

**JOURNAL OF SOMALI STUDIES**

**Volume 1, Issue 1, 2014**

**INAUGURAL ISSUE**

# Journal of Somali Studies

## Mission

The Journal of Somali Studies is a peer reviewed interdisciplinary scholarly journal dedicated to advancing critical scholarship on the history, culture, politics, linguistics, and economics of Somali society and the experience of the Somali diaspora around the globe. The JOSS welcomes submissions based on original research, comparative analyses, and conceptual and methodological essays. All views expressed are those of the authors of the articles and not necessarily those of the editorial staff.

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<p>Adonis &amp; Abbey Publishers Ltd St James House 13 Kensington Square PO Box 43418 London W8 5HD Tel: 0845 873 0262</p> <hr/> <p>Copyright 2014 © Adonis &amp; Abbey Publishers Ltd ISSN 2056-5682 (Online) ISSN 2056-5674 (Print)</p>	<p>No. 3 Akanu Ibiam Street Asokoro, Abuja, Nigeria Tel: +234 (0) 7058078841/08052035034</p>	

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## Introduction

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As a result of a lengthy political crisis, an unprecedented global dispersion, and a more pronounced and divisive identity politics, the political culture of Somali society today is in the midst of a profound and fundamental social transformation. A prolonged civil war and its concomitant political crisis have contributed to the disintegration of a viable civic space where non-essentialized forms of inquiry, interpretation, negotiation and discussion could take place. The absence of a civic space able to accommodate and address the aspirations and desires of the groups and classes in the country has facilitated, fostered and deepened the level of identity politics. The new reality has also produced massive dislocations of people (both as internally displaced persons [IDPs] and as refugees traversing international borders) on a scale never witnessed before in Somalia.

The social transformations resulting from these forces have challenged erstwhile traditional Somali ways in which individual, group, political, and social identities have been historically constructed and understood. These transformations present Somali studies with significant challenges and opportunities at the start of the twenty first century. An important challenge facing Somali studies researchers is how to critically propose new ways of understanding the social and economic dynamics of this now-

changing Somali society. Equally challenging is the endeavor to describe and analyze the links between transnational Somali communities who are partially assimilated into their host cultures in Australia, Europe and North America, and their social, political, and economic interactions with those they left behind.

By focusing on these challenges and opportunities, and their implications, our purpose in this journal is to create a new and robust discourse that is capable of engendering new ways of looking at ourselves and our surroundings. Such a new discourse would transcend the reified and at times rarified lore that dominates our collective consciousness. It is self-conscious of the locus of positors/enunciators of all stripes, subject-object relations, power differentials, and the locations from which enunciations are made. In short, we are implicated in the form and kind of choices and pronouncements we make. The interpretive project we propose is to claim a conceptual and physical space from which to challenge or affirm what has already been interpreted, or to imbue an argument with new meaning gained from a novel vantage point.

The circumstances and events that frame the Somali conundrum will reveal how Somalis are still far too caught up in the past. Present and future are held hostage to a past whose contours and origins are shrouded in mystery, but whose quotidian practices are repeated through rituals that are endowed with verisimilar significations. The paradox here reflects our collective misapprehension of reality, our misunderstanding of what clan or cultural identity entails. In the words of the late Stuart Hall, "Cultural identity ... is a matter of "becoming" as well as "being." It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. ... Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, [cultural identities] are subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture, and power" (1990:225).

Identity, therefore, is always relational, dynamic, and dialogic. We hope to question (quest-ion) the component elements that inform Somali cultural identities, and how configurations of these elements mutate and militate against the normalizing tendencies of an

excessive clan or group consciousness. We believe that a sympathetic, compassionate, and constructive criticism helps ideas develop through a dialectical continuum, which, in turn, would contribute to the construction of a new vision. The Syrian-Lebanese poet and critic, Ali Ahmed Said (Adonis), through Roger Allen (1982:15), explicates vision as “a leap outside of normal concepts. Thus it is a change in the order of things and in the way of looking at them.” Our objective in this new project is to limn the contours of a new vision formulated in a new language, a new idiom. As such, we aim to: 1) unsettle the hermeneutic and interpretative intent and horizon of inherited analytic categories; 2) analyze what is in the Somali collective memory, and critically examine the various strands that informed and shaped what Benedict Anderson calls “the embryo of the nationally-imagined community” (1991:47); 3) reflect on the constituent parts of the givens of Somali social, political and ethical existence, and account for the unraveling (to use Catherine Besteman’s apt term) of these givens; and 4) juxtapose the internalized and externalized constituent elements of Somali cultural identity. We agree with bell hooks’s assessment of the ties that held the African American community together: “We were a community, not because we were black, but because of what we did together.” Hooks’ statement complements what Karl Deutsch views as the nexus between nationalism and social communication:

The usual description of a people in terms of a community of languages, or characters, or memories, or past histories, are open to exception. For what counts is not the presence or absence of any single factor, but merely the presence of sufficient communication facilities with enough complementarity to produce the overall result. (1966:97)

To reiterate, what we hope to see in the pages of this new journal is the creation and fostering of a healthy and robust discussion that both affirms and challenges all that is good about Somalia and Somali studies. In that spirit, the articles in this inaugural issue bridge the discursive practices they employ and a non-discursive empirical reality. In “Somalia: An Overview of Primary and Secondary

Education,” Mohamed Eno, et al. compel us to be wary of the kind of ideas that are securely ensconced in what Michael Apple calls the “hidden curriculum.” It is a curriculum that has its origins in Paulo Freire’s oft-quoted phrase: “the ‘banking’ concept of education” (1993:53). Coauthored by four seasoned educators, the essay deftly discusses the dialectical relationship between “hegemony” and “education.” In “The Externally Defined Somali National Identity,” Ali Mumin Ahad traces the origins of some foundational concepts that have come to cast a lasting shadow over our understanding of Somali cultural identity. Grappling with the peasant/pastoralist symbology, Ahad examines the process through which a mode of production is naturalized as a social hierarchy. His argument demonstrates the need for a lucid explication of the dynamics and the uneasy relationship between “identity” and a “relation.” Abdifatah Shafat in “The Challenges the Youth of Northeastern Kenya Face: A Historical Analysis” examines how the past—both immediate and remote—returns to haunt the living. The article reveals the need for a bold initiative to tackle some of the vexing problems that bedevil the Somali-populated areas of Northeast Kenya. It is important to revisit the country’s “cultural symbolic constitution” in order to understand how invented traditions, “as a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition” (Hobsbawm, 1993:4), could hold a nation hostage.

Shafat’s basic argument agrees with Pierre Bourdieu (1991:39) that “Religion and politics achieve their most successful ideological effects by exploiting the possibility contained in the polysemy inherent in the social ubiquity of the legitimate language.” It pays to invest in the nation’s human, social, developmental and ethical infrastructure. Finally, Abdi Kusow’s “The Somali Question” is a seminal essay with a great potential to transform our understanding and discussion of the great issues that bedevil Somali scholarship. Here, Kusow (re)constructs what amounts to be a working theory to understanding and explicating cataclysmic events at the moment of their constitution. All four articles point to the need for a new (and

ameliorative) way of looking at the world, of creating alternative conceptual and physical spaces that are able to produce new images of future forms of citizenship. We conclude this inaugural issue with Mohamed Haji Ingiriis' perceptive, generous yet firm review of Heather Marie Akou's *The Politics of Dress in Somalia*. Reading Ingiriis' review of Akou's book reminded me of a pioneering article on the subject, "Alindi: The Decent Wear," by Mohamed Eno, which was published in 1984 in *Heegan Newspaper*, the only English weekly of its time in Somalia.

Now, a word about how the Journal of Somali Studies (JOSS) came into being. Almost a year ago (August 27, 2013, to be exact), Dr. Jidefor Adibe, publisher of Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd, invited us to reflect on ways of establishing a journal of Somali studies "which we will sponsor and publish." A long discussion ensued. Professor Adibe was asked to elaborate on the project's objectives and target audience, and his company's interest in the project. His response was: "One of the reasons we ventured into journal publishing was to enable African scholars to set the agenda of their research—rather than anticipating the needs of the funding agencies. For this reason, we never interfere in editorial matters in the journals we publish." That was enough to convince us of the validity and worth of the project. We invited scholars of all stripes to join us on this journey. And, we are proud of the caliber and diversity of both the editorial and advisory boards. No better team could ever be assembled.

*The Journal of Somali Studies* (JOSS) invites scholarly contributions that are built on solid research foundations, and are able to prove the "this-sidedness" of their argument. We do not privilege any one group or school of thought over any other. In an era when suspicion and counter-suspicion drown good ideas, we must make one thing clear: **All views expressed in the pages of the JOSS are those of the authors and not of the editors.** We hope this categorical statement will put to rest the tendency among some of us to look, as a Somali

anecdote has it, for crocodiles—real or imagined—in the waters of any river. On a lighter note, we hope the JOSS will suffuse the senses of our readers with good and productive thoughts. Last but not least, we hope you will both contribute to the exchange of productive ideas by honoring us to publish your research, and by subscribing to the journal.

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**Volume 1, Issue 1, 2014**  
**Pp 11-33**

**Somalia: An Overview of Primary and  
Secondary Education**

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The intellectual can be the lightning rod for the implementation of [a] new ethic. We must teach our people by example. We must by the same token learn from them. We must install and strengthen, wherever it exists, the importance of tolerance and of accommodating the views of others. – Ali J. Ahmed (1995:151)

**Introduction: A Glance at Education in Somalia**

In order to understand the dialectics of education in Somalia, particularly at the levels of primary and secondary studies, it behooves us to shed some light on the background: the traditional Qur'anic school where the task of conventional learning starts. The reason for this is, before formal school learning, the Somali child undergoes a traditional pedagogical system in which s/he starts

learning Islam's Holy Scripture in a Qur'anic school as young as from age four. Here, s/he learns how to read and write the Arabic alphabet, which is the basis for Qur'anic as well as Arabic-language studies. In due course, the learners are expected to master the reading of the Qur'an, usually based on rote memorization, to "commit the Quran – as much of it as possible – to memory", but without comprehension of the text (Hersi, 1977:38).

Although we concur with Hersi (ibid) on the learners' memorization of the Qur'an, we believe that in the *dugsi* or Qur'anic school, getting "more familiar with the Arabic language" does not usually take place in a comprehensive manner. In addition, the learning of Arabic or *Tafsiir* (interpretation of the Qur'an) did not take place in the mainstream *dugsi* or Qur'anic school. For the kind of exegetic undertaking implied in the term "tafsiir," there existed specialized and more advanced learning centers that enrolled adult learners rather than children at the beginning stage of mastery of the Holy Scripture.

However, with the basic ability of reading and writing the Qur'an, students had the opportunity of enrolling in formal schools where their reading and writing skills would help them considerably, particularly those who joined Arabic medium schools or, in the case of the study of Arabic and Islamic studies, non-Qur'anic schools. Unlike the non-Qur'anic learning institutions, the Qur'anic schools of the 1960s and 1970s or earlier in urban centers consisted of a large room that accommodated both male and female learners in a co-educational system. They sat on the ground and wrote on *loox*, wooden slates or tablets of varying sizes. Therefore, what the colonial administrations and proponents of colonial literature introduced as "formal" school or learning was actually preceded by the formal mastering of the Holy Script; where *carabka* (the tongue) and *caqliga* (the mind) were initially drilled to a more formal commitment to the faith. Robert Hess (1966:169) provides strong evidence to the Somali people's commitment to the Qur'an as he writes, "Throughout most of the colonial period, there was practically no educational system in the colony other than the traditional Koranic schools."

## The Cradle of Secular Education in Somalia

Indeed, like many other nations in Africa, the system of secular education in Somalia began during the colonial period, accelerating its pace after the Second World War (Touval, 1963:82). This colonial system of education, despite its advantages, brought an enduring perplexity to the country's education, where the diversity of the dominant colonial languages (English in the north and Italian in the south) complicated the streamlining of the national education program after independence and unification of the two sister zones.

It is noteworthy, though, that the British colonial administration had established some good English-medium schools as pioneering centers of secular learning in British Somaliland, notwithstanding the unimpressive enrollment figures, probably resulting from parents not sending their children to the *gaalo* (infidels') schools. In the south (e.g. Mogadishu, Merca, and Kismayo), outstanding institutions with Italian medium of instruction were established. Touval (1963:82) suggests that during this colonial period "change was taking place" in the education sector; while Hess (1966:169), on the other hand, entertains the view that the undesirable situation of education in Italian Somaliland could be described as "a complete neglect."

However, apart from the mainstream school system, the Italian colonial administration introduced adult evening classes whose objective was, as Rodney (1974:240) observed of colonial Africa "...to train Africans to help man the local administration at the lowest ranks, and to staff the private capitalist firms which meant the participation of few Africans in the domination of the continent as a whole." Similar to Rodney's view, Hess (P. 187) notes that such training prepared the Somali "only for subservience to his Italian masters."

At the attainment of independence in 1960, there were about 230 primary schools and approximately 10 secondary schools consisting of general (ordinary) and technical/vocational institutions. Notably, from the colonial period until the introduction and subsequent adoption of the Somali orthography in 1972 the country was still in

search of a decisive policy to introduce a consistent national educational curriculum that adhered to a single medium of instruction. Commenting on the predicament, Laitin (1977:114) remarks, "...the recognition of Arabic, English and Italian as official languages, and the use of Arabic as the medium of instruction in the early years of school, with English used in the later years - became, by default, the national policy."

A few years after independence, state preference of English as the medium of instruction gained considerable momentum. Italian declined as a choice, while Arabic has been trailing English. Almost all schools were set for the adoption of English; in lower primary, especially from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade, (elementary) English was taught only as a subject, while other subjects were conducted in Arabic. In the intermediate grades, from 5<sup>th</sup> grade to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and even through secondary school from grade 9 to 12, the medium of learning for all subjects was converted to English, followed by Arabic as a subject only. Quoting Cali Garaad Jaamac, a former education minister in one of the post-independence Somali administrations, Laitin (1977:105-6) writes:

After a careful study of the problems and the needs of the country, we propose that English should be gradually brought in as the common medium of instruction throughout the whole Republic...Beginning this year, however, Italian will not be taught in new third- year elementary classes and English will be introduced instead...English will take over completely over a period of six to seven years.

### **The Rise and Fall of Somalia's Primary and Secondary Education**

Somali education rose significantly during the military regime of Mohamed Siad Barre, which seized power on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1969 in a bloodless coup. After the introduction of Somali orthography in 1972, massive education campaigns followed. At this early stage of its rule, the military junta initially won the support of the masses. Compulsory primary schools as well as secondary education institutions were built, many of them on self-help schemes. Intensive teacher-training programs were designed for the different levels of schools, and the College of Education and other state projects were

assigned the broad task of producing primary and secondary school teachers in one of the most rigorous and most intensive teacher-training programs in the history of Somali education. This and the orthography of the Somali language are considered as milestone achievements attributed to the military administration. For, in less than a decade of military rule, the enrollment of primary school students, which stood at 28,000 in 1970, rose to 271,000 by 1982; with an institutional increase of 1407 by 1980, up from mere 287 schools in 1970, subsequently raising the number of teachers to a well trained workforce of 3,376 by 1981 (Bennaars, Seif, & Mwangi, 1996).

The early gains, however, were derailed by a host of factors which mainly related to the increase of malfeasance in the top echelons of the military administration and the civil service. The decline of a budget of 11% in the mid-1970s to less than 2% allocation to the national education sector towards the end of 1990 could be related to several factors that had a negative impact on the economy and social and political life of the masses. For instance, the 1977 Somalo-Ethiopian war and the ensuing aborted coup, the militarization of the budget (as with the rest of Africa, where social services got short shrift of everything), massive debt-service allocations, and the conspicuous tribalization of the institutions, all contributed to the deterioration of state policy towards education. Consequently, the phenomenon left only about 640 schools and approximately 660 teachers in operation shortly before the collapse of the military regime in early 1991, placing Somalia among the countries with “the lowest school enrolment rates in the world” (UNDP, 1998:69; 2001:82).

The departure of well-trained Somali professional teachers from the classrooms further dented the nation’s education system, enormously contributing to the brain drain; similar to what was also experienced in other parts of the continent. Brittain (1994) and Bayart (1993) discuss a great deal about the vicious scenario of Africa’s institutionalized corruption and its impact on the intellectual bankruptcy the continent experienced through the resultant brain drain. Taking a similar position, Eno (2005) indicates how scholarships, international seminars, and workshops were used in Somalia as instruments to advance certain ethnic groups and as a

reward to appease those loyal to the ruling clique. Recalling the trends, Ali (1995:73) characterizes the predicaments of the 1980s as “unbearable conditions” which prompted a large number of the educated human capital, among them engineers, medical doctors, teachers, veterinarians, geologists, and agronomists, to flee the country either due to personal security reasons or lack of professional achievement and self-esteem.

It was during this period of drastic economic and political pressure caused by the military regime and its security apparatus that some of the most experienced educators and educational leaders abandoned their jobs in search of ‘greener pastures’ abroad or a better-paying job in the private sector. In due course, utilization of the vast amount of educational talent, sharpened over the years and vested in graduate teachers, (the pillars of expertise in Somali education), started dwindling at a tempo faster than could be explicated. Most of this essential manpower was made to consider the teaching profession as what Hans (2003:288) described as “a stopgap whilst looking for something better.”

From the same perspective, Urch (1997:406) argues, “By the mid-80’s the nation’s bureaucracy had begun to crumble and teachers were not being paid. As a consequence, teachers found employment elsewhere, schools closed, and teaching material disappeared.” Further shedding more light on the multifarious repercussions, Ali (1995:73) acknowledges how “the country suffered a severe ‘brain drain’” due to the legitimization of malfeasance along ethnic qualification. Confirming Ali’s view above, Mohamed Eno (2005), after interviewing members of former educational policymakers during Barre’s military administration, reports on how ethnocracy rather than meritocracy was the most prevalent criterion for promotion; as well as how that policy contributed to the impairment of teaching and learning in the country’s educational institutions.

Moreover, the effects of unprecedented ethnic fast-multimillionairization of individuals with the least education played a significant role in the ensuing social disarray and drastic economic decline in the 1980s. Without doubt, these negative effects were augmented by factors such as the Somalia-Ethiopia war of 1977-1978

(mentioned above) and the Cold War politics of the 1970s. These factors had a heavy impact on a country that had developed no potential to exploit its available natural resources but instead adhered to the eccentric culture of dependence on foreign aid – through the effectual manipulation of politics of Arabization and the political economy of the Cold War.

### **Civil Anarchy and the Restoration of Primary and Secondary Education**

In late December 1990, the civil war reached a culmination of years of hemorrhaging that came home to Mogadishu to roost. It took several shapes and covered various geographical locations, though mainly in the South and Central South. Due to persistent inter-clan rivalry and multifaceted intra-clan and sub-clan animosities, the warlords and politicians further obstructed a variety of measures to restore stability. Even after the installation of several administrations such as Transitional National Government, Transitional Federal Government, the Administration of Puntland, the Administration of Somaliland, and the current Federal Government of Somalia, stability remains an unpromising commodity in that a conflict can flare up any time and for various reasons, though mainly through Islamist provocations in recent times. These confrontations have spread to schools, chiefly to hunt down a target or recruit children studying in the institution.

The immense psychological traumas that occur as a result of these attacks and their impact on the young minds in the targeted learning institutions have not yet been investigated. But understandably, they take a huge toll on the learners and their teachers. For example, a young girl from Baidoa relates her experience of such an incident to Amnesty International (2011:42): “It was a male teacher who was killed. They shot him.” In a similarly heinous situation, a young teenage girl from the district of Wadajir in Mogadishu narrates the impact of one of Al Shabab’s raids on her school: “One teacher was killed because he refused to obey. He was brave; he was the one who was advocating for the rights of the girls” (Amnesty, 2011:41).

In Galkacyo the calm and stability often emphasized is sometimes betrayed by the onslaught of marauding armed clan militia and/or rival Islamist organizations. Again, as Amnesty International (2011:39-40) details in one of its reports on the Human Rights situation in this part of Somalia:

Armed conflict over the past four years has taken a toll on children and young people's ability to access education. School buildings have been destroyed or damaged during indiscriminate or disproportionate shelling. A 10 year-old girl, who used to live in Galkayo South, in the Galgaduud region [sic] in central Somalia, until she fled in January 2010, explained: *'In Galkayo, fighting started between al-Shabab and Ahlu Sunna Waal Jama. It was in January 2010. Al-Shabab came into the town. I was going to school in level two, but the building was destroyed in that last fighting. It was a private school. There were children in the school who died and were injured.'* (Italics in original)

Attacks on innocent children and teachers in learning institutions have warranted parents' skepticism about sending their children to school as the latter are vulnerable to abduction and other life threatening consequences during raids at schools. Ever since Siad Barre's ouster from power, the education sector has suffered considerable setbacks, including the emergence of uncoordinated networks of private education organizations that use not only diverse syllabi but also different media in the instruction delivery. For instance, according to a former school official who left the country after threats by Al-Shabab, "Some institutions use various Arabic syllabi generated in Kuwait, or a program adopted from Saudi Arabia as well as certain other Arab countries; others employ Somali, while others embrace English syllabi merged with instruction material borrowed from neighboring countries, somewhat supplemented with what is locally available." While these are private institutions for the elite with means to educate their children, missing from the scene is the national education system, which uniformly accommodated the poor. This need saw the early intervention of international organizations like UNICEF and UNESCO, and is also a reason why most available literature on Somalia's post-civil-war education is sourced from these institutions. The next section draws on such reports.

## **The Role of International Organizations in the Revival of Somali Education**

As a UNICEF report (2012) confirms, “In the 2011/2012 school year, due to increased humanitarian funding, 429,974 children (43% girls) were enrolled in UNICEF-sponsored schools” (p. 26), which use Somali as a medium of instruction. This figure seems to be a combination of what was recently categorized as three zones, including Central South Zone, Puntland, and Somaliland. Earlier in 2005, another UNICEF document titled ‘Back to School Campaign – Somalia’ demonstrates that “only about 20% of primary school age children have access to formal education,” while a 6<sup>th</sup> September 2013 press release by the same UN agency under the title ‘Massive campaign to get one million Somali children into school to be launched’ reveals that “[o]nly four out of every ten children are in school.”

A report under the title ‘National Education Plan’ issued by the former Somali Transitional Federal Government’s Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education (Somali Republic, MEC&HE, and 2011:2) confirms:

Education umbrellas, privately owned schools, colleges and higher education institutions have been established to cover the services that the ministry of education was providing to the people before 1991. But again this effort could not provide quality free education throughout the country.

In addition, the document describes that “the role of the Ministry of Education in the education sector is not so great,” subsequently highlighting how “significant concerns have been raised” about the enhancement of the services needed to be realized through the country. An example of these concerns is mentioned as “The huge fund given to our education sector by the donors through the international and local NGOs,” but whose effect is not reflected in any significant achievement in the education sector (Somali Republic, MEC&HE, p. 2).

The efforts of these institutions have no doubt created jobs for adult teachers and learning opportunities for many Somali children

who would have otherwise been left idle and in many circumstances prone to negative social influences. But the efforts do not contain all the potential problems related to education. For example, the outcome of the formal performance assessment of 2012 shows “fewer girls than boys continue to take and pass exams in all of Somalia,” with more concern at the secondary level education (UNICEF, 2012:27). However, a comparative analysis of the 2011/2012 data on final primary school exam results indicate that almost 97% of examined candidates in Puntland and 93% in Somaliland realized over 90% success. As the UNICEF Annual Report 2012 highlights, “The scaling up of emergency education response in 2011 and covering the school year 2011/12 brought in significant funding and over 35 partners were involved in implementing these activities in CSZ (Central South Zone)” (p. 28).

Despite the endeavor, and for reasons it does not mention, the report suggests students in Puntland and Somaliland to have “met expected standards” for the literacy section with a score of over 60%, while comparatively “only 19% met the expected level for numeracy” with an indication that students in Puntland did better than their counterparts in Somaliland, with scores of 70% and 23% compared to 64% and 15% in the respective learning levels measured. The report, however, notes the lack of clarity on the exact reasons behind the undesirable numeracy results, although it hints at “weakness in quality and systematic teaching and learning,” which could be related to “the lack of any systematic teaching of handwriting or the development of basic numeracy concepts” (p. 28). When a math teacher in Mogadishu was asked by one of the authors (Omar) to explain the problem, he touched on a combination of factors, mainly reiterating the “shortage of qualified math teachers with the latest teaching techniques.”

The UNICEF Annual Report 2012 establishes, however, that a total of 29,368 candidates including 33% girls registered for the 2012 final exams for each exit level (Primary 8 and Form 4) but that at least 27,854 sat for the final exam. Grade 8 had about 20,701 candidates, of whom 33% were girls, registered, but that 19,613 (33% girls) took the final test, (p. 28). A results analysis of Grade 12 candidates reveals

that out of 8,667 registered candidates, 8,241 sat for the final exam, including 28% girls. The report suggests that the dropout rate between the registered and the examined candidates stands at “only 5%,” indicating a remarkable success rate of “over 90%” (p. 29). Another laudable remark is the increase in the number of students compared to 2011, which stood at 24,650, including a female population of 7,746, equivalent to 31% of all the pupils examined (p. 28).

The 2012 Somaliland Ministry of Education operated with a consolidated budget of USD 8.8 million. Although this amount is much less than the budget needed for this crucial sector, it nevertheless suggests a significant annual increase when compared to USD 2.3 million in 2009, USD 2.4 million in 2010, and USD 6.2 million in 2011. The personnel costs of the 2012 budget have been well reduced to a controllable level of 67.38% compared to 2011, which consumed 90% of the same sub-sector (p. 29). The increase of the education budget of the Administration of Puntland was low; “from 1.75% in 2010, 2% in 2011, to 3.5% in 2012” with a planned increment of 6% for 2013. However, teacher remuneration in Puntland “has been increased twice: by 35% in 2011 and by 49% in 2012,” although the report does not furnish the amount of net salary the teacher receives monthly (ibid). On the other hand, despite the assumption that the “trend of budget allocation is positive,” as the report emphasizes, “nevertheless, it is far from the African average of 20%” (p. 31).

In spite of the problems, these organizations take into consideration the very sensitive issue of quality, without which mere provision of education may not matter. In order to devise an aligned standard Quality Assurance system in Puntland and Somaliland, Africa Education Trust assisted in the establishment of a Quality Assurance Unit. Also in the administration of Puntland, a teacher’s assessment document titled ‘Minimum Standards for Teacher Certification’ has been completed and endorsed for adoption, while UNICEF staff made a contribution in the establishment of an Education Management Information System for the entire provinces (UNICEF Annual Report 2012).

Concerning the Central South Zone (CSZ), where the umbilical cord of the Somali impasse is attached to, an undated UNICEF Report states that “[l]imited progress was made” concerning mapping of schools in the Zone (Mogadishu and related regions) for proper census. This is due to: (a) lack of financial resources, and (b) absence of support from private schools. Consequently, the lack of cooperation between local and international institutions has led considerably to the collection of “insufficient data to analyze the questionnaire” (UNICEF Annual Report 2012, p. 30). As an undated UNICEF document titled ‘The Situation of Women and Children in Somalia’ indicates, “Education is even more difficult to access in CSZ.” The problem made it impossible to ascertain the number of children in schools across CSZ. Notwithstanding the unfavorable circumstances, the report claims that “UNICEF and cluster partners helped keep 571,607 children in school through the 2011/12 school year despite famine, displacement and conflict,” (<http://www.unicef.org/somalia/children.html>).

In comparison, the Primary School Census Statistics Yearbook of the Administration of Puntland, Volume I, published in 2012, reports that the registered primary school children, from Grade 1 to Grade 8, consist of 91,451 students, of whom 43% are girls. A similar report by the breakaway republic of Somaliland registers a total primary school population of 184,682, including 43% girls. A further breakdown of both documents reveals 42% of those pupils as living in rural areas, against their urban counterparts at 58% for Puntland; and 70% urban dwellers compared to 30% rural student population in Somaliland. The pupils-teacher ratio (PTR) in both zones stands at 22:1 for Puntland and 31:1 for Somaliland.

### **The Widening Teacher Training Gap in Somali Education**

They [teachers] must possess enough command of the subject they are going to teach to be able to differentiate what is important and central from what is incidental and peripheral. They must have a philosophy of education to help guide them in their role as teachers. They must

know how human beings learn and how to create environments that facilitate learning. – James M. Cooper (2003:3).

In spite of the good intentions of the communities and efforts of the international organizations involved, streamlining lower education at the primary and secondary school grades is hampered by the lack of qualified teachers with basic subject knowledge. According to UNICEF (2012:27), “The poor quality of education is mostly attributed to the poor quality of teaching,” where the teacher-student ratio in Somalia is estimated at “1:32”, with caution that this figure “varies significantly” from one administrative zone to another. On the contrary, education analyst Mohamoud Dahir Omar reveals a different student-teacher ratio. Referring to a 2013 evaluation report on Somaliland education, Omar (2014) analyzes that “pupils' certified teacher Ratio 64:1” demonstrates a shortage of qualified personnel in the teaching profession. Despite the shortcomings, UNICEF and partner organizations are trying to deal with the situation, reporting on how “enhanced on-the-job and in-service training was provided for 6,742 (20% female) formal and non-formal education teachers” (ibid, p. 26).

Quoting Obanya, Mbachu & Dorgu (2014:28) maintain, “What makes Education central to any discussion of sustainable development is that Education deals with the awakening and nurturing of human potentials.” Therefore, for humans to realize sustainable development, ‘nurturing of human potential’ has to start with the professionals whose career would put them in constant communication with the human brains to be molded and sharpened for participation in the huge ‘development’ task ahead.

Among other factors, the analysis underlines the importance of teacher training and professional development. In their discussion on the impact of individual teachers’ “teaching style” in 72 primary schools in neighboring Kenya, Ngware et al, (2014:3) report, “Quality of instructional delivery is an important determinant of the extent to which the teaching process has an impact on learning achievement.” The researchers argue that learners’ “learning achievement can be improved through quality teaching,” even in situations where problems of “class size” are extant. However, in a study focusing on

the impact of class size on 4<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics students, Breton (2014:56) contends: "After controlling for numerous characteristics of the students' learning environment, the results indicate that each additional student in a class is associated with a decline in average test scores of 2.4 points." Hence, the importance of the student-teacher ratio discussed above and its consideration in educational development.

As we have witnessed from the evolution and innovation in the teaching profession and industry in recent years, teacher responsibility has taken advanced steps, requiring teachers to be able to identify the existence of learner hindrances to learning, investigate them, and find solutions by action/applied research (Henson, 1996). These and other emerging trends make necessary the development and implementation of high quality teacher education curriculum capable of meeting the emerging challenges in modern education systems. It requires, in addition to pre-service and in-service training, dedicated men and women professionals with enthusiasm for choosing teaching as a career. Such qualities should be part and parcel of the guiding principles of the broader picture of a national education curriculum that commits every teacher and institution to the shared common values that interpret the mission and vision of an individual school and community as an indispensable unit of the larger social organization.

A debate of this nature brings into focus whether the teacher has been cultivated adequately to be able to function as a member who fosters the ideals of "a learning community" environment as compared to a "traditional school" setting. These demanding professional attributes cannot be met by an inadequately trained teacher, not to mention an untrained one, recruited for the sole intention of filling an existing gap for lack of a 'better one'. Developing a community of learners needs a cultural shift of the school from its traditional learning culture to an environment that hosts a learning community of admirable professional quality (DuFour & Faker, 1998; DuFour et al., 2005), and whose infrastructure fosters "objective discourse focused on student learning and practice" (Brendefur et al., 2014:39).

A recultured school ambience will then play the role of providing “a collaborative improvement” (Brendefur et al, p. 40) by equipping the teacher to utilize a multifocal lens in tackling his/her duties towards improving the learning condition of not only the slow and average learner but equally the achievement of the above-average learner. This is to argue that without providing the teachers with sufficient training, they will not be able to deal with the bridging necessitated by the “gaps left by teaching materials,” nor will they be helpful in developing “alternative ideas and supplemental materials” (Brendefur et al., p. 39) to fill any gaps identified during the teaching-learning sessions taking place in the classroom environment.

Although serious concerns were raised regarding the need for teacher training in Somalia, the solution still seems to be out of reach. The idealistic pupil-teacher-ratio of 22:1 (but challenged above by education analyst Mohamoud Dahir Omar), though suitable, is underpinned by other difficulties that do not respond to the ideals of successful teaching. One among a variety of such conundrums is appropriate selection of teaching as a career by those in the business, and the quality of training offered to the novice teacher or the professional development of the trained leader entrusted to educate society’s future leaders. As several interviewed teachers mentioned, in a situation where they don’t have many choices, anything that can help them sustain a livelihood comes as a perfect opportunity; including teaching. A female teacher replied that she joined teaching “due to the shortage of women professional teachers to help the schoolgirls,” regardless of her lack of basic teaching skills.

Notwithstanding the presence of under-trained teachers and their endeavor to cope with day-to-day execution of their duties, another difficulty is augmented by the lack of reference books for the school subjects and the inability of the teachers to self-develop as independent learners and adult professionals. We raise this point because the issue of teachers’ lack of proficiency in English (the language in which most books are available) has been emphasized not only by the international donors engaged in the enhancement of education but by teachers and education leaders as well. According to an education officer from Puntland who talked to one of the authors

(Mohamed) at Centro Hotel in Sharjah, UAE, in mid-2013, "One of the most serious problems in our education system is our students' poor English language competency, which obviously emanates from the teachers' low proficiency." The same sentiments were shared by participants from Somaliland, particularly an expert in legal affairs who stated that the domination of English was a reality. A leader of a private school in Mogadishu informed one of the authors (Omar) that "teachers who are poor in English and cannot benefit from available books," stands as one of the problems the country's education authorities have to address.

Aside from English as an important medium and therefore a needed subject, a primary concern also involves teachers' mastery of the subjects they teach. The context of our discussion here is related to the depth and breadth the teacher should have acquired in the subject before any discussion on classroom management, student assessment, motivation, and other teaching skills are brought forward. Thus, a primary school teacher in Mogadishu admits, "Although we are trained, I think we still need more because only a few seminars and workshops cannot be the same as a full teaching course of three or four years. But we are trying our best." Despite the motivation to teach, whether triggered by intrinsic or extrinsic factors, not much can be expected from inadequate training coupled with little subject knowledge. The necessity for rigorous teacher education, and continuous but relevant professional development, is justified on the basis of existing scholarly evidence. For, as Brendefur et al., (2014:36) maintain, "Learning to teach well, even for veteran teachers, is a complex, uncertain, and difficult task."

The enormous task of education facing every administration in Somalia, whether the Federal Government or Regional Administration, should be dealt with by prioritizing constructively designed, high-quality teacher-training programs that equip the trainee teacher with the necessary knowledge and skills. Once these leaders of the crucial teaching and learning tasks in the classroom are well-trained and able to solve teaching-related problems independently, only then can we be confident of their quality of teaching in the implementation of their vital duty. Therefore, while

appreciating what was achieved with the little training available and the combined efforts of all the institutions, communities and individuals who made that endeavor a success, improving this sector should be a major priority in the development policy of the country.

Qalinle Hussein (2012) reports 1,100 graduate teachers of a 2-year school-based teacher-training course named “Strengthening of Capacity of Teacher Training” (SCOTT) implemented in the break-away republic of Somaliland. Hussein also mentions a 2015 target of 6,872 teachers, which is expected to realize an increase of 13% aimed at decreasing the number of *untrained* teachers to 5 percent. However, the trained number mentioned here includes “teachers from universities, secondary colleges and primary schools,” as Hussein notes. An analysis of the data evinces that the number of primary and secondary school teachers still remains below the required number of the teaching workforce. The consequence of untrained or inadequately trained teachers is that children may find themselves overwhelmed by traditional teacher domination where, according to Egan (2003:11), “[t]he master told the novices about the subject, in lecture and argument,” and not the kind of interactive class that accommodates learner experiences.

The challenge is that, apart from rote subject knowledge, a teacher should be familiar with a basic understanding of the functioning of the mind with regard to human habits during the process of learning. Accordingly, any educational policy designed to provide a child with fair learning opportunity must go beyond the enduring belief “that autonomous individuals, pursuing personal interests, can produce significant improvement in student performance” (Lipton & Wellman, 2001:119). The teacher training/education curriculum which the policy makers and curriculum designers develop should aim at the production of a teacher who is a provoker of talents and motivator of learners; that is, one who is a facilitator of the thinking potential of his/her students in the process of curriculum implementation. By doing so, the teacher is not only a classroom leader but also assumes the multiple roles as a guide, mentor, and model, to name a few. The requirement of these multifarious qualities of the teacher exerts more emphasis on the planning and

development of an effective teacher education curriculum. From this point of view, we raise the concern that sufficient budget should be allocated to the teacher education programs since the teaching workforce is the foundation on which the pillars of the national education goals and development of academic consciousness are firmly constructed.

### **The Enduring Complexity of Curriculum and Medium in Somalia**

Brubaker's (1982:2) definition of what constitutes curriculum is based on "what persons experience in a setting." Tanner and Tanner (1980:43) seem to broaden the scope by describing curriculum as the "reconstruction of knowledge and experience, systematically developed...to enable the learner to increase his or her control of knowledge and experience." Phenix (1962:64) maintains that "the curriculum should consist entirely of knowledge which comes from the disciplines." Taba (1962:11) views curriculum as pertinent to "a plan for learning," rather than the content of what is taught itself. Oliva (1982:10), however, denotes curriculum as "a plan or program for all the experiences which the learner encounters under the direction of the school." Considering the incongruity in the definition and scope of curriculum, Beane, Toepfer, and Alessi (1986:35) caution us that: "[i]f one selects one definition to have 'most favored status', one should still recognize that several definitions do exist and are just as favored by others. Thus, they cannot be rejected lightly since all have advantages and disadvantages." In the same line of thought, Egan (2003:10) criticizes, "The field seems to have no clear logical boundaries."

Apart from the incongruity in the definitional scope of the term 'curriculum', its interpretations are laden with several important factors, one of which is how they guide the curriculum designers/developers in targeting the appropriate destination of the learner in accordance with the values of a given society. The development of an appropriate curriculum, at the initial stage, lays open the necessity for well-trained developers who are abreast of the global as well as national requirements at the various but

interconnected levels of the learners. The scope of responsibility of the developer is also a matter of great importance, based on the expected outcome of the curriculum. At the next level, and upon its development, the curriculum cannot function without trained and dedicated men and women to implement it to the satisfaction of all the different stakeholders.

In post-civil-war Somalia, the coordination and implementation of a unified school curriculum has been a difficult problem at the core of education. With the existence of over seven educational umbrellas and various agencies operating in the country over the past two decades “without a unified national syllabus to guide primary and secondary school instruction,” the magnitude of the enduring perplexity in Somali education becomes evident (Farah, 2013). The lack of coordination, in effect, contributed to the complexity in the streamlining of appropriate and reliable Quality Assurance. However, it was only as recently as 2013 that the network of “education umbrellas are representing 1,130 private schools across Somalia” agreed to set a blueprint for a unified syllabus as a measure of standardizing the education system at the primary and secondary grades. The preparation and merging of the multi-curricular systems, according to Abdi Moalim (2013), “took about three years.” Moalim also notes how a unified medium still remains a pending issue, particularly when the seven networks have not reached any agreement to overcome the diversity of their media of instruction where Somali, Arabic, and English are used according to the preference of each individual institution and/or umbrella.

Conformity to the same curriculum, despite the diversity of medium, is expected to set the direction ahead for the students. On the other hand, the disparity of the media of instruction calls for a cumbersome translation of the various textbooks taught in each of the levels from grade 1 to grade 12. The translation task will demand men and women who are not only subject experts and/or specialists in one or more education areas but experts with fluency in the original language of the textbook as well as skills in the art of translation. Secondly, it will involve large sums of money as investment by the

education institutions, which parents will have to pay indirectly, once those costs are included in the production of the textbooks.

## **Conclusion**

The essay discussed Somali education in various periods, with a focus on the era of civil anarchy. It argues that although the local communities and international agencies have tried their best to play a significant role, diverse problems do exist in the core areas of curriculum, medium, and teacher training. With neither public institutions nor concrete policies designed to address the heavy responsibility of producing a cogent teaching workforce as a national priority in the education sector, Somali children will have to go a long way before experiencing good teaching by well-trained professional teachers, equivalent in quality to or even better than the graduates from the College of Education in its heyday. In order to deal with each of the inter-related problems facing primary and secondary education in Somalia, an exhaustive study is necessary to interrogate not only what is lacking and therefore essential for improvement, but also what can be gleaned from the experiences and achievements made in the current activities of agencies, local institutions, and authorities involved in the revival of the national education system.

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**The Externally Defined Somali National Identity**

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**Introduction**

The Somali political system is largely the product of the Italian colonial administration. There are few, if any, traces of the British system of government left in either the Somali system of governance or the country's political practice. From the very beginning, the Italian colonial vision of Somalia entailed dividing the society into two separate parts: nomadic pastoralists freely roving within and beyond the country's boundaries and sedentary agriculturalists who could eventually provide a servile labor-force for the colonial enterprise. This dubious categorization of Somali society was instituted by representatives of the eighteenth-century Omani Sultanate of Zanzibar in the Benadir region. The sultans of Zanzibar brought Somalia into the sphere of Indian Ocean slavery, which ultimately led to the enslavement of hundreds of thousands of indigenous Somalis and other Africans.

The explicit separation of Somalis into free pastoralists and subservient agriculturalists was utilized by the Italian colonial administration that replaced the representatives of Zanzibar. More importantly, colonial anthropologists who adopted this categorization of Somali society interpreted it along racial lines. This point is paramount in understanding the later "racialization" of Somali

identity. In Southern Somalia, the colonial system produced a cultural attitude of contempt and discrimination for the autochthonous population whose genetic constitution does not contain strong Asiatic elements. During the colonial era, and even in post-independence Somalia, existing cultural and physical differences were used to justify prejudices. These biases were reinforced by invented traditions that were extremely detrimental to the southern population. The colonial representation of Somali society, which has been utilized by many non-Somali scholars, reproduced racial and social discrimination within Somali society and culture. This cultural manipulation became instrumental in defrauding people of political rights.

In his 1955 work, *Peoples of the Horn*, Ioan. M. Lewis first articulates a conceptual and anthropological framework of the Somali nation-state and national identity (Lewis, 1994). Based on fieldwork conducted in a small nomadic community in the Northern Somaliland British Protectorate and earlier work by Italian colonial anthropologists Colucci, Cerulli and Puccioni, Lewis uses the social structure he observed in this community to explain the entire Somali society before he even visited central and southern Somalia. In later works, Lewis defines the Somali agnatic and segmentary social structures as a pastoral democracy, a government structure where the clan system serves as its foundation. This idea of a clan-based Somali society captivated everyone until the eruption of the recent civil war in late 1990 that ensnared the whole nation in a web of antagonistic tribal relations that magnified the problems of clan conflict. As I noted earlier, Lewis' work refers primarily to the northern portion of Somalia included in the British Protectorate. In southern Somalia, almost all of the indigenous agriculturalist population was uncritically defined by Italian colonial scholars as *liberti*, or formerly enslaved freedmen.

One of the key—and possibly most divisive—moments in Somali national identity formation was the Abyssinian War of 1935-36. Prompted by fascism, this conflict had Somali militias from different

clans fighting alongside the Italians. The recruitment of Somali militias occurred in circumstances that reinforced the social differentiation that had already been established by early Italian colonialism. Italian colonial authorities racially discriminated between farmers and pastoralists in Somalia. In fact, the farming communities were barred from enlisting in the colonial militias by Governor De Vecchi. This was an application of a 1924 decree, which predates the 1938 racial legislations against the Italian Israelites (Ahad, 1993).

### **Methodology**

This study uses an observatory method of existing data available from various sources and in different languages, especially Italian and English. It attempts to interpret the data by developing the link with the existing traditions locally produced. In the following sections, the essay will first analyze the diverse literature from the perspective of the colonial misconceptions in identifying the people, followed by a discussion of the terms *Rahanweyn*, *Sab*, and *Samaale* and aspects of their differences but also their relationships. Then, an examination of the pre-Hemitic population of agriculturalists will be next. This section will develop the argument into the mechanism of association and assimilation between them and their pastoral counterparts, before the last segment concludes the discussion.

### **Exploring the Colonial Misconceptions**

A new perspective in Somali Studies might contribute to a better understanding of how prejudices and contrived traditions led to forms of discrimination that are still in effect and yet defy common sense. The subtleties of colonial power have been accepted as a fact, and, in addition, politics in postcolonial Somalia have been built on the colonialist perception of Somali society, which represents a false image that is not yet been fully challenged. Connivance with a clan system benefits from a constructed colonial historiography. The time has come when Somali scholars must refuse to passively accept what has been done for purely colonial reasons and call for a critical

analysis of both the colonial historiography and its political conceptualizations.

Both the concept of pastoral democracy and the Italian colonial hypothesis of “former slaves” in relation to the indigenous agriculturalist population in southern Somalia should be seen as merely corresponding to the colonial views of the British administration in the north and of the Italian administration in the south. The British protected their subjects while the Italians sought to dominate theirs. While British scholars appreciated the social organization of the Somali population, the Italian colonial authorities and scholars misrepresented the social organization as being based on race. The British did not discriminate between Somalis in their northern protectorate as the Italians did in the south.

The extension of Lewis’ concept of pastoral democracy to all of Somalia substantiates a particular view of Somali identity. Another emergent view is that the Italian colonial attitude towards agriculturalists in southern Somalia as *liberti*, produces an erroneous understanding of southern Somali society. Non-Somali scholars contributed to the perpetuation of an identity that excludes a large part of the society; after all, not all of Somali society is made up of nomadic pastoralists, nor has the vast majority of the agriculturalist population in the South been subjected to slavery. Slavery, an abhorrent activity, was exclusively related to the period when the Sultans of Zanzibar controlled the coastal cities of Benadir. The Italian commercial enterprises that replaced the sultans in the Benadir ports continued to disregard the agriculturalists and occasionally supported slavery. Eventually, the Italian colonial authorities sought to politically exploit slavery. At first, they exposed the issue in order to prove their antagonism to it. Later, they used the stigma of slavery to get menial labor and to dispossess the agriculturalist population of the fertile lands in the South.

The populations that inhabited lands along the important Juba and Shabelle rivers for centuries, before any migration from the northern shores of the Peninsula occurred, were robbed by the

colonial policy of inland expansion. These agriculturalist populations on the banks of the Juba and Shabelle absorbed nomadic pastoralists through a system of forced adoption in agriculturalist communities. Some colonial and postcolonial scholars ignore this fact and ambiguously infer a mixing of these populations with elements deriving from slavery (Lewis, 1965; Laitin & Samatar, 1987). However, what such scholars fail to say is that the eventual number of persons brought to Somalia's Benadir as slaves is quantitatively less significant compared to the number of autochthonous agriculturalists. In the nineteenth century, well-established agriculturalist institutions with autonomous, stable organizations existed in the agricultural area between the two rivers of Juba and Shabelle in southern Somalia. Things would change drastically with the advent of colonialism, particularly with its agricultural economic transformation that superseded the sustainable subsistence system that allowed the agriculturalist population to be autonomous.

The definition of Somali society as segmented units is limited to northern Somali pastoralists. Lewis delineates his concept of Somali society in the following way: the Somali people comprise a vast system of segmented groups. It is convenient to call these groups nation, tribal-family, confederacy, sub-confederacy, and tribe (Lewis, 1965). A segmentary society is made up of several structurally similar groups that are capable of combining or dividing at various levels according to the circumstances (Cassanelli, 1982). The conceptualization of the nation as segmented groups of nomadic pastoralists acts as a powerful instrument that gains a more precise political role when building a socio-political system of and for the pastoralists. Lewis himself definitively associates the physiognomy of the society with the clan system from which the concept of a Somali pastoral democracy is made up. Therefore, with time, the misrepresentation made through the external description of the nation and its people has begun to assume a stable configuration in the Somali political psyche that has led to the development of nationalist ideas. The social complexity and the cultural and ethnic

diversity of the different groups within the population give way to the idea of a simple homogeneous national identity constituted in accordance with the concept of agnatic segmentary society and are well described by Lewis's idea of a pastoral democracy.

In postcolonial Somalia, the colonial categories and concepts have been utilized to describe the Somalis and their political environment. Categories such as *noble* and *non-noble* were colonially imposed. They were used to stratify society to conform to the political objectives of the Italian colonial authority at that time, particularly the Fascist labor conscription policy that targeted the agriculturalist population of the colony (Segal, 2001). The colonial authorities intended for such categories to correspond to a stratification of the local society prior to colonization. However, this was not the case. Pre-colonial Somali society was organized in such a way that every group had a stable location and territory that corresponded with its main economic activity; this allowed for considerable autonomy from any similar unit. Somalis have never known a culture in which feudal subservience and strong political and religious hierarchies were standard (Abdullahi, 2001). Thus, racial distinctions are actually a product of the colonial experience because slavery and the slave trade (which was not significant for Somalis) are new to Somali culture (Drysdale, 2000). The use of these racial categories tends to simplify the anthropologically complex features of modern Somali society and fails to consider absorption and intermarriage between the different populations that, in successive periods, lived in southern Somalia. The anthropological features are traced by Lewis (1965:5) as follows:

In their facial features particularly, the Somali also exhibit evidence of their long standing relations with Arabia; and, in the south, amongst the Digil and Rahanwein tribes, physical traces of their past contact with Galla and Bantu peoples in this region.

### **Revisiting the Terms *Rahanweyn*, *Sab*, and *Samaale***

The classificatory partitioning of activity in Somali culture that makes agriculture into a servile activity and pastoralism into a noble one

was strongly reinforced in the Somalis' perception by the actions of colonial authorities in southern Somalia who introduced a system of forced labor on banana plantations. The Italian colonialists were exclusively interested in areas with irrigation potential (Helander, 1986). As Abdullahi (2001:157) argues, "In the earlier years of the twentieth century, Italian colonialists got concessions on the best arable land and started huge plantations, under the active encouragement of the fascist regime". By imposing forced labor on the agriculturalist populations along Juba and Shabelle rivers, the Italian colonial authority strengthened the impression that agriculture and farming are servile activities. Consequently, as Julia Maxted (2000:162) remarks, "Agricultural activity has traditionally been avoided by members of the Samaale [which is a later adjustment of the previous name *Soomaal* that was paired with *Sab*] in that it was associated with African-ness and peasantry, and inferior to nomadic pastoralism."

Colonialism influenced the creation and reinforcement of separateness between Somalis because of their location and activities. When that separation was closely—but elusively—connected with a discourse of difference and status, what emerged in Somali cultural behavior could be considered discrimination. However, it is important to examine the genesis of the term *Sab* and compare its meanings in a socio-political context. The intention of this essay is to find what is apparently lacking at this moment in Somali studies, to determine the relationship between the two meanings of the term *Sab*, and to present an alternative hypothesis about the *Sab* identity in a complex Somali national identity.

From the historical documents created by European travelers and colonial scholars, we know that the first use of the term *Sab* was in northern Somalia where it was used to label occupational castes of craftsmen such as smiths or shoemakers or hunters, distinguishing them from those engaged in animal herding, which was the most prevalent activity of the pastoral nomads in northern Somalia. As Cerulli (1957) points out, the Isaq and Darod Somali give to the

people of low caste living in their territory the name Sab. So, in traditional Somali politics, certain caste groups have been considered socially inferior. This contradicts Islamic tenets, as Islamic law does not recognize a caste system; rather, it proclaims the fraternity of believers and is, therefore, opposed to the general principle of castes (Laitin, 1977).

The creation of castes in Somalia and the resulting discrimination are not related to Islam (Cerulli, 1959), despite Somali clergymen's silence over the issue (Eno & Eno, 2010). In the northern part of the Somali peninsula, the caste system seems to be connected to the desire to distinguish groups of Arab descent from the local population who succumbed to the political dominance of the former. The first were owners of wealth or animals (*siwualmal*), while the latter (*sab*) had skills as hunters or craftsmen. Derived from the Arabic term *siwualmawuasci* (owner of herd), the term *siwualmal* means both "owner of a herd" as well as "he who eats and drinks only the meat and milk of his animals." Robecchi-Brichetti (1889) suggests that the term Somali could be derived from *siwualmal*.

A Somali tradition suggests that *Sab* is the name of an Arab expelled from his country for a reason connected to the *zakat* (charity) payment. He established himself on the shores of Tajura and became an ally of a local chief (Lewis, 1994). In other words, the original Sab (used with a capital S by Lewis to differentiate it from the caste with small s) was one of the numerous Arab immigrants who intermingled with local women and became a founder of multiple Somali tribes. The legend says that Sab broke his alliance with the Galla chief after he became powerful, earned the name of Gobron, established his own hereditary lineage, and went to southern Somalia. This tradition identifies the Gobron group in Geledi as descendants of Sab. This tradition clearly contradicts Cerulli's hypothesis on the origin of the term *Sab* as well as the historical evidence. As Cerulli suggests, *Sab* may indeed be an ethnic name.

As Arnold Hodson says, *Sab* is one of the main sections of the Galla Borana people that inhabit the area between the Somali borders

up to Ganana and Dawa Valley to Lake Stefania on one side and Sidamo and Arussi on the other (Hodson, 1919). Further, Lewis (1994) indicates Cerulli's suggestion that *Sab* has some connection with the Sabo moiety of the Galla Borana who contributed extensively to the current *Sab* population. For Cerulli, it is most probable that the *Sab* of the Galla Borana population gave their name to the Dighil (in Somali *Digil*) people when the latter drove them from Bur Hakaba in the seventeenth century but remained their neighbors. Even the Rahanweyn (also called *Reewing* in Somali Maay language) absorbed a significant part of the area's preexisting Galla Borana population. This possibility is bolstered by linguistic similarities between the dialects of the Dighil and Galla populations (Cerulli, 1926).

The term *Sab* is used by the northern Somalis in relation to groups traditionally defined as low caste. It is particularly relevant that those who are defined as *sab* in northern Somalia are not devoted to nomadic pastoralism, but to less prestigious activities such as crafts and hunting. For Cerulli (1959), it seems equivocal that the term *Sab* indicates the low-caste groups in the northern part of Somalia; rather, he explains that it refers to the ancestors of a section of Galla Borana and Somalis in the south. If ambiguity exists on this matter, it is because of the different social organizations involved. In the case of the northern nomadic society, the agnatic system, which is the predominant organization in Arabia, produces a segmentary lineage system that is consistent with nomadic life.

The southern social system, although still recognizable as a patriarchal social organization founded on genealogy, was open to external contributions through the collective adoption system, which was derived from the practices of the African agriculturalist culture and permitted the coexistence of different populations. It is an historical fact that in southern Somalia agriculture was traditionally the mainstay of the economy until the spread of nomadic pastoralism. Agriculturalists surrounded the early, still Asiatic, immigrant colonies in the coastal cities.

Like the newly founded coastal cities, the rural agrarian society was politically organized as an open society which accepted new elements and citizens. From the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, nomadic pastoralist groups became a part of the agricultural societies surrounding the coastal centers of Benadir and eventually settled alongside the Shabelle River. This form of mixed society was clearly inconceivable for the clan-based mentality of the northern nomadic populations who regarded it as less noble because it would lead to the creation of the agriculturalists. To define this mixture of diverse individuals, they utilized the term *Sab*, which was previously used among themselves to describe members of the low caste. Another term in use in northern Somalia to indicate hunters and gatherers is *rahan*.

The term *rahan* was first recorded at the time of the arrival of Europeans in the northern part of the country by Cruttenden (1849) of the British Army. *Rahan* and *Sab* are both used by northerners to describe low-caste people, and it is logical to conclude that they coined the term *rahan-weyn* to indicate the confederacy of diverse people in southern Somalia. Therefore, the term *rahan*, which indicates a population of hunters armed with bow and arrow in northern Somalia, seems to be used in the south to indicate not a similar group of hunters but the ethnically composite population of the whole of Somalia. The southern populations, which include hunters and agriculturalists as well as animal herders and pastoralists, constitute an anomaly for northerners.

To return to the story of the tradition that makes Sab an Arab that has been expelled from his country or an immigrant who settled on the northern coast of Somalia and became an animal herder; let us see how tradition explains the story of people in southern Somalia. The progeny of Arab immigrants may have grown in number and decided to move southward in search of better grazing for their herds. When they arrived in the south (where it is possible today to find those who claim to be descendants of an ancestor of Arab origin who, in the distant past, went there with his sons), they encountered an

indigenous population who was mostly devoted to agriculture and hunting. The newcomers, who were fewer in number than the original inhabitants, were first accepted as neighbors. A process of inclusion in the agricultural social context then took place.

Is it this scenario of contact among communities from diverse ethnic backgrounds that contributed to the creation of what would become the social structure of southern Somalia? This is highly probable, since there is a more integrated society in the south, one that could be defined as agro-pastoralist, as distinguished from the more nomadic pastoralist societies of the north that developed the lineage system. More to the point, the newcomer's traditions and positions within the indigenous host group confirm both the process of inclusion into the agricultural social organization and the subsequent accession to a political role within it. In many cases, the northern nomads' claim of Arab descent and the importance of religion and the religious heritage in the agricultural social context endow the whole group with a powerful instrument with which to facilitate consensual access to leadership in this new situation (Egal, 1968). This mechanism of social integration and political mobility within a preexisting socio-political framework is more common than it appears to most present-day anthropologists and historians.

Cerulli's *Sab* hypothesis, which should not be completely dismissed, requires a supplementary postulation supported by local tradition, which has not been considered previously by scholars. It is basically linked to the concept of autochthony. As Cerulli has suggested, the name *Sab* could be connected with the Galla Borana who contributed considerably to the present *Sab* population in Southern Somalia. If there was contiguity between the northern nomadic pastoralists and the Galla population that occupied the country before them, this connection could be an explanation for the transmission of the term *Sab* from Galla to the newly constituted confederation of Rahanweyn. But the Rahanweyn confederacy includes both agriculturalist Bantu and hunters who previously

inhabited the country that the Galla population had left during the sixteenth century (Cerulli, 1957).

There are records of Sab-Rahanweyn people who were descendants of the many autonomous pre-Cushitic groups that occupied the country and the area between the Juba and Shabelle Rivers prior to the arrival of the Galla and the northern nomadic pastoralists (Helander, 1986). Cerulli's hypothesis that the term *Sab* is derived from the Galla tribe name *Sabo* may be compared with the hypothesis of Ugo Ferrandi, an Italian colonial resident at Lugh, a locality mostly inhabited by Rahanweyn people. Ferrandi derives the term *Sab* from an African language but does not indicate which language. It appears to be from an area in the vicinity of, and having some relationship with, southern Somalia. If this is correct, it could be in the same territory that was referred to as Benadir during the Italian colonial period or, at least, in its immediate vicinity.

Ferrandi, referring to those groups that only he and Cerulli recognize as being autochthonous, writes that *Sab*, in that unstated African language, means "indigenous." Etymologically, the term *Sab* has two possible derivations in the Somali language, both of which are related to cultivation and agriculture. The first is *sabuul*, or corn-cob; the second is *sabo*, which literally means courtyard or sedentary. It is logical to think that *Sab* derives from the Somali term *sabo* which means courtyard or resident. The meaning of *Sab* as resident population, the opposite of nomadic, derives from the adjective *sabool*, or poor in comparison to the *siwulmal*, the rich owners of herds and nomadic pastoralists (Ahad, 2008). *Sab* is the "indigenous cultivator" population of pre-colonial southern Somalia.

### **The Pre-Hamitic Agriculturalist Population between the Juba and Shabelle Rivers**

Desmond Clark asserts that in historically distant times, southern Somalia was inhabited by a population with a strong Negro "Black" element. These people were driven further south and partially absorbed by Hamitic immigrants from the north. This process of

pushing back and absorbing populations which preceded the Dighil pastoralists in southern Somalia happened around the fourteenth century. Before that time, the area of the Bur was occupied by people mentioned in Elai traditions as *Loo Medo*, most of who were probably a mixture of Negroes and Galla Wardai (Clark, 1953).

The site changes of a population are not instantaneous and do not completely exhaust the vitality of the departing groups. It can take generations before a group disappears and is completely integrated into another. This is the case where populations are devoted to the same activity. More difficult is the fusion of different occupational groups such as pastoralists and agriculturalists. What happens in this case is that the preexisting group is integrated into the socioeconomic dimension of the newly arrived one or vice versa. That mixture sometimes creates a more integrated community or mixed society with its own customs and culture. As relates to the process of mixing populations, Lewis (1969:49-77) expresses his version as follows:

The present Digil and Rahanwin populations are in large measure the outcome of a long, disjointed series of migrations and expansionary movements by Somali nomads from the north and north-west, their conflicts and agreements with earlier Galla and Bantu communities, and the blending of these elements in a variety of patterns of mutual accommodation.

When the Dighil pastoralist groups arrived in the Bur lands where the traditions mention the pre-existence of Negroid and Galla populations, they, probably, did not totally absorb the previous occupants. Sometimes, previous groups resisted the absorption and maintained their individuality. Mohamed Haji Mukhtar, in his essay in *The Invention of Somalia*, refers to traditions that confirm the existence of pre-Islamic pagan dynasties that constituted a clear expression of well-framed social and political organizations. With Islam prevailing as a religious and cultural force, such dynasties adapted to the situation. Mukhtar (1995:13) writes:

The oral tradition in the Doi belt of Somalia suggests the existence of powerful pagan dynasties in the region, like *Ghedi Baabow*, *Dubka Baalow*,

*Fyle Arow, Barambara* and others. The headquarters of these dynasties were mainly located on the tops of mountains, like Bur Hakaba, Bur Haybe, Bur Gerwiine, Gelway, and others. Such dynasties found in Islam a means of protecting their political power. (Emphasis in original)

Who were the ancient inhabitants of the Doi (in Somali script *Doy* or *Dooy*)? Were those populations incorporated within Rahanweyn genealogies and completely absorbed? Cerulli tends to support that view and sees the constitution of the Elay as an example of the melding of the two elements of a population that was made up of Negroid agriculturalist and hunting groups inhabiting the area of the Bur and Somali pastoralist groups that entered the same location around the seventeenth century (Cerulli, 1957). Desmond Clark (1953:49-51) refers to some cultural clues and traditions:

Eile tradition says that at one time they themselves inhabited the whole of the country in the region of the three "burs," Bur Hakaba, Bur Degis and Bur Eibe, but that they were driven out of the first two areas by the Elai and Hellada.

These oral traditions are widely diffused within the Eile and Elay populations. They are also known among southern Somalis but are infrequently referred to by Somali scholars. The Eile and Elai traditions mention Gheddi Babow, king of the Eile, who ruled as a tyrant but was valiant in war. He used to entrench himself in the Bur Mountains. From that position, Gheddi Babow defended his realm using poisoned arrows. He was the only person who knew the secret of making the *waabaayo* (a poison made from an alkaloid extract obtained from a species of euphorbia.) Desmond Clark (1953:49-51) described the legend of Gheddi Babow in the following manner:

Legend also credits Gedi Babo with having lived at Bur Eibe where the rock shelter known as the Gure Wabai (Guri Wabaio) which means "the cave of the arrows poison," is pointed out as having been his home. It was here, so it is said, that the Eile brought him their arrows for poisoning as none was as expert as he in applying the poison to the tang.

There is considerable evidence supporting the presence of a Bantu population along the Juba River. From the oral histories collected by Cerulli and Clark, it is presumed that this group was connected with the Galla population. The Galla cohabited with the pre-Cushitic populations on the Shabelle River plateau. Beckingham and Huntingford suggest that though the early home of the Galla was Somaliland, they were not allowed to remain undisturbed there. The growing strength and consolidation of the Somali, the need to extend their grazing lands, and the spread of Islam (which was introduced into Somaliland in the latter half of the seventh century) gradually drove a large part of the Galla towards the southwest (Beckingham & Huntingford, 1954). As early as the twelfth century, pastoralist tribes of the interior had begun to wrest the land from its pre-Cushitic Bantu and Galla inhabitants (Hess, 1966). Desmond Clark (1953:49-51) suggests the idea of the connections between pre-Cushitic Negroid and Galla people, but he does not explore it further:

It is possible, therefore, that this early Negroid element in the Horn is today represented, albeit much diluted, by the Bon (Waboni), Ribbi, Eile and some of the Elai; the purest of these today being probably the Bon.... The relationship of these groups to the more essentially Negroid peoples of the Webi Shebelle and Juba valleys – the Shaveli, Shidle, Makanna and Gosha – is obscure.

The obscurity that Clark refers to concerns the relationship between the inhabitants of the region between the Shabelle River and the Doi (in Somali written as Doy or Dooy) prior to the Galla occupation. This obscurity is more apparent than real. It is accounted for by the fact that the middle-upper tract of the Shabelle River was—and still is—occupied by the Makanna and Shidle, neither of whom are Bantu-speaking populations, contrary to the assertions contained in the 1993 *Country Study* (Metz, 1993). The Makanna and Shidle populations are related to the other pre-Cushitic Negroid elements referred to by Clark. The confusion as to whether these populations speak Bantu originated with a research hypothesis suggested by A. H. J. Prins and recorded by Priscilla Reining (1967). The intent is surely

not the exclusion of the possibility that the two populations, Bantu-speaking and pre-Cushitic Negroid, had been in contact in the Somali peninsula at some moment of their history. Both ethnic groups were agricultural, sedentary populations prior to the arrival of nomadic pastoralists in the area between the Juba and Shabelle rivers in the southern regions of Somalia, while the Boni hunters occupy the savannah hinterland of Lamu and the Bajun Islands (1965).

Before the incursions of the Hamitic Galla and Somali, this region, according to Lewis, was occupied by a mixed pre-Hamitic population—the Zengi of medieval Arab geographers—who seem to have comprised two distinct populations. Sedentary agricultural tribes, settled in the inter-riverine area survive today in Shidle, Kabole, Reer 'Ise, Makanne, and Shabelle peoples on the Shabelle River. As Lewis (1961:22) writes:

To the same group belong the Eelaay of Baidoa in the hinterland, and the Tunni of Brava District. The other section of the pre-Hamitic population consisted of Bushmanlike hunters and gatherers, and along the rivers of fishermen, of whom contemporary representatives are the WaRibi, WaBooni of Jubaland and southern Somalia, and the Eyle of Bur Hacaba.

The Shidle, the Shabelle, and the Makanna, who are the aboriginal populations of the middle and upper Shabelle River plain, did not speak Bantu language at any known historical time (Cerulli, 1926; Cassanelli, 1982; Menkhaus, 2003). They speak the Somali language and use a considerable number of Galla-Oromo idioms. The Shidle, the Shabelle, and the Makanna are a sedentary and surely autochthonous pre-Cushitic population, which implies, more importantly, that they are the *Sab* in the meaning of the term suggested by Ferrandi, which is that they are indigenous to the Horn of Africa. They maintained considerable cohesion and were powerful enough to remain politically autonomous from—and minimize predatory raids by—surrounding pastoralists (Menkhaus, 2010). The nomadic pastoralists learned the practice of agriculture from them (Puccioni, 1937). Northern pastoralists were attracted to the sedentary cultivating

population of the south between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries and even later (Cerulli, 1957).

According to Cerulli, these pre-Cushitic agriculturalists along the Shabelle River are not considered low caste by the nomadic pastoralists (Cerulli, 1959). This differentiates them from the connected pre-Cushitic hunting groups such as Eile, Bon, and Midgan, who are considered as low caste because of their activity. They are all indigenous pre-Somali populations and are evidently ethnically intermixed (Lewis, 1955). These groups are also those referred to as the Zenji population mentioned by Arab writers and geographers in medieval times and it seems that they consisted of two distinct groups: hunters and sedentary agriculturalists. Cerulli was aware of the autochthony of these agriculturalist populations. This is evident in Cerulli's (1926:2-3) statements such as the following:

I am increasingly convinced that the current explanation in relation to the undoubtedly Negro populations of the Shidle, the Shabelle etc., that is that they were the slaves of the Somalis and were liberated by their owners, is certainly to be rejected. I hold that there is no doubt that the primitive nucleus of the populations of the Shidle, the Shabelle etc. was made up of those left behind by the Negro Bantu when, under pressure from the Galla, they cleared out the people from the region of the Uebi.<sup>1</sup>

They were Islamized before the great migrations of northern pastoralist groups. They now speak the Cushitic language of the Galla and Somalis. Their political system is based on the federation of territorial villages. As Colucci maintains, the majority of the villages in Somalia arose among populations of non-Somali races, in the definition of the colonial anthropologists, who cultivated the land along the banks of the rivers. The practice was to classify these populations as either Negro or Southern Bantu (Colucci, 1924). Among Italian colonial scholars, Colucci (1924:61) was the first who treated the origins of that agriculturalist population as ambiguous even though he recognized and described their stable organization and economic system:

The banks of the Webi Scebeli, however far up-river one goes, are populated by people usually referred to as freedmen although the origins of some are altogether obscure. Starting from the northern border of our Colony, we see, one after the other, the Macanne, the Rer Issa, the Cavole, the Scidle, all established in villages and dedicated to the cultivation of the fertile land watered by the river.

This economic organization and political system of indigenous *Sab* agriculturalists, already in existence at the foundation of the coastal centers of Mogadishu and Brava, was founded upon a village structure of social relationships. From their inland villages along the Shabelle River and their agricultural areas, according to Cerulli (1926), the agriculturalist groups maintained economic and trade relationships with the economic centers on the Indian Ocean, particularly Mogadishu in the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. In his 1926 address to the *Accademia dei Lincei*, Cerulli asserts that the agriculturalists on the Shabelle River constituted the autochthonous population of Somalia. Notwithstanding this and for reasons related to colonial expansion, their collocation was rendered ambiguous-and deliberately blurred-in the colonial historical accounts. This concept of the autochthony of the southern agriculturalists is also expressed by Lewis (1955:88) in the following terms: "Nomadic is characteristic of the Somali, sedentary cultivation of the Negroid autochthons." Cerulli (1926:3) addresses the political autonomy of those populations as follows:

I think that there is no doubt that the original nucleus of the populations of the Shidle, the Shabelle, etc. was made up of those left behind by the Negro Bantu when, under pressure from the Galla, they moved out of the region of the Uebi (Webi Shabelle). In my opinion there is much evidence that the so-called "liberti" had such an historical origin. Let us look at it. First of all, the distribution of these groups along the banks of the river in zones held to be unhealthy and impractical because of malaria, the tsetse fly, and the nature of the terrain itself in the periods after rain: an area that for that matter was of no economic interest to the pastoralists of the Galla and the Somalis except as a watering place for animals in certain periods of the year. Then there is the political constitution and the nature of the relations which still exist between the Somalis (the successors of the Galla) and the so-called

“liberti.” It is a general principle that the black soil, that is all of the area resulting from alluvial deposits, belongs to them: and until some time ago, the Shidle resisted, even with arms, any claims by the Somalis to the black soil area.

The evidence of autochthony of origin in addition to a well-known degree of political autonomy and a well-established political system of the agriculturalist population in southern Somalia prior to and after the colonial impact are the main reasons to link this alternative *Sab* identity hypothesis to the agriculturalists before the arrival of any of the nomadic pastoralist groups in the southern part of Somalia. Among the primarily sedentary cultivating *Sab*, the basic social unit is the mixed village, which has a heterogeneous social and ethnic composition. This organization was already extended to include the newcomer nomadic pastoralist groups between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This happened because there was an open socio-political system of village organization in an agriculturalist society that, through a system of collective and individual adoptions, accepted and included new elements in its organization. In other words, the agriculturalist population, which had been established for a long time upon the river banks of Somalia, is the group to which the term *Sab* refers if one adopts the meaning of “indigenous population” attributed to it by Ferrandi. This population, known to early Arab geographers as the Zenji, was concentrated in the fertile land between the Juba and Shabelle Rivers. For Lewis (1965), the Zenji or pre-Somali indigenous people seem to have consisted of two principal elements. The major part was made up of Bantu people who were sedentary cultivators living in the fertile pockets between the Shabelle and Juba.

As Cassanelli suggests, some of these farmers may have been descendants of Bantu-speaking peoples who settled in the river valleys of Somalia more than a millennium ago (Cassenelli, 1982). Another part consisted of the populations of agriculturalists along the Shabelle River that, according to Somali oral traditions, historically held the “black land” of the river banks. According to Abdullahi

(2001:157) "Riverside agriculture had existed for centuries and was practiced by the riverine Bantu peoples of southern Somalia." In the hypothesis adopted here, they are the *Sab* and are "descendants of pre-Somali inhabitants of the area who were able to resist absorption or enslavement by the Somalis" (Metz, 1993:79). That is, they were the aboriginal population in accordance with oral traditions and material artifacts. This hypothesis is supported by Somalist scholars who are deeply involved with the southern agriculturalist population of Somalia, including Eno and Eno (2007:13-14) who point out that:

Among the distinguished communities living in Southern Somalia are two clusters of Bantu people who are predominantly sedentary farmers. One group consists of the residents along the Shabelle River and its environs; they are the indigenous native to their current settlement .... The second group ... comprises those along the Juba River, also known as Gosha (forest) people."

The second group, Gosha, according to Eno and Eno (2007:18), has been "absorbed into other [pre]existing Bantu aborigine/Negroid communities who were scattered in small and large villages on both banks of the river."

### **The Mechanism of Association between Agriculturalist and Pastoralist Groups**

In their southern expansion, nomadic Somali pastoralists typically sought alliance with, and the protection of, local agriculturalist tribes (Gorman, 1981). According to Lewis (1994), nomads traditionally disparaged agriculturalists because they were sedentary, but this did not prevent northern nomads from settling amongst them as clients, probably under acute environmental pressures. Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, the *Sab* agriculturalists welcomed groups of pastoralists within their socio-economic organization with whom they established a well-defined system of reciprocity and cooperation.

As Tom Farer observes, the story of Somali pastoralist expansion is not only a tale of conflict; there were also some elements of cooperation and integration (Farer, 1979). The relationship between pastoralist and agriculturalist groups in the area of the Shabelle River was clearly demonstrated by Cerulli, who provides considerable evidence of assimilation, resource sharing, and peaceful trade between groups of pastoral immigrants and the agricultural population (Cassanelli, 1982). The instrument or mechanism of association between *Sab* (agriculturalists) and *Somal* (pastoralists) is the adoption system of African populations by which pastoralist groups are inserted and incorporated into their organization. According to Lewis (1994:140):

This institutionalized adoption of clients, which attaches strangers not to individual patrons but to groups and is extremely rare among the northern nomads but very common among the southern cultivators, is crucial to any understanding of the differences in structure between the two Somali groups.

The most important structure produced in these early contacts between the two groups was the hybrid society of agro-pastoralists (Cerulli, 1926). However, the nature of this association has been misrepresented by colonial scholars. The term client (*arifa*) is a corruption of the Somali word *halifa*, which is derived from the Arab word *halafa* that means to swear. For the political purpose of creating colonial jargon, the term "client" is preferred to "adopt" to underline a position of inferiority, and the term *halifa* was substituted by *arifa* (Guadagni, 1981). The adoption system in use within African agricultural populations favored the integration of diverse groups into the agriculturalists' social organization. This system, first used by agriculturalists established on the banks of the Shabelle, progressively spread to a wider area.

Assumedly, the system later became familiar to agro-pastoralists inhabiting territories far from the river like the Rahanweyn, who made it into a durable social system. Indeed, according to Bernhard Helander, Rahanweyn clans have a very high proportion of

immigrant members who, despite their origins in other clans, are fully or almost fully integrated into their host clans (Helander, 1996). There is an Elay tradition (referred to by Colucci) related to the institution of adoption (*halif*) which asserts that the most important agro-pastoralist society in southern Somalia today—the Reewing—was formed by the aggregation of a nucleus of autochthonous and sedentary agriculturalist population with other mostly pastoralist groups. It was within this system of social and economic integration that a process of power acquisition developed later in the sixteenth century.

The traditional arrangement of adoption within the agriculturalist society required the newcomer desiring to settle on the land of the cultivating group to seek admission into the group as a client and to undertake all the responsibilities and duties with his hosts (Eno, 2008:73-74, 80; Lewis, 1994). Cerulli registers the relationship between the two groups of population, and how they settle conflicts concerning cultivated land and herd watering places along the river. The Italian scholar states that ownership of the fertile “black land” remained with the agriculturalist groups (Cerulli, 1964). These historical facts, which confirm the existence of large agriculturalist populations in the Shabelle and Juba Valleys prior to and following colonial impact, contradict the picture of a prevalently pastoralist society, which “dominated both the academic texts, and the nationalist aspirations of successive postcolonial politicians (Maxted, 2000:159).” These bilateral agreements produced mutual collaborations between agriculturalist and pastoralist groups in the Shabelle area. It is worth saying that these arrangements developed a system of partnership within which an agriculturalist group became the ally of one particular pastoralist group.

This typical aggregation in the Shabelle area can be seen as the basis for the development of a multicultural society, which was the norm until the time of colonial intervention. Lee Cassanelli, with extraordinary and remarkable critical insight, notes that Cerulli’s work provides considerable evidence of assimilation, resource sharing, and peaceful trade between pastoral immigrants, hunters,

and agricultural occupants of the land in southern Somali riverine areas. Yet, Cassanelli (1982:32) highlights that these aspects of his (Cerulli's) work received little attention in later historical writing on Somalia, which continues to focus on the origins of the Somali and the chronology of their pastoral expansion.

## **Conclusion**

This essay has attempted to discuss about the misconception of early colonial writers, particularly in the south, whose works concentrated on mixing identities and misinterpreting realities about certain communities. By using an analysis of the available literature, the essay tasked itself to hypothesize the root of some of the ethnic and/in identity terms the early writers have used in order to provide a different contextualization as well as understanding of what was misinterpreted and, as a result of that, misrepresented into a different identity. The discussion focused specifically on the possible root and meaning of the terms *Rahantweyn*, *Sab*, and *Samaale*, which are used as ethnonyms for the different categories of people the name refers to. It also describes the possible relationship and assimilation of these groups with the indigenous Bantu people described by some scholars as residues of earlier settlers in the area. In significance, the essay draws attention on the need to further study and clarify what constitutes the distinct Somali groups by considering the available traditions and other archival material, particularly the available literature in the Italian archives, so that Somalia scholarship benefits from that substantial knowledge which has often been ignored in Somali Studies.

## **Notes:**

1. All translations from the Italian are the author's.

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**The Challenges the Youth of Northeastern Kenya Face:  
A Historical Analysis**

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**Introduction**

Despite that young people constitute a sizeable percentage of Africa's total population, there has been little research into how their different socio-political and economic experiences affect their futures and also shape their identities and attitudes. Scholarly analysis has considered African youth as a single category, assuming that they have had similar colonial and postcolonial experiences; they might also share similar worldviews. This paper is a departure from this simplistic approach. Drawing on colonial and postcolonial experiences, the aim of this paper is to examine the impact of this history on the youth of northeastern Kenya. Specifically, the essay will illustrate how the dual identities of religion and ethnicity have been used by regimes not only to demarcate the youth but to deny them access to necessary resources. This state-driven marginalization has imposed a particular, mostly negative, set of consequences on the youth.

**Review of the Literature on African Youth**

Much of the literature on African youth has focused on their political and social vulnerabilities (Abbink, 2005; Obadare, 2007), violence (Diouf, 2003), generational politics (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999), and children's rights (de Waal, 2002). Much of this literature highlights

negative youth behavior. Although these studies reveal the challenges that the youth confront, the studies have not kept pace with the political transformations in African countries, which are marked by a drastic change from military rule and civilian dictatorships to democratic leaning governments. These political changes are salient because they have created and fostered conditions where violence has decreased and a more inclusive socio-political atmosphere has taken shape. The new political and social atmosphere in many African countries has found the youth redirecting their attention from negative indulgences such as drugs and violence toward positive social activities after community intervention (Young, 2007; Russell & Gozdzia, 2006). Thus, young members of society who previously suffered from drug addiction were now becoming positive, productive members of society.

### **Youth and Generational Politics**

Attempts at defining the term “youth” and who is included or excluded in the category have attracted scholarly interest. The primary concern is how the age differences between the socially constructed categories of “youth” and “adults” have fostered or hindered the youth’s access of the public space. For instance, Diouf (2003) argues that African nationalist movements sought to maintain a barrier between elders and juniors to preserve traditional African cultures. This cleavage created a non-egalitarian environment where elders continue to make important decisions (Diouf, 2003). Similar to what Diouf observes in West Africa, Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) note that there is a similar tendency in South Africa where the dominant line of cleavage has become age.

In Kenya, Kagwanja describes the violent Mungiki vigilante group in certain parts of Kenya as representatives of young people who are deeply embedded in Kenyan politics. He suggests that the youth have deployed their age for financial gains. The author also points to ethnic loyalty among the youth which, he claims, is an element characteristic of the youth of independent Africa (Kagwanja, 2006). Contrary to these examples of the (mis)use of age, Durham sees

no clear-cut division in regard to age in Botswana. In her research, Durham noticed no competition among the age groups, concluding that age is a relative and fluid concept for categorizing individuals (Durham, 2004).

### **Drugs, Diseases, and Violence**

Much of the literature categorizes African youth under the following rubrics: drug addicts or peddlers, carriers and transmitters of sexually transmitted diseases, or child soldiers. Such perceptions emanate from conceptions of young people as a group that is easily susceptible to political, social, and economic vulnerabilities (Abbink, 2005; Obadare, 2007). Because of these vulnerabilities, the behaviors of young people in Africa have led scholars to coin terms and phrases that illuminate the group's contradictions. Consequently, African youth are viewed through an ambivalent, contrasting prism as either being "Makers and Breakers" (Honwana & de Boeck 2005) or "Villains or Heroes" (Seekings, 2006).

Such conceptions of African youth are widespread in the literature. Durham's (2004) claims that African governments fear youth as a source of instability is closely aligned, for instance, with Kagwanja's (2006) representation of the Mungiki as a lawless lot that is ready to kill for—or against—its state and its ethnic group. Many commentators such as Kagwanja assume that the scourge of African tribalism has effectively been replaced by fear of the youth. This observation stems from the fact that the youth are easily stoked by the simplest provocation and that youth violence emerges from minor frustrations such as fee increases to issues with national ramifications such as the elimination of corruption. Indeed, these stereotypes of the youth were buttressed by the youth's actions across the continent such as burning tires, hurling stones, or setting buildings on fire, which occurred in Niger (Durham, 2000).

### **Youth in the Public Sphere**

Skepticism accompanies youth action even when they engage in positive behaviors within the community (Moyo, 2012). Nonetheless,

the youth are playing an increasingly important role in the public space, which can be attributed to the changing social, political, and economic conditions. Young people are not only contributing to national debates but are also engaged in key developmental issues. These developments are instructive, as generational cleavages do not seem to stand in the way of the youth as they aim to become involved in public engagements. Instead, they are acting as agents of social change. Howana and De Boeck (2005) describe African youth as a force for the public good. The authors argue that young African people are participating in the social, economic, and political development of countries across the continent.

Durham (2004) has examined the activities of Herero Youth Association (HYA) and Botswana Democratic Party, two youth groups in Botswana. Their agendas include, among other things, education, development, and engagement with the public. Wamucii (2012) has also noted the work of the Mathare Youth Group (MYG) in Kenya. MYG is engaged in an array of activities such as instructing dispossessed youth in diverse areas including sports, the arts, dancing, photography, and HIV/AIDS prevention. In addition, MYG is conducting community outreach to jailed children around the country. The organization also helps disempowered youth who would have otherwise engaged in drugs, prostitution, and/or violence.

### **Colonial Northeastern Kenya**

The sad history of colonialism is all too familiar for African people. What is less clear, though, is its lasting legacy. One aftermath is ethnic identity, an element which, though present in pre-colonial and colonial Kenya, has been invigorated in postcolonial Kenya. As in the colonial state, tribal identity and resource mobilization have been closely linked. Since power is associated with resource distribution and acquisition, the ascent to public office has become every ethnic group's main concern. Power has ensured resource delivery to those groups who possess it. Inversely, groups that do not have representation in government have been left out of the sharing of

national resources. Ethnic consciousness, or “tribalism” as it is more commonly known, has ossified into a uniquely beneficial economic and political tool in postcolonial Kenya. As this section will show, the emergence of tribal sentiments that have locked out ethnic Somalis from the inner circles of government began with the arbitrary drawing of borders as well as ordinances that ushered in not only a long history of socioeconomic and political exclusion, but also intense ostracism and neglect in the development sector.

A careful reconsideration of the colonial and postcolonial history of Kenyan-Somalis is warranted for two reasons. To begin, Simpson (1996) states that historians have neglected the colonial history of northeastern Kenya. More importantly, to appreciate the perilous conditions in which the Kenyan-Somalis, especially the youth, have lived, understanding the experiences that shaped these conditions is imperative. Much of this section’s discussion will be general, focusing on policies, ordinances, and attitudes.

Britain annexed Kenya in the late 1800s, a time when many ethnic groups still practiced pastoral-nomadism. Pastoral-nomadism necessitates a transient lifestyle, and because rigid borders were not established, nomadic groups such as the Somalis, Boranas, and Rendilles moved about freely. However, Britain recognized that continual mobility, amorphous borders, and sociopolitical instabilities complicated the colonial objective of ultimate domination. For Britain, Somalis posed an existential threat. Thus, Britain instituted ordinances to eradicate this danger, which Kromm (1967) insists began when the Northern Frontier District (NFD), currently known as the Northeastern Province, was incorporated into British East Africa. However, before surveying the ordinances that would curtail Somali movements, we need to understand how Britain became interested in northeastern Kenya.

British interest in this region coincided with a larger scramble for territorial control in the region. As colonialism was taking shape, territorial claims and counterclaims were widespread, particularly among the British, Italians, and French. Unsurprisingly, an indigenous colonial power was aggressively seeking inclusion into

this power matrix: Ethiopia. Under Menelik II, the Ethiopian empire was expanding southward and frantically claiming new territory. In their separate studies, Kromm and Simpson both observe that Ethiopia was Britain's earliest challenge. Moreover, other plausible concerns undergirded British actions. First, the Italians claimed southern Somalia and exhibited expansionist tendencies. Second, Somali westward movement and its encroachment on ethnicities already under British control was a concern. Thus, Britain felt that it had to eliminate these threats. Hyndman (1997) insists that the only feasible solution was to create a buffer zone among what would become Kenya, Ethiopia, and Italian Somaliland. Naturally, the buffer area was the Northern Frontier District.

After incorporating the Northern Frontier District into Kenya, Britain recognized Somalis as a distinct ethnic group based on their religion, homogeneity, and customs (Castagno 1964). However, it was not these factors that shaped British policies or attitudes toward the Somalis. From the start, Somalis mounted a vigorous armed resistance against the colonialists (Turton, (1972). In the same vein, Chau (2010) acknowledges the Somalis' objection to adhering to political conventions and colonially drawn boundaries. As a consequence, Britain enacted special laws that sought to contain Somalis. Subsequently, the first ordinance was the drawing of the "Somali-Galla Line," which was intended to halt Somali westward movement.

The Outlying District Ordinance, a more punitive ordinance, was introduced in 1926 (Hyndman 1997; Otunnu 1992). The ordinance is based on the fact that colonial officials felt that by simply preventing Somalis from crossing a line did not effectively eliminate their threat. The implementation of the ordinance and related policies heavily restricted their movements in and out of the "Closed District" by requiring discriminatory identity cards; only with these could Somalis exit or enter the closed districts. Another ordinance, called the Special District Ordinance, was enacted in 1934. Though similar to the previous ordinances, it contained radical additions. The Kenya Human Rights Commission (2008) observed that the ordinance gave

colonial administrators extensive powers to “arrest, restrain, detain, and seize properties of hostile tribes, legalized collective punishment of tribes for offenses done by other members.” The colonial officials used, misused, and abused these powers to a degree that “more punitive campaigns were carried out against the Somalis than any other people in Kenya” (Turton, 1972:121).

It is impossible to discuss the history of Kenyan-Somalis without referencing their historical links to Somalia. Though under Italian colonial rule, Somalis had successfully formed political parties. The most prominent was the Somali Youth League (SYL), which was founded in 1943 to agitate for freedom and dignity (Sheikh-Abdi, 1977). SYL considered itself as a universal Somali voice. Noticing the living conditions of Somalis in Kenya, SYL responded by establishing offices in the main population centers of northeastern Kenya such as Garissa, Wajir, and Mandera along with other towns in the country’s large northern region. The SYL’s objective was to oppose discriminatory colonial policies including land grazing control schemes and arbitrary boundaries. The SYL’s confrontations with colonial officials nearly brought government activities to a standstill. In addition to its campaign against discriminatory practices, SYL imbued ethnic Somalis with a sense of Somali consciousness and unity. In 1948, less than five years after its foundation, SYL offices were closed by threatened colonial officials. The organization’s leadership was banned from political activities, snuffing out the only vestige of help for Kenyan-Somalis. Through ordinances, policies, and attitudes, the colonial state had subjected Somalis to a miserable colonial experience, one that would haunt them in postcolonial Kenya.

### **Postcolonial Northeastern Kenya**

The seamless continuation of the colonial state’s structure and policies in postcolonial Kenya is unique to this country. Klopp and Orina (2002) state, “One of the great disappointments of independent Kenya, however, was the persistence of colonial practices and mentalities, particularly within the government.” The perpetuation of

the British colonial and political system, which promised to continue sustaining the domination by those individuals or ethnic groups in power, formed the nucleus of this endeavor (Schlee 2013). Thus, long after other Kenyans had begun to enjoy the rewards of independence, an era harsher than the colonial period commenced in the northern region. It was particularly brutal in the northeastern region. Aukot puts it more explicitly when he suggests that the people of the north discern no difference between colonial and postcolonial Kenya (Aukot 2008). Therefore, the concept of independence has remained as remote and distant as were its appellations of justice, rights, and freedom. In light of this history, this section will briefly address postcolonial Kenyan-Somalis, focusing on issues specific to this group such as *shifita*, state violence, and enduring underdevelopment.

In 1960, when the colonial government eventually lifted the ban on the SYL and other Somali civic and political associations, the Somali activists began to form political parties that served as avenues for channeling sociopolitical grievances. In due course, however, another consciousness slowly developed throughout the region—one centered on self-determination and the desire to free the Somali people from what was, by all accounts, an apparent dual colonialism. The main impetus for this shift came from southern Somali independence and its immediate union with British Somaliland (Chau, 2010). As a result, a nostalgic sentiment of pan-Somalism, or the creation of a Greater Somalia, spread throughout the Somali-inhabited regions. According to Whittaker (2008:1), “[T]he people of the former Northern Frontier District (NFD), united behind the Northern Province Progressive People’s Party (NPPPP) calling for recognition of their right to self-determination and unity with the Somali Republic.” The (NPPPP) played a dominant role in the effort to break away and be part of the anticipated Greater Somalia. Dekhow Maalim Sambul, one of the founding members and secretary general of the party, recalls the organization’s clamor for secession:

We recognized that we were different from the rest of Kenya in so many ways. However, we sought secession not for the mere overt differences of religion, region, or origin, but the realization that we had had a different set

of colonial experiences that was being grounded into the new system. We wanted to join Somalia because we felt our voices would be heard there, and we would have a chance of being part of a caring nation.

Shortly before Britain gave independence to Kenya, NPPPP demanded that the British consider a referendum to ascertain whether the residents of northeastern Kenya wanted to be united with Somalia or Kenya. The British conceded, and a plebiscite was launched in 1962. When an overwhelming majority of referendum participants expressed a desire to unite with Somalia, as Ringquist (2011) claims, the British reneged on promises they had made to the Somalis. It would later emerge that the plebiscite was a dishonest exercise by the British to deflect blame from themselves as to make the issue look like a people's decision rather than British interference. Schlee (2013) articulates this well: "People had been misled by a referendum held by the British to believe that joining the newly independent Somalia was an option." The dishonesty became apparent when the British threw their support behind Jomo Kenyatta, a politician who fervently opposed secession. This duplicity resulted in resentment among Kenyan-Somalis who felt betrayed and misled. To register its profound anger and displeasure, the Somali government immediately broke off diplomatic relations with Britain. Consequently, when Kenya's independence was declared in December 1963, hostilities flared, which were primarily instigated by Kenyatta's refusal to negotiate his assertion that Kenya would not yield an inch of its land, and his challenge to Somalis to pack their camels and leave (Castagno, 1964).

In the ensuing conflict infamously known as *shifita*—a word that means bandit(s)—Kenyatta's government ironically borrowed heavily from the tactics that the British had been using against the Mau Mau uprising. Kenyatta declared a state of emergency two weeks after independence. The emergency laws enforced a five-mile prohibited zone along the Kenya-Somalia border and imprisoned anyone who was found in the area without a government pass. The Kenyan government also enacted a shoot-to-kill policy. Though no hard figures were recorded, the Kenyan forces reportedly massacred over

2,000 people (Otunnu, 1992). Sharing eerie similarities to the Special District Ordinance of 1934, the emergency laws enacted under President Kenyatta accorded law enforcement officials with a wide-ranging set of powers to enter properties without warrants, search Somali houses, seize and destroy their property (Whittaker, 2012). Burning buildings, confiscating or killing livestock left people without shelter and property, thus increasing the poverty that was prevalent in the Somali inhabited areas.

Furthermore, under Kenyatta, the infamous colonial ordinance of collective liability was reinstated. Under this ordinance, the government demarcated and zoned off regions to different clans in accordance with their settlements. The clans would then be held responsible if anti-government activities were reported or detected in their respective regions, providing the state security organs with more reason to indulge in making the Somalis' lives more miserable. The implication was that if an individual were reported to have engaged in anti-government activity or expressed a subversive idea, the whole clan would be held responsible and would as a result face collective punishment. To add more pain to the burden, in case a herder wandered unknowingly into another clan's zone, the government would seize 10 percent of his herd (Schlee, 2013). Moreover, anyone suspected of involvement in subversive activities was held for up to fifty-six days before he or she was arraigned in a court of law (Hyndman, 1997). These conditions have led to rape, theft, and extrajudicial killings which were used as tools for extracting confessions from subversives (Human Rights Watch, 2009). In 1966, two additions augmented these laws, making life more unbearable for Somalis. The first addition increased the prohibited zone between the Kenya and Somalia borders from five miles to fifteen. The other was the forced policy of villagization. Under villagization, the government herded residents into government-designated villages under tight security (Whittaker, 2012).

The effects of *shifita*, which came as a result of the people's resentment, were profoundly debilitating to the Somali civilian population. Beyond the killing of thousands of people and massive

property destruction, the extreme violence instilled an enduring terror and suspicion in the civilian population, leading many of them to avoid urban centers for fear of being killed, raped, robbed, or jailed. Although *shifita* officially ended in 1967 following an agreement between Kenya and Somalia, government killings of civilians and the underdevelopment of their region intensified.

Frequently, military campaigns, which were labeled “operations,” were constantly launched. To put the “operations” into perspective, consider two well-known massacres: the 1982 burning of Garissa and the Wagalla Massacre of 1984. In the latter operation (Abdullahi, 2013), an estimated 5,000 people—possibly more—were massacred. In both campaigns, villagization was used as a way to lure and then kill unarmed, innocent civilians. In 2008, the government launched a military exercise that claimed to disarm militias that aimed to attack the civilian population. Human Rights Watch (2009) notes that 1,200 were injured, one died, and at least a dozen women raped. These experiences are etched into the memories of those who lived through them and are evocative of a system that has produced heavy structural violence and social inequality.

As a result, no development would be anticipated in an environment such as this. Enforced marginality is evidenced through disparities in physical infrastructure such as schools, roads, and hospitals between the northeastern region and “Kenya.” The government’s excuse for the underdevelopment of the region is that the funds that have been earmarked for infrastructure have been often diverted to the province’s security sector. However, the irony of this claim is that the region remains the most dangerous despite being heavily militarized. The government’s lack of interest in the residents’ needs is present in a statement from Tom Mboya, the first minister for planning in Kenya, who stated, “Given our limited resources, and when we consider that these [pastoral] areas do often have basic natural resources including water or land . . . they cannot compete for development money with other parts of Kenya” (Kenya Human Rights Commission, 2008).

This has not only institutionalized an unequal claim to state resources such as education and employment but also sustained a colonial-era understanding of citizenship. Abdullahi (2013) elucidates the extent of neglect by recounting the road conditions. Of more than 16,000 kilometers of roads in the northeastern region, Adbullahi (2013) notes that only 20 kilometers are paved; the rest is unpaved earth that is covered in potholes or completely disappears during the rainy seasons. Hospitals are few and far between, severely understaffed, and lack basic resources such as medicine.

### Youth Challenges

In its sixty years of colonial rule, the British successfully created a racial spectrum of identity that placed Whites at the top, Africans at the bottom, and Indians and Arabs in the middle. This compartmentalization served two main purposes. First, by keeping groups, particularly the Africans, separated, they could minimize subversion against the colonial state. Second, resources were apportioned with Whites being privileged over other races. Following independence, the spectrum structure remained in place with ethnicity replacing race. The tribalization of politics has created a situation where members of the president's ethnic group are awarded plum jobs, fertile lands, and scholarships at the expense of others.

By 1964, barely a year after independence, Jomo Kenyatta's Kikuyu ethnic group's members were appointed to most of the senior national positions, a move that other Kenyans considered a *Kikuyunization* of the civil service (Hornsby 2012). When he came to power in 1978, Daniel arap Moi reversed Kenyatta's appointments and replaced them with Kalenjins, Moi's tribe (wa Wamwere, 2003). Mwai Kibaki, in turn, followed in the footsteps of the previous two presidents and reinstated members of his Kikuyu tribe. What is insightful, though, is how other Kenyans view the president's ethnic group. The president's ethnic group is often feared and referred to as "*serikali*" or "the government." Not subject to the rule of law, members of the ethnic group can plunder the treasury and get away with the most egregious crimes. Therefore, certain members of the

president's ethnic group are assumed to be above the law; in other words, more "Kenyan," a status derived from its close proximity to the seat of power.

For other ethnic groups, citizenship has been constructed around specific symbols (Lochery, 2012). With or without these symbols, the Somalis have not been considered properly Kenyan by other ethnicities. This nature of exclusion has its roots in the colonial era when Somalis were required to carry a separate identity card, also known as *kipande*. As the importance of *kipandes* has intensified in postcolonial Kenya, the awarding process has become extremely corrupt, discriminatory, and biased. Assuming that the rule of law is observed, citizens are qualified to be issued a *kipande* once they turn eighteen. However, this has not been the case. While "proper" Kenyans have little difficulty obtaining a *kipande*, birth certificate, passport, or other government-issued document, the youth from the northeastern region are subjected to an extremely arduous process that ends up with their being denied these documents.

To be issued a *kipande*, a Kenyan must prove his or her citizenship through numerous vetting processes to various committees. The processes revolve around various degrees of verification and counter-verification of a person's tribe, clan, sub-clan, and family, place of birth, his or her area chief's name, schools attended, and other banal measures. Older Somali men who are bankrolled by the Kenyan government constitute these committees, but it is ultimately state agents who determine when *kipandes* are issued. To mollify the agents, the committee members tend to be extremely harsh and often deny *kipandes* to deserving young people. Hence, despite a young person succeeding in establishing his or her citizenship, he or she is still expected to bribe the government agents and vetting committees to obtain a *kipande*.

In 1988, in addition to *kipandes*, the government required Somalis to obtain another form of identification called "screening cards." The intent of this new requirement was to stoke "clannish" sentiments among Somalis. The government argued that it needed to curb the number of Somali citizens who were fleeing the violence that had

broken out in Somalia. Thus, to segregate Somalia-Somalis from Kenyan-Somalis, Kenyan leaders, specifically those of Somali ancestry, encouraged the state to create screening cards that would be issued to Kenyan-Somalis in addition to their *kipandes*. These screening cards would make it easier for the government to address the influx of Somali immigrants. A consequence of this exercise was the classification of people that is analogous to colonialism, in which all ethnic Somalis, whether born in Kenya or Somalia, were treated as second-class citizens. Human Rights Watch (1990) stated that at least 2,000 Kenyan-Somalis were deported to Somalia, depriving them of their citizenship status and exposing them to the dangers of the Somali civil war.

The effect of the screening cards on the youth was that state agents could easily refuse to issue *kipande* or even screening cards to Somali youth that agents suspected to be from Somalia. Even after the youth acquired *kipandes* and other documents, police often questioned—and disregarded—the genuineness of these documents, sending the *kipande* holders to jail. Not having *kipandes* and screening cards has negative consequences. First, *kipandes* and screening cards are, primarily, symbols of identity and, therefore, the official permission to reside in the country. Additionally, these forms of identification are crucial mechanisms through which to access vital national resources.

As in any other nation, Kenyan youth have to prove their citizenship before being allowed to enjoy the rights of citizens such as being able to enroll in educational institutions or seek employment. Denying young people these essential documents is equivalent to taking away their educational and employment opportunities and rights. Considering these factors, it is no surprise that there is a wide gap between the youth in northeastern Kenya and those in other parts of the country. Furthermore, traveling from the northeastern region to “Kenya proper” involves crossing multiple bridges with barriers. Each of these bridges is defended by armed troops who stop, frisk, and “screen” travelers to Nairobi and other Kenyan cities. An

inability to prove citizenship means that their journey ends halfway before they reach Nairobi, and they are sent to jail.

As described in the preceding section, one's ethnicity is an important indicator of whether one will be able to access national resources such as, in the case of education. However, the situation becomes grimmer when it takes a political turn. According to Alwy and Schech (2004), the underlying cause of unequal access to education has been the patron-client relationship between the ethnic group of the ruling elite and the prevailing Kenyan government. This effectively translates into the fact that if such relationships do not exist, educational opportunities do not materialize. Being one of those groups that have, historically, been bereft of such patrimonialism, northeastern Kenyan youth have been enormously disadvantaged in education.

This staggering lack of education emanates from various factors, not the least being lack of schools, inadequate teachers, and a dearth of necessary resources such as books. Consequently, the lack of education not only denies opportunities to youth but also leaves them out of salient public discourses. Sociopolitical discourses in Kenya are conducted in Swahili and English, two languages that most Kenyans encounter in schools but that are not understood by pastoral northeastern youth engaged with traditional nomadic livelihood. Deficient in the ability to speak, read, or write in these languages, northeastern youth are falling behind in Kenyan academic as well as socio-economic development.

To understand the massive inequalities in Kenya, it is best to reference colonial ordinances, for it is from these ordinances that the present neglect springs. Moreover, the colonial ordinances are a constant inspiration for successive Kenyan governments in regard to how to deal with Somalis. The colonial government systematically denied Somalis education despite their constant petition for schools, while Western education was easily introduced in other parts of Kenya shortly after the introduction of colonialism. This inability to access education does not imply that Somalis shunned schools. In fact, as early as 1931, Kenyan-Somalis from Garissa, particularly the

Abdwaks, petitioned for schools. However, due to prejudices against pastoral communities, these demands were instantly rejected.

Another important factor that led to the inequalities was the fact that nongovernmental and religious institutions were active in non-Somali-inhabited areas, providing schools that educated non-Somali Kenyans. Unfortunately, such educational opportunities were not available to the Somalis (Turton, 1974). Early Christian missionaries founded schools and churches that trained Kenya's earliest elites. Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first prime minister and then president, attended the Church of Scotland Mission, whereas Oginga Odinga, Kenyatta's vice president, was educated at Maseno School, which was built in 1906 by the Church Missionary Society. These institutions could not be created in northeastern Kenya, as the predominantly Muslim population was unappealing to missionaries. Postcolonial Kenya perfected the denial process that the colonial government had established. Currently, the northeastern region boasts few schools, an insufficient number of teachers, and few books, all of which are the ingredients for poor academic performance (Karue & Amukowa, 2013). As Kenya celebrated its fiftieth year of independence in 2013, Abdullahi (2013) describes the pathetic school conditions in the northeastern region as the few schools in the vicinity of towns serve as *clajOSSooms* during the day and livestock *boma* (field) during the night and holidays. The lack of schools, hospitals, and employment opportunities continue to perpetuate the socioeconomic and political gap.

## Youth Options

Options are normally selected from an ensemble of available choices. Whether these choices are positive or negative is immaterial. As pointed out in the literature on African youth, the group has a few primary options such as violence, drugs, or generational conflicts. However, while I raise no objections to the diversity of options that youth can choose, including the aforementioned ones, scholars have not effectively contextualized much about why these options exist for the young people. In this section, I briefly discuss two distinct options

prevalent among the youth of northeastern Kenya: khat and al-Shabab. Based on the historical—and current—marginalization that the Kenyan-Somalis have been consistently subjected to, the two options discussed in this section resulted primarily from lack of meaningful alternatives.

## **Khat**

Though increasingly attracting world attention for reasons connected to the dispersal of its consumers, khat (also known as *miraa* in Kenya) is still largely confined to its traditional cradle of the countries of Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Yemen (Balint et al., 2009; Tulloch et al., 2012). Khat is generally a green, leafy plant that is chewed. The green fluid is swallowed, causing stimulation and hyperactivity. Its consumption is widespread among Kenyan youth, yet a pattern has recently emerged. Despite being grown in the highlands of Kenya's central and eastern regions, specifically around the Meru and Embu districts, Kenyan-Somalis are frequent purchasers and consumers of the product, more so than are other ethnicities (Beckerleg & Sheekh, 2005). Additionally, other East African consumers such as Somalis, among whom khat is popular, are also overwhelmingly Muslim, leading those who study khat consumption trends to attach religious connotations to their studies. Some examples include "Muslim drug" (Carrier, 2008) and "Flower of Paradise" (Kennedy, 1987).

There is little disagreement regarding whether khat is a drug (Beckerleg, 2006). Because khat has been designated a drug, it presents a potentially major health risk even though the symptoms do not appear immediately following consumption. Instead, as with cigarettes and other drugs whose malicious effects take a long time to mature, khat-related diseases occur following long-term, consistent use. Effects include hallucination, addiction, inactivity, and teeth yellowing. A Mayo Clinic study revealed that "khat chewers were more likely to die after ACS (acute coronary syndrome) and more likely to develop post-ACS stroke and cardiogenic shock" (Mateen & Cascino, 2011).

In addition, another study that was conducted in Somalia among heavy users linked khat consumption to the development of psychotic symptoms (Odenwald et al. 2005). However, the interesting thing is that khat consumers are cognizant of its potential health risks. Nevertheless, researchers asserted that the short-term stimulation that consumers get from khat tends to outweigh fears of these risks. Balint et al. (2009:605) sum up this paradox: its “stimulating effect (which) causes a certain degree of euphoria” dwarfs avoiding it for fear of contracting the aforementioned diseases.

This growing body of work is pivotal because it opens a small but important window into the vulnerabilities of this segment of the population and the potentially adverse conditions in which khat consumers will eventually find themselves. These conditions are demonstrably frightening for two principal reasons. First, the northeastern region lacks basic health infrastructure to test and determine khat-related diseases. This vast region, with an area of 49,173 sq. miles (127,358 km<sup>2</sup>), has only one referral hospital, which is located in Garissa. Second, even if by miracle the equipment to test for these diseases existed, hospitals, trained staff, or the necessary medication are completely lacking. Moreover, this condition is even direr for youth who have no health-care coverage or the financial wherewithal to seek medical help. Indeed, if the negative effects of khat are not determined early enough or remain untreated, a person could die. Child and youth mortality rates are already high in the region because of malaria, tuberculosis, cholera, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Besides health risks, khat consumption poses socioeconomic and educational challenges. Khat is a social drug that is consumed in groups, meaning that the behavior is easily passed on to new consumers. Khat users acquire a symbolically superior status of “sophistication,” “urbaneness,” or “independence.” Carrier (2005), for instance, observes that youth in Kenya praise khat as *poa*, or “cool,” which exacerbates the already alarming abuse of this drug by the youth. Accordingly, the overwhelming use of khat is attributable to its accessibility and its relative affordability. Considering the youth’s

staggering unemployment rate, khat can be easily abused, which inadvertently leads to social problems. An article that appeared in the *East African Standard* newspaper titled “Miraa Ruining Lives in Garissa” argues that the youth have disproportionately invested what money they could find into purchasing khat, exacerbating the violence, rape, robbery, and drug peddling that already existed (Mohamed, 2009). Subsequently, the focus on acquiring money to buy khat becomes the singular motivation to engage in violence, theft, and robbery.

Closely connected to these social ills, drug-related punishment disfavors poor youth. A study carried out in Kenya showed that 70 percent of inmates at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison came from poor families (Omboto et al., 2013). In a corrupt environment such as Kenya, rich youth can often get away with crimes that the poor cannot. A crucial effect of khat is how it can divert the youth’s attention from constructive engagements. As much as khat is a social drug, it is also an addictive one, and its continual use will almost definitely result in complete devotion. As a result of addiction, young people will neglect other areas of their lives, ones in which their youths’ presence is mandatory, such as education. Instead, prostitution, illiteracy, and dependency become diseases that affect the area because of khat consumption.

## **Al-Shabab**

For more than two decades, the absence of central authority in Somalia has enabled the appearance of powerful, violent non-state actors that have exacerbated an already deleterious internal situation and also contributed to regional insecurity (Menkhaus & Prendergast, 1999). An Arabic term for “the youth,” al-Shabab’s lifeline has primarily been the youth. Over the years, the group has perfected the art of luring the youth by tailoring its message to attract and then recruit them into al-Shabab’s fighting ranks.

Al-Shabab’s efforts at targeting young Somali men and women have only caught Western attention following the return of scores of

Somali youth from the United States and other Western countries to Somalia. The most discussed were the twenty-plus young men who snuck out of Minneapolis in 2009 and found their way back to Somalia. Only after this incident was picked up by the international media did questions begin to arise about the lengths to which al-Shabab could go to recruit its fighting forces or the danger that the group posed to the West. However, lost in these discourses were this group's activities in Somali-inhabited areas of Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti.

Al-Shabab's effectiveness in ensnaring unsuspecting youth follows from a confluence of political deceit and religious indoctrination. Menkhaus (2009) characterizes this feature of al-Shabab, expressing how the group succeeded in mixing its Islamist agenda with sentiments of Somali nationalism when facing Ethiopian forces invading Somalia, thereby creating a strong insurgent group. To its credit, al-Shabab played a decisive role in the eviction of the occupying Ethiopian forces (Gartenstein-Ross, 2009). Nonetheless, this confrontation and eventual ouster of the Ethiopians has served as an additional recruitment tool for al-Shabab. The repeated and illegal Ethiopian invasions allow al-Shabab to persuasively convince the youth that it was not only Somali sovereignty but Islam itself that was at stake. The youth responded to the call and joined the group in large numbers.

Al-Shabab's ease of access to the northeastern youth and the rapid spread of its message have been aided by commonalities in religion, custom, memory, region, and kinship between northeastern Kenya and Somalia. The continual flow of people, ideas, and commerce has intensified this interconnection. Utilizing these human resources along with a reserve of financial and material inducements, al-Shabab found abundantly fertile ground from which to recruit in northeastern Kenya. For instance, the BBC has reported that al-Shabab was offering \$600 monthly stipends in exchange for fighting in Somalia. In a single instance, more than twenty young men were recruited from a Garissa mosque (Cufe, 2010). Other factors that contributed tremendously to the successful recruitment were the

massive youth unemployment, historical government neglect, alienation, and extreme poverty, all of which drove the youth into the waiting arms of al-Shabab.

Al-Shabab has developed an effective, complex web of recruiting strategies (Shin, 2011). Surprisingly, although al-Shabab gives a public persona of being militant and confrontational, it was able to co-opt Kenyan government officials, particularly in the security wing, paving the way for its activities in Garissa and other main cities in northeastern Kenya. An investigation launched following an attack on a bar that killed ten people in Garissa on April 21, 2013 revealed that al-Shabab had infiltrated the police force, bought loyalties within its ranks, and orchestrated a killing extravaganza. The investigators explained that the head of criminal investigations, eleven security chiefs, and a local area chief had been indicted after the disclosure of links with al-Shabab.

Notwithstanding this unabashed collusion with the enemy of the state, the Kenyan government has repeatedly blamed the residents of Garissa and other Somali inhabited towns, for sheltering al-Shabab elements that attacked and killed the people and warning residents to identify the perpetrators or face the wrath of government law enforcement. When no volunteers came forward, the government launched an "operation," which was a massive military offensive that evoked the killings and harassment that the residents had suffered way too frequently. Following this offensive on November 20, 2012, eight people were killed, and fifty others were wounded in Garissa. Moreover, reminiscent of the reviled emergency laws that had been lifted less than five years earlier, the Kenyan army entered homes and schools, searched property, and torched buildings. These harsh experiences that Somalis in Kenya have to live with, especially in this era of al-Shabab, can be summarized in the following manner: "Somalis are beaten, arrested, and bundled into police cars for detention where they languish for days or weeks with no charges ever leveled against them" (Samora, 2013). The terrifying outcome is that the residents do not trust either the government or al-Shabab both of which are feared equally as villains.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this paper, I have attempted to illustrate the challenges that the youth from the northeastern region of Kenya continue to face and the options that have led to such difficult circumstances. In doing so, I tried to revisit the scholarly narratives that have often put African youth into a predetermined set of categories that includes violence, drugs, and generational conflict. However, I have also examined the salience of context in understanding the idiosyncrasy of Somali youth in Kenya and how their uniquely negative experiences have limited their ability to compete in Kenya. To fully address the youth experience, I have traced the historical marginalization of the Somalis that began during the colonial era when Britain treated ethnic Somalis as a problem that needed to be monitored and administered separately. Such administration included the imposition of harsh ordinances that many compared to Apartheid in South Africa. However, upon attaining independence in 1963, the successive postcolonial Kenyan regimes have retained these colonial ordinances and actually made them worse. In addition to prohibitive legislations, there has been constant state violence against ethnic Somalis while the denial of infrastructure such as roads, hospitals, and schools has maintained a wide socio-political and economic gap between Somalis and other Kenyans. Though these oppressive state actions have affected Somalis in general, the youth have been harshly affected. The absence of schools has made meaningful education unattainable for the youth. Without proper education, they are not able to pursue or find meaningful employment, leading them toward poverty. More saliently, the youth are not able to engage themselves in Kenya's socio-political discourses. Because of these reasons, the youth in that part of the world have either fallen prey to drugs such as khat or traveled to Somalia to fight for al-Shabab.

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## The Somali Question

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More than half a century ago, Frantz Fanon made two pivotal observations about cataclysmic convulsions that would engulf Central and Eastern Africa. The first referred to his prescient observation that the African continent resembles a revolver, and Zaire is the trigger (Fanon, 1966 [2005]). His clairvoyant statement eerily prefigures what political commentators have, since the 1990s, characterized as the potential starting point of Africa's First World War (Williams, 2013). After the overthrow of Mobutu Sese Seko, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly known as Zaire) became the site where warring armies from more than four neighboring countries came to battle one another, presumably to defend the legitimate existence of a proxy group in the country. Zimbabwean and Angolan forces were aligned with the regime of Laurent Kabila, while Rwanda and Uganda—the original patrons of Laurent Kabila and his putsch—were now his sworn enemies. Fanon's second observation warned against the ramifications and implications of a Somali-Ethiopian war whose foundation was nationalistic (Fanon, 1969). This warning came with devastating consequences. The resulting political, social, and economic landscape of Somalia compels us to examine the contours of both the centripetal and centrifugal forces that still animate social upheavals. This requires a bold reexamination of analytic categories, and the ability to envision new ones to cope with the new reality. In this essay, I confine myself to the

new reality in the Horn of Africa. I will engage in a comparative analysis by telescoping a panoramic view of regional history. This new telescoping and reality must be understood, not from the vantage point of national disintegration by way of political conflict, but through the perspective that social transformation and migration work as the ultimate engine of social change (Richerson and Boyd, 2008).

### **Horn of Africa in Focus**

On New Year's Eve 1991, the entire Somali state collapsed, and the people of Somalia began the last decade of the twentieth century mourning, instead of celebrating, the onset of a new millennium. To be sure, this kind of political conflict is not confined to Somalia; it remains a significant feature of the region. The Horn of Africa, which encompasses Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda, is one of, if not the most conflict-prone zones in the world. Several interlocking conflict clusters exist in the region. The first involves the long-standing civil strife in South Sudan, which extends into Uganda and Chad. The second centers around the complicated network of conflicts that link Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Kenya (Prendergast and Thomas-Jensen, 2007).

Each country is characterized by complicated and interlocked internal social and economic conflicts. Over the past three decades, every country in the region except Kenya has experienced a context-altering social conflict. Since the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie by the Derge in the early 1970s, Ethiopia has undergone radical social transformations. Once considered a cohesive Christian nation surrounded by an ocean of hostile Muslim populations, Ethiopia's manufactured and official narrative, by the 1970s, rapidly morphed into an internally conflicted nation with multiple identities, voices, and contested narratives. Eritrea's independence honeymoon is on the brink of becoming a nightmare with various ethnic and religious demarcation lines and conflicts. After a protracted civil war, South Sudan seceded from Sudan to become the newest member of the African Union. Within a year of declaring its independence, however,

South Sudan descended into political chaos. Somalia, the supposedly most homogeneous country on the continent, has shown that homogeneity, even if it were empirically true, is not an indication of political stability. Even Kenya, the region's most economically and politically stable country, is facing a legitimization crisis (Habermas, 1973), as are many other countries in the region.

What is more problematic is the apparent inability of much of the scholarship in the region, particularly Somali scholarship, to comprehend and contextualize the ever-expanding violence and the resultant dissolution of the nation-state. This is partly because the outlook of both Somali scholarship and Somali society has generally remained provincial, unable to theoretically and methodologically locate the Somali condition within the larger social, political, and demographic contexts of the region and the world. Somali scholarship suffers from what I consider to be an "ostrich syndrome." By ostrich syndrome, I mean a symptom that some people exhibit or manifest when they are confronted by confounding and conflicting social, political, or controversial issues in their lives. Instead of confronting the issues, such people would rather ignore them or, as ostriches do, bury their head in the sand, hoping that the threat will go away. This is why current Somali scholarship is obsessed with everyday dynamics--Al-Shabab versus the federal government, Clan X versus Clan Y, or which clan now controls which region--rather than discerning the gathering storm of impending social and demographic forces.

My purpose in this essay is to force Somali scholarship out of the ostrich syndrome and compel it to see the effect of regional social and demographic transformations on the social and geographic boundary of *Somaliness*. My argument is that, unless Somalis can subdue the current disintegration of Somalia, the ramparts of the nation as we know them will be severely tested--if not unhinged--by the demographic and economic forces of its neighbors. The purpose here is not to sound a false alarm, but to compel Somali scholars to reflect on relevant comparative and contrastive morphologies of migrations and counter-migrations. This increased awareness would help us to

reassess and gauge the ramifications of the ongoing immigrations and economic and geopolitical tendencies of Ethiopia and Kenya on the social and geographic boundaries of *Somaliness*.

The vexing nature of the political conflict and the legitimization crisis facing the region is most revealed in Somalia. Over the past twenty years, the Somali crisis has been articulated as an immediate conflict between differently named central governments with various groups claiming one form of camouflaged identity or another. This is not surprising because this conflict will mark its twenty-fourth anniversary next year and has taken on many different names. If history is a guide, this stubborn saga may prove to be nothing more than the newest episode of a political soap opera that cinematically kills certain characters and replaces them with new ones so that what actually changes is the naming of the oppositional binary characters rather than the conflict itself.

### **The Dynamics Within**

On the eve of the Somali Civil War in 1991, the conflict, at least on the surface, was between United Somali Congress (USC) versus Siyaad Barre; within a year, it changed to Ali Mahdi versus Aideed. After twenty years and several character changes, we now have the National Federal Government versus Al-Shabab, Ahlu Sunna Wal-Jamaaca, and other self-proclaimed regional states. However, what remains unresolved is how to move the Somali nation away from divisive clans toward a more unified national identity articulated through one or another shared interest. Both Sheikh Aweys Mohamed and Sayyid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan, for example, attempted to transcend Somali clan divisiveness by introducing their own Islamic movements, which were infused with local, clan-based sensibilities. The most revealing example of the Somali attempts to transcend tribalism came during the Siyaad Barre regime. One of Barre's first actions was to "bury tribalism" by burning the tribe in the form of an effigy at pre-organized gatherings in every city and town in Somalia. These burnings dictated that from then onward, tribalism was dead, and any discussion of the idea would not be tolerated. As

with all dictators during the initial phase of solidifying their power, Barre camouflaged his activities under the banner of scientific socialism. He claimed that Somalia will be economically self-sufficient in a decade and that all Somalis will prosper regardless of their clan identity. However, within a few years, it was clear to the average Somali that Barre was engaging in tribalism by recruiting members of his clan and strategically placing them in important political, economic, and military positions.

The Somali inability to transcend tribalism is revealed in Amin Amir's 2006 cartoon, which shows a criminal being dragged by a member of the Islamic Courts Union (AminAmir.com). The Islamic Courts Union representative says, "Behaviors of the old days are no longer acceptable. I will now take you to the Islamic Courts Union's jail." The criminal responds, "Please take me to the court of my clan." A bystander says, "The criminal is correct. Take him to the court of his clan; they are the same anyway" (<http://aminarts.com>). I reference this cartoon not to suggest that the Islamic Courts Union was simply a proxy for clan motives, but to highlight the power of clan identities in informing religious, ideological, and nationalist identities in Somalia. More important, clan identities inform who is and who is not considered an enemy. If the roles of Ethiopia and Kenya over the past few years are examined, one will find that each country was considered as an enemy by one clan and a friend by another. This means that, in Somali clan politics, determinations about whether a country is an external enemy or a friend depends on the prevailing clan power politics and the balance of power between the clans. In the case of the controversy surrounding the supporters of the self-declared Jubbaland and supporters of the recently created state of Southwestern Somalia, Kenya is either a friend or a foe depending on where one's allegiances lie. Also, if one examines Somali Islamic movements, one will find that they encompass diverse outlooks, objectives, and practices as informed by clan, ecological, and subsistence variables, making it difficult to conceive of a movement that can appeal to all Somalis. The reason why Somalis cannot transcend tribalism is that all national and local identities are

conflated with clan identities, making it difficult to tell one from the other.

The inability to start a movement that is able to transcend parochial, clan, or ethnic ontologies is not isolated to the Somali situation. Similar unappreciated and misunderstood complexities are observable in countries throughout the region. This is because the conventional historiography that informed much of the scholarship on the Horn of Africa has been derived from the thesis that the main source of the region's political, social, and economic crises resulted from the colonial demarcation of state boundaries, creating anthropologically blurred social and physical boundaries that are buttressed by neo-colonialism. This kind of scholarship is, of course, not unique to the Horn of Africa, but is a general part of African scholarship.

### **Postcolonial Geopolitical Dynamics**

Over the past fifty years, this scholarship has articulated various African problems as well as identities in terms of resistance to colonialism and structural adjustment problems among other areas. The usage of resistance to colonialism, structural adjustment issues, and postcolonial dictators as the only categories for analyzing the region's social and political realities has created two conceptual problems. First, the focus on resistance has created a condition in which external interventions and international geopolitical interests have been indiscriminately used as the main turning points that supposedly arrested the cultural and historical moments of the region's past. Second, resistance to colonial occupation and postcolonial geopolitical dynamics has created a situation in which each country's population has been portrayed as a homogeneous entity, and the only acknowledged differences and distinctions were because of the colonized and colonizer binary (Cooper, 1994). The point here is not to deny or question the negative effect of European economic and social structures on colonized societies, but to acknowledge that such an ontological position does not speak to contemporary social and political realities in the Horn of Africa. In

other words, the region's social and political contexts are fundamentally different from what they were two decades ago. This kind of historiography cannot account for the fact that the technological, demographic, and social contexts within which the regional social conflicts take place have become complicated. Recent advances in transportation and communication systems have compressed both time and space, creating a condition in which the flow of ideas, social action, and people has been transnationalized so that the traditional hegemony of the nation-state cannot be sustained empirically (Kearney 1995; Basch et al. 1992).

Demographically, the unending conflict in the region has led to an emigration of hundreds of thousands from the region, setting the foundation for a large, influential diaspora in Europe and North America. In addition, the conflict increased the level of migration within and between countries such that each country has a significant number of immigrants from other countries in the region. Underlying these local social difficulties, however, is demographic transformation, which is another transformative variable that has not been accounted for. I will spend the remainder of the paper elaborating on this issue.

### **The Dynamics of Social Transformation and Shifts in Identity**

The idea of social transformation is intended to capture both the demographic and identity shifts that have occurred in the region over the past three decades and explain how these modifications may alter the political and power dynamics of the region. Over the past thirty years, the Horn of Africa has experienced one of its most significant demographic and population transformations in history. Prior to the 1990s, there was minimal migration between countries in the region. Since the Somali Civil War, hundreds of thousands of Somalis have fled to Ethiopia and settled in Addis Ababa and other regions of the country. A significant number of Ethiopians have immigrated to Somalia, particularly to the north and northeast, and Djibouti. When I visited Djibouti few years ago, I realized there was an increasing influx of Ethiopian immigrants in the country. My short visit to Addis

Ababa also confirmed the existence of a significant Somali immigrant population in the city. This is on top of the Somali Ethiopian population in what is officially known as Zone Five, or Kilika Shanaad, which houses about 10 percent of the total Ethiopian population. The number is significantly larger if the Somali immigrant population in Ethiopia is included. Both Djibouti and northern Somalia will likely experience a larger influx of Ethiopian immigrants. If this trend continues, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Somalia will have significant ethnic populations from each side of their national border. Similar trends will appear in Eritrea, Kenya, and Sudan as well. The region will be divided into immigrant sending or destination centers. This pattern may change the complex ethnic dynamics of each country so that the meaning of nationalism will be replaced with one based on economic opportunities.

This demographic transformation is further facilitated by increasing economic interdependency within the region. One clear example of this is the economic relationship between Ethiopia and Djibouti. In 2002, Ethiopia and Djibouti signed an electric power sharing agreement. This project costs more than US\$80 million, including US\$33 million from the African Development Bank and US\$56 million from AfDB Bank Group. The agreement will likely increase the region's economic viability. More important, this project will further interdependence within the region, which will, along with population movement, change its social and political dynamics. The project will result in the economies of Ethiopia and Djibouti being so closely linked that any regional conflict will paralyze both countries and, by extension, Somalia.

One of the most revealing examples of this demographic transformation is found in the United States. Over the past two centuries, the United States has been transformed from a primarily white society with small black and native populations to one with large non-white populations. Current population projections indicate that by 2050, the non-white population will be nearly half of the total population. We already see the social and political consequences of this transformation in the election of President Obama, an idea that

political pundits would not have entertained just a decade ago. If the effect of demography is as important in the Horn of Africa as it is in the United States, the region will experience similar outcomes in the next fifty years or so. This shift will be even more significant given the increasing economic interdependency between the countries of the region, particularly Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Given the current relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Ethiopian economy will become increasingly dependent on Somalia and Djibouti because both countries are natural markets for Ethiopia. Because Ethiopia has the second largest population on the continent, Somalia and Djibouti will remain destinations for Ethiopian immigrants, which will, most likely, reconfigure the demographics of both countries.

The most significant demographic transformations will likely occur in Somalia and Djibouti. Since the Somali-speaking population is the smallest in the region, it will experience the most noticeable social and demographic shifts. Despite its size, the Somali-speaking population represents the most dispersed and most mobile community in the region. The size, mobility, and presence of the Somali population in Ethiopia and Kenya have internal and external implications for Somalia. If the quality of life in Djibouti and Somalia is better than in Ethiopia, which is very likely, Djibouti and Somalia will experience a significant influx of Ethiopians, which will, as I pointed out earlier, transform the ethnic boundaries of *Somaliness*. On the one hand, due to their large numbers in Kenya and Ethiopia, Somalis will influence the political dynamics of both countries. In other words, the Somali-speaking population will play a role in transforming the region's political and identity dynamics.

## **Conclusion**

The Horn of Africa is probably in the midst of its second great migration, one that will parallel or eclipse the sixteenth-century migration that cemented the region's current settlement and identity patterns. Despite the lack of written record, this sixteenth century migration was spearheaded by the so-called great Somali migration waves that pushed the Oromo communities further upward into the

Ethiopian highlands. This migration, which was allegedly stopped by the British colonial administration in the early decades of the twentieth century, is credited with the current identity settlement patterns of the region. The migration of Somali people may have been caused by long droughts and clan warfare. I suspect similar conditions are at play in the region today, except that this time, the migration push may not just come from Somalia, but all sides. The most important component of this modern migration may be the emigration from Ethiopia to Somalia. A new factor in the current migration is the possibility of increased interdependency between Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya, which will simultaneously make economic opportunities, not ethnic identities, into the primary motive of settlement patterns and increase the interdependency of the countries' political and economic structures.

These processes will probably have the greatest effect on Somalia and Djibouti. Because Somalia and Djibouti have two of the smallest populations in the region, significant Ethiopian emigration will certainly increase the ethnic composition and diversity of both Somalia and Djibouti. My purpose is not to suggest that migration and demographic transformations are inherently a problem. To the contrary, it is, in fact, an engine for social change and economic development for the entire region. But my ultimate purpose is to gently force Somali scholarship out of the ostrich syndrome and to embrace the methodological imagination that will allow it to understand the Somali condition from a context increasingly characterized by continuous and dynamic social and demographic transformations.

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**The Politics of Dress in Somali Culture, By  
Heather Marie Akou, Indiana University Press**

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Heather Marie Akou is an associate professor of dress and fashion design at Indiana University at Bloomington. She is a remarkable scholar in the embryonic field of Somali studies, and she has been conducting research on Somali history for more than a decade. Her particular focus is on dress and design. Akou is innovative in her approach to researching the much-neglected theme of dress and design in Somali studies; another interesting aspect of her work is her ability to blend cultural anthropology with cultural history. Akou previously wrote two book chapters on the topic of dress.<sup>1</sup> In her work, she considers dress to include not just clothing, but also hairstyle. Her book is bedecked with historical images and pictures and touches upon Islam, politics, globalization, gender, and refugees.

*The Politics of Dress in Somali Culture* contains six chapters, an appendix, a glossary, notes and a comprehensive bibliography. This is the first book of its kind in nearly thirty years; it was preceded by an edited book on Somali culture that was published in 1986.<sup>2</sup> Akou's first chapter sets the stage for the study, providing an introduction to Somali society, conceptualizing the concept of dress, and justifying the importance of the book. Chapter 2 reviews Somali history prior to the nineteenth century. Sources from this era are very slim, and Akou

does not delve into collecting Somali sources, although she does employ European travelers' accounts. She identifies some hints about and changes in pre-colonial Somali dress. While Akou recognizes the differences of cultures, customs, and traditions in North and South Somalia, she could have explored this aspect further by scrutinizing the Banaadiri traditional coastal dress and how it was exported to Egypt and as far as Maldives. In pre-colonial Somalia, Arab dress was the norm in urban coastal areas, though it was soon replaced by colonial clothing.

Chapter 3 traces Somali dress from the turn of the nineteenth century to World War II, the epoch of the clash of civilizations. This was an important period in relation to the subsequent occurrences that shook the Somali territories. Dress transformation—or cloth revolution—occurred after the British occupied Aden in 1839. The nomad Somalis who lived in the northwest and northeast encountered traders from India and inner Arabia and bought dress items that differed from their usual goatskin apparel. Somalis in the north depended mainly on trade with southern Yemen, while trade in the south hinged largely on Zanzibar. One of the magnificent changes that occurred in the Somali territories following the encroachment of colonialism involved the traditional mode of Somali dress in both urban and rural areas.

Akou provides comparative links between eastern and central African cultures as well as Arabian cultures. She notes that the nomad Somalis were cognizant of fashion and dress styles in the nineteenth century and loved colourful garments. Colonial configuration differed depending upon which Somali territory one studies, but “Somalis were far ahead of their time when it came to borrowing items of dress from other cultures” (Akou, 2011:4). Almost every European explorer and traveler noted the generosity of Somali nomads. From Burton and Bricchetti to Paulitschke and Peel, most Europeans gave the nomads presents of *Merikani* (white cotton fabric made in Britain and the United States). When wrapped up, the *Merikani*—not to be confused with Marikani of Mali and of South

Africa—“conveys a strong sense of Somali nomadic identity” (Akou, 2011:1). The popularity of *Merikani* among the nomad Somalis caused Indian manufactures in British-controlled Bombay to label their products as “Country American,” the equivalent of the modern “Made in America” label.

Colonialism altered the traditional Somali way of dress. Colonial powers compelled Somalis to accept all things colonial; for instance, the white uniform (with the neatly buttoned jacket and long trousers) was a semblance of colonial rule because the sleek white fabric signified colonial wealth. In the 1950s and 1960s, prior to their independence, Somalis became westernized and accepted colonial statecraft. To be modern, Somalis had to mimic the colonial modernity. The post-colonial era saw more modification because the outlook of those Somalis who replaced colonial authorities was influenced by the colonial legacy. Of all these Somali regimes, the most secularized was the clano-military dictatorship (1969–1991), which oversaw considerable changes to the form and meaning of dress through army auxiliaries and *guulwadeyaal* (victory bearers).

Chapter 4, “Dressing the Nation,” describes the era of dress from 1945 to 1991. Akou briefly studies the period prior to 1969; this portion of the history of dress is allotted less than seven pages. The author focuses more on the clano-military regime that oversaw the dissolution and disbanding of the Somali state. Chapter 5 discusses dress at the time of “extreme change.” As the idea of the Somali nation disintegrated, the notion of national dress, in the eyes of this reviewer, also collapsed, though Akou does not put it that way. Even though she posits that traditional Somali dress was out of fashion, it still existed in some rural Somali territories. Chapter 6 provides a conclusion about the relevance of history. Akou raises questions hitherto unasked in Somali studies and offers interesting suggestions for further research. For example, how have outside cultures from countries such as Nigeria, India, Indonesia, and Uganda influenced the Somali way of dressing? How are Diasporic Somali youths using the Internet not only to share ideas, but also to refashion their styles

of dress? Akou also asks why Somali women prefer to change the colours of dirac but not guntiino and why jalaabiib or jalbaab, a more protected Islamic outfit for many women, remains more widespread both back home and in diaspora.

Akou suggests that Islam is peripheral and thus emphasizes western rather than Islamic dress, although Islam is central to most Somalis' everyday lives.<sup>3</sup> It has become a custom for many students of Somali society to insist that the influence of Islam on Somali dress occurred after the civil war. Such oft-repeated myths gloss over the impact Islam has had on Somalis through the ages and the number of Somalis who have followed Arabian customs in their dress. Akou is a bit critical of jalaabiib, and she endorses the pre-civil war dress of secular, westernized Somali women. Jalaabiib, a type of Islamic outfit, served as a symbol of relief and resistance to immoral, irreligious rule. Admittedly, Akou recognizes that "Islamic dress is more than just clothing or a 'choice': it represents a stabilizing force in [Somalis'] lives" (p. 100). Nonetheless, she is concerned about "Arabization," which is tantamount, in her opinion, to "Westernization." This is not the case. Somalis share more than faith, culture, custom, and tradition with Arabia—they share blood. A considerable number of Somalis do believe they are descended from Arabs who crossed over into Somalia.

In her lengthy research, Akou finds that Somali society consists not just of those who claim to be proper Somalis, but also of "a fair number of people who [are] non-Somali or partly Somali" (p. 4). She demonstrates how anti-colonial events involving the northern Somalis were different from those of the southern Somalis; ostensibly, these activities occurred no less frequently in the Somali territories in Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya, a point already raised by Lee Cassanelli in his classic study *The Shaping of Somali Society*. This reviewer also wishes that Akou had used Charles Guillain's huge volumes collected in 1846 from southern to northeastern Somali territories; Akou might have gathered from photographs or portraits of his drawings how Somalis on the coast and in the countryside

dressed. There is no doubt that people were clothed in the Banaadiri coastal towns during the fourteenth century following the visit of Ibn Battuta. Sources on Banaadiri cloth-weaving could be found in Iran, Yemen, and other Asian countries, but Akou could not visit overseas archives due to a lack of funding. In addition, she did not travel anywhere in Somalia to carry out research; ideally, she would have pursued her research in Somaliland. Instead, she conducted ethnographic fieldwork among Somali communities in Minnesota combined with extensive archival research at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in the United States, an assiduous undertaking that deserves praise.

Nonetheless, several inaccuracies stand out. In 1949, Somalia was declared to be a UN trusteeship, not “British and Italian Somaliland” (p. xii). Somaliland has never come under a UN trusteeship. Somali did not become “a written language” in 1972 (p. xiii). Instead; it was standardized into a Latin script. Indeed, Sufi religious sheikhs in the nineteenth century used the Somali language written in the Arabic alphabet. The modern textile factory was located not in Mogadishu, but in Bal’ad, a district roughly twenty kilometres outside the capital (p. 80). Former U.S. president George W. Bush shut down Al-Barakaat in November 2001, not 2002.

These minor slip-ups notwithstanding, Akou adds salt to a field where researchers fixate on the contemporary, chaotic, and anarchic conditions stemming from the legacy of the Siad Barre regime. In a nutshell, the book can serve as an introduction to Somali history for a general audience; it is a creative, well-crafted book accessible to both scholars and students and is user-friendly because it is not jargon-heavy.

## **Notes**

1. Heather Marie Akou, “More than Costume History: Dress in Somali Culture,” in *Dress Sense: Emotional and Sensory Experiences of the Body and Clothes*, eds. Donald Clay Johnson and Helen Bradley Foster (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 16–22; and “Nationalism without a

Nation: Understanding the Dress of Somali Women in Minnesota," in *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress*, ed. Jean Allman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, (2004), 50–63.

2. Katheryne S. Loughran et al., *Somalia in World and Image* (Washington, D.C.: Foundation for Cross Cultural Understanding, 1986).
3. For well-researched studies on the salience of Islam in Somali Diaspora, see Rima Berns-McGown, *Muslims in the Diaspora: The Somali Communities of London and Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); and Marja Tiilikainen, "Somali Women and Daily Islam in the Diaspora," *Social Compass*, 50, No. 1 (2003): 59–69. For case studies on Somali diaspora communities, see Abdi M. Kusow and Stephanie R. Bjork, eds., *From Mogadishu to Dixon: The Somali Diaspora in a Global Context* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2007).

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