

FOREWORD

THIS STUDY CONTRIBUTES SIGNIFICANTLY to our understanding not only of Somaliland, but of the predicament of the Somali people as a whole.

Today, they are scattered over what used to be British Somaliland (capital Hargeisa), former Italian Somaliland (capital Mogadishu), former French Somaliland (now Djibouti), Ethiopia (the Ogaden), and Kenya. These are the five fragments they have been split into following the European scramble for Africa in the 19th and early 20th century.

In 1960, amid considerable euphoria, the former British Somaliland united with the former Italian Somaliland to form the Somali Republic. This emerging post-colonial state was widely regarded as the closest an African country could be to a classical nation-state. The new Somali republic was homogeneous in language (almost everybody spoke Somali), homogeneous in religion (almost entirely Muslim), homogeneous in political culture (based on a system of clans), and almost homogeneous in economic lifestyle (mainly pastoralist, but reinforced by fishing along the coast).

In the course of this study, we retrace some of the steps taken by Somalia during the first 30 years of independence (1960 to 1990). The earliest years promised the evolution of a pastoral democracy. Somalia was close to being the most open society in postcolonial Africa. There were high levels of political participation, open debates, and impressive political eloquence in the emerging parliamentary culture.

Against such a background, it would have been tempting to study the Somali story not as a case of nation-building but as one of national demolition, not as a case of political development but as one of political decay. Part of the originality of Iqbal Jhazbhay's approach has been to transform this agenda. Instead of focusing on the disintegration of the Somali Republic, he has turned his attention to the resilience of Somaliland, which pulled out of the union in 1991. The Somali Republic can be studied as a case of national disintegration, but Jhazbhay draws lessons from the experience of Somaliland as a case of national integration. The wider Somalia illustrates political decay, while Somaliland is an experiment in political development – what Jhazbhay calls a 'bottom-up approach to nation-building'.

Because of high levels of poverty among people such as the Somali, social scientists have often been drawn to political interpretations based on economic

causality – indeed, some scholars studying developing countries have been drawn to neo-Marxist forms of economic determinism. Jhazbhay has resisted the lure of economic explanations. He has opted instead for the primacy of culture as the central determinant of Somali behaviour. Thus he regards the main social forces at work among the Somali as ‘culturally rooted, and internally driven’.

The pre-colonial legacy inherited by all Somali people was a culture of rules rather than rulers. According to scholars, before Europeans arrived, Somali society was one of ‘ordered anarchy’. Governance was ultimately based not on a state’s monopoly of physical force but on consensus-building within and among clans. There were no kings, sultans or emirs.

The imposition of European colonial rule interrupted the tradition of ‘ordered anarchy’. Nascent statehood was initiated. The colonial state certainly insisted on a monopoly of physical force. When the British and Italians departed, and their two former Somali colonies united into one republic, there was, for a while, ‘order’ without the ‘anarchy’. This stable ‘order’ was soon undermined by what Jhazbhay calls ‘the interplay of internal and external forces’. Mogadishu and its surroundings became increasingly militarized. The pre-colonial tradition of consensus-building within and among clans was rapidly eroded. For a while, the Somali people experienced not ‘ordered anarchy’ but ‘ordered tyranny’, especially under Siad Barre. But the element of ‘ordered’ declined, and was replaced by ‘tyranny and disorder’.

The situation was exacerbated by the ‘interplay between internal and external forces’ during the Cold War. While the United States and Soviet Union competed for the allegiance of Mogadishu, consensus within and among clans was increasingly undermined. Tension between the clans of former British Somaliland and those of former Italian Somaliland escalated, and Puntland was caught in the crossfire. In the course of the 1980s the Somali Republic descended into chaos – a condition of post-colonial anarchy without pre-colonial order.

Jhazbhay takes us through the different stages of resistance, collapse, and conflict – illustrating what Ahmed Yusuf Farah has described as a ‘culture of locally based reconciliation-processing’.

After Northern Somalia’s withdrawal from the Union in 1991, the Horn of Africa experienced ‘A Tale of Two Somalias’. The Somalia of Mogadishu continued to be a case of anarchy without order, while the Somalia of Hargeisa was gathering momentum as a case of ‘bottom-up nation-building’, rooted in culture and energized from within.

To what extent were the differences between the Somalia of Mogadishu (chaotic) and the Somalia of Hargeisa (relatively stable) due to the differences

between their former imperial powers (Italy and Britain)? Was the Italian legacy part of the explanation for Mogadishu's chaos? Was the British legacy part of the explanation for the relative stability of the Somalia of Hargeisa? Jhazbhay does not buy such a simplistic explanation; instead, he ascribes the relative stability of Hargeisa to 'the efficacy of Africa's approach to bottom-up nation-building'.

Some Somali analysts in Hargeisa regard the British legacy as relevant for relative stability, and the Italian impact as contributory to chaos. But this was not because British political culture in the United Kingdom was more stable than Italian political culture in Rome. Hargeisa analysts have argued to me that British rule interfered less with indigenous clan culture in Hargeisa than Italian assimilationist pretensions had done in Mogadishu. British rule had therefore been less culturally intrusive than Italian imperial rule.

Jhazbhay has not tapped these issues of comparative colonial policy as much as he might have done. But he does allow for their relevance in 'balancing tradition with modernity', and in 'comparative elite formation' under different colonial powers.

The Somali have a love--hate relationship with the Arabs, but a great commitment to Islam. I am delighted that Jhazbhay found my concept of 'Afrabia' useful in the Somali context. He is also fascinating on what he describes as 'the Global Islamic Civil War' in relation to the 'War on Terror'. Although the Somalia of Hargeisa has been less fundamentally affected by the politics of Islamism and Al-Qaeda than the Somalia of Mogadishu, Jhazbhay has confronted these issues of radicalized Islam frontally. These are forces affecting all Somali in one way or another.

Jhazbhay's study of the people of Hargeisa sometimes comes close to being a case of participant observation in the tradition of British social anthropology. He has conducted wide-ranging interviews both within Somaliland and outside, and socialized with the people to get to know them better. He has also agonized with them about the stressful politics of international recognition. Hargeisa people have often complained that the international community is ready to spend millions of dollars on Mogadishu because it is chaotic, rather than spending any money at all on Hargeisa, precisely because it is stable. The international community is less interested in investing in the nation-building of Hargeisa than in the explosive tumult of Mogadishu. Jhazbhay has sympathized with these lamentations.

This study contributes significantly to our understanding of the Horn of Africa in the context of wider international forces. It also contributes to a number of different theoretical concerns – ranging from the role of culture in nation-building to the emerging forces of radical Islam, and from the nature of post-war

reconstruction to the dilemmas between self-determination and regional integration. We salute it as a major scholarly success.

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10 March 2009