

The Prairie Fire that Burned Mogadishu:

The Logic of Clan Formation in Somalia

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Overview

For the last 25 years, Somalis and international interlocutors concerned with state-building appear to have assumed that 'clans' are the core identity units in Somalia, bonded by primordial ties. However, the prevalent formula that redefines selected corporate lineage aggregations as political-territorial identity units is a historical contingency that needs to be explained. Somalia has a segmentary lineage system in which the recognized four major Clans are a level of collective aggregation, both arbitrary and inconsistent, determined by contingencies external to the kinship system itself. This paper presents analysis of the processes that led to the emergence of the Clan-based political-military-territorial units in the period 1987-92. It describes the transformations of pastoralism, specifically rangeland enclosure, and the resulting inter-communal armed conflicts and associated changes in the political significance of the lineage system. It describes the manipulation of lineage politics by Siyaad Barre as he sought to make his regime coup proof and the rivalries among the opposition leaders, which culminated in the formation of Clans as political units for the purposes of capturing state power. Those units proved intrinsically unstable and transient and, even with sustained efforts to find civic representatives of Clans who can share power, it is unsurprising that Clans are unsuited to serve as the basis for the reconstruction of the country.

Introduction

Understanding the dynamics that led to Somalia's 'year zero' in 1991¹ is more than a matter of history. The processes of socio-economic and political transformation that were underway in the years immediately prior to state collapse left an imprint on the country that endures more than 25 years later. In this paper I argue that the height of the civil war (approximately 1987-92) was a period in which the logic of identity politics was substantially altered. This happened through two processes. The first was the political organization of the means of violence in pursuit of state power (by both regime and armed opposition), and the second was the economic transformation in the pastoral social economy. The outcome of the first was the transient dominance of political-military-territorial units based on units that, in this paper, I call Clans (with a capital 'C'). The result of the second process was that these units were intrinsically unstable. Nonetheless, Clan units became and have remained the dominant framework for explaining Somali society and politics, and (despite strong complaints) they pervade persistent international efforts to construct (or reconstruct) a functional state.

This paper draws primarily on unpublished research that I conducted in Somalia during 1991-94, involving interviews with politicians, businesspeople, and civil society activists, into the political economy of the civil war, and research using secondary literature on the political economy of pastoralism. Returning to the research materials after 25 years, it is striking how much remains relevant today. The question that motivated my initial research—what is the United Somali Congress, the force that destroyed Mogadishu?—has not been adequately

answered. My hypothesis, that it sprang in part from the traumatic ruptures of the pastoral economy, remains worthy of inquiry.²

The terminology of 'clan' is pervasive in Somalia and some clarification is needed. The word 'clan' is used in an elastic manner, to refer to corporate lineage groups at any number of different levels of aggregation. Thus, the Ayr, the Habr Gidir and the Hawiye are all labeled as 'clans', despite the fact that each one is a subsection of the next. If used in such a malleable and contextual manner, the term 'clan' can thus explain everything and nothing. The word is also used to refer to units that, in other African contexts, would have been termed 'tribes' or 'ethnic groups'. In this paper, I reserve the word Clan for these units—the capital 'C' indicating their status as historically produced. To minimize confusion, I use the (somewhat clunky) terminology of 'corporate lineage groups' to refer to any other formation. When I use the word 'clan' it is either in a direct quotation of others' work or in the everyday elastic and indeterminate sense of the word.

The period 1987-92 was the most violent in Somalia's modern history. While a number of memoirs and journalists' accounts were published at that time, the events of that year have only recently been subject of more critical scholarly scrutiny. Notably, Lidwien Kapteijns has detailed the 'clan cleansing' of Mogadishu and its legacy (Kapteijns 2013).³ Episodes of extreme violence such as this have the characteristic of appearing to speed up history and warp time. Within a relatively short time period, many momentous events occurred, with impacts that reverberate up to today. Moreover, as noted by Donald Donham (2007), episodes of extreme violence tend to 'primordialize' the

1 Cf. Clapham 2017.

2 The research was interrupted by the Rwanda genocide. The African Rights discussion paper, '[Grass and the Roots of Peace](#)' (African Rights 1994) was completed in April 1994 but only circulated to a limited audience. In the list of published discussion papers, its place as number 3 was taken by a paper on Rwanda.

3 The term 'clan cleansing' was first used with reference to north-western Somalia by Jama Ghalib (1995, p. 187).

collective identities and hatreds that existed at the moment of violence, projecting those identities and hatreds into the past and thereby obscuring, and perhaps even inverting, the law of cause and effect. Thus, because the episodes of anti-Isaaq violence of 1988 and the Hawiye-Darood violence of 1991 were so important in defining subsequent identities and polarities, the events leading up to those battles and massacres tend to be seen through the lens of Hawiye and Darood Clan units. This is an error, which in this paper I try to correct.

In his account of the United Somali Congress (USC) and its role in bringing down the regime of Mohamed Siyaad Barre, Omer Elmi (1993) writes of the 'prairie fire' of violence that burned among the pastoralists of the central rangelands, which spread at last to Mogadishu. Elmi is avowedly partisan but the details he provides of the USC's foundational conference appear to be factually accurate. He describes 'guerrilla' delegates from a number of 'bases' who congregated at a garrison in Ethiopia to anoint their leader (General Mohamed Farah Aideed). He candidly notes that they were already armed and mobilized before the arrival of their leader. The 'bases' and 'guerrilla units' he lists map precisely onto groups of self-armed pastoralists, who had organized themselves incrementally over the previous ten years in order to protect their livestock, fight for access to grazing land, and raid others. These were the foot soldiers of the USC-Aideed who ransacked much of Mogadishu in 1991 and 1992. Following a discussion of lineage and identity politics in Somalia, the first substantive part of this paper describes how these local conflicts arose.

The Hawiye Clan identity of these groups was the product of Aideed's burning political ambition to seize state power—the other 'prairie fire' that consumed Somalia. Many others also sought state power and used much the same mechanism to try to achieve it. But both regime and opposition lacked institutions and rule-bound procedures for regulating such rivalrous ambitions. President Mohamed Siyaad Barre

dismantled military and civilian-administrative institutions to preserve his personal power. In parallel opposition leaders, for reasons of political tactics, chose not to establish institutions—and indeed, those that existed within the first and most potent opposition front, the Somali National Movement (SNM), were shattered by military calamity in 1988.

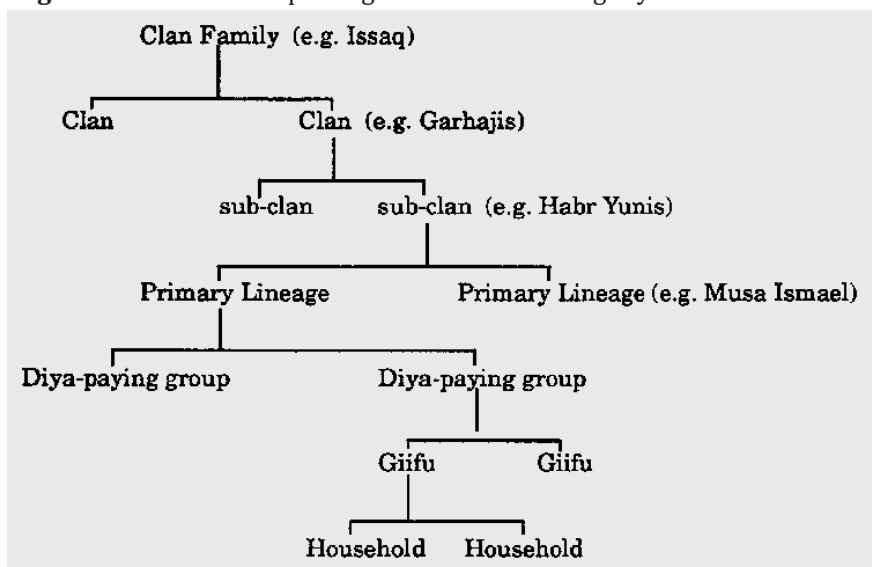
Beginning with this period, one of the remarkable aspects of the Somali political crisis is that many analysts and almost all policymakers use the term 'clan' as though it refers to a natural unit, despite the fact that historians and social scientists have—with a few notable exceptions—long ago abandoned such primordialist frameworks. A singular and fixed formula of 'clan' identity is simultaneously decried as malign and invoked as unavoidable. 'Clans' are historically constituted and are used by members of the country's political and military elites as instruments of power—seeking state power and disciplining their constituents. They are used by external intervenors for political and (especially) military purposes. Given that contemporary conflicts in Africa and the Middle East almost always take on an ethnic character, it is not surprising that Somalia's civil war in the 1980s should have become an ethnic conflict. What needs to be explained is when and why the particular configuration of collective entities emerged that are known as Clans, and why they persisted.

The central claim of this paper is that Clan has served as handmaiden to the construction of the current Somali political-territorial configuration much as 'nation' did to the modern European state system (c.f. Gellner 2006). Clan cannot be taken for granted. It has been formed through violent and extractive processes at the intersection of pastoral livelihoods, military organization and spoils politics as a strategy for seeking and sustaining political power. But identities also have their own autonomous substance and logic, and in Somalia this demands that we analyze the lineage system, its specificities and the function played by narratives

around ‘clan’. Ironically, it was attempts by civic leaders and foreign mediators to circumvent or marginalize Somalia’s warlords that subsequently formalized the Clan system—a backhanded complement to the hegemony achieved by the violent processes of Clan formation.

The starting point for analysis of Somali identity is I.M. Lewis’s classic ethnography, *A Pastoral Democracy* (Lewis 1961). It is the intellectual point of origin for the conventional parsing of the Somali ‘total lineage’ into what Lewis called four clan families, their constituent clans, sub-clans, and sub-sub clans. These terms have subsequently been used loosely and confusingly, and I will avoid this classification.

Figure 1: Conventional parsing of the Somali lineage system



Source: Lewis 1994.

Lewis did his fieldwork in the last years of colonial rule and his book was a product of that historical moment. In common with the pioneering generation of British social anthropologists, the colonial state is both ubiquitous and invisible in Lewis’s monograph. Late colonial ethnographies such as this were an integral part of the administrative tribalism that the British Empire bequeathed to the first generation of post-colonial leaders, and these writings influenced their thinking for both good and ill. Thus, General Mohamed Farah Aideded cites Lewis’s framework as authoritative (Ruhela 1994, pp.

150-1). Throughout this paper I follow Lidwien Kapteijns (2010) in regarding it as an invented and largely malign tradition. However, we will also come across cases in which this framework served as a useful fiction, lending authority to arguments for civility, notably in the construction of Somaliland.

Thirty years on, in *Blood and Bone*, Lewis argued that his analysis applied wholly unchanged as the central explanation for civil war and collapse of the state (Lewis 1994). Such unreformed primordialism cannot be taken seriously. It is also inherently ‘groupist’ in that it attributes agency to social units (c.f. Brubaker 2009), transgressing the principle that ‘clan’ is an expression of lineage relations rather than

a property of collective units. Most recent scholarship on the history and politics of Somali identities has focused on the non-nomadic peoples of southern Somalia who have historically been politically marginalized and whose lineage system has been seen as a deficient version of the ‘pure’ northern Somali version, or who are not ‘Somali’ by lineage at all. This is an important corrective to the dominant narration of Somali identities. In this paper, however, the focus is more narrowly on those historically dominant pastoralist groups

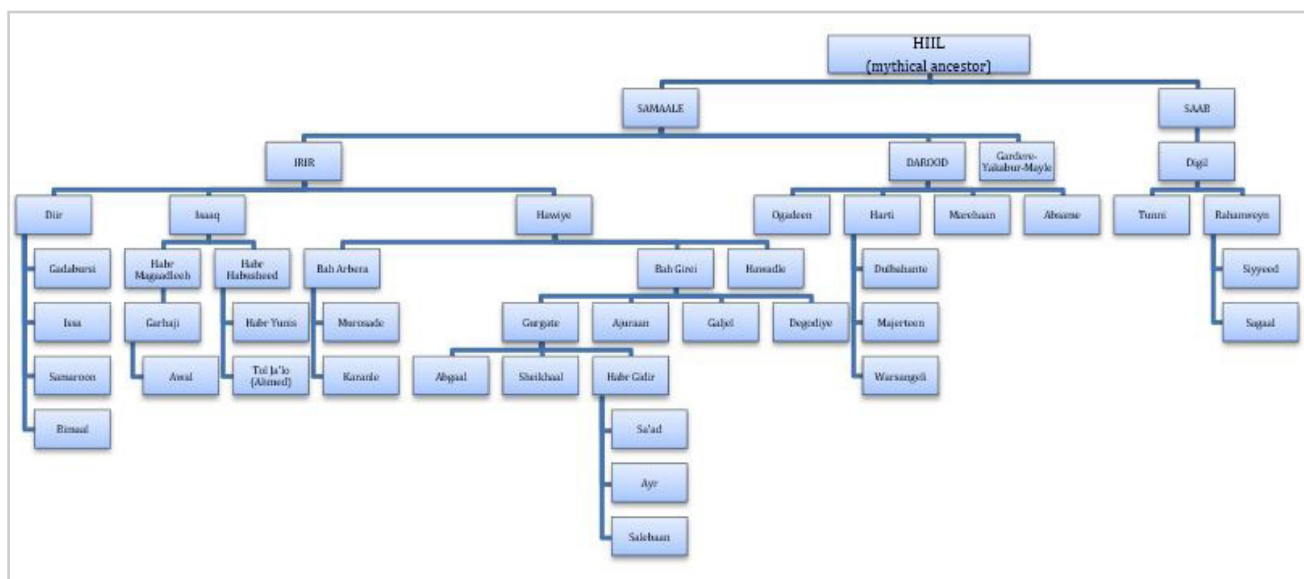
themselves—the very same communities that Lewis studied, namely the Isaaq and Darood pastoralists of northern Somalia and the Hawiye of the central rangelands—and how their identities have been reconstructed.

Lewis was a sufficiently diligent ethnographer that his material is much richer than might be inferred from the pared-down primordialism that he and his acolytes have advocated. Lewis’s book still provides a useful starting point for understanding the Somali lineage system and its historical corollaries, notably *xeer*

(‘contract’).⁴ Interestingly, it gives no pointers to the future of Clan conflict. To re-state, in this paper, I use Clan to refer to *the level of lineage aggregation most salient for political purposes, constituted as the basic element of armed conflict and ethno-nationalism*. In the 1950s, Clans were convenient for colonial administrative tribalism, but other levels of lineage identity (sub-clan and *dia*-paying group) retained their social reality and political potential. Clans only became the politically dominant aggregation at a later time.

beled as clans at one point or another. However, while scholars have increasingly questioned primordialized accounts of Clan, they have paid less attention to why Somalia is dominated by this specific configuration of Clan-based political-military-territorial formations. Indeed, otherwise-astute analysts of how clan has been constructed have accepted this formula. Thus Abdisalam Issa Salwe advocates ‘clan balancing’ as a remedy for clan domination (Issa-Salwe 1996, p. 134) and Alice Hashim advocates ‘clan self-rule’ (Hashim 1997). One of the rea-

Figure 2. Somali total lineage



Source: adapted from Abbink 2009.

There is nothing in the Somali lineage system that preordained that any one level of corporate lineage association should be paramount. The four major Clans are an arbitrary construct. And indeed, as levels of corporate lineage association, they do not match one another evenly. The three major pastoral lineages are Hawiye, Diir/Isaaq and Darood; but the most common usages of ‘clan’ are for the Isaaq and for subsets of the Darood: the Dulbahante, Majerteen, Marehaan and Ogadeen. Meanwhile the Harti (consisting of principally of the Dulbahante, Majerteen and Warsengeli) is the salient level of corporate association in Kismaayo. All the units in figure 2 have been la-

sons for their advocacy is that by invoking Clan, they can generate a formula for representation in peace talks and political structures that is based on something other than military force (Menkhaus et al. 2009, pp. 44-5).

I follow Abdi Samatar (1992), Daniel Compagnon (1998) and Lidwien Kapteijns (2013) in locating this inflection point somewhere during the zenith of the Mohamed Siyaad Barre’s oppression and the depths of the civil war and the mass atrocities that accompanied it. At the moment of the final battle for state power in January 1991—which was also in retrospect the moment of state collapse—there were three

4 Pronounced heer and written that way prior to the establishment of the Somali script in 1972.

main armed movements, namely the Somali National Movement (SNM—‘Isaaq’), the United Somali Congress (USC—‘Hawiye’) and the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM—‘Ogadeen’). Others had recently formed, namely the Somali Democratic Movement (SDM—‘Reewin’ or ‘Rahanweyn’) and Southern Somali National Movement (SSNM—‘Diir’), while the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF—‘Majerteen’) had been revived from a moribund state. The Somali National Front (SNF—‘Marehan’) was created from remnants of the regime. These were, I argue, the vehicles for the political-military-territorial units, identified as Clan, that have dominated ever since. In invoking Clan, the political-military entrepreneurs made an implicit bargain with the custodians of Clan identity, but erroneously assumed that they would be masters of that bargain. Subsequently, at peace conferences in 1996 in Sodere (Ethiopia) and 2000 in Arta (Djibouti), mediators and civic leaders turned that logic against the warlords by appealing directly to Clan elders, and fastening onto Clan-based representation formulae that culminated in the ‘4.5’ specification (Menkhaus et al. 2009). The ‘4.5’ are constituted by the four big Clans: Daarood, Diir (including Isaaq), Hawiye and Reewin/Rahanweyn (Digil and Mirifle); with a half (or ‘fifth clan’) allocated to minority groups. While this was an effective tactic for marginalizing the armed factions, and possibly the best way of securing representation for minorities, it has formalized the legacy of Clan formation. It has subsequently been translated into a constitutionally-sanctioned allocation of power according to the ‘4.5’ formula and a territorial division into the ‘building blocks’ of Federal Member States that matches it, albeit unevenly.⁵

The violent episodes of 1987-92 were undoubtedly crucial in fixing the narrative of Clan identity and Clan hatred, and severing cross-clan ties, in such a way that a turn to civic representation could not reverse these new realities. However, following Donham’s enjoiner to

try to understand violent events in their correct sequence, it is important also to attend to what happened immediately beforehand. Why did Clan emerge as the organizing framework for the insurgency? This paper seeks to answer this question.

Lineage and ‘Clan’

However much they are politically instrumentalised, socio-political identities also have their own autonomous logics. When a politician appeals to identity as the basis for political mobilization he is making a pact with the custodians of identity, such as tribal chiefs or sectarian religious authorities. In most societies, those custodians have social constituencies and hold to systems of values and beliefs that provide them with some autonomy *vis-à-vis* the politicians. Along with the way in which episodes of extreme violence generate identity configurations, this is one of the core dynamics of identity-construction in a situation of political contestation and armed conflict. However, segmentary lineage systems allocate authority over identity in an egalitarian manner, which means that politicians and businesspeople can themselves be effective identity entrepreneurs, without having to appeal to custodians of identity who possess autonomous authority.

Somalia is a paradigmatic example of a segmentary lineage system. It is a simple and elegant system in which each identity-based corporate association corresponds precisely to a generational level of the patriliney (Lewis 1961). This is encapsulated in the formula, ‘me against my brother; me and my brother against our cousin; me and my cousins against the stranger.’ All members of the main pastoral clans can trace descent from a common ancestor within a ‘total genealogy’. The highest, most unifying levels of this genealogy appear to have been established in the nineteenth century at the time of resistance to imperial encroachment (Ahmed 1995;

5 Each of the Federal Member States has a dominant ‘clan’ and significant numbers of minorities and trans-state communities (those with a presence across state boundaries).

Cassanelli 2010, p. 60). There are many fictions in the higher levels of the genealogy and telescoping of the generations (Mansur 1995; Abbink 2009). Somalis have a vocabulary that refers to different levels of lineage organization, including terms such as *qabiil* (generically used for identity unit), *reer* ('family'), *jilib* and *laaf* (lower levels of lineage grouping). It has become solely a matter of convention to name certain levels of lineage as 'subclans', 'clans' and 'clan families', as though they corresponded in some manner to 'ethnicity' or 'tribe'. The total genealogy means that each male member of the main pastoral Somali lineages is in principle able to choose the lineage-based unit of solidarity from the level of the immediate family to that of the Somali people as a whole, with units such as 'clans' becoming salient on a circumstantial or arbitrary basis. It is a democratic patriliney: all adult males in the genealogy have, in theory, equal standing. When a man's name attaches to a lineage formation at any level ('clan', 'sub-clan', etc.) that occurs solely because he achieved prominence as an individual, through political, military, social or economic proficiency. We must not conflate or confuse two different things: 'clan' as relationship and 'clan' as unit. One is individuals' general affinity with their lineages; the other is individuals' purported singular identification with a Clan.

The simplicity of segmentary lineage conceals four vitally important aspects. First, the content of what is at stake in the lineage system changes with level (cf. Simons 1995, p. 138). In the pastoralist system as it existed during the colonial era, the fundamental unit of identity was the mutual assistance association among patrilineal kin, organized for the purposes of paying or obtaining bloodwealth (*dia*) as recompense for homicide. For obvious practical purposes, this used to limit the *dia*-paying group to a relatively restricted span of kin—four to eight generations, a few hundred to a few thousand men—who are within a geographical range (Lewis 1961, p. 6). Implicitly, it identifies the *dia*-paying group with a group

that can be mobilized militarily. This constraint does not scale easily: as the level moves higher in the genealogical tree, the sentiment of solidarity remains, but its mechanics vary. As Roland Marchal observes, the internal function of lineage units is diverse: 'history, migration and urbanization ... have made each clan very distinct, even while they claim many commonalities' (2007, p. 1098).

Note that there is a danger of circularity in attributing conflict to lineage units, as the function of these units may be to organize violence and reconcile after violence. The *dia*-paying group is a paradigmatic example of this. It illustrates the phenomenon of how the anticipated mechanism of resolving the conflict defines the formation of the conflict parties. In

In a similar way, in the contemporary era of Clans, military commanders and militiamen justifiably anticipate that ceasefires and political settlements will be negotiated on the basis of Clans, and so will participate accordingly.

the era when the localized *dia*-paying group was the most salient form of lineage organization, then when there was a potentially violent conflict, the participants would enter it in the knowledge that the final settlement would be negotiated between *dia*-paying groups. Any individual participating in that conflict would be liable for contributing to *dia*-payments or his family would be eligible for receiving such compensation only insofar as he participated as a member of a *dia*-paying group. In a similar way, in the contemporary era of Clans, military commanders and militiamen justifiably anticipate that ceasefires and political settlements will be negotiated on the basis of Clans, and so will participate accordingly. Conflict and identity units are mutually constitutive; neither is logically prior to the other.

Second, kinship is necessarily leavened by complementary institutions of contract-making. In

the customary system as described in Lewis, this was 'a form of social contract' known as *xeer*. Lewis describes it in these terms: 'All lineages which act corporately do so first because of their agnatic basis, and secondly through an explicit treaty defining the terms of their collective unity.' (Lewis 1961, p. 3) Typically, it was the *dia*-paying group that is the contracting unit. While the *dia*-paying units that came together through *xeer* were usually from the same clan or clan family, there was no automatic solidarity, but rather a deliberate process of negotiation that allowed for groups to be approached or not approached, and to opt in or out. There was also no restriction on which *dia*-paying groups can be approached to form a contract. Lewis writes, 'it is possible to have treaty obligations and political solidarity without agnation' (p. 193). For example, one kind of contract (*gashaanbur*) was among a coalition of small lineages, to resist the power of a bigger one (Compagnon 1998, p. 84).

There can be other bases for making contracts and creating corporate associations, for example Islamic law and practice, or administrative arrangements associated with the state. In the last half century, customary forms of *xeer* have changed, either merging into or being replaced by other forms of civil, commercial and political transactions and agreements. The *dia*-paying group remains significant but has become detached from its basis in local pastoralist organization. Instead, the *dia*-paying group is fused with other networks of solidarity, among them business-commercial ties, and the organization of political and economic rewards around Clans and other forms of lineage solidarity that raise funds for common activities. The group that organizes the collection of payments for *dia* and other obligations is known as *qaraan*, which can be more flexible than solely following the lineage principle to the boundaries of the *dia*-paying group, and may include friends and the wider clan (Simons 1995: 120-122). The lineage principle animates all these forms of solidarity, but none of them presuppose a fixed identity unit.

Third, the 'classic' segmentary lineage mode of social organization is closely associated with a particular form of livelihood, namely nomadic pastoralism. This customarily has a particular form of territorial organization, according to which grazing lands are a common resource, and access and utilization of the rangeland is based on negotiation among the collective groups that organize herds of livestock. Water ownership and access varies: in the case of wells and reservoirs it is organised according to who dug and maintained them. Historically, land was plentiful but water and grazing resources were dispersed, seasonal and variable from one year to the next. As recently as 1970, most Somali herds were kept primarily for subsistence. Few animals were sold, reflecting the pastoralists' dependence on the direct consumption of milk rather than the sale of animals to obtain money with which to buy other commodities (British Veterinary Team 1973). Other main reasons for removing animals from the herd were bridewealth and *dia* payment, the slaughter of animals for religious feasts and to honour guests, and changing the composition of the herd. The lineage system becomes more complex in the south, and especially among the historically settled peoples of the inter-riverian areas, where livelihoods were historically based on a combination farming and livestock herding. As Abdi Samatar observes, the first order of intellectual business in updating Lewis's Pastoral Democracy should be to focus on that imprecise word 'pastoralism' and analyse how it has been transformed by the commodification of livestock and the means for sustaining them (Samatar 1992, pp. 627, 631).

Finally, lineage identity does not exist in a political vacuum. Segmentary lineages are the classic example of a self-governing society without a state; but to the extent that such statelessness ever existed, it was incomplete and occurred only in a particular context. Where there is an important presence of a state or a commercial entity, the significance of lineage changes. A politically significant individual becomes a broker between the state and the lineage. Offices such

as *sultan* and *ugaas* usually emerged in these circumstances. Lineages as such cannot be represented in power structures. Rather, individuals have posts in hierarchies of military power, administration and patronage, which intersect with their positions in their lineages.

In the 1950s, the northern Somali lineage system engaged with the colonial power, however much the ethnographer might have tried to make the colonial impact invisible. In much the same way that 'tribes' emerged from the colonial encounter as a means of making African societies legible to imperial authorities and providing the means to administer them indirectly (Ranger 1983; Mamdani 1996), the framework of 'clan' was a military-administrative convenience for defining colonial subjecthood. In the post-colonial era, the lineage system interacts with other political ethnicities (in southern Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya), with domestic state authorities, and with international powers. And, it is under pressure to conform to the standard model of modern state formation (Samatar 1988).

One significant element in the Somali segmentary lineage system is, however, difficult to change. As noted, and in contrast to forms of ethnicity that prevail in agrarian societies those in which customary systems have been adapted and validated by state authority, the Somali lineage system has no privileged specialist custodians of identity. There are no chiefly offices tied to land, spiritual authority or aristocratic lineage. All adult males possess, in principle, equal legitimate claim to public authority. Anyone of a certain age and mental capacity can be an 'elder': it is a normative term that refers to someone who acts in a certain way, rather than a descriptor of an office. Individuals who hold chiefly titles such as *Ugaas* or *Sultan*, do so insofar as they carry out the functions of the position; their status may be heritable but holding the office is ultimately based on individual merit and collective agreement. The egalitarianism of the lineage system has important implications for how Clan has been politicized.

In other contexts, we can depict the instrumentalization of ethnicity as a bargain between politicians who wish to utilize identity for their own purposes, and the custodians of legitimate identity, who have their own interests and constraints (which can be extremely diverse). The degree to which identity politics is regulated depends on the authority and interests of those custodians, which are in varying degrees independent from the politicians. In the pastoral Somali case, where no such autonomous custodians of identity have historically existed, any adult male can aspire to become recognized as a lineage leader and the only mechanisms for restraint or regulation are his peers. This recognition can arise through political-military prowess and reputation, through personal integrity and respect, through riches, through serving as a broker with an external political entity, or a combination of the above. During the post-colonial period, political-economic developments pressed the Somali lineage system to generate forms of political identity compatible with state formation. This allows us to begin to understand the dynamics of intensely competitive Clan formation, driven by the violent rivalries among political entrepreneurs and the (weaker) efforts of 'elders', espousing norms of civility, to restrain them. The logic of lineage could be mobilized with equal legitimacy by all these actors in such contests—and indeed a single individual could switch between different roles in accordance with contingency and choice.

The formation of Clans through the processes described in this paper, however, have also created the positions of identity custodians. Alongside political-military entrepreneurs, 'elders' have begun to emerge as respected representatives of Clans. The mechanisms for identifying these representatives are critical. Notably, the 2000 Arta peace conference where each Clan was asked to nominate 180 individuals (160 men and 20 women), was a pivotal case. In Ethiopia, the principle of 'nationality' has been incorporated into political organization since the 1970s and forms a central and con-

troversial element in the 1995 Federal Constitution. This recognises Somalis as a constituent nationality of the Ethiopian federation, where they have the intriguingly named Ethiopian Somali National Regional State. By extension, Somali Clans are also recognized as constituent elements of the Somali nation, implicitly a theorization of ‘segmentary nationalism’ (c.f. Lewis 1989) that has informed Ethiopian policy towards Somalia since 1991. Among other things this has contributed to Ethiopia’s preference for a ‘building blocks’ approach and its advocacy of formulae based on equal political status for Clans in Ethiopian-sponsored peace processes, such as the 1996 Sodere conference (Menkhaus et al. 2009, p. 14). By recognizing Clans as administrative entities, the Ethiopians have elevated Clan elders and administrators into privileged guardians of Clan identity, solidifying the preconceptions of those who articulated the framework in the first place.

The Transformation of Pastoralist Livelihoods

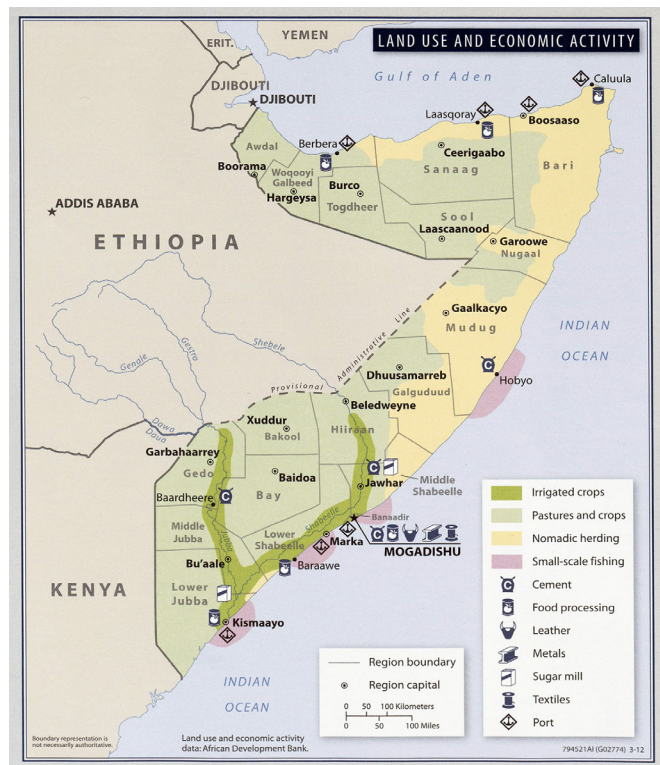
The first element in the origins of the ‘prairie fire’ is how disruptive changes in the pastoral economy created what might be called a proto-insurrection—poorly coordinated forms of violent resistance and intercommunal conflict—before any organized insurgency emerged.

The ‘ideal type’ of Somali lineage organization, as encribed in the ethnographic canon, existed at a time when the basis of livelihoods—livestock ownership—was widely distributed and organized by families and *dia*-paying groups, and Somalis political ambitions were limited by colonial rule. The transformation in pastoralism was the first factor in reshaping identities and the emergence of the post-colonial ‘clan’.

Between the early 1970s and the late 1980s, traditional forms of pastoral livelihoods were

transformed. There was a rapid commercialization of livestock ownership and a huge land grab. Four main factors drove these changes: growth in numbers, commercialization and associated social stratification, changing land use, and politics and war. The ‘great Somali land grab’ of the 1980s drove a series of pastoral land conflicts that were pivotal in shaping the ways in which violence, politics and ‘clan’ identities were organized.

Map 1. Land use in Somalia



Source: University of Texas

Growth in numbers of livestock. A huge increase in numbers of camels, sheep, goats and cattle was related to the commercial orientation of herders, the growth of veterinary facilities, increased provision of water and the expanding human population. The result was that, in contradiction to the historical combination of water scarcity and plentiful pasture, grazing became increasingly scarce, while water was relatively abundant. In turn, there was an overall deterioration in the quality of the range, particularly the depletion of the most favoured species of grass. One result was that

pasture became a scarce resource, and private ownership of pasture grew. Perhaps the most striking development in the 1980s was the widespread private enclosure of the range. In the traditional nomadic economy, herders and their livestock could move freely, subject only to negotiation with others in the vicinity. Fenc-

The rapid spread of thorn fences across the rangelands, enclosing land claimed as private, was an indicator of a dramatic change in the territoriality of Somalia's political economy.

ing the grazing lands would have been unthinkable. The rapid spread of thorn fences across the rangelands, enclosing land claimed as private, was an indicator of a dramatic change in the territoriality of Somalia's political economy.

Commercialization. From the 1970s to the 1990s, Somalia's livestock economy followed a dramatic sequence of boom, bust and boom. The bust was brought about by government restrictions on exports, droughts (1974-75 and 1986-87), and war. The background was the fast growth in the commercial export of livestock which came to dominate the pastoral economy in the 1970s and 1980s, reaching to even the most remote parts of Somalia. The livestock trade was the main motor of social and economic trade among Somali pastoralists before the war. It had a profound impact on herding patterns and on resource use, and played a central role in shaping the conflicts that arose. The trade itself was a major economic resource, and thus a focus of conflict between the government and its opponents.

By the mid-1980s, commercial pastoralism dominated over traditional livestock herding. The trading sector was highly dynamic and expanding rapidly. The marketing structure that developed was highly sophisticated, and (in the north and centre of the country) adapted to the peculiar demands of the market in the Arabian peninsular. The majority of the mar-

keted animals were exported, and were sent to Saudi Arabia and Yemen, in particular for the Haj market. This made the market highly seasonal, and concentrated commercial activity on a single trade route (through Berbera) at a single time of year, that shifts by eleven days each year in accordance with the Islamic calendar. The southern livestock market was focused on Mogadishu and Kenya.

Another unique feature of Somali pastoralism is its credit arrangements, whereby middlemen are paid by exporters only when their animals are sold in the destination market. This was a mechanism for concentrating livestock ownership among the wealthy. In the 1980s, most animals on the range were owned by brokers, middlemen and export traders, who employed young men as herders. Those businessmen co-opted the lineage system for their purposes. The traditional small-scale organization of the lineage system was changed to one of commercially-owned herds, with traders and their agents making the key decisions concerning management and sale. If animals were stolen or herders killed, the businessman would invoke lineage solidarity and perhaps mobilize the *dia*-paying group to resolve the dispute, but these actions clearly would hold a different meaning to their invocation by members of a lineage acting in solidarity with one another.

The monetization of the herders' economy was a closely related phenomenon, which arose from the increasing sale of animals, combined with improving terms of trade between livestock and consumable goods such as grain. It led to a marked change in herders' lifestyles and diet; instead of being primarily dependent on meat and milk, herders bought larger amounts of foodstuffs from the market, including sugar, tea and cereals, and also purchased other consumer goods. The major source of income was sale of livestock. But a growing number of poorer rural people also began to engage in economic activities that brought in small amounts of money, with which they would buy essential commodities. The growth

of the low-income monetized informal sector in towns, and the growth of small trading centres, was very noticeable.

A consequence was intensified economic stratification. Pastoralist societies are commonly inequitable, and dominated by small numbers of wealthy herders. In the late 1970s and 1980s, a new phenomenon in Somalia was the chronic inability of smaller herders to sustain themselves, with resulting impoverishment. This was made worse by serious livestock losses during the 1987 drought. The consequences included widespread indebtedness, outmigration, and livelihood diversification.

Changing land use. The most important factor in driving changing use of pastureland was the rapid development of year-round water provision. In the traditional Somali nomadic pastoral system, water rights were more developed than grazing rights. This reflected the relative scarcity of water and the investment required to dig a well or a reservoir, and to maintain it. Thus, complex systems of water rights evolved. The individual or lineage who dug the well were said to own the well, and hence to have first right to the water, but these rights did not extend to refusing water to others, if it were available.

The provision of improved water supplies became a political and economic priority for successive governments and international aid programmes. Officials in the Siyaad Barre government rewarded their supporters by providing deep bore holes with mechanical pumps or excavating public reservoirs. The rapid spread of water supplies across the rangelands radically changed the nature of pastoralism. Water became relatively plentiful all year around. This meant that many areas that were previously unusable, could be grazed, and areas that previously could be grazed only in the wet season, were now open for year-round grazing. This increased the pressure on pastures and led many pastoral communities to reconsider their attitude towards the provision of water

supplies—a well or reservoir could spell the intrusion of herds belonging to other clans or big traders into what had previously been a wet season reserve for local herds.

Herders had some difficulty in communicating their scepticism about the value of improved water supplies to the agencies responsible for providing water ‘development.’ One of the first priorities of the Central Rangelands Development Project (CRDP) after its inauguration in 1983 was the provision of permanent water sources in areas prone to water shortage. At Budbud in Bulo Burte district of Hiraan region, Hawadle pastoralists rejected plans for the agency GTZ to drill a borehole in their seasonal pastures in 1984. They feared they would lose exclusive use of this land. When the GTZ engineer nevertheless started drilling, they attacked and killed him. Similarly, in 1986, Ogaden herders in Afmadow in the Lower Jubba lobbied against the further development of water resources in their area, fearing the encroachment of other herds. The fear was well-founded: Marehan herders began to use the water and grazing resources, leading to conflict.

During the war, many deep bore holes and reservoirs became inoperable due to lack of spare parts and maintenance. For some pastoralists, this was not unwelcome. In some areas, herders refused to ask for their water supplies to be rehabilitated, fearing that this would spark conflict. A key water point near Zeila in Somaliland remained unrepaired until 1994, at the request of the local Issa and Gadabursi herders, on account of fears of conflict.

Politics and war. The Siyaad Barre government repeatedly intervened in the rangelands in support of certain clans. This was the key factor in escalating local disputes that would otherwise have been resolved by mediation among the parties concerned, into intractable conflicts of a national political nature. Fomenting such disputes was part of Siyaad Barre’s divide-and-rule strategy. The resolution of these conflicts

ultimately depended on the overthrow of the government. Several of these disputes will be described below.

In turn, the armed conflicts contributed to a further assault on the social and economic base of pastoralism. War began by disrupting the trading systems; as it intensified, pastoral movement was disrupted by sowing land mines, by the destruction of water supplies, and by the requisitioning and slaughter of livestock by the Somali army and later by the militias. Some of the government counter-insurgency strategy was specifically aimed at rendering pastoralism unviable: the theory was that once the herders had been forced to abandon their herds, the guerrillas could no longer exist in the rural areas. It did this by targeting migration routes and seasonal pastures for mining, by blowing up water points, and by mounting rural patrols that terrorized herders and confiscated their animals. The collapse of veterinary services also contributed to the crisis of pastoralism. The Somali army destroyed considerable areas of forest in order to deny insurgents the opportunity of using the natural cover provided by trees.

As a consequence of all the above, rural people moved out of traditional forms of nomadic pastoralism. They moved to cities, as labour migrants to Arab countries, became agro-pastoralists, or became part of a massive dispossession of farmland in other parts of the country. Most immediately important for the changing geography of clan, was the growth in agro-pastoral livelihoods that mixed livestock herding and cultivation. This was one driver in a huge land grab: a development that demands special attention.

The Great Somali Land Grab

The 'great Somali land grab' had three manifestations: the massive dispossession of farmland in the south (Besteman and Cassanelli 2000), the seizure of urban land in Hargaisa, Mogadishu and Kismaayo (Kapteijns 2013), and the enclosure of the range. This section focuses

only on the third, because it is the most relevant to the thesis of this paper that transformations in pastoralism contributed to transformations in identity politics. Historically, we can see that the pastoral land grab was also important in the organization of violence in the formative stages of the civil war. It is also the least documented. The pastoral land grab took quite different forms in different parts of the country (African Rights 1994): this paper will focus on the central rangelands and immediately adjoining areas (Hiraan, Galgadud and Middle Shebelle regions) as this was pivotal to the emergence of the USC as a clan militia, and not deal with the Jubba Valley or the north-west.

As the war began, vast areas of the central rangelands were being enclosed, with thorn fences thrown up. Enclosure strikes at the very heart of nomadic pastoralism. It forbids free movement of herds and prevents open access to grass and where it is widespread it spells an end to traditional nomadism.

The Land Registration Act of 1975 made all collective land the property of the state, and gave government courts rather than lineage elders or Shari'a courts the authority to adjudicate land and inheritance claims. This was transformative for the farmlands of southern Somalia, leaving the minority groups that had customary rights to the land at the mercy of the state and its officials (Cassanelli 2015). It also had far-reaching impacts on rangeland management and pastoral land rights. Colonial administrations imposed regulations on land use, including restricting grazing rights to certain areas to certain clans and demarcating pastoral, agricultural and forest areas. The management and enforcement of these regulations were mostly entrusted to lineage elders. The 1975 act abolished the elders' role. The restrictions had helped to ensure the range remained open; the relaxations always benefited the expansion of cultivation and enclosure. Selective attempts to re-impose land use classifications during the 1980s were not successful, as it proved impossible to enforce grazing reserves.

There were also sporadic government attempts to regulate pastoral and agro-pastoral enclosure, which met with mixed success. Often, fences were burned on the orders of an administrative officer, only to be rebuilt within a few years. All land-use regulation collapsed during the war, and none was re-imposed. Hence, the regulations that (intermittently and unevenly) held the growth of enclosure in check were removed, and the pressure towards private ownership of pasture gathered momentum, unconstrained by legislation.

Enclosure occurred for a number of reasons. The reasons listed below are not mutually exclusive and often, a particular piece of land was enclosed for several reasons simultaneously.

Agro-pastoral enclosures. The economic need to cultivate was probably the most common reason for enclosure. There were several forms of agro-pastoral enclosure. One can be called a 'rotational pastoral enclosure.' Under this system, an area of land—say, four hectares—is enclosed, but only one hectare cultivated in any one year. The farmer assumes that three years are required for the land to recover from each year's cultivation. The farmed area rotates through the whole enclosed area, in a self-sustaining cycle (Behnke 1988). The second is 'shifting enclosure.' Under this, an area is enclosed and part of it cultivated, but there is no intention to manage the enclosed area on a sustainable basis. After a while, the enclosure will be abandoned as the farmer encloses another area, or revert to a pure (albeit degraded) pastoral enclosure. The third is 'fictional agro-pastoral enclosure.' According to law and custom, only cultivated land should be enclosed. Hence, a pastoralist wishing to enclose rangeland may create a small area of cultivation within a large enclosure purely in order to give an appearance of complying with the law.

Pastoral grazing reserves. Ownership of grazing reserves or ranches was a characteristic of the wealthy. Enclosure of the range is strictly illegal, but under Siyaad Barre, wealthy

or well-connected individuals were able to circumvent the law. Some were awarded land for agricultural projects which never materialized, enabling them to use the land for private gain. In areas where commercial sheep production was advanced, large enclosures were common. This was the case for example in Nooleye in the central rangelands (Somali Democratic Republic and Mascott Ltd., 1985, Annexe I Section 3.2). Close to towns, many pastoralists began to enclose pastures to support cattle, so that they could provide milk supplies to the urban markets. Many of the bigger commercial enclosures were dismantled and overrun during the war, but as soon as commercial livestock production rebounded in the early 1990s, enclosure resumed where it was possible.

Commercial grass production. Enclosure of the range can also be an economic proposition for non-herders. Sale of the grass—either by renting out the grazing for a fee or by cutting the grass for sale in the marketplace—can be an important source of income. For the most part, traders themselves deny that they have enclosed land for their own use, instead they prefer to buy fodder on the market. Many of those who have enclosed have been poor people or speculators with low incomes, who see the sale of grass as a potential source of income.

Land banking. Once enclosure has started in a particular area, it develops a momentum of its own. Those who have no immediate reason for enclosure may try to enclose land, fearing that if they do not do it now, the opportunity will be lost. There is an element of panic and speculation in every land-grab. This was well-expressed by Roy Behnke:

'The problem, [Nooleye residents] maintained, was that everyone has panicked, anticipating a land shortage, and enclosed huge fallow areas for future use. But like a run on a bank, the panic was self-fulfilling... No-one planned to enclose the area, residents say it just happened, the unintended result of each individual protecting his own

interests (Behnke 1988, p. 6)."

A land-grab for pasture can be sparked by any form of enclosure. For example, in any area where there is a threat of agro-pastoral enclosure, herders are prone to fence land pre-emptively.

Politically-motivated land enclosure. Once a land grab was underway, in the context of a violently contested political struggle, it inevitably became a political, and sometimes military, matter. As we turn to the process of armed group formation, below, the intrusion of politics and counter-insurgency into land seizure will be clear.

The outcome of the land grab in pastoral areas was a massive growth in the private ownership of pastureland and the appropriation of land and water for the exclusive use of particular clans. In turn this led to a reconfiguration of territoriality and identity, a shift away from a society governed by the lineage principle towards one governed by a more standard model of territorially-constituted political units. Another outcome was a proliferation of land disputes. Several of these contributed directly to the mobilization of the insurgencies that

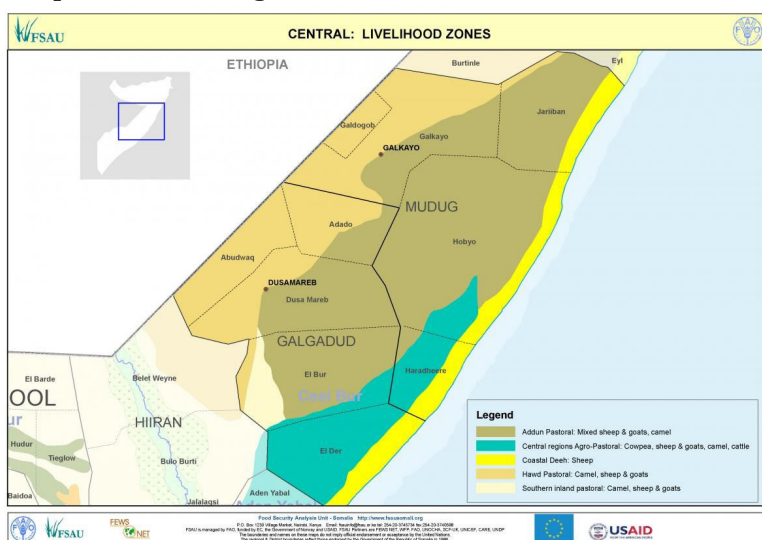
overthrew Siyaad. Three conflicts in the central rangelands that fed into the USC rebellion, are examined next.

Conflicts in the Central Rangelands

Conflict among pastoralists in the central rangelands had reached a high intensity before any politically-organized insurgency began. The story of these conflicts has rarely been told, and still more rarely have their origins and dynamics been analyzed.

The USC's Omer Elmi writes, 'Mudug was the cradle of USC struggle well ahead of USC's formation.' (Elmi 1993, p. 29) He describes the first 'guerrilla units' forming in 1988 at Balli Dhuumoodle near Galkayo, consisting of fighters from two Hawiye clans, Salebaan and Habr Gidir,⁶ who first clashed with the 'regime' (specifically, Clan groups aligned with the president) and then joined first the SSDF and then the SNM before forming the nucleus of the USC. They had two 'bases': Dhuumoodle and Hanah Weilod. Elmi writes that by the end of 1990, 'the Dhuumoodle Base had finally proliferated into a prairie fire of guerrilla activities up to the gates of Mogadishu' (p. 29).

Map 2. Central Rangelands



Source: Reliefweb

The story can also be told as a series of conflicts over pasture and water, in which the senior figures in the government intervened in a partisan manner, intensifying the violence. It is not easy to resolve the question of whether those disputes originated in the pasturelands or among the political elites circulating in and out of the president's political favour, but my focus in this section is on the local drivers of conflict. One such dispute was between Marehan and Salebaan (Hawiye) herders in Mudug. The origins of this conflict lie in a history of migration and displacement in Galgaduud. The contested area, north-west of the main north-south 'Chi-

6 Note that in the Somali lineage, the Salebaan are usually classified as a subclan of the Habr Gidir.

nese' road, is an important grazing area with good year-round water widely available. The proximity to the road also makes the area valuable for commercial herds as they can be easily trucked to Berbera or Bosaso.

In the 1960s, the Salebaan corporate lineage group was expanding into previously Marehan areas. Under Siyaad Barre, this process was reversed. In 1983, on the creation of the CRDP, the government made a big dry season grazing reserve in an area previously grazed by the Salebaan, but Marehan herders were given preferential access. The following year, the CRDP put in a water point at in the same locality, and the local authorities awarded the water rights solely to the Marehan. This led, inevitably, to armed conflict between the Marehan and Salebaan, with the government supporting the Marehan.

The 1987 drought led to disruption throughout the central rangelands, with several conflicts erupting over grazing and water. For example Habr Gidir-Ayr (Hawiye) herders fought against Murursade (Hawiye) pastoralists near El Bur, but the government was neutral in this conflict and helped settle it. However, the government intervened decisively against the Salebaan. Troops machine-gunned herds of camels trying to cross the Chinese road into Marehan-controlled areas, and despatched soldiers to defend Marehan water points against use by other clans.

A second case is a dispute between the Omer Mohamoud (Majerteen/Darood) and the Habr Gidir-Sa'ad (Hawiye). This conflict appears to have been almost entirely politically-instigated: it is the one referred to Elmi above. The north-western part Mudug region is dry and the enclosure or private ownership of land here would be almost entirely futile, and there is the additional problem of shortage of trees and bushes with which to make fences. For both clans, cooperation in providing access to grazing has a stronger economic rationale than an attempt to exclude the other from certain areas. Historically, clashes have occurred

mostly at water points, especially when water is scarce. During the early 1980s, in fact, the Sa'ad were largely free from the pressures on land that existed further to the south. The major reason for this was that between 1978 and 1985, the government was engaged in conflict against the Majerteen on account of the attempted coup of 1978 and the subsequent formation of the SSDF. The southernmost Majerteen lineage, the Omer Mohamoud, were among the chief targets.

In this region, Mudug, territorial disputes between the Omer Mohamoud and the Sa'ad had existed since the 19th century. The Italians designated a line between the two clans, known as the Tomaselli Line, but this was formally abolished in 1971 with the abolition of clan territories. Moreover, in the 1960s, Majerteen-dominated governments had been encouraging Omer Mohamoud herders to push southwards. However, the tide dramatically reversed after 1978 with Siyaad Barre's repression of the Majerteen. Although not designed to have this effect, it allowed the Sa'ad to expand northwards. In 1985, with the government's adoption of 'Daroodism', Siyaad Barre made a rapprochement with the Majerteen. The Omer Mohamoud was the clan that benefitted least from this in terms of government positions, but it now had government and if necessary military support in regaining its lost territories, and violent conflict over the grazing land escalated. This contributed directly to the mobilization of the Habr Gidir-Saad as a proto-militia, which was then the raw material for the USC's Dhuumoodle 'garrison'.

A third example, illustrates another wrinkle in this story. It is the conflicts arising from widespread enclosure in the south-east of Galgaduud region in the 1980s. It shows the complex and inter-connected roles of different reasons for enclosure, including the political motive for controlling territory by rival clans—in this case both of them Hawiye. The dispute was between the Abgaal and Murursade corporate lineage groups. The political component of the

dispute was a rivalry over political control of the district councils. The Abgaal (specifically the Waisle lineage) controlled El Dheere district and were dominant in Nooleye district. The Murursade were dominant in El Bur district (shared with Habr Gidir Ayr and Duduble) and a substantial minority in Nooleye, but felt that their numbers and importance warranted control of another council. Under the leadership of Mohamed Sheikh Osman (then minister of finance), Murursade businessmen invested in several villages, including Birgaan, Jacar and Gal Harerey and finally succeeded in having the latter upgraded to a district council, which was duly controlled by Murursade.

Control of land was both means and aim of the struggle. The Abgaal hoped to expand their territory to cope with their increasing numbers of animals; the Murursade tried to block them off. Each lineage group rushed to enclose land, especially prime land close to water points. This had a clear economic rationale—it was this very land that was ideal for commercial sheep production and was desired by both groups. Under economic pressure, many herders were also taking up cultivation. But it also had a political (and psychological) rationale—by enclosing land, it was denied to the other. Once the rush for land had started, members of each lineage group enclosed what they could while land was still readily available. The rush towards land was further intensified by the 1987 drought, which caused serious livestock losses (up to 80 percent in the Middle Shebelle).

Control of water was another means in the rivalry. Murursade politicians were able to direct international assistance supplied through the CRDP preferentially into their area. For example in 1987, the CRDP engineering team responsible for excavating water reservoirs was directed to work in Murursade areas as a priority, despite their relatively good water supplies, overturning its professionally-assessed priority of providing help to the largely waterless areas customarily grazed by Duduble-owned herds. Meanwhile, prominent Abgaal

merchants and elders, such as the Ali Shador family, also invested in private water points to try to expand their area of control.

Violent conflict is reported to have started at Nooleye with Murursade herders demanding access to the Abgaal-controlled (but legally open to all) borehole. During a local drought in 1984, Murursade herders moved southwards and tried to graze Abgaal enclosures by force. The government intervened in support of the Murursade and burned many fences, but the enclosures were rapidly re-established.

This conflict illuminates how two other proto-militias arose, linked to patrons with political and business interests distributed across different levels of local and national government, and each serving as an incubator of Clan.

Siyaad Barre's Instrumentalization of Disorder

To understand the emergence of the Clan-based military-political order, we need also to analyse the political-military context in which it arose. Two strands are particularly crucial. The first, discussed here, is the security strategies adopted by Siyaad Barre. The second, in the next section, is the organization of the insurgency.

Siyaad Barre did not create clan politics from scratch or alone, but his attempts to coup proof his regime in Mogadishu and suppress insurgencies in the north were crucial to the way in which lineage identities became politically salient. At a tactical level, Siyaad Barre used lineage as a mechanism for neutralizing the organizational capability of military units and state institutions that he saw as threats. To undermine and circumvent them he animated alternative patronage networks utilizing patronage. Unlike the colonial powers that had floated above the lineage system and used clan as an instrument for indirect rule, Siyaad Barre was

embedded within the lineage system, and used it directly for divide and rule.

From the first days of his regime, Siyaad's biggest immediate threat had been his closest military colleagues. Two of his most prominent co-conspirators in the coup were dismissed in 1970 and 1971, one of them executed. Siyaad then consolidated his regime and hugely expanded the army and its officers' privileges. In the mid-1970s, the USSR provided 250 tanks and 52 combat aircraft, meaning that it outnumbered and outclassed Ethiopia (Lefebvre 1992, pp. 159-60; Robinson 2016, p. 240). The army was the symbol of national unity, with officers and men from all Somali speaking territories. They were well-paid, well-trained and had high social standing. After the debacle of the 1977-78 war and the ignominious retreat from the Ethiopian Ogaden, the officer corps was the number one threat to Siyaad Barre's power. And indeed within a few months there

was an attempted putsch. Because of the lineage of several of its leaders it was branded as a Majerteen conspiracy: its Clan

identity was forged more in its repression than its inception. But the spirit of nationalism—now defensive and fearful—still animated the army, with fears that Ethiopia was going to launch a large-scale counter-invasion. There were indeed two cross-border incursions in 1981 and 1982, although it became clear that neither superpower was going to risk another confrontation on the scale of 1977.

After defeat in 1978, all Somalis agreed that Siyaad Barre's days were numbered. In turn, the president's dominant calculus was neutralizing the always-imminent threat of a coup. This led him to dismantle any institution that could threaten him, starting with the army. Purges of senior officers began even while Ethiopia still presented a serious military threat, with its

forces crossing the border in 1981 and 1982. But Siyaad Barre was more fearful of a coup than an invasion. Within a decade, Somalia's once-proud national army had been reduced to a coalition of Clan militias. This was a familiar strategy of disorder as a political instrument (Chabal and Daloz 1999), with the predictable consequence that, while reducing the threat of a coup, it increased the likelihood of insurgency (c.f. Roessler 2016). It was also a familiar process whereby an armed conflict, as it persists, consolidates ethno-territorial identity units.

The process of dismantling the army began apace in 1982. The former head of intelligence Jama Ghalib (1995) details the arrests of seven high-ranking officials on 9 June 1982. One was Ismail Ali Aboker, third vice president and a key engineer of the 1969 coup. Others included the former foreign minister Omer Arteh, extremely well-connected to Somalia's Arab sponsors. Both of these were Isaaq. Five were southerners

Unlike the colonial powers that had floated above the lineage system and used clan as an instrument for indirect rule, Siyaad Barre was embedded within the lineage system, and used it directly for divide and rule.

including two from Siyaad's own Marehan (a third Marehan was also on the list but couldn't

be found that evening). The most significant of these was General Omer Haji Mohamed, who had earlier been groomed as a potential head of the army but had drawn up plans for reform ran afoul of the patronage networks of Siyaad's senior wife Khadija (pp. 168-70).

This was to be Siyaad's logic: power first, lineage or Clan identity as a secondary factor, manipulated for the purposes of power. Ghalib observes how he both favoured the Marehan and hit them hardest when they were disloyal to him (pp. 174-5).

A few years later, the opposition dubbed Siyaad's security apparatus 'MOD': Marehan, Ogadeen, Dulbhante. It was a characteristic Somali play on words, describing the Ministry of

Defence as a cabal of lineages. It was true insofar as individuals from those clans occupied high positions in the army and intelligence, but it misrepresented the system of rule, which was not rule of clans but rule of Somalia by using individuals *chosen to represent* clans. Throughout the 1980s, Siyaad played clan politics by making sure that some representatives of each clan or subclan had a position in the government and army, making them into brokers of patronage, coopting them into his kleptocracy, and playing them off against one another.

One of the standard mechanisms for coup-proofing is divide-and-rule, especially keeping commanders busy in their home areas and tying them up with local rivals. Siyaad was a master of this. Compagnon notes, 'One of his tactics was to militarize the clans by creating clan militias, giving them weapons, and then implicating them in the repression against a targeted clan segment.' (1998, p. 176) These militias were typically commanded by SNA officers, serving or retired. The problem is that these militias are typically less effective than a professional military. First, they are poorly trained and less disciplined. Second, they perpetrate indiscriminate violence against communities, partly because they do not have the accurate intelligence to identify individuals and so inflict atrocities on entire communities, and partly because they have material incentives to rob and loot. Because militia commanders have some command autonomy, they can also more readily rebel, though any such rebellions are less dangerous than the mutiny of a regular army unit.

The 1980s witnessed mutiny after mutiny. Not all the mutineers joined the opposition. Many negotiated with the government and some accepted to return to the regime, usually gaining a post that allowed them to profit from corruptly-awarded contracts or to run a private militia as a lucrative counter-insurgent and looting operation.

The government also mounted a counterin-

surgency of remarkable brutality, destroying entire cities in the north, looting and disposing whole communities, displacing hundreds of thousands, and killing tens of thousands (Africa Watch 1990). It was the intensification of this insurgency, which Siyaad Barre identified as an 'Isaaq' Clan rebellion, and his evocation of 'Daroodism' as a counterweight, that made Clan the most salient level of lineage organization.

Political Competition within the Opposition

The final and most essential element of the story of the creation of 'clans' is the rivalrous politics within the armed opposition. The account begins with the first coup attempt in 1978, and becomes particularly significant in the mid-1980s with the deeply compromised attempt to build a unified national opposition front. The failure of that attempt was marked the fracturing of the SNM, which in turn was crucial for the emergence of the USC as the putatively dominant political-military force in the Hawiye areas of the central rangelands and Mogadishu. The dynamics of the birth of the USC have discoloured Somali politics—notably identity politics—ever since.

The opposition to Siyaad Barre began by trying to claim nationalist credentials. After the disastrous war with Ethiopia, Siyaad Barre could not be accused of being unpatriotic, only of being an incompetent dictator. The opposition fronts were established with the enormous handicap that their bases were in Ethiopia, the historic enemy. The names they chose speak of their attempts to claim nationalist legitimacy. Despite the way in which they became identified with 'clans', each front has a name that combines 'Somali', with 'salvation', 'national', 'patriotic' and 'united'.

The opposition was handicapped in practical ways by its foreign sponsors. The Ethiopians

did not want inadvertently to incubate a new nationalist government in Somalia, and repeatedly interfered in the leadership of the SSDF and SNM, sometimes brutally. Another sponsor was Libya, but Colonel Muammar Gaddafi was mercurial and unreliable. The communist government in South Yemen provided crucial early support to the SNM, but did not follow up. However, much more problematic was the internal disorganization of the opposition and its violent factionalization. The SSDF was broken by internal disputes. Among other things, this had the disastrous legacy that Somali intellectuals were deterred from joining the opposition, leaving the leadership to soldiers and businessmen. The opposition political analysis was limited to the goal of removing Siyaad Barre and his clique from power (Samatar 1992, p. 625; Elmi 1993, p. 18).

The underlying structural weakness of the opposition was that each group was set up with the intent of mounting a military putsch—and they expected that opportunity to come soon. The priority was not winning a people's war by following the classic stages of guerrilla insurgency but rather to possess sufficient military strength to either strike the death blow or to be on hand to take over as the regime crumbled. Therefore the driving logic of the rebel leaders was positioning themselves *vis-à-vis* their internal rivals to be in the best position to take power at that critical moment. It followed that until internal rivalries were resolved, the war should continue. They thus replicated the key feature of the Siyaad Barre regime, which was keeping institutional capacities weak for fear of a takeover. For the rebels, this was a fatal impediment to building a mature political movement and an institutional and disciplined army. Leaders were fearful that newcomers might arrive with financial resources or newly-defected military units that would be strong enough to take over the leadership.

The Somali National Movement

The SNM began through a hybrid of different

elements. One was a local militia, initially a unit of the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), which had been the guerrilla force fighting hand-in-hand with the Somali National Army inside Ethiopia. The WSLF set up rear bases in north-west Somalia after being pushed out of Ethiopia in 1978. Its fighters gained a bad reputation for abusing local people, and Isaaq elders petitioned the government to create an Isaaq wing of the WSLF. Known as Afraad (the 'fourth unit'), this became operational 1979 and quickly came into armed conflict, first with the WSLF and then with government forces. Forcibly transferred away from the border, many Afraad militiamen defected and became guerrillas. In parallel there was a series of clashes between Isaaq and Ogadeni herders in the Haud pastures of the north-west and adjoining areas of Ethiopia. The first armed actions by the SNM took place inside Ethiopian territory, as the SNM drove the WSLF out of Ethiopia.

Another element was military officers from the north-west who defected and began organizing a rebel army in 1981-82. The name they chose is instructive: it is a deliberate echo of the Somali National Army, from whose ranks the SNM officers were drawn, and it espoused a national agenda, and—despite the fact that Somalis all speak the same Somali language—it chose to give itself an English name and set of initials, so as to attract international support. Most of the SNM officers were in fact from the Isaaq clan family, and most of its financial support was from Isaaq clan family businessmen abroad. Nonetheless they recruited non-Isaaq and at times the SNM had substantial components from other clans. A third component was businessmen, with those in the diaspora in Britain taking the lead as they were freer to act than those within Somalia. Their preference was generally to form an Isaaq clan movement.

The political trajectory of the SNM in the 1980s created the template for the disordered clanism that followed. It managed the personal rivalries among its leaders better than other movements, but at the expense of never

clarifying its political objectives. Particularly problematic was the divide between the diaspora leadership and the military commanders (known as *calan cas*), with deep rivalries within each grouping. Although the final outcome was the separation of Somaliland, the secessionists in the movement could not show their hand because they relied on Ethiopia which was vehemently anti-separatist. The unionists initially won the tactical arguments, so that military operations were expanded from the north-west (the homeland of the Isaaq, from where the founders were drawn) to the centre and south, and a Hawiye deputy president was chosen (Ali Wardigley, who became a founder of the USC).

The SNM massively under-utilized its material and human resources. Jama Ghalib, a former senior intelligence officer who helped organize clandestine support for the SNM and was profoundly frustrated to see how the capable and well-placed individuals he helped recruit were not utilized, explains it in these words: 'The rules of the game played by the opportunists [in the SNM] were that the SNM should never succeed in overthrowing Siad Barre or in forcing his troops out of the North until certain officers could seize the leadership of the movement.' (1995, p. 186)

The course of the war and the identity of the SNM dramatically changed in 1988. Faced with growing insurgency and continual political crisis, Siyaad Barre gambled that a peace deal with the Ethiopian government (facing similar crises) would free him from the SNM rebels. He miscalculated. In response to the imminent expulsion of the SNM from its rear bases in Ethiopia, the SNM leadership decided to go on the offensive, against huge odds, and attack the cities of Hargaisa and Burao. The results of the attack included: the devastation of the SNM fighting forces, with as many as half of its officers and men killed or out of action; the devastation of the two cities and the flight of most of the population to the refugee camp of Hartisheikh in Ethiopia; and the escalation of the government

counter-insurgency (Africa Watch 1990).

The government counter-insurgency was aimed at the Isaaq Clan explicitly and indiscriminately. Siyaad Barre and his son-in-law General Mohamed Hersi 'Morgan' did not trust the SNA and so did not rely on its units. They hired foreign mercenaries to fly their planes, and they mobilized refugees from the Ogaden clan and from Oromo refugee camps as counter-insurgent militia. The fighters were paid in loot: when they had finished, Hargaisa was a roofless city, with all the zinc stolen for sale, as well as any remaining vehicles, contents of shops, furniture, copper wire, even window frames.

The regime, as by far the more powerful actor, must take the greater share of responsibility for turning a political conflict into an ethnic war. But the SNM was not innocent of ethnicization either. It had a historic opportunity in 1988: in renouncing the Somali claim to the Ogaden, Siyaad Barre forfeited his strongest nationalist card. Many army officers were driven to mutiny: commanders from the Ogadeen in the SNA and from diverse lineages aligned with the SSDF contacted the SNM to bring their forces over. The SNM spurned them, passing up its political chance.

Two SNA commanders, Colonel Omer Jeas and Colonel Bashir Bililiqo, offered to mutiny with their fully-formed military units and establish a common front. When the SNM did not take them up, they joined armed herdsmen of the Ogadeen in the Jubba Valley to form the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM). The pastoralists were in a stage of near insurrection because of disputes with the Marehaan over control of the Afmadow pastures (Janssen 1988) and rivalries over the export of cattle (Little 1992).

The SNM withdrew its units from central and southern Somalia and proposed to its non-Isaaq members that they set up friendly political-military fronts in their home areas. In 1989, General Mohamed Farah Aideed, from the Habr

Gidir-Ayr (Hawiye), approached the SNM leadership wanting to join the organization and broaden its base. The SNM leadership advised him to start his own resistance front in the central rangelands, the Hawiye home territory and handed over one base (Mustahil) to him.

Instead, the SNM became an Isaaq Clan movement. The shattered rebel army regrouped in Hartisheikh camp, while the relatives of the dispossessed and disappeared mobilized in outrage and solidarity. The camp itself was laid out on the basis of lineage groups. This was partly spontaneous and partly for ease of administration of relief rations by the UN. There was a flood of angry and dispossessed young men wanting to join; their leaders agitated them on behalf of the Isaaq, which had been subject to a genocidal attack. The SNM veteran soldiers were vastly outnumbered by these recruits. For ease of organization the SNM was re-mobilized

As the movement became an Isaaq Clan entity, it set its sights on the state power commensurate with its reach: a separate Somaliland republic.

as lineage-based fighting units. Clan elders facilitated the recruitment of volunteers. Ghalib describes how ardent volunteers managed to 'force their way into the movement, when their sub-clans brought pressure to bear on the SNM military commanders, a pattern which was eventually to have a negative effect ... It strengthened loyalty to the parochial sub-clans at the expense of central authority.' (1995, p. 192) Family networks provided the circuitry for sending supplies to the camp and the SNM and bringing the elderly and sick abroad for care and treatment. 'Clan cleansing' in Hargaisa and Burao was instrumental in creating a sense of politicized clan identity among the survivors. As the movement became an Isaaq Clan entity, it set its sights on the state power commensurate with its reach: a separate Somaliland republic.

In this situation of crisis, the institution of lineage 'elders' emerged as a workable mech-

anism for organizing solidarity. This might appear to vindicate the Lewisian thesis of the resilience of clan, and indeed a narrative of the selfless, respected clan elders forming a council to resolve the quarrels of the fractious fighters and politicians served the people of northwest Somalia well, through to the meeting of the *Guurti* (council of elders) in 1993 that forged a government for Somaliland (Bradbury 2008). It is no accident that the Isaaq leaders of that time appealed simultaneously to the legacy of British colonialism (which defined the territory of Somaliland), to the clearest exposition of late colonial administrative tribalism, namely Lewis's *Pastoral Democracy*, and to a generation of men shaped by that colonial encounter. It is the most benign face of clannism, but it is an historical invention nonetheless. The 'elders' had no special claim to leadership other than their personal reputations and social standing. Most were businessmen or out-of-work politicians, some were professionals and academics. All had brothers and cousins who were fighting men or active politicians. It was merely personal circumstance and moral choice that led some to become 'elders' dedicated to the community rather than political or military entrepreneurs, and indeed some switched from one category to the other, in either direction.

The ironic success of Siyaad Barre's counter-insurgency and instrumentalization of disorder was that he destroyed the SNM as a fighting force and an organized political movement. He reduced it to a mirror image of the regime, paralyzed by infighting and without effective leadership. The SNM command could not even coordinate the means to keep control of their putative capital of Hargaisa in 1989: they captured it but those responsible for resupplying the troops did not keep their word, forcing the fighters to abandon the city (Ghalib 1995, p. 186).

Between 1988 and 1993, the SNM's own decision-making structures were gradually merged with the clan structure of the north-west, dominated by the Isaaq, and ultimately taken over

by the Clan. The lineage institutions were sufficiently robust to regulate political competition even as the armed movement disintegrated, and the SNM served mainly as a political forum that legitimized Clan formation and the takeover of a ruined state, and then dissolved when that job was done.

The United Somali Congress

The trajectory of the SNM from putative national political resistance front to vehicle for Clan formation, was followed by the USC, albeit in a different configuration, and with a different outcome. The USC emerged from the three elements of businessmen and civic leaders seeking a modicum of an orderly transition, ambitious military officers intent on seizing power, and the existence of a large number of armed young men, already mobilized.

The Manifesto Group of 114 business and civic leaders, who came together in 1990, was Somalia's most tragic missed opportunity (Sahnoun 1994). Even while Somalia descended into a militarized kleptocracy, its business class thrived (Jamal 1988). This did not translate into a well-organized bourgeois opposition. We can speculate several reasons for this failure. One is Siyaad Barre's secularism, so that he did not permit an Islamist opposition (noting that the Muslim Brothers at that time had their power base in business and civil society). A second is the lack of external support for any such initiatives. When the Manifesto Group issued its warning of the perils of the current situation, it was the best chance for a negotiated transition of some kind. Siyaad Barre arrested most of the signatories or forced them to flee: the list of those victimized is a veritable catalogue of the most eminent Somalis of the independence generation (Ingiriis 2012). The most energetic and persuasive member of the Manifesto Group, Ismail Jimale, died of a heart attack in Rome just two months later. Moreover, the group was supported by just one foreign embassy (Italy). A donor consortium demanding change might have been effective, both in pressuring Siyaad Barre and in gener-

ating confidence in the opposition, so that (to use the language of the political marketplace) they could have begun trading in futures—issuing promissory note to be redeemed for a specified price at such time that a recognized government were set up. Such donor support might have been a possibility just a year or two later, when western policies had shifted into their post-Cold War democratization mode. A third reason is the efficacy of violent suppression, exemplified by the trauma of the 14 July 1989 massacre, which followed the murder of the bishop of Mogadishu in circumstances that were never explained. This immediate outcome was a rapid disintegration of security in the city and a rush by residents to arm themselves. There was, at the time, no evident logic of either Clan or political mobilization, but rather a sense of bewilderment, fear and isolation (Simons 1995, pp. 67-98).

The Manifesto Group was the co-originator of the USC. But the military wing of the USC, led by Gen. Aideed, quickly became dominant. Although the split between the two wings was evident from the outset, neither could abandon the name USC, because—following the example of the SNM—it was coterminous with the Hawiye Clan and its claimed homeland. As that territory included the capital city, the fate of Somalia turned on the resolution of the question of who should lead the USC.

The earlier section on the land disputes in the central rangelands provided detail on how various lineage units of the Hawiye formed armed militia. Those processes of militarization followed different paths and the armed units that emerged were organized at different levels of lineage segmentation. The key facts are that none were fighting as the 'Hawiye clan' but nonetheless what Elmi calls the 'prairie fire' of the central rangelands (1993, p. 29) was already burning fiercely before the USC was formed. When Aideed crossed the border from Ethiopia he found militias awaiting a leader, and he was happy to oblige. This meant, of course, that his units were also organized on the lineage princi-

ple rather than as a disciplined liberation force or even a unified Clan army. The USC never had a core of nationalist veteran soldiers comparable to the SNM, nor even units drawn from across all the Hawiye lineage groups. Recall, moreover, that this was not a traditional kind of mobilization of camel-herding *dia*-paying groups bound together by *xeer*. Rather, this was a combination of young men whose prospects of traditional pastoral livelihoods were dim (popularly known as *mooryan*), businessmen who owned the herds and were deeply imbricated in the enclosures, and lineage elders who were trying to manage these changes and traumas, while pursuing their own interests too.

Mustahil was the former SNM base inside Ethiopia, handed over to the USC in 1989. Aideed convened a conference there in May-June 1990, at which delegates unanimously voted for him chairman of the USC. Elmi summarizes the participants and agenda. Delegates from the diaspora, from the SNM Southern Front, from the 'bases' at Dhumoodle, Hana-Weilood and Hiran—each of them in effect a self-mobilized pastoralist self-defence militia—and what were described as 'Galgadud and Mogadishu guerrillas and activists' were present. Elmi writes: 'Action plans were drawn up to unify all these USC supporting factions and armed struggle streamlined from scattered groups and spontaneous sporadic actions into a unified comprehensive form with a centrally commanded force.' (Elmi 1993, p. 30) There was no time for training or even organization, only a rush of existing units under their commanders into battle or in search of spoils.

Aideed then called for the SNM and SPM to join him for a conference to determine the future coalition government. The SNM refused to attend—its more nationally-oriented members felt that they should be the convenors of the conference, and its more secessionist members wanted nothing to do with Mogadishu. They could agree only to coordinate military operations to remove Siyaad Barre, which amounted

to no more than designating separate areas of operations. The failure of this initiative meant that as the collapse of the regime accelerated, the opposition had no plan for power other than dividing up the areas they intended to despoil.

In December 1990, an uprising began in Mogadishu against Siyaad Barre. At that time, USC and SPM forces were more than a hundred miles from Mogadishu: USC to the north, SPM to the south. The main forces in the city were Siyaad Barre's units drawn from the most loyal lineages: Marehan, Dulbahante and the Aforqe lineage of the Majerteen under command of Siyad Barre's son-in-law, General Morgan. Morgan's troops were stationed at the national stadium and began stopping people on foot and in cars and buses, and selectively killing Abgaal and Habr Gidir. Dulbahante troops at fairground followed suit.

Closest to the city was Omar Jeess with his SPM forces. However, on Aideed's insistence that Mogadishu was Hawiye territory, and that Hawiye troops would occupy the city with less resistance and less bloodshed, Jeess held back and allowed the Aideed to send his fighters ahead. Immediately after the battle for Mogadishu, most Darood said that they believed that Aideed tricked Jeess,⁷ but it is also possible that Aideed's promise to bring Jeess into government was genuine and was simply overtaken by events. In any case, the SPM lost its chance to take part in the 'liberation' of the capital, which also allowed the USC to seize control of the vast military arsenals there as well as loot the riches of the city. The absence of Darood among the 'liberators' helped make the final battle in Mogadishu into a clan war. Jeess and his army waited just outside the city in Afgoy while the USC politicians squabbled and the USC fighters looted, pillaged, raped and killed. An exodus of Darood civilians streamed through Afgoy going south. Aideed's lieutenants were also busy seizing the best farms along the Shebelle river. There is no agreed account of why Jeess switched sides, but

7 Speaking to this author, Nairobi, February 1992.

the most credible story is that the final straw for him was when his erstwhile allies, the Rahanweyn Somali Democratic Movement forces, turned against SPM troops in Baidoa on 7 February. Three days later, Jeas joined the emerging Darood resistance in Kismayo and the Jubba valley. Clan cleansing in Mogadishu created the sentiments of a politicized common Clan identity among the Darood.

As the war reached its crescendo, the near-moribund SSDF was reinvented, as a solely Majerteen organization. After he was driven from Mogadishu in January, Siyaad Barre mobilized his Marehan clan as the Somali National Front (SNF), and tried to stage a comeback, his forces reaching within thirty miles of Mogadishu in April 1991 before Aideed rallied the USC to drive them back.

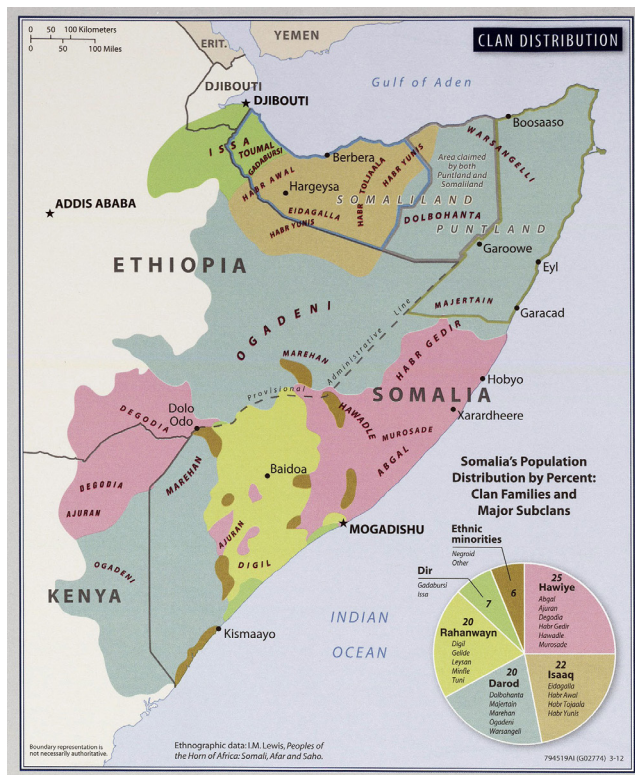
The Dynamics of Fragmentation 1991-92

At the moment of victory over Siyaad Barre, the organization of the war in Somalia appeared very simple: the Isaaq had the SNM, the Hawiye had the USC, the Rahanweyn had the nascent SDM, and the Darood were divided between the Ogadeni SPM, the Majerteen SSDF and the remnants in government. This was the first time in Somali history that political-military organization had reached the level of Clan (approximately the four big clan families of the total genealogy). It was a product of that particular historic moment: a fight for the state following acts of genocidal violence at the Clan level of aggregation (Kapteijns 2013). Somalia appeared to fragment into subnational territories that followed Clan lines. Darood fled towards Kismayo and Kenya; a huge convoy of Isaaq left Mogadishu and headed north to Hargaisa.

But even at that moment of apparent simplicity, there were clear inconsistencies in the mapping of clan-family identities onto political-military-territorial units. The SNM had a

single clan-family organization, but it was falling apart. The USC also had one, but its two main factions were fighting one another, while some Hawiye subclans (Sheikhal, Hawadle) remained neutral. The Darood clan family had two, the SPM and SSDF, each of which had dispersed territories or potential territories, and shortly thereafter a third, the SNF. The minorities didn't have any.

Map 3. Clan territories



Source: University of Texas.

The civil war made 'clans' as political-military-territorial units, and 'clans' in turn made war to seize the state (or states, if we include Somaliland and Puntland). Even when the state had collapsed, the expectation of a state shaped the conflict. But once the USC had failed to control the national capital and thereby capture the state, a different logic of fragmentation became dominant.

The first wars in Mogadishu, fought in 1991, had dual logic. On one hand, they were fought over the pillars of state power: Villa Somalia, the national radio, currency for the bank, and

uniforms for the police. Ali Mahdi, by virtue of capturing Radio Mogadishu first and proclaiming himself president, appointed the world's biggest cabinet (over 70 members, from every clan), almost every one of whom was eyeing future lucre; General Aideed (formally, Minister of Defence) did not turn up to the swearing-in ceremony, negotiations in Djibouti failed, and instead Aideed launched a coup in November 1991. His military strike failed and there was a stalemate.

On the other hand, there was looting: spoils politics taken to the extreme. As the Darood fled, their property was ransacked. This soon became organized commercially. The looters' first targets were high value, low bulk electronic goods: televisions, video players, fridges, air coolers, word processors, generators. Traders from Kenya, Sudan and the Gulf converged on Mogadishu with ships and light aircraft. Industrial machinery, furniture. Then items with a resale value such as light fittings and window frames, plumbing fixtures, copper wiring and aluminium sheets.

Then, food became an object of looting. Relief food was particularly vulnerable to attack. Local voluntary organizations tried to get around this problem by opening kitchens serving cooked food. The rationale for this unorthodox humanitarian operation was that 'The dry food distribution is the one the gangs use [target]; they can sell it and do any other things, but when the food is cooked, it has not any value except to eat.'⁸

The next round of politically-instigated fighting was over the centres of commerce and revenue, such as Mogadishu port and airport and Kismayo city. Those conflicts were also unresolved, and the fighting shifted to disputes over more local issues, such as smaller towns and the farmland along the Shebelle River. Briefly, the USC reunited to confront the threat of Siyad Barre's attempted comeback from the Kenyan border, but as soon as the SNF forces were de-

feated, the USC leaders fell out again. By the end of 1992, there were numerous local wars fought among ever more local armed groups.

The fighting of 1991-92 was hugely destructive, and created famine, with an epicentre in Bay and Lower Shebelle regions where local people were stripped of everything, even their cooking pots and clothes. The extent of depravity was shocking, and it both revealed and sharpened the racism towards the minorities who lived in the devastated areas (Besteman and Cassanelli 2000).

All militia looted humanitarian aid, an act without immediate consequence because aid fell outside the moral orbit of the lineage system: no compensation could be demanded or need be paid. International aid agencies had never faced this kind of problem before, and they agonized over whether to hire armed guards, and improvised in their distribution systems. This experience led to a vigorous debate about the ethics and political economy of aid providers becoming players in a war economy, and—more significant for this account—the role of aid in fuelling warlordism.

Among the most creative were the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Save the Children Fund (SCF). They used dispersed routes for delivering aid so as to minimize the extent to which they were targeted by looters. The ICRC, which ran by far the biggest aid operation, offloaded from ships anchored offshore near Brava, Merca, Adala, Obbia and Gezira beach, onto small dhows which could sail up to the beaches. When the monsoon winds changed and offloading on small boats was not possible, the ICRC used helicopters. The ICRC delivered 180,000 tons of food to Somalia in 1992. In Mogadishu, SCF ran numerous small feeding centres using local staff, and almost completely escaped looting.

By contrast, the World Food Programme and its main implementing agency, CARE, stuck to

⁸ Dhahabo Isse, interviewed in Mogadishu, 23 March 1993.

the standard practice of using the main port in Mogadishu, storing food in a large warehouse, and dispatching convoys of 25 or more lorries to large distribution centres. They became targets for both political appropriation, massive looting, and armed attack. The rate of distribution was desperately slow, as CARE staff tried and failed to negotiate safe passage for their vehicles. When fierce fighting broke out in the city on 17 November 1991, nearly 8,000 tons remained in the warehouse in the port. On 20 January 1992, while CARE prevaricated and the price of food in Mogadishu soared, the Hashamud militia that controlled the port announced it would open the food warehouses to all comers. Thousands of Mogadishu residents flocked to the port and took what they could carry: residents reported seeing people totally white from the spilled flour that covered their bodies and clothes. The price of food in the city dropped to just one seventh of what it had been, and tension was markedly if briefly reduced. This was probably the best thing that could have happened to the WFP wheat, though it contributed to a somewhat misleading claim, made later that year, that 80 percent of food aid in Somalia was being looted, which was a justification for the U.S. military intervention. The experience of a lessening of tension due to a lower price of staple food led to a proposal to 'flood the country with food' by any means. Recognizing that any managed distribution of large amounts of dry food posed a security risk, the plan was to bring down the market price by any means, taking the pressure off the national food system. Ultimately, the strategy of providing as much food as possible by any means necessary worked; the famine prices prevailing in July 1992 fell by two thirds by October.

More aid agencies arrived in Somalia in late 1992 as the U.S. mounted an emergency airlift to the epicentre of the famine in Bay region, and still more after the U.S. military intervention and the establishment of a huge and ambitious UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM). NGOs responded to the continuing security problem by moving from directly providing

emergency aid themselves to working through local NGOs, authorities and commercial contractors, creating the new problem that their activities became associated with the identities of their Somali intermediaries (Gundel 2002). Aid's main resources (food) and the even more substantial secondary resources provided by aid agencies (employment, housing and transport contracts, protection payments) became a major, if transient, part of Somalia's economy, and control of aid became an integral part of the political-commercial viability of political-military units.

The fighting of 1991-92 also reconfigured political-military alignments. Aideed constructed the Somali National Alliance, bringing in elements from other armed groups (notably the SPM), while his rival Ali Mahdi constructed a parallel Somali Salvation Alliance that similarly spanned different 'clans'. The two coalitions had discernibly different economic interests: the USC-Aideed and SPM were 'liberators' whose interests were in seizing urban property and farmland, while the USC-Mahdi, SSDF and SNF leaders were more concerned with protecting the property rights they had acquired, by whatever means, over the previous decades. But those potential class interests were submerged by the immediacies of mobilizing and funding military units. The USC existed only insofar as it was the political vehicle legitimized for taking state power in Mogadishu, because it was identified with the Hawiye Clan, and for that reason neither of the rival leaders could abandon its name. In his brief stint as Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, the Algerian diplomat Mohamed Sahnoun cultivated Hawiye elders as a counterweight to the warlords (Sahnoun 1994). Had he succeeded, the USC might have mutated into the Hawiye Clan as a less militarized political institution. Something comparable happened in Somaliland, where the SNM collapsed entirely and clan elders constituted a functional government from the ashes. In south-central Somalia, that burn through was interrupted. Sahnoun was dismissed in October 1992 and the U.S.

mounted a military intervention six weeks later, which suddenly restored hope in a central state, a fountain of rents.

Intervention and the Consolidation of Clan

The insurgencies of 1987-92 were organized on the basis of Clan for the purposes of capturing state power, in Hargaisa or Mogadishu, or in the proto-state of Puntland. However, the political-military fronts were formed from fractious and disorganized pastoralist militia, and whatever Clan unity existed was momentary, circumstantial, and unsustainable. The USC and its contenders were founded on massacre, ransacking and 'clan cleansing'. Subsequently, the memories of those traumas left Clan identity with an enduring salience, but only as vehicles for channelling resentment.

However, Clan also had a logic that was simple and attractive to outsiders, not least because the political-military organizations had given themselves English-language names and initials, which mapped on to a conveniently small number of units which could also be represented on a map of the country. This kind of territoriality was new to Somali political ethnicity (Hoehne 2016). Clan units proved equally efficacious as the interface with the international community in the absence of a state. Although the political-military entities existing in 1991 did not persist for more than a few brief years, they established an enduring framework for Somali political authority.

The U.S.-U.N. military intervention of 1992-93 had several immediate consequences. One was to recentralize the political process: the immediate prospect of state power was back. Initially, the Americans appeared to believe that their humanitarian objectives meant that they were not political actors, and that their negotiations with the Mogadishu warlords would have no consequences other than enabling a safe environment for their troops and aid convoys. Soon, the U.S. indicated that they were indeed intending to create a government which

could be recognized. The fast fragmenting political-military organizations scrambled to become credible interlocutors with the intervening forces and to get a seat at the table for the forthcoming talks. The Somalis, accustomed to strategic rents because of the geo-strategic position of their country during the Cold War, interpreted Operation Restore Hope as a re-affirmation of the importance of their country to America, and expected corresponding largesse.

Second, the Americans and the UN required a simple, legible model and map of the country, and an associated formula for peacemaking. The one they chose was to deal with the existing political-military organizations, as labelled, at the highest level of aggregation. UNOSOM adopted a policy of restricting political representation on the envisaged National Council to factions existing at the time of the intervention. While UNOSOM understandably did not want to spark a violent competition for places by opening up options to new factions, this decision created another equally problematic political dynamic. It represented a contemporary version of the colonial practice of creating tribal territories and appointing administrative chiefs, and like that earlier version, involved freezing a dynamic socio-political reality in some places, trying to resurrect a disintegrating arrangement in others, and inventing a formula from scratch elsewhere. In many cases, direct cash payments were made to those chosen as representatives; in others, participants expected vast resources to flow in the near future.

In making this decision, UNOSOM was guided by the two places in which order was returning. In the north-west, the self-declared Republic of Somaliland, a convention organized by businessmen and clan elders instituted a new political order, without any external input. Most of those involved were members of the Isaaq Clan, and the simplest explanation for success was the shared Isaaq identity and the robustness of traditional forms of conflict resolution and societal authority. The story is of course much

more complicated (Bradbury 2008; de Waal 2015, pp. 130-140), but the narrative was reassuring to Somalis anxious to find laudable and state-building values and institutions in their own society. In the north-east, in the territory that became Puntland, order was also restored, within an area that roughly corresponded to the domain of the Majerteen. The SSDF did not disintegrate; it formed an administration and merged into it. The presumed model of internally homogenous Clan territories was adopted for the rest of the country, despite the far greater complexities in lineage and territorial organization and the absence of any comparably cohesive political-military organizations.

The main region for the intervention was south-central Somalia. Here, American military officers, UNOSOM and aid agencies could not engage operationally at the Clan level, as no united and centralized USC-Hawiye organization existed, and their efforts focused on establishing local councils as intermediaries for providing security and protecting aid, with a view to being the legitimate authorities for rebuilding a state. This process of identification was usually done very rapidly, with minimal consultation and little expertise. Some of those brought in for managing the process, such as the Life and Peace Institute, devoted enormous effort to trying to make the councils more representative and effective (Heinrich 1997), but this was always a patch-up job: whatever local hierarchy existed at the time of UNOSOM's entry was kept intact, along with the security mechanisms offered by that local elite. Joakin Gundel observes that local people preferred UNOSOM to what came before or since, because it did impose a degree of stability, but concluded, 'Yet the attempts by UNOSOM to buy political agreements through direct payments to local Somali leaders strengthened Somali perceptions of international assistance as a source of competition that undermined the peace process it was supposed to promote.' (Gundel 2002, p. 154)

Beginning with the 1993 conferences, external

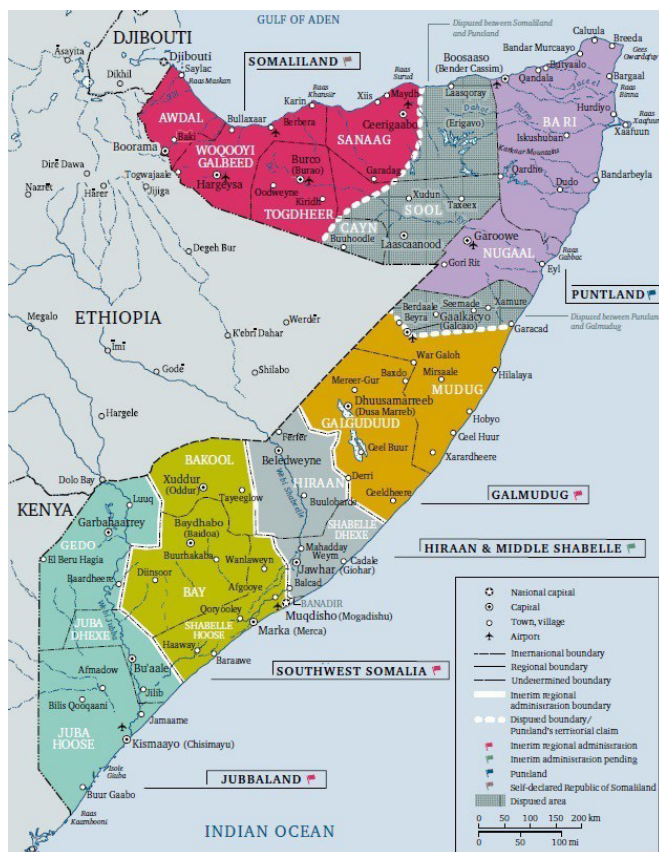
mediators sought to balance a realistic recognition of the power of warlords, with attempts to ensure that all Somali groups were represented in peace talks and the governance structures set up. This reflects a laudable motive of ensuring that politically marginalized groups have a seat at the peace table, and that discredited warlords do not dominate. However, the formula for representation bears the deep imprint of the violent processes of Clan formation, and becomes a formula for sharing political offices, not solving political problems.

...the outcome of the war represented the end point of more than a decade of spoils politics that culminated in massive ethnic cleansing, ransacking and forcible land-grabbing.

International peace-making efforts had another common feature: they prioritized power-sharing agreements, leaving substantial political issues such as property ownership (farmland, urban real estate and pasture) and residence rights for resolution by a future government. This was never likely to work, as the outcome of the war represented the end point of more than a decade of spoils politics that culminated in massive ethnic cleansing, ransacking and forcible land-grabbing. The Clan armies existed precisely in order to pursue these tasks to their violent conclusion in the form of mass killing, clan-cleansing and expropriation. The zero-sum politics of allocating political office masked a still more important zero-sum spoils politics.

Over the subsequent fifteen years, all external peace-making, peace-building, state-building and constitution-writing efforts in Somalia had similar starting points: the assumption that a state in Somalia would arise through sharing power among representatives of the Clans, identified as such. This was adopted in the Soderre Conference of November 1996-January 1997, where a formula for political representation based on equal standing for the four major

Map 4. Federal Member States



Source: Chatham House

Clans was first formally recognized. At the instigation of the Somali participants, the Darood, Diir/Isaaq, Hawiye and Rahanweyn were each awarded nine seats on the National Salvation Council, with five seats reserved for minorities (Africa Confidential 1997, p. 2). Four years later this evolved into the '4.5' formula that was explicitly named and adopted in the Arta Conference of April-May 2000 and maintained at the 2002-04 Mbagathi National Reconciliation Conference in Kenya, and throughout the subsequent constitution-building conferences. It is commonplace to hear the evils of clannism decried by officials in international organizations and the leaders of East African countries that have dispatched troops to Somalia for peace enforcement operations, who would prefer to build a bureaucratic Weberian state (Fisher 2018). Nonetheless, in their political engagement with Somali political organizations and (especially) their military cooperation with the Clan-based units of the putative Somali National Army and other security forces, external

intervenor use the Clan unit as their routine organizing framework—a testament to its hegemony. While the entities SNM, USC and SPM quickly passed into history, they served as vehicles for imprinting their logics of identity and territory onto all subsequent political processes, with the important exception of the Islamist ones.

Conclusions and Implications

State failure in Somalia was not pre-ordained. A slightly different sequence of events could have led to a government that could have been recognized internationally and formed the basis for a modest, fraught but nonetheless credible process whereby the state was preserved and reconstructed. A Clan-based territorial division of the country, and a formula for governance founded on the '4.5' principle was also not pre-ordained. Identity politics and inter-ethnic war were probably inevitable on account of the way in which the regime used lineage-based patronage politics and the opposition mobilized its fighters on the basis of local conflicts, and their external relations on appeals to lineage solidarity. But Clan as the dominant organizing principle was not inevitable.

The civil war period of 1987-92 was a time of traumatic and accelerated identity formation. This had three elements. The first was an identifiably modernising process whereby traditional lineage organization and livelihoods were transformed. Open range nomadism changed to a demarcated territorial system of herding animals primarily for commercial exchange, and lineages became militarized. The Siyaad Barre regime used lineage-based patronage and divide-and-rule primarily to fragment internal threats, and in doing so stoked the flames of rural insurrection. Those insurgencies were structured as vehicles for military takeover, their leaders subordinating any systematic organization of resistance their personal ambitions. As they persisted, each rebel

organization converged on an ethno-territorial unit as a matter of military expediency. Militarily shattered in 1988, the SNM abandoned its national agenda and merged into a forum of the lineages of its core constituency. Clan formation occurred in defeat as a vehicle for the agenda of controlling its home territory—a task that the dying SNM bequeathed to the Republic of Somaliland. In the meantime, the SNM's introversion duly gave birth to the USC, which took the same Clan formation logic to the national capital, which it claimed as 'its' territory. The USC was a fragile coalition from the outset, united only by its leaders' agreement that it should take state power. The USC duly disintegrated, but in the meantime the ruinous dynamics of political competition among its leaders determined the fate of Mogadishu, and hence the Somali state as a whole. From this emerged a fractious, turbulent political system based on the trading of allegiances—the political marketplace that had incubated within the Siyaad Barre regime and its systemic corruption.

The external interveners decried clannism but recognized that these 'clans' were formations with which they could work. However, Clans were initially formed as vehicles for spoils politics, built on 'clan cleansing' and primitive accumulation. Finding civic representatives of Clans and asking them to share power could not change this fundamental fact. For the U.S. and U.N.-led peacebuilding process, the great unmentionable was the inter-communal armed conflict, massacre and dispossession that were foundational for those units. The prospect that such Clan formations could, in some Tillyean manner, make a state through war, was not founded on any analysis of whence they came or how they were constituted. This paper has sought to show how transient, circumstantial, localised and contradictory were those processes of Clan formation. Although the political-military formations of 1991 have long since perished of their self-inflicted wounds, their ghosts still haunt Somalia.

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