicer, "Propaganda for Peace," *New York Times*, 10 December 1994.