

Somalia and the Joshua Effect

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I. Introduction

Somalia is trapped in a maliciously rancorous and senselessly violent history where all fire exit signs lead to the same *cul de sac* of clan-based injustice. The lack of sustained intellectual discourse on the fundamental cause of the state's failure, on why the quadrennial electoral shenanigans produce similar incompetent and corrupt "leaders" as before, and what might be the most viable way out of the current vicious cycle only maintains the dreadful status quo or sets the stage for worse. And since Somalia's challenge seems unique, search for answers compels one to turn every stone including Holy Scriptures.

As someone who does not subscribe to the prevalent analytical method that arbitrarily excludes historical events, and refrains from incorporating specific narratives or transformational figures simply because their narratives were prominently highlighted in the Qur'an or the Bible, this author came to accept that Somalia is going through a *Teah* period of its own. *Teah* is an Arabic word describing the forty years of aimless wandering in the desert that was imposed on the children of Israel for breaking God's covenant.¹

Somalis could learn a lot from that period and the triumph and glory that ensued after people took ownership of their

shortcomings and repented; after they changed their attitude or their outlook from within. But before delving further, let me first say a few things about the ever-morphing Somali political conundrum and its volatility. During the past thirty years, many articles, essays, and books were written about the fratricide and subsequent political disharmony and fragmentation in Somalia; but seldom about how to solve this ever-morphing problem.

This brief essay will attempt to unpack the complex issue at hand and propose a viable strategic option to end the hopeless clan-based fragmentation trajectory.

II. Language Influence of External Predators

If one's action is determined by one's interest and frame of mind and if all political entities are made of assortments of individuals of mutual interests, the growing attitude in certain circles that the end of the transitional period (Aug 20, 2012) is "*Xilligii kala guurka*" or "Time to part-ways" ought to be a matter of great concern. In a clearly coordinated effort to inculcate certain attitude of apathy toward nationhood and de-synthesize certain nationalistic sensitivities, the said phrase became the motto of most politicians, traditional elders, media groups, and some of the "intellectuals." Make no mistake, language matters; especially in politics.

These are primarily front-line states such as Ethiopia and Kenya who may have certain security related concerns, whose political gaming intentions are thinly veiled. States and free-wheeling predators are motivated by opportunities for zero-sum advantages. They use conventional armies, mercenaries, intelligences, and individual political hit-men of various levels to manipulate the clan balance of power in certain regions to advance their own strategic or proxy geopolitical objectives.

III. Mercenaries and Influence of the Ghost-lords:

The biggest problem, and ironically the seldom discussed among the many facing the Somali government, is regulating their con-

duct or keeping these contractors in check, especially now that the international anti-mercenary laws are all but defunct. As it was proven in Sierra Leone and other parts of the world, these kinds of contractors operate with great impunity while they engage in various outlawed operations such as illegal mining, arms trafficking, and serving as a proxy war machine in favor of foreign interest groups or in favor of one domestic contender or another. Since 2007, the international community has been fed the narrative that the presence of AMISOM troops is critical for the security of Somalia whereas the presence of these troops and various foreign mercenary security-related outfits in Somalia may actually be making security more precarious in this fragile war-torn country.

As I argued in an old essay entitled “Insecurity in Somalia: Is Mogadishu’s Green Zone Part of the Problem?” broken nations like Somalia that require intervention from the international community require a safe area where diplomats and other officials representing key governments and organizations could be hosted. Hence Somalia’s heavily guarded “Green Zone,” or *Halane* as it is commonly known. As a compound dominated by African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) soldiers, mostly from Uganda, and a network of guerilla diplomats who respect no diplomatic boundaries and which is infested with “economic hitmen,” foreign intelligence, counter-intelligence, counter-insurgency and counter-stability (mercenaries) agents, Halane became a mega bazaar for political exploitation and zero-sum trade. Twelve years after becoming the artificial nerve center of Somali politics, it became clear that *Halane* needs to undergo a detoxification process in order to serve its original objective: to help Somalia re-emerge as a nation-state capable of protecting itself and running its own affairs.

Today, though various training sessions in security and governance take place inside the Halane compound, it is where the carrots are dangled to co-opt Somali officials and where sticks are wagged so that the self-confident among them are psychologically broken down until they accept behaving like guests in their own country. It is where the elite with political ambitions

are required to go to get their blessings and a few power-projecting pictures for social media. It is where resolutions that undermine Somalia's central government authority and legitimacy are concocted despite the fact that Somalia's transition period ended in 2012.

IV. Domestic Profiteers and Corporate Freeloaders:

The former are men who, through their fluid businesses or "NGOs," callously exploited the lawlessness of the past three decades, and the latter are unregulated business conglomerates that grew exponentially in the past two decades. While all are presumably in legal businesses, none have been paying taxes or have on their own been assisting in provision of public services.

A few mega "corporations" such as Hormuud and Dahabshil practically own the entire country. Over the past two decades, these companies, especially those in the telecommunication business who are granted exclusive right to use the official gateway and country code without paying licensing fees or taxes, have been investing in keeping business as usual. It is an open secret how these mega companies co-opt key political actors by bringing them on board as stakeholders or through kickbacks to sustain their silence. Meanwhile, the old lady selling tomatoes under the scorching sun is routinely harassed by the municipality to pay her "public service" dues.

V. Jubbaland Puntland Enigma and Beelstan Politics:

During the electoral related political rancor of recent months, two of the five regional governments known as federal-states have openly declared that they do not recognize Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo whose term ended February 9th as the nation's President. They defiantly rejected a number of proposals and invitations extended by the Somali President. They accused him of political hypocrisy and malicious intent to "poison them." Being under the same clan umbrella along with President Farmajo, the accusation made by Ahmed Islam of Jubbaland and Said Deni

of Puntland have exacerbated the a crisis and deepened distrust of other clans, though this latest matter is more complex than the conventional clan politics as both are deeply intertwined with foreign powers--Jubbaland with Kenya and Puntland with United Arab Emirates.

These elements have ignited vicious discord and armed skirmishes that ultimately led to the de facto siege of Villa Somalia—the presidential palace—with four different clan militias camping in strategic areas with a stone throw distance from The Villa. Since Somalia never had a genuine reconciliation, the political situation still remains volatile and combustible as ever. The residue of a toxic mix of *beel* (community) politics—euphemism for clan-based distrust—frustration emanating from electoral process manipulation, divided loyalties to competing foreign interests, and the central government’s illegal interference in the federal states’ almost ignited a new civil war.

In late April, gunfire erupted across Mogadishu as “security forces loyal to the president clashed with units that appeared to have sided with his rivals, stoking fears that Somalia’s simmering political crisis is spilling over into violence. The fighting, some of the worst in the Somali capital for years, followed months of tense talks between President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (Farmajo) and opponents who accuse him of making an unconstitutional power grab.”² This was a rude awakening to many politicians, intellectuals, activists, and other Somali political actors who relentlessly used to ridicule any suggestion that Somalia still needs a genuine reconciliation. That violent episode that brought Somalia to the edge of renewed civil war underscored the perilous fickleness of the current trajectory to reconstitute the Somali state. Though things have been getting better, it is no secret that clannism still remains the most vibrant ideology that fuels the Somali political machine. Clannism is a vicious zero-sum game that continuously fragments the Somali society. Regardless of how abundant resources are, others should always be kept at a disadvantaged or an inferior position.

The last four decades underscored Somalia's lack of foresight. The society has proven to the rest of the world that Somalis might be individually competent but collectively inept. And that, precisely, is the nature of clan politics. Clan politics' pre-eminent dysfunction is highlighted in its inability to pause and ponder what might be in the collective best interest. *Beelstans* are fueled by the social and political drama of the moment.

VI. Law of the Land, AMISOM and Sovereignty:

If constitution means a social contract that clearly outlines the demarcation of authority and who has the legitimacy to exercise and execute power, and how the law supersedes all governmental politics, Somalia does not have one. What Somalia has today is a mock document known as provisional constitution without the right court (constitutional or supreme court) that possesses the exclusive right to interpret laws outlined in the constitution and others resulting from judiciary rulings. In a nutshell, Somalia's constitution has been in a transitional developmental process since 2012.

At the dawn of this century, the legendary geopolitical strategist and the lightning rod of foreign policy controversy, Henry Kissinger, wrote: "Africa's civil wars and ethnic cleansing should be left largely for African nations....The industrial nations could assist by supporting the creation of an intervention force drawn from African nations. A center for training in African peace-keeping missions could be created where American and European advisors could assist the projected African force." This, of course, has paved the way for the so-called "African solutions for African problems" that include three frontline states--Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti.³ As is clear in Somalia, this kind of politico-military model--especially when neighboring states are directly involved--may solve a problem by creating others that perpetuate dependency, exploitation and subjugation.

"When one asks a powerful neighbor to come to aid and defend one with his forces...These forces may be good in themselves, but they are always dangerous for those who borrow

them, for if they lose you are defeated, and if they conquer you remain their prisoner," forewarned Niccolo Machiavelli many centuries before Kissinger's locally romanticized concept.⁴ The only substantive progress toward viable statehood or reconstituting that collective identity that Somalia made in the past four decades is this: from chasing winds to chasing mirages.

A country is not sovereign if it fails to fulfil its obligation to protect its citizens and all others living in the geographical territory that is within its domain of authority from domestic and foreign threats.

Meanwhile, conspicuously declared in one of the top clauses of every UN Security Council resolution on Somalia are these shallow words: "Reaffirming its (UNSC) respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and unity of Somalia..." Granted, no state is wholly sovereign as such sovereignty belongs only to The Almighty. However, states can, and should, have claim to sovereignty. That is the highest political authority within certain negotiated or legally defined geographical territory accepted by the United Nations. This type of sovereignty is necessary to establish the rule of law, to govern independently, to protect the nation's values, resources, territorial integrity, unity, and to mobilize for defense against internal and external threats.

VII. The Man of the Moment:

Joshua son of Nun was Moses' assistant and protégé who was mentioned in the Qur'an, The Cave Chapter or Surah Al-Kahf when Prophet Musa (Moses) was on his journey to meet the one man who had more knowledge than he--Khidr is the Islamic tradition.

His name in Hebrew is Yehoshua. And in Arabic or the Islamic version of the same figure is known as Yush'a Ibn Nun. As the trustworthy, humble young assistant and protégé of Prophet Moses--a man with unwavering trust in the will of God and promises. Joshua is revered in Islam as a faithful, brave, vision-

ary young leader and indeed a great strategist. Joshua's history is covered more broadly in the Hadith tradition.⁵

Somalia needs a new paradigm of leadership--a transformative leader with a vision, strategic plan, prudent pragmatism, moral conviction, and selfless ethos to lay down the foundation for a modern state that serves and upholds its citizens' constitutional rights.

A leader who could earn the trust and respect of those he is to lead. One who inspires them and affects their attitudes and outlooks and challenges them to seek new beneficial aspirations and to reach higher.

There are certain universal values that we collectively learn from the *Teah*: The importance of faith in God--that He will fulfill His promises and He will only assist those who make the first attempt to assist themselves. Secondly, we learn the importance of discipline--gaining certain competencies and knowledge requires certain trainings, practices, obedience and codes of conduct, accountability and retribution to deter abuses. Third, we learn the importance of transformative leadership. In addition to faith, vision, and strategy, the transformative leader must appreciate the importance of hope and having sense of optimism that there is a way out of the current state of despair. That leader must have the patience with the process. Every farmer knows, between sowing and harvesting there is a process of various lengths.

VIII. Conclusion

Among the principle objectives that drive the establishment of a new state are:

- 1) Creating a safe space for a polity that shares specific geographical territory.
- 2) Preservation of a communal identity- race, religion, history, and future aspiration.

For Somalia to reinforce these principle objectives, it must take steps backward before taking steps forward. Currently, the political entity known as Somalia is a web of competing and counter-competing interests and predatory scams. To untangle and sift through all these mostly existential threats requires a moratorium period to administer the shock therapy that it so desperately needs to survive as a nation.

Every fourth year, the so-called Somalia political, social and intellectual elite ignore the fact that political polarization erodes trust, and without trust there cannot be cooperation for the common good to save and defend the nation. Good politics is the art of converging various interests into foundational grand interest--patriotism--to preserve sense of nationhood or *Soomaalinimo*. Without trust, all pathways lead to a failure. The most existentially critical question facing the nation is: How can we reconstitute a new and a viable state? I do not think another four year term of a new or an old face will get Somalia out of the current dilemma. Somalia needs radical transformation and that demands leadership with radical vision, strategy and the will to swim against the current political tide. And such leaders must be cultivated.

In an article entitled "A Shock Therapy for Somalia," this author proposed a controversial counterintuitive option: Current state of affairs is such that: foreign sponsored national reconciliation has been a periodical ritual since year 2000. The completion and ratification process of the transitional (provisional) constitution that already costed over \$60 million has been on-going since 2004. The periodical U.S. aerial bombardments have been on-going since 2007 and are now intensified to bi-weekly deadly drones. AMISOM (including Ethiopia & Kenya with direct conflict of interest) has been fighting al-Shabaab since 2007. The Somali national army has been under a never-ending process of rebuilding since 2004 while Somalia still remains under UN arms embargo. Furthermore, the balkanization process of Somalia into clan-based political entities; each with its own foreign, defense, and immigration policies, so to speak, has been on-going since 1991. Each of these entities is ruled by an Alpha clan

that claims exclusive or zero-sum rights over all other clans. And each is founded or sustained by a hate narrative.

Somalia is already in a muted or a “stealth trusteeship” in which U.K. still remains the country’s pen-holder or the official gate-keeper of all Somalia related issues at the UN Security Council. Granted, the formal trusteeship system was established to help the Trust Territories (former colonies) attain the capacity for self-determination and self-governance. This is good so long as there is a trustee willing to help in capacity-building and a trustee council providing the necessary supervision and scrutiny. Once the UN Security Council agrees to such proposal, a friendly country with proven goodwill toward Somalia will be invited to serve as a trustor for a period of 4 years.² In so many different ways—political, economic, educational, and in capacity building—Turkey has proven itself being a loyal strategic partner.

The Somali government should establish serious strategic dialogue with Turkey and appoint a permanent commission made of thoroughly vetted credible and visionary men and women with no political ambition that may undermine their role of maintaining the continuity of relationship and administering the critical oversight needed during those four years. Painful, ego-wounding, and vanity-shattering as it may seem, that official and transparent humiliation maybe the precise condition to level the playing field and expose clan-based false narratives of superiority and equally debase all alpha clans in perpetual zero-sum clan competition. Today, Somalia is at a worse predicament than before independence six decades ago.

It is the only way to streamline the multilayered Somalia’s domestic and foreign problems; the only way to form an independent reconciliation commission that is not funded and framed by foreign powers. It is the only way to genuinely negotiate a constitution that sidelines all forms of clan-based rights in favor of citizenship rights and cultivate the right leadership to transform Somalia into a viable state. Today, we are where we were before, facing the same perilous volatility. “ Still the

average Somali sees his/her government as the archetype of power abuse, the magnet of demagoguery, the personification of partisanship, the agents of disunity, the epitome of incompetence, the exploiters of resources, the executioners of injustice, the promoters of corruption, the purveyors of propaganda, the distorters and manipulators of nationalism....” Ironically, when I wrote these lines there was no *Nabad iyo Nolol* or Peace & Life—the party currently in charge.

As this essay is being written, there is a fierce political row between President Farmajo and Prime Minister Mohammed Hussein Roble that is being played out in the public’s sphere. It was triggered by Roble’s decision to replace Farmajo’s right hand man and enforcer — Director of the National Intelligence Service Agency (NISA), Fahad Yasin—over a murder investigation of a young female intelligence officer—Ikraan Tahlil—and the agency’s seeming cover up. This latest development comes at a time of heightened tensions due to the aforementioned cliffhanger of inter-clan violence. I shall conclude, then, with a reminder that resilience is a state mind. It is the willingness to rise above adversities and misfortunes by consciously managing or changing one’s outlook and attitude.

Notes

1. What Can We Learn from the Israelites Wandering the Desert for 40 Years? Hope Bolinger, April 16, 2020 Christianity.com
2. Somalia: Manifestation of Stealth Trusteeship. Afyare Elmi Apr 4, 2011.