State collapse and post-conflict development in Africa: the case of Somalia (1960-2001)
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Chapter Two

The Somali State in Academic Discourse

2.1. Introduction

The state is a political system, which has become an indispensable mechanism for social organisation in this present day world. This quintessential polity thus makes the state a central component of our contemporary social inquiry. Here I review the debates about the Somali state that the traditionalist and the transformationist schools of Somali studies have advanced. Emphasis is placed on the continuity of the primordial socio-cultural aspects in the society and change of the political economy explanations that both schools alternatively presented for the collapse of the state. The discussion also introduces the modernisation and dependency debates as a backdrop to the discourses of both schools of Somali studies that I have just mentioned above. It is important to appreciate these perspectives as they informed the logic and reasoning of both traditions. Furthermore, it is in this chapter that I shall elaborate in detail on the alternative frameworks of private and public pursuit that I use throughout this study. As I will show in this research study, both pursuits advance a more cogent explanation for the collapse of the state than hitherto available.

The post-colonial Somali state, like other African states, has been a subject of academic discourse over the past four decades. More often than not, this academic debate has been conducted in reference to historical experiences and social realities that have taken place outside the continent of Africa. For instance, the historical trajectories of state formations in Europe and Latin America were the mirror reflections through which the African state was imagined, theorised over and also analysed. Or, as Stephen Ellis writes, the body of literature on the state in Africa is "derived from political theory rather than from close observation of African history or society" (Ellis 1996:2).

From the early 1960s until the late 1970s, the academic debate on the state in Africa has been conducted within the parameters of the modernisation and the dependency theories, which their respective proponents claim to possess a universal relevance. Indeed, both paradigms were presented as meta-perspectives, which could explain the social phenomena of every society around the globe. In fact, until the late 1980s, the prevailing academic perspectives of both the universalist perspectives have greatly influenced how we conceive the state in Africa in a theoretical sense. Consequently, the respective debates of both schools had strong bearings on the conceptual orientation of the Somalist scholars writing on the Somali state over the past four decades. In this chapter I will first present an exposé of the theoretical debates between the modernisation and the dependency schools as a backdrop and then pinpoint how they informed the dominant scholarship on the state in Somalia.

2.2. The Modernisation Debate

The modernisation or political development perspective was a dominant intellectual tradition from the late 1950s until the late 1960s. The paradigm was the product of a search for a comparative approach to politics that was extended to the developing areas. It was formulated as a guiding framework for the social scientists, particularly American researchers at the time, who embarked on studying the problems of political transitions, democracy, institutional stability and economic development in the newly independent states of the Third World (Almond and Coleman 1960). In this sense, the blossoming of the modernisation school was very much linked to developments in American political science in the 1950s. During that time the policy imperative of the US government was to equip the country with regional expertise, which would be needed to bolster up its new role as a superpower. The United States emerged as the leading superpower from World War II and was determined to keep this hegemonic power by preventing the spread of communism from engulfing the newly de-colonised states in Africa and Asia. Phrased in another way, what the US in essence wanted was to keep the expansion and the ideological influences of the rival Soviet-led communist bloc at bay away from the states in the Third World. It is this policy imperative therefore that compelled the social scientists, already attached to the rapidly expanding American academic establishment, to launch a new initiative to encompass research in the field of Third World studies. These researchers with active encouragement and generous financial support from the government then produced a considerable amount of literature. In practice, the study was aimed at developing a programme for the promotion of modernisation in the newly independent Third World countries that would lead towards a Western rather than an Eastern path of economic and political development. In this respect, the modernisation school was not only predominantly an American product but was also a study very much influenced by the Cold War politics.\(^{16}\)

Historically speaking, the modernisation paradigm was considerably informed both by evolutionary and functionalist perspectives. Evolutionary theory became popular in the aftermath of the Industrial and the French Revolutions which, heralded the emergence of a new social order in Europe. The perspective was dominant at the time because it helped explain the transition from traditional to modern society in Western Europe in the nineteenth century. The basic premise of the evolutionary theory was the belief that all mankind develops along a linear path from a primitive to an advanced state of civilisation.

The functionalist theory, on the other hand, distinguishes societies through the “pattern variables” as formulated by Talcott Parsons. In this categorisation, traditional societies are attributed with features, which are collectively oriented, particularistic, ascriptive and diffus, while modern societies are perceived to have characteristics based on rational and universal values, meritocratic statuses, and specialised and differentiated social functions (Parsons 1952:58-67). Other features generally seen as characteristic of traditional societies include factors such a low level of division of labour, dependence on agriculture, low rates of growth of production and limited administrative competence. Modern societies, achieve exactly the opposite.

\(^{16}\) For an excellent explanation of how development theory is the product of American foreign policy that aimed to combat and contain the spread of communism, see Irene Gendzier, Managing Political Change: Social Scientists and the Third World (Boulder: Westview, 1985).
Heavily influenced by such basic parameters of the evolutionary and the functionalist theories, the modernisation scholars began to study the ‘political development’ of Africa and other developing countries. They therefore embarked on their research study with the predetermined notion that human society, irrespective of the point in time, goes through stages of an evolutionary process, which is unidirectional and irreversible. Such development is a lengthy process and proceeds in a slow, gradual and piecemeal way. Accordingly, the passing from traditional forms of society to modernity is positive and inevitably progressive since this transformation leads to an ultimate form of social advancement. Consequently, the societies in the newly independent Third World states must obliter ate their outdated cultural traits, traditional values and belief system and instead establish a modern social system that would be participative, pluralistic and democratic. David Apter, one of the influential modernisation writers on Africa, explains modernisation as the importation of advanced ideas, values and practices originating from the developed world into traditional societies in the Third World (Apter 1965:42). This is indeed the central gist of the modernisation proponents who assume that the tradition-modernity dichotomy is universally applicable.

For the modernisation writers, the nature and the political role of the state was not a key concept in their analysis. It was left out as a sideline arena. However, the “reluctance to use the state concept stemmed rather from their interest in understanding the prospects for the political development of these societies along Western democratic lines” (Hyden 1996:27). As a result, the vast literature that the scholars of the modernisation school produced was mainly concerned with the study on political development. Nonetheless, despite such limitation, the modernisation study had a very strong practical orientation, while its aim was to provide grounds for immediate action. Some of its programmes were presented to leaders and political elites of the newly independent states. These political leaders in the Third World were strongly encouraged to use the programmes as a recipe and a manual guide to act upon if they wanted to modernise their traditional societies within a short frame of time. It was presumed that implementing practically the recommendations from the study on political development would speed up the transition from traditional to ‘modern’ forms of social associations and political organisations of the backward pre-capitalist societies of the ex-colonies. More importantly, the proponents of the modernisation school argued, with conviction, that coping with these modernisation programmes would help the developing societies engineer stable political structures imbued with a sense of national unity, foster social reforms and nation-building and ensure a rapid economic development (Almond and Coleman 1960). Despite this, the modernisation theory as a practical policy approach was eventually a disaster, as it failed to yield rapid development results. According to Leys, “for over ten years (i.e. from late 1955 to the late 1960s) ‘development theory’… progressed with only modest excitement. Then, partly due to disappointment with the results of policies based on ‘development theory’ (especially in Latin America and India), and partly to the general reaction of the 1960s against all ‘official’ values and ideas, the theoretical temperament rose” (Leys 1996:7). However, as an intellectual product and in orientation, the modernisation school had a wider impact on academic research as it opened up new academic areas in the field of Third World studies (Leys 1996:10).

Nonetheless, there were weaknesses in the conceptual orientation of the modernisation theory. Firstly, the modernisation writers are criticised for assuming the existence of a single, evolutionary path to modernity. This assumption therefore was what led them to claim that each country would progress unproblematically towards modernity. Secondly, the modernisation researchers are accused of having certain biases. Specifically, they are accused of having an inclination which favours domestic rather than external explanations for political occurrences as well as having socio-cultural rather than historical and structural factors in their political analysis. Thirdly, the modernisation exponents are criticised of treating traditional culture as something, which is pristine and static that condemns the Third World society to relative stagnation. Fourthly, the modernisation writers are attacked for saying nothing or little about the role of economic forces, the emergence patterns of class formation, and class conflict.¹⁸ Lastly, the modernisation scholars are criticised for being ‘a-historical’ since they presented essentialist explanations in understanding the social conditions in the Third World countries (So 1990: 53-59).¹⁹

However, despite this theoretical limitation, the modernisation study has considerably informed the traditionalist scholarship of Somali studies in two respects. First of all, like the modernisation theorists, the traditionalist writers on Somalia favour domestic explanations for political occurrences. They therefore put more emphasis on internal dynamics in the analysis of the politics in Somalia. Second, like the modernisation writers, the traditionalist scholars on Somalia advance socio-cultural rather than historical and structural explanations as the causes for the domestic political problems and the predicament of the Somali society. I will return later to this discussion of the traditionalist school of Somali studies. I shall now turn to the dependency theory, which to some extent informed the transformationist literature in the field of Somali studies.

2.3. The Dependency Debate

The dependency school emerged in the late 1960s as a critique of the mainstream modernisation school. In contrast to the modernisation perspective, which was developed in the West, the dependency theory was formulated in the Third World. As Blomstrom and Hettne put it, the dependency school speaks of “the voices from the periphery” that aim to challenge and deconstruct the intellectual hegemony of the American modernisation school.²⁰ According to So, “just as the modernisation school can be said to examine development from the point of view of the United States and other Western countries, the dependency school can be said to view development from a Third World perspective” (So 1990:91). As I will show later, the dependency theory turned many of the assumptions of the modernisation perspective upside down.

The dependency school originated in Latin America. The concept developed as a reaction to the great disappointment concerning the programme of the UN Economic Commission for

¹⁸ However, an exception is that of Walt W Rostow. The Stages of Economic Growth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).


Latin America (ECLA). The programme had been based on the policies informed by modernisation theory (Dos Santos 1973). The failure to generate rapid economic growth and establish political stability through this modernisation path of development had dashed the high expectations of many populist regimes in Latin America as well as many Latin American researchers in academia. The social researchers particularly, were disillusioned by the inability of modernisation theory to explain the problems of the economic stagnation and political crises that faced the nations not only in Latin America but also in other Third World countries. To put it differently, they were concerned with the problem of explaining why Latin America and other Third World regions were not developing as predicted by the modernisation thesis.

Heavily influenced by radical neo-Marxist theories, the dependency exponents devised a way to popularise and spread this alternative perspective beyond Latin America. And Andre Gunder Frank was, so to speak, the right scholar in the right place at the right time to formulate and deploy the concepts of dependency and underdevelopment against modernisation theory. Frank was in Latin America in the early 1960s during the time when the dependency debate was evolving as a serious intellectual orientation. Consequently, it was Frank who disseminated the ideas and the theoretical contention of the dependency school to the rest of the world through his seminal publications. Other exponents of the dependency and underdevelopment orientations for Latin America include Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Enzo Faletto and James Petras.

Dependency theory overturned many premises of the modernisation approach. First, in stark contrast to the modernisation perspective, dependency theory focused not on the process of development but on the root causes of underdevelopment. Second, the dependency writers offer external rather than internal explanations for the underdevelopment of Third World countries. They stress that the experience of colonialism and neo-colonialism is what perpetuates the economic backwardness of Third World countries. On this point, they drastically shifted the focus of political analyses from the domestic to the international and from the idiosyncratic to the structural. Third, the units of analysis of the dependency researchers were not the individual and the domestic national systems but classes and/or the global system. Fourth, the dependency writers placed more emphasis on economic factors such as modes of production, social formations and class conflict. Finally, the dependency theorists uphold the view that the linkages between Third World countries and Western countries are harmful since they are exploitative and retard the development of the former.

As a result, some of the radical exponents of the dependency school even advocated that Third World countries must break the linkages with the dominant capitalist Western world and embark on an autonomous and independent path of development.


22 For a comprehensive elaboration of how these external linkages work, see, T. Smith, "Requiem or New Agenda for Third World Studies?" in World Politics, 1985:532-561. Smith explains how the convergence of interests between local petty bourgeoisie and modern state elite of the underdeveloped and foreign capital of the developed countries destroys the subsistence economy of the marginalised domestic forces.

23 For this radical stance, see Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1972); and Samir Amin, Unequal Development (Sussex: Harvester, 1976). Both writers powerfully argue that it is the logic and the dynamics of capitalism, which do not permit Third World countries to develop and thus the only option they have is to turn to socialism.
Although the dependency theory first emerged in Latin America as the result of economic and political problems specific to that continent, it was later transferred to Africa like the modernisation concept before it. In this respect, the conceptual development of the dependency theory was not born out by the specific historical experience or by concrete economic and political conditions within Africa. Nonetheless, in Africa, the dependency and underdevelopment perspectives were deployed by Africanists and African social scientists, who wanted to address and explain the process of development and the economic backwardness of the continent in relation to the West. These researchers adopted the notion of the state as viewed by the dependency scholarship. The dependency approach considers the state to be an instrument of power and domination rather than a tool to solve societal problems as argued by the modernisation writers. Thus, the African state is viewed as an instrument used by minority elites in power to serve their own and foreign interests at the expense of the majority of the population. Since the 1970s, it was this instrumentalist nature of the state that the dependency researchers on Africa have been attempting to explain in many of their academic writings (Hyden 1996:28). However, in the late 1980s, when the dependency debate on the state in Africa became unable to explain the political and economic predicaments in the continent such as the rise of ethnic tensions, military coups, personal rule and declining growth rate, the dependency concept was abandoned.

Thereafter, the academic discourse on the state in Africa has shifted to that of statist theory. Here is not a place to review the statist debate in detail since it is not the central concern of this research study. Suffice to note that the statist approach sees the state as a primary motor force behind social and economic occurrences, and power holders are held accountable for the political and economic crises in the continent.

The dependency school like the modernisation school which preceded it also came under severe criticism in the early 1970s. Firstly, the dependency writers were charged with being economy deterministic and failing to consider the social and cultural aspects that also affect the process of the development in Third World countries. Secondly, the dependency proponents were accused of over-emphasising external factors in explaining underdevelopment and neglecting the role and impact of internal dynamics such as social classes, the state and other forms of political struggles. Thirdly, the dependency writers were criticised for presenting vague policy conclusions and for failing to spell out concrete guidelines for action in local arenas, which would help the newly independent states to realise their national goals. Fourthly, the dependency researchers were attacked for sacrificing close empirical studies on domestic processes in favour of debates over theory. Finally, the dependency perspective was accused of being highly abstract, particularly in so far as it delineated a general or a universal pattern of dependency perceived applicable to any country.


in the periphery but neglected the historically specific development of each particular Third World state.  

Yet despite its shortcomings, the dependency school has largely informed the writings of the transformationist scholarship of Somali studies in two respects. Firstly, like the dependency scholars, the transformationist writers put greater emphasis on the impact of external factors rather than internal dynamics while examining the process of economic underdevelopment in Somalia. Secondly, like the dependency proponents, the transformationist scholars focus on the state class which they blame for the political disintegration of Somalia. Let me now first turn to the traditionalist debate of Somali studies.

2.4. The Traditionalist Debate of Somali Studies

The traditionalist paradigm of Somali studies is informed by three intellectual sources. These are the historical writings of the British colonial explorers, notably the adventurer Richard Burton, the anthropological diachronic recordings of Evans-Pritchard and the modernisation theory noted earlier. Richard Burton was the first to write in length, in English, the history of the Somali people, albeit in the way he saw it. In his book titled ‘First Footsteps in East Africa’, Burton writes an account of the cultural, social and political institutions of the Somali people at the time, which was indeed tainted by his ethnocentrism (Burton, 1894). Nonetheless, since there was no written Somali language and there were hardly any other publications on Somali society and culture except for the few recordings of the journals of few Arab travellers, Burton deserves credit for this initiative. The Evans-Pritchard’s formulation of the Nuer lineage segmentation in the Sudan has also considerably informed the traditionalist scholarship on Somalia. However, a more comprehensive scholarly study on the Somali society, culture and institutions has developed very recently. This began when Joan M. Lewis as a young postgraduate student at the Institute of Social Anthropology at Oxford University became interested in doing research on the social and the political structure of the Somali nomads in the late 1950s. Lewis, in his own words, justified his research


28 Apart from Richard Burton, the writings of other colonial explorers worth notable include Ralph E. Drake-Brockman, British Somaliland (London: Hurst & Blackett, Ltd., 1912); Angus Hamilton, Somaliland (Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press, 1911/1970); F.L. James, The Unknown Horn of Africa (London:George Philip & Son, 1888); Douglas Jardine, The Mad Mullah of Somaliland (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1926/1969); Major H. Rayne, Sun, Sand and Somalis: Leaves from the Notebook of a District Commissioner in British Somaliland (London: H.F. & G. Witherby, 1921); Major H.G.C. Swayne, Seventeen Trips Through Somaliland and a Visit to Abyssinia (London: Rowland Ward, Ltd., 1900); F. Adam, Handbook of Somaliland (London, 1900); A.H.E. Morse, My Somali Book (London, 1913); J.R. Rodd, Social and Diplomatic Memories (London, 1923). All these recordings contain narrations of personal experiences mixed with accounts of Somali society and culture coloured by the writer’s own perceptions of them.

29 The most important of those few Arab travellers who documented facts about Somalia was the North African Ibn Battuta. See further Ibn Batuta, Ibn Batuta in Black Africa: Selections Translated by Said Hamdun and Noel King (London: Collings, 1975).

30 The lineage segmentation model developed by Evans-Pritchard is adopted by the traditionalist writers to describe and analyse the Somali social structure, albeit in a more flexible application. See further E.E. Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940/1978).
interest in Somalia as "my romantic ambition to go and study the nomads" (Lewis 1994:2). Lewis undertook this research project when Somalia was still under colonial rule. Understandably, the Colonial Social Science Research Council had sponsored the anthropological fieldwork of Lewis in the country. Nonetheless, the exotic and romantic ambition of Lewis to study the Somali nomads gradually developed into an important academic discourse on Somalia. From 1955 to 1960, Lewis published a series of works on the Somali people, their lineage segmentation, kinship system, religion and their modern political associations.\(^\text{31}\) And it was through these early writings that Lewis laid down the groundwork of an intellectual foundation in the traditional field of Somali studies. However, the major intellectual breakthrough came when Lewis published his classical book entitled: A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics Among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa (1961). It was in this book that Lewis outlined the thesis of the traditionalist school of Somali studies he expounded. According to Lewis, the social structure of the Somali pastoral nomads has the following key characteristics. First, the Somalis are highly egalitarian because of the absence of exploitation and domination in their power relations. Second, the Somali society is stateless, lacking centralised institutions and formalised authority. Third, the primary social networks of the Somali people is regulated by a web of lineage segmentation, which provides the fundamental basis for identity-formation. Accordingly, the persistence of this primordial kinship segmentation has been what prevented Somali society from developing a single political unit during the pre-colonial period. Even in the contemporary post-colonial era, the tenacity of this lineage segmentation is what perpetuates social divisiveness and political fragmentation among the Somali population. Thus, lineage segmentation remains central to the thesis of the traditionalist scholars of Somali studies, since according to them it provides the most sophisticated explanatory power in understanding the social and the political behaviour of Somali society.\(^\text{32}\)

Since then, this traditionalist thesis pioneered by Lewis has received for wider currency and emulation. Many subsequent studies were tailored to fit the centrality of Lewis’ thesis, as a crucial point of departure in analysing the social and the political structure of the Somali people. For instance, Lewis and his disciples have been repeatedly arguing over the past four decades that the continuity of the law of lineage segmentation system is what informs and also explains the nature of the political dynamics in Somalia. To concur with Lewis and confirm his thesis, David Laitin and Said Samatar wrote that:

"For years the eminent European anthropologists Enrico Cerulli and I. M. Lewis have been telling us that to understand Somali politics, it is necessary to understand Somali clanship and kinship ties... The political history of independent


\(^{32}\) For instance, Said Samatar argues that “lineage segmentation produces a society of extreme individualism, in which each man is his own sultan with no one endowed, legally or morally, to exercise centralised national authority. Fragmentation is the norm in such societies. Thus,... anarchic factionalism is in fact endemic in Somali society" (S.Samatar 1993:16). See also Said Samatar, Somalia: A Nation in Turmoil (London: Minority Rights Group, 1991).
Somalia, however, makes the relevance of Lewis and Cerulli’s argument painfully clear. One can scarcely think of a significant domestic or foreign development in Somali politics since independence that was not influenced to a large degree by an underlying clan consideration” (Laitin and Samatar 1987:155).

For the traditionalist writers, as the quotation makes clear, clanship is the bedrock of Somali politics, while the clan ties are the real political stuff through which the wheeling and dealings in Somalia from local to national are instrumentally used. They therefore posited that the primacy of clanship relations over national unity is indeed the crux of the social and political problems in Somalia. This last point has currency. That is to say, it provides a convincing explanation as to why the modernised state elites attempt to obliterate the nomadic clanship influence and culture in the society. Guided by this traditionalist informed policy orientation, the state elites in Somalia embarked on modernisation projects aimed to sedentarise the pastoral nomads and to eradicate their cultural value systems, norms and traditional institutions. Eventually, although the attempt did not weaken the primacy of the clanship relations, the sedentarisation policy negatively affected the productive capacity of the pastoral nomads and also emasculated their traditional techniques of managing conflicts. The Somali state elites were with the view that the traditional conflict settlement mechanisms were an outdated practice that challenge and undermine to the desirability of modern laws, court institutions and government authority.

After the state collapsed in 1991, the traditionalist proponents proclaimed the triumph of their internally oriented socio-cultural thesis. This is what their eminent foreman has to say. According to Lewis, the collapse of the colonially created state is a reaffirmation of the supremacy of the segmentary lineage system and kinship in action in the Somali politics. As I shall quote in length, this is how this perception was summed up by Lewis:

“At a more abstract level, the collapse of the colonially created state represents technically a triumph for the segmentary lineage system and the political power of kinship. For better or worse, clanship has certainly prevailed, and the assertions of some Somali and non-Somali ideologists that clanship was an atavistic force doomed to oblivion in the modern world seem rather dated. Given then, that like nationalism, clanship is a human invention, is it in the 1990s basically the same phenomenon that it was in the 1890s? Linguistically the answer must be “yes”, since the same terminology has been employed throughout the recorded history of the Somalis. Sociologically, the evidence also supports this view. Indeed, the argument of this book is that clanship is and was essentially a multipurpose, culturally constructed resource of compelling power because of its ostensibly inherent character “bred in the bone” and running “in the blood”, as Somalis conceptualise it” (Lewis 1994:233).

Since then, a lot has been published which unequivocally endorses the thesis of Lewis. Most of these writers often cite passages from the work of Lewis in order to affirm the validity of

33 For an excellent critique of these modernisation programmes see Gerald Braun, The Somali Development Concept in Crisis, Northeast African Studies 11, no.3 (1989): 1-12.

their explanations. Thus, in a nutshell, the theoretical orientation of the traditionalist scholarship of Somali studies (especially the continuity of primordial clan politics) still remains pervasive and is what largely informs the conventional academic circles, the popular media as well as influencing the decisions and policy making procedures of countries and international organisations currently involved in Somalia. I will now turn to the transformationist school of Somali studies.

2.5. The Transformationist Debate of Somali Studies

The transformationist perspective of Somali studies arose as a major intellectual challenge to the traditionalist scholarship in the 1980s. This transformationist school has been pioneered by the brothers Abdi and Ahmed Ismail Samatar. And like the traditionalist writers, who were informed by modernisation theory, the transformationist scholars were influenced by the dependency discourse. In a collective publication by both brothers, this is how they affirmed their theoretical orientation:

“We suggest that the materialist literature more accurately depicts both the general global milieu within which Africa’s submerged classes continue to struggle, and the nature and role of the post-colonial state” (Samatar and Samatar 1987:673).

Ahmed Samatar goes on to explain the significance of deploying the analytical tools of critical political economy to delineate the historical changes in the material production and socio-political transformation of the Somali society over a period of time. According to Ahmed Samatar:

“This paradigm concerns itself with the production and accumulation, distribution of economic surplus, social reproduction, political arrangements and the impingement of the global order” (Ahmed Samatar 1989:8).

Furthermore, like the dependency scholars, the transformationist writers focus more on external factors in the making of the contemporary social and economic conditions in Somalia. For instance, the transformationist researchers advance that the penetration of the global market economy and the imposition of the colonial state impacted fundamental structural changes on the pre-colonial mode of production and social relations of the Somali society. However, before they outline the core of their thesis, the transformationist scholars first challenge the epistemological grid of the traditionalist approach which they consider to be an outdated anthropological concept that lacks the grasp of capturing the dynamics of the moment. This is how Abdi Samatar formulated the attack:

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For example, since the civil war broke out in the country, the regional organisations such as Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), states and the United Nations bodies involved in the peace process in Somalia have been enlisting traditionalist scholars as political advisors, commissioning them to write reports and policy oriented research papers, consulting their academic works and also basing the interventions they undertake in the country on the policy recommendations of these traditionalist consultants.
"The first task in this effort is to deconstruct the ghettoization of Somali studies as a backwater area in African studies. In spite of the revolutionary theoretical advances in the latter field in the last twenty years, which was stimulated by the crisis of peripheral capitalist development in the continent, Somali studies seem marooned to the earlier phases of modernisation theory. It is therefore high time that the theoretical and methodological innovation in the study of African underdevelopment penetrate and inform the Somali condition" (Abdi Samata 1989:4).

Firstly, the transformationist writers charge the traditionalist approach with lacking specificity, with being static and a-historical. Secondly, the traditionalist proponents are accused of confusing the explanations of key concepts such as pastoralism, tribalism and the state in the process of the Somali social formations. Thirdly, the traditionalist scholars are criticised for lacking the insight to grasp the difference between clanism and kinship since they often confuse both terms by using them as if they had the same meaning.

After these scathing critiques of the traditionalist scholarship, the transformationist proponents then present their thesis, which according to them is guided by historicity and specificity (Abdi Samata 1992). Firstly, the transformationist writers argue that the pre-colonial process of Somali social formation did not remain static. Instead, it continued, albeit in a decomposed form because of its incorporation into the global economy as a periphery, the impact of violent imperial incursions, the commercialisation of its subsistence pastoral production, and finally its subordination to a centralised state (both colonial and post-colonial). Thus, the impact of all these historical episodes attests not to a static but to a far-reaching process of transformation of the structure of Somali society. Secondly, the transformationist scholars attempt to proffer a historical context as well as social meanings in order to make plain the distinction between kinship and clanism. This is how Ahmed Samatar clarifies the misconception:

"Kinship denotes a central relationship buttressed by both blood-ties and deeply revered tradition and custom (xeer) - one which mediates among individuals or groups. This is part of the dominant ideology in some precapitalist social formations. Clanism, on the other hand, is the transformation of kinship by detaching blood-ties from tradition and custom. This bifurcation results from the forceful intrusion of an alien type of social and economic organisation and its concomitant norms and values"(Ahmed Samatar, 1989:8).

Finally, the transformationist writers contend that the process of the transformation of the Somali society, which has been going on well over one hundred years, has resulted in the emergence of social stratification in Somalia. These new social strata can be classified as pastoral producers, merchants, petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia. However, these new social forces have emerged in an environment of acute material deprivation, economic crisis and underdevelopment, which is the result of Somalia's peripheralisation in the global capitalist system. Consequently, the tensions that have been simmering from the struggles of these new social forces since then, have created a deeper domestic social disorder that eventually led to the disintegration of the state.

Therefore, focusing on the dynamics of social struggles in the society, the transformationist critics, unlike the traditionalist writers, contend that in Somalia, it is the rivalry between the new social strata, which hampers economic development and perpetuates the political problems in the country. To be more specific, the transformationist writers argue that it is the
internal tussles of the ruling state class, the petty bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia, over power and appropriation of the surplus produced by peasants and pastoral nomads which is the core of the problem in Somalia (Ahmed Samatar and Abdi Samatar 1987:669-690). In a nutshell, for the transformationist scholars, the major culprits to be blamed for the collapse of the state are these dominant class fractions who used perverse clan politics as an instrument to advance their narrow material interests. In this respect, the transformationist writers put more emphasis on intra-class competition at the level of the state, although they are careful not to subscribe the Somali society to the rigid classification of classical Marxism. Nonetheless, for the transformationist proponents, class conflict is the most appropriate level of analysis in understanding and explaining why the Somali state collapsed. However, the recent writings of the transformationist scholars shifted the focus of the class analysis to the nature of the state and the leadership in Africa.36

2.6. The Continuity and Change Debate

To recap the substantive arguments of the debate, both major discourses of Somali studies draw on the conflicting theories of modernisation and dependency schools. The traditionalist writers claim that it is the continuity of the primordial socio-cultural idiosyncrasies in the Somali society, which is the core of the political problems in Somalia. By contrast, the transformationist critics severely repudiate this premise and instead argue that the externally impacted dynamics of change in the field of production and power relations put on course the present political crisis in the country. Put simply, both approaches view the causes of the collapse of the state either as the result of the continuity of segmentary lineage system or the change of the political economy brought about by external dynamics. This study attempts to bring together the substantive aspects of the continuity and change explanations both schools advance. Nonetheless, the continuity and change explanations this study will offer are more comprehensive than from those argued by both schools of Somali studies.

However before sketching in detail the outlines of my alternative explanations, let me first clarify my theoretical point of departure. The theoretical orientation of this study is guided by the longue durée perspective of Braudel and by the distinct historicity of Bayart or what Mamdani calls a historically specific social reality of Africa - which must be established as a unit of analysis (see chapter 1). The longue durée perspective enables us to examine the political economy trajectories of present societies in Africa in terms of their own distinct histories. The concept of historicity as Bayart argues, informs us that politics must always be viewed as a moment in a complex and very long-term history. Accordingly, this long-term political history must therefore bring together the influences of external and internal dynamics, which are specific to the country under study. Bayart holds the view that the contemporary political reality in Africa is shaped by the concurrent effects of a 'triple history' – the pre-colonial, the colonial and the post-colonial dynamics. In Africa the colonial and postcolonial periods are relatively short periods in which the continuity of the pre-colonial cultural processes and historical dynamics have certainly not yet ceased. Consequently, without insight into these pre-colonial and colonial past dynamics, the contemporary politics in Africa cannot be understood.37 Similarly, Mamdani suggests to us that we should study the social reality

in Africa as a specific historical process rather than as a history by analogy. For instance, Mamdani writes, “Africanist debates tend to focus on whether contemporary African reality most closely resemble the transition to capitalism under seventeen-century European Absolutism or that under other Third World experiences, or whether the postcolonial state in Africa should be labelled Bonapartist or absolutist. Whatever their differences, both sides agree that African reality has meaning only insofar as it can be seen to reflect a particular stage in the development of an earlier history” (Mamdani 1996:12). Thus, both scholars concur that each concrete case taken as a unit of analysis, be it a given country or Africa as a continent for that matter, must be examined against its own distinct historical trajectory. This approach enables us to restore the specificity and the legitimate historical reality of the state in Africa.

This study takes its point of departure from this historically informed theoretical orientation. In doing so, it transcends the now sterile debates between modernisation and dependency theories that have shaped the academic discourse concerning the state of Somalia over the past four decades. It also challenges the principal thrust of the debates between the traditionalist and transformationist Somali scholarship that have been conducted to hold a mirror to the historical and social reality in Somalia to experiences that have taken place elsewhere. In short, this study seeks to establish the historical specificity of Somalia as a unit of analysis. Put simply, it attempts to examine the current political problems and the collapse of the state in the country against each distinct historical conjuncture and crisis through which the Somali political institutions have evolved over a long period of time.

After critically reading about the history and the political economy of the Somali society across a historical time, I have come to this conclusion - that the dire constraints in the material environment and the predicaments in the history of Somalia have been determining the process of the Somali social formation across the triple history – that is the pre-colonial, the colonial and the post-colonial periods. The deleterious effects of both misfortunes – enduring poverty of the domestic economy on the one hand and the pitfalls of the colonial intervention and fragmentation of the country on the other have produced contradictory tendencies of private and public pursuits which I outlined in the introductory chapter. As I explained, both tendencies systematically unearth concrete trajectories, which have been shaping the social and political life of the Somali society over a long period of time. Moreover, the identification of the contradictory tendencies towards private and public pursuits enables us to read and interpret the underlying historical dynamics of the Somali society as a coherent process. This remains so without however losing the focus as Braudel advises us that, “research is question of endlessly proceeding from the social reality to the model, and then back again, and so on, in a series of readjustments and patiently renewed trips” (Braudel 1980:45). Furthermore, the dynamics of both private and public pursuits offer better explanations in the synthesis of analysis of continuity and change discussions than those which the major schools of Somali studies respectively advance.

On this point, though this study builds on the insight of these Somalist scholars and follows their lead, it seeks in a modest way to construct a mode of analysis and interpretation in the hope of advancing better and fuller alternative explanations into the contemporary political crisis in Somalia.

38 For an excellent and devastating critique of all these forms of “contemporary unilinear evolutionism”, see Mahmood Mamdani, Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and The Legacy of Late Colonialism, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
As I previously mentioned, the emphasis on the continuity versus the change explanations as to why the state collapsed, advanced by the two dominant schools of Somali studies has a significance. Yet, my purpose in this study is to problematise both contentions through a critical analysis. To begin with, the gist of my critique of the traditionalist thesis is that it stresses that the persistence of clan atavistic loyalty is the core of the political disaster in Somalia. In fact, the subscribers to these traditionalist schools argue that the primordial clan tendency is a factor in continuity across time, and this single variable powerfully explains Somali politics throughout history. This socio-cultural proposition posits an essentialist line of argument, precisely because the traditionalist focus on this single clan analysis overlooks the impact of the limited development of productive forces in the country that actually perpetuates the survival of kin ties in the Somali society. It also neglects significant concrete variables that the historical dimensions of the tendency towards private pursuit powerfully illustrate. More objectionable, the traditionalist writers read the contemporary historical process of the Somali society incorrectly since they claim the current resurgence of clan atavistic tendency to be the cause of the political predicament in Somalia though in reality it is the consequence. For instance, the power struggles of the political elite are what reproduce the clan schisms as they deliberately exploit the clan differences and use them as sources of political instrument for their private pursuits.

The theoretical proposition of this study in contrast to the traditionalist thesis is that internally the continuity of the tendency towards concrete private pursuit rather than innate clan animosity is what largely determined the collapse of the state in Somalia. As I will illustrate in this study, the continuity of the tendency towards private pursuit, which is given rise to by the extreme material deprivation in the country, explains in a concrete way why different groupings in Somali society still pursue sectarian interests, remain organised along kinship lines, exercise fragmented politics and fail to establish a single political unit. Put simply, the continuity of the tendency towards private pursuit can be observed in the social, economic and political spheres of contemporary Somali society. In this sense, the tendency towards private pursuit is not only confined to the embezzlement of public resources for parochial gains; its influence also affects other structures in the society. The explanatory power of this alternative mode of analysis is that it reads the political economy of the society not in a piecemeal way as in the case of the traditionalist writer’s approach but in its historical totality. In a way, traditionalist proponents resolutely detach politics from economics and say virtually nothing about the relation between them. More significantly, this alternative framework brings together both the causes and the consequences of the Somali predicament, which are largely wrought by the constraints in the material environment which most of the Somali people still endure.

This study also contests the thesis of the transformationist scholars who argue that the change brought about by the colonial economic and political intervention is what fundamentally accounts for the destructive turn of events in Somalia today. The colonial occupation not only transformed the political economy of the Somali society as the transformationists emphasise, but more deleteriously it gravely dismembered the Somali people and their territorial habitat. In this respect, the division of the country was the most dramatic change that the Somali people have ever endured. For instance, the colonial imperial designs ruthlessly wounded the very psyche of Somali cultural nationalism, as it fragmented the ethnic Somalis under different foreign political powers. Since then, the healing of this wound by struggling to bring together the ethnic Somalis in one place is what has given rise to the primacy of the public pursuit in the Somali politics. Thus, as I will explain in this study, the history of Somali-wide politics since colonialism has largely been the history of this public pursuit. The other related history at the sub-national level that manifested as sectarian politics is that of private pursuit. In this respect, both dynamics are not separate phenomena but are interacting tendencies in a complex whole of historical processes.
that have been shaping the Somali society through the ages. Nonetheless, each tendency has impacted on the Somali social formation in its own distinctive ways. But ultimately, the positive and negative impulses of both private and public pursuits have largely determined the social and political realities in contemporary Somalia.

In a nutshell, my alternative proposition to the continuity and change explanations is that of the private and public pursuit since both tendencies identify comprehensive historical processes — internal and external — at work in Somalia. Private and public pursuits uncover aspects which advance continuity and change explanations that offer different interpretations for the collapse of the state than those hitherto available. Furthermore, the comprehensive aspects that the private and public pursuits underline include the elements that have been already addressed by the traditionalist and transformationist scholars of the Somali studies. Therefore, I will argue in this study that the manifestations of both of these historical processes are indeed the key or dominant determinants over all other variables that are put forward to explain the causes for the collapse of the state in Somalia. Throughout this study I will also use both terms as guiding frameworks. In the following two chapters, the constraints in the material environment and the misfortunes in the Somali history, which wrought the conditions that have engendered the tendencies towards private and public pursuit will be discussed.

2.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I attempted to review the debates on the post-colonial Somali state since the late 1950s. The main body of this chapter discusses how the debates on the Somali state, as other states in Africa, was largely conducted in reference to historical and social experiences that have taken place either in the West or in Latin America. Modernisation proponents who first conceptualised the society and the state in Africa viewed the continent to be in a process of a pre-modern and pre-industrial stage of development that Europe has already passed. Accordingly, it was felt that with a rapid economic development and social transformation along that linear path already taken by Western society, society in Africa will arrive at a modern and industrial capitalist transition in a foreseeable time frame. Similarly, the dependency theory that followed up the modernisation perspective also debated the African state and society in the light of social and political experiences which had taken place in Latin America. More problematically, the dependency scholars treated the countries in the Third World as if they had similar political economy problems since they seldom conducted a close empirical study of specific cases. In this respect, both the grand theories have ignored or misread the specific historical experiences of African states since they failed to guide our understanding of the problems facing the continent. Despite this, both universal perspectives have influenced the debates between the traditionalist and transformationist proponents of Somali studies. Take, for instance, the explanations of the domestic socio-cultural continuity as argued by the traditionalist writers versus the externally induced political economy change as encountered by the transformationist scholars, which they respectively advance to be the genesis of the contemporary political predicament in Somalia.
Since the late 1980s a new research agenda was initiated in response to the failure of the modernisation and the dependency perspectives. The tendency now is to examine each concrete case against its own historical conjuncture instead of mirroring to a historical experience elsewhere. To put it simply, this means that we should study each African state in the context of its distinctive historical trajectory, rather than in terms of highly abstract perspectives, which are flawed or outdated. In this study, taking a point of departure that is based on a historically informed theory, I will analyse the collapsed state in Somalia in the light of its own long-term trajectories through which the political institutions of the Somali society have evolved. In other words, I will attempt to seek out the causes of the contemporary collapse of the state within the context of the past economic and political history of the Somali people.

"I am however very much aware that rejecting the determinism of modernisation and of dependency should not lead to an historical historicism, but to a more dialectical approach. This is why in the context of Somalia the dialectic towards private and public pursuits in the historical process plays the centrality of this study."