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SOMALIA

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Regularity in Chaos: the politics of difference in the recent history of Somalia

*Günther Schlee*¹

Introduction

In poststructuralist anthropology kinship and lineages are no longer fashionable. This paper, however, seeks to explore the constant elements, the patterns or “structures” so to speak, and, the lineage factor prominent among them, in connection with new and more variable factors in recent conflicts in Somalia. In order to clarify the lineages and the contractual elements employed in their mobilization it focuses on the best known example, the rivalry between the two pretenders to the presidency of the country, namely Aydid (killed in 1996 and succeeded by his son) and Ali Mahdi, along with their respective allies. In the 1990s each one was in control of a part of the capital city. It deals with old and new forces in Somali politics. Examples from other parts of Somalia and of Somali in other countries (Kenya, Europe ...) are used to illustrate one or the other point but are not explored systematically. The paper starts with a summary of the history of Somalia and continues with an analysis of the forms of conflict extant there.²

Somalia, as it appears on the map today, has only existed since 1960. Or to be more precise, this construction existed from 1960 until it broke up towards the end of the 1980s, when ever larger parts of the region came under the control of competing militias. For roughly three decades though, a unified state did exist, not only on paper, but as a political reality. As used here, however, the term “the history of Somalia” includes both the period prior to and in particular the period following this approximately thirty year interlude. Because directly or indirectly, the problems that led to costly, futile interventions by international agencies and to an ongoing refugee problem all ultimately have something to do with the breakdown of this state.

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² There are early German versions of this paper (Schlee 1995 and in Schlee/Werner (eds.) 1996.) Some of the materials used here have also been included in a more comprehensive publication in Spanish (Schlee 1998). The present version has been expanded and updated with regard to recent events. (The emphasis here is not on these events, however; the focus is rather on the identification of patterns, and these can be illustrated just as well with reference to what happened some time ago as to very recent events.) I have also attempted to take the latest

“Somali” was of course the name of a people long before the states which Somalis live in today (Djibouti, Ethiopia, now once more fragmented Somalia and Kenya), and these countries’ colonial forerunners, took shape. The Somali language belongs to the lowland branch of the East Cushitic languages, as do the neighbouring languages to the west: Afar, Saho, Oromo and Rendille. The internal dialect differentiation is strong, and even more pronounced in the south than the north, which seems to indicate that these people have had a longer history in the south.³ The nucleus from which the Somali-speaking groups spread would appear to lie in the south-west of the area they currently occupy, probably in the southern part of the Ethiopian highlands or in what is today the Kenyan-Ethiopian border region (Schlee 1987a). The thesis, that there was a general tendency to migrate from north to south arises from an unjustified generalization of recent migrations of certain clan groups.⁴ Nevertheless, this strong emphasis on north-south migrations, also found in oral accounts, ties in very well with pious legends of genealogical origins in the *quraysh*, the tribe of the Prophet, and descent from migrant Arab sheikhs. Were one to subscribe to these legends, it would mean that all Somalis were Arabs by patrilineal descent. The origins of their distinctive language and characteristics - of everything that makes Somalis Somali - are not explained in these traditional accounts. Moreover, different versions of these genealogies contradict one another (Schlee 1987b, 1989: 214).

As an ethnic category, “Somali” is not clearly delineated. Certain groups have increasingly come to see themselves as Somali in the course of Islamisation. There are also transitional linguistic and cultural areas between Oromo and Somalis in which groups may define themselves more as one or the other depending on what happens to be politically opportune.⁵ The first attempts to colonize Somali territories were made from 1884 onwards, when the European countries divided Africa up amongst themselves at the Berlin Conference. Since the building of the Suez Canal, Aden had been of extreme importance to the British as a base due to its position on the sea route to India. In 1885 and 1886 British negotiators entered into various agreements to mutual assistance with Somali chiefs on the coast across from Aden. If

literature into account, in the notes at any rate. I thank Adam Kuper, Stephen Reyna and Patty Gray for comments.

³ See Lamberti 1983 on Somali dialects, Dyen 1956 on the relationship between language distribution patterns and the history of the spread of people.

⁴ As recently as 1980 Lewis (1980: 22-3) still subscribed to this thesis. Though often repeated, it has little historical foundation.

one reads these agreements carefully, there is no mention of handing over territory; but since the rival European colonial powers needed no particular legitimation for their conquests in Africa anyway, this was of little consequence.⁶ In 1885 France took Djibouti, and in 1887 the Ethiopian emperor Menelik captured the Muslim city of Harer in the east of the country, driving a wedge deep into Somali-speaking territories. In the same year, Ethiopia signed a border agreement with the British. Already at this point, then, the British must have felt entitled to dispose of Somali territories.

Italy completed its takeover of Italian Somalia only in the 1920s; the territory finally took on the form it was to retain in 1925, when Jubaland, formerly part of British East Africa, was conceded to the Italians. The British, having had unpleasant experiences with the Aulihan Somalis at Serenli in 1916 (Schlee 1989: 44f), were undoubtedly happy to comply with the Italians' desire to expand their territories in this area. Since one of the arenas of the Second World War was the Horn of Africa, the development of colonies was interrupted during this period. After the war, the Italians regained their lost colony in the form of a UN mandate. From the British-controlled north, however, the Somali Youth League (SYL) articulated ever more pressing demands for independence; and since the British and Italian Somali territories became independent in 1960, with their unification into a single state ensuing a few days later, it can be said that in effect the colonial period lasted barely a generation. That the colonial states did not last long does not mean that the Somali had no experience of statehood as such. Just to their west there were sultanates like the one of Harrar and the Ethiopian empire. Djama (1997 a: 403 ff.) is right in underlining that it would be a simplification to describe Somali society as a pure and non-state lineage system. Mainly on the coast nuclei of centralized power, the emergence of a commercial class and links to the world market could be found. These rudimentary states and commercial networks were penetrated by the lineage mode of organization, and that applies also to the postcolonial state and later its fragments. Even if Djama puts the stress on the differences between his analysis and the „functionalist model“ of segmentary lineages, his description is full of references to the latter. His final and concluding example of a chief who was originally elected by his lineage and who later managed to find all sorts of arrangements with external powers and kept an elevated position through all political upheavals shows, according to Djama, that „the dynamics at work in the local political field can no longer be read along the old segmentary grid“ (1997 a: 425). From this

⁵ Schlee/Shongolo 1995, Schlee 1994a.

⁶ FitzGibbon (1982: 15-20) quotes some of these agreements verbatim; see also Hamilton 1967. On the further dynamics unleashed by the border drawn between Ethiopia and north Somalia, see Djama 1993.

example one can also draw the opposite conclusion: the persistence of choosing a leader by a lineage council indicates the continued importance of lineages. Even if the „old segmentary grids“ are no longer the only elements necessary to understand local politics (if ever they were), it continues to be true that these latter cannot be „read“ without reference to them. (*The translations of citations are all mine.*)

What Djama's analysis shows is that instead of playing out the „lineage“ against the „State“ (like the classical British authors did), and instead of playing out the „modern“ forces and the „State“ against the „lineage“, one has to study the interpenetration of the two.

For a long time after independence Somalia was regarded as the only true nation state in Africa, and given extensive linguistic and cultural unity. Together with the fact that all Somalis locate themselves in a common genealogical system, and the almost one hundred per cent Islamisation, the view seemed justified. Here and here alone in all of sub-Saharan Africa the European idea of a 'nation', implying something more than just a common state, had found organizational expression. However, the question of what all Somalis really do have in common will be addressed further on. From the outset there was also the problem that although almost all the inhabitants of Somalia were Somalis, by no means all Somalis lived in Somalia. Right from the start there were demands for the annexation of the Somali territories in Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya, and in the 1960s a guerrilla movement in the north of Kenya, the so-called *Shifita*, fought for the annexation of north and east Kenya with support from Somalia.

Perhaps 1977 can be regarded as the peak of the Somali state's power. At this point democracy had long given way to a dictatorship which was supported by a clan alliance whose core consisted of only a minority population group. Nevertheless, Somalia had never been closer to achieving its military objectives. The *Western Somali Liberation Front* (WSLF), militarily supported by Somalia, had brought large areas of east Ethiopia, the *Haud* and the *Ogadeen* under its control. In 1978 though things changed. Ethiopia regained its eastern territories, and in Somalia the refugee camps filled up. The USA had been supporting Ethiopia for decades, whereas Somalia had been relying mainly on the Soviet Union for the preceding ten years. A change of alliances occurred in 1977, with the Soviet Union henceforth supporting Ethiopia, whilst the USA half-heartedly turned to Somalia.

Prior to this, the USA had acquired the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia as a strategic base, which meant that Kagnaw, its base in Eritrea had ceased to be of much significance.⁷ The use of this Eritrean base had been agreed with the central government in Ethiopia.⁸ Thus although the USA had up until then had a very concrete interest in Ethiopia remaining a centralized state, this interest now sunk considerably. In addition, the Carter administration was facing growing criticism for supporting a regime responsible for the bloody suppression of the Eritrean liberation movement. When the revolution in Ethiopia led to imperial rule being replaced by a regime with Marxist-Leninist proclivities, it was no big deal for the Americans to end the alliance. The Russians were able to exchange a small ally in the Horn for a big one, thus making a significant advance as far as influence in Africa went.⁹

Somalia had also gained sympathy in the West when Mohammed Siad Barre's government allowed a unit of the German Federal Border Guard to storm a Lufthansa aircraft hijacked and held at Mogadishu by Arab terrorists on October 18, 1977. The Somali government expected, and received, Western support as a reward for their cooperation in what the Germans code-named "operation fire magic" ("Aktion Feuerzauber"). However, this support was not sufficient to ensure Barre's victory in the *Ogadeen* war.¹⁰

In the context of the superpowers' change of alliances in the Horn of Africa, Somalia and Ethiopia totted up some staggering arms-related statistics. The Soviet Union's military aid to Ethiopia in 1977 and 1978, more or less equalled its imports to Somalia over the entire preceding decade. In 1977 the value of arms imports to Ethiopia was 132.3% of the total value of that country's exports, and in 1978 the figure was 358.3%. Note that this does not

⁷ Lewis (1981: 14) infers this connection.

⁸ According to Matthies (1987: 105) the American military's rights in Ethiopia, particularly the use of the Kagnaw base, were granted in return for extensive military and economic aid. "The USA saw in the Ethiopia of the time a stable, conservative and anti-communist bulwark ..."

⁹ This view, that the Soviets simply exchanged a small piece of Africa for a larger one (about ten times larger in terms of population) may appear too simplistic to some analysts.

Prunier (1997: 394) attributes ideological motives to the Soviets "....Somalia... saw its Soviet protectors abandon her in the middle of the conflict to join in a decisive way the side of the much more credibly Marxist-Leninist revolution which was taking place at the time in Ethiopia" (the translations of quotations are all mine). The credibility of Marxism-Leninism in Ethiopia in the dergue/Mengistu period (1974-1991) may appear doubtful to others (not to speak of its credibility in Russia itself during that period).

¹⁰ Development cooperation in the civilian sector was also intensified after "Mogadishu". For instance, the German Organization for Technical Cooperation, GTZ, was running one of its biggest programmes worldwide in Somalia in the 1980s, with 22 projects and 50 experts (Conze/Labahn 1986: 7).

refer to the profits made over and above the rest of the country's foreign trade, but to the total value of all products Ethiopia exported in this period. In Somalia too, the value of arms imports exceeded the total value of exports in 1974, 1976, 1977 and 1978 - which, at 158.9%, reached its peak. Already in the 1970s, then, there was no hope whatsoever of these countries ever being able to pay back the loans taken out on the basis of their own economies to buy arms. Nor indeed could those who delivered weapons to the Horn on credit have possibly expected payment (Henze 1984: 651). There are rumours though that in the years that followed, the Russians had direct access to goldmines in southern Ethiopia, and that gold deliveries that do not appear in the foreign trade statistics were made to the Soviet Union.

When the tide of war turned against Somalia in the *Ogadeen* war, there was a massive flood of refugees. It was never possible to establish exactly how many were involved, since the Somali government systematically hindered or manipulated censuses. In any event, the government wanted to present high numbers to ensure a constant flow of aid. Thus from time to time refugees were moved from one camp to another by truck, to be counted several times. In the end a figure of 700,000 was agreed upon - a number which must be regarded as politically motivated, and the result of negotiations.¹¹ The country's dependence on the international community rose due to the refugee problem, which was also perpetuated and exacerbated by the Somali government itself impeding remigration and integration. The numerous UN officials who lived in a select quarter of Mogadishu earned on average 45 times more than a Somali minister.¹² Given this kind of imbalance, it is not hard to imagine that a Somali minister would scarcely be content to live on his salary alone; instead, Somali bureaucrats made the food aid industry and other charitable institutions pay for allowing them to help the country. The representatives of the aid agencies, who were often on temporary contracts and anxious to have one project phase after the other implemented, were often only too willing to pay such bribes. Through this type of corruption and via other mechanisms such as the disappearance of goods, allocation of posts in projects etc., the state rapidly turned into an instrument for accessing help from the outside and for creaming off external resources.

¹¹ Waldron 1984: 673, similarly also Negussay 1984: 665.

¹² Using the Somali Shilling's black market exchange value, which is a truer reflection of its buying power, the difference is in fact 1:90 (Hancock 1991: 198). Anna Simons who witnessed the end of that first (non-military) UN invasion of Somalia in 1989 describes the way of life and the stereotypical convictions of this subculture of American and European "experts" and the relationships of their Somali employees and counterparts with them.

At the same time the development of internal resources, in particular the pastoral economy, was increasingly neglected. This was because, even though this view had long since been refuted by science, there was a “conviction on the part of officials in the local government and also in the international development organizations that it [i. e. mobile livestock husbandry, G. S.] is an anachronism, a sign of backwardness” (Stern 1991: 124). Similarly, Baas notes: “The rural regions, which is the area where foreign exchange income originates, are ignored, the nomadic life is branded primitive and unproductive” (1991: 234). State measures, ostensibly aimed at improving grazing conditions, led at best to the elites privately acquiring the choicest cuts to be had in the pastoral system: an “expression of political calculation aimed at self-enrichment on the part of the government” and material considerations paid to “financially powerful persons” (Stern 1991: 126, see also Janzen 1984).

Yet over the years that sector of Somali society which could reckon with obtaining benefits from the state shrunk ever more. In spite of making the clan structure a taboo - under Siad Barre it was officially forbidden to ask anyone what their clan was – this same clan structure has always remained the power base of each Somali government.¹³ The prohibition on speaking about clans was linked to the impossibility of discussing this power base, or indeed of questioning its legitimacy. Whereas earlier Somali governments had co-opted elements of various clans to widen their power base, Siad Barre’s government was known as ‘MOD’: the ‘M’ stood for his clan, *Marehan (Marexan)*, the ‘O’ for the *Ogadeen*, the President’s mother’s clan (or as one would say in Somali, the clan of his mother’s brother: *reer abti*), and the ‘D’ for *Dulbahante*, the clan of his son-in-law, who was head of State Security.¹⁴ As the Barre regime went into decline, ever larger parts of the *Ogadeen* and *Dulbahante* began to pull out, and eventually Barre was left with his own clan *Marehan* as his only power base. On the other

By calculating domestic budgets of the Somali she also shows that for them the search for more or less illegal supplements to their salaries was a question of survival (Simons 1996: 124 ff.).

¹³ It is evident that this taboo on speaking about clans – which here even takes the form of an official interdiction – is an indicator of the importance of these clans in games of power. It is therefore strange to see anthropologists who have come to analyse these very power games obey this taboo. Anna Simons (as Djama 1997 b: 525n has noticed) never gives the names of clans in her case histories. I thought this was political (over-)“correctness” on her side, but she later told me that nobody volunteered clan names to her. And she might not have pushed. In Kenya, where there are no such political sensitivities, people would often ask somebody for his clan affiliation before they even knew his name.

¹⁴ Lewis 1981: 16. The *Dulbahante* son-in-law was Mohamed Seleban Abdallah. More will be said about another son-in-law of Siad Barre’s below.

hand, during the final stages, the *Marehan* were almost entirely militarised or otherwise incorporated into the state.

This process whereby large parts of the Somali population broke away from the state until only the *Marehan* were left within it, began in the north, where the second largest of Somali clan families, the *Isaaq*, had long felt excluded from power. The city of Hargeisa was bombarded, wells poisoned, and millions of landmines were planted in north Somalia.¹⁵

As Mohamed Siad Barre's power dwindled, so the armed opposition to him grew, until finally on Jan. 27, 1991 he was forced to flee Mogadishu. While the exiles' organizations were still awaiting consultation, Ali Mahdi promptly declared himself interim president two days later. The north reacted on May 18, 1991 by declaring the independence of 'Somaliland' within the borders of the former British colony. In the south of the country, those forces denied a share of the power by Ali Mahdi took up arms against him. On Sept. 10, 1991 the UN announced that it was pulling out of Somalia, although it remained active in the northern Republic of Somaliland (Eikenberg/Körner 1993: 34-45). The reason for the helpers' withdrawal was the civil war unleashed when Ali Mahdi proclaimed himself president. This self-proclamation was contested by the other movements that had ousted Siad Barre. Within a short time, famine broke out as a result of the war.

The USA, presumably motivated amongst other considerations by the desire to improve its image in the Islamic world in the wake of the Gulf War by appearing in an Islamic country in the role of helper, not enemy, felt obliged to intervene in the name of the United Nations. On Dec. 9, 1992, during peak television viewing time in America, US troops landed in Mogadishu. Some months later, and also on camera, the corpses of Americans were maltreated by an angry mob in the streets of Mogadishu. As a result, the USA left the country again, the last of their troops pulled out on March 25, 1993¹⁶, ahead of other intervention forces – of which the Pakistanis had suffered the most losses.

Here the chronological overview comes to an end. Looking back, one has to see the United Nations intervention in Somalia (UNOSOM), in which the US played a prominent part, as a failure that cost billions of dollars, and incurred even greater costs in human and political

¹⁵ Africa Watch Report: Somalia, a government at war with its own people, 1990.

¹⁶ For a chronology see Ruf 1994: 165. Ruf discusses legal aspects of the UN intervention.

terms. Various reasons as to why this happened will be addressed below in relation to a closer analysis of forms of conflict and organization in Somali society.

Forms of conflict in pre-colonial and colonial Somali society

At a conference on the Horn of Africa in December 1993 at the Institute of African and Asian Studies of the University of Khartoum (Sudan), a representative of the Somali National Alliance (SLA), the faction under General 'Aydid', one of the former presidents of Somalia, took the floor frequently and at length. His thesis was that before the intrusion of Europeans into the Horn of Africa, the Somalis lived together in peace and harmony. Only outside interventions, first the colonial conquest and all it entailed, then the American intervention, were able to destroy Somalia's peace. This myth of a pre-colonial idyll was widespread in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1960s, when decolonisation was at its peak. However particularly with regard to Somalia, this assertion of pre-colonial tranquillity is nothing short of absurd.¹⁷

Somalia is the only country in Africa in which the majority of the population still consists of nomadic pastoralists. Even today, the one-sided orientation towards livestock products for specific markets remains a problem for the export economy.¹⁸ The picture handed down from

¹⁷ Absurd as it may be, this myth about the pacific character of pre-colonial Somali society seems rather widespread. Prunier has also come across this "construction, most often of Somali origin" (1997: 375) which he contrasts with his own finding that "violence is a fact which is inseparable from the life of segmentary groups" (p. 383).

¹⁸ According to Janzen (1986: 17), over 50% of the Somali are nomads. About 25% live in towns, and the remaining 25% are sedentary farmers. Sedentarization has increased recently (Aden 1986). The dominance of the livestock economy is most obvious in the profits from export (in times of peace, figures from 1982). The livestock economy's share was 93.9%; agriculture on the other hand made up only 1.3% (Janzen 1986: 22). One problem with the livestock exports was Saudi Arabia's purchasing monopoly (monopsony) and the one-sided orientation of the trade structures towards this (Janzen 1986: 22, 38; Hummen 1986: 120; Aves/Bechtold 1986: 155). Abdullahi (1991: 262) shows the cyclical nature of this trade with Saudi Arabia in a graphic model. The *hajj* season is the high point of this cycle. This contradicts the image of nomads constituting a traditional society producing only for their own needs. Somali nomads are market-dependent and react to market trends by adapting their production to meet the demand. As to the export situation, the mid-nineties presented the following picture: the prices for small livestock, which make up the majority of the exports, were low. The Saudi-Arabian purchasers were in a strong bargaining position. Busy shipping had resumed around many small harbours on the Somali coast. On the Saudi side, a harbour specially for the livestock transports from Somalia had been created near Jidda. Here the market was subject to somewhat different practices than elsewhere; the suppliers were exclusively Somali, and they were disadvantaged - with official support. Payment was made in goods, for example in sugar! Though Somalia did export to other countries on the Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia is the

pre-colonial times is dominated by the notion of martial pastoralism. Narrower and broader solidarities and alliances were created according to the principle of patrilineal clan organization in small units and also in larger units of the same kind (Schlee 1989: 26-29). By tracing back the father's line to specific apical ancestors, every Somali was able to evoke numerous patrilineal units, some more restricted, some more expansive. Smaller units of limited genealogical depth were included in the larger units calculated from more distant apical ancestors. One of these units – larger units of several thousand members were chosen for the purpose – was defined as the unit that had to pay wergild. If a member of such a group killed a male outsider, then a fine of 100 camels had to be paid to prevent retaliation. For a woman the payment was 50 camels, and there was also a whole catalogue of different grades of compensation payments for injuries. Such payments are termed *mag* in Somali, but are more frequently referred to by the Arabic term *diya* in the literature. They are a component of *adat* law, which is recognized in the Islamic legal system as local law albeit with a lower status than the *shari'a* and provided it does not conflict with the *shari'a*. A larger *diya*-paying group had a double advantage over a smaller one. Thanks to its own potential strength, it could assume with greater confidence that the opposing group would not attempt to take vengeance and would withdraw from a disputed territory. Even in the event of the larger group agreeing to pay wergild, the individual members each had to pay a smaller contribution.

The rules about compensation are based on the right to retaliate because one pays compensation to avoid vengeance. If one calls this a form of justice, one might just as well call it a form of injustice. Other legal systems, may, of course, also produce injustice and they may be sensitive to force and bend the law. In the Somali case no force is required to bend the rules: force underlies the rules; the rules themselves provide the space in which force is exerted. If vengeance or acceptance of bloodwealth are equally legitimate options, it is always the party which is in a position to exert vengeance that can shape the outcome of the negotiations by an effective latent threat of violence. Therefore one can defend one's rights just as well as one's wrongs through this system. Below is an example of what happens between a small and weak group and a large and powerful one as a result of purely bilateral negotiations about compensation without judge or arbitration.

major customer, on account of the *hajj* (Ahmed Farah Mohamed, personal communication, Bielefeld, 16.7.1995). In 1997, Saudi-Arabia once more banned the import of meat from Somalia after an outbreak of Rift Valley fever in Kenya (IRIN, May 13th, 1999).

In northern Kenya in 1990 I was present at a meeting between Degodia, a large and well armed clan which affiliates itself by a uterine link to the Hawiyye clan family, and Sakuye, a group of some one thousand islamised speakers of the Oromo language. The Sakuye had suffered a heavy loss of lives and property during the *shifita* emergency of the 1960s when they had taken up the cause of Somali irredentism.

A young Degodia had raped a Sakuye girl who was tending animals in the bush. He left her disfigured and almost without a voice as a result of stab wounds to the face and neck. The Sakuye demanded five camels and the Degodia agreed perfectly that that would be a *diya* payment justified by the rules. "But, if you demand *diya* now," the Degodia went on, "what would you do in the inverse case, if, for example, one of your youths killed one of ours? Would you be able to pay one hundred camels as *diya* for him? Certainly not. You would ask us not to insist on *diya* and to accept the sort of present one would give inside one's tribe, in a brotherly way, to mollify us. Now it is your turn to waive *diya* and to accept a gift. Let us be brotherly!" In the end the Sakuye accepted a single camel. However, it is doubtful whether the Degodia would have shown the same degree of brotherliness, had a Sakuye man raped one of their women. More likely they would have committed a revenge massacre, or, if the Sakuye had persuaded them to accept compensation, they would have insisted on one hundred camels. The Sakuye are too prudent to put this to the test.

This system of justice gives those the freedom to defend themselves who are able to do so. It knows no other equality but that of balanced forces. But what about the third part of the motto of the French revolution, namely fraternity? This system dictates to everyone not strong enough to stand on his own to become someone's little brother as soon as he can. So, in this system one needs to be strong, and strength depends on numbers and cohesion. If the numbers of people linked to oneself by ties based on patrilineal descent are not sufficient, they need to be complemented by contracts.

Let us first focus on the patrilineal descent groups in which smaller ones are nested in larger ones that have greater genealogical depth but are of the same kind. As far as the recruitment of military strength and organization of social solidarity along patrilineal lines is concerned, the Somali are by no means unique. The model of segmentary lineage systems once was a standard one (particularly in British anthropology: e. g. Evans-Pritchard 1940, Middleton/Tait 1958). In fact, for a time, it was used to such an extent that it has occasionally aroused criticism when applied all too mechanically to cases where it was not appropriate, or when

other elements of social organization (Big-Man-ship, age-groups etc.), also present and making the picture seem more complex, were neglected due to an all too one-sided accent on the segmentary lineage system.¹⁹ The argument was less concerned with the question of whether the segmentary lineage system could be seen as an instructive model – that much was granted by most – but rather what it was a model *of*. Did it model an emic social construct, or a behavioural reality? Whereas for example Peters (1967), writing on the Bedouin of Cyrenaica, believed that their form of organization was actually based on local units, and that the lineage genealogies were mere ideology, Salzman (1978) (field research in the Iranian part of Baluchistan) objected that the lineage system was by no means a folk ideology. Instead it was rooted in the reality of actual behaviour; and this reality was given in the case of the Bedouins of Cyrenaica as well. Even if from time to time the lineage system might be of secondary importance to territorially defined units, Salzman argued, it remained in reserve until the next territorial shift or next migration, when it would re-emerge as a functioning structure. Later the model of segmentary lineages was washed away altogether by an anti-structuralist wave along with all other concepts relating to social structure. It was done away with on the grounds of principle, not on empirical grounds. This later criticism did not distinguish between cases where the model is more appropriate and where it is less so. Those who discarded this model often did not replace it by one which explained the data in a better fashion. Many of them appear not to be interested in explanations at all (the *Writing Culture* crowd). Now the time has come either to give up the anthropological enterprise altogether as a vain effort or to take up the struggle with empirical data and model building once more. I opt for the latter. We can distinguish between cases where the segmentary lineage model is an artificial imposition, others, where it works but neglects further important aspects²⁰, and yet others where it fits rather well. To a large extent, the Somali – and not just their folk ideology

¹⁹ Indeed, descriptions of those societies upon which the development of the segmentary lineage model was based are the ones most intensively re-analysed to find out if other models could not be used for them. In the early 1980s there was a major *Nuer* debate raging in *Current Anthropology* (Karp/Maynard 1983 with eight commentaries, Bonte 1984, Glickman 1985), with a smaller one in *American Anthropologist* (Verdon 1982, Kelly 1983). Kuper (1988) is often understood as considering the entire lineage model to be an anthropological illusion. In a personal conversation, however, he told me that he regards it as overgeneralized and too mechanically applied but fitting some cases better than others. This would not amount to a rejection on principle. Johnson (1991: 116) keeps himself aloof from this debate, declaring that all those involved have completely misunderstood the history and ecology of the Upper Nile region and that no one has a solid empirical basis. In part, he asserts, the issue is nothing more than selective readings of E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1940).

²⁰ I criticized the model whereby clans and subclans are regarded only as subunits of larger units and interethnic clan identities are neglected (Schlee 1998: 1).

or the image they themselves have of their society – correspond to this model, even if a few amendments are made below. This is not to imply that they are helplessly subjugated to these lineage structures. Even “descent” is not pure fate, but subject to political and religious influences; in other words, to human ambition. (On the influences affecting the formation of Somali genealogies cf. for example Schlee 1989, Chapter 5.)²¹ Obviously, the ties and bonds that arise from the obligations imposed by common linear descent or from the transfer of these reciprocal obligations to adopted “brothers” were not “discovered” by modern anthropologists. Indeed, according to Ibn Khaldun, blood (including pseudo-kinship based on the model of consanguinity) was the only kind of bond which could serve as a basis for power at all. For Ibn Khaldun, who analysed Muslim societies in the Maghreb and the Mashreq with astounding perspicacity in the 14th century, it was nomadic herdsmen, and also farmers, who had the necessary tribal cohesion to allow them to take power in the Muslim state. Ibn Khaldun was also familiar with the complex urban type of society with its division of labour; this functioned according completely different principles from the communities of equal-ranking nomadic pastoralists, but in Ibn Khaldun’s view lacked the vital element of cohesion. (Here he differed from Durkheim, who saw the division of labour as the root of modern, higher “organic solidarity” as opposed to the earlier “mechanical solidarity” of segmentary societies.) For Ibn Khaldun, the city was at most a useful site where sophisticated objects were produced, and one which was worth ruling over – but it was never a source of power.

Thus Ibn Khaldun’s theory is a theory of the state. He is interested in how segmentary structures form the basis of power in the state (or as we would say today, in a particular kind of state). Segmentary societies can of course manage very well without the state (and unlike

²¹ To claim that they *are* a segmentary lineage society seems problematic only in terms of principle. Because if there are such things as segmentary lineage societies, then they constitute one. One can of course hold the view that it doesn’t make sense, or is potentially misleading at least, to apply adjectival characterizations of this kind to *societies*. The line of thought being pursued here is analogous to Needham’s, when he also asserted that there are no patrilineal and no matrilineal societies, but rather at most patri- and matrilineal forms of transferring rights and affiliations. If one applies characterizations like “segmentary”, “caste”, “modern”, “organic”, “class” etc. to entire societies rather than to forms of organization and internal differentiation which may also co-exist and interact, then societies end up all too quickly in different pigeonholes, or even in different disciplines: the segmentary ones end up with the Africa anthropologists, and the caste ones with the Indologists. Yet some elements of caste thinking (and the practices which accompany it) such as endogamy/hypergamy, or else differentiation on the basis of status or occupation in the case of the “segmentary societies” (for example the sacred lineages of the Bedouin of Cyrenaica, Evans-Pritchard), would not fit into a framework of this kind.

Ibn Khaldun, one would say today that states can also manage without segmentarily organized conquerors).

This independence from the state, and the possibility of organizing life without state and centralised governments, was what fascinated modern ethnologists about segmentary societies. Book titles like “Regulated Anarchy” (Sigrist 1967) and “Tribes without Rulers” (Middleton/Tait 1958) reflect this interest (Leverenz 1987).

But while modern ethnologists come from societies organised as states, and thus thematise the potential distancing from the state demonstrated by segmentary societies, Ibn Khaldun is coming from the opposite direction: his starting point is the segmentary society, and he is interested in explaining how the power to rule is constituted in the state. This power, he observes, changes hands cyclically. Nomads conquer the cities and “go soft” so rapidly that within approximately four generations they too become the victims of the next wave of nomadic conquests, and become part of the subjugated urban population themselves (Gellner 1981). According to Ibn Khaldun, critical urban Qur’an scholars, tired of the corrupt rule of pampered sultans, enter into alliances with as yet untainted tribal warriors, and together periodically renew Islamic society. Ibn Khaldun is an analyst rather than a moralist. Yet to the extent that moral evaluations shine through, the nomadic warriors can be seen to have the more positive role. Obviously, Ibn Khaldun’s theory cannot be transferred indiscriminately from the 14th century Maghreb to the Horn of Africa at the end of the 20th century. Perhaps, though, the same cohesive forces of tribal organization as described by Ibn Khaldun are at work in today’s Somalia, and the youthful, *qat* chewing²² militia members, harassing the

²² *Qat* (*catha edulis*), the leaves of which are chewed, is a mild drug and plays an important role as payment for militia members in Somalia at present. The health aspects of this drug consumption are probably insignificant compared to the political structures which arise as a result of its distribution, and the economic consequences of its being imported by air. *Qat* is grown in the highlands of east and northeast Africa. The best kinds come from Kenya, where it is known as *miraa*.

In the context of warlords, *qat* is often demonised as a drug (Elwert 1997: 89, 1995: 133). In the media it is sometimes even said to make people go mad. As it is consumed by militias, it is believed to make one aggressive. In fact, it has about the same hallucinogenic potential as chocolate or tea. At most, it deprives one of sleep. For this reason it is appreciated by long distance drivers and watchmen.

For unclear reasons, *qat* was forbidden in Germany where it was consumed only by immigrant circles, mostly Somali, in 1998. At the same time as the legalization of strong drugs is proposed with good reasons to reduce Beschaffungskriminalität (“crimes of procurement”, drugs related crimes) a very soft drug is being pushed underground. That may mean that Somali asylum seekers will be obliged to spend an even higher proportion of their welfare on *qat*. As to the role of *qat* in Somalia see also Heyer 1997: 29, 30; Pape 1998: 48.

civilian population of Mogadishu from their jeeps with their mounted machine guns, are in fact a degenerate form of Ibn Khaldun's pure, unspoilt Bedouin warrior. Whereas they resemble the latter in their tribal cohesion, they contribute neither to the renewal of Islam nor indeed to any kind of social order.

If it was impossible to recruit a big enough group along patrilineal principles – whether due to the distance from other segments of one's own clan, or to its limited demographic growth – there was still the option of forming *diya*-paying groups with segments of other clans in the same position, on a contractual basis. The principle of *tol*, of patrilineal descent, or the segmentary lineage system, and, the principle of *xeer* (*heer*), the association by contract, were the two recruitment mechanisms used to constitute the divisions of Somali society; divisions which were internally peaceful, but tendentially aggressive towards outsiders. *Xeer* were contracts between equals. Groups that were too small or weak to present themselves as independent partners in a contractual arrangement could also enter into pseudo-kinship-relations with stronger groups. These relationships are called *sheegat* from the verb *sheeganaya*, "I name". In this case one names the forefathers of another group as one's own, that is, one subordinates oneself to it in terms of genealogy. In any event, one's chances of survival depend on support from a powerful group. This principle is aptly reflected in the Somali motto, "either be a mountain, or else lean against one (Lewis 1961, 1962, 1972).

Cunning is a highly-valued cultural attribute among Somali. And it is regarded as highly cunning to break a contractual agreement, whether it be based on *xeer* or on *sheegat*, at an opportune moment. Like the stories of the Icelandic Vikings or of Byzantine court intrigues, Somali history bristles with treachery and massacres of former protectors. The latter are struck down and robbed of their women and herds the moment their dependents have grown strong enough under their protection.²³

²³ Cf. e. g. Turnbull 1955: 2 et passim, Schlee 1989: 46f. That the Somali place cultural value on cunning, and that a well-staged swindle is much admired, can be inferred from a series of folk tales collected by Muuse Haaji Ismaa'iil Galaal, edited by B.W. Andrzejewski, (1956). Cf. e. g. no. 4, p. 33, which is reproduced here in my own translation from the Somali:

Cousin, teach me cunning!

One day a man came to another. He said: "I would like you to teach me cunning." The other replied: "Milk your camel for me!" So the man milked his camel for him, and when he had drunk the milk, the one who had brought the milk said: "And now, teach me cunning!" Whereupon the other said: "I've done that already. I've had your milk, haven't I?" The man's mouth dropped open in surprise.

The ever-present threat of treachery restricted the growth of internally peaceful and cooperative groups. The tendency of groups to become larger, thus reducing the individual's risks vis-à-vis dangers from the outside, was countered by suspicion of distant clan kin and allies from other clans, which produced a tendency towards fission, and thus a reduction in group size.

However, a series of factors caused the tendency towards unity to outweigh the tendency towards division, and thus larger groups were formed. First of all, obviously, there was the threat from outside. Then the skill of politically gifted personalities also contributed. While simple Somalis often married within their own clans, and being relatives, were released from paying part of the brideprice, leaders often contracted strategic marriages across clan boundaries. Sayyid Muhammad Abdille Hassan, who defied several colonial powers at once from 1900-1920, made extensive use of this mechanism. Head of a "dervish" order, the *Salihyya*, he was awarded the derogatory nickname 'Mad Mullah' by the British, and he contracted an impressive number of strategic marriages, both simultaneously and successively.

Battle lines and forms of conflict

In the turmoil after the expulsion of Muhammed Siad Barre, the following picture emerged: the country collapsed into numerous zones in which local power-elites tried to gain control of resources on the basis of clan membership and clan alliances. The capital, Mogadishu, split into two halves, one controlled by Ali Mahdi Muhammed, the other by General Mohammed 'Aydid'²⁴ until the latter died of the injuries received in an exchange of fire with followers of Osman Ali 'Ato', of whom more presently. A short time later his son Hussein took his place.²⁵ Both Ali Mahdi and 'Aydid' originally belonged to the United Somali Congress (USC). But since in this context important-looking abbreviations such as this have little substance, it is more productive to examine the power base of both pretendants to the presidency within the Somali clan system. Overall, Ali Mahdi can count on the support of his subclan of the *Herab* clan, of the *Hawiye*, which is called *Abgal*. In the case of General 'Aydid', it is another *Herab* subclan, the *Habr Gidir*. The distinction, then, is at the subclan level.

²⁴ 'Aydid' will be discussed here almost exclusively with reference to his clan affiliations. For a more detailed biographic appreciation see Dualeh (1994), and for an assessment in terms of the history of ideas, see Zitelmann (1996).

²⁵ Africa Confidential 37, no. 17, Aug. 1996.

It is clear from the news reports of the early 1990s that the division into *Abgal* on the one hand and *Habr Gidir* on the other must have been too rough from the start, or else that segmentary processes had taken place, splitting these subclans into even smaller parties along sub-subclan divisions (lineages). Up to two yet finer degrees of distinction below the level of *Habr Gidir* are mentioned in reports. For example, in June 1994 differences arose between 'Aydid' and his financial advisor Osman 'Ato', and both of them were sure of their respective subgroup's backing: 'Aydid's' being the *Jalaaf* subgroup of the *Saad* sub-subclan of the *Habr Gidir* subclan of the *Hawiye*, Osman 'Ato's' being the *Hilowle* within the *Saad*.²⁶ In August of that year there had been fighting at an airfield "belonging" to one of 'Aydid's' benefactors, Ahmed Dualeh (*Saad/Habr Gidir*). His airport guards had clashed with fighters recruited from a subgroup of the *Absiye*, who belong to the *Ayr*, who in turn are part of the *Habr Gidir*. This shows, according to "Africa Confidential", that the economic dominance of the *Saad* over the other groups belonging to the *Habr Gidir* continues to meet resistance. The reports also precisely locate Ali Mahdi, the rival president: he is a member of *Harti Abgal*, a subgroup of the *Abgal* subclan of the *Hawiye*.²⁷ But enough of names. The principle has become clear by now: in the current political and economic conditions, the patrilineal clan structures have a stronger tendency to divide than in the immediately preceding period. Solidarity is restricted to smaller groups of shallower genealogical depth.

Since both presidential hopefuls nursed the ambition to be more than simply rulers of a part of Mogadishu, each tried to extend his power base by means of alliances. General 'Aydid' had an ally amongst the *Ogadeen*, Ahmed Omar 'Jess', who named his faction the *Somali Patriotic Movement* and exercised a certain amount of control in Kisimayu and areas surrounding this southern Somali port.

On 22nd February 1993, shortly after the Belgians and Americans had marched into the town, rival clan groups drove Ahmed Omar 'Jess' out of Kisimayu. These were under orders from Mohamed Sa'id Hirsi, known as General Morgan, another son-in-law of ex-president

²⁶ Africa Confidential 35, no. 12, June 1994. At a party conference on 12.6.1995 'Ato' replaced 'Aydid' as Chairman of the United Somali Congress, which did not prevent the latter from continuing to claim the state presidency. He was supported in his claim by businessmen from the *Nimaale* and *Ayanle* subclans of *Saad* (Africa Confidential 36, no. 13, June 1995).

²⁷ Africa Confidential 35, no. 20, Oct. 1994.

Mohamed Siad Barre. Mohamed Sa'id Hirsi 'Morgan' is *Majerteen*²⁸, that is, a member of a clan group that lives mainly at the eastern most point of the Horn. Down in the south though there are still people who resettled here because of the drought mentioned above.²⁹ 'Morgan's' power base also rested on his brothers-in-law, the *Marehan* of ex-president Mohamed Siad Barre and on cooperation with General Adan Abdullahi 'Gebiyu' of the *Ogadeen*. The division into followers of 'Jess' and 'Gebiyu' is said to correspond to that between *Mohamed Zubeir Ogadeen* and *Aulihan Ogadeen*.³⁰ *Majerteen*, *Marehan* and *Ogadeen* all belong to the large *Darood* clan family. Those who take as their starting point the idea of the segmentary lineage system, in which more closely related groups cooperate against more distant kin, will not be surprised that in this case parts of these three clans should ally themselves with one another. The deviation from the model consists in the fact that they do this against parts of themselves, cooperating with parts of completely unconnected clans: 'Jess' with 'Aydid's' *Habr Gidir-Hawiye* and 'Morgan' and 'Gebiyu' at least de facto Ali Mahdi's *Abgal-Hawiye*, who were manning another front against 'Aydid' and his allies. Since 'Ato's' break with 'Aydid' and in the logic of such alliances it follows that he should join up with 'Aydid's' opponents. Accordingly there were reports³¹ that he had had an arrangement with 'Morgan' and also one with Ali Mahdi, which confirmed that these two had an indirect alliance with each other – an alliance, note, with strangers to the clan and not clan "brothers".

Against this background, 'Aydid's' anger at the Americans is understandable. They had entered Kisimayu as "peace-bringers", started to disarm 'Aydid's' ally 'Jess', and then stood and watched his rival 'Morgan' take the town.

Transcontinuities

Elements of a social structure, or a political system, which survive revolutionary alterations and always re-emerge, albeit perhaps under a different name and guise, whatever social ruptures may occur, are termed "transcontinuities". No matter how much the *ancien regime* may have been based upon "divine right", and Napoleon's rhetoric been loaded with

²⁸ According to Africa Confidential 34, no. 5, March 1993 and 35, no. 12, June 1994. The information that he is *Marehan* (34, no. 13) seems to be incorrect. The *Marehan*, the ex-president's clan, are his brothers-in-law, not his clan brothers. "Sa'id" and "Siad" are two different names. They are occasionally confused by the press.

²⁹ Oral information from Feisal Hassan, Bielefeld, 16.5.1995. The spelling of names in this article tends to follow the forms used by the persons in question, rather than the Somali standard orthography, which would have Xasan for Hassan, Farax for Farah, Cabdille for Abdullahi. In many contexts Somali do not use their own orthography.

³⁰ Africa Confidential 35, no. 20, Oct. 1994.

³¹ Africa Confidential 36, no. 13, June 1995.

“republican” values, the historian still finds more similarities than differences in the organization of power in both systems. The Stalinist system can be seen as by no means less autocratic than Czarist rule, although Czarist rule openly acknowledged its absolutism, and Stalinism (personality cult aside) professed to be based on rule by the social class constituting the majority of the population. Transcontinuities have also been much discussed with regard to the revolutionary upheavals in Ethiopia, where – at least in the Christian heartland – the same centralist, hierarchical structures always triumph.³²

In Somalia too it is possible to trace transcontinuities which span two radical historical changes. Patrilineal descent and clan alliances were basic social structures in the pre-colonial as well as colonial period, when the colonial rulers made good use of these very structures to demarcate grazing areas and arbitrate in conflicts. Indeed, they strengthened the structures further by codification; and by strengthening them naturally also changed them.³³ The principles of *tol* and *heer*, patrilineal descent and contractual alliance, also underlie the battle lines formed in the Somali civil war - despite the impressive-sounding names (containing programmatic elements like “National”, “Salvation” and the like) used in rhetoric aimed at the outside world.

Like the colonial powers before them, UNOSOM has given in to the temptation of using clan proportion systems to help establish representation and control. In so doing, they have failed to recognize the changeable character of these divisions. Patrilineal units alter their function in accordance with demographic growth. Lineages become subclans, subclans become clans. This is why the Somali language declines to deliver more precise terms for these levels of clan division. Basically, they are always larger or smaller units of the same kind, with their functions depending on their size. Alliances are no less variable. Neither can be pinned down, both are subject to political opportunism, and both can be manipulated far better by Somalis than by rulers or mediators from outside.

Connections established through wives, i.e. in-law relationships, were just as important for Sayyid Mohammed Abdille Hassan at the start of the 20th century as for Mohammed Siad

³² In the ethnographic literature, “Political Systems of Highland Burma” (Leach 1954) is a good example of transcontinuities. The Ethiopian case is discussed by Janssen (1991).

³³ The most remarkable example of a genealogical survey in the colonial period is Hunt, 1951. On the use made of such genealogies cf. Schlee 1984a: 156, 1989: 48.

Barre, even though in other respects Somalis would quite rightly object to these two historical figures being put into one basket.

Transcontinuities are not only to be found in such areas as military recruitment or the formation of larger solidarity groups. The organization of labour in the small family group is often characterized by diversification or spatial separation. In the nomadic herding sector, there is the camel camp, *geel her* or *geel jire*³⁴ for example; satellite camps at remote pastures, where the young men tend the camels far from the main camp, which is closer to the wells and where the women, children, older men and small livestock are to be found.

After the country suffered a severe drought in 1974, the Somali government developed programmes aimed at introducing other forms of production outside the nomadic herding sector. There was a sedentarisation programme on land administered by agricultural development projects, and fishing towns were established on the coast, where former pastoralists were taught to fish and given boats and equipment. After a certain time, a large proportion of the men returned to the nomadic sector, whilst women and children frequently remained behind in the newly-established settlements so as to have continued access to services such as schools and healthcare.³⁵ This pattern of families splitting up geographically on work-related grounds was extended with the onset of male migration to the Gulf states. Today, with the internationalisation of the refugee problem, the pattern can be discerned on a global scale: the men will be working in the Gulf while their families are living on social security in Sweden or Canada.³⁶

³⁴ The former term is used by Lewis 1981: 23; the latter I heard in Kenya.

³⁵ Lewis 1981: 31; Farah Mohamed/Touati 1991: 100.

³⁶ The situation in the countries of asylum is not simply characterized by a transfer of old models into new situations. In family relations there have been radical changes. The practice of the authorities to count children with the mother and their perception of fathers as peripatetic and unstable elements – realistic as it may be – led them to channel financial assistance through the women and even to register children under the name of their mother's father may result in these children being regarded as illegitimate if they ever return to Somalia. These practices contribute to the instability of Somali marriages which in any case are of comparatively short average duration (ongoing research in cooperation with 'Isir Schlee née Hassan Musa and Saado 'Abdi about Somali migrants in Germany).

By marriage a Somali woman does not change her clan affiliation. Patrilineal descent applies to children of both genders, married or unmarried alike, even though it is, of course, only transmitted through sons. Therefore to avenge a tort against a woman is primarily the responsibility of her brothers and not of her husband. The double set of links of wives in exogamous marriages – by descent to one clan and by marriage to another – predestines them for mediating roles. This task of Somali women is claimed in even stronger terms in exile under the

With so many transcontinuities, one naturally has to ask what is in fact different today. One major difference is the escalation of violence. There is a glut of weapons originating from stocks built up in the course of the superpowers' arms race in the Horn of Africa in the 1970s, which means automatic firearms are easily available everywhere.³⁷ Before and during the colonial period, particularly in the dry season, grazing was only available near watering places, and these could be the scenes of fierce fighting. Occasionally one or two strange herdsmen might be killed at the well. Reprisals too, if not forestalled by wergild payments, could sometimes result in death. But the current confrontations are taking place on a far higher level of escalation, and do not only concern grazing rights, but also the control of the harbour, the airport, urban areas and foreign aid deliveries. They go on all year, they are more anonymous and also more numerous. In a reader mainly concerned with the Jubba Valley, a river oasis, Cassanelli (Cassanelli/Besteman 1996) also underlines the importance of competition for commercialized agricultural resources in this context. Indeed he sees this as the underlying cause of the Somali crisis. In so doing he takes a sideswipe at unnamed earlier analyses which allegedly placed too one-sided an emphasis on clan structures. Focusing on the population of the Jubba Valley, who are crop farmers and partly of Bantu extraction, he argues that the population of Somalia is not only differentiated according to clan membership, but is in his words also "deeply divided by occupation, class, physical type and dialect", even if "journalists and pundits" should have failed to notice this (Cassanelli 1996: 14). To avoid landing in either of these objectionable categories, it is as well to consider this argument more closely.

To begin with, the mere presence of occupational and status-related differentiations does not necessarily imply that there are unbridgeable rifts in a society. There are societies, among them the so-called "modern" ones, which are based on precisely such differences. Nor do variations in types of physical build and differences in dialect as such inhibit integration. For both features, the internal variation in Germany is undoubtedly greater than in Bosnia. Nevertheless Germany is enjoying internal peace at present, and Bosnia is not. Without

influence of western feminism (Sonja Heyer, report on the "Seventh International Congress of Somali Studies, York University, Toronto, July 8 – 11, 1999, for the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/S.).

³⁷ On the glut of weapons in west Kenya, cf. Bollig 1992: 73, in north Kenya, Schlee 1994b: 3, which also discusses the knock-on effects of the dissolution of Mengistu's army on power relations elsewhere, as weapons which had been abandoned, sold or exchanged for food were passed from hand to hand.

getting side-tracked by the disparaging rhetoric, then, we need to consider what Cassanelli's perspective is capable of explaining, and what it is not.

As a result of discrimination against people displaying the features mentioned above, the "minorities" of south Somalia were particularly vulnerable, as Cassanelli demonstrates convincingly. Since the members of clans with pastoral roots were battling one another for land that had formerly been farmed by the "minorities" in their region, the latter were particularly badly affected by the war. Cassanelli and the authors contributing to his collection do thus partly explain what the war was about: it was amongst other things (in this region at least) about control of the labour power of these south Somali minorities, and of the land which they traditionally farmed. But they fail to explain the form of conflict or the fronts which emerged. The lines of conflict in fact run through the relatively homogeneous groups of the north and central Somalis, who are remarkably similar in "occupation, class, physical type and dialect", and who furthermore, as has been shown above, are frequently very close to one another in their clan affiliations.

Once again at this point it appears necessary to revert to the lowest segmentary level, and look at alliances in terms of the clan analyses of which Cassanelli is so dismissive. How little Cassanelli distinguishes between these two aspects is apparent from his analysis of Mohamed Siad Barre's success. He used, says Cassanelli, resources of whatever origin – foreign aid deliveries, profits from trade in livestock and *qat* etc. - to buy political support. "That he did this along lines of kinship and clientelism gave precedence to clan analyses of Somalia's plight, but in fact it was his control of resources that underpinned the system." (1996: 22) This is a false opposition. The resources named were the *object* of the transfer; clan structures and clientelism were the *formative forces*. The first is the answer to the question "what?", the second is the answer to the question "who to whom?" or "who with whom?" How one can construe a contradiction ("*but*") between them is logically not altogether fathomable.

That the farmers of Bantu descent were the real sufferers in the war, rather than being main actors, is also confirmed by Menkhaus (1996: 150): "Although the Gosha played no part in the fighting and had seemingly little stake in the outcome of this internecine war, they bore the brunt of the war's destruction."³⁸ In view of this increased level of violence and the

³⁸ As a bone of contention, just how important the role of agricultural resources (the other aspect mentioned by Cassanelli) is in terms of the bigger picture cannot be conclusively established here. The figures quoted above would seem instead to indicate the continuing dominance of pastoral nomadic livestock production. In another

broader spectrum of resources which are the object of competition, it is highly questionable whether the traditional legal instruments for restoring peace, negotiations and compensation payments, will ever again be able to bring about some kind of regulation.

Somalia and the outside world

The UNOSOM intervention lacked funding, knowledge and goals. It may have been possible to overcome the country by military force, place it under a military administration and under its protection to build up the institutions of a civil society, an administrative apparatus, professional and other associations. It may finally further have been possible to found political parties and then, following elections, to restore the reins of government to the local people. However, in a country as fragmented and heavily armed as Somalia, this would have demanded such a degree of financial sacrifice and so high a loss of life that it is extremely unlikely that the parliaments of the industrial powers would have been prepared to release the necessary means. As it is, the intervention cost 1.6 billion dollars: more than the amount spent in the preceding decades on development aid to Somalia (ZDF, Bonn direkt, 4.3.95). Yet it is hard to see how much sense an intervention that fell anything short of a complete takeover of the country and the establishment of a military administration could have conceivably made. At one point in the conflict, maps were drawn up in America with a view to dividing the country into 5 pieces, namely Somaliland within the borders of the former British colony, Puntland (imaginatively given an old Egyptian name) in the north east, central Somalia on the lower Shabelle, Upper Juba and Jubaland.³⁹ What was never explained when these plans were being made was how it could be assumed that these smaller units would not be subject to the same processes of fractionation as former Somalia as a whole. As has been pointed out, the current political fractionation is taking place at the subclan level, and all five areas accommodate hundreds of subclans.

UNOSOM was unable to provide backing for civilian political forces. On the contrary, they supported leaders of clan militias – urban business people and political entrepreneurs – who

contribution to the collection, one focused more on the region of Afmadow, some distance from the Jubba Valley, there is no mention of crop farming. In Little's view (1996: 111), the conflicts described above with the protagonists 'Jess' and 'Morgan' have correlates in rivalries between clan-based networks of livestock traders.

Incidentally, it would be interesting to know why Little (or else his informants) describe the *Herti* as a subgroup of the *Majerteen*, when precisely the opposite genealogical view is more widely held (compare Little 1996: 95 with Coronaro 1925: 332).

³⁹ Africa Confidential 35, no. 11. Patrick Gilkes also commented on such plans at the aforementioned conference in Khartoum in December 1993.

were by no means identical with traditional clan elders, inviting them to Addis Abeba for conferences, paying for their air tickets, and then artificially increasing their political clout with media coverage.

In an earlier version of this paper in German (Schlee 1995: 289) I concluded in the following way:

In the current situation, one has to conclude that outside intervention failed, that internal forces of renewal are not to be discerned, and that the rekindling or continuation of the civil war is highly probable. In terms of the international refugee problem and debates on the right to asylum, including the one being conducted in Germany, this means that for the foreseeable future there are very real grounds for seeking refuge .

Recent reports which indicate that subsistence production and to some extent trade are functioning again in rural areas do give some grounds for hope, however. This is no thanks to the many political movements with their impressive acronyms. On the contrary, the indications are that it is distance from these movements, or indeed from any form of state at all, right down to the very idea of one, which actually makes it possible to function. Since these movements fought over the state as a resource until it fell to pieces (Simons 1994), it is only distance from them that allows a modicum of regulation reminiscent of peace, together with a modest degree of security. The segmentary lineage system, with its various forms of sanction and consultation, seems to be surviving well, as long as it is far from the state. The horrors in Somalia were never the result of the segmentary lineage system in its own right, but rather of the takeover of the state by segmentary lineage structures (and vice versa?) under Siad Barre and equally so under those who fought over his succession. Little (1996: 110) reports that the local economy has not completely broken down in south Somalia, only gone underground. With the warlords sitting in the harbours, though, the official marketing structures have collapsed. Saudi Arabia as a market has moved far out of range; instead, livestock are being smuggled over the nearby Kenyan border. From there perhaps it still finds its way to Saudi Arabia, and there is no question that the Kenyan harbours have profited from the collapse of Somali foreign trade. For the present then one has to trust in the healing power of local arrangements and the black market, since there are no political movements in sight

right now that might have the ability and resources to re-establish a state, let alone a unified state, in Somalia. Even the colonial powers, who were squabbling over this corner of Africa with expensive intrigues a century ago, would not take on today's task even if you paid them.

In the meantime the "rekindling or continuation of the civil war" which I described earlier (Schlee 1994) as highly probable, has materialized. In 1999 there was a new escalation. Hussein Aydid has formed an alliance with the Islamist movement *Ittihad* which also operated in region 5, i. e. the Somali area of Ethiopia. That provoked an Ethiopian invasion in the area of Baidoa. The Ethiopians supported the RRA, the Rahanweyn Resistance Army, which took control of Baidoa in June 1999 (IRIN, June 11, Aug 4, Oct. 10 1999) The Rahanweyn, like their Digil allies who have also joined the battle, are southern Somali for whom agriculture is of greater importance. At the early stages of the civil war they and their lands only figured as the bone of contention between central and northern Somali factions of pastoralists and former pastoralists. But ever since a bumper harvest in 1994 these southern agriculturalists have also been in a position to acquire arms (Natsios 1997: 94).

For Ethiopia, Somalia was only the second front in this period. The principle theatre of war was the Eritrean frontier. After the fall of the Mengistu regime the new leaders of Eritrea and Ethiopia were initially on good terms. In the struggle against Mengistu they had been comrades in arms. A war of independence which had lasted thirty years now had come to an end. In 1992 Eritrea was formally established by a referendum. But in 1999 a border conflict soon escalated into a full-scale war. Ever since taking possession of the capital, the Ethiopian regime, of Tigray origin and originally regionalist, combined regionalist rhetoric with more and more centralist policies. In the course of this new conflict they now fully took up the unionist discourses of their predecessors and all the symbols they had formerly tried to dismantle: a long Christian-Semitic tradition of Empire and the battle of Adawa against the Halian, the central symbol of Imperial military glory.⁴⁰

In such a situation in which civil wars are superimposed on international ones, it is logical to look for allies among all forces opposed to one's adversaries. Thus, a triangle of support came about between the Somali forces of Aydid's alliance, Eritrea, and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) which operated in southern Ethiopia from bases in Kenya. The relations of these latter are the object of another study (Schlee and Shongolo, work in progress). For a long time the presence of the OLF had been ignored by the Kenyan authorities, but this tolerance ended in

1999. Pressure by Kenyan military obliged the OLF to leave Kenya in June (DAILY NATION, June 9, 1999). Moving down to the coast in Somalia the OLF cleared the roads of the road-blocks of rival Somali militias (BBC) and changed the equilibrium in favour of Hussein Aydid for a brief period. But already by December, the OLF was (or should have been) disarmed and its leaders expelled from Somalia after Hussein Aydid was obliged to sign an agreement to that effect in Addis Abeba (IRIN, Dec. 21, 1999).

One could go on indefinitely talking about Somali factions and their alliances. Also the relatively successful model of Somaliland or ‘Northern Somalia’⁴¹ would merit a discussion. But here we limit ourselves to our privileged case: the region between Mogadishu and Kisimayu and the alliances around Ali Mahdi and the Aydids, father and son. As far as these alliances are concerned, there was little change between 1992 and the time of writing (2000), apart from the just mentioned external extensions of these alliances and the circumstance that – at least at times – Ali Mahdi became isolated in his own movement and withdrew into Egyptian exile. But at a peace conference in Djibouti in May Ali Mahdi showed up again (IRIN, May 05, 2000) although the president of the host country had declared that “all those associated with violence, namely warlords” should be excluded from participation in the “national reconciliation conference” (IRIN, Oct. 6, 1999).

Apparently Hussein Aydid had also been invited but had refused to come (IRIN, May 5, 2000). But all this concerns persons and not structures. The model of alliances between Hawiye subgroups with Darood subgroups against other Hawiye and other Darood seems to have persisted throughout this entire period.

In some periods of the past – including the uneasy peace based on domination by a large alliance – the patrilineal groups among whom internal peace and solidarity against outsiders prevailed, were genealogically deeper and demographically larger than today. However, there is no evidence that in periods of stronger fragmentation, sublineages of as shallow depth as the ones we find as political units today have not forged cross-clan alliances in just the same way as in pre-colonial times. In other words: with minor variations the patterns have remained

⁴⁰ Dereje Feyissa, oral communication, Feb. 3, 2000.

⁴¹ I. e. the former British colony. In the cases of Somalia and neighbouring Yemen the references to cardinal points in the names of political units do not quite correspond to geographical realities. In both cases the “southern” part has a north-eastern corner which extends further north than the “northern” part. Regarding Somaliland see Prunier 1996.

the same. In colonial times these variations included the fact that the colonial powers became part of the game and formalized lineage structures for administrative purposes. During this period the colonized and colonizers manipulated each other, both using the lineage idiom. Newer interventionists like the UNOSOM have unsuccessfully attempted to play this game as well. In spite of these outside interferences, of exogenous and endogenous variations, however, the basic principles of group formation are those already described by I. M. Lewis back in the period of the pax Britannica: namely patrilineal descent and contract (*xeer*).

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