State collapse and post-conflict development in Africa: the case of Somalia (1960-2001)
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Chapter four
The Pitfalls of Colonialism and Public Pursuit

4.1. Introduction

This chapter traces how the change brought about by the colonial imposition led to the primacy of the public pursuit in Somali politics over a century. The colonial occupation of Somalia not only transformed the political economy of Somali society as transformationists emphasize but also split the Somali people and their territories. Therefore, as I will argue in this study, the multiple partitioning of the country is one of the key determinants that fundamentally account for the destructive turn of events in Somalia at present. The competing colonial powers partitioned Somalia into: (a) the British Somaliland Protectorate; (b) Italian Somalia; (c) French Somaliland or Djibouti; (d) Ogaden under Ethiopia; and (e) the Somali inhabited territory of Northern Kenya (also under British rule). In this study, the policy of the public pursuit is understood as a Pan-Somali aspiration and a dream of attaining a single united Somalia one day. The strategies that the Somalis adopted to wage the politics of the public pursuit alternated between militancy, passive and irredentist expansion. In this chapter, militant and passive public pursuit is examined while irredentism is discussed in chapter six which deals with the foreign politics of post-colonial Somalia.

However, as I demonstrate in this chapter, the efforts of the tendency towards public pursuit were constantly frustrated by the particularistic impulses towards private pursuit. In this context, the two pursuits are not separate but are inter-linked dynamics as they are parts in a complex whole of historical processes that shape the Somali society. Throughout the Somali history, the contradictory impulses of the tendencies towards private and public pursuits have been interacting at different levels in the society. Private pursuit manifested as a factor that has pulled the Somali social formation towards narrow clan identity and parochial social and political arrangements. By contrast, public pursuit crystallized as a tendency that has pushed the Somali social formation towards wider political identity, unity and nationhood. Consequently, the contradictory tendencies have produced tensions that indeed became sharpened as the colonial period was coming to its end.

4.2. The Nature of the Partitioning

Somalia was partitioned into five political entities for different colonial objectives and interests. In the late nineteenth century, Britain was the first colonial power, which established a protectorate in the north of the country. This took place around 1885 when the British authority had succeeded in signing formal commercial ‘treaties’ with Somali clan-heads in the territory. The option of running northern Somaliland as a protectorate was the cheapest way of controlling the area. And the interest of the British Empire in carving up northern Somaliland was mainly commerce and livestock trade. The British involvement in Somaliland was

74 For more background information, see the booklet, The Somali Peoples’ Quest for Unity: An explanation of the issues involved in the Somali/Ethiopian, Somali/Kenyan disputes and the liberation of French Somaliland (Mogadiscio: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1965).
indirectly determined by its possession of rich India (Jewel in the Crown) as a colony. In 1839 the British Empire established a military station in Aden in order to protect its trade interests with India. Aden was located on an important short sea route to India. However, Aden, apart from its strategic maritime communication links, had no other benefits. Aden had no economic resources, yet the British military personnel stationed there had to be fed. Britain easily resolved this problem by taking over Somaliland, which was not only the closest area to Aden but was also rich with livestock. In other words, it was the abundant livestock in the area and the urgent demand of meat supply to Aden that primarily brought this part of Somalia under the protectorate of the British government of India. At the time, Britain also had another overriding motive to take over Somalia and that was to prevent other competing European powers from occupying it.

Somaliland remained a protectorate as long as this arrangement served the economic and political needs of the British authority. This was how the British government of India explained its initial interest in annexing Somaliland:

"The primary objectives of Government are to secure a supply market, to check the traffic in slaves, and to exclude the interference of foreign powers. It is consistent with these objectives, and with the protectorate which the India Government has assumed to interfere as little as possible with the customs of the people, and to have them administer their own internal affairs" (quoted in Samtar 1989:31).

The British Foreign Office was the authority which ran Somaliland when it was a protectorate. However in 1905 when the protectorate system of rule was abrogated and Somaliland became a proper British colony, the Colonial Office took over the control of the territory. Rescinding its protectorate status and making Somaliland a proper colony was in fact necessitated by the emergence of the militant Dervish movement in the countryside in 1900. The British authority, becoming anxious that such uprising could disturb trading routes in the countryside and the free flow of the supply of the livestock, imposed its military power throughout the territory.

During that period, a rival imperial power competing with Britain in the region was France. Both imperial powers were vying for the control of the Nile waters and their rivalry was further heightened when the Suez Canal was opened in November 1869. Britain, having already occupied Aden, was determined to prevent France (considered as a hostile power) from conquering the nearby Somali coast. However, France, in contrast to Britain, had bigger imperial ambitions in the Horn of Africa. Firstly, France had trade ambitions in Ethiopia and in 1881 the Franco-Ethiopian trading company was established in that country. Secondly, France had already acquired colonial possessions in Indochina as well as Madagascar and was in great need of a base and coaling station in the Horn of Africa for its ships plying the long sea-route. Thirdly, France was aware of the prestige of possessing a piece of land in Africa in the eyes of other ambitious rival colonial powers. In other words, at the time, possessing a colony was also a matter of prestige. Eventually, as politics in the region dictated, the French authority signed an Anglo-French treaty, which officially defined the possession and the border of the French colony in Somalia in 1888. In that treaty, France possessed French Somaliland, which is now called Djibouti.

In the race of scrambling Somalia, Italy later followed the British and the French. Italians searching for a place under the sun in Africa arrived late in Somalia. In this respect, they were
latecomers to the orgy of slicing Somalia, yet Italians with the tacit consent of the British carved southern Somalia (Italian Somaliland) in 1893. The interest of Italy in Somalia actually grew after it possessed the port of Assab at the southern tip of the Red Sea. In southern Somalia, the Italians adopted a different colonial policy from that of the British in northern Somaliland. Unlike the British, the Italians planned from the beginning to create a proper colony for entire southern Somalia both at the coast and in the productive agricultural hinterland. According to Robert Hess (1966) at least two factors were critical. First, Italy was urgently seeking to acquire a settlement for the poor Italian farmers in the best and most fertile part of the agricultural land in the country where fruit plantations could be established. For an immediate practical purpose, the settlement of the poor Italians in Somalia was intended to reduce the population surplus Italy was then enduring. However, as the footnote in (see chapter 3) demonstrates, this ambitious plan to settle Italian population in Somalia failed. Second, Italy was looking for secure overseas markets for its industrial goods that hitherto had been threatened by England and the United States protectionist policies in the international trade at the time. Thus, both population pressure and economic interests were the main underlying factors, which urged Italy to establish a proper colony in southern Somalia. In fact, what the Italians wanted was to create a lasting colony in southern Somalia. Accordingly, with this long-term objective in mind, the Italians had adopted coercive measures in appropriating the fertile land in the upcountry and also subjected the sedentary farmers in the area to forced labour. Indeed, these coercive measures were commensurate with the modus operandi of the fascist rule in Italy since 1923. Lisa Anderson (1986), in her study on the Italian rule in Libya, also noted harsh subjugations similar to that meted out to the Somali subjects in southern Somalia.

In addition to the European imperial powers, Ethiopia also participated in the dismembering and sharing out of Somalia. Imperial Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa was an important rival power, which could not be ignored. The Ethiopian empire having defeated Italy at the battle of Adowa in 1896 also had colonial ambitions in Somalia. After that military victory against Italy, the Ethiopian empire demonstrated itself to be a power that could not be subdued with force but one to be recognised and seriously negotiated with for peace and stability in the region. And it was this position of strength which led to the Anglo-Ethiopian treaty that ceded western Somaliland (Ogaden) to Ethiopia in 1897 (Lewis 1988). In the negotiation of this treaty, Menelik, the emperor of Ethiopia, not only got a share of Somalia, but was also accorded other concessions. For example, Britain permitted the Ethiopian emperor to import arms through its north Somaliland ports. Britain also exempted Ethiopia from customs duties for the goods imported for the household use of the emperor (Samatar 1989). Thus, the Ethiopian empire took part in the radical partitioning and sharing out of the land of the Somali people.

During World War II, Britain defeated Italy in East Africa. The defeat shattered Italy's dream of imperial grandeur in the Horn of Africa. In the war, Italy lost southern Somalia (which it

75 Sylvia E. Pankhurst recorded in detail the ruthlessness of the modus operandi of Italian colonialism in southern Somalia. For example, Pankhurst noted that: "under the colonial system men, women and children had been taken by force from remote places and condemned to an indefinite period of servitude on Italian farms.... Punishment, inflicted by the resident on the ex-parte representations of the employer, was brutal and excessive. For a first offence of disobedience or indiscipline fifty lashes with a hippopotamus-hide whip was a common award, and for a second offence the victim was strung up for several hours on a gallows, with his toes just clear of the ground, suspended by chains attached to wooden billets under his armpits, and with his hands handcuffed behind his back" (139). See further her Ex-Italian Somaliland (London, 1951); See also, The First to be Freed: The Record of British Military Administration in Eritrea and Somalia 1941-1943; Issued by the Ministry of Information (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1944)
ruled from 1893 to 1941) along with its East African Empire. This therefore ended the Italian occupation in southern Somalia. Consequently, the Italian defeat paved the way for the British military Administration to occupy southern Somalia in addition to the other areas in the country it already possessed. Britain already had under its control north Somaliland, Ogaden76, and the Northern Frontier District (NFD) in Kenya, inhabited by Somali pastoral nomads. This means that in 1941 Britain controlled 90 per cent of the land inhabited by the Somali people except for the tiny French colony of Djibouti, which was only 10 percent of the country (Omar 1992). Eventually, the British military rule of Somalia lasted from 1941 to 1950.

In 1946, Britain tabled a proposal, which recommended that the best way for the wandering Somali pastoral nomads to survive in the marginal environment of Somalia was to let the country unite and remain under British Administration. However, this proposal, known as the Bevin77 Plan was swiftly rejected by Ethiopia as well as by the other three big powers (France, USA, and the USSR) because they were suspicious of the British intentions. They also thought that accepting such a proposal could undermine their influence and political interests in Somalia. As a result, Somalia was partitioned once again. Southern Somalia was given back to the defeated Italy in 1950 to administer for a period of ten years under United Nations Trusteeship. Ogaden and its adjoining Somali areas were handed over to Ethiopia in 1948 and 1954 respectively. Northern British Somaliland reverted to its former protectorate system of rule; while the British Administration decided to give the Northern Frontier District (NFD), inhabited by Somali nationals, to Kenya in 1963. In a passing remark that sounds remorseful, this is what Lord Renell Rodd had to say on the slicing of Somalia decades later:

“If we had been interested enough ... (and if the world had been sensible enough), all the Somalis ... might have remained under our administration. But the world was not sensible enough and we were not interested enough, and so the only part of Africa which is radically homogenous has been split into such parts as made Caesar’s Gaul the problem and cockpit of Europe for the last two thousand years. And Somaliland will probably become a cockpit of East Africa” (quoted in Laitin and Said Samatar 1987:53-54).

76 Ogaden is the name of a Somali inhabited region that is controlled by Ethiopia.

77 Ernst Bevin was the Foreign Secretary of Britain at the time. Bevin was also the architect and staunch advocate of the unification of the Somali inhabited territories. Bevin is in fact the authority of the concept of a ‘Greater Somalia’. This clarification is important because Greater Somalia is not a notion conceptualised by the Somalis. In the Big Four Power conference (Britian, France, USA and the USSR) in Paris 1946, Bevin pleaded that: “in all innocence, therefore, we proposed that British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, and the adjacent part of Ethiopia, if Ethiopia agreed, should be lumped together as a trust territory, so that the nomads should lead their frugal existence with the least possible hindrance and there might be a real chance of a decent economic life” (quoted in Touval 1963:79).
In a nutshell, this was how Somalia was partitioned in the 1880s and again repartitioned in the 1950s. See beneath the colonial map of Somalia.

4.3. Dervishes and Militant Public Pursuit (1892-1920)

The first strategy that the Somalis adopted to resist the foreign conquests and colonial occupation was a militant one. This militant public pursuit was launched with religious fervour as Islam was used as a unifying factor of the segmented Somali lineages. The Muslim brotherhood led by a charismatic sheikh, Sayyid Mohamed Abdulle Hasan, was the domestic social spearhead of this militant Somali-wide public pursuit. The history and the colonial struggles of Sayyid Mohamed and his militant Dervishes are already recorded elsewhere and there is no need to repeat them here.\(^78\) A significant aspect worth noting here is that the emergence of this Dervish movement heralded the first modern nationalist Somali resistance against foreign subjugation.

Colonial incursion in Somalia caused both fear and indignation as alien and predatory authorities were established in the country. First, the centralised system of governance of the colonial state was a great leap from the decentralised and egalitarian political system of the Somali people. Second, the colonisers were people of another faith and that created fear and suspicion in the minds of the Somali people about their intentions. Third, the Somali pastoral nomads felt the squeeze and the pressure on their grazing land, particularly by the expansion of the Ethiopian colonial army. It was a normal practice for the troops of emperor Menelik of Ethiopia to send expeditions into Somalia to raid and plunder the herds of the pastoral nomads.

In this respect, the intervention and partitioning of the country among foreign predators, snatching the pasturage, and raiding the livestock, was a momentous event and the turning point of the Somali people at the time. During that period, a Somali poet described the situation in the country in the following lines:

"The British, the Ethiopians, and the Italians are squabbling,  
The country is snatched and divided by whosoever is stronger,  
The country is sold piece by piece without our knowledge,  
And for me, all this is the Teeth of the Last Days!"\(^79\)

For instance, the 'Teeth of the last Days!' understood in a concrete worldly sense meant the end of united Somalia and Somali people instead of the abstract and metaphysical imagination of the poet. Nevertheless, the poem signified the intolerable conditions of the Somali pastoral nomads at the time. Eventually, the oppression of the colonial subjugation sparked a militant uprising. The Somalis took up arms to drive the colonisers out of the country and to ensure that the Somali people remain united as one nation. This last point is important because although the Somali people did not develop a united political entity, they did nevertheless have a strong sense of cultural nationalism. Despite their lineage segmentation, they had the

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feeling that they belong to one ethnic group, which shares the same language, history, religion, and memories of a common past.

This first militant public pursuit, which lasted from 1892 to 1920, was waged by armed Dervishes whom Ahmed Samatar referred to as "the proto-nationalists" in the early Somali struggles against foreign domination (Ahmed Samatar 1988:24). Sayyid Mohamed and his Dervish fighters had an uncompromising attitude towards the colonialist presence in the country as they determined to drive all of them from the Somali soil.

With this objective in mind, in 1899, Sayyid Mohamed called on all the young Somali men irrespective of their clan affiliations to join his Dervish army. He appealed to the clans in the spirit of their Islamic religious ties. Phrased differently, the message of the Sayyid was: let us unite in the name of our religion and confront the occupying foreigner infidels in order to save our land and our Islamic faith. Within a short period of time, the Sayyid had raised a fighting army of about 5000 men (Samatar 1989:38). At the same time, he started importing weapons and arming his militant Dervishes. Sayyid Mohamed financed his Dervish army, military campaign and weapon purchases through money and livestock donations he received mostly from the rural Somalis who were supportive to his cause.

In 1900, after raising enough young fighting men (numbered at round 6,000) across clans, and acquiring sufficient firearms, the Sayyid started engaging first the Ethiopian army at Jigjiga in Ethiopia. This military engagement against the Ethiopian expansion in Somalia was indeed the first test of the militant public pursuit. After the Ethiopian army, the next target of the Dervish movement was the British Colonial Administration. The movement declared war on the British presence in the country and as a direct warning raided several clans who were collaborating with the colonial Administration. As a reaction against this action, British troops, in collaboration with the Ethiopian army, mounted a punitive attack in order to root out the Dervish resistance.

Eventually, the British military action resulted in the defeat of the Dervish forces but it did not succeed in uprooting them. For instance, when the Dervishes were defeated several times in direct confrontation with the superior colonial troops, they changed their military tactics and resorted to guerrilla warfare. This militant public pursuit of the Dervish resistance continued unabated despite frequent military setbacks for years, until, finally, the British launched a massive and coordinated sea, land, and air offensive against the headquarters of the Dervish movement, which was known as the Taleh forts in 1920. The combined massive offensive was a tremendous blow to the Dervish resistance as it decimated its military ranks. After this heavy loss, Sayyid Mohamed and few of his Dervish survivors escaped to the Ogaden region where he died of malaria in 1921. Eventually, the death of the leader ended the existence of the Dervish movement along with its militant strategy against the colonial occupation in Somalia.

Within established Somali scholarship, the underlying reasons for the emergence of the Dervish resistance in the country at the time have been presented in different interpretations.

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80 As Saadia Touval writes, "Somali nationalism stems from a feeling of national consciousness in the sense of 'we' as opposed to 'they' which has existed among the Somalis for many centuries. It was nurtured by tribal genealogies and traditions, by the Islamic religious ties, and by conflicts with foreign peoples" (Touval 1963:84).

81 According to Beachey, the word Dervish that originates "from Turkish dervis or Persian darvesh and refers to those valiant and ardent fighters for Islam vowed to a life of poverty and austerity" (Beachey 1990:25).

82 Somalia was the first African country in which air attacks were used by a colonial power.
Traditionalist scholars view religion as the main factor behind the appearance of the Dervish movement (Lewis 1988; Said Samatar 1982). Transformationist proponents like Abdi Samatar on the other hand contend that it was the crisis in the material life of the pastoral nomads brought about by the colonial predation, which led to the uprising of the Dervish movement (Samatar 1989). Modernisation writers represented by Saadia Touval, explain that it was the combination of both religious and nationalist motivations that resulted in the emergence of the Dervish resistance. According to Touval:

“It would seem, therefore, that characterising the Mullah’s movement as primarily a religious one, coupled with nationalistic corollaries, would be more appropriate than attempting to constrain it into a purely ‘religious’ or ‘nationalist’ mold” (Touval 1963:56).

There is no denying that all the above noted elements have played more or less a crucial role in the emergence of the Dervish movement in Somalia at the time. Yet, I believe that the liberation of the country from the colonial occupation was the overriding factor. For example, the country was taken away and was divided in pieces among different colonial powers and that was the most dramatic experience that the Somali people have ever endured. It was the most dramatic in three respects. Firstly, the division of the country resulted in the separation of family members into different colonial administrations. Secondly, the seasonal movements of the pastoral nomads was hindered as they could no longer cross from one pastureland to another as easily as was the case before because of the foreign manned border controls. Thirdly, the modus operandi of the colonial military in the country was oppressive, violent and cruel in nature. Thus, in my view, the occupation and the parcelling of the country was the key factor, which led to the emergence of the Dervish resistance. It also powerfully explains why since then the overriding political struggles of the Somali political elite have been for achieving independence from the colonial yoke and a Somali-wide territorial unification. This was indeed in the line with the core objective of the tendency towards public pursuit during the post-colonial period, namely the creation of a wider political identity, unity and a Somali-wide statehood. In the subsequent discussions in this study I will explain how the struggle to reunify the colonially dismembered territories inhabited by ethnic Somali populations has been the most important national project for the Somali political elites since Somalia achieved independence.

4.4. Political Parties and Passive Public Pursuit (1941-1960)

For almost two decades the crusades for the Somali-wide public pursuit waned not only as the result of the terrible military defeat of the militant Dervish forces, but also because of the physical occupation and control in the countryside of the colonial troops whose punitive expeditions wiped out any fickle uprising against their presence. Consequently, over twenty years, the struggles for liberation, freedom and for a pan-Somali public pursuit were temporary halted until the outbreak of the Second World War. However, the political outcome of the war presented an opportunity for the Somalis to revive the aspirations of their public pursuit against the foreign domination albeit through passive tactics. The military victory of the Allies in the war against the Axis was in fact the winning of the ideology of the universal emancipation over the fascist worldview. In Somalia, the colonial state of Italy, which represented the Axis in the region, was routed out by Britain, one of the Allied powers.
Fortunately, this momentous victory of the Allied powers presented a turning point for the political history of the Somali people as for many colonised societies around the globe.

After the war ended, Britain as the sole colonial power assumed the political control of both northern and southern Somalia from 1941 to 1950. Under the British Military Administration (BMA) the Somalis started organising themselves as political parties for the first time. The political parties were free to campaign for Somali-wide political freedom and the unification of all Somali inhabited territories by peaceful means. In this respect, political independence and territorial unity were the twin aspirations of the public pursuit that the Somali political elites have campaigned for since the end of the Second World War.

In northern Somalia, the important political party during that period was the Somaliland National Society (SNS) established in 1935. Later in 1947, SNS was renamed the Somali National League (SNL). In southern Somalia, the dominant political parties at the time were the Somali Youth Club, formed at Mogadishu on 15 May 1943 and the Hizbia Digil-Mirifle, created on 25 March 1947. Both political parties later changed their names. In 1947, the Somali Youth Club became the Somali Youth League (SYL), and the Hizbia Digil-Mirifle was transformed into Hizbia Dastur Mustaql Somali (HDMS). During that period it was the "benevolent paternalism" of the ruling British Military Administration (BMA), which helped these newly emerged political parties to consolidate and flourish around the country (Lewis 1993:28). Others even suggested that the Somali Youth League, the leading political party in Somalia (before and after the independence) was in fact nurtured in the cradle of the local British Administration (Collins 1960; Touval 1963). It was perhaps for this reason that the political parties were less militant towards the colonial Administration and opted to achieve their independence and territorial unification of Somalia through peaceful means.

Yet, the passive public pursuit of the political parties in the aftermath of the Second World War was in great contrast to the militant Dervish movement in the early decades of the twenty-century. The early Dervish movement was conservative and primarily a religious-inspired uprising. Dervishes were adamantly against the presence of foreign infidels on the Somali soil as they were fearful that the missionary education of the Christian colonisers and its resultant influence would destroy their religion and pollute their spiritual purity. This is how Sayyid Mohamed, the spiritual-political leader of the Dervish movement orated:

"Unbelieving men of religion have assaulted our country from their remote homelands. They wish to corrupt our religion, to force us to accept Christianity, supported by the armed forces of their governments, their weapons, their numbers. You have only your determination. Do not be frightened by their soldiers or armies; God is mightier than they. Be patient and steadfast in hardship. Our aim is to cleanse the land of Unbelievers" (Martin 1976:182).

Nonetheless, the freedom struggle of the Dervish movement was a source of great inspiration for the Pan-Somali pursuit of the later political parties (Lewis 1980). However, in the 1940s all the existent political parties in contrast to the Dervish movement had more or less exhibited a secular world-view. And despite their opposing political views, all parties were willing to achieve the aspirations of their political struggles without antagonising the ruling colonial Administration. Also, compared with the Dervish movement, the new political parties were open to the influence of the progressive ideals such as freedom, liberty, fraternity, democracy and
self-determination that the Allies fought in the Second World War and were then spreading all over the world. In Somalia, some of the British officials working for the local colonial Administration were in fact the advocates of such universalised values. Undoubtedly, it was these ideals, which inspired the Somali political parties in the 1940s to seek secular education, progress, political freedom and national unification.

It is important to note here that Somalia was the only country in sub-Saharan Africa where the Second World War was literally fought. As I noted earlier it was the place where the Allied forces defeated the Italian colonial army and ended Italy’s East Africa Empire. During the war, many Somalis were recruited as a fighting army alongside the Allied forces. Gradually, the close contacts with the serving military men and the constant media broadcasting of the progressive ideals of the Allies waged the war in the country largely awakened the nationalist consciousness of the Somalis at the time. In other words, in contrast to many colonies in Africa, it was principally the global war and its political consequences, which provided a great impetus to the emergence of modern nationalism in Somalia.

Although all the newly created political movements agreed to operate within the laws and the policy restrictions laid down by the British Military Administration, and to pursue their political goals peacefully, they nonetheless failed to develop a collective national strategy. And this shortcoming had dire repercussions on their shared aspiration of the Pan-Somali pursuit. The fundamental problem was that most parties had different political agendas and contradictory aspirations. Moreover, they represented national, regional, socio-economic, and clan interests. For example, while the Somali Youth League was advocating broader national aspirations, the Hizbia Dastur Mustaqil Somali party was campaigning for particularistic clan interests.

During that early period, the HDMS was a clanist party, as it was not concerned with the interest of the nation as a whole. Among all the Somali political parties in the 1940s, the Somali Youth League (SYL) was the only party which had a national outlook. Also, the SYL was the largest, best organised, and most widely represented party. Yet, it was considered by other rival political parties to be either a southern movement or a party dominated by northern pastoral nomads. Unfortunately, it was this mistrust, suspicion, and narrow regional, socio-economic, and clan interests, which prevented the political parties from collectively

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83 Some liberal minded British officers who fought on the Somali soil against the fascist Italians were sympathetic to the political aspirations of the Somali people. One of those officers who were supportive to the Somali cause was Douglas Collins. In his request to join the local British Administration in Somalia, Collins wrote that: “I am interested in the Somalis. I feel sympathetic to their aspirations, feel that I understand them, their problems, their way of life, and as an Administrative Officers I am sure that I can get closer to them” (Collins 1960:162). Collins wrote a book on the general condition and the political situation in Somalia during the rule of the British Military Administration in 1940-1950. The book that Collins dedicated to his beloved Somali mistress Amina, who tragically died in a capsized dhow in the Indian Ocean of Somalia, was entitled “A Tear for Somalia”. In the foreword of the book, another British military officer, Lieut-Colonel Humphrey French, who also served in Somalia at the time, noted his concern for the future of Somalia. French wrote in the foreword: “1960 sees the arrival of independence for Somalia. Let us hope that those countries who have brought her to independence will stand by to see that she survives in this difficult modern world without being made the plaything of international politics”. This ominous forecast predicated what actually happened and the Somali state indeed became the plaything of the Cold War politics.

84 For example, while the Somali National League in the north saw the SYL, as a southern party; the Hizbia Dastur Mustaqil Somali of the sedentary agricultural clans viewed it as a party for the pastoral nomads on the other hand.
struggling and campaigning for their overriding public pursuit - the unification of all Somali territories.

For instance, as I discussed earlier, in 1941, after Italy was defeated, all the territories of Somalia, with the exception of Djibouti, came under the control of British Military Administration. And for the Pan-Somali public pursuit, this was a godsend especially since Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary at the time was a supporter of the territorial unification of all the areas inhabited by the wandering Somali pastoral nomads. Bevin tabled a proposal to the Council of Foreign Ministers in which he pleaded for the preservation of a single united Somalia administered by the British under United Nations Trusteeship. Accordingly, in 1948, a United Nations Four-Power Commission comprising Britain, France, USA and the USSR came to Somalia to ascertain the aspirations of the Somali people. This was a golden occasion for the Somali political parties to put behind them their parochial differences and personal rivalries and collectively endorse the Bevin proposal of a single united Somalia since this was exactly what they wanted. For example, the president of the Somali Youth League, Haji Mohamed Hussien, while answering a question asked by a member of the Commission, replied:

"Mr Bevin advocates the establishment of a Greater Somalia. That point appeared in English as well as Arabic newspapers. When we saw this being uttered by a Foreign Minister of a Greater Power we were very happy indeed because it is one of our great aims." (Four-Power Commission Reports, 1959:15; see also Collins, 1960:164).

Yet, the leaders of the political parties who presented the fate of the country to the Commission failed to convince the mission of the good sense of uniting the whole of the Somali-inhabited territories. According to Omar:

"Keeping the territories together depended entirely on the wisdom and skill of those of our politicians who were meeting the Commission. Their ability in arguing the case would be crucial in deciding the fate of the people"(Omar 1992:20).

Even the leaders of the SYL who were the staunch advocates of the Pan-Somali aspirations and violently protested against the return of defeated Italy to Somalia failed to convince the Commission of the need to place Somalia under British Military Administration. The leaders of other rival parties, like Hizbia Dastur Mustaqil Somali in the south and splinter groupings had no inkling of the nation-wide aspirations and did not show any interest at all in the fate of the country as a whole. They were concerned only with their narrow clanist and individualistic interests. In opposition to the nation-wide policy of the SYL, the rival groupings formed an alliance named "The Conference" and made demands to the Commission that only the southern part of the country should become the Trusteeship of United Nations under Italian Administration. Italy colonised that part of Somalia from 1889 to 1941. Particularly the Hizbia Dastur Mustaqil Somali, the party of the southern agricultural clans, was staunchly in favour of Italy returning back to Somalia. The leaders of that political party had the belief that if Italy returned to the area, its presence would protect their clanist interests which they felt were being threatened by the numerically strong and dominant party (SYL) of the pastoral nomads from the north. Eventually, it was the lack of forceful articulation, internal rivalry, and particularistic instead of national interests, which made the Somali political parties allow this golden opportunity to pass.
As I explained earlier, the European powers (with the exception of Great Britain) as well as Ethiopia were totally against the proposal of the Bevin Plan – the unity of all the Somali-inhabited territories. Nonetheless, if the political parties had collectively supported the proposal, Bevin would have argued the case much more seriously in the Council of Foreign Ministers at the Paris Conference. And perhaps, at the time of gaining independence, the Somali political leaders would have inherited a single united Somalia (with the exception of Djibouti) from the British Military Administration. Unfortunately, Somalia was once again balkanised and this repetition was what Bevin was against. On 1 April 1950, only southern Somalia became a United Nations Trusteehip, with Italy as the administering authority.85

4.5. Public Versus Parochial Pursuit

During the early uprising of the Dervish movement, the struggles for a Somali-wide public pursuit, was subdued by the military aggression of the colonial powers. This was understandable since the colonial powers were defending their imperial domination. But this time it was the Somalis whose parochial concerns superseded the aspiration of Pan-Somali pursuits. For example, accepting Italy to administer only southern Somalia, a small portion of the country, was indeed a great setback to the goal of the Somali-wide territorial unification. More deleterious was the victory of parochial clanist and regionalist interests over the ideals of nation-wide aspirations.

In short, it was the victory for the forces of fragmentation over the forces of unity in Somalia. Or, to put it differently, it was the victory of private over public pursuit. The mission of the Four Power Commission to Somalia was a good litmus test to ascertain how far the political parties could transcend parochial identities, conflicts and particularistic interests. However, it soon became apparent that most of the political parties, which emerged in the 1940s, were primarily established to serve only narrow objectives. First and foremost, they were established to promote the interest of specific clans and lineages despite the affixed "Somali" associated with their respective party names. Some of the party leaders did not campaign for the interest of the Somali people as a whole since they did not comprehend the existence of Somalia either as a nation or as a state. A good example of this point was that a member of the Commission asked the president of the Hizbia Dighil e Mirifle party, Sheikh Abdullah, two questions.

The first question was whether:

"He is not interested in the political activities of the country", and his answer was: "I have only interest in the Dighil Mirifle." The second question was whether "he is not concerned about the trusteeship of Somaliland", and his answer to this enquiry was: "when we asked for the trusteeship, we only meant for the country where the Dighil Mirifle live, not the rest of the country. We do not mean the rest of Somalia" (Four-Power Commission Reports, 1959:3).

85 As Omar recently lamented: "if only Britain had been nominated by the Somali politicians of the time as the administering power, most of the Somali territories could even then have been brought together, united as one, with a good chance in due course of ultimately regaining our brothers who were then under French rule" (Omar 1992: 25-26).
The narrow vision of such an important party leader confirms the sectarian clan-based outlook of the leaders of most political parties at that time. Between 1940-1950s, the only political party, which to some extent achieved a political maturity enough to transcend parochial interests and which developed a sense of national outlook, was that of the Somali Youth League (SYL). However, during the 1950s, the worldview of the most localised political parties changed. They manifested a nationalist spirit at least in their public slogans as announcing support for aspirations of the Somali-wide public pursuit. Even the Hizbia Dastur Mustaqi'il Somali which was a clanist party in the 1940s, adopted a nationalistic outlook.

Encouraged by this new nationalistic political climate, new political parties were formed. One of these political parties was the National United Front (NUF) that was formed in the British Somaliland in 1955. This new political party was particularly created to struggle for the return of the Haud and the Reserved Area to British Somaliland in the north. The British surrendered the area to Ethiopia in 1954 under the pretext of honouring the treaty of 1897 between the two imperial powers. The return of the area to Ethiopia angered the leaders of the Somali political parties both in the north and in the south of the country. Thus, the National United Front party was established to provide a platform for political parties and other organisations engaged in the struggle for independence and territorial unification of all Somalia. Another important political party, which was formed in the late 1950s, was the Greater Somalia League (GSL). This party emerged after a split in Somali Youth League ranks in 1958 and was led by Haji Mohamed Hussien. The GSL criticised the SYL for being moderate, pro-Italian, and less committed to pursuing the aspirations of a Somali-wide unity. Accordingly, the GSL party took a more militant stand in its advocacy for the unification of all the Somali-inhabited territories. Gradually, the militant view of this new political party influenced the policy agenda of the dominant SYL party. For example, in 1956, Somalia was granted an internal self-rule under Italian Administration and Abdullahi Isse, the leader of the SYL was appointed as Prime Minister. Accordingly:

"Abdullahi Isse in explaining his government's programme to the Somalia Assembly had given first place to the unification of the Somali territories. The Somali he told the assembly form a single race, practise the same religion and speak a single language. They inhabit a vast territory, which, in its turn constitutes a well-defined geographic unit. All must know that the government of Somalia will strive its uttermost, with the legal and peaceful means which are its democratic prerogative to attain this end: the union of Somalis, until all Somalis form a single Greater Somalia" (Lewis 1988:161).

This new Somali government in order to ensure that the aspirations of the Somali-wide public pursuit remain alive in the minds of successive generations invented a sky-blue national flag with a five-pointed star. Symbolically, the five-point star represents the five different political entities into which the land of the Somali people was divided.

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86 Among other developments, the impending independence of the country was the most silent political factor that awakened the nationalist consciousness of the most locally oriented political parties in the country. The leaders of these political parties then proclaimed a compromise with their old political stances and integrated their specific clan or regional interests with a Somali-wide nationalist cause – the struggle for the territorial independence of Somalia and for the unification of all the Somali inhabited territories (Touval 1963:95).

87 As I noted earlier, the old Anglo-Ethiopian treaty of 1897 ceded the area to Ethiopia but in 1941 as the result of the Second World War, the whole of Somalia including Ogaden came under British Military Administration. The defeat of the Italian colony in the war, that had occupied Ethiopia since 1936 had paved the way for the British to rule over the entire country except for French Somaliland (Djibouti).
4.6. Public Pursuit Versus Domestic Matters

The aspirations to unify all the Somali-inhabited territories was not only frustrated by the parochial interests of the political parties but was also hampered by domestic preoccupations such as the tasks of running the local administration of government, the race for private spoils and the problem of choosing an official language for the country. In fact, both facets one after another superseded the primacy of the nation-wide public pursuit with detrimental consequences. For instance, while the pursuit of parochial interests undermined the collective project of the Somali nation and thereby indirectly aided in dividing the country once again, the preoccupation with domestic matters on the other hand led to a temporary abandonment of the Somali cause.

After the country was divided again, northern Somalia had remained under the British Administration. The Administration took the responsibility for running that part of the country separately and for the preparation for its independence when that time came. With this objective in mind, the Administration introduced a simple form of local government by the enactment of the Local Authorities Ordinance, and by the formation of advisory bodies at a district level to be known as District Councils. This initiative gave the natives a greater share in running the local government. And even some Somali individuals gradually acquired senior posts in the Administration, Agriculture, Education, Police, Information, Prisons and Public Works Departments.

Southern Somalia on the other hand was brought under the United Nations Trusteeship and Italy was mandated to prepare the area for its independence within ten year's time (1950-60). Yet the time frame was very short while the task needed to be accomplished was daunting. The Italian Administration had to develop everything in this political entity within the country very rapidly, from a parliamentary system of government to local municipality. They had to train Somali administrative cadre, draft a constitution, design political programmes, establish government institutions, and give Somalis the opportunity to participate in running the administration of the territory. This means that the existing Somali political parties had to get involved in the domestic affairs of the area. And the domestic matters to be attended to were overwhelming whether public or for private pursuits as these absorbed the time, energy and the activities of the political parties at the expense of the Somali-wide political agenda.

However, the foremost preoccupation of the new Somali government was the race for private pursuit since the individual gains expected from it was greater. As I noted in the last chapter, the impact of peripheral capitalism and the resources of the colonial state changed the communitarian Somali social relations of production to individualised private pursuit. As a result, new interest groups emerged which competed for access to modest clerical and other lowly jobs in the colonial state Administration, for their own private welfare. But now as the colonial state was withdrawing the stakes that could be inherited from it were even bigger.

Thus, it was to this end that the members of the political parties started fiercely jockeying to capture the positions that the Italian governing authority was gradually handing over to the


Somalis. Actually, the idea that this part of Somalia would soon be a sovereign state and that the Somalis would run it as directors, ministers and prime ministers had a magical effect. The expectation aroused relentless competition for spoils, consumed a lot of energy, created rivalry among the political elites and resulted in derailing the ideals of their nationalistic aims. Moreover, the very promise of granting independence for the territory within a short time frame reversed the policy priorities of the new Somali government. Domestic matters whether for personal or for other narrow pursuits gained primary priorities over national agenda and countrywide territorial unification. In 1956, the Prime Minister of the new Somali government Abdullahi Isse stated clearly that from now on, the struggle for Pan-Somali unity would not be the overriding concern of the Administration. The immediate priority of the government would be given to pressing domestic matters such as economic development, attracting foreign capital and assistance, and increasing the revenue of the government through widespread taxation (Lewis 1988:156).

Another domestic concern at the time, which also greatly preoccupied the local government, was the problem of choosing an official language for education and administration in the country. The Somali language was oral not written. The government was therefore given the task of inventing an alphabet for the national language or adopting one of the foreign languages (Arabic, English, and Italian) spoken by the Somalis as the state language. Nonetheless, this language question raised intense debates among different sections of the elites and was finally left unresolved. Eventually, it was settled on October 21, 1972 when a Latin-character alphabet was adopted for the Somali language.

On top of the domestic preoccupations, there were also external constraints that prevented the new government from campaigning for the unification of all Somali-inhabited territories. For instance, since southern Somalia was still under Italian trusteeship, the new local government run by the Somalis was not permitted to get involved in any political activity beyond the domestic matters of the territories. They were not even allowed to engage in the external affairs of the territory since this was the prerogative of the Italian Administration. To put it simply, with respect to the external matters of the territory only the Italian administrators had the mandate to represent and speak on behalf of the Somalis. This was indeed a blow for the aspirations of the Somali nationalists. Under the Italian Administration the Somali nationalists in the territory lost their free political expression and freedom in pursuing internationally the cause of Pan-Somali unity. This temporary suspension for the Pan-Somali aspirations had dire consequences. First, it cooled down the intensity of the struggle. Second, it loosened the cohesion of the Somali people as a nation in pursuit of a single united state.

90 According to Saadia Touval, “as independence was assured, the remaining goal of national unification received increased attention [by the Somali political parties]. But the political parties and the various tribal groups were mainly occupied with capturing the positions which the Italian trusteeship administration was gradually transferring to the Somalis” (Touval 1963:87).

91 At the time the only Somali script which existed was one called Osmaniya. Yusuf Kenadid Osman invented this alphabet for the Somali language in the 1920s. Yet, although Osman was one of the early Somali nationalists, his Osmaniya script was rejected on several grounds, notably because of its distinct regional and clan identification.

preoccupation with domestic matters and the imposition of the Italian Administration on the territory greatly circumscribed the aspirations of a Somali-wide public pursuit between 1950-1960.

4.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed how the colonial powers partitioned Somalia into five different territories and how the Somalis reacted to it. I also argued that the changes brought about by colonial occupation not only transformed the political economy of the Somali society as the transformationists suggested but more gravely dismembered the Somali habitat. The territorial splitting of the country and the fragmentation of the ethnic Somalis under different colonial powers was the most dramatic experience as it ruthlessly wounded the very psyche of Somali cultural nationalism. Since then, it was the healing of this psychological wound by struggling to unite the ethnic Somalis that had been the primary public pursuit of the Somali political elite. To put it differently, this Pan-Somali historical struggle is one of the underlying dynamics that largely determine the social and political conditions in contemporary Somalia.

As I explained in the main body of the chapter, the struggle for a Somali-wide public pursuit first began as a militant uprising against the colonial domination. The Dervish army led by a legendary leader Sayyid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan was the domestic social force, which started the revolt. The Dervish resistance movement was defiant and adopted a militant strategy to liberate Somalia from the foreign occupation. This early militant resistance however was traditional, conservative and conceived in the spirit of religion. In 1920, the Dervish movement collapsed when its spiritual leader, Sayyid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan passed away.

After twenty years the next struggle for a Somali-wide public pursuit emerged in the country in the 1940s. This new movement, in contrast to the early Dervish resistance, was passive, secular, and was conducted in a nationalistic orientation. It also appeared in the form of political parties, which wanted to unite Somali-inhabited territories through diplomatic and peaceful means. However, once such an occasion came at the time when Bevin proposed the unification of Somalia under British Military Administration, the political parties failed to grab the chance and support the plan. This was indeed a missed opportunity. Mohamed Omar notes that this event “has to be judged as political short-sightedness, and as a massive historic failure on the part of our politicians” (Omar 1992:52). No doubt it was the result of political immaturity on the part of the political leaders at the time but was also coupled with parochial clan, regional, and socio-economic and individualised private interests. In other words, parochial and private interests were more appealing than territorial integrity and a Somali-wide public pursuit. Furthermore, the global and regional politics were not in favour of the unification of Somalia. For example, as I mentioned earlier, the Somali political leaders were not even permitted to exercise Somalia wide political rights as long as the territory remained under Italian trusteeship. Later this changed when the period of the Italian trusteeship in the country ended.

93 David Laitin and Said Samatar published a book that was entitled, Somalia: Nation in Search of a State (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), which affirms the seriousness and the overriding importance for the struggle of the Somali-wide public pursuit.
The relevant lesson that can be drawn from this colonial period in Somalia is how the parochial tendencies towards private pursuits have constantly undermined the efforts geared towards social cohesion, nation building and state making projects. The tendency towards private pursuit provides positive impulses at sub-national levels in terms of guaranteeing security, solidarity and group survival but negatively impacts aspirations at national levels that are aimed to foster a Somali-wide interests. This is what I attempted to illustrate in this discussion. I have also shown in this chapter how during the colonial period the Somali political elite failed to reconcile the contradictory impulses emanating from the tendencies towards private and public pursuits.

In July 1960, as Somalia was granted its political independence both the northern and the southern parts of the country became united forming the Somali Republic. However, the unification of only these two parts of Somalia and the emergence of a Somali state though historic was not far-reaching. Three Somali-inhabited territories were still missing and the project of a Somali-wide public pursuit was not yet complete. Consequently, accomplishing this mission became the primary political task that the government of the new Somali Republic had to shoulder. It also explains why since independence, the principal objective in the foreign policy agenda of the Somali government(s) has been how to achieve the reunification of the missing territories.

However, in contrast to the militant and passive tactics of the Dervish movement and the political parties during the colonial era, the strategy adopted by the post-colonial elite of the Somali Republic in waging the Pan-Somali struggle was irredentism, which was pursued both by peaceful and violent means. In furtherance to the discussion in this chapter, I will examine in chapter six how the irredentist politics for the struggle of a Somali-wide public pursuit militarised the state during the Cold War era.

Nonetheless, before I conclude the discussion in this chapter, a historically informed theory worth consideration here is the lesson of how a structural problem developed in one period can continue to the next period. In other words, how an unresolved structural crisis in the past can still perpetuate a tension in the present as the case of the contemporary Somali society powerfully illustrates. For example, the dismemberment of the Somali territories was a structural problem created by colonialism. However, it was not resolved during the colonial period but was bequeathed as a deleterious legacy to the post-colonial era. Thus, the post-colonial elites of Somalia inherited a structural problem of which the seeds were already sown during colonialism. This reality urges us to search out the causes of the present in the past.