

Destiny Worse than Artificial Borders in Africa: Somali Elite Politics¹

Abdi Ismail Samatar

I. Introduction

Much political and scholarly energy has been spent in understanding the nature and impacts of political boundaries on African development and public life. The standard argument by many anticolonial groups is that the Berlin Conference that instigated the European scramble for Africa in the 19th century paid no attention to the geography of African livelihood experiences.² Drawing boundaries engulfing territories claimed by various Europeans was arbitrary, and the legacy of their existence has caused much grief in the continent.³ It is a fact that colonial boundaries in Africa were artificial, but it is also the case that all political boundaries nearly everywhere are not natural.

Most of these studies underscore how artificial colonial borders segmented communities that shared economic, ecological and cultural resources. In some cases, these boundaries have been the “cause” of inter-state conflicts between post-colonial countries, i.e., Ethiopia and Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia; Kenya and Somalia; Algeria and Morocco; Libya and Chad. But other equally artificial borders in the continent have not incited similar conflagrations despite fragmenting cultural, religious and ethnic groups, such as the Massai of Kenya and Tanzania, and the many communities that straddle along the borders of South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Namibia, etc. An unexplored question that demands urgent attention is why conflicts develop over some borders and not over others in different parts of the continent.⁴ As important as this question is, this paper examines a related but

different issue: the ways in which the political and economic systems that colonial powers designed and imposed on Africa instigated processes that have generated social and political discord, which has led to different types of conflicts *within* countries.⁵ Such conflicts have forestalled the flourishing of civic culture and an accountable system of government in the continent.⁶

African elites' self-serving political economic behavior has reified the colonial system of governance and consequently produced acrimonious internal divisions that appear to be even more destructive than those artificial international borders. African and Africanist scholars have broached the ways in which ethnicity as a cultural feature was transformed into state-driven political identity to facilitate the colonial agenda of "divide and rule."⁷ Deepening political ethnicity and the associated regime of accumulation and underdevelopment in the post colony have exacerbated political cleavages in ways that colonial masters and the architects of apartheid could only have fantasized about. Political divisions induced this way call for a critical examination of elite driven processes that are generating nasty borders within countries. Further, political ethnicity has created opportunities, as Berman has pointed out, for the political and economic elite to hoodwink the underclass in their communities to support the former's schema regardless of the fact this agenda has had dire consequences for the poor:

For ordinary people the central problem lies in their day-to-day contacts with local authorities and agents of the state where they cannot expect disinterested competence and fairness. Instead, they expect and mostly get incompetence, bias, venality and corruption. So long as this persists, they cannot develop the critical relations of trust in their dealings with the state, and will continue to rely on the personalized, protective ties of *clientalism*. Without displacement of decentralized despotism ... limitation on the opportunities for accumulation and patronage through the state apparatus, and effective accommodation of the reality of ethnic pluralism in formal political institutions, there can be little hope of fundamental change moving more clearly towards *modernity*.⁸ [emphasis added]

Without buying into Berman's profoundly pessimistic proposition, and particularly his assumption that the systems he describes are not "modern,"⁹ it is difficult to disagree with the broader analysis he and other scholars have laid out regarding the transformation of the relations between accumulation, the state, and political ethnicity. The original traps set up by the European colonialist have been adopted, reinforced, and deepened by the elite as two of Africa's eminent novelists, the Ghanaian Armah and Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o,¹⁰ so painfully portrayed in their respective novels, "The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born," and "The Devil on the Cross." The political and economic strategy of members of the post-colonial elite has been to use public authority as the means to prolong their grip on power in order to enhance their accumulation of wealth. In so doing, they use political ethnicity and patronage politics to maintain sufficient followings among the population. Such a strategy has impeded the development of civic bonds among ethnic communities that could challenge the established order and foster trust-based relationship between government and the population. Consequently, elite centered politics has produced a whole new set of boundaries (political, cultural, spatial, and economic) that have undermined the very foundation of the nationalist project and the essence of liberation even among the most ethnically homogenous countries.

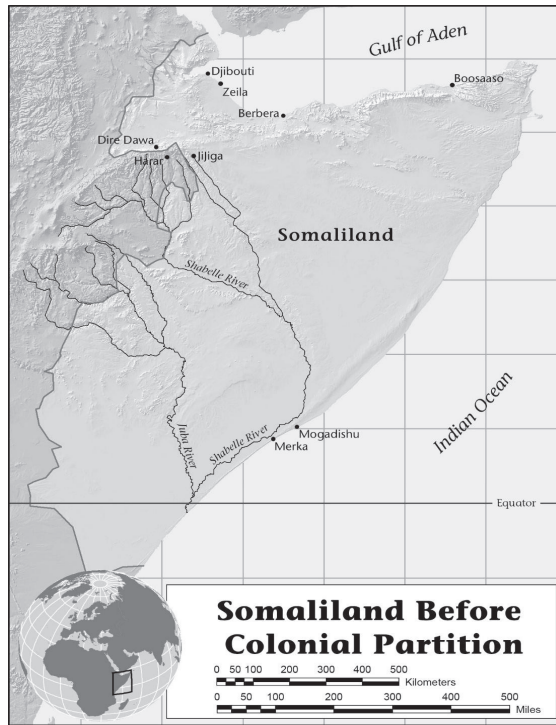
This essay demonstrates the ways in which colonial strategies of divide and rule in one particular African country, Somalia – arguably the continent's culturally most homogenous country – were resuscitated and strengthened by victorious factions of the political elite. Their political practice created social fissure that has induced the proliferation of internal boundaries that are pushing the country into an ever deeper and absurd fragmentation. This condition continues to alienate communities from each other on genealogical basis despite the glaring fact that the population's economic, social, cultural, and political interests are almost identical.

II. Origins of Borders in the Land of the Somalis

Somalia (meaning the Somali Republic) has gone through multi-dimensional political, economic, and cultural mutations over the last three decades due to the searing violence that has afflicted nearly all parts of the country. These bloody maneuvers have shaped the political-economic order of the country in ways that would have been unimaginable before the national government collapsed in 1991.¹¹ Among the many consequences of the catastrophic civil war is a re-imagining of the relations between politics and culture in the minds of the political class, while the vast majority of the population remains disenfranchised. Such a vision has turned the original political dream of Somalia inside out and created internal borders leading to the formation of a new “tribal federalism.” The rest of the paper narrates the political dynamics that produced ethnic federalism, ascertains the potential consequences of such a system for the Somali people, and reflects on what this means for the study of borders in Africa.

The social and political organization of pre-colonial Somali society was less hierarchical than most societies in this region of Africa, such as Ethiopia. In the main, there were no chiefly traditions where authority rested on the direct or indirect alienation of land or livestock – the economic base of society. The basic social unit was the extended household, which had relatively unimpeded access, use, and control of grazing and farming land, as well as water resources. Livestock was ‘owned’ by the household and the harsh and semi-arid environment induced households to cooperate in herding livestock together, developing and maintaining water wells, managing and exploring the rangelands, and circulating livestock to wider kin groups in order to minimize the deleterious impacts of ecological perturbations. As such, the geography of Somalis’ pre-colonial order had ecological zones (and no hard political boundaries) as was the case in many parts of the continent.¹² Hence, the Somali landscape was a wide-open territory with grazing and cultivation zones, which were accessible to all community members except during times of exceptional circumstances. Map 1 depicts the extent of Somali territory without internal borders in the pre-colonial era.

Map 1: Land of Somalis Before Colonial Partition



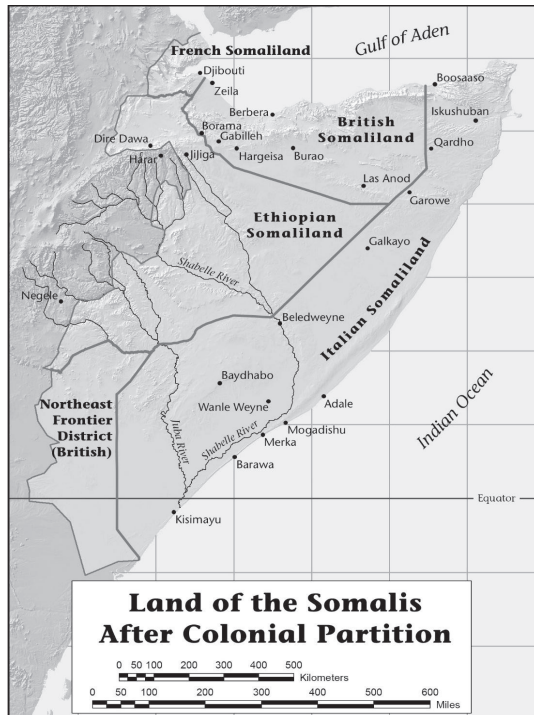
Despite the open nature of the Somali commons, the culture exhibited three features of inequality. First, the distribution of the livestock herd among the community was determined by the managerial skills, luck, and location of a household in the network of exchange and position in the family cycle. Second, patriarchy was a major defining feature of the cultural, economic, and political life in Somali society. Women and girls had less freedom of movement as well as control of livestock and other resources. Third, older men occupied the pinnacle of the social ladder and had significant command over the endowment of the household as well as the fortunes of their sons and daughters. Consequently, adult men constituted the elders and decision-makers of the community.¹³ Although this social order was hierarchically gendered and age-based, the rule of the elders was democratic in nature and their edicts could only be enforced through social sanctions in the absence of established police and other coercive tools of a state. The elders, then, had much less direct authority over the community and individuals than the more stratified chiefdoms and monarchs elsewhere in the East Africa region, such as Uganda.

The pre-colonial households and network-based economic system was an integral part of the larger political and moral order. This system was bounded by the older tenets of kinship ethics and the guidelines of the Islamic faith. Kinship had two constituent elements. These were the customary law known as Xeer and the ties that were a product of genealogy (Tol) or marriage (Xidid). Xeer was the Somali-wide social contract that governed communal and individual codes of conduct. The Xeer and teachings of Islam superseded the potential divisiveness of male genealogy (Tol). Furthermore, the web of relationships created by intermarriage (Xidid) reinforced the community-wide spirit of Xeer and Islam and thus blunted the fissures sometimes triggered by narrow genealogical calculations.¹⁴ The household, Islam, and the kin-based political economic and moral order of pre-colonial Somalis did not prevent conflicts between communities, but it certainly precluded prolonged hostilities driven by 'tribal' chauvinism. In this era, then, there were no hard boundaries that forbade trespassing, and even the limits of Somali territory gave way to transitional zones to their Afar and Oromo neighbors in what is contemporary Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya.¹⁵

This tradition went through radical metamorphosis as the land of the Somalis came under colonial occupation in the 1880s which engendered the formation of political boundaries slicing their land into five colonial segments: British Somaliland, French Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, Ethiopian Somaliland, and the Northern Frontier Districts of the Kenya colony.¹⁶ Thus, with the mere stroke of the pen Somalis from one region became foreigners in other parts of their old territory (Map 2). These administrations instituted genealogical elders as tribal chiefs who then became vassals of their respective administration.¹⁷ The primary role of the Aqils (chiefs) was to be a hyphen between the state and the 'tribesmen.' But Somali chieftains lacked an autonomous and legitimate political base as they did not possess resources of their own and consequently depended on the colonial state. In effect, the chiefs acted as the employees of the state and rarely challenged the dictates of their employer in any significant way.¹⁸ Somali chiefs became a central cog to the colonial order. Their ability to command some respect and authority among the Somali people was contingent on: (a) the few favors they extracted from the administration to distribute to the community, and (b) their capacity to call on the coercive power of the state to discipline those natives who transgressed chiefly authority. Notwithstanding such weakness, colonial chieftainship in the Somalilands had fundamental impacts that vastly exceeded its material and

moral deficiencies. The constellation of the colonial state, colonial chiefs, tribalization of the moral and political order, and slow commercialization of the pastoral and peasant economy transformed the very nature of Somali social order. First, the onset of the colonial state as the center of political authority created at once a unifying and divisive pan-Somali bureaucratic authoritarian structure. This entailed the formation of a forum, with a somewhat colonial imprint, for discussing Somali-wide issues that enabled various elements of Somali society to overcome their relative isolation from one another.¹⁹ Second, this new context significantly diminished the vitality of the kinship-Islamic based moral order, and the establishment of Italian and British colonial systems not only superseded old traditional identities, but also generated parochial mentalities and petty conflicts within the new circumstances. For example, the 'legal' prerequisite for any individual Somali to be a legitimate subject of the new order was membership in a 'tribal' group under the leadership of a chief. This novel political hierarchy composed of subject, tribe, chief, and colonial administration created identities undergirded by a supportive incentive and authority system.²⁰

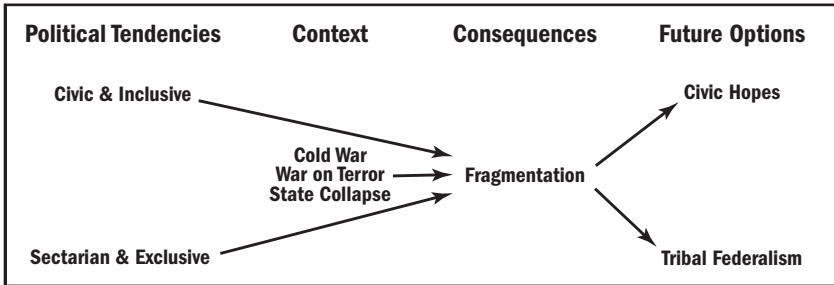
Map 2: Land of the Somalis After Colonial Partition



Unlike the old communal arrangements in which the elders did not control a coercive machine or wield economic clout over the community, the imposition of colonialism on the Somali removed the *major social means of restraining those in position of authority*. Third, while engaged in the process of reinventing or modernizing tradition, the colonial state also induced commoditization of the basic sources and social restructuring. On the economic front, livestock and other resources of subsistence gained monetary value and became objects of trade and accumulation. Moreover, this process produced new social groups, such as merchants, other elements of the growing urban population, and employees of the state. These groups, particularly the merchants and state employees, least encumbered by the old folkways, found access to relatively secure and independent means of livelihoods. Such development had positive and negative consequences, including a gradual emergence of relations between many members of this group regarding their pan-Somali interests. As the intensity of their contact grew, it facilitated the development of a shared and modern Somali identity that challenged the tribal thrust of the colonial project.²¹

The British and Italian colonial states in the two territories did not draw administrative boundaries within each territory along tribal lines due to the significant intermingling of various genealogical groups. For example, in British Somaliland the six districts of Burao, Erigavo, Berbera, Hargeisa, Borama, and Las Anood did not reflect any established 'tribal' divisions, as none had any traditional moorings. Instead, all the districts were named after the major towns in each unit. It is instructive to compare this to Botswana where districts were named after ethnic groups. In Italian Somaliland, the pattern was similar, even with the seeming exception of Majeertinia.²² Thus, the colonial project set in motion contradictory social, economic and political forces that concurrently emphasized tribalism and nationalism, and subsistence and commercialization. It seems, in hindsight, that these forces morphed into two competing political tendencies in the post-colonial republic as shown in Figure 1. One of these proclivities emphasized Somali-wide ideas, identity, and systematic pursuit of national objectives, while the second was steeped in insular and sectarian interests without much regard for the larger community.

Figure 1: Political Tendencies in Somalia

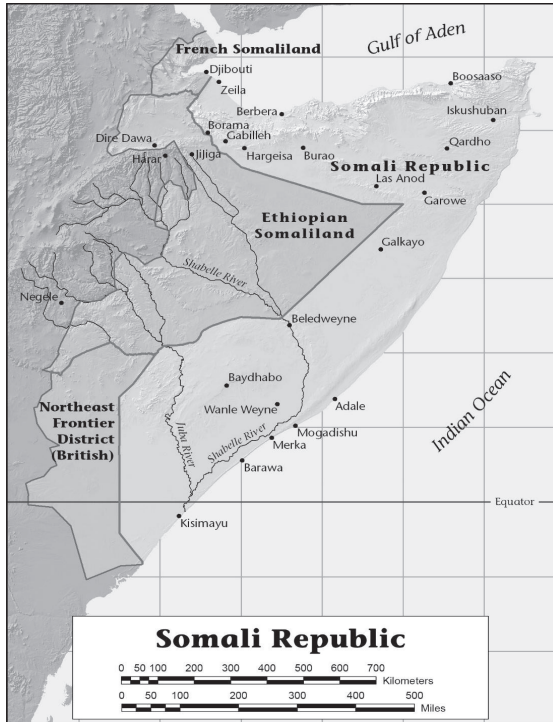


The contradiction between inclusive versus the insular/tribalist trajectories was embedded in the fabric of the late colonial period. Which scenario prevailed essentially depended on the way in which political conflicts among the new Somali elite were resolved and how its leadership managed public affairs. As a matter of fact, the fault-line of future struggles could be observed in the first legislative elections in British Somaliland. First, although a tribalist element was present in the political process and to some degree in the main political party in the Protectorate, the Somali National League (SNL), others such as National United Front (NUF), United Somali Party (USP), and the Somali Youth League (SYL) were arguing for a more inclusive agenda. This division was apparent from the results of the legislative election. Among the individuals elected to the legislative council in Hargeisa, the center of the SNL, were two ‘Ogaden and Tumul kinsmen.’ If genealogical identity was significant in the election, then, neither candidate had any chance of winning, as their kin-groups were, at best, statistically insignificant minorities.²³ The second issue that signaled that myopic forces were not ascendant was the fact that the Protectorate Legislative Council voted to send a mission to Mogadishu with the mandate to negotiate with leaders in Italian Somaliland for the unification of the two Somali lands.

The social organization of the elite and the quality of its leadership played a central role in shaping dominant scenarios in independent Somalia. Culturally and religiously, the Somali elite is homogenous with differences mostly in local habits and dialects-cum accent in the language. Such widely shared cultural values provided a potential basis for a Somali-wide agenda. Thus, the transfer of parts of British Somaliland to Ethiopia by the British in the mid-1950s breathed life into the inert nationalist spirit in the Protectorate. The anti-colonial

movement, which this event induced sufficiently, galvanized the public and gave momentum to the civic propensity of the Somali body politic. This process and heightened decolonization activities in the Trusteeship territory generated sufficient nationalist energy to lead to the unification of two Somalilands (Map 3).

Map 3: Unification of British & Italian Somalilands



III. Regionalism in the Democratic Era

The ascendant nationalist movement that culminated in independence and unification, the intense fervor that accompanied it and the social unity that it signaled were palpable. However, the longevity of this current was susceptible to the divisive and sectarian tendencies also embedded in colonial Somali society. Somalia's elite, which consisted of merchants, bureaucrats, and politicians, was an unstable social stratum. The brevity of its individual and collective social experience and the shallowness of its material base, both as individuals and as a cohort, compounded their vulnerability and acute intra-group rivalry. Most members of this class's insecurity immeasurably added to the internal incoherence of the group and absence of relatively lasting consensus about the collective national project. Such conditions obviated the emergence of legitimate and stable leadership that could ensure discipline amongst them. The internal structure and dynamics of the elite generated a vicious survivalist undertow that triggered an opportunistic agenda over the systematic interest of the elite as a "class for itself." This posture predisposed a majority of the elite to be small-minded in their strategy that, in turn, dovetailed with the partisan and tribalist paradigm inherited from the colonial period. The confluence of individualistic and sectarian tendencies molded a volatile political and economic environment in which most political leaders felt insecure in their tenure at the top of the hierarchy and attempted to exploit it while in command. This was further exaggerated by the fact that the majority of those individuals in strategic positions of leadership were not willing to take the risk of standing up against the survivalist stampede. High anxieties of self-interest became intimidatingly real, as most of these leaders had neither the resources nor the skills to maintain their standard of living in the event that they forfeited their official position. Africa's first post-colonial leader to leave office peacefully and democratically summed up the unseemly behavior of these actors:

... I am told that our country is unfortunate with the irresponsible behavior of many of its men, who continue to see the problems of the country only in terms of their own interests and how it can further that concern. ... The same old trick, ever since 1959, is repeated today ..., and therefore it is clear that they do not grow up! God save Somalis from the starving beasts in human form that are the supposed 'representatives of the people.'²⁴

The parochialism of this tendency and hyper-insecurity of politicians reinforced each other and created a schismatic and destructive alliance. Such an alliance did not immediately ride rough shod over the civic nationalist group and tendency in the immediate post-independence period. Yet, Somalia’s political and social profiles over the last fifty years display the tug-of-war between these two perspectives and their correlated political forces. Table 1 summarizes the different phases of this struggle between the civics and their nemeses.²⁵ The fleeting civic spirit of the immediate post-colonial moment provided some initial basis for the articulation of a precarious collective project. The only other, and equally brief, period of civic consensus among the elite came with the first few years of the military order.

Table 1: Struggle among the Political Elite

Regime	Elite Unity	Conscious leaders	Legitimacy	Clarity of strategy	Institution building
1960-64	High	Low/high	High	Yes	Yes: integration
1964-67	Medium	High	High	Yes	Yes: civil service reform
1967-69	Low	Low	High/low	No	No
1969-77	High	Low	High	Yes	No
1977-91	Low	Low	Low	No	No
1991-	No	No	No	No	No

Harmony among the elite in these periods (1960-67 and 1969-77) was a product of (a) the euphoric effects of independence and the absence of previous conflicts among the elite at the national level; and (b) the overthrow of the utterly corrupt and despised civilian government in 1969. The period immediately after independence coincided with the first regime of President Aden A. Osman and his prime ministers Abdirashid A. Sharmarke and Abdirazak H. Hussien. The latter two were heads of government and as such directed its operations. While the regime faced some opposition, it enjoyed a high degree of legitimacy and popular support. However, the seeming consensus within

the regime concealed serious differences between the President and the first Prime Minister. Still, both of them and their partners were committed to not expanding the administrative burden on the country and kept their focus on integration.²⁶ President Osman did not fire the Prime Minister Sharmarke once their political differences became clear, but waited until the strategic time after the 1964 national parliamentary election. He acted this way to avoid destabilizing the functioning of the government and reifying emerging political factions.²⁷ The election marked a watershed in the political annals of the country; it exposed the ascendancy and strength of the sectarian forces, as well as the attempt by civic nationalists to resist the onslaught by the former. Political parties who fielded candidates in the election grew to 24 in number. However, only four parties won seats in parliament. President Osman decided to shift the debate by nominating Abdirazak H. Hussen as Prime Minister. Once confirmed, Hussen and his government pursued an activist and transformative civic agenda that shook the political landscape in the country. Three qualities distinguished the new government from its predecessor. First, members of the new cabinet were appointed mainly on the basis of their professional skills. Second, a significant number of key portfolios went to northerners breaching the regionalist political divides in the country. Third, the government adopted far-reaching civil service reforms, which shocked the foundation of the bureaucratic elite. This progressive civic agenda lasted for three and half years.

In spite of the strong agreement between the President, the new PM, and the cabinet, many deputies were opposed to the civic agenda as it constrained license to abuse public resources. The latter group fixed their sights on the presidential election of 1967 and saw it as the opportunity to defeat the civic program. Their tactic was to rally around former PM Sharmarke, who had his own ambition to replace President Osman. Sharmarke immediately promised, if elected, the premiership to another major political figure: Egal. This coalition inaugurated levels of corruption never seen before – offers of cash and ministerial portfolios were made to MPs to win their votes. The Sharmarke/Egal approach worked and President Osman and his team were defeated by a handful of votes in 1967.²⁸

President Sharmarke and Premier Egal understood the volatility of the political and electoral process. Consequently, they started planning for the 1969 parliamentary election. Political members of the elite failed to be united by anything except their own proclivity to trade

off any public resource for private gain. Government leaders, having fueled this tendency during the presidential election, knew the only way that they could maintain some control was to appeal to the material interests of each individual MP and, thus, tantalized them with rewards and promises. It quickly became apparent to the public that the Sharmarke-Egal government was swiftly and conspicuously becoming corrupt.²⁹ This set in motion a precipitous decline in popular legitimacy. Furthermore, its hold on power became dependent on attending to the 'personalist' welfare of MPs. This exercise so thoroughly absorbed the government's attention that little else was done during the period between the 1967 presidential and the 1969 parliamentary elections. Though the regime did not directly dismantle the Civil Service reform enacted by the Hussen government, it simply let it wither on the vine. In the end, the systematic and institutionalized campaign against corruption and incompetence also became a thing of the past. The competition for parliamentary seats in the 1969 election proved that the sectarian and tribalist factions of the elite had gained the upper hand. The ideals and the strategy of the nationalist wing of the political elite were battered and lay in ruins. As a measure of the flea market-like ambience and level of political disarray, 61 political parties competed for 123 seats. All but one of the "opposition parties" that won 50 seats quickly and voluntarily joined the governing SYL party. Only former Premier Hussen and his party retained the status of opposition. Somalia became the first contemporary African country in which a democratically elected opposition decided to unite with the ruling party to create a "one" party state. Despite the proliferation of political parties and candidates for parliament, the growth in corruption in the public sector and the deterioration of professionalism in the civil service, the Sharmarke-Egal regime share one notable characteristic with Somalia's pioneering democrats: notwithstanding tremendous political pressure on these governments to placate followers by expanding administrative portfolios and create make-believe jobs, they resisted further inflation of the country's regional administrative units. Thus, Somalia retained its original eight administrative regions until the early 1980s (Map 4).

Seven months after the parliamentary election, and spurred by the assassination of the President by a member of his own police guard, the military staged a coup. The public enthusiastically welcomed the change. Initially, the leaders of the military regime seemed representative of a cross section of the country. They established more schools in all parts of the country, created the Somali National University, and much needed infrastructure building was undertaken. These accomplishments received enormous public elation and the junta's legitimacy was further enhanced by the effective way it dealt with the devastating drought of 1975-4-5, and the adoption of orthography for the, until then oral, Somali language.³⁰

Map 4: Regional Administrative Region

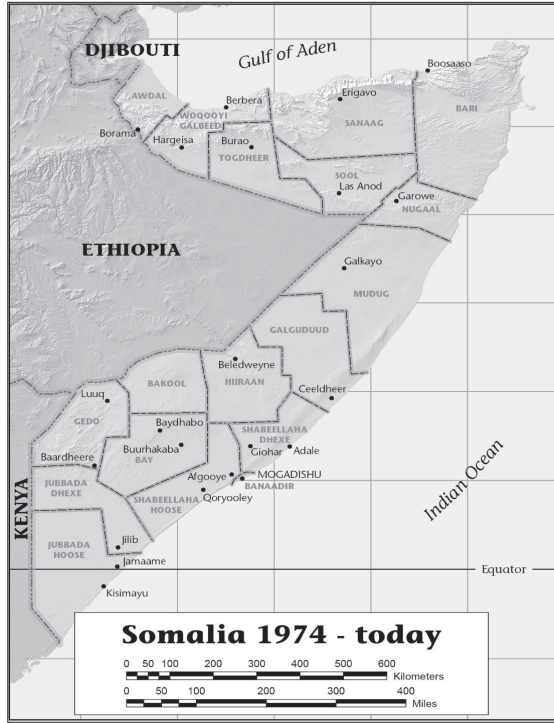


IV. Military Dictatorship & Proliferation of Internal Boundaries

Public support for these development initiatives and the enveloping general civic mobilization were reminiscent of the halcyon days of independence. But, by the middle of the 1970s, as Ahmed Samatar had written, telling cracks appeared between the regime's rhetorical claims and the realities on the ground.³¹ First, the leader, General Siyad Barre, began to sideline his colleagues and to appoint friends and relatives to strategic positions in the armed forces. Second, he and his associates unilaterally placed their friends and relatives in key civil service and ministerial offices. These acts completely shattered whatever legitimacy the regime had accumulated and began to erode the integrity of public service. Soon, the regime began to change the regional administrative structure of the country by creating ten more regions during the next decade (Map 5). No feasibility studies were carried out to assess the need for more administrative regions. Indeed, it used authoritarian fiat to justify its agenda. The regime had two simultaneous objectives that were behind such expansion: to fragment the opposition in the country by creating competing administrative regions and rewarding its allies by giving them political and economic platforms.

Such an arbitrary way of managing public issues convinced the majority of the Somali people that state affairs were being run for the benefit of a few senior leaders, their associates and for specific "genealogical communities." This system of administrations brought forth new forms of conflicts, which destabilized the country. Ultimately, the consequence was the birth of militarized opposition, mobilized on the basis of ethnic politics. Among the first such groups were the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) and the Somali National Movement (SNM). These two groups claimed to represent the Somali people against the regime, although it was rather obvious to most Somalis that their declarations were undermined by sectarian animus

Map 5: Proliferation of Administrative Region under the Military



The relief and reunion that the public, mistakenly, expected with the demise of the military dictatorship never materialized. On the contrary, a new level of vicious scramble for leadership and dominance commenced once the old order was demolished and its leader, literally, chased out of town. As the bloodletting between two competing factions in Mogadishu intensified, the rest of the country fell into the hands of 'regional' militias, warlords and sectarian strongmen. The northern region taken over by SNM declared its 'independence' unilaterally. All over the country, in the place of one dictator appeared many self-appointed and power-hungry individuals. The sole objective of each was to create a tribal fiefdom to facilitate a takeover of the presidency of a country that had almost evaporated as a political unit. Their unwillingness to strike a compromise that would have allowed for national resurrection and reconstruction was demonstrated by the failure of fourteen 'national' conferences for reconciliation. For nearly fifteen years, warlords and self-proclaimed big men created vicious

local tyranny in most parts of the country. Life for the majority of the population became nasty and brutal, and without an end in sight. In 2006, the Union of Islamic Courts (UICs) mobilized the population in and around Mogadishu and liberated the city from the violent savagery of the warlords. The UICs articulated a mixture of Islamism and nationalism that won over most of the people, even those in the far reaches of the country. To be sure, the six months of political sway by the UICs were quite short. Still, their intervention, despite some shortcomings in vision and management, their presence shifted the debate from one of tribal fiefdoms to national issues. Whatever the promise of that effort, it was short-circuited by the USA endorsed Ethiopian invasion and occupation of Mogadishu, resulting in the defeat of the UICs on December 25, 2006. Immediately, the old sectarian politics came back with vengeance. In this context, narcissistic “big men” fueled by tribal improvisations jostled for power. In the meantime, generalized political disenchantment and the fragmentation of the country rolled on.

V. From National Re-liberation to Tribal Involution

Elements of the sectarian elite who brought down the military regime scrambled for power, which made the life of ordinary citizens even worse as all public institutions disintegrated. Their zero-sum struggles led to the fragmentation of the country. The SNM was the first to declare the northern region (Somaliland) as a totally separate and sovereign country in 1991 (still unrecognized in 2020), while the factions in Mogadishu and much of the south were engaged in a horrid civil war. In 1998, the northeast of the country announced a self-governing province, which ultimately became Puntland. Two other provinces were formed, Jubaland and Southwest in 2015. Many political actors and communities contest the legitimacy of these regions. Similarly, another cohort of politicians who contest the independence and integrity of Somaliland had announced the formation of another state, Khatumo, in the eastern part of Somaliland. Two more states have been formed in 2014 and 2016, namely Galmudug and Hirshabelle (Map 6).

From all the evidence available, it appears that the forces behind the formation of these regions are the sectarian actors bent on to creating political platforms which will position them to effectively compete for national stature as well as give them unimpeded access to public resources for themselves and their clients regardless of the terrible economic, political, and social consequences of this divisive territorial

restructuring of the country. The African Union, the United Nations, neighboring states (particularly Kenya and Ethiopia), and the United States and the EU have endorsed a tribalist political agenda that has given “legitimacy” to the establishment of ethnic-based federal system. Two regions (Somaliland and Puntland) provide examples of the political dynamics and the centrifugal forces that are turning the country and the life of the people into a political nightmare.

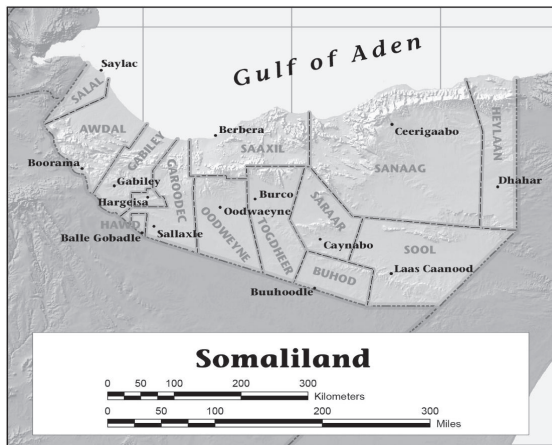
Map 6: Proposed Federal Regions



In the North, due to a combination of exceptionally bad governance in the region and particular brutality meted out to the population by the military regime, a number of people from W. Galbeed and Togdheer formed the SNM to drive the regime out of power. But like the other ‘liberation’ movements from the Northeast (now Puntland) and South-Central, the SNM was a tribal-based group that pretended to have a national civic agenda. Lest other Somalis might fight against its separatist agenda, then, the SNM did not articulate such intentions for

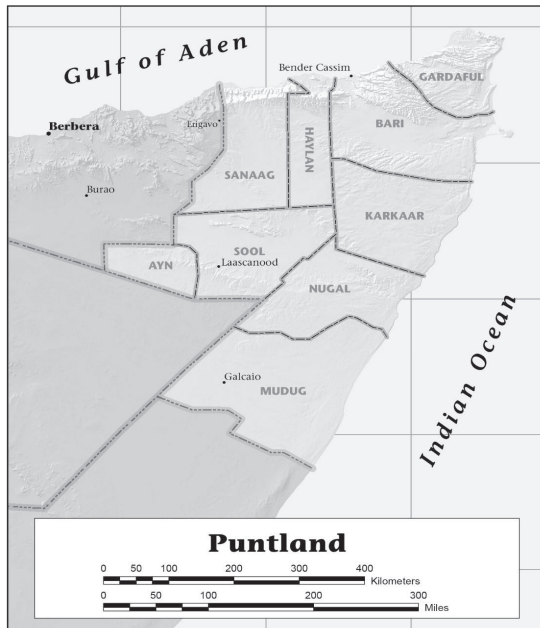
the region during the struggle against the dictatorship. However, once the regime was disposed of, SNM hastily declared the independence of 'Somaliland.' Because of the tribalist orientation of the Somaliland project, communities in eastern and western zones of the territory have been inimical towards the secessionist idea. After several years of violent struggles and political disorientation, Somaliland gained stability and peace. This was the result of, among other, two main and converging factors: (a) the leadership of Somalia's last democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohamed I. Egal, who returned to his region of birth, was voted in to become the president of the region in 1993; and (b) the consequent creation of relatively workable governance procedures and institutions. Egal's deployment of his deep experience and crafty contributions set the foundations for reconciliation and order in the region. He died in office in 2002. While Somaliland ought to be noted for its relative success more than any other region in the country, it is not immune to the undertow of centrifugal sentiments and political forces. The consequences of these include increasing territorial subdivision of the area into fourteen sectarian regions primarily reflecting genealogical identities as shown in Map 7. Despite the claims of the Hargeisa-based administration that the "Somaliland Republic" encompasses all the former northern region of the Somali Republic, the reality on the ground is that the eastern quarter of the region is not under its control and is now called "Khatumo state."

Map 7: Regions with Somaliland



The authorities in Puntland claim that it encompasses northern Mudug, all of Bari, Nugal, and Sool regions, and much of Sanaag. Somaliland and the recently formed Glamudug Federal Region in central Somalia challenge these territorial claims as well. Wherever the boundaries might be, Puntland was created in 1998 after nearly seven years during which the region had lacked political and administrative order. Once Col. Abdullahi Yusuf, the military chief of the SSDF, took charge of the region, stability slowly returned, and a rudimentary administrative structure was put in place with Garowe as the capital. A new political structure based on genealogical identity was set up, similar to many other parts of Somalia. There had been three peaceful transfers of political authority at the top, although one transition instigated a violent conflict. As such, Puntland, similar to Somaliland, has been among the most stable and peaceful of all regions. But stability and peace in the region has not prevented the proliferation of administrative fragmentation as in all other regions of the country. Since it was established, Puntland's political leaders divided and subdivided the territory into nine regions shown in Map 8, largely along genealogical lines.

Map 8: Regions within Puntland



The main purpose behind these subdivisions is not to enhance administrative efficiency or accountability but to provide a platform for local politicians and to support certain groups within the province in the struggle for dominance in Somalia's proposed federal system.

VI. Conclusion

The ill effects of artificial colonial boundaries have not been vigorously debated in recent years as other equally important existential issues have come to the fore. Yet, the conflicts induced by such borders have not vanished. For instance, the deadly and costly Ethiopian—Eritrean war in the late 1990s, which consumed nearly 120,000 lives and led to the highly militarized border centered on the small town of *Badame*, illustrates the living legacy of colonial borders. Be that as it may, more sinister types of borders have emerged *within* many countries since independence. This new demon is fueled by the *reinvention* of the colonial strategy of divide and rule by small-minded African elites. Political ethnicity and private accumulation using public resources are the twin instruments the elite have used to create uncivic political and communal relations that have magnified minor cultural differences into deadly political rifts. This vicious combination has heavily discounted the appeal of *major* shared values.

The consequence of this kind of political economy in independent Africa has been dreadful civil wars that continue to consume millions of lives and fractured social order in many countries.³² These events have impeded the emergence and the subsequent establishment of broad-based political alliances that would enhance communal solidarity and national integration. If the original liberation agenda in the continent was to undo colonial gerrymandering of geographic and political economic landscapes, to restore the dignity of Africans through justice and competence in each country, and to advance the continent to a higher level of solidarity and development, then political ethnicity and the looting of public resources by the elite have generated lethal conflicts in even the most culturally homogenous nation. These conflicts have spawned new maps and new borders *within* countries that have seriously derailed African renaissance. Somalia is the poster child for these new and ugly politics. A nation endowed with deep and dense cultural commonalities and a very long history of free movement of people across the Somali territory had a decent start as an independent country in 1960. Its birth signaled the removal of one

of the colonial borders that had artificially divided British and Italian Somalilands. A central and driving hope among Somalis in the coming of independence was the reunification of other Somalilands and the progressive improvement of the quality of life of the population. For the first decade of independence, progress was made in institutionalizing the rule of law and putting an accountable system of government in place. But once the sectarian faction of the elite seized power it began to use public authority to prolong its tenure, loot whatever little resources the country had, as well as terrorize the population. This strategy ultimately led to the reemergence of political ethnicity and social disharmony and fragmentation. The proliferation of Somalia's internal administrative boundaries reflects the march of this regressive political schema, eventually ushering in the catastrophic collapse of the national government. Efforts to resuscitate the Somali state has been marred by recurring failure as major international actors, neighboring states, the African Union, and Somali factions who profited from the disorder of the last 30 years, use ethnic criteria to redraw the political map of the country. In addition, they have endorsed the use of an ethnic formula to determine representation in parliament and all political and professional employment in government. Such conflation of ethnic and political identity subverts civic commonalities and diminishes the likelihood of national recovery and reintegration in the near future.

The Somali condition may be extreme but it is not exceptional.³³ It is an instantiation of the profane politics that is prevalent in many parts of the continent. Unless alternative social movements with a more just socio-economic and political agenda and structures, as well as competent leadership come to the fore to challenge the current order, Somalia may not remain the poster child for too long; others will follow. The simmering social disintegration that erupted in places like Kenya (during 2007, 2012, and 2017 elections), and the collapse or near collapse of others such as the DRC, CAR, Libya, and South Sudan may well morph into geographic dismemberment. Such an eventuality will put the hope of African renaissance out of reach for decades to come. This means that the type of cultural politics inherited from the colonialists and reinforced by many African elites is pregnant with more catastrophic power than the artificial border lines Europeans drew on the African map. As Thandika Makandiwire so vividly noted, the human cost of these internal wars has been nothing short of calamitous. The occurrence of Africa's killing fields is the product of this ghastly local

politics stimulated by the legacy of the international looting machine. “Democratic elections” and imported cage-like good governance models have not cured the maladies of ethnic politics and associated corrupt regime of accumulations. To reform the current system will require a more conscious and far-reaching political and socio-economic agenda – one whose core values are equity, economic growth, institutional legitimacy and leadership competence, and the resolute promotion of civic belonging. Together, these achievements are bound to curtail the appeal of ethnic identity in politics and the poor’s dependency on their wealthier and powerful “kinsmen.”

Notes

1. A different version of this paper was published in the South African Geographical Journal in 2019. The author thanks the SAGJ for permission to republish the article.
2. Ajala, 1983; Amadife and Warhola, 1993; Blanton et. al. 2001; Green, 2012
3. Mukisa, 1997; Mazrui, 2010; Alesina, et. al, 2011
4. It appears that two factors may have played in the creation of these conflicts. First, one of the countries involved, such as Ethiopia, took part in the scramble for Africa and forcibly occupied territories of other communities. “While stracing the actual boundaries of my Empire, I shall endeavor, if God gives life and strength, to re-establish the ancient frontiers (tributaries) of Ethiopia up to Khartoum, and as far as Lake Nyanza with all the Gallas. Ethiopia has been for fourteen centuries a Christian island in a sea of Pagans. If Powers at a distance come forward to partition Africa between them, I do not intend to be an indifferent spectator” (The Circular Letter of the Emperor Menelek to the Heads of European States, 10th April, 1891). In addition, the new authority discriminated against the ‘natives’ of the newly conquered lands and in the process fostered resentment and resistance. Second, without taking part in the colonial scramble an African states’ oppressive rule might have targeted particular ethnic communities for ill treatment. Such misrule then led to rise of conflict
5. Mkandawire, 2002; see papers by Noe 2019
6. Berman, 1995
7. Mafeje, 1971; Vail, 1989; Ranger, 1983, Samatar, 1989, 2004, 1992; Mamdani, 1996, 2004
8. Berman, 199:341
9. Amin, 1976.
10. Armah (1968), Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1987)
11. Samatar, 1989
12. Ajala, 1983:178
13. Samatar, 1989
14. Samatar (Ahmed). 1994
15. There was a great deal of intermarriage on the transitional zones with the Oromo for instance.
16. Omar, 2001.

17. Brigadier General T. Fisher, 1946
18. For a comparative case of African traditional chiefs who resisted colonial domination, see Crowder, 1988.
19. Samatar, 2016: chapter 4.
20. Samatar, 1997; Mamdani, 2004.
21. Samatar, 1992.
22. Samatar, 1997.
23. Ibid.
24. Osman, July 5, 1964.
25. Samatar, 1997.
26. Samatar, 2016.
27. Osman, 1963.
28. Samatar, 2016.
29. US Department of State, 1969.
30. Samatar, 2011.
31. Samatar, 1988.
32. Mkandwire, 2002.
33. This phrase was the title if an article on agrarian issues by Mamdani, 1987.

References

- Ajala, A. (1983). "The Nature of African Boundaries" *African Spectrum*: 177-189.
- Amadife. E. et.al (1993). Africa's political Boundaries: Colonial Cartography. The OAU, and the Advisability of Ethno-National Adjustment" *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 6, 4: 533-554.
- Amin, S (1972). "Underdevelopment and Dependency in Black Africa: Origins, and Contemporary Forms." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 10, 4: 503-524
- Armah, A. K (1968) *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin).
- Blanton et. al. (2001). Colonial Style and Post-Colonial Ethnic Conflict in Africa" *Journal of Peace Research* 38, 4: 473-491.
- Brigadir General T. Fisher, Military Governor, Shiekh, Letter to Foreign Office, 31 January 1946 PRO, FO, 1015/132
- Berman, B. (1998). "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism." *African Affairs* 97: 305-341.
- Burgis, T. (2015). *The Looting Machine: warlords, Tycoons, Smugglers, and Systematic Theft of Africa's Wealth* (New York: William Collins).
- Campbell, H. (2013). *Global NATO and the Catastrophic Failure in Libya*.(New York: Monthly Review Press).
- Crowder, M. (1988). *The Flogging of Phinehas McIntosh. A Tale of Colonial Folly and Injustice*, Bechuanaland, 1933. (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- Fatton, R. (1995). Africa in the Age of democratization: The Civic Limitation of Civil Society" *African Studies Review* 38, 2:

- Brigadir General T. Fisher, Military Governor, Shiekh, Letter to Foreign Office, 31 January 1946 PRO, FO, 1015/132
- George, S. (1988). *A Fate Worse Than Debt* (New York: Grove Press).
- Green, Elliott. (2012). . "On the size and shape of African states." *International Studies Quarterly* 56.2: 229-244.
- Hoshchild, A. (1998). *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Houghton Mifflin).
- Mafeje, A. (1971). "The Ideology of Tribalism," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 9, 2: 253-261.
- Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Mamdani, M. (2004). "Race and Ethnicity as Political Identities in the African Context." In *Keywords: Identity*, Ed. Tazi, N. (London: Abacus).
- Mamdani, M. (1987). "Extreme but not Exceptional: Towards an Analysis of the Agrarian Question in Uganda," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 14, 2
- Mazrui, A. In A. Abebayo (ed) (2010). *The Curse of Berlin :Africa after the Cold War*. (London: Hurst & Company): xi- xxviii).
- Mkandawire, T (2002). "The Terrible Toll of Post-colonial 'Rebel Movements' in Africa: Towards an Explanation of the Violence Against the Peasantry." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 40.2 : 181-215.
- Noe, Christine. "The Berlin Curse in Tanzania: Making of Selous World Heritage Property." (Part of the proposed special Section of SAGJ)
- Mukisa, R (1997) *Towards a Peaceful Resolution of Africa's Colonial Boundaries" Africa Today* 44, 1: 7-32.
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1987). *The Devil on the Cross* (Oxford: Heinemann)
- Omar, M.O. (2001). *The Scramble in the Horn of Africa: History of Somalia 1827-1977* (New Delhi: Everest Press).
- Osman, A. A (1964). *Diary*, July 5 (Mogadishu).
- Osman, A. A. (1963). *Diary* (Mogadishu).
- Patman, R. (1990). *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa: Diplomacy of Intervention and Disengagement* (New York: Cambridge University Press).
- Ranger, T . (1991). "Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika: The Invention of Ethnicity in Zimbabwe," In Vail (ed). *The Creation of tribalism in Southern Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Samatar, Ahmed. (1988). *Socialist Somalia: Rhetoric or Reality* (London: Zedbook, 1988).
- Samatar, Ahmed. (1994). The curse of Allah: civic disembowelment and the collapse of the state in Somalia. In Samatar (Ed) *The Somali Challenge: from Catastrophe to renewal* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner).
- Samatar, A. (1997). "Leadership and ethnicity in the making of African state models: Botswana versus Somalia." *Third World Quarterly* 18.4 (1997): 687-708.
- Samatar, A. (2004). "Ethiopian Federalism: Autonomy versus Control in the Somali Region." *Third World Quarterly* 25.6: 1131-1154.

Samatar, A. (1989). *The State and rural Transformation in Northern Somalia, 1884 – 1986* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press).

Samatar, A. (1992). "Destruction of state and society in Somalia: beyond the tribal convention." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 30.04: 625-641.

Samatar, A. (2011). "Genocidal Political and the Somali Famine." <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/07/2011726135256169831.html>

Samatar, A. (2016). *Africa's First Democrats: Somali Aden A. Osman & Abdirazak H. Hussen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

US Department of State. (1969). Research Memorandum RAF-10, July, 8.

Vail, L. Ed. (1989). *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (Berkeley: University Of California Press).